

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.18

OFFICIAL MEDIA

STATE COUNSELLOR AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MEETS WA AND NDAA LEADERS

Leaders from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army-NDAA (Mongla) held talks with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw on 29 July. During the meeting the leaders of the UWSA vowed that the Wa Self-administered Division would not secede from the country. The two organisations also supported the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong and vowed to participate, said Zaw Htay, President’s Office spokesperson. “ This is the first step with the group. We are satisfied with the meeting,” he said. To join the peace making process the Wa delegation would meet with the peace making committee today in Nay Pyi Taw and the NDAA delegation will also meet the committee in Yangon. Following the meeting, the State Counsellor also met with youths from the two ethnic armed organizations in Nay Pyi Taw.

The leaders from the UWSA and NDAA (Mongla) also met with Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Nay Pyi Taw on 29 July. The UWSA delegation was led by Deputy Secretary-General Pao Yu Yi and the NDAA (Mongla) delegation was led by Chair Sai Lin. During the meeting Senior General Min Aung Hlaing clarified the Tatmadaw’s work toward achieving peace in the country and stressed the importance of the role of the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed organisations in achieving peace in the country. He also stressed the need for the ethnic armed organisations to work together with Tatmadaw with mutual understanding as the country is now on the path to democracy. The leaders of the two ethnic armed organisations discussed measures being taken for peace, and stable development in their respective regions.¹

PEACE COMMISSION MEETS UWSP AND NDAA IN NAY PYI TAW

The Peace Commission Chairman Dr Tin Myo Win, and the United Wa State Party, led by Deputy Secretary-General Pao Yu Yi, held a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on 30 July. The UWSP group expressed its satisfaction with the recent meetings with the State Counsellor and the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Secretary of the Peace Commission Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo (Rtd) said that the ethnic delegation pledged earnest cooperation with the new government in the same way as it had done with the army as well as with the former government. They vowed to continue to make fraternal efforts with solemn hope to restore peace despite challenges, the former army senior officer added. At the end of the meeting both sides responded to queries of invitation to a meeting that would review the framework for political dialogue. “The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) is more than a ceasefire agreement. It has a place for political dialogue. So a framework is essential as to determining how to organise the conference, how to set the ratio of representatives and what topics to be discussed,” he said. The former army senior officer hinted at possible amendment to the initially agreed framework for political dialogue, stressing that the framework allowed for amendment as times change. The finalisation of the framework for political dialogue will be negotiated with the ethnic armed organisations before the Union Peace Conference - the 21st Century Panglong commences. According to Khin Zaw Oo, encouraging the ethnic groups to participate in the peace process will enable them to feel that they are involved. He also quoted that the Wa delegation as saying that they would strive to join the adoption of the framework.

¹ Govt, Wa, NDAA (Mongla) meeting brings step closer to peace –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 July 2016 (p. 1)/
Commander-in-Chief holds talks with UWSA, NDAA (Mongla) delegations –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 July 2016 (p. 4)

Representatives of the NDAA(Mongla) backed the government’s “all-inclusive” peace policy and pledged again not to secede from the union, upholding it as a political principle. The organization based in Special Region-4 in Shan State held talks Union Peace Commission on 1 August in Yangon over the upcoming Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong. “ They NDAA also proposed a resource sharing issue and expressed their views that the country’s resources should be equitably shared among all ethnic peoples for the development all regions and the taxation be managed systematically,” said Secretary of the Peace Commission Lt-Gen (Rtd) Khin Zaw Oo. The two sides also discussed land issues, environmental conservation, human rights and freedom of belief. The peace commission also invited the NDAA (Mongla)leaders to participate in the political framework review meeting which is scheduled to be held in the first week of August.²

USDP CHAIRMAN THEIN SEIN MEETS UWSP, NDAA (MONGLA) DELEGATIONS

The Chairman of Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) former President Thein Sein received a delegation led by the Deputy Secretary- General of the United Wa State Party (UWSP) Pao Yu Yi and a delegation led by Chairman of the Mongla Special Area 4 Sai Lin at the Headquarter of the USDP in Nay Pyi Taw on 2 August. The meeting focused on peace-making approach acceptable to all ethnic groups, national cohesion and border areas development.³

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES ECONOMIC POLICY

The government released its economic policy on 29 July, highlighting national reconciliation and job creation as basic considerations for the policy which guarantees nationwide equitable development. Speaking on the occasion, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi stressed the importance of national reconciliation, which she considered the most important basic point for the economic policy to achieve success. “Without national reconciliation, we can’t move forward,’ she said. She also vows to bring equitable development to the agricultural, livestock and industrial sectors. Regarding natural resource extraction, the State Counsellor promised to keep a balance between environmental conservation and the economic development of the country with consent of the people.

The three-page announcement, released by the Ministry of Planning and Finance, outlined 12-point policy ranging from the privatisation of some state-owned enterprises to the development of infrastructures including electrification facilities and ports to implementing an ID card system, the Digital Government Strategy and the e-Government System. The announcement is intended to set economic policy to “create opportunities for new generations with all-round capacity”, according to the release. The policy also stated that the government will draw separate policies to attract foreign investment and to promote use of copyright and the rule of law as well as establish an effective and fair tax system. More detailed plans on energy and infrastructure will be released in future, according to the State Counsellor.⁴

UEC TO COOPERATE WITH CSOS TO ENSURE ACCURATE VOTER LISTS FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS

Union Election Commission (UEC) will seek help from Civil Service Organizations and local election observers to ensure an accurate voter lists for future elections, UEC Chairman Hla Thein told a workshop on rights and responsibilities of local election observers held in Nay Pyi Taw on 1 August. In

² Wa Joins the Fold : Peace Commission meets UWSP in Nay Pyi Taw for political dialogue framework –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 July 2016 (p. 1 &3)/

A Step Closer to Peace : NDAA (Mongla) holds talks with Peace Commission, backs “all-inclusive” peace policy –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 August 2016 (p. 1)

³ U Thein Sein meets UWSP, NDAA (Mongla) delegations –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 July 2016 (p. 2)

⁴ Engineering Equality : Government Launches Economic Policy –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 July 2016 (p. 1)

his address UEC Chair said, election observation is a tool for improving the quality of elections as observers help build public confidence in the transparency of the elections and promote acceptance of results. Acknowledging final reports of local and international election observation missions, the UEC Chairman highlighted the importance of their recommendations for next elections. According to the Chairman Hla Thein, the workshop is aimed at establishing a legal framework on local election observers and seeking ways and means for better future polls through cooperation with observation teams. The UEC Chairman also held talks with those present on a wide range of matters including election legal framework revision process. According to the UEC, more election observers will be invited to observe upcoming by-election and 2020 general elections. Presentations by the IDEA senior programme manager and the resident representative of Democracy Reporting International and discussions on a code of conduct and accreditation process for election observers were also given during the workshop. Altogether 11,445 local observers and 1,153 international observers were allowed to observe the previous general elections last year.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

UNFC WILL NOT SIGN CEASEFIRE UNLESS ALL MEMBERS INCLUDED

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a 9-member ethnic alliance that opted out of signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) with the previous government, said it would not sign the agreement unless all of the member groups were permitted to join. UNFC leaders reiterated their all-inclusive policy on 29 July, the fourth day of the Mai Ja Yang ethnic summit in Kachin State. “We have adopted a stance that UNFC members will only sign the NCA if all groups can sign,” said Nai Hong Sar, vice chair of the UNFC. Ethnic leaders said that they were not yet clear on whether the new government wanted them to sign the NCA before or after the upcoming Union Peace Conference. Burma’s military has officially stated that it would not allow the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), or the Arakan Army (AA) to sign the agreement unless the three groups officially released a statement saying that they would disarm. “[The Myanmar Army] wants us to renounce our beliefs and apologize to them and the people for waging a wrongful war. This is virtually impossible for us,” said Brig Gen Tun Myat Naing, AA chief of staff. “We are fighting for our beliefs, without earning any money. Asking us to give up something that we value more than our lives makes us think that they are intentionally banning us to impede the NCA,” he said. The three allied groups are interested and prepared to join the political dialogue, but they have not received a concrete offer from the government, and the peace conference is drawing near. However, the groups have sent a message to Aung San Suu Kyi about finding a positive solution, Tun Myat Naing added. Of the three groups, only the AA attended the Mai Ja Yang summit. The TNLA and MNDAA were absent. “Without the inclusion of all of the ethnic groups, the peace process is meaningless and nationwide peace will not be possible. Therefore, we do not accept the exclusion of certain groups. We are all ready to take part if we can all sign and attend the peace conference without restriction,” said Nai Hong Sar. The UNFC also has plans to meet with the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the largest non-state armed group in Burma, to discuss the inclusion of the AA, MNDAA and TNLA in the peace process.⁶

YOUTH ETHNIC ALLIANCE EMERGES AFTER SUMMIT

A major new national ethnic youth alliance was formed during the with its first vow being to ensure the inclusion of young people in the forthcoming 21st Century Panglong Conference – despite government chiefs’ attempts to dismiss them. The announcement comes after around 800 youth

⁵ UEC to cooperate with CSOs to ensure accurate voter lists for future elections – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 August 2016 (p. 2)

⁶ UNFC Will Not Sign Ceasefire Unless All Members Included – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/unfc-will-not-sign-ceasefire-unless-members-included.html> (the Irrawaddy) 1 August 2016

delegates from across the country gathered at the site of the historic 1947 Panglong agreement for the past week to discuss peace, federalism and ethnic minority rights. Organisers of the Ethnic Youth Conference, which concluded on 2 August said that if the government would not allow the youth contingent a dedicated seat at the table, they would lobby ethnic armed groups, civil society groups and politicians. Min Naung Htaw, a representative of the Mon delegation, said, “We are not sure yet whether our desire to be involved will be fulfilled or not, but we will find a way by approaching the ethnic leaders and the MPs.” Kyaw Min Htike, a Dawei ethnic youth representative, said, “We youths are the future of this country. The government should create a pathway for young people in the political sector to have a role in forming a better country.” Last-minute attempts by the government to halt the Ethnic Youth Conference were ignored by organisers who pushed ahead regardless. Deputy Director General for the President’s Office Zaw Htay suggested the young delegates were wasting their time. “The government will not take into account their recommendations because it already has plans for the participation of civil society groups in the peace process,” he said. But the leaders of the new youth alliance insisted on their right to be involved. The much-heralded 21st Century Panglong Conference, due to take place at the end of this month, will see 700 representatives of the government, parliament, the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed groups, political parties, ethnic representatives and a small “other relevant representatives” contingent come together in a bid to reach an agreement to end the country’s long-running civil war. While campaigners have called for a quota of female representatives to be instated, the issue of youth representation has largely gone undiscussed. By far the majority of those who will attend the event tipped as so crucial to the country’s future will be older men. Organisers of the Ethnic Youth Conference, which ran for 6 days with delegates from dozens of different ethnic groups in attendance, said another key resolution from the event was a unified demand for the immediate cessation of major business projects involving natural resources in conflict zones. “When we analysed the causes of conflict, natural resources were seen to be one of the principal issues,” said Khun Oo, a Pa-O ethnic spokesperson for the new National Ethnic Youth Alliance. “Any big natural resource projects must involve transparency and accountability and should not be allowed to begin until peace has been achieved,” he added. While consensus was reached on what would be a positive step toward achieving peace, the youth delegates were unable to gain agreement on another key conference topic – how a federal Union should look. Representatives said the new alliance would continue to discuss the issue. Organisers said that the new alliance would comprise representatives of at least 26 different ethnic minorities, with more expected to come on board. “We organised a historic event that showed big unity among the ethnic people in the spirit of the 1947 Panglong Agreement. We are proud of it and we will continue working for the federal Union we dream of,” said Khun Oo.⁷

KAREN WOMEN LEADERS MARGINALISED IN WAKE OF CEASEFIRE

Women are losing positions of community leadership as ceasefire agreements see men return home from fighting, a new report by the Karen Human Rights Group has found. The report, “Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles : Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar”, said that women in Karen areas of southeast Myanmar experienced a number of changes in their lives since the 2012 ceasefire between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar government. One of the key findings was that women who had taken on positions of leadership in their wards and villages while men were away involved in civil conflict were now being squeezed out of those roles. “In our report there are eight key issues we focus on, but [one of the most significant] findings was that in the past women had to take leading roles, but after the ceasefire that leading role was handed back to men. Women expressed the feeling that after the ceasefire they were no longer being given a role,” said Eh Taw, a spokesperson for KHRC. The report cites a 20-year-old woman from Kyaikto township, in Thaton

⁷ Youth ethnic alliance emerges after summit –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21733-youth-ethnic-alliance-emerges-after-summit.html>

(Myanmar Times) 3 August 2016

District. “In the past, if the people called a meeting, most of the villagers who participated in the meeting were female, therefore, they selected a woman as the village head in the conflict period. They selected a village head who could speak Myanmar [language] and had self-confidence to speak with the Tatmadaw.” She added, “After the peace process, females and males are participating in the meetings, so when they select the village head most of them are male ... [The men] did not attend the meetings [in the past] because of the conflict period.” As well as the gender imbalance in villages during the conflict period, reasons given for the high numbers of female village heads included the fact that villagers believed members of the Tatmadaw would be less likely to beat a woman. Respondents told researchers that while some women had concerns about taking on the role of village head, particularly when it required dealing with members of the military or armed groups at night, others believed it had brought them status. The report also found that because of the continued presence of armed men in their area, women remain fearful, including over the threat of sexual violence. Landmines were also identified as a further danger lingering after the conflict, one that continues to restrict women’s access to land and services, as well as posing a direct threat of death or injury. Other changes reported following the ceasefire involved increased land grabbing – particularly in relation to road constructions as moves toward development were accompanied by demand for infrastructure. In their conclusion, the report authors made a number of recommendations, many of which relate to the implementation of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Myanmar is party. The recommendations include providing training and building the awareness of local administration offices at township and ward/village tract levels on issues of gender inequality and rural women’s rights, including on the right of women and men to jointly register their land. It also calls for more work to be done to achieve equal representation of women in leadership positions, from village to Union level – including women from different ethnic minority backgrounds and women who have returned after being displaced.⁸

ANALYSIS

The government in its effort to achieve national reconciliation has recently held talks with leaders from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army-NDAA (Mongla). While the talks are the first between the NLD-gOvernment and the two groups it should be seen a positive step in the right direction and that future talks also with other EAOs and groups should also be explored. While both the government and the UWSA and NDAA groups have expressed their desire to achieve peace the reality is that both sides and all stakeholders involved will need to make the necessary concessions and compromises if they are genuinely committed to peace. Whatever the case may be, the meetings will no doubt serve as a basis towards the national reconciliation process and that the government together with the Tatmadaw (military) will need to work hand in hand and more importantly adopt a common position and understanding in handling the on-going peace process. The task which lies ahead will be tested with the convening of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference in the coming weeks.

⁸ Karen women leaders marginalised in wake of ceasefire –
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21719-karen-women-leaders-marginalised-in-wake-of-ceasefire.html> (Myanmar Times) 3 August 2016