
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 24

OFFICIAL MEDIA

TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED TO SIGN CEASEFIRE IN OCTOBER

President Thein Sein and senior leaders of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) held talks on 9 September and both sides tentatively agreed to sign a ceasefire accord in October. Senior Adviser at Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) Hla Maung Shwe, told the media that the government had agreed in principle to the EAOs demands for an all-inclusive deal, although it called for a progressive realisation of the truce pact that would involve it being signed first by the 15 groups with whom it has already reached bilateral peace agreements. Of the 6 groups that the government has so far not included in the deal, an agreement has been reached for the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), Arakan National Council (ANC) and Wa National Organisation (WNO) to take part in the political dialogue without needing to sign the NCA. However, it is expected that separate talks will be held with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), while the Taaung National Liberation Army (TNLA) is reportedly likely to sign the national ceasefire accord if it can reach a bilateral agreement with the government. According to Senior Adviser Hla Maung Shwe, a date for signing the accord with 15 groups would be set during a meeting between Union Minister Aung Min and the EAOs. Member of the Senior Delegation of the EAOs P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, said that the signatories to the deal would take responsibility for the ensuring that internal peace is lasting and the terms respected.¹

I AM READY TO SIGN THE CEASEFIRE: COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said at a military meeting on 18 September said that all parties must use foresight when discussing issues involving ethnic armed groups and other internal affairs. The Senior General also reiterated his support for democratisation and development and his readiness to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement and urged those involved in the peace process to strive to overcome challenges. Present at the meeting were Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Commander-in-Chief (Airforce) General Khin Aung Myint and senior officers from the office of the Commander-in-Chief. "The armed forces prefer representatives who can work in the interests of the nation through their political, economic, and administrative and defence outlooks," he said.²

GOVERNMENT INVITES WA AND MONGLA GROUPS TO SIGN CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The government has invited Wa and Mongla groups to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA), which is slated to be inked during the first week of October. A Presidential peace delegation extended an invitation to the Wa Special Region 2 and Mongla Special Region 4 during a meeting in Kengtung in Shan State on 12 September. A government delegation led by Vice Chairs of the Union Peace Making Committee Aung Min and Thein Zaw met the leaders of the two special regions : Vice General Secretary of Wa Special Region 2 Pauk Yu Yi and Chairman of the Mongla Special Region Sai Lin in Kengtung, Shan State. They government delegation also conveyed a message on behalf of President Thein Sein and the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing that both the government and the country's armed forces are keen to see the 2 armed groups participate in the upcoming signing. The Wa Special Region 2 and Mongla Special Region 4 groups released a joint

¹ Peace Draws Nearer: Tentative agreement to sign ceasefire in October –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 September 2015 (p. 1)

² I am ready to sign the ceasefire: Commander-in-Chief –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 September 2015 (p. 3)

statement after the meeting to state that they welcomed the signing of a nationwide ceasefire accord and pledged to continue to engage in constructive negotiations with the government.³

NAGA GROUP DISCUSSES CEASEFIRE ACCORD WITH GOVT PEACE COMMITTEE

The Union Peace-making Working Committee held a meeting with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang (NSCN-K) on 16 September to discuss the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA). UPWC Vice Chairman Thein Zaw described the Naga Self-Administered Zone as a strategic location for Myanmar and said that the meeting would help leaders of both sides to play a constructive role in the peace process and in regional development. NSCN-K's leader Kyaw Wan Sein said, "the NSCN-K had attended meetings for the drafting of the NCA as an observer five times," and that he and the rest of the council would discuss whether they would sign the accord with the Myanmar government. U An Kant of the NSCN-K also expressed his delight at the right to discuss the signing of the accord in the meeting. The NSCN-K representatives also raised questions focused on post-accord measures, its participation in the writing of the political framework and political dialogues, the recognition of its council as a legal organisation and governmental protection of its land from foreign intrusion.⁴

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS CHINESE LEADERS

President Thein Sein at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the events to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of Victory of the World Anti-Fascist War held in China on 2-4 September 2015. The two leaders also held officials talks and had in-depth exchanges of views and reached important consensus on further advancing China-Myanmar comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership and deepening cooperation and friendly ties between the two countries. President Thein Sein also met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and discussed the need to promote the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries as a top priority and to adopt a strategic and long-term perspective in moving China-Myanmar relations in the right direction and agreed to work closely in resolving issues on border management. Myanmar also welcomed China's positive role and constructive efforts in promoting the on-going peace process in Myanmar.⁵

ADVANCED VOTING FOR MILITARY WILL BE TRANSPARENT: UEC

The Chairman of the Union Election Commission, U Tin said the Union Election Commission (UEC) has begun preparations to ensure that the advanced votes of military personnel is in accordance with electoral rules and regulations aimed at ensuring transparency. During a meeting with the US delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel R. Russel on 4 September, the UEC Chairman Tin Aye said that the commission has already begun coordinating with the Tatmadaw for allowing official observers and members of the media to witness balloting by members of the Tatmadaw. The meeting also focused on a number of other issues related to the upcoming general election on 8 November, such as ensuring voting rights for all eligible voters by compiling an accurate voters' list, scrutinising candidates, avoiding the politicisation of religion and the 25 percent quota of parliamentary seats held by military personnel. The UEC chairman reiterated that the use of religion for political purposes whilst campaigning for political office is prohibited by the Code of Conduct and the Election Law and added that the commission is vetting candidates in

³ NCA eyes Inclusiveness. Government invites Wa and Mongla groups to sign ceasefire – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 September 2015 (p. 1)

⁴ Naga Seek Protection. Naga group discusses ceasefire accord with govt peace committee – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 September 2015 (p. 1)

⁵ Myanmar, China agree to step up cooperation in border management and work together to maintain peace and stability in border areas – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 September 2015 (p. 2)/ President meets Chinese counterpart in Beijing – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 September 2015 (p. 3)

accordance with rules and regulations and will allow all those who are eligible to stand for election. During a meeting in Yangon on 1 September between UEC and various political parties, the Election Chair Tin Aye called on politicians to adhere to the Code of Conduct at all times and made a public pledge as to the commission's commitment to holding free and fair elections.⁶

MOBILE THEATRE TO PROMOTE RIGHTS OF DISABLED VOTERS

Disability rights group Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) will conduct a public awareness campaign on disability-inclusiveness ahead of the upcoming election in mid-October, according to its founder Nay Lin Soe. The MILI will use a mobile theatre for the first time to host performances throughout Yangon to raise awareness about the rights of disabled voters. "Most people with disabilities have been excluded from voting in the past for a number of reasons. They face all sorts of discrimination and barriers to being able to vote, but they have as much right to vote as anyone else," Nay Lin Soe said. He also added that the shows will star disabled performers and that the organisation will spend K3 million (US\$2,300) of its budget on the campaign, which will take place in four busy areas of Yangon. "Performers and locations for the campaign have not yet been selected, but we'll do so soon," he said. Nay Lin Soe said that in addition to the mobile theatre, MILI will hold public discussions with candidates and persons that focus on issues affecting persons with disabilities. According to the 2014 census, Myanmar has more than 2.3 million people with disabilities, which accounts for 4.7 percent of the country's total population. The MILI was founded in 2011 as an organization working to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Myanmar.⁷

BETTER BALLOTS. GOVERNMENT FACTORIES TO PRINT 125 MILLION

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has ordered more than 125 million ballots from the state-run Printing and Publishing Enterprise (PPE) for the upcoming general election, said PPE managing-director Aung Myo Myint. At a press conference in Yangon on 17 September the managing director said the PPE is currently printing 125,550,000 ballots at government-owned factories in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw and aims to complete the order by 21 October and will be delivered to the UEC by 25 October, said Aung Myo Myint. Among the ballots to be printed, 40.4 million are for Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) seats and 38.35 million are for the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House). Another 39.63 million are for region and state parliaments, including the seats reserved for ethnic minorities. The PPE has already printed 10 million envelopes for advance votes, of which 9.3 million will be used for the Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw and state and region parliaments. The remaining 700,000 will be used to elect ethnic minority representatives. The PPE will be able to print ballots for Myanmar citizens residing overseas within 14 days of receiving an order from the UEC, the managing director said.⁸

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS EXCHANGE VIEWS ON INTERNAL PEACE

Civil society organizations exchanged their views on the ongoing peace process at Mingalar Yama Pali Tekkatho Monastery in Yangon on 7 September. The meeting was attended by representatives and officials from 34 CSOs including religious leaders from four major religions in Myanmar, Sayagyi Thakin Ko Daw Hmine Peace Network, national races and democratic forces. After the discussions, an 8-point statement was issued to announce that wars are basically political issues and armed conflicts break out as the highest form of conflicts when political issues cannot be settled successfully. Wars are a

⁶ Advanced voting for military will be transparent: UEC –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 September 2015 (p. 3)

⁷ Mobile theatre to promote rights of disabled voters –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-07-red.pdf> (GNLM) 7 September 2015 (p. 3)

⁸ Better Ballots. Government factories to print 125 million –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 September 2015 (p. 1)

mere continuation of policy and therefore political solutions are essential for solving internal peace issues including ceasefire agreements.⁹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KAREN COMMUNITY GROUPS DEMAND KNU TAKE THEIR CONCERNS SERIOUSLY

Karen community groups claim the Karen National Union (KNU) is ignoring their concerns about the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the government, said a Karen News on 4 September. The claims came at a meeting 15 community-based Karen groups had with the KNU leaders to discuss the nationwide ceasefire agreement. The meeting held at Lay Wah in Hlaingbwe Township on 31 August 31 between KNU representatives and the Karen groups was an opportunity for the political organization KNU to explain their position on the nationwide ceasefire agreement. Saw Soe Doh, who attended the meeting as a representative for the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network said that the meeting was more about information than an open discussion. He said, "Our leaders explained their position. They seem to be already determined to sign the agreement despite the concerns we have raised. They are not taking [our concerns] it into consideration. It is like they just inform us about their work on the nationwide ceasefire agreement and whatever comments we make don't matter." The Karen community groups also said that invitation for the meeting was given on short-notice and many were unable to send senior representatives to actively discuss the issues with their leaders, the report said.¹⁰

SACKED TELECOMS MINISTER TO CONTEST HIS HOMETOWN SEAT

Former Telecoms Minister Thein Tun – fired by President Thein Sein's government in 2013 on the eve of a major corruption investigation – is making a comeback bid. The former general will stand for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in his Magwe region home town of Myaing, which he also won in 2010. His candidature was approved by both the Union Election Commission and Myaing Township election commission and that the former Minister Thein Tun would stand for a seat in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House). His main rivals for a seat in parliament for one of Myanmar's poorest areas are Aung Khin Win of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Aung Tint from the National Unity Party. "Yes, he will be in the election for Myaing. The list was approved by the commissions of township level to Union level through the district and region," said Myaing Township Elections Chair Myo Min Thein. He declined to comment on Thein Tun's background, including the allegations of corruption from his stint as minister. Myaing Township has a total of 332 villages and there will be 247 polling stations. Some Gaungwe residents in Myaing Township believe, the former Telecoms Minister will prevail. "We think he can help our township develop. Hopefully he can win 70 pc of the vote," said Hla Myint, a local who is among those benefiting from the roads, water supply, a school and 6 villages with electricity thanks to their patron.¹¹

KAREN AFFAIRS MINISTER RESIGNS FROM RULING PARTY TO JOIN KAREN PARTY

The Karen Affairs Minister from ruling the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in Tanintharyi Region resigned and has joined the Kayin People's Party (KPP). Saw Hervy, the current Karen Affairs Minister, said that he resigned from the USDP and will now contest the upcoming

⁹ Civil society organizations exchange views on internal peace – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-09-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 September 2015 (p. 2)

¹⁰ Karen community groups demand KNU take their concerns seriously – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/karen-community-groups-demand-knu-take-their-concerns-seriously> (Mizzima) 5 September 2015

¹¹ Sacked telecoms minister to contest his hometown seat – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16438-sacked-telecoms-minister-to-contest-his-hometown-seat.html> (Myanmar Times) 11 September 2015

general election as a candidate for the Kayin People's Party (KPP). In early August, Saw Hervy quit the USDP and it is understood that he had already registered his candidacy to the Union Election Commission as a KPP candidate and will now stand for re-election as the Karen Affairs Minister for Tanintharyi region. Saw Hervy said, "In 2010, I contested for the USDP and won. But now the Chief Minister for the region selected a woman candidate to contest the seat so we would have had 2 candidates. I sense incompetency and also I have been in contact with KPP for a long time. I already informed in writing that I would join (KPP) on the day the USDP released its list of candidates. So I resigned it." According to the KPP General Secretary, Saw Say Wah, the KPP will contest all 5 seats that have been allocated for the Karen Affairs Ministers and have registered 119 candidates with the Union Election Commission. Saw Say Wah said he will be contesting for the Karen Affairs Minister's seat in the Yangon Region. A source close to the Tanintharyi regional government, who asked to remain anonymous, claimed the rationale behind the USDP's motive to run 2 candidates may have been tensions between Saw Hervy and the region's Chief Minister. Saw Hervy served in the regional government's Education Department for 36 years and retired as the Education Director of Tanintharyi Division and was elected as the Karen Affairs Minister for the Tanintharyi Region at the 2010 general election.¹²

NUP BATTLES AGAINST THE ODDS

The National Union Party (NUP) is tapping into its Socialist roots to compete with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Spokesperson for the NUP Han Shwe told reporters that its election campaign and party policy broadcast on state-owned media will focus on "9 guarantees for workers". The party disappointed in 2010, when it fielded almost 1000 candidates but won just 64 seats, mostly in State and Regional parliaments. Han Shwe said the party had selected better candidates this year and its 756 representatives had been placed in winnable seats, he said. While that makes it the third-largest party, he admitted the NUP would struggle to compete with its larger rivals. "Competition with the USDP and the NLD will be the biggest challenge for us. But we have selected qualified candidates and will try as much as we can to overcome this challenge," he said on September 7. "Based on our previous experience, we have whittled down the constituency number ... This time we will contest in places where we can secure a majority of votes. We won't contest in places that are uncertain, such as autonomous regions in Shan State," he said. "We hope we can achieve a good outcome because our candidates are well-qualified." Han Shwe encouraged all eligible voters to cast a ballot in the election, regardless of which party they support. "In a democratic country, sovereignty is in the hands of the public. The public has to choose candidates to work on behalf of them," he said. The NUP was formed in 1988 out of the ashes of the disbanded Burma Socialist Programme Party, which was set up by former President Ne Win.¹³

KIA, GOVT TROOPS CLASH AS PEACE TALKS PROCEED

Burmese government forces have clashed with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in northern Burma, as President Thein Sein met with leaders of the 5 major Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in Nay Pyi Taw to negotiate and finalise a date for the signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

The KIA's Vice Chief of Staff, Maj-Gen Gun Maw, said the group's 3rd Brigade has been engaged in active hostilities with government troops between the Kachin towns of Bhamo and Shwegu. This latest conflict has been ongoing for three days, and erupted when the Burmese army attacked the KIA's

¹² Karen Affairs Minister Resigns from Ruling Party to Join Karen Party – <http://karennews.org/2015/09/karen-affairs-minister-resigns-from-ruling-party-to-join-karen-party.html/> (Karen News) 6 September 2015

¹³ NUP battles against the odds – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/16383-nup-battles-against-the-odds.html> (Myanmar Times) 9 September 2015

frontline sentry units. "Fighting has been ongoing for 3 days in areas operated by the KIA's 3rd Brigade, 12th Battalion, in the Bhamo-Shwegu area involving their frontline sentry units. Citing a similar incident when KIA units were targeted with air attacks while ethnic and government negotiators signed a May draft of the NCA, Gun Maw said attacks by government forces taking place during peace talks had become a pattern. "We don't know whether the government ordered the attacks or not, but on our side we always try to practice restraint when there are talks taking place. To date, we have never attacked the [Burmese army] first," he said.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

Efforts to finalise the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) is now entering a critical stage and the recent meeting between President Thein Sein and EAOs leaders will indeed have given the process the much needed boost but more importantly contributed in building trust between the two sides. Furthermore, the invitation by the government to the Wa and Mongla groups to sign the NCA should be seen and received positively by the two groups and accepted in the interest of national reconciliation.

While the NCA may have taken the headlines, the focus of attention on the elections slated for 8 November still remains the date which will define Myanmar's future in the coming years ahead. The Election Commission on its part has stated that arrangements and plans have been put in place to ensure free and fair elections though continued fighting and unresolved issues in conflict-affected areas raises further concerns and doubts regarding the credibility of the elections. After decades of self-imposed isolation, Myanmar's democratization has made progress and that it is still in transition and that both the signing of the NCA and outcome of the elections will contribute to the success of the on-going democratic reforms in the country.

¹⁴ KIA, govt troops clash as peace talks proceed – <http://www.dvb.no/news/kia-govt-troops-clash-as-peace-talks-proceed-burma-myanmar/57130> (DVB) 9 September 2015