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## POLITICAL MONITOR NO.17

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **BURMESE ARMY CHIEF MEETS WITH THAI GENERALS**

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing paid an official visit to Thailand from 3 to 4 July. During his visit, Min Aung Hlaing called on Commander-in-Chief of Royal Thai Army General Tanasak Patimapragorn and exchanged views on the experiences of the two armies and the role of the military in the political crises of their countries. Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing also met with leader of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and Thai army chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha and discussed cooperation between the two militaries in solving border affairs and immigration issues. General Prayuth also promised to work together in the establishment of border economic zones, and to promote the ties between the two militaries.<sup>1</sup>

#### **PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ADDRESSES NATION ON RECENT COMMUNAL UNREST IN MANDALAY**

In a radio message on 7 July, President Thein Sein called for unity among the different religions and communities in preventing the spreading of violence in Mandalay. He stated that Myanmar had faced some conflicts in racial and religious issues; some problems happened due to poverty, lack of education and less development, while some others are caused by instigators who are under-mining the development of democratic practices in the country. He also said that such intentional instigation activities have left innocent people to suffer and tarnished the country's image. The President added that the different communities and people in Mandalay have traditionally lived together for many decades and such practices are the model society for the whole country. He also said that every cloud has a silver lining as after the recent riots many people Mandalay showed their unity and mutual trust. President Thein Sein also promised that the government would take serious actions against activities which pose a threat to peace and stability of the country through systematic management. He also warned that the country has enjoyed media freedom due to the political reform processes and that the press freedom should be used without threatening the stability of the state.<sup>2</sup>

#### **INTERFAITH ORGANIZATION RELEASES STATEMENT ON MANDALAY RIOTS**

Addressing the aftermath of the riots in Mandalay, members of the Interfaith Organization met in Yangon and issued an 8-page statement on 4 July. The statement urged all parties involved to settle the conflicts according to law, to provide enough security as soon as a conflict breaks out, take effective action against offenders without bias, not to spread rumours in the media, to state only facts without personal opinion, to use responsible journalism, to regard all those living in Myanmar as brothers and sisters irrespective of religious differences. A similar meeting also took place in Mandalay on 6 July and issued a joint statement thanking Buddhist monks and community and religious leaders who assisted in ending the riots and maintaining stability and urged authorities to take strict and immediate action against the ring leaders and those who committed crimes during the riots, and to provide security to the public was issued by the organisers. In connection with the recent riots in Mandalay, local authorities have charged 16 people on 15 separate counts of illegal

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<sup>1</sup> Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets with Thai General –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-05-red.pdf> (NLM) 5 July 2014 (p. 3) /  
Myanmar military to help establish economic zones with Thailand: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-06-red.pdf> (NLM) 6 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>2</sup> President U Thein Sein appreciates intercommunal unity in Mandalay –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 July 2014 (p. 1)

possession of weapons and other criminal charges, while those involved in two murder cases, three assault cases and one incineration case are still under investigation. 145 people were arrested for violation of the current curfew and later released, while 201 people from seven townships in Mandalay District were charged on 4 and 5 July with violation of the curfew and seven townships including Aungmyethazan, Chanayethazan, Mahaaungmye, Chanmyathazi, Pyigyidagun, Amarapura and Patheingyi, have been placed under curfew.<sup>3</sup>

### EMERGENCY MONITORING CENTER OPENS IN MANDALAY

At the wake of riots that started on 1 July, an emergency monitoring centre was established in Mandalay on 10 July, according to Mandalay Region Information and Public Relations Department. The emergency center will coordinate with authorities concerned and carry out emergency tasks as soon as incidents take place. According to an IPRD official, "The aim is to enable the public to report incidents but public is required to provide name, address, and national registration card number. Three shifts will be assigned duty for 24 hours round. The centre is likely to be effective during the curfew, but it is impossible to say exactly when the centre expires." The emergency centre is composed of 3 teams - Team 1 is made up of officials from the information department, district general administration department and religious affairs department, while Team 2 includes members of the criminal investigation department, district police force and social welfare, relief and resettlement department, and Team 3 consists of the bureau of special investigation, region development committee and region information, public relations department and reserved police force. Team 1 is assigned to Chanayethazan, Aungmyaythazan and Mahaaungmye Townships while Team 2 is assigned to Chanmyathazi and Pyigyidagun Townships. Team-3 will carry out duties in Amarapura and Patheingyi townships. Twenty-four hours hotlines have been put into operation and the contact numbers of the centres are as follows: 02-67162 for Team-1, 02-67163 for Team-2 and 02-67164 for Team 3.<sup>4</sup>

### HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

#### Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 23<sup>rd</sup> day meeting on 3 July. At the session the Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation briefed the session of developments of the Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone in the Rakhine State.

- Chairman of the Management Committee of Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation Myint Thein, said that **Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone is designed to create job opportunities contributing to sustainable economic growth and development of socioeconomic life of citizens and that the first phase plan of the SEZ was drawn by a team composed of experts from Japan Development Institute, advisors from the board of advisors for the special economic zone, and partner organizations and the team went on a number of field trips to the region to invite advice from local people and partner organizations. The Deputy Minister said all the related works and implementation had been done in accordance to the Myanmar Special Economic Zones Law 2014. Works related to designating the project area, studying preliminary environmental impacts, drawing environmental conservation measures, compensation for those who are affected**

<sup>3</sup> Interfaith Organization releases statement on Mandalay riots – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-07-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 July 2014 (p. 2) / Interfaith friendship organization officials comfort families of Mandalay riot victims – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 July 2014 (p. 2) / Curfew violators, criminals prosecuted in Mandalay – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-07-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 July 2014 (p. 2)

<sup>4</sup> Emergency monitoring center opens in Mandalay – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 July 2014 (p. 1)

by the project, creating job opportunities that generate higher income than their former livelihoods and higher living standard would be carried out in accordance with the involuntary resettlement source-book of the World Bank and that the project would be implemented phase by phase in 2045.<sup>5</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 25<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 7 July. At the session the following questions were raised and answered:

- In responding to the question raised by MP Sai Bo Aung of Muse Constituency, **Shan State regarding Myanmar migrant workers in China, the Speaker informed the representatives the message had been conveyed to the President and that the need to protect the birthrights of Myanmar migrant workers in China had brought to the attention of the higher authorities ;**
- MPs also discussed matters related to **traffic congestion in border town Myawaddy, withholding taxes on work contracts to private builders and arrangements for closure of old copper mines.**<sup>6</sup>

#### **Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 22<sup>nd</sup> day meeting on 1 July. Three questions were raised and discussed:

- A military MP representative, urged **the Union Government to create favourable conditions in Rakhine State as a national concern, saying that the availability of electricity, the creation of job opportunities, and higher education all contribute to regional development and economic growth. “Prosperity comes only with stability as instability is a constant source of worry which makes it hard for local people to do business in peace of mind,”** he added.
- Dr Aye Maung of Rakhine State Constituency 1 spoke in **support of the proposal, calling for the Union and Regional governments and the to construct a bridge over the Kispandi River in Kyauktaw linking to the plain between Ponna Island and Sittwe, where an industrial zone is to set up. “The construction of this bridge is necessary because it will be easier to export local oil-bearing crops through the Sittwe Harbour,”** he said.<sup>7</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 23<sup>rd</sup> day meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. The session discussed developments on the on-going peace process:

- A military MP representative of the Upper House stated that **the Tatmadaw is currently involved in the implementation of the on-going peace process and had adopted six principles, which urged all parties to have genuine desire for peace, to respect promises made, not to exploit peace agreements for their own purposes, not to burden local people, to respect existing laws and to participate in the democratization process in accordance with the three main national causes of the Tatmadaw. The military MP also said the Tatmadaw will try to retain sustainable peace through political dialogues and is working towards stability and development of socioeconomic lives of national races. He said it is important for all parties to cooperate until sustainable peace is retained and all people can live equally under one legal system. However, an ethnic representative of the**

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<sup>5</sup> Kyauk Phyu SEZ to create job opportunities –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-05-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>6</sup> Budget allocation to be more transparent in future –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>7</sup> Favourable environment for Rakhine nationals is national concern: soldier representative at Upper House –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-02-red.pdf> (NLM) 2 July 2014 (p. 1 & 3)

Upper House said that it is important to settle disputes and overcome the challenges through negotiations without confrontations among the national races. It is necessary to apply the federal system that guarantees the equality and self-determination of all the national races residing in the country in order to end armed conflicts and to shape the future. He also expressed his belief that the civil war will come to an end by applying the federal system and fair distribution of power and natural resources among states and regions.<sup>8</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 24<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 7 July. Questions raised and discussed included the following:

- MP Khin Maung Yee from Ayerwaddy Constituency No. 6 urged the government to provide In-year Reports and Citizens Budget and asked if there were plans to implement such activities. Deputy Minister for Finance Dr Lin Aung said, Myanmar is moving towards a more transparent system of budget proposals and implementation year by year. He added that the government is cooperating with the World Bank for the development of public finance management and is implementing step-by-step measures to develop more transparent open budgets and citizens budgets in accordance with international standards. It is the responsibility of every government to inform the public how taxes are used and loans are repaid, he continued. The citizen budget means releasing basic information on the budget to the public without any technical terms so that the public can know how much income a government earns and how to allocate it. After developing the strategy for development of public finance management, the government has been implementing it since 2014-15 fiscal year ;
- the session also discussed issues related to the purchase of raw rubber from local business and issuing land grant documents.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 6<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. At the session, the questions on loans from the World Bank and International Fund for Agricultural Development were discussed:

- In briefing the session, Deputy Minister Dr Kan Zaw and Deputy Minister Ohn Than briefed parliament that the World Bank's \$100 million loan to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation would be used in implementing four irrigation projects and that IFAD's loan is to be used for a comprehensive agriculture development project and requested the approval of parliament in seeking the loans.<sup>10</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 8<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 10 July. At the session, discussions of the report of the land investigation commission were the discussed:

- Regarding the question on land confiscation and the Land Investigation Commission's report, Speaker Thura Shwe Mann said, that since 8 August 2012, the commission had been conducting cases of land confiscations. Thus, the understanding could be built between the people and the government to some extent. He urged the commission to take its responsibility for the interest of the people not to suffer loss in confiscation of farmlands

<sup>8</sup> Ongoing peace process discussed at Upper House –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>9</sup> Budget allocation to be more transparent in future –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>10</sup> Parliament discusses future loans from World Bank, Int'l Fund for Agricultural Development –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-03-red.pdf> (NLM) 3 July 2014 (p. 9)

until the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw releases any order for the commission. The investigation commission submitted its report that a plan is underway to coordinate presentation of compensation to 40 persons who submitted the related ownership documents for 409.54 acres of farmlands that were included in the Punhlaing Golf Course housing project in Hlinethaya Township. Likewise, farming rights certificates were issued to 71 farmers for 645.56 acres of farmlands that were included in the forest reserve area in Gwa Township of Rakhine State. According to the approval of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the decisions of the Hluttaw and reports of the commission would be sent to the Union government, departments and organizations concerned.<sup>11</sup>

## UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

### **MPC: CEASEFIRE ACCORD UNLIKELY TO BE FINALISED THIS MONTH**

The Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) says it is unlikely that talks between the government and armed ethnic groups to finalise a draft ceasefire agreement will take place in late July.

A senior adviser to the MPC, Hla Maung Shwe, said it had proposed that the talks take place late this month when it met members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team, a coalition representing armed ethnic groups, in Chiang Mai on 6 July. “We proposed a meeting to be convened in the last week of July but the minority ethnic groups will only be able to confirm their participation once they have held their summit conference,” said Hla Maung Shwe, who participated in the Chiang Mai meeting.

The summit of armed ethnic organisations, including the 16 groups groups in the NCCT, is expected to be held in Chiang Mai from 24 to 26 July, he said. If the next proposed meeting between the government's Union Peace-making Work Committee and the NCCT cannot take place late this month it will represent a delay in finalising negotiations on a ceasefire.

“We had initially proposed the last week of July as a date for the signing of the agreement, however that now seems unlikely,” Hla Maung Shwe said. The two sides reported progress towards finalising a ceasefire accord at the end of the last round of negotiations that ended in Yangon on 23 May.<sup>12</sup>

### **GOVT, KIO HOLD PEACE TALKS IN KACHIN STATE**

The government and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) held a 3<sup>rd</sup> round of peace talks in Myitkyina on 5 July in an attempt end skirmishes between rebel forces and the army. There has been no major fighting between the army and the Kachin Independence Army in June. However, occasional skirmishes do occur in places where both sides are closely stationed, sowing more mistrust as the government works to forge a nation-wide ceasefire deal.

“We already discussed matters relating on the conflict occurred in Manweing Gyi village in Shan State. We talked with attendees about the conflict so that it does not to occur again. But no major skirmishes are taking place in right now,” said La Maing Gon Jar from the Peacetalk Creation Group (PCG) who attended the discussion. The discussion current between the government and the KIO is an attempt to discuss how to set rules to bring about a ceasefire and support the ongoing peace process. The PCG urged the negotiating teams to solve the crisis facing displaced Kachin farmers who cannot return to their land because of the high threat of skirmishes.

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<sup>11</sup> Investigation commission to continue its tasks for interest of farmland losers – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-07-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 July 2014 (p. 3)

<sup>12</sup> Ceasefire accord unlikely to be finalised this month, says MPC – <http://www.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/11697-ceasefire-accord-unlikely-to-be-finalised-this-month-says-mpc> (Mizzima) 7 July 2014

“When the public hear a gun or mine go off, they worry about their livelihood. That’s why we request both sides to station their troops back at their original places,” said La Maing Gon Jar. The government’s negotiating team was led by Colonel Than Aung, the minister for Kachin State security and border affairs. They first met with the KIO in Myitkyina on 28 May and a second meeting was held on 18 June.<sup>13</sup>

### **SHAN STATE ARMY-NORTH AND GOVT DISCUSS TROOP CLASHES**

A Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) delegation met with Burmese government officials in Naypyidaw on 8 July and discussed prevention of future clashes from happening between the two sides in Shan State.

Khun Hseng, Secretary General of the SSA-N, said that these clashes were happening in Kensi Mansam Township, home to the ethnic armed group’s Wanhai headquarters. He added that the mobilisation and reinforcement of government troops have led to heightened tensions between the two sides. “We discussed how we can reduce tensions in the area — to prevent exacerbation of the issues and to keep clashes from breaking out – by demarcating territories from each side,” Khun Hseng said. “We believe that for now, the withdrawal of troops from both sides will relieve the situation.”

The establishment of a joint committee to monitor clashes was also proposed during the meeting, he said, adding that “delicate” issues such as the withdrawal of troops or demarcation of territory would take further negotiation. According to the SSA-N, roughly seven Burmese army battalions entered the area and took positions across the town last week, causing locals to flee their homes in fear of renewed fighting. The SSA-N reiterated the need for the Burmese government to control their troops and their actions. Although the SSA-N reached a union-level ceasefire agreement in 2012 with the government, more than 100 clashes have erupted between both sides since then.<sup>14</sup>

### **OVER 100 VILLAGERS FLEE BURMA ARMY ABUSES AMID MOUNTING TENSION IN CENTRAL SHAN STATE**

Over one hundred villagers fled to Wan Wap Temple, Kehsi Township on 6 July, due to mounting tension between the Burma Army and Shan State Progress Party / Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA). The Burma Army has continuously reinforced its troops closer to areas under the control SSPP/SSA in Mongsu and Kehsi townships since the two sides exchanged fire in mid- June, causing the SSA to lose a camp in Mongsu. “After the Burma Army started deploying their troops closer to us, they have been patrolling around Wan Wap village, trampling on villagers’ crops, breaking farmers’ fences, and building bunkers”, said an SSA officer.

A villager said: “We were told by the Burma Army that we must stay in our houses, must not visit each other, and must not take rice out of the village. If we want to eat, we must eat at home”. According to the villagers, the Wan Wap school has been closed, affecting 125 students, because the Burma Army has set up the camp there. An SSPP/SSA officer said: “We told the villagers they can take refuge in our headquarters or in big towns and warned them not to flee into the jungle, because the Burma Army can shoot them on sight”.

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<sup>13</sup> Govt, KIO hold peace talks in Kachin State – [http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6691:govt-kio-hold-peace-talks-in-kachin-state&catid=44:national&Itemid=384](http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6691:govt-kio-hold-peace-talks-in-kachin-state&catid=44:national&Itemid=384) (Eleven News Media) 7 July 2014

<sup>14</sup> Shan State Army-North and govt discuss troop clashes – <http://www.dvb.no/news/shan-state-army-north-and-govt-discuss-troop-clashes-burma-myanmar/42154> (DVB) 9 July 2014



The government troops which have recently been deployed to SSA areas were under Battalion 516 in Namjarnng, Battalion 287 and Battalion 9 in Mongnawng, Battalion 297 in Mongpan, Battalion 12 in Loilem, and Battalion 249 at Tahsang.<sup>15</sup>

### **ETHNIC LEADERS AND WOMEN BRIEF POLITICIANS ON PEACE TALKS**

Ethnic political parties met with ethnic leaders and Burmese women activists in Thailand on 7 July to discuss the latest developments in the peace process. Twenty-three party leaders—representing the Mon, Karen, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Tailai (Red Shan) and Burman ethnic groups—met with members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), which represents ethnic armed groups in ceasefire talks, in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai.

“We shared our views on the peace process, mainly discussing the NCCT’s task, federalism, how we find ways to overcome challenges, and how to have politicians and parliamentarians participate in the process,” said NCCT leader Pado Kwe Htoo Win. Last week, NCCT leaders decided that they would hold a third conference of ethnic armed leaders at the end of this month in Laiza, Kachin State, before meeting with the government’s negotiation team.

Hkyet Hting Nan, chairman of the Unity and Democracy Party (UDP) of Kachin State, and an Upper House lawmaker, said he appreciated the NCCT’s efforts to draft a single text of a nationwide ceasefire agreement. “They have worked hard on this, day and night,” he said. Amid ongoing disagreements over certain words in the text, including “federalism,” the Kachin lawmaker said, “What’s most important is practicing genuine federalism in reality, regardless of whether we use this word or not.” Activists highlighted the need for negotiators to consider the wellbeing of women in conflict zones. “It is important that we remember to raise the issue of women, who play a vital role in society but have suffered most in the conflict and have been left out of decision-making,” the Kachin lawmaker said.

Tin Tin Nyo, Secretary of the Women’s League of Burma (WLB), said women required greater legal protections, referring to the issue of gender violence in conflict zones. “Some leaders have even told us to forgive the perpetrators—army soldiers, in our country’s case—but what we would like to say is it is not right to ignore the truth when we are in the peace building stage,” she said.

The workshop on federalism policies, electoral systems and the peace process was held in Bangkok and attended by officials and representatives from the UDP (Kachin State), the Chin Progressive Party, the Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), the Tailai Nationalities Development Party, the Karen People’s Party, the Mon National Party, the National Democratic Force, the Democracy and Peace Party, the National Unity Party, the Democratic Party (Burma), the Arakan National Party and the Kayah National Race Democracy Party.<sup>16</sup>

### **SUPREME COURT LAWYER CRITICISES MANDALAY GOVT HANDLING OF RIOTS**

A Supreme Court lawyer in Mandalay has criticised the Mandalay Regional government’s press statements relating to communal mob violence in the city this week, saying such a failure could stoke the simmering tensions in the region. Thein Than Oo warned the government not to “manipulate” information. On 3 July, a press release by the local assembly stated that “Muslim nationals” had beaten up “Burmans”, while noting that mob riots were conducted by both Muslims and Burmans. Burman, or Bamar, is the majority ethnicity in the country, and Burmans are invariably Buddhist.

<sup>15</sup> Over 100 villagers flee Burma Army abuses amid mounting tension in central Shan State – [http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5867:over-100-villagers-flee-burma-army-abuses-amid-mounting-tension-in-central-shan-state&catid=87:human-rights&Itemid=285](http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5867:over-100-villagers-flee-burma-army-abuses-amid-mounting-tension-in-central-shan-state&catid=87:human-rights&Itemid=285) (S.H.A.N) 7 July 2014

<sup>16</sup> Ethnic Leaders and Women Brief Politicians on Peace Talks – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ethnic-leaders-women-brief-politicians-peace-talks.html> (Irrawaddy) 7 July 2014

Supreme Court lawyer Thein Than Oo said it was unwise of the divisional government to single out Muslims, pointing out that it could “stoke simmering tensions” between the two communities. “There is no Muslim nationality – it is simply the word used for people who practice Islam,” he said. “Right now, the situation is extremely fragile, so the government should be careful with the usage of such words,” the lawyer said. “It will incite hatred between different ethnicities and different faiths.” He added that Speaker of the Union Parliament Shwe Mann has warned those in authority not to manipulate the situation during these incidents.

Thein Than Oo added that officials in Arakan State were similarly irresponsible as their counterparts in Mandalay when dispersing press releases about the inter-religious violence in that region by using the pejorative term “kalar” when referring to the Rohingya Muslim community.<sup>17</sup>

### **OPPOSITION PARTIES OBJECTS TO 2015 ELECTORAL CHANGES**

Opposition parties urged the government on 7 July not to change the electoral system next year, saying it is not yet the right time to use a proposed proportional representative system. Leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and four main ethnic political parties met on 6 July to discuss the parliament’s decision to implement the change for the 2015 general election.

“We got agreement with ethnic parties to protest against changing electoral system,” NLD spokesman Nyan Win said. “This only makes confusion for voters and we believe this PR system is not good for country at this time,” he said. An alliance of 20 ethnic parties also announced in late June that they would not accept the proposed changes.

Parliament approved a bill last month to adopt the new system proportional representation system for the upper house in 2015. Under the current system, the winning candidate in each constituency gets a seat in parliament. Proportional representation would apportion legislative seats to each party based on the total number of votes received in the general election. The government argued that the change would provide more opportunities for smaller parties.<sup>18</sup>

### **ANALYSIS**

The on-going democratic reform process in Burma has witnessed significant changes but remains very fragile. The continued fighting in Kachin and Shan states is of concern and poses a threat which can undermine the government’s ceasefire efforts and brings into doubt the relationship between the President and the Tatmadaw (military) leadership.

The military, or Tatmadaw, remains the most powerful actor in Burma’s political system. Its role has changed significantly while its core interests are focussed on maintaining its independence and to be seen as the sole protector of the state.

If that is the objective the military’s relations with civilian opposition parties, ethnic groups and international community, has to greatly improve. The military will also need to adopt a more positive and flexible approach towards the on-going peace process as well as reforming the military.

Although a major challenge such efforts to improve these relations will be crucial in shaping and deciding the country’s political future.

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<sup>17</sup> Supreme Court lawyer criticises Mandalay govt handling of riots –  
<http://www.dvb.no/news/supreme-court-lawyer-criticises-mandalay-govt-handling-of-riots-burma-myanmar/42087>  
(DVB) 5 July 2014

<sup>18</sup> Myanmar opposition objects to 2015 electoral changes –  
<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/Myanmar-opposition-objects-to-2015-electoral-chang-30237929.html> (the Nation) 7 July 2014