

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.7

OFFICIAL MEDIA

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES MARTIAL LAW IN LAUKKAI, MONGLA REGION

Fighting between Tatmadaw personnel and MNDA (Kokang) forces continued in Laukkai and Kokang on 18 February. About 200 Kokang groups attacked a battalion near Parsinkyaw village with small and heavy weapons on 17 February evening and withdrew when the battalion responded. Similarly, from 17 February evening to 18 February morning, MNDA troops attacked Tatmadaw camps with small and heavy weapons and withdrew when counter-attacks were launched. In addition, Tatmadaw personnel who were heading to troops in Laukkai on major communication route to Laukkai such as Hsenwi-Namslag-Kunglong road, Kutkai-Tamoenye-Monesi-Tapah road and Kutkai-Muse-Kyukok-Monekoe-Tangyan were also ambushed or attacked by Kokang groups, KIA, TNLA and SSA (Wanghai). From 15 to 18 February, SSA (Wanghai) forces attacked the Tatmadaw columns between Kyaukme and Hsipaw, Lashio and Hsenwi while KIA and TNLA ambushed the Tatmadaw 3 times between Hsenwi and Kyukok, 2 times between Kutkai and Monsi and once between Monsi and Tapah. Kokang troops also ambushed the Tatmadaw column 4 times between Parsinkyaw and Chinshwehaw.

Due to the clashes, the government announced a state of emergency and martial law in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone on 17 February. In a separate statement, the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services appointed the Regional Control Commander (Laukkai) Col Saw Myint Oo to exercise the executive powers and duties and judicial powers and duties concerning community peace and tranquillity and prevalence of law and order in Kokang Self-Administrative Zone. The orders also authorize the commander to divide the area into military regions and to appoint military region commanders with the approval of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. President Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also met wounded soldiers and their families and vowed not to lose an inch of Myanmar's territorial integrity.¹

GOVERNMENT FORCES CAPTURE TEMPORARY BASES OF KOKANG GROUP

The renewed hostilities between Myanmar troops and the Kokang ethnic group continued amidst the government's state of emergency. Tatmadaw (government) ground troops launched attacks in

¹ Declaration of State of Emergency –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 February 2014 5 (p. 1)/
Military Administrative Order issued –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 February 2014 5 (p. 1)/
Military Administrative Authority empowered on BC 20830 Col Saw Myint Oo, Commander of Regional Control Command (Laukkai) –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 February 2015 (p. 2)/
President U Thein Sein vows not to lose an inch of Myanmar's territory, honours military personnel who fight against Kokang renegades –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2014 (p. 1)/
Government troops seize bodies, weapons from Kokang renegade groups –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 February 2015 (p. 2)/
Government troops seize arms, ammunitions in effort to secure Laukkai –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-02-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 February 2015 (p. 3)/
Drugs, weapons and ammunition seized from Kokang renegade groups –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2015 (p. 3)/
Laukkai Regional Control Commander to assume administrative and judicial powers –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 February 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
Fighting continues between Tatmadaw personnel and Kokang renegade groups –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 February 2015 (p. 3)/

tandem with air strikes against Kokang troops stationed on hills in the vicinity of 18th-Mile junction on the Laukkai-Kongyan road on 21 and 22 February, with the army capturing temporary bases, militarily-strategic hills where the rebels had stationed to cut off main access roads, officials said. Transportation has returned to normal as the main sections of the road have come under the control of the army. Five engagements broke out in 2 days, killing 4 and wounding 21 government soldiers including officers. The army also seized 3 bodies, 7 small arms, ammunitions and narcotic drugs. Similar clashes also took place between Kokang and government troops in Kongyan, northern Shan State on 24 February evening, but there was no casualty at the local battalion. On 25 February, Kokang insurgents opened fire at Laukkai from Siaw village and shells exploded in the residence of Kokang Self-Administered Zone Leading Body Chairman Pei Sauk Chein. The attack left 1 member of the Kokang security troop dead and 4 injured.²

WORKSHOP FOR MEDIA ON ELECTION REPORTING HELD IN YANGON

Ministry of Information in partnership with International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) organized a workshop for the media on election reporting on 21 February according to the ministry. Elections and the role of media, ethics in reporting, interview for story, gathering information from the sources, newsroom management and fundamentals for covering an election, are the main topics of the workshop. During the one-day workshop, Daw Khin May Zaw, lead trainer of ICFJ, shared her experiences on election reporting, including conversion of the results of polls into stories, voter education and evaluate the fairness of the electoral process. The workshop also focused on the importance of social networks and digital media and their advantages and disadvantages. “The media is responsible for providing citizens with sufficient information on voting procedures,” said the trainer. She also discussed conducting an effective interview with a political candidate or party leader, reporting on vote counting and talking directly to voters to get their opinions on political parties, candidates and issues. Around 100 reporters and editors from local broadcast and print media as well as news agencies actively participated in the workshop.³

ELECTION COMMISSION AND CSOS BREAK DEADLOCKS ON ELECTION ISSUES

The Union Election Commission (UEC) and civil society organizations have gained an understanding of each other as both sides have relaxed some strict rules for observing the upcoming General Elections. During the meeting between UEC and CSOs 16 February in Yangon, the UEC agreed that the election observers should submit their reports on election observation to the commission instead of the requirement to submit their reports, said Han Shin Win, an advocate of Bade Dha Moe, who participated in the meeting. CSOs have felt that the UEC have abolished some strict rules and has removed burdens from the CSOs during the meeting, said Chan Nyein Aung, a participant from the Charity Oriented Myanmar.

The Commission Chairman Tin Aye also pledged that the UEC will make utmost efforts for holding the free and fair general elections which is slated to be held in last week of October or in first week of November 2015. He also called on political parties to cooperate with the UEC and to do check and balance each other so that the election can become a free and fair one. In his opening address the UEC Chair Tin Aye invited the CSOs to cooperate in voters’ registration, voter training and voter education in accordance with the rules and regulations of the general election law and instructions of the Election Commission. He also urged the CSOs to be free from party bias as they have been

² Military columns capture temporary bases of Kokang insurgents – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 February 2015 (p. 3)/
Tatmadaw columns occupy a hill near mile post 23 on Laukkai-Kongyan road – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 February 2015 (p. 9)

³ Workshop for media on election reporting held in Yangon – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 February 2015 (p. 3)

permitted to observe from voters registration to objection to voting. Representatives from 55 CSOs and 11 international non-governmental organizations attended the meeting.

In a separate meeting on 17 February, the Union Election Commission agreed to extend the election campaign period from 30 days to 60 days and also pledged to legalize the extension of the poll campaign period as soon as possible. During the meeting representatives from the political parties expressed their voices for deciding which voting system would be practiced in the upcoming 2015 elections. The next co-ordination meeting between the UEC and the political parties is expected to take place in April.⁴

NNER HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE ON AMENDMENT BILL FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION LAW

National Network for Education Reform (NNER) held a press conference in Yangon on 22 February. At the press conference, Dr Thein Lwin of NNER said that the amendment bill published in state-run newspapers on 19 February should be headlined as the amendment bill on the National Education Law to be submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw as agreed at the four-party-talks instead of amendment bill drafted and signed by Dr Thein Lwin, Dr Nyo Nyo Thin and U Aung Hmine San on behalf of representatives of the NNER and students of the Action Committee for Democracy Education. As only monastic education schools are covered by the National Education Law and education schools established by other religious faiths are excluded, representatives of the NNER and students held consultation sessions after receiving complaints from education schools established by churches after the approval of the National Education Law, according to Dr Thein Lwin. In addition, he also explained that 3 medium of teaching which include mother tongues, Myanmar language and English language is adopted under Section 22 (E) as the mother tongue used in the family of a child is the best way for children to start studying school subjects and it is easy for children to understand Myanmar language and English language as well as other school subjects like mathematics, science and geography when they have understood the structure of their mother tongue.

The amendment bill on the National Education Law is drafted based on the 11-point demand of students that were derived from seminars held NNER in 25 areas since 2012 October and provisions that are against the demand were excluded from the bill, according to Dr Thein Lwin. In addition, Dr Thein Lwin said that a letter would be sent to the Union Minister and clearly stating that for points that are against the agreement of the four-party talks and should be clarified to avoid any misunderstandings.⁵

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 14th day meeting on 16 February and discussed the on-going clashes between the Tatmadaw and Kokang groups.

- MP U Stephen from Kengtung Township constituency, submitted a proposal calling on the Lower House **to denounce the aggression and fighting by Kokang troops which are attacking civilians, security forces and Tatmadaw with the support of other armed groups.** U Stephen said, **Kokang troops led by Phon Kya Shin launched attacks to a military base in Konekyan area, headquarters of Kokang Self-Administrated Zone, Se-aw detention centre,**

⁴ UEC, CSOs break deadlocks between them –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2015 (p. 1)/

UEC agrees to extend poll campaign period to 60 days –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 February 2015 (p. 1 & 2)

⁵ NNER holds press conference on amendment bill for national education law –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 February 2015 (p. 3)

police station in YanLone Kyaine and Laukkai station on 8 February. He also noted that the attacks of Kokang groups are tantamount to threatening stability of Laukkai area and sovereignty of the country.

- The Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw read out the verdict of Constitutional Tribunal of the Union that remarked white cardholders are ineligible to vote in referendum on amendment of State Constitution as per Section 4, sub-section (a) of Section 38 and Section 391.⁶

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 15th day meeting on 17 February and discussed the progress report of the Land Utilization Management Central Committee.

- Deputy Minister for Home Affairs and Secretary of the Land Utilization Management Central Committee Brigadier General Kyaw Zan Myint clarified the body's progress to the session after listening to the investigation report of Joint Bill Committee on business permits for coastal and inland transport which is a conflict issue between the two Hluttaws. The Deputy Minister presented the progress of land reallocation schemes with the supporting sub-committees at respective areas. Brigadier General Kyaw Zan Myint said the central committee had returned the confiscated lands to the owners. He also added that the committee handed over the lands released by government ministries and private firms to original owners, and they have been informed to reclaim their lands with ownership documents.
- MP Khaing Maung Yi, a member of Yangon Region Farmland Investigation Commission, suggested the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's investigation commission and Land Utilization Management Central Committee should meet to solve remaining problems. Similarly, MP Kyaw Myint, a member of Yangon Region Farmland Investigation Commission, also said that mismanagement of land investigation bodies at village and township levels should also be clarified.⁷

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC ALLIANCE MEMBERS QUESTION UNION DAY PEACE PLEDGE

A pledge to work for peace and national reconciliation in the context of a federal union signed amid fanfare on Union Day by leading members of the government and armed forces and some representatives of ethnic armed groups has been dismissed as “meaningless”. The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a grouping of 8 parties, said they do not believe in the commitment. Executive Committee member of the Rakhine National Party and a member of the UNA Aye Thar Aung said the pledge meant nothing. “The government has been negotiating a ceasefire agreement, but the civil wars are still continuing. We want political dialogue. The government must hold the political dialogue first, and then we should move to the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement,” he said.

The head of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy Khun Tun Oo said at a meeting between the UNA and other ethnic organisations on 17 February that they did not sign the pledge because the government had not informed them about it beforehand. “We went to Nay Pyi Taw for the Union Day reception. We wanted to discuss the pledge, but didn't have time. The peace process doesn't move that fast,” he said.

⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw condemn individuals and armed groups affiliated with Kokang renegades and honours the Tatmadaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2015 (p. 2)

⁷ MPs seek clear instructions of central committee Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on land reallocation processes – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-02-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 February 2015 (p. 2)

Colonel Sai La, the spokesperson for the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), which signed the pledge, said his organisation would urge other groups during the three-day UNA meeting to sign the commitment.

Participants discussed the 2008 constitution, with UNA members agreeing to work with ethnic armed groups, political parties and civil society groups to amend the charter, and to call for a political dialogue culminating in a second Panglong conference, which set the relationships between the various ethnic groups in the country.

President Thein Sein, the 2 vice-presidents, the 2 speakers of the Pyithu and Amyotha Hluttaw, representatives of 4 ethnic armed groups, 15 Union ministers, 3 MPs, 3 lieutenant colonels, 55 political parties, 29 ethnic ministers and the chair of Union Election Commission signed the pledge on 12 February.⁸

DKBA SAYS NO PLAN TO JOIN TATMADAW TO FIGHT KOKANG

The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) issued a statement on 22 February saying it has no plan to join the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) to fight the Kokang armed group. In the statement, the DKBA implored political organisations and the public not to misunderstand its stance.

"The rumour that the DKBA seeks to cooperate with the Tatmadaw in the fight against the Kokang troops is spreading on social networks and is totally wrong. Like the DKBA, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) is one of ethnic armed groups that are struggling for their national interests," the statement said.

"In the past, some troops from the DKBA were transformed into the border guard force. The rumour may have been spread by these border guard forces," said Colonel Maung Lay, the information officer for the DKBA. "The DKBA has no plan to cooperate with the Tatmadaw to fight Kokang troops because the latter is one of the ethnic groups living in the country. If alien troops invade our country, every ethnic group is responsible for defending our country. If so, we will join hands with the other ethnic groups, including the Tatmadaw, to fight against the alien troops," Colonel Maung Lay said.⁹

SNDP SETS SIGHTS ON 50% ELECTION SUCCESS RATE

The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) says it aims to win more than 50 percent of all seats it competes for in this year's general election. Speaking at an SNDP conference in Shan State capital Taunggyi on 17 February, the SNDP's Deputy-chairperson Ye Htun said, "If we are the majority or ruling party, we will be empowered to fulfil the needs of the local population, as well as Shan people living in other regions. "We will also aim to shape a true federal union," he said. MP Ye Htun also said the party was looking to field candidates in at least 63 constituencies: 43 in Shan State; 9 in Kachin; 4 in Karenni; 4 in Sagaing Division; and 3 in Mandalay Division. Ye Htun said the SNDP will coordinate with other ethnic Shan-based parties to avoid overlapping constituencies. He said many party representatives at the 2-day conference raised the issue of drug-related problems in their townships, and that the party has made a decision to work together with various organisations to alleviate drug problems. The 16-17 February conference was joined by almost 1,000 party representatives from more than 40 townships. The SNDP currently holds 31 of 143 seats in the Shan

⁸ UNA members question Union Day peace pledge –
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/13178-una-members-question-union-day-peace-pledge.html>
(Myanmar Times) 18 February 2015

⁹ DKBA says no plan to join Tatmadaw to fight Kokang –
http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9125:dkba-says-no-plan-to-join-tatmadaw-to-fight-kokang&catid=44:national&Itemid=384 (Eleven News Media) 25 February 2015

regional assembly. It also has 18 MPs in the 440-seat Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw); and 4 representatives in the 224-seat Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw).¹⁰

UEC AND PRESS COUNCIL TO DEVELOP ELECTION REPORTING GUIDE

Journalists covering the general election later this year will be given a “guidebook” jointly produced by the Union Election Commission and Myanmar Press Council (Interim). The guide, expected to be released by World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, will contain a code of ethics, say the two bodies. The UEC met with members of the press council at the Yangon Region Election Commission Office on 17 February, the same day the UEC held a workshop with the political parties.

“Our main focus is the role of the media in gathering and publishing information about the election in terms of freedom and fairness,” said Press Council Secretary Kyaw Min Swe. “We are going to develop a guidebook for reporters which will contain do’s and don’ts in reporting the election, and what reporters should know about electoral rules, laws and directives.” He said the press council will draft the book in coordination with the election commission in accordance with international norms and Myanmar’s electoral rules. “We will try to distribute the guide in time for World Press Freedom Day, which falls on May 3,” he said.

Vice President of the Press Council Khin Maung Lay said the commission had promised to provide journalists with information while they cover the election. “By presenting information accurately during the election, we can help them show to the world that the election is free and fair,” he said.

UEC chair Tin Aye said the commission was concerned about the possibility that the big parties could misuse the media, impairing the freedom and fairness of the poll. “We don’t want parties to win by using their strength against the media. The playing field must be equal for all. We will conduct a free and fair election, and we request the media to report the news fairly,” he said at the end of a meeting with civil society organisations on 16 February.¹¹

ELECTION COMMISSION TELLS UNA TO STAY OUT OF STUDENT PROTEST

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has advised the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) to avoid confrontation with the government over the student march calling for amendments to the National Education Law. The comment was made by the UEC chairperson Tin Aye at a meeting of UEC officials and UNA delegates on 23 February. The meeting was attended by 7 members of the alliance. The Central Executive Committee member of Mon National Party Min Kyaw Win, who attended the meeting said, “Although it was not a direct warning that appears to be the intention. He said that the parties must cooperate with the government when the government is in crisis, and avoid confrontation with the government.”

The comment came in the wake of a February 17-19 conference involving 8 UNA member armed groups, 18 UNA member parties and 7 civil society groups, after which the UNA issued a statement. The UNA conference urged the government to establish peace through political dialogue, and to re-draft or amend the 2008 constitution. It also urged parliament to immediately implement the student marchers’ 11-point demands calling for amendment to the National Education Law and urged the authorities not to take punitive action against the student marchers. And the conference urged the UEC to hold free-and-fair general elections.

¹⁰ SNDP sets sights on 50% election success rate –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/sndp-sets-sights-50-election-success-rate/48441> (DVB) 18 February 2015

¹¹ UEC, press council to develop election reporting guide –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/13184-uec-press-council-to-develop-election-reporting-guide.html> (Myanmar Times) 19 February 2015

Central executive committee member of the Rakhine National Party Aye Thar Aung said that the UEC issued a warning on some points mentioned in the statement of the UNA. Some members of UNA were involved in the students' strike and some members made donations towards the students, and that may be the reason why the UEC warned the UNA. "We made the demands in accordance with the law. And we did not deviate from the government [the government's rules]," said Aye Thar Aung. "Education is important for the country, so we have to support [the efforts]."

Despite the UEC's warning, the UNA will continue calling for educational reform, dialogue for peace, a conference of national ethnic people and amendments to the constitution, according to the UNA.¹²

ANALYSIS

The resumption of fighting in Kokang Region once again raises tensions as well as speculation on Myanmar's national reconciliation process. Despite the introduction of martial law fighting continues and demonstrates the fragility of the current peace process. While the exact reasons regarding the cause of the recent outbreak remains unclear, the little trust which had existed between the government and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) will now have diminished. Furthermore, the latest clashes have also created instability along the Sino-Myanmar border and thus will not be conducive to the already tense Sino-Myanmar ties. It is therefore crucial that ethnic conflicts in Myanmar must and should be resolved through dialogue and engagement. Furthermore, it is necessary that all stakeholders concerned are involved in peace talks and democratic reform and that their concerns are addressed in a fair and just manner. Naypyidaw's response in ending the Kokang conflict will not only have ramifications on the peace process but also in testing and shaping the future of Sino-Myanmar relations.

¹² Election commission tells UNA to stay out of student protest – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/18093-election-commission-tells-una-to-stay-out-of-student-protest> (Mizzima) 24 February 2015