

# POLITICAL MONITOR No.1

## OFFICIAL MEDIA

### **NATIONAL-LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE FOR ETHNIC GROUPS HELD IN KAYIN STATE**

The Sub-National Ethnic Political Dialogue (Kayin) was held in Hpa-an, Kayin State from 18 to 20 January. The ceremony was attended by Kayin State Chief Minister Nan Khin Htwe Myint, Chairman of Karen National Union Saw Mutu Sae Po, Vice Chairman of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre Dr Tin Myo Win, Commander of Southeast Command Maj-Gen Myo Win and Secretary of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee/Panglong Conference (UPDJC/PC) Khin Zaw Oo.

During the first day discussion, political papers were read out by representatives of the Karen National Union (KNU), the KNU/ Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Karen Unity and Peace Committee (KUPEC) and the KNU/ KNLA. Member of the Union Peace Commission Aung Tun Thet discussed economic matters. On the second day of the meeting, Kayin representatives discussed the issuance of a paper by sectors, with the revised paper to be submitted to representatives on the third day of the meeting. The sub-national Ethnic Political Dialogue (Kayin) concluded with summaries of discussions of political sector group, economic sector group, social sector group and land and natural resources sector group—and proposals of Kayin civil society organizations, Kayin youths, the organizing committee, the regional and Kayin political parties were put on record. Fundamental principles adopted and reached at the dialogues are to be submitted to the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference. The meeting was attended by over 600 participants of the KNU, the DKBA, the KNU/KNLA-PC, Kayin political parties, religious leaders, representatives from Kayah, Kayin and Mon States and Taninthayi, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawaddy regions, Kayin Civil Society Organizations, representative of national races, officials of the UPDJC, members of the Kayin State Cabinet and diplomats.<sup>1</sup>

### **PEACE PROCESS ORIENTATION COURSE BEGINS**

The Peace Process Orientation course 1/2017 kicked off at the National Reconciliation and Peace Center in Nay Pyi Taw on 19 January. The three-day course was attended by supervision committee members from places that are initially to hold sub-national political dialogues, designated supervision committee members from States which have not yet prepared to hold national-level political dialogues, government representatives at the Union Peace Conference - 21st Century Panglong and executive members of government's group. The Orientation Course was arranged to clarify how to perform the very basics of the present peace process — the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the framework of the political dialogues, instructions on national-level political dialogues, and how to carry out negotiations during the conference, said Union Minister Kyaw Tint Swe, in his capacity as the Vice-Chairman of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre. Political negotiations have been categorized into five sectors — political, economic, social, security and land/natural environment sectors. Trainees should be well-versed in how to negotiate in sectors, how to make decisions and how to resolve a deadlock in negotiations. Persons who have previously taken part in the peace process were selected as tutors after completing the course, he added. He also said that the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong comes as ethnic armed groups have demanded time to solve political issues through political means in order to end the nearly 70-

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<sup>1</sup> National-Level Political Dialogue for Ethnic Groups (Kayin) begins – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 19 January 2017 (p. 2)/ National-level political dialogue for ethnic groups (Kayin) continues – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 20 January 2017 (p. 3)/ National Political Dialogues for Ethnic Groups (Kayin) concludes – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/21\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/21_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 21 January 2017 (p. 3)

year-old civil armed conflicts in the country. “The unique solution to cease age-old armed conflicts is Federalism, which will suit Myanmar and be able to be effectively implemented. It has been accepted by all. Union Peace Conference— 21st Century Panglong is the only political round-table to negotiate Federalism,” said the Union minister. Border Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung discussed the emergence of the NCA step by step, with the Joint Monitoring Committee and its responsibilities discussed by Col Wunna Aung, secretary of JMC, the framework of political dialogues by Hla Maung Shwe, member of the JMC, and Federalism by Sayar Kyaw Win. On 20 and 21 January, situations of peace process and organization, working instructions for political dialogues, national-level negotiations and working instructions were discussed.<sup>2</sup>

### **MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH HOLD CONSULTATIONS ON REPATRIATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS FROM RAKHINE STATE**

Myanmar and Bangladesh have agreed to start consultations for verification and repatriation of those who are proved to have fled from Myanmar following the 9 October attacks against police outposts, according to a statement released by the Myanmar Foreign Ministry on 12 January. The Ministry released the statement following the visit of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Kyaw Tin to Bangladesh as Special Envoy of the State Counsellor from 11 to 12 January. The Myanmar delegation called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her residence in Dhaka on 11 January. During the meetings, the two sides cordially discussed issues of mutual interest and expressed the common desire to deepen bilateral relations and cooperation between Myanmar and Bangladesh and to resume the existing annual bilateral consultation mechanisms as well as to hold regular meetings between the two border security forces and Army-to-Army talks. They also stressed the importance of exchanging information with a view to maintaining peace and security along the border and to preventing infiltration of terrorists. The Bangladesh Prime Minister expressed her desire to strengthen ties with its neighbouring countries and reiterated Bangladesh’s zero tolerance policy against terrorism. She also stressed that Bangladesh will not allow its soil to be used for terrorist acts against its neighbouring countries and sought Myanmar’s cooperation to resolve the border issues through negotiations. The Special Envoy also presented to the Prime Minister the State Counsellor’s letter expressing her confidence that Myanmar and Bangladesh would be able to address the issues of mutual concern in a spirit of good neighbourliness, trust and mutual understanding between the two countries. The Myanmar Special Envoy and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Kyaw Tin also met with his counterpart Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali and Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque on separate occasions at the Padma State Guest House in Dhaka.<sup>3</sup>

### **UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR VISITS MYANMAR**

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee and party arrived on 9 January in Myanmar to begin her fifth visit to the country. During the visit the Special Rapporteur visited Kachin, Mon and Rakhine State and toured IDP camps in Myitkyina and also Warbaik and Pyaingpaik villages in Rakhine State affected by the violent attacks last year. Ms. Lee and party also held meetings with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Vice President and Chairman of the Maungtaw Commission Myint Swe, Chairman of Legal Cases and the Special Assessment Commission of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann and Union ministers and members of the various parliamentary committees. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi briefed the UN Special Rapporteur regarding the peace-making process, efforts for promoting human rights, the situation in Kachin and northern Shan states, which saw armed conflicts recently, and promoting the sending of humanitarian aid to the areas. At the meeting Ms. Lee strongly denounced the violent

<sup>2</sup> Peace process orientation course begins –/

[https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 20 January 2017 (p. 1 &3)

<sup>3</sup> Myanmar, Bangladesh to consult on villagers who fled to Bangladesh –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 January 2017 (p. 1)

attacks on border outposts in northern Rakhine in November and October and openly discussed with the State Counsellor the allegations of human right abuses by security forces in northern Rakhine during area clearance operations and increasing humanitarian aid to the state. Chairman of Legal Cases and the Special Assessment Commission of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann and the Special Rapporteur exchanged views on legal cases related to the human rights situation in the country, including the specific rights of women, children and Myanmar citizens. They also discussed the commission's assessment of existing laws and cooperation on drafting bills and the role of assessment of laws in democratic reforms.<sup>4</sup>

### **ADVISORY BODY OF PC HOLDS TALKS WITH DPN DELEGATION IN CHIANG MAI**

The Advisory body of the Peace Commission and the Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN) led by Khu Oo Reh of the United Nationalities Federal Council-UNFC met in Chiang Mai, Thailand on 13 January. Aung Kyi, The Chairman of the Advisory Body of the Peace Commission Aung Kyi and leader of the DPN Khu Oo Reh, , delivered addresses at the meeting, before discussing the 9-point demand of the UNFC, future talks in Yangon and matters related to the Joint-Monitoring Committee. Member of the Advisory Body Hla Maung Shwe, said that they had explained the policy of the government and the talk was successful to some extent but added that not all matters were solved at the meeting.<sup>5</sup>

## **UNOFFICIAL MEDIA**

### **KNU TROOPS FIRE ROUNDS AT NMSP'S THE-CHAUNG BASE**

According to Mon News, a unit of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), armed wing of Karen National Union (KNU) invaded and opened fire at the The-chaung base of Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), the armed wing of New Mon State Party (NMSP), in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region On 11 January morning. After the KNLA's initial gunfire at the MNLA unit office based in The-chaung area, MNLA troops soon retaliated, and the exchange from both sides took place for 15 minutes at around 5:30AM, on 11 January. Following the morning's fight, both sides launched fresh attacks at 12:30PM that same day for another 10 minutes between The-Chaung and Tawlawi plantations, according to an official from the NMSP's Tavoy-District.

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<sup>4</sup> Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar arrives – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 January 2017 (p. 2)/  
UN special rapporteur visits IDP camps in Kachin State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 January 2017 (p. 3)/  
UN human rights envoy Yanghee Lee visits correctional facilities in Mon State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 January 2017 (p. 3)/  
Ms. Yanghee Lee visits Sittway, Rakhine State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 January 2017 (p. 1 &3)/  
Special Rapporteur visits Rakhine State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 January 2017 (p. 3)/  
UN Special Rapporteur tours Rakhine – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 January 2017 (p. 3)/  
State Counsellor, UN human rights envoy hold talks – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 19 January 2017 (p. 1)/  
UN rights envoy, Maungtaw Commission discuss alleged abuse in northern Rakhine – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/19_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 19 January 2017 (p. 1)/  
Thura U Shwe Mann receives UN rights envoy – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 20 January 2017 (p. 3)/  
Special Rapporteur meets union ministers, Hluttaw committees – [https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20\\_jan\\_17\\_gnlm](https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/20_jan_17_gnlm) (GNLM) 20 January 2017

<sup>5</sup> Advisory body of PC holds talks with DPN delegation in Chiang Mai – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs23/GNLM2017-01-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 January 2017 (p. 3)

“Early this morning [January 11], the KNLA troops fired roughly 40 times using large artillery rounds. In the process, our office building was damaged,” said the official from the NMSP’s Tavoy-District.

As a result of the attack, two men from the MNLA’s unit were wounded, with one seemed to be sent to hospital carrying serious injuries, according to NMSP Headquarters. It was reportedly stated that after the NMSP signed state level and union level ceasefire agreements with the government, The-chaung base is one of the 18 bases the NMSP’s troops had agreed with the government. The-chaung base is under NMSP’s Battalion No. 2 control in the area of Kin-chaung-pyar, Yebyu Township. However, although the KNU already signed state level and union level as well as the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) with the government, there is no demarcation for the KNU in the area yet. The troops from the KNU’s Brigade 4 and the NMSP’s Tavoy-District Unit had exchanged fire four times [from] late 2016, a result of trespassing into the NMSP’s controlled territory. On 11 September 11, 2016, 3 representatives from the NMSP and the KNU respectively, held a meeting and founded a liaison committee to prevent any armed engagement by both sides based in Yebyu Township.<sup>6</sup>

### **BURMESE ARMY CAPTURES 3 KIA BASES**

Burmese government forces say they have captured three bases from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), including its local base command in Bhamo District, southern Kachin State. According to a report from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief, the *Tatmadaw* [Burmese army] successfully captured a base in Mansi Township belonging to the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the KIA’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade on 18 January morning. The report said that two other Kachin outposts soon fell, following a series of assaults since 13 January that included aerial and artillery bombardment.

According to the Burmese military chief’s office, the base in Mansi had been a major hub for smuggling timber and cattle to “a neighbouring country”, which almost certainly refers to China. It is also alleged that the KIA’s 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion was also involved in attacking strategic military positions in Mongko in Shan State’s Muse District last November before it was routed by government forces, forcing the Kachin rebel unit into a retreat. The *Tatmadaw* reported that it continued to track the rebels’ movements via ground and aerial surveillance, and ultimately located their base of operations near the village of Mangan, adding that the base was situated outside the KIA’s demarcated zone. Minister of Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung blamed the ethnic militia for provoking the assaults by violating an agreement not to expand their troop strength or territory. “They previously agreed not to expand their forces or set up new bases,” said the minister. “Clashes are continuing in Shan State because they are not adhering to this agreement,” he continued. “We have no reason to fight ethnic armed groups that comply. Both sides must keep to the agreement and find peaceful solutions via political dialogue.” The commander-in-chief’s office released a further statement on 19 January, claiming that *Tatmadaw* troops had seized 108 tons of logs at the base in Mansi. The KIA has so far been unavailable for comment. San Awng, a member of the Peace-Talk Creation Group in Kachin State, which frequently mediates negotiations between the KIA and the Burmese military, confirmed that the base had been captured but dismissed the allegation that it was a major timber-smuggling centre.

“It’s likely just propaganda,” said San Awng. “The KIA is not solely responsible for the entire timber-smuggling operation. The logs come from Sagaing Division, so there must be more parties involved. There are no forests in the KIA 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s area.”

The KIA is one of four ethnic armed groups –alongside the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta’ang National Liberation Army – that coordinated simultaneous attacks on Burmese military and police positions in and around Muse Township on 20 November.

<sup>6</sup> KNU troops fire rounds at NMSP’s The-chaung base –

<http://monnews.org/2017/01/12/knu-troops-fire-rounds-at-nmsps-the-chaung-base/> (IMNA) 12 January 2017

Clashes ensued after the *Tatmadaw* reinforced its troop strength in the area, and brought in heavy weapons. Jet fighters have also been used on rebel strongholds. The ongoing conflict has compelled thousands of local residents to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. Many crossed the border into China, where authorities arranged makeshift accommodations for them.<sup>7</sup>

### **MISSING KACHIN PASTORS CONFIRMED DETAINED BY BURMA ARMY**

The Burma Army confirmed on 19 January the arrest of two Kachin pastors, Nawng Latt and Gam Seng, who disappeared on Christmas Eve in the conflict-torn northern Shan State town of Mong Ko. The two Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) pastors were arrested in Mong Ko on 24 December at 6:30pm and are accused of acting as “financial-supporter, informer, recruiter, [and] rumor-monger” for ethnic armed groups during the Northern Alliance’s offensives in November and December, according to a statement from the Ministry of Defense. The Burma Army said the pair were investigated in line with Section 376 of Burma’s Constitution, which states that no person can be detained for more than 24 hours without charge except “on precautionary measures taken for the security of the Union or prevalence of law and order, peace and tranquility.” According to the statement, the “two arrestees could not be detained under investigation by opening files of lawsuits” as there were ongoing military clashes in Mong Ko, and there was no functioning police force in the town at that time. The two men had assisted journalists from Rangoon (including those from the Irrawaddy) to report on the situation in Mong Ko, the site of heavy fighting between the Burma Army and the Northern Alliance—a coalition of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Arakan Army (AA). Despite multiple requests for information from the KBC - including a letter to the State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi—the pair’s whereabouts remained unknown for nearly a month. A Lashio-based KBC official, Zau Ra, told local news media that the pastors’ friends and family were surprised to learn the news from a military statement. “We were all worried that they had been killed.” Zau Ra strongly rejected the Burma Army accusations that the two men assisted the KIA by informing them of Burma Army information, recruiting troops, and transporting fuel. “They only helped the wounded. They did not support the [ethnic armed groups],” he asserted. The KBC have contacted the Burma Army to request that the two men be handed over to Mong Ko police as soon as possible. Zau Ra also noted the timing of the Burma Army’s statement; it came on the two-year anniversary of the double rape and murder of two Kachin teachers—purportedly by Burma Army soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

### **BURMESE ARMY CLASHES WITH RCSS/SSA IN MONG PAWN**

A Burmese army unit has exchanged small arms fire with the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) in the southern Shan State township of Mong Pawn. The incident happened at about 6 a.m on 19 January, according to a resident in Loilem, who said the clash was between Burmese army Battalion 429 and RCSS/SSA troops near Nongle village, Pengjai tract, in Loilem District’s Mong Pawn Township. “The RCSS/SSA is active in this area and is led by Maj. Muu Ni,” said the source. “In the past, fighting has broken out around here between the RCSS/SSA and the Pa-O armed group.” No casualties have been reported.

Col. Sai La, a spokesperson for the RCSS/SSA – which is one of 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations that signed a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) with the previous Thein Sein government – said the fighting could affect the peace process. He claimed that hostilities are breaking out in many regions because the *Tatmadaw* [Burmese military] wishes to flex its muscles and create conflict across the

<sup>7</sup> Burmese army captures 3 bases from Kachin rebels – <http://www.dvb.no/news/burmese-army-captures-3-bases-from-kachin-rebels/73656> (DVB) 20 January 2017

<sup>8</sup> Missing Kachin Pastors Confirmed Detained by Burma Army – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/missing-kachin-pastors-confirmed-detained-by-burma-army.html> (the Irrawaddy) 20 January 201

country. He explained that in order to solve issues of conflict, the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) must be involved at each and every level. “When trust is broken, peace will also be destroyed,” he added. At least five clashes have occurred between government forces and RCSS/SSA troops since the NCA was signed in October 2015. On October 5, 2016, local news media reported that Burmese army Battalion 292 had launched offensives against Shan Herald RCSS/SSA units in Wan Boi village, Tonglao village-tract, in southern Shan State’s Mong Kung Township, a site where the Shan group had set up a rehabilitation facility for local drug addicts. The fighting compelled more than 2,000 civilians in the area to flee their homes.<sup>9</sup>

### **ICRC PREVENTED FROM HOLDING TRAINING AT SSA’S HEADQUARTERS**

The Red Cross was denied permission to run a training workshop this week at the headquarters of an ethnic armed group. The International Committee of the Red Cross was scheduled to lead the legal workshop on January 16 in Wan Hai, the Shan State Army’s base. ICRC communications Coordinator Jean-Yves Clémento told *local news media* that the intention of the workshop was to train members of the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) in human rights laws, and especially the Geneva Convention. “It is true that we have recently been denied authorisation to access this area. However, we had been granted authorisation to travel to this same area on multiple occasions in the past,” he said. “We organise such workshops with parties [involved in] the conflicts in Myanmar, [including] the Myanmar army and armed groups,” he said, adding that the trainings are aimed at protecting those affected by the conflict. He declined to comment on who had cancelled the Wan Hai training, or to speculate on why it was called off. However, Sao Naw Leik, a spokesperson of the SSPP/SSA said it was not his group, but the Tatmadaw’s Eastern Central Command, that had stopped the training. A Myanmar language media outlet called *The Ladies’ Journal* quoted Colonel Sai Phone Han, another SSPP/SSA spokesperson as saying that the ICRC had sent a request for permission to the Shan State authorities, and the command turned it down. “The ICRC was able to access Wan Hai to help IDPs in the past. But I heard that the ICRC was denied permission this time due to the current situation,” he told the journal. The SSA and the Tatmadaw were engaged in fighting in October and November 2015. The conflict ended within six weeks, but prevented Kyethi Township from participating in the historic November 2015 election. Three seats for the township are open in the upcoming April by-election, and the election commission has said it expects polls to go ahead with the SSPP’s cooperation. Deputy Director General of the President’s Office Zaw Htay said he was not aware of the cancelled ICRC training in Wan Hai. General Aung Ye Win, a spokesperson for the Tatmadaw, said, “I don’t know about that. I’ll have to ask the Eastern Central Command.” Clémento said that the ICRC intends to reapply for permission to access Wan Hai to hold the planned training. “We will resubmit a notification to [access] the area after a discussion with the relevant Shan State authorities,” he said.<sup>10</sup>

### **TNLA CALLS FOR NEW PEACE PROCESS ROADMAP**

The Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) - one of the armed groups engaged in ongoing fighting with the Tatmadaw - has slammed the new government’s guidance of the peace process as “ineffectual”. The group, which has not signed a ceasefire, demanded a widening of the peace process and called on the NLD to do more leg work to involve all ethnic groups. In a 7 January statement released after the TNLA annual conference, the group went so far as to accuse the NLD of hindering the political transition’s forward momentum. “Since the NLD-led government has not been

<sup>9</sup> Burmese army clashes with RCSS/SSA in Mong Pawn – <http://english.panglong.org/2017/01/20/burmese-army-clashes-with-rcsssa-in-mong-pawn/> (Shan Herald News Agency) 20 January 2017

<sup>10</sup> ICRC prevented from holding training at SSA’s headquarters – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/24627-icrc-prevented-from-holding-training-at-ssa-s-headquarters.html> (Myanmar Times) 20 January 2017

able to change the Tatmadaw's peace policy, the fire of more than 70 years of civil war has not ceased, but has instead intensified," the statement reads. To achieve success in the peace process, the TNLA said the NLD must be willing to overhaul the roadmap. "The NLD-led government should review current peace-related processes and its seven-step peace roadmap and initiate a more practical approach [that will] include all armed ethnic revolutionary organisations," it said. The TNLA, which is a member of the newly created Northern Alliance coalition force, added in the statement that it is willing to stop all military offensives in order to begin political dialogue with the government. The group also said it would protect its operational areas which were invaded by the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). "To avoid unnecessary problems, we are willing to meet with the RCSS and have dialogues as soon as possible to prevent problems between us," said the statement. The RCSS is party to the NCA but began engaging in fire with the TNLA toward the end of 2015 over territorial disputes. The TNLA accused the RCSS of invading with the assistance of the Tatmadaw, an accusation both the RCSS and the Tatmadaw have denied. The Northern Alliance – made up of the Kachin Independence Army, the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the TNLA – launched a joint offensive against the Tatmadaw near the mile 105 trade outpost in Muse Township, Shan State in November. Government peace negotiators have tried to broker ceasefire negotiations, so far unsuccessfully, due to disputes over the composition of the talks. The alliance insists on a group meeting, while the government demands one-on-one negotiations. The TNLA did not attend last August's 21st-Century Panglong Conference after disagreements over a precondition to disarm. It is not yet clear if the group will be invited to the second 21st-Century Panglong Conference anticipated for the end of this month, or if only NCA signatory groups will be invited. In response to the TNLA's statement, Zaw Htay, deputy director general of the President's Office yesterday referred to the State Counsellor's 23 November statement. "In her statement, she stressed three points: political problems must be solved by dialogues, they [the ethnic armed groups] need to come under the umbrella of the NCA to participate in dialogues, and only after this, will the political dialogues start. The government's stance has not changed," Zaw Htay said.<sup>11</sup>

### **JMC-S HOLDS PUBLIC MEETING IN MON STATE'S YE TOWNSHIP**

The State-level Ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee – Mon State (JMC-S) held a public meeting on 7 January, in Hnintsot Village, Ye Township, Mon State, to explain the rules and regulations between the ethnic armed groups that signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and the Tatmadaw. The meeting attracted over 400 local participants in Ye Township, in addition to the presence of the Mon State JMC vice-chairman (1), Colonel Saw Palay, Colonel Win Naing Oo of Mon State's Security and Border Affairs Ministry, and the Mon State Chief Police Bo Bo Oo.

"They explained to the locals the rules and regulations that both sides [NCA signatory groups and Tatmadaw] have to respect. The public wants to live in peace right now. They do not want conflict like there was in the past. They request that both sides take responsibility for long term peace," said Aung Than Lwin, who attended as a representative of Ye Township's Township Municipal Committee. Locals urged at the meeting that those who are responsible must participate in finding solutions for the land disputes in Ye Township. "The Joint Monitoring Committee – Mon State members should elaborate about the KNU (Karen National Union) and Tatmadaw situation because the KNU has signed the NCA. At the meeting, they explained the rules that both sides should follow," said a local. The JMC-S Mon State members also clarified the fundamental points of the NCA, the NCA's objectives and goals, ceasefire matters, the stations of armed groups, and future programs. JMC-S Mon State was founded on June 30, 2016, and currently holds 14 members, including Brig.

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<sup>11</sup> TNLA calls for new peace process roadmap – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/24460-tnla-calls-for-new-peace-process-roadmap.html> (Myanmar Times) 9 January 2017

Gen. Myo Win of the Southeast Command in Mon State, as core chairperson, Col. Saw Palay as vice-chairman (1) and Dr. Min Nwe Soe, vice-chairman (2).<sup>12</sup>

### **SHAN ARMY ACCUSED OF FORCED RECRUITMENT**

Villagers from Nam San and Mong Ne townships in southern Shan State say they fled their homes recently to avoid a forced recruitment drive by the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South). Officially known as the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army, or RCSS/SSA, the Shan militia has recently been engaged in several clashes against the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The SSA-South is a signatory to the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, while the TNLA is part of a coalition known as the Northern Alliance which launched attacks on Burmese government positions in northern Shan State in November. The Nam San and Mong Ne residents told local news media that 10 persons were conscripted from their villages on 3 January. "The RCSS/SSA has a list of names of every person living in Nam San and Mong Ne," said one villager on condition of anonymity. "They came looking for particular men. That's why we fled." SSA-South spokesperson Lt-Col Sai Ngin rejected the accusations. "Our headquarters did not initiate any new policy of recruitment. This may be a misconception among the villagers," he said. However, villagers said that the practice of conscription by the SSA-South is so common in the area that every year many youngsters leave home and head to the Thai border or other towns to find work; consequently there are very few young people left in those villages. In addition to ethnic Shan people, groups of Palaung or Ta'ang live in the Nam San and Mong Ne areas, as well as Pa-O and Lisu nationals.<sup>13</sup>

### **KNU CHIEF CALLS FOR RELAXED LAWS**

Chairman of the Karen Union (KNU) General Mutu Say Poe, has called on the government and the army to ease restrictions and stop their repeated attacks if they want more groups to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement. The KNU Chairman said talks are needed to help build a peace deal and an inclusive federal union. He called for a unified effort from different groups, mainly based around a viable ceasefire. "I call on all sides to meet as quickly as possible without putting disagreements, arguments, blame, hatred and rancor at the forefront and that national reconciliation is the lifeblood for sustainable improvement of our peace processes," he added.<sup>14</sup>

### **SHAN WHITE TIGER PARTY WARNS SSPP TO STAY OUT OF POLITICS**

The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), also known as the White Tiger Party, has called for the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) rebel army not to side with any political parties and stay neutral in future elections. The SSPP recently held its annual general meeting and said it aimed to help establish peace and development, end ethnic people's suffering and political and military conflict. The SNDP said it hoped the SSPP would boost public trust and respect by not siding with any political parties ahead of future elections. Major Sai Su, spokesman for the SSPP, was unavailable for comment. The SSPP also recently said that it would participate in the next 21st-century Panglong conference or Union Peace Conference and actively collaborate in making Myanmar a developed nation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> JMC-S holds public meeting in Mon State's Ye Tsp –

<http://monnews.org/2017/01/09/jmc-s-holds-public-meeting-in-mon-states-ye-tsp/> (IMNA) 9 January 2017

<sup>13</sup> Shan army accused of forced recruitment –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/shan-army-accused-forced-recruitment/73495> (DVB) 9 January 2017

<sup>14</sup> KNU chief calls for relaxed laws –

<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/7477> (Eleven Myanmar) 19 January 2017

<sup>15</sup> Shan rebels told to stay out of politics –

<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/7427> (Eleven Myanmar) 15 January 2017

## UNITY PROTEST HELD OVER DIVIDED ANP

Locals in Taungup, Arakan State, staged a protest on 8 January to voice their displeasure at the factionalism that has beset one of the country's strongest ethnic political parties as members of the Arakan National Party (ANP) continue to weigh whether to formally split the party in two. About 130 Taungup residents gathered in front of City Hall over the weekend as members of the Arakan League for Democracy faction of the ANP were holding a meeting. Former political prisoner Maung Maung Thet, one of the demonstrators, told local news media that the protest was aimed at avoiding a situation in which Arakanese nationalists "don't know who our father is." "Firstly, we don't agree on separation from the party. Secondly, we are against the ALD faction that came to Taungup to make a bigger separation," he said. "In Arakan [State], the two parties joined into one at the people's request. We don't want to see another new party. We will have difficulties choosing a party. We don't want to get into a situation where we don't know who our father is." ANP leaders should discuss among the different factions to forge a united front once more, said Zaw Naing Win, who also participated in the demonstration. "We want to see a reunion. ... If the leaders have different positions, how about our young people [discuss] how we can move forward in politics," he said. "We asked the leaders to talk to each other to review how they could unite again. That's what our young people want."<sup>16</sup>

## ANALYSIS

The government's peace process training courses as well as the sub-national Ethnic Political Dialogue (Kayin) are being implemented as part of the national dialogue process and bringing genuine peace to the country. The NLD is keen to bring more ethnic armed organisations that have yet to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. However, the battles between government forces and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) will not augur well for the on-going peace process. Furthermore, the incident between a unit of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and groups from the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA, can only create further tensions. Furthermore, the operations against EAOs in the Kachin and Shan States can be seen as actions taken by the Tatmadaw that the NLD government may lack the authority to restrain. And as such, the government's current measures to bring peace may fall short of its objectives. Similarly, the crisis in Rakhine State has not helped the government and the visit by the Special Envoy and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to Bangladesh will no doubt contribute to resolving the issue. However, it is important to note that successive governments including the current government has failed to prevent the outbreaks of violent attacks. The formation and investigation by the Maungtaw Commission led by the Vice-President will not be sufficient to address the hostile and tense situation in the Rakhine State. The use of violence must stop.

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<sup>16</sup> Unity protest held over divided ANP – <http://www.dvb.no/news/unity-protest-held-divided-anp/73490> (DVB) 9 January 2017