

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.6

OFFICIAL MEDIA

GOVERNMENT, ETHNIC GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES SIGN PEACE PLEDGE

At the meeting to celebrate the 68th anniversary of Union Day, President Thein Sein met leaders of armed ethnic organizations (EAOs) and political parties in Nay Pyi Taw on 12 February. In his address, he stated that internal peace is the most urgent need for the country and that the peace process is a long journey as it is based on finding solutions through political dialogues. The President urged those present to make all-out efforts for peace so that the trust and expectation of the people will not be in vain as it has been over four years since peace efforts were made.

The Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation was signed by the President, vice presidents, 14 union ministers, five Hluttaw representatives, including the speakers of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw, the chairman of the Union Election Commission, three representatives from the Tatmadaw, armed ethnic groups including Karen National Union, Restoration Council for Shan State, KNU/KNLA Peace Council, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, 29 ethnic affairs ministers, and 55 representatives from political parties. The remaining armed ethnic organizations (EAOs) will sign the deed of commitment after discussions have been held and approved by their organizations.

The Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Speaker of the Union Parliament Thura Shwe Mann and Speaker of the Upper House Khin Aung Myint also received the leaders of the EAOs separately and discussed the on-going clashes in Laukkai, Shan State and the role of the army and parliament in assisting the democratic reforms and efforts to restore national conciliation and internal peace in Myanmar.¹

FIGHTING BREAKS OUT BETWEEN TATMADAW, KOKANG TROOPS

Government troops and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang) forces have been engaged in fighting in Laukkai since 9 February in Nyankhwam and Tautshwe villages. In another incident, troops of Kokang attacked outposts of the Tatmadaw near Mawhtike Town. The two sides also clashed when Kokang fighters attempted to seize the government military headquarters in Kongyan area but government troops aided by fighter jets and helicopters were able to counter the offensive.

From 9 to 12 February, a total of 13 clashes have broken out between the government troops and the MNDAA, with the former carrying out five airstrikes during the military operations. So far, the fighting has left government forces with 47 dead, 73 wounded and five vehicles destroyed. The Kokang renegade groups were carrying out military operations to capture Laukkai before Union Day.

¹ President U Thein Sein meets armed ethnic groups, political parties – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 February 2014 (p. 1 & 3)/
President U Thein Sein meets leaders of armed ethnic groups – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 February 2014 (p. 2)/
Speaker relates current constitution to federalism, which refers to integration rather than separation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 February 2015/ (p. 1 & 3)/
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets armed ethnic groups – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 February 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 February 2014 (p. 2)

According to reports, Myanmar has informed China of the incidents that occurred on the border and the local Shan State regional government has made efforts in bringing stability back to the region.²

UNION ELECTION CHAIR MEETS AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

The Union Election Commission (UEC) Chairman Tin Aye received Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers and party of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) at his office on 11 February and the two sides exchanged views on voter training, voter education and voter information processes being taken by Myanmar for the upcoming general elections. The UEC Chairman Tin Aye briefed the visiting Australian delegation on the organizational structure of the commission, electoral system, voting system, electoral roll which is underway, background on Myanmar's politics and elections and work being carried out for the upcoming 2015 general elections.³

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

GOVERNMENT BLOCKS UN AID TO KACHIN IDPS

Local aid groups in Kachin State have been forced to increase their support to IDP camps in response to the government's refusal to allow any United Nations aid convoys into Kachin Independence Army-controlled territory since September. In the first 9 months of 2014, the UN conducted 30 missions reaching a total of almost 186,000 people in IDP camps. However, those convoys came to a halt at the start of October and have not resumed. The government has blocked the missions primarily for security reasons, although the UN says "bureaucratic delays" have also been an issue.

"Since September 2014, cross-line convoys have been delayed, pending Kachin State government approval for travel authorisations for international staff," said Mark Cutts, head of office in Myanmar for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The delays meant around 27,500 displaced people – including more than 12,000 children – in camps around Laiza and east of Bhamo were not able to receive items such as blankets and warm clothes from UNICEF and the UNHCR ahead of the winter months. An estimated 50,000 people are displaced in areas outside government control. Mr Cutts said the most "urgent needs" resulting from the delays were being met by local NGOs but the government's refusal to grant travel permission has damaged the humanitarian response, particularly in shelter, food, winter kits, water and sanitation. In December 2011 the UN sent one aid convoy to KIA-controlled territory but did not subsequently get permission for another mission until September 2013. It then sent around 3 a month until the latest stoppage.

Ko Ja Nu, a program coordinator with the Metta Development Foundation, one of the largest local NGOs providing aid to IDPs in Kachin State, said the stopping of the convoys had resulted in a lack of basic food items in camps. Residents have also been "discouraged due to the uncertainty this has created", Ko Ja Nu said. "Nevertheless, local actors like Metta and others have remained active and this reduced the potential negative impact that could have had," he said. "While continuing to try and get access, the UN should use the local NGOs to reach out to the desperate IDPs ... They have the capacity, access and trust from all sides, including the government ministries and the IDPs." Ko Ja Nu also criticised the government for not allowing the missions, saying that humanitarian aid should

² Fighting breaks out between Tatmadaw, Kokang renegade troops – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 February 2015 (p. 1)/
Tatmadaw forces in hot pursuit of Kokang renegade troops – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 February 2015 (p. 9)/
Government troops make efforts to bring stability to Laukkai – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 February 2014 (p. 9)

³ Union Election Commission Chairman meets Australian Electoral Commissioner – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 February 2015 (p. 2)

not “depend on political agendas”. “There is a fundamental right to receive and offer humanitarian assistance that all actors should protect and promote.”⁴

NLD FORMS CENTRAL ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

The National League for Democracy (NLD) formed a central elections committee on 9 February with its patron Tin Oo serving as Chairman and Central Executive Committee member Maung Maung Oo as Secretary. Other members of the NLD elections central committee include Nyan Win (CEC member), Nan Khin Htwe Myint (CEC member), Mahn Jonny (Ayeyawady Region), Dr Than Ngwe (Shan State), Dr Tin Myo Win (Taninthayi Region), Win Mya Mya (Mandalay Region), Shar Mee (Sagaing Region), Maung Kywin Aung (Rakhine State), Khin Win (Magway Region), Kyu Kyu Than (Kachin State), Min Oo (Bago Region), Dr Khin Hsaung (Mon State), Nwe Nwe Aung (Mon State), Dr Soe Moe Thu (in-charge of central youth taskforce), Kyaw Zeya (organiser of the central taskforce) and Than Oo (treasurer) as members.⁵

MILITARY TRAINING COURSES OFFERED TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

An event to celebrate the opening of military training courses for university students was held in Yangon University Campus Diamond Jubilee Hall on 9 February. The event was attended by the Minister of Education Khin San Yee, Yangon Region Command Major General Tun Tun Naung and Yangon University rector Dr Aung Thu and students. “I’m a student attending Yangon University of Education. I think this training gives me some helpful knowledge for when I teach children. Nobody forced me to attend this training. It was my choice. We will get food supplies and salaries just like the soldiers. There are about 500 trainees. I feel different when I wear the military uniform,” said a student. The 2-year training course will also be opened in Mandalay Region and Mawlamyaing in Mon State.⁶

EU PLEDGES \$17M FOR CONFLICT-AFFECTED PEOPLE

Europe is to provide a further 15 million euros (US\$17 million) to help people affected by conflict in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan states. The donation was announced by the global director of operations for the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), Jean-Louis De Brouwer. The funding also includes support for residents of refugee camps in Thailand, De Brouwer said on 6 February after completing a visit to Sittwe, Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw.

“Our humanitarian partners are providing life-saving aid to the most vulnerable populations in those states. We will of course also follow the situation closely throughout 2015 in order to track potential new unmet needs that might arise,” he said. While in Sittwe, De Brouwer was joined by the EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Korbia in launching an EU-funded education initiative for the children of Rakhine State.

EU support through ECHO has been funding relief programs in Myanmar for more than 20 years, providing a total of 191 million euros (\$217 million) worth of humanitarian assistance to victims of man-made and natural disasters, including 12.9 million euros (\$14.6 million) in 2015. ECHO’s

⁴ Government blocks UN aid to Kachin IDPs – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/13040-government-blocks-un-aid-to-kachin-idps.html> (Myanmar Times) 9 February 2015

⁵ NLD forms central committee for winning elections – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8992:nld-forms-central-committee-for-winning-elections&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven Media) 11 February 2015

⁶ Military training courses offered in universities – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8991:military-training-courses-offered-in-universities&catid=44:national&Itemid=384 (Eleven Media) 11 February 2015

operations focus on people displaced by conflict in Kachin State and the inter-communal violence in Rakhine State, according to the announcement.⁷

ANALYSIS

The signing of the Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation on Union Day 12 February was indeed significant and a reflection of the government's desire in achieving peace with the aim of holding an inclusive dialogue to resolve political problems. Furthermore, the fact that the government and 4 ethnic armed organizations, 29 ethnic affairs ministers, and 55 representatives from political parties signing the deed amounted to an incredible show of support for federalism and edging one step closer towards the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA). However, the fresh clashes which have broken out in Laukkai, Kokang Region raise concerns and could overshadow the on-going efforts to ink a nationwide peace agreement. Taking into account, the current fighting with the MNDAA group and recent clashes with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin and Shan State, it is clear that maintaining peace and stability in Myanmar's northern regions will not be easy. Furthermore, due to geographical locations, it is obvious that any military offensive targeted at a specific group will no doubt directly or indirectly affect other EAOs. It, therefore, is crucial that any long-term political solution to the conflicts will need to state clear and practical definitions on the right to self-rule. The absence and lack of trust between the government and EAOs as well as renewed fighting will not help the national reconciliation process and could possibly unravel the existing peace agreements in place. The government and the Tatmadaw will need to find a solution to address such shortcomings and that the longer the fighting continues the hope of achieving peace will become more elusive.

⁷ EU pledges \$17m for conflict-affected people – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/13097-eu-gives-17m-for-conflict-affected-people.html> (Myanmar Times) 13 February 2015