

# POLITICAL MONITOR No. 1

## OFFICIAL MEDIA

### UNION PEACE CONFERENCE KICKS OFF

The Union Peace Conference kicked off at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-2 in Nay Pyi Taw on 12 January attended by 1,136 representatives from the government, parliament, the Tatmadaw, armed groups and political parties. A 45-member panel of chairmen for the conference was selected and approved during the session. The 1<sup>st</sup> day of the conference was chaired by Minister and government representative Aung Min, Thein Zaw, a representative from the parliament, Lt-Gen Ye Aung, a representative from the Tatmadaw, Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, a representative from the ethnic armed groups, and Sai Aik Paung, a representative from the political parties. Secretaries of the joint committee for Union peace talks Hla Maung Shwe, Maj-Gen Soe Naing Oo and Khet Htain Nan clarified the topics and schedules of the conference and disciplines. Representatives from 7 groups discussed the main topics set for discussion at the conference which included- politics, security, economic and social issues as well as issues related to land and natural resources. The conference, which is the biggest gathering of political forces in the country since its independence in 1948 and is being held in accordance to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed on 15 October 2015.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the conference the 7 stakeholder groups of the government, Tatmadaw, Parliament, ethnic armed organisations, political parties, ethnic minorities and other invitees that include intellectuals and intelligentsia into roundtable discussed 5 topics under 5 separate agenda themes— political, economic and social issues, security and land and natural resources. The 5 topics of discussion included the basic principles for establishing a democratic federal Union, resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons, taxation and revenue sharing, the basic principles for national defence and security and natural resources management and distribution. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day stakeholder groups and other invitees read out their papers on the conference's 5 agenda items: political issues, economic and social issues, security, land issues and the environment.<sup>1</sup>

### COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING RECEIVES FOREIGN AMBASSADORS

Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing during a meeting with EU Ambassador Roland Kobia on 13 January said the Union Peace Conference currently under way in Nay Pyi Taw, is a historic and vital step in Myanmar's reform process and that the people have placed high hopes on the conference. He explained that the peace process is an internal affair, and it will be carried out among local stakeholders. "In building peace, the livelihoods of indigenous armed group members must be guaranteed," said the senior general. The Commander-in-Chief said that the government will make arrangements for those wishing to lead civilian lives and for those who wish to enter the Tatmadaw in accordance with rules and regulations. "The constitution already grants equal rights to all indigenous people, including self-administration, but they will not be allowed to keep arms for their defence or for their efforts to cling to power," said the senior general. There shall be one only army and that the Tatmadaw is trying to preserve the peace and democracy Myanmar. The EU ambassador discussed the EU's role in the on-going peace process, ties between the EU and the Myanmar Defence Services and the progress of democratic reforms and interfaith tensions.

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<sup>1</sup> Union Peace Conference kicks off –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 January 2016 (p. 1)/

Seven discuss Five : Union Peace Conference enters second day with seven stakeholders' discussions on five topics –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 January 2016 (p. 1& 3)/

Union Peace Conference continues in Nay Pyi Taw –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 January 2016 (p. 2)

On 12 January the Defence Services Commander-in-Chief also held separate meetings with the Chief of the Defence Staff of the British Armed Forces General Sir John Nicholas Reynolds Houghton and discussed the promotion of cooperation between the two armed forces and plans to exchange visits and conduct non-military trainings.

The Senior General also received and the Chinese Special Representative for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang and exchanged views on matters relating to peace-building and ensuring stability along the border between Myanmar and China.<sup>2</sup>

### **CEASEFIRE MONITORING COMMITTEE PUSHES FORWARD MECHANISM IN SHAN STATE**

The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) mandated by the NCA is pushing forward with their efforts to establish an effective state-level mechanism in Shan State according to the attendees of the committee's 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the meeting in Yangon on 8 January. JMC's Secretary (1) Dr Shwe Khar said that a joint monitoring committee at the state level would be established in Kolam Township, Shan State. The state-level committee is set to comprise five representatives each from both the government and ethnic armed organisations and four from civil society organisations, he added. According to the JMC's secretary-1, Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, JMC's chairman, will lead the process of forming the Shan State joint monitoring committee. The JMCs will also be formed at a regional level, apart from Union-level and region/state-level, said Col Wunna Aung, another committee's secretary.

On works to be done in improving communicative links between the two sides that have engaged in the renewed clashes in Shan State, Dr Min Zaw Oo, a programme director at Myanmar Peace Centre, stressed the need to establish a better understanding between the commanders of the two sides. Prior to the demarcation process in Shan State, we are now looking to first set up the mechanism that involves monitoring, verification and conflict resolution, he added.

Shan State will become the first area to see renewed clashes after the signing of the ceasefire deal between the government and 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) following the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), an NCA signatory. "The incident is an accident", Col Wunna Aung commented on the case, adding that the implementation of the military code of conduct for both sides as well as guidelines will take place at various levels following the formation of the state-level committee in Shan State. The monitoring mechanism in Shan State will become effective following the formation of the state-level committee and the setting up of a system of monitoring adherence to guidelines for the committee, said Ko Gyi, one of the JMC's members. He called on NCA signatories to be strict in their adherence to the basic principle of resolving the conflicts through negotiation, rather than using brute force.<sup>3</sup>

### **\$21 MILLION NEEDED FOR CEASEFIRE MONITORING**

The monitoring process will cost an estimated US\$21 million to run for 3 years in ceasefire areas, according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) meeting held from 7 to 8 January and attended by representatives and officials from government, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and civil society organizations in Yangon. Programme Director of the Myanmar Peace Center, Dr Min

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<sup>2</sup> There shall be only one army Constitution grants equal rights –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 January 2016 (p. 3)/  
C-in-C talks peace with Chinese special rep –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 January 2016 (p. 2)  
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing holds talks with UK military chief –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 January 2016 (p. 2)

<sup>3</sup> JMC unveils Shan Plan : Ceasefire monitoring committee pushes forward mechanism in Shan State –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 January 2016 (p. 1)/  
Divide and Monitor : NCA parties to set up truce observation scheme in Shan State –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-08-red.pdf> (GNLM) 8 January 2016 (p. 1 & 2)

Zaw Oo, in speaking to the media said that it is estimated to cost \$7 to \$8 million a year at an estimated cost of around \$21 million for 3 years. Potential donors of the international community have been informed of the estimated budget for Union, region/state and regional level mechanism to deal with monitoring, verification and conflict resolution processes, he added. "Now we know how to structure and implement the monitoring mechanism and how much it will cost," Min Zaw Oo said. Prior to receiving funds from donors, Tatmadaw (the military) is committed to working towards implementation of the terms of national ceasefire agreement, said JMC Secretary Colonel Wunna Aung. In the future, there is likely to be an allocation of funds from the defence budget of Tatmadaw for the peace process, the secretary added. On 8 January the 26-member JMC briefed diplomats and officials from embassies and UN agencies in Yangon on works to be implemented by the committee as well as an estimated budget needed to run the monitoring process for three years. JMC's Secretary Dr Shwe Khar, on behalf of ethnic ceasefire signatories, said that attendees to the meeting from the international community expressed their willingness to help, but who will be donors is not known yet. "Own resources will be used to run the functions of the committee before funding comes as the monitoring process is the important matter," added the ethnic secretary.<sup>4</sup>

### **TATMADAW AIMS TO REMOVE AA INSURGENTS FROM RAKHINE STATE**

Tatmadaw troops have clashed with the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic insurgent group, 15 times from 28 December to 4 January in the Ranchaung-Ru Chaung area of Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State. The fighting occurred when Tatmadaw troops cleared the area, acting on intelligence that AA insurgents were preparing to invade. Several Tatmadaw personnel, including one Commanding officer, were killed in sniper attacks, many others were injured. The Tatmadaw captured three insurgents and seized one weapon, 1,250 rounds of bullets, 44 mines, 10 grenades, 15 tents, 42 bags of rice, 15 containers of edible oil and a cache of medicine. Following the Tatmadaw operation, AA insurgents have withdrawn from the area and have returned to civilian life in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U and Minbya Townships. Tatmadaw forces suspect the insurgents are waiting to combine with allies, who are expected to travel through the forest route linking Magway to Setoktara. As they retreated, AA troops took some as hostages while they were working on a farm in Paletwa Township. The AA insurgents reportedly encountered other non-state militias from a neighbouring country and demanded assistance from them. Most AA members are thought to have been recruited by force or coercion. The Tatmadaw has announced that it will continue to launch offensive attacks against AA forces until the area is cleared of all insurgents.<sup>5</sup>

## **UNOFFICIAL MEDIA**

### **EAOS, POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES MEET WITH NLD LEADERS**

EAOs and political party representatives to the UPDJC Secretariat met with NLD leaders at their office in Rangoon on 4th January, the Karen National Union said on 5 January on the organisation's official Facebook page. KNU General Secretary Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, along with EAOS leaders attended the meeting. They discussed the forthcoming Union Peace Conference, and the continuation of the Peace Process after transferring power from the current government. The NLD agreed the NCA and the Peace Process would continue accordingly. However, the role of MPC in the Peace Process will be reviewed. They agreed that the Peace Process would continue after the handover of power from

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<sup>4</sup> Ceasefire monitoring mechanism needs \$21 million for three years – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 January 2016 (p. 1 &3)

<sup>5</sup> Tatmadaw aims to remove AA insurgents from Rakhine State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-08-red.pdf> (GNLM) 8 January 2016 (p. 1 &3)

the current government. The NLD expressed and shared their perspective on the Peace Conference agenda that will hold in Naypyitaw on 12 January 2016, the posting said.<sup>6</sup>

### **RENEWED FIGHTING BETWEEN GOVT, TNLA IN SHAN STATE**

Renewed fighting between Burma's Armed Forces and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) broke out in northern Shan State on 3 January, with the ethnic armed group claiming government troops called in aerial firepower to back ground forces. Mai Aie Kyaw, a spokesperson for the TNLA, said that hostilities broke out in two separate locations in northern Shan State on 3 January. According to a Facebook post by the TNLA's Information Department, fighting occurred in Nam Loi Lai village of Muse Township involving TNLA Battalion 571 and Burma Army Light Infantry Division 99, lasting from around 10.40 am until after 5 pm. Separate fighting occurred in Namkham Township involving the TNLA's Battalion 478 and the Burma Army's Light Infantry Division 77, lasting from around noon until 4 pm on 3 January. The group's information unit also posted photos of what it claimed were helicopter gunships used by government forces on Sunday. The two helicopters attacked the TNLA's Brigade 1 base in Muse Township from 4.40 pm. The Palaung armed group similarly claimed that the government used helicopter gunships during fighting in Namhsan Township on 14 and 15 December 2015. The early-January fighting came a few days after Burma Army Commander-in-Chief Senior-Gen Min Aung Hlaing pledged to work for peace and stability in 2016 in a new year's message posted to social media. "The Tatmadaw [Burma Army] is cooperating with the government, focusing mainly on ensuring peace and stability, unity and progress, which are in fact essential requirements for the country," Min Aung Hlaing wrote. "I solemnly promise that the Tatmadaw will work together with national people in harmony and in unison for further enhancing peace and stability and the prosperity of the country in 2016." The TNLA was not among armed groups that the government deemed eligible to sign a so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement in mid-October. Only 8 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) signed the deal.<sup>7</sup>

### **NLD MEETING FOCUSES ON CABINET PORTFOLIOS AND MINISTER SELECTION**

The Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting of the National League for Democracy was held in Naypyitaw on 10 January and focused on the selection of ministers for the forthcoming new cabinet and the merging of some ministries, NLD party spokesman and CEC member Nyan Win said. "We have been considering portfolios and positions but have not yet made final decisions," NLD spokesman and CEC member Nyan Win said to media after the meeting. The NLD, which won general elections in November, has to form a new government and its CEC meeting was held at Aung San Suu Kyi's residence, Rose Villa, Ottarathiri Township, Naypyitaw and lasted about two and half hours. "We discussed both of these sectors and there will be a final resolution soon," he said. Nyan Win also said that in their new government, generally, at least, two to three ministries would be merged. The CEC meeting was attended by CEC members Nyan Win, Win Myint, Dr. Zaw Myint Maung, and May Win Myint among others.<sup>8</sup>

### **INTERIM COMMITTEE FORMED FOR CHIN PARTIES COOPERATION**

An interim committee tasked with the creating of cooperation among ethnic Chin parties was formed in December 2015, during a meeting of Chin political parties, according to Salai Aung Min Hlaing from

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<sup>6</sup> EAOs, Political Party representatives meet with NLD leaders –

<http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/eaos-political-party-representatives-meet-nld-leaders> (Mizzima) 5 January 2016

<sup>7</sup> Renewed Fighting Between Govt, TNLA in Shan State –

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/military/renewed-fighting-between-govt-tnla-in-shan-state.html> (the Irrawaddy) 4 January 2016

<sup>8</sup> NLD meeting focuses on cabinet portfolios and minister selection –

<http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/nld-meeting-focuses-cabinet-portfolios-and-minister-selection> (Mizzima) 11 January 2016

the Asho Chin National Party. “This meeting was the fourth meeting of the Chin family political parties. This [interim] committee has been organized with the aim to review the results of the 2015 Multi-party Democracy General Election and find out how the Chin political parties will work together over the next five years for the common interests of the Chin people,” said Salai Aung Min Hlaing, who has also been elected as the secretary of the interim committee. Although the meeting ended without the delegates reaching an final decision on the cooperation of Chin parties some common ground was reached. “The reason why this committee has been formed is that when we look at the poll results in which the NLD won, there are many places where we could have won against the NLD if we add [all the ballots] received by the Chin parties. This shows that the NLD has won due to differences amongst the Chin parties. Now, it’s not easy to go with a common agreement. The Chin political parties have agreed to cooperate as much as they can. Even if we cooperate, we want to cooperate after drafting the framework because we are trying to draft it to prevent a single party from overpowering and have everyone cooperate within the framework,” said Salai Aung Lain from the Chin League for Democracy (CLD). 13 Chin political parties met three times before the General Election and signed an agreement to run in the election after dividing up their constituencies. But this cooperation was only partially successful. However, 6 Chin parties issued a letter on 26 September 2015, claiming that the CLD had breached the agreement. “If the Chin parties hold another meeting, they must discuss the merging issue without failure. They said they need to draft the framework. What this means is that the Chin parties will try for a systematic merging. Merging doesn’t mean a single party. It can be a coalition as well as an alliance. It is also possible for them to reduce [the number of Chin political parties] to two. This depends on how they will cooperate. Merging does not depend on becoming a single party. As if it is a coalition, no parties need to be removed and each party will function with its own policy,” said Salai Issac Khan. Although 2 Chin parties, the Chin Progressive Party and the Chin National Party (now the Chin National Democratic Party), discussed merging in 2013, they ultimately did not. The Chin League for Democracy emerged shortly later. The first meeting of the Chin political parties was held in March, followed by a second meeting in May, a third meeting was held in July and the fourth meeting on December 17. A fifth meeting is scheduled to be held later this month.<sup>9</sup>

### **ONLY MNP INVITED TO 9TH MON CONGRESS**

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) has explained its decision to invite only the Mon National Party (MNP) to its 9th Congress without extending requests to 2 other ethnic Mon political parties. “The MNP is a member of UNA [United Nationalities Alliance],” said NMSP Vice-Chairman Nai Hongsar in an interview with the Mon News Agency on 10 January. “The UNA has connections with UNFC [United Nationalities Federal Council]. Regarding our activities, views and programs, we are very similar. So we invited the MNP to our congress as an observer.” “We do not discriminate between one or another organization and one or another party. But we do not have much contact [with the other parties], so we did not invite them to the congress.” Nai Hongsar added that the other groups, the All Mon Regions Democracy Party and the Women’s Party (Mon), are not as closely aligned with the NMSP. Before a recent name change, the MNP was called the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), founded in 1988. Former MNDF leaders, including Nai Tun Thein and Nai Ngwe Thein, led the first ethnic Mon armed resistance group, the Mon People’s Front. The two groups worked together in 1995 when the NMSP signed a ceasefire agreement with the previous government. “The MNP [MNDF at the time] and 5 representatives won [seats] in the 1990 elections. At that time, [NMSP] Chairman Nai Shwe Kyin set up an alliance with the MNDF. We can call it the first alliance. We invited [MNP to the January meeting] based on the political alliance,” said Nai Aye Mon of NMSP’s Central Executive Committee. NMSP’s 9th party congress commenced on 27 December and concluded on 14 January. In addition

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<sup>9</sup> Interim committee formed for Chin parties cooperation – <http://www.bnionline.net/2015-election/chin-state/item/1413-interim-committee-formed-for-chin-parties-cooperation.html> (BNI) 11 January 2016

to representatives from the party, several prominent Mon monks, ethnic Mon leaders and members of MNP were invited.<sup>10</sup>

## **ANALYSIS**

The Union Peace Conference has been convened bringing together representatives from the government, MPs, politicians, Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and was mandated to tackle 5 main themes of politics, social issues, economy, security and environmental policy but more importantly to seeking a political solution to decades of internal conflicts in Myanmar. The Peace Conference and the peace process both play important roles in Myanmar's political transition and will also be part of the transfer of power process due to take place in the coming months. The discussions and outcomes of the Conference while in itself will not be complete will serve as a basis for deliberations in the future. How the NLD will deal with these issues will determine the success or failure of the peace process. The Commander-in-Chief's recent comments that 'there will only be one army' should be seen as a stark reminder not only on the role of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar's political future but also the integration of EAOs armies. This idea of integration however will not go down well with the EAOs and that this issue will need to be handled with care especially at a such a crucial juncture in time when trust-building between the government including the Tatmadaw and EAOs is still lacking after decades of mistrust. The new government will therefore need to tread carefully in its dealings with the Tatmadaw and EAOs and that failure or any shortcomings could affect its running of office during the next 5 years.

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<sup>10</sup> NMSP explains congress invitation to only MNP – <http://monnews.org/2016/01/14/nmsp-explains-congress-invitation-to-only-mnp/> (IMNA) 14 January 2016