

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.2

OFFICIAL MEDIA

LEGAL ADVISOR TO NLD ASSASSINATED

A prominent legal advisor of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) was gunned down at Yangon International Airport 29 January upon his arrival back from Indonesia after attending the Senior Leadership Program in Jakarta and Maluku Province of Indonesia from 22 to 29 January. The gunman also killed Nay Win, 42 a taxi driver but was later arrested by police and bystanders. The taxi driver was shot in public and died on the way to hospital. The police said the name of the gunman is Kyi Lin, 53, of Maha Aungmyay Township, Mandalay. The police seized one 9mm pistol and nine bullets and one five-barrel gun with four bullets from him. He is under interrogation in an ongoing investigation. Officials on social media expressed their sadness and outrage upon hearing of the assassination. "A very dark day for Myanmar. Just hearing the incredibly tragic and upsetting news that Ko Ni was just assassinated at Yangon airport," tweeted Thant Myint-U, an advisor to Myanmar's president.

One day after the assassination, the Tatmadaw offered its help in the investigation, officials said. "For the loss of the life of the legal advisor, the Tatmadaw have condolences for his bereaved family. The event has harmed much concerning security, thus the Tatmadaw will co-operate with security forces for the emergence of the truth and the prompt arrest of those who committed the crime," according to the release of the Tatmadaw's Information Committee. The Government on 3 February also warned of possible provocation for conflict in the country, urging the people to be fully aware of religious and racial incitements following the murder of Ko Ni on 29 January. The President's Office also requested the people to inform authorities and to provide evidence concerning the case or of actions aimed at destabilizing the state.¹

STATE COUNSELLOR ASKS PEACEMAKERS TO INSPIRE FUTURE GENERATIONS

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in her address at a Union Day dinner held in the Shan State capital, Taunggyi, urged those involved in the peace process to be unselfish and of dutiful spirit, and able to inspire future generations. "I do not see how one can be meaningful in life if one works only for oneself, or for family or for the environment. One will be meaningful if he serves for the Union, for the country or for the place we live in," she said. Aung San Suu Kyi also met with family members of leaders who had signed the Panglong agreement in 1947. The State Counsellor said it is her wish that future generations will happily celebrate the Anniversary of Union Day because of their old grandparents' dutiful works. "The Union was established by sacrificing many lives. So we have the responsibility to protect this union to last forever. But we have to think about some parts. For example, this is our owned land but no one owns the country. We have only a duty to protect for the preservation in a life. Thus, we must value our country like something to be protected which we do not own. The main strength should be our spirit of duty," she said.²

¹ Legal advisor to NLD assassinated at Yangon airport – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 January 2017 (p. 3)/
Tatmadaw to aid in investigation of U Ko Ni assassination – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 January 2017 (p. 4)/
Press release regarding assassination of U Ko Ni – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 January 2017 (p. 3)/
Gov't warns against religious, racial incitement after murder of NLD legal adviser – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 February 2017 (p. 1)

² State Counsellor asks peacemakers to inspire future generations – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 February 2017 (p. 3)

CEASEFIRE MONITORING COMMITTEE 9TH MEETING CONCLUDES

Union Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC-U) decided on 9 February to begin demarcation discussion starting from the State-Level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC-S) and approved rules which would be exercised at the JMC-S offices. Out of 45 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), 10 were approved at previous meetings and two at the 9th Meeting which ended on 9 February at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon. During the three-day meeting, the members of the JMC-U discussed Terms of Reference-TOR, the budget for JMC-U and matters on arrangements for a visit to the Philippines, conducting mine clearance trainings and demarcation for the troops. “We will make further discussion on clearance of mines and the work is scheduled to launch in Kayin State,” said Col Wunna Aung, Secretary-2 of the JMC-U.³

TATMADAW COLUMN ENGAGES WITH KIA/TNLA COMBINED TROOPS IN KUTKAI

A Tatmadaw column and combined forces of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Kutkai clashed in northern Shan State in the early hours of 9 February. The Tatmadaw column was engaged with about 20 KIA and TNLA troops at a site 3,000 meters north of Nam-Un village. The combined ethnic armed forces withdrew to the north and northeast at 1:35 am. During the clashes, the Tatmadaw columns captured two KIA guerilla troops, two M-22 guns, three M-22 cartridges, 331 M-22 bullets, five 40mm bombs, two launchers, two TNT cartridges and accessories. The Tatmadaw column is still conducting area clearance operations.⁴

STATE COUNSELLOR ADDRESSES WORKSHOP TO PROTECTS RIGHTS OF MINORITIES

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi addressed a two-day workshop responsible for drafting rules that protect the rights of ethnic minorities, stressing the important role of the majority in protecting rights of the minorities, held in Nay Pyi Taw on 31 January. The State Counsellor, said that ethnic majorities have a great responsibility to give protection to the languages, culture and customs of ethnic minorities, urging them not to forget the needs of minorities when they work for protecting the rights of minorities. “You are deeply urged to keep it in your minds that it is incumbent upon great nations to be kind to lesser minorities and take responsibility to protect their rights,” she said. “In protecting the rights of ethnic nationals, you also need to be careful about responsibility. If anyone wants rights, they are required to accept responsibility.” “Rule of law is meant for defending the whole populace of the country under the protection of laws of great benefit for the citizens, absolutely not for suppressing the people. Therefore, rule of law is of great importance. And the law needs to be just. It will be beneficial for our country only if there are just and fair laws”. The State Counsellor also met with Union Ministers, Ministers of ethnic affairs from Regions and States, and leading members of Self-Administered Regions and clarified the initial draft of the regulations on protecting the rights of ethnic nationals with those present discussing in groups. In its current form, the regulations consist of nine chapters. Officials from the Office of the Attorney General, legal experts and scholars also participated in the workshop to address the legal aspect of the draft rules.⁵

³ JMC-U’s 9th meeting concludes –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2017 (p. 2)/
JMC-U discusses procedures, budget –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-08-red.pdf> (GNLM) 8 February 2017 (p. 3)/
JMC-U continues third day of discussions –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 February 2017 (p. 9)

⁴ Tatmadaw column engages with KIA/TNLA combined troops in Kutkai –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2017 (p. 9)

⁵ State Counsellor: Majority protects rights of minorities –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 February 2017 (p. 1)

MALAYSIAN AID FOR RAKHINE ARRIVES IN MYANMAR

A ship filled with food and supplies from Malaysia docked in Yangon on 9 February, with the aid to be delivered to two communities in conflict areas in northern Rakhine State, said Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Win Myat Aye. The Minister said, "We will send the aid to northern Rakhine by navy ships and we will distribute the aid to conflict areas in cooperation with the Rakhine Government." The delivery comes after the Malaysian Ambassador in Yangon asked the government to accept the aid as they wanted to donate to the two communities in northern Rakhine, according to the Union Minister. Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister Dato Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican handed over the aid to Minister Dr Win Myat Aye.⁶

MYANMAR-CHINA (2+2) HIGH-LEVEL CONSULTATIONS HELD

The Second Round of Myanmar and China (2+2) High-Level Consultations led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence was held on 7 February 2017 in Kunming, China. The meeting was attended by the Myanmar Delegation led by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Kyaw Tin, Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, Ministry of Defence and the Chinese Delegation by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin and Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission Major General Shao Yuanming. The two sides exchanged views on border related issues focusing on China's constructive support for the peace process of Myanmar, promoting peace and tranquility along Myanmar-China border, stabilization of the situation of Northern Myanmar, confidence-building measures and development of border areas to promote the interests of the population in these areas. They also agreed to step up cooperation in areas such as Myanmar-China border management, combating narcotic drugs, and preventing illegal entries and illegal trade; to adhere to the Boundary Treaty in constructing river banks maintenance works to prevent river banks erosion along the Boundary Rivers and jointly develop guidelines for construction of retaining walls along the river banks.

The High-Level Consultation Meetings were established to strengthen the cooperation in security and management in the Myanmar-China border areas more effectively. The First Myanmar and China (2+2) high-Level Consultations led by Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence was previously held on 25 November 2016 in Nay Pyi Taw.⁷

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SELF-RELIANCE GROUPS NATIONWIDE

Facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme, Myanmar Rural Women's Network (a) *May Dow Kabar* continues women-centered development projects across the country, said Daw Cho Aye, Chairman of the Network. *May Dow Kabar* is a network formed with rural women's self-reliance groups (SRGs), focusing on providing access to credit to rural women and economically empowering them to develop their capacities and enhance their well-being. The network now has about 22,000 members in 2,000 villages in 31 townships in project areas, including delta and arid regions as well as Chin, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine and Shan states, Cho Aye said. The SRGs are joining hands with other local development organizations, authorities and the private sector to raise public awareness on healthcare, education, human trafficking, and various forms of gender-based violence, providing livelihood support to women in need. UNDP invested considerable resources into strengthening the capacity of the SRG members, especially women, who have been provided with knowledge and skills

⁶ Malaysian aid for Rakhine arrives in Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2017 (p. 1)

⁷ Myanmar-China (2+2) high-level consultations held – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2017 (p. 6)

development. There are more than 5,000 SRGs in Myanmar facilitated by UNDP through its projects.⁸

PREVENTION AND PROTECTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND RAPE OF CHILDREN DISCUSSED IN MYAWADY

Prevention and protection of violence against women and rape of children were discussed at the District General Administration Department, Myawady in Kayin State on 27 January. The District Women's Affairs Committee Chairman District Administrator Lwin Ko Oo delivered the opening speech, saying that there are many cases of violence against women and rape of children across the country. He added that the educative talks and table discussions will be held down to the level of villages. Lwin Ko Oo also said that he wanted all to co-operate in these activities. District Social Welfare Department Deputy Director Myint Zaw, members from district women's affair committee and Maternity and child welfare association, ward administrator, school heads and officials concerned attended the meeting.⁹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

GNU, KIO CALL FOR MORE PEACE EFFORTS



KIO Vice-Chair N Ban La and General Gun Maw addressing KNU delegation KNU Chair Mutu Sae Poe visiting Kachin IDPs

During the meeting held at the Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) headquarters in Laiza along China-Myanmar border on 16 February, KIO and the Karen National Union (KNU) officials exchanged views on a number of things related to the peace process and called for more cooperation.

A member of KNU's central executive committee, Padoh Saw Ta Doh Moo told Myanmar Times that officials said communication was the main problem between KIO and the government's peace commission. He said the KNU delegation led by its chair General Saw Mutu Say Poe met with the KIO Peace Team and learnt of the difficulties the latter is facing currently in negotiating peace with government. "They said they sent a letter to the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre previously. They want the official response from government," the KNU official said.

KNU is a signatory armed ethnic group to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), whereas the KIO is not, and is currently at engaged in fighting with government's troops in Kachin State as well as in northern Shan State. After clashes with the Tatmadaw in Mid-August of 2016, KIO requested a

⁸ Empowering women through self-reliance groups nationwide – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2017 (p. 9)

⁹ Violence against Women and Rape of Children discussed In Myawady – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 January 2017 (p. 2)

meeting with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw's Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Despite being a member of United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and having on-going negotiation with government, KIO officials said they would want to have a private meeting with the government. Earlier this month, the government had replied to a KIO's letter that it was willing to have private talks with the armed ethnic group.

"The main problem is weakness in communication at both sides. As far as I know, previous government led by the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] was better at communicating with armed ethnic groups," said Padoh Saw Ta Doh Moo.

Citing to the Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation, a document that Karen National Union signed with previous administration at the Union Day of 2015, the joint statement said terms of non-aggression should be pursued, as efforts shall be made for the participation of all armed ethnic groups to the peace process. The joint statement also said the KNU and KIO agreed to work together for the inclusivity of the peace process. "We urge all concerned parties to work and find ways for ending armed conflicts in line with agreements and for the participation of all relevant parties at the political dialogues," said the joint statement. The KNU and KIO's joint statement have also said that they all are "armed ethnic organizations" and not "terrorist organizations", but are in partnership at the peace process. Meanwhile KIO is a recognized party to the peace negotiation; the government has so far denied the participation of the coalition's three other groups.

Padoh Saw Ta Doh Moo said the KNU and its leaders have often called on the government and Tatmadaw to soften their stance towards the non-signatory armed ethnic groups to the peace process, and to the 21st Century Panglong Conference specifically.

The UNFC has previously said it would sign the NCA if the government would agree the nine points of proposal previously raised by it. The proposal was to strengthen the ceasefire at the post-NCA-signing period. The KNU official said, "Though we have signed the NCA earlier, it would be good to have the nine points of proposal by UNFC because it would strengthen the ceasefire than now it is."

Though the second batch of 21st Century Panglong Conference was targeted to start on February 28, representatives at the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee have decided to postpone the commencing date of the conference to mid-March. National-level political dialogues are scheduled to be held in Shan and Chin states at the end of February.¹⁰

GOVT AGREES TO TALKS WITH KIA

The government's peace commission is set to grant the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) its long-awaited request for an individual meeting, as conflict rages on in parts of northern Shan and Kachin States. General Gun Maw has confirmed the KIA received a letter from the peace commission on January 27, expressing interest in a sit down. The development was also confirmed to Myanmar Times by a member of the government's negotiating commission.

Peace commission advisory team leader Aung Kyi said exact details on meetings with the armed ethnic groups had yet to be finalised. "We have informed them that we are willing to have an open discussion with them individually," he said. Talks have been delayed due to a communication breakdown between the government and the KIA, which is a non-signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The influential armed group is currently engaged in hostilities with the Tatmadaw. "We would discuss bilateral affairs when we meet and specific matters related to the government and KIA only," said Aung Kyi.

¹⁰ KNU, KIO call for more peace efforts –

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/24982-knu-kio-call-for-more-peace-efforts.html> (Myanmar Times)
17 February 2017

The KIA had reportedly been requesting a meeting since late 2016, but has become engaged in fending off fierce offensives in Kachin State. KIA communication officer Lieutenant Colonel Naw Bu told Myanmar Times on 1 February that the KIA would discuss matters related to ceasefire and political negotiations. However, he refused to be drawn on whether or not the KIA would participate in the next round of the 21st Century Panglong meetings this month. “Concerning the Panglong conference, we will attend as a member of United Nationalities Federal Council. UNFC officials have already said they will not attend if invited as observers, so I cannot say for sure if we are attending or not – it depends on the government,” he said. In an interview with Radio Free Asia, General Gun Maw of the KIA said there would be certain issues that the KIA would want to discuss privately with the government – as well as the use of “terrorist” designation.¹¹

SHAN NATIONAL DAY HELD AT LOI TAI LENG



Shan State Army – South troops on parade

Foreign diplomats in Shan attire attend Shan National Day celebrations

The Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) celebrated Shan National Day, on 7 February, with a huge military parade at their mountain base of Loi Tai Leng. This year was a special year, because it marked 70 years since the original signing of the Panglong Agreement on 12 February 1947 by General Aung San for the government and representatives of the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic groups in the southern Shan State town of Panglong. This year also marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of the RCSS/SSA in 1997 when they split from Khun Sa’s Mong Tai Army after it surrendered to the Myanmar Government in 1996. The festivities were also due to continue until 8 February because that day was the 60th birthday of the RCSS/SSA chairman and commander-in-chief, Lieutenant General Yawd Serk.¹²

KWO TO PARTICIPATE IN GOVERNMENT PEACE ACTIVITIES

The Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) announced in a statement that they will be participating in the peace dialogue process, and begin campaigning for peace building activities together with the Myanmar government. The announcement was made at the Second Karen Women Seminar led by the KWO which was held in Lawghila, Karen State, from 2 to 3 February. It was attended by a total of 97 Karen women. The announcement also stated that discussions at the seminar had laid down the major point concerning the handling of the crisis currently being faced by the Karen women. This major point is that the respective organizations will give training to Karen women with the aim of

¹¹ Govt agrees to private talks with KIA –
<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/24785-govt-agrees-to-private-talks-with-kia.html>
(Myanmar Times) 2 February 2017

¹² Shan National Day held at Loi Tai Leng –
<http://www.mizzima.com/news-features/shan-national-day-held-loi-tai-leng> (Mizzima) 11 February 2017

improving their ability to participate in Karen social activities in the future. Moreover, the statement reported that more information and advice will be given to Karen women who are participating in the peace process in order to help their involvement.¹³

CHIN PARTY ISSUES STATEMENT ON NATIONAL-LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The Chin National Democratic Party (CNDP) Secretary Salai Ceu O Bik Thawng told Mizzima that their party issued a Statement on 8 February, after the government had prevented the holding of the national-level political dialogue in Chin State. Salai Ceu O Bik Thawng said, “We have already made all preparations for that meeting. We assume that they deliberately did not give permission to hold this meeting so we issued a statement today.” “The national-level political meeting is very important. Union Peace Conference has been held two times. In fact, it was held in January and the 21st Panglong Conference was held for the first time to welcome the new NLD government. We have held these conferences without dynamic and vibrant political dialogue. And in accordance with the political framework adopted (in the peace process) we must hold these national-level political dialogues. We believe that it will be meaningless to hold this Union Peace Conference for the third time without these national-level political dialogues.” he added.

In their 6-point demand in the statement, CNDP expressed that they had already prepared for holding the national-level political dialogue (Chin) since November 2016 with Chin National Front (CNF), Chin political parties and Chin CSOs so they seriously and profoundly demand the Union Government to let them hold this dialogue at the earliest date. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) authorizes ethnic organisations to hold national-level political dialogues in territories of signatories of the NCA. The outcomes of political dialogues will be presented to Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) for approval and will be forwarded to the biannual Panglong Conference.¹⁴

NMSP DENOUNCES OBSERVER ROLE IN 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE

The New Mon State Party (NMSP), said that it would not take part in the upcoming 21st Century Panglong Conference, if it's only allowed to attend as an observer, according to NMSP's Chairman Nai Htaw Mon. The Chairman stated the above in a press conference after the 70th Anniversary of Mon National Day central celebration in Japan Well Village, a NMSP controlled area, in Three Pagodas Pass (TPP) Sub-township, Thai-Burma border. “We won't attend the 21st Century Panglong Conference if we are not allowed to present or discuss anything. If we are invited just to be an observer, we won't go,” said Nai Htaw Mon.

The chairman's statement referred to the plan that the government's peace commission is undertaking. Namely, to invite the ethnic armed groups that has not signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) as 'special guests' to the second Union Peace Conference, also known as the 21st Century Panglong, projected to be held on 28 February. “We will sign the NCA if they accept the UNFC's requested 9 points. We stand with the UNFC alliance,” said Nai Htaw Mon, adding that the UNFC's 9-points included that the government must announce a nationwide ceasefire, international witnesses must be included in the NCA inking, and tripartite talks must be held for political issues. Of the 21 ethnic armed groups in the country, only 8 groups have signed the NCA. The NMSP is yet to sign the accord.

“It has become tradition for armed groups to have armed parade at their ceremonies. However, the government's Tatmadaw informed us not to conduct this type of parade. Therefore, to hold an

¹³ KWO to participate in government peace activities –
<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/7774> (Eleven Myanmar) 8 February 2017

¹⁴ Chin party issues statement on national-level political dialogue –
<http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/chin-party-issues-statement-national-level-political-dialogue> (Mizzima) 9 February 2017

armed parade, we must have some forces taken from here to be stationed for security reasons. Thus far, there has been nothing of note to report,” said Lt Col. M Seik Chan, of commander of battalion no. 5 of Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), NMSP’s armed wing. The Mon State Government’s Security and Border Affair Minister warned the NMSP not to conduct an armed parade during its central celebration of 70th Mon National Day [held] at the football field in Japan Well Village, Thai-Burma border. The 70th Mon National Day central celebration was held in Kyaikmaraw Town, Mon State, and celebrations also took place not only in Mon State but in Karen State, Yangon Region, Mandalay Region, and Nay Pyi Taw Capital, as well as other parts of the world, including U.S. and Australia, where Mon people have resettled.¹⁵

MONTHLY MEETING OF SHAN STATE JMC CANCELLED

This month’s meeting of the Shan State Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC-S) is to be cancelled due to time and budget restraints, according to an official from the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA). Major Sai Oo, the RCSS/SSA spokesperson, said that his group had not received any information or briefing to the monthly JMC-S meeting for February. He said that a Viber group account had been set up to help facilitate communications; however no information had been circulated relating to the monthly meeting. “We have received no contact from each other recently,” he said. “If we can hold regular meetings, I believe it will help support the peace process.” He added: “The main reason that the JMC-S meeting could not be scheduled this month is because of budgets. Each group also has to work to ensure that they can allot time for these meetings.” The Shan State JMC was established on 1 January, 2016. However, to date only four meetings have been held. The first meeting took place on 9 January, 2016, in southern Shan State’s Kunlon Township, where the headquarters of the Burmese military Central Eastern Command is based. “We setup the JMC-S for both sides [ethnic ceasefire groups and Burmese military] to discuss mutual problems and to find solutions,” Maj Sai Oo explained.

As per the terms of the peace process, the JMCs were established to monitor military matters between the Tatmadaw (Burma armed forces) and the troops of the NCA signatories. If hostilities were to break out between groups from within the network, then the regional JMC was given the responsibility to mediate the case. Over the last year, several clashes have occurred between government forces, NCA signatories and non-signatories. Significantly, the RCSS/SSA has been involved in armed fighting against government units, most recently in the southern Shan State township of Mong Pawn. Currently, five regional JMCs are in place: Tanintharyi Region, Shan State, Karen State, Mon State and Bago Region. There is also a plan to form another JMC in Chin State. According to the Burmese military commander in Tanintharyi, Maj-Gen Lin Aung, shareholders in that region hold regular monthly meetings. He said that they also have an online network where they can discuss issues. “There has been no fighting since we setup the JMC in Tanintharyi,” he said. “We regularly contact each other via Viber. Sometimes, there are some difficulties with the mobile signal, but that is not a big problem for us.”¹⁶

SNLD KICKS OFF BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN SHAN STATE

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) on 15 February its campaign for April’s by-election, with candidates running in all seven constituencies where polls will be held in Shan State. Speaking to Shan Herald, SNLD spokesperson Sai Lek said that party members kicked off the campaign in Kehsi, Monghsu and Kengtung townships on 15 February. He explained that the

¹⁵ NMSP denounces observer role in 21st Century Panglong Conference – <http://monnews.org/2017/02/14/nmsp-denounces-observer-role-in-21st-century-panglong-conference/> (IMNA) 14 February 2017

¹⁶ Monthly meeting of Shan State JMC cancelled – <http://english.panglong.org/2017/02/14/monthly-meeting-of-shan-state-jmc-cancelled/> (S.H.A.N.) 14 February 2017

candidates' main task will be to explain the party's policies to the electorate. "We have started campaigning in all seven constituencies: three in Kehsi, another three in Monghsu, and one in Kengtung township," he said. "We are laying out our policies and helping voters understand how to cast their ballots.

Polling in Kehsi and Monghsu Townships were cancelled during the general election in November 2015 because of fighting between the Tatmadaw [Burmese government forces] and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA). "We will not be forcing people to vote for us," Sai Lek added. "We will explain to them that they can vote freely and for whomever they wish. We are taking time to explain the voting process. "During the general elections in 1990, 2010 and 2015, many people in Shan State did not understand the responsibilities of voting. To this day, many still don't truly understand the process, and that's why we are explaining it to them. This is the main issue we are addressing. "We will contest all seven seats," Sai Lek said. "If the public supports us, we believe we will win them all."

In the 2015 election, the SNLD, commonly known as the 'Tiger Head Party,' won a total of 40 seats, making it the second strongest party in Shan State, next to the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Its main rival, the Shan National Democratic Party (SNDP), won only one constituency in the last general election; that was a State Assembly seat in Mong Pan Township. The SNDP will also contest all available seats in the April 1 by-election. However, the newly formed Eastern Shan State Development Democratic Party (ESSDDP) has announced that it will not contest any seats at the upcoming by-election unless its sister parties, the SNLD and SNDP, cooperate with them.

According to a Union Election Commission (UEC) announcement on 1 October, a total of 18 vacant seats will be up for grabs in both Union and regional parliaments on April 1. Constituencies under the control of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) – namely Panghsang, Narpan, Pangwai and Mongmaw – as well as Mongla Township, which is the headquarters of the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), have not announced whether they will hold polling for the by-election¹⁷

ARAKAN ARMY CLASHES WITH GOVERNMENT TROOPS

The Arakan Army reported clashing with Burmese government forces in Arakan State on 16 February morning. The spokesperson for the Arakan Army Khaing Thukha, said AA troops traded fire with the Burmese Army in an area north of the town of Buthidaung. "A clash took place near the headwaters of the Mayu River, between the AA's 214th Battalion and a Burmese Army unit under the 5th Military Operations Command. The Burmese Army later retreated, indicating there could be casualties among their troops," Khaing Thukha told DVB. He said the area was held by the Arakan Army and the clash broke out when Tatmadaw troops encroached on the territory. Thursday's altercation was the first clash reported between the two sides in Arakan State in several months.

Meanwhile, the Chin National Front, an ethnic armed group in neighbouring Chin State, recently issued an ultimatum directed at the Arakan Army, which it ordered to cease activities in Chin State or face military action. In response to the CNF ultimatum, Khaing Thukha said the Arakan Army would be forced to retaliate if its troops were to come under attack. "We are ready to retaliate [against] whoever comes into an area where we are based without prior announcement," said Khaing Thukha. The Arakan Army is a member of the Northern Alliance, a coalition of four ethnic armed groups that engaged in hostilities with government forces late last year in northern Burma, where the Arakan Army has received military training and maintains a troop presence.¹⁸

¹⁷ SNLD kicks off by-election campaign in Shan State –

<http://english.panglong.org/2017/02/16/snld-kicks-off-by-election-campaign-in-shan-state/> (S.H.A.N.) 16 February 2017

¹⁸ Arakan Army clashes with government troops –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/arakan-army-clashes-government-troops/74189> (DVB) 16 February 2017

US AND BRITISH AMBASSADORS VISIT KACHIN STATE

Ambassadors from the United States and Britain visited Kachin State for a second time on 9 February to discuss the plight of refugees from the conflict in northern Myanmar. US Ambassador Scot Marciel and UK Ambassador Andrew Patrick arrived at Myitkyina and met with the state government officials and later also met with MPs, civic groups, UN agencies, plus cultural organisations from five Shan minorities.

Khan Lin, aka Dain Khan Phone, Deputy Speaker of the Kachin State Parliament said: “The second visit of the ambassadors was intended to discuss aid for war refugees as there is less aid for them. “We told them that no special name is being discussed about the aid in parliament and we only know about aid provided by the UN. The parliament cannot do anything, as it cannot ask for budget [from the national government]. “The parliament only expressed thanks to the international community for their help. We told them the political situation in other countries is not the same and we cannot copy it and [so we] asked for help and advice for the country.”

Khin Pyone Yee, from a Shan literature and cultural organisation, said the group did not know what the ambassadors wanted to discuss. “We will tell them about human rights violations in Kachin State and about murder cases in Hpakant, farmland issues and the concern about land-mines in the state,” he said. “And we will discuss about literature and culture. We don’t know what the ambassadors want to discuss yet.” Ambassador Marciel said the US would help Myanmar to bring peace, to provide aid for war refugees and to build a federal state.¹⁹

ANALYSIS

The recent killing of NLD legal advisor Ko Ni, has come at a very inopportune time when the government is confronted with continued fighting between government forces and the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the need for stability in Rakhine State. The government has announced that a detailed and thorough investigation would be conducted to probe the incident and to bring justice to the perpetrators. The incident could prove to be a test for the government and its commitment to promoting rule of law. Whatever motive may have been behind Ko Ni’s death, the incident is indeed a set-back for the on-going democratization process and no doubt raises concerns among those advocating reforms and change. The incident should be taken seriously. The government will need to assure the public that such kinds of killings do not occur again. The NLD government together with the military will need to find ways to address such sensitive issues if national reconciliation and reforms are to be achieved.

¹⁹ US and British Ambassadors visit Kachin State –
<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/7815> (Eleven Myanmar) 10 February 2017