

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 24

OFFICIAL MEDIA

2ND TRIPARTITE MEETING OF UPWC, NCCT AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The 2nd meeting of the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC), the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) and political parties was convened at Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon on 27 September to exchange views on on-going peace process. The tripartite talks follow the completion of the 6th round of ceasefire negotiation on the 4th draft single text document held from 22 to 26 September. The tripartite meeting was attended by representatives of the UPWC, the NCCT and 61 political parties, plus observers. In his speech, the deputy leader of the UPWC and Union Minister Aung Min described the tripartite meetings as “a good beginning” to secure a peaceful future in the country, calling for great strides to be made in pursuit of peace. He affirmed his belief that authentic results could be brought about by solving the political problems by political means in order to end the armed conflicts born together with the country’s independence. NCCT head Nai Han Thar highlighted the importance of political dialogue for political solution. He continued to assert that no secession attempt will happen to the Union based on ethnic equality and self-determination. The 1st tripartite meeting was held on 18 August earlier this year.¹

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 10th day meeting on 26 September and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- **Regarding the allocation of virgin lands, wetlands and marshlands, the deputy minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Khin Zaw said virgin lands, wetlands and marshlands have been allocated to farm less people in a bid to reduce poverty in rural areas, with the land management committees turning shifting plantation into ladder farming in hilly regions. He also stated that permits have been granted to individual farmers to work on 50 acres of land in line with the rules and regulations by management committees and that lack of funds has made some regions and states difficult to reclaim cultivable lands, despite a vast stretch of virgin lands, wetlands and marshlands in those regions.**
- **Regarding a question of possible disputes among telephone operators in the country, Deputy Minister for Communications and Information Technology Win Than said that the ministry is responsible for dealing with impending disputes according to the law and that plans are under way to form a national-level communications advisory committee and a communications commission, which he said will come into existence soon.²**

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 11th day meeting on 1 October and discussed the following issue:

- **The Deputy Minister for Border Affairs Maj-Gen Tin Aung Chit briefed the session on the strategic plan for stability and development of Rakhine State and stated that in order to restore stability and the rule of law in Rakhine State, a border guard police force had been**

¹ Tripartite peace process talks of UPWC, NCCT and political parties held for second time – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-09-28-red.pdf> (NLM) 28 September 2014 (p. 1 & 3)

² Cultivable lands reclaimed for farm less people to help reduce poverty: Lower House – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-09-27-red.pdf> (NLM) 27 September 2014 (p. 2)

formed with 3,600 personnel from the Myanmar Police Force, Immigration and National Registration Department and Customs Department in addition to a naval police force for security in the sea. He added that a total of 2,812 barracks and 1342 houses have been built so far for the resettlement of the victims while 8 ministries are carrying out tasks for socioeconomic development for the locals with K 1.11 billion special reserve funds from the Union Government. The Deputy Minister also said in order to patrol the waterways, authorities will hold negotiations with Bangladeshi counterparts to prevent illegal immigrants from entering into the country and the naval police force will be provided with full weapons and equipment to respond to the activities of illegal immigrants. Police forces will also be trained and reinforced where necessary to prevent conflicts and to control riots more effectively. In coordination with INGOs and NGOs, resettlement plans will be implemented in order to build houses for the victims in Sittway, Pauktaw, Myebon, Yanbye and Maungtaw, to provide fuels for cooking, transportation, communication and healthcare services to them, to collect population statistics and to support the livelihood of the victims, the Deputy Minister said. Regarding the resettlement plans, discussions were held with local communities from July to September in 2014 and infrastructure development projects would be initiated from October 2014 to March 2015 and the relocation of internally displaced people could also begin at the end of this year.³

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

HEAVY FIGHTING IN SHAN STATE KILLS 17 GOVT SOLDIERS

Heavy clashes between the Burma Army and a combined force of Palaung, Kachin and Kokang took place in northern Shan State's Kutkhai Township and killed 17 government soldiers on 1 October. According to Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) spokesman Tar Ban Hla the Burma Army's Infantry Division 11 made an incursion into TNLA area, prompting a response by fighters of the TNLA, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), a small Kokang militia. He said the rebels in northern Kutkai Township's Tarmoenye Sub-Township had then been surrounded by government forces and were forced to face the approaching soldiers at close range. "From our side, we do not have big artillery. This is why we always try to get as close as possible on site when we fight them. They used a lot of artillery," Tar Ban Hla said, adding that clashes began at 10 am and ended at nightfall. "We ended the attack when the rains began to pour down last night at 6 pm," he said. "According to our ground report, 17 of them were killed and 4 were wounded. We fought for long hours. They tried to block every movement of our troops. This is why we have to attack them," Tar Ban Hla said. Since early 2014, northern Shan State has been the scene of occasionally heavy fighting between the Burma Army and the TNLA, which has been joined by other rebels operating in the region.⁴

ELECTORAL REFORM BODY BATTLES DEADLINE

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann has instructed a committee examining electoral reform to propose at least 7 potential systems for use in Myanmar, after the body submitted 3 proposals on 30 September. The committee established by the Pyithu Hluttaw in its report, focused on three options: 1) first-past-the-past, 2) proportional representation and 3) a hybrid system combining the two. Thura Shwe Mann has instructed the committee to examine at least 4 more systems and submit the

³ Strategic plan to be implemented for stability and development of violence-hit Rakhine State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-02-red.pdf> (NLM) 2 October 2014 (p. 2)

⁴ Heavy Fighting in Shan State Kills 17 Govt Soldiers, Rebels Claim – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/heavy-fighting-shan-state-kills-17-govt-soldiers-rebels-claim.html> (Irrawaddy) 2 October 2014

report by the original deadline of 21 October. “Three types of electoral system have been proposed but we should offer more options for the public,” he said.

Committee member Thein Tun Oo said he was unsure whether the task could be completed by the deadline. “We will keep working on it but will have to take a time to complete this task,” he said. Another committee member and NLD representative Zaw Myint Maung said proportional representation was both opposed by the public and unconstitutional. “Proportional representation is outside the constitution,” he said. “It will be very difficult to use that system but maybe it could be used if the constitution is changed.” “Every democratic country must have elections and the electoral system must represent the public and we are studying proportional representation in order to find the most suitable system,” said Committee Chair Zaw Myint Pe. He added that the Committee would find a system supported by the public and that opponents of proportional representation were misleading the people. The proposal is also being considered by a committee in the upper house, which passed a proposal in June earlier this year to introduce proportional representation for the 2015 election.⁵

ESTABLISHING A FEDERAL SYSTEM AND CHANGING CHARTER ARE KEY GOALS, NLD SAYS

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has said it has two current tasks – to help establish a federal union in unity with ethnic groups, and to amend the 2008 constitution. This was announced in a statement at a ceremony on 27 September to mark the 26th anniversary of the founding of the NLD at the party headquarters in Bahan Township in Yangon. A practical link exists between the affairs of ethnic groups and democracy and the link should be the basis of a framework for a national ceasefire, the statement said. Reforming the electoral system was just an inappropriate effort by some parties worried about support from citizens in the future, while amending the constitution was what all knowledgeable nationals expected and desired, it said. NLD patron Tin Oo said, “Although the NLD’s chairperson, Aung San Suu Kyi has demanded a 4-sided meeting to discuss amending the 2008 Constitution, no related people have given this consideration. So, a big activity to display the people’s desire was conducted – about 5 million people signed a petition calling for the constitution to be amended, based on people enfranchised to do this. This is regarded as a respectful and noticeable act. If the authorities do not regard this for special consideration, the party hierarchy will use effective ways step-by-step to accomplish get the constitutional changed, in accordance with democratic practice.” “In addition, it ought to respond with great care if the authorities’ replacing the constitutional amendment with a new electoral system and though it is understood that proportional representation is a way to chose in democratic elections, party heads and other ethnic political parties oppose the PR system,” he said. “Under the 2008 Constitution, 25% of parliamentary representatives must come from the military and until that charter, which makes the Parliament one that is influenced by the military, is amended in a democratic way, it will be questionable if the upcoming election is a clean and fair one, or not,” Tin Oo said. Likewise, tasks such as holding a meeting of all four sides, calling for a ceasefire, getting nationwide peace, forming a real federal union, and establishing a democratic constitution, would only be implemented when leaders join hands with citizens, the party said.⁶

⁵ Electoral reform body battles deadline –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11826-speaker-seeks-more-suggestions-on-electoral-reform.html>
(Myanmar Times) 3 October 2014

⁶ Establishing a federal system and changing charter are key goals, NLD says –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7689:establishing-a-federal-system-and-changing-charter-are-key-goals-nld-says&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 29 September 2014

GOVERNMENT TROOPS REINFORCED AROUND KYAIKMAYAW TOWNSHIP

The government army has reinforced its troops stationed in and around Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State after fighting erupted between the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and government troops. A New Mon State Party (NMSP) official said that “government troops were first deployed security in Moulmein capital and that after the breakout of fighting, government troops were deployed in and around the villages where fighting took place. The government troops ordered villagers [who fled] for safety not to come back to the village for the moment.” The MNSP official continued that government troops prohibited any travel in and around the villages concerned after 6:00 pm, while boats providing transportation across the Ahtaran River also stopped running. Schools in nine villages were closed due to heavy fighting between government troops and DKBA near Shwe War Chaung Village, Kyaikmayaw Township, according to local residents. “Because the government army has reinforced a lot of its troops in the area, we are worried that the fighting will take place in the villages. The schools have been closed; every house in the village is also closed, and everyone is hidden,” said a Kyar-khet-kon villager, who fled the village. Fighting between government and DKBA troops broke out on 26 September in Kayint-taw Village, Kalaing-kanaing Village and further clashes continued in Shwe war Chaung Village, Kyaikmayaw Township on 27 September. Speaking to local media, NCCT leader Nai Han Thar stated that after signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement, a code of conduct will be drafted, which the army must adopt and practice. Commenting on the recent outbreak of fighting, Nai noted that since a ceasefire agreement had not yet been signed, such fighting can erupt, but respective armed groups must not initiate such fighting or armed conflict.⁷

ANALYSIS

The second tripartite talks can be regarded as a step in the right direction and that the on-going peace talks are being expanded towards a more inclusive process. In order for the peace talks to be successful, the UPWC and NCCT should inform, but, more importantly, also seek the participation of other stakeholders including women, youth, civil society and local communities. However, the inclusion of stakeholders alone will not be enough to deliver peace and democracy to Burma. Measures to end on-going clashes between government forces and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) will need to be implemented with strong commitment and political will. The government, Tatmadaw (military) and EAOs have stated their desire to end decades of fighting in the country; though have been unable to deliver peace due to differences on key critical areas of interest. It is therefore crucial for those involved to make compromises and sacrifices to achieve peace. Whether the parties involved in the process are willing to take such decisions remains to be seen.

⁷ Government Troops Reinforced Around Kyaikmayaw Township – <http://monnews.org/2014/09/30/government-troops-reinforced-around-kyaikmayaw-township/> (IMNA) 30 September 2014/
Heavy Fighting Breaks out Between DKBA and Gov’t troops; Residents Flee for Safety – <http://monnews.org/2014/09/29/heavy-fighting-breaks-dkba-govt-troops-residents-flee-safety/> (IMNA) 29 September 2014