

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.15

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RECEIVES EU AMBASSADOR

President Thein Sein received EU Ambassador Roland Kobia in Nay Pyi Taw on 18 June and discussed assistance from the European Union in reforming the Myanmar Police Force and the local peace-making process. They also discussed assistance for the peaceful coexistence of both communities in Rakhine State and development affairs, the recognition of the EU over the achievements of reform process in Myanmar and other areas of mutual interests.¹

VICE PRESIDENT SAI MAUK KHAM MEETS UN ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham received a delegation led by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 June and held talks on providing humanitarian aid to Kachin and Rakhine states and on prospects of the UN and INGOs to overcome the challenges faced here. The UN delegation also met Minister for Foreign Affairs Wunna Maung Lwin and exchanged views on humanitarian assistance and emergency response to natural disasters in Myanmar.²

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS TOUR RAKHINE STATE AND VISIT RELIEF CAMPS

Union Minister Lt-Gen Thet Naing Win of Border Affairs and National Races, Union Ministers Soe Thane and Tin Naing Thein of the President's Office, Union Minister Khin Yi of Immigration and Population, Union Minister Aung Kyi of Information made an inspection tour of Rakhine State from 13 to 15 June and met state-level departmental officials, towns-elders of Sittway, and social organizations, explaining matters concerning the scrutinizing of citizenship for Bengalis under the Myanmar Citizenship Law of 1982, with a preliminary survey starting at a Bengali relief camp in Myebon. The Union Ministers and Chief Minister for Rakhine State also held meetings with departmental officials from Sittway, Maungtaw and Mrauk-U, An and Myebon Townships, and visited relief camps. On 15 June, the Union Ministers met Rakhine State government officials and exchanged views on development of the Rakhine State and future steps to be taken for regional development and stability, management of refugees and displaced people affected by the communal conflicts.³

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 7th day meeting on 9th June. At the session the following issues were raised and discussed:

- Regarding the question on property taxes, Union Minister for President's Office Soe Maung said that **although the government allowed first time buyers to pay lower taxes, it is controlling land prices by levying 30 percent property transaction taxes and income taxes on those who speculate on land.** However, he admitted that **the government is losing taxes**

¹ EU recognizes achievements of reform process in Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 June 2014 (p. 3)

² Myanmar, UN Assistant Secretary-General discuss humanitarian aid for Kachin, Rakhine States – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 June 2014 (p.3)/ Union FM receives UN Assistant Secretary-General – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 June 2014 (p. 2)

³ Myanmar Citizenship Law topic at Union ministers' visit to Rakhine – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 June 2014 (p. 3)/ Meeting on development of Rakhine State held – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 June 2014 (p. 3)

because land speculators buy land from owners under general power or special power without officially registering the transaction with the Yangon City Development Committee, which is responsible for collecting taxes on land transactions. Minister Soe Maung also said that land prices tend to rise in early stages of economic liberalization as factories, hotels and houses are being built hastily, but they will later fall and become stable since the government is drawing town plans for factories, hotels and houses. The Union Minister said that the government is considering property taxes adopted in the international community by consulting with state/region governments, state/region parliaments and businessmen.⁴

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 8th day meeting on 10th June. At the session the following issues were raised and discussed:

- Deputy Minister at the President Office Aung Thein briefed the session and stated that **Yangon City Development Committee is issuing land grants in accordance with the law, but he denied that the committee did not grant permission to private companies to construct buildings in former recreation parks.**⁵

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 9th day meeting on 13th June. At the session the following issues were raised and discussed:

- **a question to allow male MPs to remove their turbans (gaung-baung) was rejected by the session. In the debate, MPs said that wearing turbans for a long time during parliamentary sessions was harmful to health.** However, a member of the Health Promotion Committee said that wearing turbans is a tradition in Myanmar and male representatives are required to wear turbans on their head as a token of respect, auspiciousness, nobility, dignity and grace. Therefore, it is a historical tradition for parliament representatives to wear turbans as an insignia. The member of the Health Promotion Committee added by saying that people consider those who wear turbans as the ones working in the interest of the country and honouring the national tradition. From a health point of view, the head might feel tight from wearing turbans and heat might be kept in- side, causing hair loss, but this is not a serious health problem considering that the tradition should be honoured, the health promotion committee member pointed out. Dr Maung Maung Wint of Health Promotion Committee submitted a proposal to debate the Myanmar Medical Council Bill. The session gave approval to debate the matter.⁶

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 7th day meeting on 9th June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- MPs debated the proposal **to adopt proportional representation system for the upcoming elections for the upper house.** The proposal was **rejected by the session on the grounds that the system is new and complicated for Myanmar voters.**⁷

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 8th day meeting on 10th June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

⁴ Government considers property taxes to further control real estate market – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 June 2014 (p. 3)

⁵ Upper, Lower Houses debate car substitution programme, electoral system – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 June 2014 (p. 3)

⁶ Request to allow representatives to take off turban during Hluttaw sessions rejected – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 June 2014 (p. 3)

⁷ Government considers property taxes to further control real estate market – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 June 2014 (p. 3)

- **A question on electoral system for the next general elections in 2015** was discussed. Military MP representative Major Win Thein said that he supported **the First-Past-the Post (FPTP) system which was practiced in 2010 General Elections, instead of the Proportional Representation (PR) system stating that it had some weaknesses;**
- MP Khin Maung Yi of the Ayeeyawady Region Constituency (6), recommended and supported **the PR system as it is being practiced in 90 countries out of more than 160 democratic states. Four MPs refused to accept the PR electoral system for the next elections.**⁸

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 11th day meeting on 13th June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Deputy Ministers answered questions **concerning the construction of roads and schools in the country;**
- the session also **agreed to debate a proposal urging the union government to lay down a policy to address inflation**, submitted by MP Dr Myint Kyi of No 8 Constituency in Yangon Region.⁹

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 12th day meeting on 16th June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- MP Khin Maung from Rakhine State Constituency No. 3 raised a question and stated **the discontent of the locals over some activities of INGOs was growing and people were worried that the situation might lead to undesirable confrontations between locals and INGOs;**
- In responding, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun said, **the Union government had taken measures to prevent confrontations and conflicts between INGOs and locals arising from discontent over some activities of INGOs in Rakhine State.** He also said that **UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs and INGOs had to submit their proposals, protocols and draft MOUs to the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and copies of these documents were sent to union ministries concerned before the Foreign Policy Committee, the Security, Stability and Law Enforcement Committee and the Union Government would approve their proposals.** The deputy minister also pointed out that in the past, **the INGOs in Rakhine State had not operated their operations in a transparent manner and the lack of coordination between the local communities and INGOs had caused misunderstandings leading to undesirable problems.** **Union-level and state-level Emergency Coordination Centers were now working to prevent such problems from occurring and that UN agencies and INGOs were also required to carry out activities stated in their MOUs in consultation with township management committees, township supporting committees and township development affairs committees,** he added. **Rakhine State Government and state emergency coordination centers were monitoring their activities to solve the problems immediately and transparently,** he concluded.
- the session also **agreed to debate the proposal urging the union government to do more for the development of nuclear technology.**¹⁰

⁸ Upper, Lower Houses debate car substitution programme, electoral system –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 June 2014 (p. 3)

⁹ Request to allow representatives to take off turban during Hluttaw sessions rejected –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 June 2014 (p. 3)

¹⁰ Union government to prevent confrontations between locals and INGOs in Rakhine State –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 June 2014 (p. 3)

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

CEASEFIRE UNDER THREAT AS BURMA ARMY'S ATTACK ON KAREN ARMY KILLS ONE AND WOUNDS ONE

The Burma Army (Tatmadaw) in Tanintharyi Township attacked the base of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in the Huaypha area killing one KNLA soldier and wounding another on 13 June. Karen National Union (KNU) sources confirmed that the attacks took place in the Megui/Tavoy District and that government soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 557 twice attacked the KNLA Battalion #11 camp in its 4th Brigade in Huaypha on 13 June and the second attack on 14 June. Sources from the KNLA's 4th Brigade said that the fighting occurred when a Burma Army patrol started shooting at a KNLA soldier who was on his way back from working at a cornfield. The Burma Army soldiers killed the KNLA soldier, stole his M16 rifle and attacked the nearby KNLA camp. The clash was reported to the relevant government authorities by the KNU. KNLA chief-of-staff General Saw Johnny said, "We have talked about the relocation of [Burma army] camps based in villages, temples and churches in our area, at Naypyidaw. Regarding the incident in 4th Brigade, we will look into the case and make an inquiry in order to handle and resolve the issue. I think this incident will not derail the whole negotiation process." This is the first fighting in KNLA 4th Brigade between Burma army and the KNLA since the ceasefire agreement was signed in January 2012.¹¹

NCCT NEED TIME TO CONSULT WITH TOP LEADERS

The Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team (NCCT) has requested for more time to consult with ethnic leaders before moving ahead with peace talks with the government. The coalition of ethnic armed groups is currently negotiating a nation-wide ceasefire agreement with the government's Union Peace Work Committee (UPWC) and talks were expected to resume this month. "The UPWC wanted to meet with us before the end of June but we are not ready to meet with the government. In previous meetings in April and May, we didn't agree some issues," said NCCT leader Naing Han Thar. "We have already said that we were going to reply to the government after holding a discussion with our top leaders," he added. The Myanmar Peace Center who are brokering the talks as delegates of the UPWC recently met with the NCCT but have been unable to fix a date for the next round of discussions. In the previous meeting held in May, both sides agreed to draw a joint draft of nation-wide ceasefire deal but they had yet to agree on certain key terms and issues in the agreement.¹²

CHIN CEASEFIRE MONITORING TEAM OFFICE OPENS IN THANTLANG TOWNSHIP

During the peace process between the Burmese government and the Chin National Front (CNF) in Chin state, a Chin Ceasefire Monitoring Team (CCMT) office was opened for Thantlang Township on 14 June. The opening ceremony was attended by Rev. Dr. Lal Uk, President of CCMT, Rev. Tluang Ceu, Secretary, Pu HC. RalHnin, in-charge of Thantlang Liaison office (CNF), Pu Thang Yen, in-charge of Maupti Liaison office (CNF), Township police superintendent, department officials and locals from Thantlang. CNF spokesperson said that all participants agreed to organize 'Ceasefire Monitoring Team' (CMT) in each township in order to monitor the ceasefire between the government and the Chin National Front and that the teams of nine persons from local parents, students, youths, women, and religious leaders for 9 townships would be formed accordingly. CCMT for Thantlang

¹¹ Ceasefire Under Threat as Burma Army's Attack on Karen Army Kills One and Wounds One – <http://karennews.org/2014/06/ceasefire-under-threat-as-burma-armys-attack-on-karen-army-kills-one-and-wounds-one.html/> (Karen News) 17 June 2014/
Clashes will not affect peace process, says KNU – <http://www.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/ethnic-issues/item/11504-clashes-will-not-affect-peace-process-says-knu> (Mizzima) 18 June 2014

¹² NCCT need time to consult with top leaders – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6501:ncct-need-time-to-consult-with-top-leaders&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 19 June 2014

Township is being led by Pu Lawm Bik and members are Dr. Hmuh Thang, Pu Siang Zel, Pu Thla Hmung and Pu Van Bawi Thang. Chin Ceasefire Monitoring Teams have now been formed for Matupi, Tidim and Hakha townships though their offices have yet to be opened officially.¹³

SSA-NORTH LOSES MONGSU CAMP TO BURMA ARMY

After heavy attacks by the Burma Army, the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) has lost its camp at Red Ruby Mountain in Mongsu, southern Shan State. An SSA-N commander at the frontline said: “The Burma Army started attacking us at Ruby Mountain in Mongsu on June 11, 2014. They (Burma Army) fired at us with heavy shells for two days, so local people were affected by the fierce battle. On the order of our headquarters, we withdrew from the camp.” He added, “The Burma Army forced people to work as their porters and human shields at the frontline. We (SSA) were requested by the people not to ambush and shoot at the frontline. If we had, the villagers and porters would have got shot.” SSA/SSPP spokesperson Major Sai Hla said: “It was not our permanent base, it was a temporary camp which we used only in the rainy season.” The Burma Army has recently deployed more troops in northern Shan State around SSA-N and United Wa State Army (UWSA). A villager said, “The situation is still tense between the two sides.”¹⁴

BATTLES RAGE IN SHAN STATE AS RENEWED KACHIN WAR ENTERS FOURTH YEAR

Kachin people’s militia (Mung Shawa Hpyen Hpung -MHH) troops under KIA’s 36 Battalion have been battling against Burmese Army’s 77th Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) troops near Man Nawng Kawng village in Mung Paw, northern Shan State as the renewed civil war in Kachin and northern Shan State enters its fourth year. A KIA source says that the fighting broke out as about 70 Burmese army troops advanced toward Man Nawng Kawng village from Man Ping village in Mung Paw early 10 June morning at 6 am. Two government soldiers died in this battle, said the source. Another battle took place near Mung Gu in northern Shan State between MHH troops under KIA’s 38th Battalion and Burmese army’s 415th Light Infantry Regiment (LIR) troops at around 6:30 am. A combined force of KIA’s 38th Battalion troops and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA, Ko Kang) fought against Burmese army’s 317th LIR troops at Loi Kang, Mung Gu in northern Shan State on the same day at around 8:30. No casualties on either side have been reported. Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) which represents more than 400,000 Kachin Baptists demanded in a statement released Monday to stop Burmese army’s brutal military offensives which intentionally and indiscriminately target Kachin civilians. The statement said, “To materialize genuine Federalism without delay, KBC believes that 100,000 IDPs are facing difficulties and suffering traumatize pains because of political problem, which is Federalism based on Panglong Treaty”. The KBC also urged to immediately withdraw Burmese Army troops from homes of over 100,000 civilians and KIO-controlled territory, so that IDPs living in various camps could go homes.¹⁵

CENSUS STALLED IN KIO-CONTROLLED AREAS

Talks aimed at allowing the government to finish its nation-wide census in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) have stalled. The Minister for Immigration and Population Khin Yi met with KIO Major General Gun Maw on 13 May but they were unable to agree on how to cooperate finalising the census in conflict areas. “At the meeting, Gun Maw (sic) and his people said they will cooperate on the census in the remaining 97 villages. In my opinion, there won’t be much census. If they are to collect in areas where there are land mines, those going into those areas need

¹³ Chin Ceasefire Monitoring Team office opens for Thantlang Township – <http://khonumthung.org/2014/06/20/chin-ceasefire-monitoring-team-office-opens-for-thantlang-township/> (Khonumthung) 29 June 2014

¹⁴ SSA-North loses Mongsu camp to Burma Army – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5853:ssa-north-loses-mongsu-camp-to-burma-army&catid=86:war&Itemid=284 (S.H.A.N.) 19 June 2014

¹⁵ Battles Rage in Northern Shan State as Renewed Kachin War Enters Fourth Year – <http://kachinlandnews.com/?p=24530> (Kachinland News) 12 June 2014

to attend training. Until now, there is no one coming for training,” said Director-General Myint Kyaing from the Ministry of Immigration and Population. 15 June was the deadline for collecting census data after an extension period to allow census collectors to reach remote areas. There is no report made to the Central Census Committee about continuing to collect data in KIO controlled areas. The KIO said they are not objecting to the census programme, and have accepted that a census is needed for the good of the country. However, recent clashes between the army and Kachin rebels in April and May have heightened tensions in the region and made it harder to collect data in contested areas.¹⁶

SUU KYI PRESIDENCY BID IN THE BALANCE

For opposition party leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the path to becoming Burma’s president was always going to be an uphill battle, but a vote last week by a parliamentary committee deciding against a crucial amendment to the Constitution just made it that much steeper. Set up in February, the parliamentary committee was to discuss reforms to Burma’s military-drafted 2008 Constitution, specifically pertaining to Article 59(f), which prohibits any citizen with foreign relatives from becoming president or vice president. Previously married to a British man and the mother of his two children, the National League of Democracy (NLD) leader is effectively barred from running for presidency in the 2015 elections. According to media sources the committee voted last week — 26 out of 31 panellists — not to endorse any amendments to Article 59(f), and will provide this recommendation to the parliament. No reasons were given for the rejection. But the NLD party has not lost hope. Speaking to the media, Nyan Win, NLD spokesman and senior party official, said this initial announcement does not automatically sound a death knell to Suu Kyi’s presidential aspirations. “We can’t say Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has no chance of becoming president until the union parliament approves it,” Nyan Win said. “We need to wait till the committee submits its final suggestions at the parliament.” Suu Kyi, for her part, contends that any changes made to the Constitution must come from the public — and presumably not from a committee that is majority stacked with panelists from the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). “Whether or not I become the president in the future depends on the will of the people, their will with regard to amending the Constitution and their will with regard to whom they wish to choose as president,” Suu Kyi said Monday at the end of a four-day visit to Nepal, according to Associated Press. She added that she and the NLD have been focusing their efforts in recent months on amending a clause that calls for more than 75 percent of the parliament to pass any constitutional changes. Article 436 is deemed undemocratic by the NLD as the Burmese military is allocated 25 percent of seats in the parliament — a matter also enshrined as a constitutional article — and therefore has an effective veto over any amendments. For the past months, the NLD has been rallying nationwide for constitutional reform, specifically on changing Article 436. From Sagaing Division to Irrawaddy Division, thousands of supporters have turned up to show public support for the NLD and its platform of constitutional reform. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate’s popularity among Burmese is unparalleled, with her party winning the 1990 election by a landslide under her leadership. But the military did not allow the NLD to govern, and put Suu Kyi under house arrest for a total of 15 out of the next 21 years, before her most recent release in November 2010.¹⁷

MILITARY MPS PUT FORWARD CHANGES TO RECALL BILL

Military parliamentarians are pushing for changes to a draft law that would make it harder for members of the public to initiate a process to remove them from office. Under the draft Recall Bill approved by the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), a complaint from a single member of the public to the Union Election Commission is enough to prompt an investigation into a military MP. For elected

¹⁶ Census stalled in KIO-controlled areas — http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6477:census-stalled-in-kio-controlled-areas&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 17 June 2014

¹⁷ Suu Kyi presidency bid in the balance — <http://www.dvb.no/news/suu-kyi-presidency-bid-in-the-balance-burma-myanmar/41569> (DVB) 17 June 2014

MPs the hurdle is higher: A petition signed by at least 1 percent of eligible voters in their constituency. On 12 June, Amyotha Hluttaw military MP Major Soe Moe suggested that complaints against military representatives should include the signatures of at least 10 witnesses from the side of complainant to ensure there is “irrefutable evidence”. Soe Moe also proposed that any complaint about a military MP’s conduct from the public be forwarded by the UEC to the commander-in-chief, who will conduct an investigation and send his decision to the Hluttaw speakers. Both complainants and witnesses should be punished if a complainant is found guilty of submitting a false claim, he said. The law currently does not specify a punishment for those found to have made a false accusation against a sitting MP. Speaker Khin Maung Myint instructed the Bill Committee to consider the proposals submitted by the military representative. Brigadier General Kyaw Oo Lwin, head of Amyotha Hluttaw’s military representative group, told local news media that the amendments were necessary to stop people from “defaming” the military. “If we make it too easy for a civilian to complain against military representatives based on their personal feelings or with the intention of defaming the Tatmataw then there may be unnecessary problems,” he said. The Recall Bill, which is based on section 396 of the constitution, was submitted to parliament in August 2012 by the Union Election Commission. However, in August 2013 MPs, unhappy at the 1pc threshold, which they said was too low, voted to suspend discussions until the end of the year, when a committee reviewing the constitution was due to complete its task. The following month, however, the commission wrote to Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and requested him to restart the discussion. While most MPs – including Aung San Suu Kyi – supported the decision to suspend debate, it was opposed by military MPs, who described it as unconstitutional. The Pyithu Hluttaw passed an amended version of the bill on March 23. The constitution states that MPs can be recalled for five reasons, including high treason, misbehaviour and inefficient discharge of duties. Under the law, if the commission receives a complaint that meets the 1pc threshold it has to examine whether the complaint can be backed up by concrete evidence. If it can, then the commission must hold a vote in the constituency on whether to “recall”, or remove, the sitting representative. At least 50pc of eligible voters must be in favour for the process to continue.¹⁸

TENASSERIM GOVT ORDERS KNU TO STOP COLLECTING ‘TAXES’

The government of Tenasserim Division ordered the Karen National Union (KNU) to stop letting their police force collect “taxes” from locals in Tavoy [Dawei] district and to keep its armed forces in check. In a confidential letter sent to the KNU on 4 June, the divisional government said that the newly established Karen National Police Force (KNPF) has been “unofficially” assuming responsibilities — such as collecting taxes — in the Myeik-Tavoy district, which is under the authority of the divisional government. The divisional government demanded that the KNPF be disbanded as it could lead to confusion among locals and be detrimental to the region’s stability. The letter also instructed the KNU to control its armed forces in the area — such as the Karen National Liberation Army’s (KNLA) 4th Brigade – to prevent them from assuming government duties. “We have to reach out to the KNU as their members have been collecting money in local villages and wearing armbands that read ‘police’, which could be confused with the divisional government’s officials,” said Tin Thein, the secretary of the Tenasserim Division who had signed the 4 June letter to the KNU. Myeik-Tavoy district – referred to simply as Tavoy by the divisional government — was the site of fierce fighting in the past between the Burmese Army and the KNU, who say it falls under their armed group’s 4th Brigade. Since the KNU came to a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2012, the KNU has been operating in the area in an official capacity. The KNU’s regional chairman Pado Bee Leh defended the KNPF’s tax collection, saying that it is in accordance with their own regulations, and that these types of letters from the government are frequent. “We have our policies and adopted procedures which we must follow,” Pado Bee Leh said. “It is necessary to seek assistance from the public before the nationwide ceasefire is implemented, and we use diplomatic means when

¹⁸ Military MPs put forward changes to recall bill –
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/10733-military-mps-put-forward-changes-to-recall-bill.html>
(Myanmar Times) 18 June 2014

collecting money from the locals. Violence has never been our practice.” He added that the KNPF has been in operation since 1998 though the government was not aware of it. This police force is also operational in areas that the KNLA’s brigades are active in, including Karen state, and have received cooperation from the police of divisional governments. Despite the ceasefire, there are still skirmishes between the KNLA and the Burmese Army. The KNU most recently reported that two of its 4th Brigade members were shot dead by the Burmese Army’s 552nd Light Infantry Battalion on 13 June when they were returning from picking corn in a field in Tavoy. Pado Bee Leh said the KNU and government officials were still addressing this incident.¹⁹

ELECTORAL PROPOSAL INCOMPATIBLE WITH CEASEFIRE DEAL

The legislative push to introduce the proportional representation might adversely impacted on the agreement on nationwide ceasefire, said Sai Saw Than Myint, spokesperson for the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF). “We have no need to introduce the proportional representation into the electoral system as the country is already under the federation system. All ethnicity-based parties, the NBF and the armed national races groups strive to uphold the federation. Introducing the new electoral system may not yield any benefit to us. If deemed necessary, the proportional representation should confine to seven developed regions which were in existence before the emergence of the federation,” said Sai Saw Than Myint. He warned that ethnic parties might reject the 2015 elections due to attempts to force the proportional representation upon them. This may lead to the collapse of peace deal, he said. “From my standpoint, the nationwide ceasefire deal may completely collapse. National ethnic parties and armed ethnic groups have shared the same attitude on this matter. Our party will oppose it if they introduce the PR system in seven States. I strongly believe that the nationwide peace deal may collapse,” he said. The nationwide ceasefire plays a key role not only in the emergence of a federation but also in ensuring a democratic country, he said. The NBF is the umbrella organisation of 20 ethnic political parties, opposing the proportional representation. In another development, about a dozen ethnic groups formed the Federated Union Party (FUP) in a bid to secure greater representation for Myanmar’s minorities.²⁰

SEVENTEEN POLL WATCHDOGS TO MONITOR FOR VOTE TRANSPARENCY

A total of 17 election monitoring groups will work to ensure the transparency of the 2015 general election across the country, according to balloting monitors. These groups had previously monitored the 2010 elections and the 2012 by-elections. The Union Election Commission (UEC) will issue accreditation cards enabling them to become poll observers for the balloting, said Tin Aye from the UEC. “As citizen observers, a group of volunteers did the monitoring even though we did not get the green light in 2010 and 2012. Under the EU Election Supporting Group, the four-sided meeting, the UEC included, was held in March, 2013. We formed the election monitoring group and the UEC gave its approval. There is no perfect election in the world, said Mya Nandar Linn, advisor to the voter education and monitoring groups. The groups have plans to disseminate information and to conduct training courses for poll volunteers. They also plan to offer a road-map on vote monitoring to the UEC. Presently, they have been training local residents who want to become observers at the balloting. Some 20 observers have been named for Yangon. On the drawing board is a plan to train observers for this year’s by-elections in Chin State and Mandalay Region. The UEC earlier said that the local and foreign observers would be involved in monitoring the elections in accordance with the international standards.²¹

¹⁹ Tenasserim govt orders KNU to stop collecting ‘taxes’ –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/tenasserim-govt-orders-knu-to-stop-collecting-taxes-burma-myanmar/41595> (DVB) 18 June 2014

²⁰ Electoral proposal incompatible with ceasefire deal –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6459:electoral-proposal-incompatible-with-ceasefire-deal&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 15 June 2014

²¹ Seventeen poll watchdogs to monitor for vote transparency –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6448:seventeen-poll-watchdogs-to-monitor-for-vote-transparency&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 14 June 2014

ANP CALLS EFFORTS TO INTRODUCE PR SYSTEM DISHONEST

The leader of the Arakan National Party (ANP) Aye Thar Aung has criticised the recent moves to change Myanmar's electoral system to one of proportional representation (PR). "At a time when the country should be striving for democracy, some are working to change to another system instead of the present election system which has no problems. This isn't honest," he said. Khin Wai Kyi of the National Democratic Force Party (NDF) submitted a proposal in parliament to introduce a PR system. The proposal was met with objections from military representatives, ethnic parties and the National League for democracy (NLD). But representatives from the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) have seconded the proposal which was approved on June 11. Most criticised the fact that introducing a complex new system at such an early stage of Myanmar's reforms will only confuse the electorate. Many see this as a way for the ruling party to weaken opposition parties ahead of next year's general election. "The important things are to let democracy flourish, to reach a ceasefire and work for peace, and to build federal system together with ethnic groups. We have many problems to face. But now instead of doing these important things, some are trying to change the election system. In my opinion, I smell something fishy going on," said Aye Thar Aung. The ANP will discuss this matter at a party meeting on 15 June. He will also plan to explain to Rakhine nationals what the issue is about.²²

ANALYSIS

The on-going peace process represents the best opportunity in decades to resolve the conflict between the government and ethnic armed organisations. However, the continued fighting in Kachin, Shan and most recently the incident in Karen State between government troops and KNU will raise doubts on the credibility of the peace process. And thus once again, the need to adopt and implement a code-of-conduct for the Burmese Army and the ethnic armed organizations becomes more pertinent than ever before and a priority to ensure that troops from both sides operate and follow to an agreed set of rules. In a country which has been plagued with ethnic conflicts for half a century and where tensions have been building, grievances can easily spill over – at any time. When trust is being built it is crucial to move forward slowly but more importantly for all sides to avoid actions which could cause renewed fighting.

Resolving Myanmar's ethnic conflicts will require substantial and sustained leadership of the government as well as the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organisations and stakeholders. And until both the government and ethnic armed organizations demonstrate not only their willingness but also full commitment to the ceasefire agreements, the success of the on-going peace process will remain uncertain.

²² ANP calls efforts to introduce PR system dishonest – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6437:anp-calls-efforts-to-introduce-pr-system-dishonest&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 13 June 2014