
POLITICAL MONITOR No.11

OFFICIAL MEDIA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EXPRESSES COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVING PEACE

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing voiced his plan that the Tatmadaw and the government will make efforts to achieve peace in the five-year term. "I want eternal peace. That's what I said to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We'll make efforts to achieve peace in this five year term," said the Senior General on 13 May in his meeting with the media at Bayintnaung Yeiktha in Nay Pyi Taw. "The door is open to those who wish to sign the peace agreement. I've been saying so from time to time. We're treading on the democratic path," said Senior General Min Aung Hlaing regarding the attitude of the Tatmadaw towards peace.

"If we don't protect the administrative machinery, we will be, I'm sure, in great trouble. We protect Our Three Main National Causes. We protect the lives and property of the people. If an institution of the administration is attacked, we cannot stay aloof with our arms folded," he added. The Tatmadaw has to fight, regardless of whoever the attacker is because the very duty of the Tatmadaw is to defend against internal and external enemies, he said.

Regarding the fighting with the KIA, the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services said the Tatmadaw did not attack their troops, but the Tatmadaw had to prevent KIA troops from committing aggressive acts as they entered the territory of the Tatmadaw. "We really want peace. A democratic country is what the Tatmadaw wants most. Depending on the results of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, we have to continue to discuss peace. There are still some armed groups that haven't signed the NCA yet. Only after signing can they proceed to the next step of demanding political rights. Demanding rights without signing the NCA is impossible," the Senior General said.

He also offered the olive branches to TNLA, AA and MNSA, saying that the armed groups are required to give up their weapons. They should guarantee that arms will be exchanged for peace. If they don't abandon arms and come to the peace conference, what about those who've signed the NCA, he added. "We should be fair to the signatories. We won't use the term 'surrender' in order not to offend their dignity. But we just want them to abandon their arms," said Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

In referring to the usage and term of 'Rohingya', the Senior General said there is no such ethnic group recognised in the country. Former USDP party President Thein Sein also, in his time as president, shared this sentiment. "I'd unambiguously say our country has no such ethnic group as the Rohingya. We have only 'Bengalis'. We call them so because they come from Bangladesh. The British brought these people into our country for difference reasons," said the Senior General. Asked if he has any plans to retire from the Tatmadaw this year, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing replied that he has no intention to retire and will continue to be in the Tatmadaw for as long as he is able.¹

PEACE PROCESS MUST FOCUS ON ALL STAKEHOLDERS : STATE COUNSELLOR

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi stressed the need to focus on the participation of all stakeholders who should be involved in every step of the country's national reconciliation and peace process, at a coordination meeting on the formation of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) on 9 May. The meeting was attended by peace negotiator Dr Tin Myo Win, Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung and Union Attorney-General Tun Oo, Tatmadaw representatives Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Lt-Gen Tun Naung and Lt-Gen Min Naung, Myanmar Peace Centre representatives Myint Soe, Khin Zaw Oo and Dr Min Zaw Oo and other officials. The participants agreed to form the NRPC in parallel with preparations for the "21st Century Panglong Conference", to focus on the involvement of all

¹ Door to Peace Opened : C-in-C of Defence Services expresses his commitment to achieving peace within five years – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 May 2016 (p. 1 & 2)

stakeholders in every step of preparing for the conference and to hold the second coordination meeting during the third week of May. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi called for national peace conference within the next two months, at the second meeting of the Union Ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee (UJMC) on 27 April stressing the need to hold the national peace conference like the historic Panglong Conference concurrently with the nationwide ceasefire.²

US WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH PEACE PROCESS : US AMBASSADOR

The United States will neither interfere with the internal peace process of Myanmar nor give pressure but provide technical assistance, said the US Ambassador to Myanmar at a meeting held at the American Centre on 10 May. Ambassador Scot Marciel said America has always given its support to the ceasefire effort and peace process of Myanmar and it lays special emphasis on the peace process. As a foreign government, the US has no plans to interfere with the peace process of Myanmar and it does not intend to influence or pressure Myanmar either, he added. He continued to say that Myanmar's peace process is something that Myanmar people have to decide on, and on its part, the US are willing to provide whatever is necessary in addition to technical assistance, said the US ambassador. The ambassador, during his meeting with representatives from Civil Service Organisations, local entrepreneurs, people from the education sector, government officials and the media said that there are still many challenges in regard to the reformation process and that the US is willing and ready to cooperate with the new government, civil society organisations and entrepreneurs. Concerning bilateral cooperation in trade and education sectors, the Ambassador said the United States is promoting bilateral trade. As an education exchange programme promoter, we will make arrangements for Myanmar students to be able to study in the US. At the moment, the US is building a new American Centre to enable Myanmar citizens to have greater access to educational resources.³

NEW NAME FOR PEACE CENTRE : NRPC TO BECOME A GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has urged stakeholders in Myanmar's peace process to have a giving mind-set rather than a taking mind-set when they sit at the negotiation table for national reconciliation and internal peace. "Concerning national reconciliation and internal peace, what counts is for all participants to discuss on the basis of what they can give rather than what they would like to take," said the State Counsellor at a meeting held at the Presidential Palace on 16 May to coordinate matters relating to formation of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) and preparations for the 21st-Century Panglong Conference. She went on to say that discussions are to be based on Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) but with flexibility and that the meeting's agenda is to be reset through reviewing the political dialogue framework.

"In the transformation of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) into the NRPC, the NRPC will become a government organisation under the ministry of the State Counsellor's Office and it is, therefore, necessary for this organisation to abide by the budgetary regulations as well as civil service regulations," said Aung San Suu Kyi, adding NRPC will have its head office in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon MPC will be transformed into Yangon Branch of NRPC.

Regarding convening of the 21st-Century Panglong Conference, a suitable place will be selected, and the NRPC formation process will be led by Kyaw Tint Swe, said the State Counsellor. A preparatory committee for convening the 21st-Century Panglong Conference will be formed, and a sub-committee will also be formed to coordinate the continuation of discussions with indigenous armed organisations that have already signed the NCA. Similarly, another sub-committee will be formed to discuss and

² Advice for Peace New Centre : Peace process must focus on all stakeholders : State Counsellor – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 May 2016 (p. 1)

³ US will not interfere with peace process : US Ambassador – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 May 2016 (p. 1)

coordinate with those indigenous armed organisations that have not signed the NCA yet. As there are time limitations, both these sub-committees are to hold meetings simultaneously but separately. “The committee and sub-committees are to be formed this week to perform their duties with greater momentum,” said the State Counsellor, adding that a CSO Forum is to be held parallel to the political dialogues in order to allow civil society organisations to participate. “The CSO Forum has to be formed with representatives selected by CSOs themselves, and the NRPC is to provide necessary assistance in this process. Suggestions and recommendations made by the CSO Forum are to be taken into account, and the discussions should not include too many people,” she said. The State Counsellor said she would meet the Union-level Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) to clarify matters concerning pre-paratory measures for the formation of the NRPC and the convening of the 21st-Century Panglong Conference. She also said the reformation of the UPDJC will take place as soon as possible.⁴

US EASES SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR IN BID TO PROMOTE GROWTH, REFORMS

The United States eased some sanctions on Myanmar on 17 May to support political reforms and economic growth in the country but retained other measures to discourage human rights abuses and military trade with North Korea, US officials said. The moves include easing restrictions on the country’s financial institutions, removing seven state-owned companies from the US blacklist and extending a measure allowing shipments to go through ports and airports, the Treasury Department said in a statement. But the United States also strengthened measures targeting Steven Law, a man already blacklisted for alleged ties to Myanmar’s military. The Treasury added to its blacklisted six companies owned 50 per cent or more by Law or the company he controls, Asia World. The sanctions decision, reported by Reuters on Friday, came before a visit to the South-east Asian nation by Secretary of State John Kerry on 22 May. President Obama, in a letter to Congress, said he was extending for one year the legal underpinnings for the sanctions that remain and provided his justification for doing so. He said Myanmar had made significant progress on reforms since 2011, but that “concerns persist regarding continued obstacles to full civilian control of the government, the ongoing conflict and human rights abuses in the country, particularly in ethnic minority areas, and military trade with North Korea.” The US actions eased restrictions on Americans living in Myanmar, allowing them to conduct everyday transactions like paying rent, which the Treasury said would make it easier for engagement between the two countries’ citizens. They also extended a measure that eases trade restrictions on Myanmar by allowing all shipments to go through its ports and airports indefinitely, even to ports and airports controlled by entities on the US sanctions blacklist. It had initially granted the easing for a six-month period in December 2015. The Treasury is also allowing transactions related to moving goods inside the country, for instance from warehouses to retail outlets. The United States removed from its blacklist three state-owned banks - Myanma Economic Bank, Myanma Foreign Trade Bank, and Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank - and is authorizing transactions with two other Myanmar banks that are still blacklisted, Innwa Bank and Myawaddy Bank. That action means that most transactions with all Myanmar financial institutions will be allowed as of May 18, the Treasury said in a statement. Also removed from the US blacklist are seven state-owned Myanmar business enterprises, including in timber, pearls and mining.⁵

PRESIDENT HTIN KYAW MEETS WITH VLADAMIR PUTIN AND ASEAN LEADERS

President Htin Kyaw, during his visit to the Russia Federation to attend the Summit commemorating the 20th anniversary of ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partner Relations, met the Russia Federation President, the Prime Minister of Thailand and the Vietnamese Prime Minister separately on 18 May in Sochi, Russia. During his meeting with the Russian leader, President Htin Kyaw said that the relations

⁴ New Name for Peace Centre : NRPC to become a government organisation –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 May 2016 (p. 1 & 3)/
State Counsellor visits Myanmar Peace Centre –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 May 2016 (p. 3)

⁵ Some sanctions lifted : US eases sanctions on Myanmar in bid to promote growth, reforms –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 May 2016 (p. 1 & 3)

between the two nations that has been stable since 1948 would be further strengthened, that goodwill societies would be founded in both nations as a gesture of bilateral cooperation, that bilateral cultural and economic efforts in cooperation would be made, that entrepreneurs from Russia would invest in Myanmar and the people-to-people interaction would be furthered and an agreement to open a Russia trade representative's office were discussed. They also discussed matters relating to investment by Russian entrepreneurs in Myanmar's oil and natural gas sector, resumption of air transport between Moscow and Yangon, the providing of technical assistance, energy sector investors' need to consider social responsibility and cooperation in cultural, tourism and defence sectors and educational exchange programs.

President Htin Kyaw also held separate meetings with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Xuan Phuc. In his meeting with Thai Prime Minister, the Myanmar President laid emphasis upon further strengthening of diplomatic ties and amicable relations between the two nations, the for-mulation of programmes for cooperation in economic, trade and cultural sectors, deep sea port projects and special economic zone projects' implementation not affecting the natural environment and matters relating to the well-being of the people. He also raised the issue of migrant workers in Thailand and also discussed the signing of a memorandum of understanding regarding bilateral cooperation in workers' affairs, reaching an agreement regarding the creation of employment opportunities and coming to an agreement concerning cross-border issues.

President Htin Kyaw and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc discussed matters concerning further cementing Myanmar-Viet Nam ties, the promotion of bilateral trade, increased investments in construction, banking, communications, air transport and the energy sector and cooperation in cultivation and production of coffee and pepper. The two leaders also discussed tourism promotion, cooperation and livestock and fishery improvement and regional cooperation activities such as GMS, ACMECS and CLMV.⁶

MYANMAR LEADERS RECEIVE THAI PM'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

President Htin Kyaw requested the right to equal treatment for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during a meeting with Thai Prime Minister's Special Representative and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai on 9 May. During the meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, President Htin Kyaw said the two countries will enjoy stronger economic and trade relations following the completion of the Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Bridge No 2 at Myawady. The Thai Foreign Minister said Thailand hopes to hold talks on bilateral cooperation during the upcoming Russia-ASEAN Summit, and also extended an invitation to the Myanmar President to pay a goodwill visit to Thailand. They also discussed trilateral cooperation between Myanmar, Thailand and Japan in developing the Dawei Special Economic Zone, the expansion of sustainable and responsible investments, further cooperation in the sectors of capacity building and human resources development and measures to upgrade the Emergency Department at Dawei Hospital.

Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi also met her Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai on 9 May in Nay Pyi Taw and discussed cooperation in bilateral relations between the two countries. Talks focussed on border region development, treatment of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand and on developong the Dawei Special Economic Zone Project.⁷

⁶ President Htin Kyaw meets with Vladimir Putin Bi-lateral relations discussed, future investment, scholarships, funding – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 May 2016 (p. 1&3)/

President U Htin Kyaw leaves for Russian Federation to attend Russia-ASEAN Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 May 2016 (p. 3)

⁷ President Htin Kyaw requests equal treatment for Myanmar workers in Thailand – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 May 2016 (p. 3)/ Myanmar, Thailand look to promote sector-wide development – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 May 2016 (p. 3)

PRESIDENT FORMS COMMITTEE TO PREVENT CONSCRIPTION OF MINORS

The President's Office has formed a Committee for the Prevention of Recruitment of Minors in Military Service with the release of Notification 17/2016, dated 5 May. The committee includes 12 members, including the deputy attorney-general as secretary. The committee will be chaired by the Union Minister for Defence. The committee is set to be tasked with 12 points of action, including discharging minors from military service or basic military training to reunite them with their families and enhancing cooperation with UN agencies, including UNICEF and the UNDP.⁸

PYITHU HLUTTAW (Session Highlights)

The Second Pyithu Hluttaw during its 24th Day Session discussed the 2012 Ward/Village Administration Law and the elimination of narcotic drugs in areas held by armed groups.

- Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Soe said that there is no plan to amend or redraw the 2012 Ward or Village Administration Law at the moment. He added that the law was drawn up by the ministry in accordance with suggestions of related ministries, legal experts, staff from social organisations, the legal advisory team of the President's Office and the Union Attorney-General's Office, and was enacted following the approval of the two hluttaws. He added that the rules and regulations were revised several times in order to minimise weaknesses.
- In response to a question on plans to eliminate the production of narcotic drugs in territories held by armed groups, the Deputy Minister replied that the fight against narcotics faces challenges amid the easy availability of chemicals necessary to make drugs in border regions and remote areas that lack peace and stability. He said drugs are smuggled out of the country the same way chemicals are brought in and highlighted the importance of peace and stability, effective legal mechanisms and the rule of law, calling for cooperation between the government, the public and ethnic armed groups in the fight against narcotics. Anti-narcotics efforts are being made in cooperation with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signatories, said the deputy minister, adding that narcotic drug elimination can be implemented as a national duty following the inking of truce deal with non-signatories and political dialogue.
- The Bill Revoking the Law to Safe-guard the State against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts was approved at the session.⁹

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CLASHES BETWEEN TNLA AND RCSS CONTINUE AS TALKS STALL

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF) and the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) have repeatedly clashed in northern Shan State during the first of week of May. The TNLA/PSLF information department posted on their Facebook page on 4 May a statement that claimed that 5 clashes had taken place with the RCSS/SSA troops and TNLA. The group reported that the next day that had 8 clashes had taken place. Reached for comment the TNLA's spokesperson Mai Aik Kyaw claimed that both sides had suffered injuries during the clashes. "Fighting is widespread now. There is fighting going on in Namkham, Hsipaw, Namhsan, Kyaukme Townships," he said.

On 1 May, the RCSS/SSA released a statement that was critical of the TNLA. "Launching an offensive against our army clearly shows their lack of will towards peaceful negotiations and finding a peaceful

⁸ President forms committee to prevent conscription of minors –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 May 2016 (p. 3)

⁹ No plan to change Ward or Village Administration Law : Deputy Home Affairs Minister –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 May 2016 (p. 2)

resolution to the conflict,” the state statement said. Both sides have indicated in public statements that they are willing to have talks, but these discussions have yet to take place. It remains unclear when or if talks will happen. Colonel Sai La, a spokesperson of the RCSS/SSA, said that the RCSS welcomes outside mediation from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), the alliance of ethnic armed groups which the RCSS/SSA is not part of but which the TNLA is a member. “When the statement from Pangsang, the headquarters of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) was released saying that they would negotiate between us. We were very pleased. We welcomed them to help us,” Col. Sai La explained. “We held a meeting on 26 April, 2016 and sent letters to the UNFC, the UWSA and the NDAA, we want to solve the problem immediately,” Col. Sai La added. “We want to solve the problem by peaceful means,” he said. Col. Sai La explained that the RCSS has never thought of the TNLA as an enemy. “We live in the same state. We have helped each other when we faced difficulties. When problems happen, it’s not a good reason to solve these problems with armed force . . . We really hope to solve the problem with peaceful means,” he said.

Mai Aik Kyaw, the TNLA spokesperson, said that because the TNLA leadership cannot travel freely they had asked the UNFC to find a place outside of Burma to hold the talks. “For the RCSS, they have signed the peace agreement so that they can go anywhere,” he said. “Right now, we have to solve the fighting issue. This is because the RCSS has entered our controlled areas and violated our people that’s why the fighting has happened. If we cannot solve this problem we cannot talk,” he added.

On 2 May, the TNLA’s news and information department released a statement accusing the RCSS/SSA of violating human rights in Ta’ang controlled territory. The statement claimed that the PLSF/TNLA had received requests from people living in the area to “clear out the RCSS/SSA forces from the area, due to their widespread violations of human rights”. The statement went on to accuse the RCSS/SSA of “intrusion” in TNLA areas and building camps in their territory. “We had never fought with the RCSS before. But, after they signed the NCA [National Ceasefire Agreement] they sent their troops into our territory,” Mai Aik Kyaw said.¹⁰

SSPP URGES TNLA AND RCSS TO FIND PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO END FIGHTING

Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) has urged the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) to find ways to stop fighting between the two groups – the RCSS/SSA and the TNLA. The statement of SSPP/SSA, which is dated 7 May, says, “Fresh fighting broke out between RCSS and TNLA, and we strongly urged both sides to find a solution as soon as possible via peaceful dialogue rather than military action.” Most of the fighting between RCSS and the TNLA broke out in the areas controlled by the SSPP, so the SSPP had to control the situation in order that the fighting not to spread, the statement of SSPP says, adding that SSPP has stayed neutral. SSPP has said this is an important time in which problems must be solved via political means rather than military means. The fresh fighting like these can delay the ethnic minorities' main aim to build a genuine federal Union, says SSPP. More than 500 people fled to monasteries in Kyaukme Township due to the fighting.

Regarding the venue for the meeting between the two groups, RCSS has proposed they want to meet in Chiang Mai in Thailand, but the TNLA wants to meet at Mongla, a border town adjacent to China, so the agreement has not been reached with regard to the venue said Tun Zaw, a member of a five-member committee formed by the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC).

¹⁰ Clashes between TNLA and RCSS continue as talks stall – <http://english.panglong.org/clashes-between-tnla-and-rcss-continue-as-talks-stall/> (S.H.A.N.) 7 May 2016

Fighting broke out between RCSS and TNLA from May 1 to May 7 at Mantone, Namhkam and Kyaukme townships, TNLA information official Mai Eik Kyaw says, adding another bout of fighting broke out near Htasant Village in Hsipaw Township in the morning of 7 May.¹¹

MYANMAR ARMY CONTINUES TO CLASH WITH TNLA AND SSPP/SSA

The Myanmar Army has reportedly suffered heavy losses in recent heavy fighting against troops from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) in northern Shan State. The SSPP/SSA and the Myanmar Army fought intensely in the Pong Woe area south-east of Kyaukme Township from 12 to 14 May. According to Shan military commanders and local sources the government forces are believed to have lost a number of officers during the clashes. When asked for a comment by an SSPP/SSA information officer said : "The Myanmar Army suffered a heavy loss in the battles on the 12th and the 14th. Some men from our side have also been killed as well. We have been living there for a long time. It seemed like they were coming to clear us away. They were trapped. That's why many people died from their side. We don't want to fight. We are living in our own place. We will defend if they come to attack us." The SSPP/SSA and a regiment under the Myanmar Army's North Eastern Command conducted a joint inspection of some military camps in Tanyang Township on 12 May. Previously tensions were high between the two armies in the Loi Say-LoiLeng ridge area in Tanyang Township, but fighting did not break out there. Instead, fighting broke out in the Pong Woe area of Kyaukme Township, which is situated on the southern section of the Mandalay-Muse Road. According to observers, the Myanmar Army took advantage of last month's clashes between the TNLA/PSLF and the SSPP/SSA along the northern section of the Mandalay-Muse road and attacked the SSPP/SSA. This was done because the military wants to secure control over the southern section of the Mandalay-Muse Road. The Myanmar Army also used combat helicopters in the battle with the SSPP/SSA. Over 700 people displaced by the conflict fled to Naung Pain Village and Kyaukme in Kyaukme Township due to the clashes, according to local residents that have been assisting the war refugees.

The TNLA has also announced that an intense battle broke out between the TNLA/PSLF and the Myanmar Army along the northern section of the Mandalay-Muse Road on 15 May. According to the TNLA, the two armies fought near KwinSalin Village in Kyaukme Township on the morning of May 15th. Intense battles have also broken out near Manei Village in Mantong Township, which is located in the Palaung Self-Administered Zone, and the Myanmar Army has also suffered many losses. The Myanmar Army has yet to release any information or comment about the recent clashes in the northern Shan State.¹²

RCSS, KNU LEADERS MEET TO DISCUSS PROPOSED NEW PANGLONG CONFERENCE

The leadership of the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the Karen National Union (KNU) met in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai for a three-day conference that began on 30 April. During the conference the representatives of the two groups discussed the proposal recently put forward by the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader and State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to hold a '21st Century Panglong Conference'.

The Panglong Agreement was reached in February 1947, following a meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi's father General Aung San and representatives from the Shan, Chin and Kachin communities. The

¹¹ SSPP urges TNLA and RCSS to find peaceful solution to end fighting – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/sspp-urges-tnla-and-rcss-find-peaceful-solution-end-fighting> (Mizzima) 9 May 2016

¹² Myanmar Army Continues to Clash with TNLA and SSPP/SSA – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/myanmar-army-continues-clash-tnla-and-ssppssa> (BNI/Mizzima) 19 May 2016/
SSPP/SSA and Burma Army Working on Joint Inspection Agreement – <http://www.bnionline.net/news/shan-state/item/1689-sspp-ssa-and-burma-army-working-on-joint-inspection-agreement.html> (BNI & S.H.A.N.) 16 May 2016

agreement is named after the southern Shan town of Panglong where the meeting was held. On paper the agreement stipulated a significant level of autonomy for Burma's ethnic groups in exchange for their decision to support Aung San's bid for independence from Britain. Aung San, was assassinated just months after the agreement was reached, his successor U Nu, did little to implement the agreement.

RCSS Adviser Khuensai, says that the KNU and RCSS used the conference as an opportunity to share ideas for the Panglong conference. "These two groups have been allies since 1996. They always hold meeting. During the recent meeting, they discussed giving a class on federalism. The leaders of both groups are the leader and deputy leader of the Ethnic Armed Organizations Peace Process Steering Team (EAO PPST). They haven't met since they were elected in March so they held the meeting. The main [objective] was to discuss and set down a program for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's invitation to hold the '21st Century Panglong Conference'," Khun Sai explained.

The RCSS Chairman Lt-Gen Yawd Serk and his counterpart from the KNU, Gen Mutu Say Poe, were recently elected to lead the EAO-PPST at the Second EAO Summit which was held among signatories of the nationwide ceasefire agreement on 24 March.¹³

LACKING FAITH IN THE NLD, ETHNIC PARTIES UNITE

Ethnic parties are disenchanted with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and must forge their own agenda going forward with the peace process, according to the leader of one of the largest ethnic alliances. Head of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and chair of the Shan National League for Democracy Khun Tun Oo, said ethnic people cannot count on the ruling party. "Ethnic people have only the UNA or the NBF [National Brotherhood Federation] or the current ethnic representatives of parliament to rely on for ethnic affairs. Ethnic people can no longer rely on the NLD," he said during an opening speech at a UNA meeting on 7 May.

The UNA is comprised of 8 political parties – the Shan National League for Democracy, the Arakan National Party, the Mon National Party, the Karen National Party, the Kachin National Democracy Congress, the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, the Kayin National Party and the Zomi Congress for Democracy. Collectively the UNA parties won over 40 seats in Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in the 2015 general election. Historically, the UNA has maintained close ties with the NLD, supporting the party's bid to revise the 2008 military-drafted constitution for instance. But ethnic parties and the NLD have faced a growing rift since the election, a schism that has only deepened after the NLD undertook appointing the state cabinets without consulting ethnic parties, even in states where the NLD won a minority of the local hluttaw seats. Ethnic parties and alliances sidelined by the NLD have questioned the party's commitment to federalism and the peace process after it already broke power-sharing pledges.

A member of the Central Executive Committee for the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party Myint Khine, said that the UNA has lost trust in the NLD government after it failed to work together with the ethnic groups. "We arranged to hold talks with the NLD but it has not happened," he said. UNA Co-founder and Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and a central executive member of the Arakan National Party, Aye Thar Aung told local news media that the ethnic parties need to unite to solve their own problems independently.

"We are seeing the government prioritise changes to other sectors, but we haven't yet seen any progress with the peace process. The government shouldn't just continue with the previous government's arrangements. Inclusivity is very important for the peace process," he said. The Arakan Army was not among the eight signatories to the ceasefire agreement, and has not been invited to

¹³ RCSS, KNU leaders meet to discuss proposed new Panglong Conference – <http://english.panglong.org/rcss-knu-leaders-meet-to-discuss-proposed-new-panglong-conference/> (S.H.A.N.) 9 May 2016

the political dialogue. Aye Thar Aung also criticised State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's vision for a second Panglong conference – a second iteration of the historic accord her father Bogyoke Aung San brokered with ethnic leaders in exchange for their assistance in fighting for independence.

“If there is no peace, a 2nd Panglong conference will be meaningless and a federal Union won't really emerge,” he said. “The government should invite all ethnic armed groups, including the [Arakan Army] AA, to sign the ceasefire first.”

The UNA meeting also addressed a recent parliamentary debate over ongoing clashes in Rakhine State, with Lieutenant General Sein Win, Union Minister for Defence, demanding the AA surrender and accusing them of behaving undemocratically.

“The AA is fighting against democracy. Under a democratic system, people have the right to present their demands via members of parliament,” he said at the May 4 hluttaw session. Khun Tun Oo said at the UNA meeting that the “Rakhine issue is very bad for the NLD government”.

NLD spokesperson Nyan Win shot back at the UNA by saying that ethnic affairs cannot be solved by one party, alliance or government alone. All parties must collaborate, he said. “We are making progress for ethnic affairs and the AA issue will be understood soon. We agree that we have to meet with the UNA, but we cannot say the date yet,” he said.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's comments on the conflicts in Kachin State, the olive branches extended to the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar National Defense Army (MNDA) as well as the role of the military in safe guarding the Three National Causes can be regarded as indicators reflecting the Tatmadaw's position on developments in the country. His pledge to work with the government to bring peace to the country is indeed encouraging though the recent skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and several ethnic armed groups as well as the intra-ethnic battles in the Shan State runs contrary to this pledge. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has also stressed on the need for participation of all stakeholders in the national reconciliation and peace process. While the comments are valid and crucial the fact that the realization of 'an all inclusive' process has failed to materialize. It therefore is crucial for the NLD government to implement such initiatives not only to show its democratic principles of transparency but more importantly the words of the State Counsellor are able to deliver on the realization of such initiatives.

¹⁴ Lacking faith in the NLD, ethnic parties unite – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20178-lacking-faith-in-the-nld-ethnic-parties-unite.html> (Myanmar Times) 9 May 2016