

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 4

OFFICIAL MEDIA

UNION JOINT MONITORING COMMITTEE (JMC-U) TO PENALIZE NCA VIOLATORS

The Union Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC-U), issued a press release following its three-day event held at the Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon held from 22 to 24 February. Representatives from the government, the 8 signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and civil society groups gathered in Yangon and agreed to seek ways to prevent further clashes, referring to developments in the aftermath of the nationwide ceasefire agreement signed on 15 October last year, particularly the clashes between the RCSS/SSA and TNLA in northern Shan State, which have displaced nearly 4,000 people. Both sides of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the government and the EAOs, are required to make their members at all levels aware of the impact the clashes might have on the lives of citizens and their property. The committee reserves the right to take action against any party responsible for further clashes, the joint statement said.¹

Sr-Gen MIN AUNG HLAING HOLDS TALKS WITH NLD CHAIR AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Chairperson of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Aung San Suu Kyi, held talks in Nay Pyi Taw on 17 February and discussed matters related to the rule of law and the further implementation of ensuring lasting peace in the country.

Sr-Gen MIN AUNG HLAING HOLDS TALKS WITH ITALIAN AMBASSADOR

The Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Min Aung Hlaing also received the Italian Ambassador to Myanmar H.E. Pier Giorgio on 17 February. In his meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said, the armed forces would support any government that led the country according to the law, while helping the country maintain a good balance in its democratic path and that the army played a central role in the elimination of armed conflicts in Myanmar. The Senior General added that the armed struggle is unacceptable in a democratic system and expressed his belief that obeying the law will ensure national stability and reflect public consent. He went on to say that the army would strengthen the multiparty democratic system as chosen by the people and make it more systematic.²

NEW MPS GET CRASH COURSE ON LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

A five-day workshop on parliamentary procedures kicked off in Nay Pyi Taw on 15 February, aimed to broaden the knowledge of new lawmakers in Myanmar's second parliament. Chairperson of the National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi urged the lawmakers to serve the interests of the country and its people as much as possible, stressing that the parliament is not a place for MPs to pursue their own interests. Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than said the induction programme will help the MPs improve their capabilities to build a democratic system. Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Win Myint urged MPs to actively participate in the workshop in order to gain knowledge on legislation. A total of 18 foreign lawmakers and experts served as trainers to the new MPs at the workshop. During the programme, MPs will share knowledge about democracy and leadership, the

¹ Holding it together: JMC-U to Penalize NCA Violators –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 February 2016 (p.1)

² SG Min Aung Hlaing holds talks with NLD Chair Daw Aung San Suu Kyi –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/18_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 February 2016 (p. 3)/

Army will support law-abiding government: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/18_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 February 2016 (p. 3)

duties and roles of MPs, the characteristics of a good MP, power-sharing and the role of MPs, sovereignty, checks and balances and challenges facing women MPs.³

PYITHU HLUTTAW SESSIONS (HIGHLIGHTS)

An emergency motion calling for an end to fighting in Shan State was submitted by an MP to the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) on 16 February. The motion put forward by MP Sai Tun Aung of Kyaukme Constituency was put to a vote for discussion and won unanimous approval at the 5th Day of the Second Pyithu Hluttaw session. MP Sai Tun Aung urged the Union Government, the Shan State government and all parties concerned to take measures as soon as possible to end the fighting in the Palaung Self-Administered Zone and Kyaukme Township and to deal with troubles of the internally displaced people as local citizens, teachers and students are suffering from the fighting. Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Win Myint announced the formation of the **International Relations Committee ; Farmers, Workers and Youth Affairs Committee ; and the Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace-making Committee.**⁴

The Second Pyithu Hluttaw's regular session continued for its 6th Day on 17 February with discussions on an emergency motion calling for an immediate end to fighting in Shan State and prompt measures to be taken to aid war-affected local people. In their discussions, MPs including Defense Services personnel representatives stressed the need of ensuring national reconciliation for building a genuine federal Union and moving towards lasting peace through cooperation of all including ethnic armed organisations. Minister Aung Min and Deputy Ministers Maj-Gen Aung Soe, Rear Admiral Myint Nwe and Phone Swe also made clarifications regarding the motion. Minister Aung Min said that the RCSS has been urged through the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JCMC) to adhere to the terms and conditions of the nationwide ceasefire agreement that it signed while dealing with civilians. Regarding TNLA that has no state-level agreement with the government and did not ink the NCA, the Minister called for resolving conflicts through negotiations. Home Affairs Deputy Minister Maj-Gen Aung Soe said that affected people have been accommodated at 17 relief camps with the provision of food, clean water and health care services. Teachers and students who fled the clashes between RCSS and TNLA have been kept at a monastery to continue learning and teaching there. The session also approved the formation **the International Relations Committee, the Farmers, Workers and Youth Affairs Committee and the Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace-making Committee.**⁵

The Pyithu Hluttaw on its 7th Day discussed the formation of **the Committee for Banks and Monetary Affairs Development, the Committee for Agriculture, Livestock Breeding and Fishery Development and the Committee for Education Promotion.**⁶

The Pyithu Hluttaw on its 9th Day session on 21 February, with submission of an urgent motion calling the government to gear up expected effects of El Niño and formation of five parliamentary committees – **the Health and Sports Development Committee, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Committee and Transport, Communication and Construction Committee.** Then, the Speaker informed parliamentarians of the creation of **the Industrial**

³ New MPs get crash course on legislative procedures –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/16_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 16 February 2016 (p. 1)

⁴ MPs support end of fighting in Shan State –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2016 (p. 1)

⁵ Pyithu Hluttaw approves emergency motion, formation of three committees –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/18_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 February 2016 (p. 2)

⁶ Pyithu Hluttaw forms three Committees –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/19_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 19 February 2016 (p. 2)

Development and Investment Committee and the Electric Power and Energy Development Committee with 15 members each.⁷

AMYOTHA HLUTTAW (UPPER HOUSE) SESSIONS HIGHLIGHTS

The Second Amyotha Hluttaw's first regular session continued for its 6th Day on 17 February and approved the formation of the **International Relations, Inter-parliamentary Relations and Cooperation Committee, the Committee on Local and International Non-governmental Organisation and the Committee on Health, Sports and Culture**. The session also proposed the creation of the **Ethnic Affairs Committee, the Farmers Affairs Committee and the Women and Children's Rights Committee**.⁸

The Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 7th Day session on 18 February and approved the formation of the **Ethnic Affairs Committee, the Farmer Affairs Committee and the Women and Children's Rights Committee** respectively. The session also proposed the creation of the **Education Promotion Committee, the Local and Overseas Employment Committee and Citizens' Fundamental Rights, Democracy and Human Rights Committee** to be formed with 15 members each.⁹

The session continued on its 9th Day on 21 February, approved the formation of the formation of the **Mineral, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Committee and the Public Complaints Committee**.¹⁰

The Second Amyotha Hluttaw session entered its 10th Day on 23 February with the formation of the **Public Complaints Committee** with 15 members and the creation of the **Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Development Committee**.¹¹

UNION ELECTION COMMISSION HOSTS POST-ELECTION REVIEW WORKSHOPS

The Union Election Commission met with sub-commissions from across the country at a post-election review workshop in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 February. In his address, Union Election Commission Chairman Tin Aye called for recommendations for future electoral processes to be submitted to the workshop, acknowledging the efforts of various sub-commissions in the 2015 general elections. Next, UEC members, chairs and members of sub-commissions held discussions on a wide range of matters including voter education and awareness campaigns, the compilation of voter lists and the enhancement of participation in the electoral process.

A similar workshop on the post-election review between the Union Election Commission and concerned ministries was held on 16 February in Nay Pyi Taw. At the meeting, the UEC Chairman Tin Aye stressed the need to make recommendations to aid future elections by reviewing previous elections and called for further cooperation among the ministries for the successful holding of 2020 general elections. Next, the UEC members and officials from the ministries held discussions on a wide range of matters including advanced voting and the settlement of election disputes.¹²

⁷ El Niño urgent motion put forward to Pyithu Hluttaw –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 February 2016 (p. 2)

⁸ Second Amyotha Hluttaw session continues for sixth day –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/18_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 February 2016 (p. 2)

⁹ Amyotha Hluttaw approves, forms parliamentary committees –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/19_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 19 February 2016 (p. 2)

¹⁰ Amyotha Hluttaw forms two more committees –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 February 2016 (p. 2)

¹¹ Amyotha Hluttaw approves one committee, forms another –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 February 2016 (p. 2)

¹² Union Election Commission hosts post-election review workshop –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/16_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 16 February 2016 (p. 3)/

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HOLDS TALKS FOR SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS

The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) held human rights talks for senior military officers from Defense Services Command and General Staff College under the Ministry of Defense on 18 February in Kalaw, Shan State. Chairman of the MNHRC Win Mra and member Yu Lwin Aung gave lectures on human rights to 220 personnel trainees and instructors attending Course No.63 at General Staff College and held discussions with them. According to the MNHRC, human rights courses for senior military officers have been conducted since 2014 and similar talks are being organised for military officers from the Army Combat Forces Schools in Bahtoo and Bayintnaung Forts.¹³

MYANMAR PREPARES FOR ILO NEGOTIATIONS

Governing board member for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has urged local businesses to strictly follow international labour standards in order to achieve success in the global supply chain. At a tripartite meeting including employers, employees and the government on fair global supply chain issues held in Yangon on 14 February, Chairman of the Confederation of the Trade Unions of Myanmar and a member of the ILO Governing Board Maung Maung, pointed out the sacking of labour union leaders and instances of ignorance to pay workers the minimum wage and overtime fees according to the law. The two-day meeting was held as part of the preparation for a discussion on Myanmar's role in creating job opportunities in the global supply chain at the upcoming 105th ILO meeting in June. The outcomes of the meeting will be discussed at the ILO meeting, said Maung Maung.

Director-General of the Factories and General Labour Law Inspection Department, Win Shein gave suggestions on improving the human resources of the labour sector in the country. The Senior Officer of International Trade Union Confederation-Asia Pacific Patuan Samosir, called for cooperation between the three groups to prevent danger at worksites. Some experts have urged the Myanmar government to assist in producing skilled labourers and building infrastructure in the labour sector. "In face of the ASEAN Economic Community, which will start this year, the government should take measures to prevent lower productivity due to power shortages and to reduce high interest rates for employers," said Aung Shwe of the management committee of the Hlaingthaya Industrial Zone, who is participating in the meeting as a representative of the employers. Local brands should prepare for competition with international brands entering the country because local brands in some countries have collapsed at the hand of international competitors, said Maung Maung.¹⁴

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

DONORS OFFER US\$75,000 LIFELINE TO PEACE PROCESS

Foreign donors have agreed to provide US\$75,000 to keep the peace process running until the National League for Democracy-backed government takes office at the end of March. The Peace Support Group (PSG) – a consortium of donors that includes the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Finland, Switzerland, Italy and Australia – agreed to provide the funds yesterday, during a meeting of the Union Joint Monitoring Committee held on 24 February, said the JMC Secretary (1) Shwe Khar. The decision came at the end of the three-day JMC meeting. The funding has been allocated to support the establishment and operation of joint monitoring committees under the nationwide ceasefire agreement. The committees are to be formed at the national, regional and sub-regional levels, and are designed to ensure communication between signatories in order to reduce

UEC, concerned ministries hold workshop on post-election review –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 February 2016 (p. 2)

¹³ MNHRC holds human rights talks for senior military officers in Kalaw –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/19_Feb_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 19 February 2016 (p. 2)

¹⁴ Myanmar prepares for ILO negotiations –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 February 2016 (p. 1)

outbreaks of conflict. But the amount allocated falls well short of the \$23 million that negotiators estimate is needed to fully implement the ceasefire over the next three years. During the meeting, donors expressed reservations about the partial success of the ceasefire – only 8 of about 20 armed groups signed the pact – and uncertainty over the incoming National League for Democracy government’s policies toward the peace process. In northern Shan State, conflict has also increased following the signing of the ceasefire in October 2015. Negotiators had originally said on 7 January they believed \$21 million would be needed over three years, but Shwe Khar said this was revised upward after costs were calculated “in detail”. JMC Spokesperson Colonel Wanna Aung, said the \$75,000 would enable stakeholders to continue the process of setting up monitoring committees at the state and region level. One has already been established in Shan State, while Tanintharyi Region and Mon State will also soon get monitoring committees. The Union-level JMC meeting was the first to be held since the Union Peace Conference kicked off in January. Aside from funding, participants reviewed the outcome of the peace conference, and discussed conflict reduction efforts and the opening of more state and region JMC offices. The offices will be opened in every state and region in which an ethnic armed group that signed the ceasefire is present. The committees will comprise 14 members – 5 from the government, 5 from the ethnic armed groups and 4 civilians. Shwe Khar said they were integral for reducing conflict. “After setting up the committees, the armed groups and Tatmadaw will be in regular contact and that will help to reduce fighting,” he said.¹⁵

ETHNIC LEADERS DRAFT POLICY TO REFLECT ‘COMMON VISION’ IN FUTURE PEACE TALKS

Ethnic representatives from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and various domestic and international advisors gathered to discuss security issues and Burma’s peace process in northern Thailand’s Chiang Mai this week. The 3-day workshop entitled “Security, Defense and Current Political Situation Workshop,” was organized by the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Centre (ENAC), an organization focused on providing training and drafting policy that will support Burma’s peace process. The General Secretary of the UNFC Khu Oo Reh - a coalition of 11 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) - said that the workshop was held in preparation to present collective policies on each sector at a future political dialogue. Khu Oo Reh is also the secretary of ENAC’s board of directors. The leaders in the workshop explored different approaches to security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, disintegration and reintegration (DDR) processes from other countries, such as Nepal and Northern Ireland. “The discussion helps us to think best [about] how to transform and integrate the armed groups during Burma’s transition period, but not by copying [the others’] ways,” said Khu Oo Reh. 8 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) signed the government’s so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in October 2015, including UNFC members the Chin National Front and the Pa-O National Liberation Organization. The two groups’ membership of the alliance was subsequently suspended. “We will share our draft policies with the EAOs to get approval and recommendations from them before the political dialogue [continues], so that we will have a common vision when the time comes for the talks,” said Khu Oo Reh. The alliance has said they are also ready to work with the new National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government, but an official channel for talks between the UNFC and the NLD has yet to be formed. Leaders participating in the workshop emphasized the need for such policy talks, noting that Burma’s public has been denied the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding education, health, investment and the environment due to the lack of a federal system.

The General Secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and a member of ENAC’s Board of Directors, Sai Nyunt Lwin, said that future policy briefings would have to be shared with local civil society groups. Awareness of the peace process, he said, is the most significant issue after that of

¹⁵ Donors offer US\$75,000 lifeline to peace process – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/19164-donors-offer-us-75-000-lifeline-to-peace-process.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 February 2016

the government's transfer of power. "Peace building is not only talking about signing the ceasefire with the various armed groups. It also has to be creating peace, stability and rule of law in the country," he said.¹⁶

PALAUNG MP REJECTS MILITARY DEMANDS FOR TNLA SURRENDER

An Upper House MP representing the Ta'Arng (Palaung) National Party has hit out at the Tatmadaw for calling on only one side to cease fire in the clashes that have ravaged northern Shan State. In an interview with local news media on 19 February Amyotha Hluttaw for Shan State Constituency (5) Nyi Sein, denounced the ceasefire demand as unfair and one-sided. He is one of the party's two MPs in the Upper House. Prolonged armed clashes in Kyaukme Township have driven thousands of villagers from their homes since fighting broke out on 7 February between the Ta'Arng National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS-South). The RCSS/SSA has signed the "national" ceasefire agreement, and the TNLA has not.

"When there is conflict between Palaung and Shan ethnic armed groups, it is unfair for the Tatmadaw to call on just one side to surrender," Nyi Sein said. Observers and local residents say that the signatory RCSS is effectively allied to the government forces, although the RCSS has denied this is the case. "Calling on the TNLA to cease fire is a punishment. The Shan group has already signed the NCA, which makes it an ally of the Tatmadaw," he said. The MP described the conflict as a territorial dispute arising from attempts by the RCSS to enlarge its forces and the area under its control.

"The RCSS wants to control TNLA territory. The TNLA was willing to negotiate with them. There were only 30 members of the RCSS in Namkham Township before the fighting broke out. There used to be only 50 of them in Kyaukme, but there are thousands now," he said, adding that the Shan armed group had forced the conflict on the TNLA.

Local residents have told the media of shelling by heavy weapons and detention and torture carried out by armed men in Kyaukme township and described the TNLA as the aggressor and committing most of the abuses. Clashes have also broken out in Namkham township, but the heaviest fighting has occurred in Kyaukme.

"The number of displaced people in Kyaukme continues to grow. We don't want war. Parliament has to find a solution. We all bear a responsibility on humanitarian grounds to stop the fighting," Nyi Sein said. He said that the TNLA was ready to take part in negotiations with the government and the Tatmadaw for a broader ceasefire, but this would require flexibility on both sides. "Parliament's current position is like a threat to the TNLA to lay down its arms," he said.

The TNLA is said to be several thousand strong and reportedly controls villages in the townships of Manton, Namsan, Namkham, Muse, Kutkai, Namtu, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Lashio and Mogok.¹⁷

MILITARY SENDS WARNING TO SHAN, PALAUNG ARMIES

The Tatmadaw has increased the pressure on Shan and Palaung armies fighting in northern Shan State to cease hostilities, warning of a planned "clearance" operation unless they pull back to the original border of their respective territories. The military-run Myawady newspaper on 24 February said that more than more than 20 separate clashes had taken place between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army between 25 September 2015,

¹⁶ Ethnic Leaders Draft Policy to Reflect 'Common Vision' in Future Peace Talks – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ethnic-leaders-draft-policy-to-reflect-common-vision-in-future-peace-talks.html> (the Irrawaddy) 16 February 2016

¹⁷ Palaung MP rejects military demands for TNLA surrender – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/19123-palaung-mp-rejects-military-demands-for-tnla-surrender.html> (Myanmar Times) 23 February 2016

and 19 February 2016. The report accused both the RCSS and the TNLA of committing a range of abuses, including burning villages, detaining Buddhist monks and murdering villagers.

The TNLA has previously been accused of executing seven men from Mine Gone village in Kyaukme Township on 7 February, but it is the first time such accusations have been levelled against the RCSS. Displaced people in Namkham township have accused the RCSS of laying mines and looting, however. According to the article the head of the Tatmadaw's Northeast Region Command had complained about the territorial expansion to the nationwide ceasefire joint monitoring committee in Shan State, the deputy leader of the RCSS and the Myanmar Peace Center. However, the RCSS responded by sending more reinforcements to the area. Unless both sides pull back, the Tatmadaw will "clear the region of both armed groups according to the 2008 constitution", it said, without giving further details.

Tatmadaw Spokesperson Colonel Myat Min Oo on 24 February said that providing any more information could compromise the effectiveness of the planned military operation. "If we talk about warfare publicly, it could lead to deaths," he said.

The issue was raised during meetings in northern Thailand on 22 February between a government team led by chief peace negotiator Minister Aung Min and an RCSS delegation led by the group's leader, Lieutenant General Yawd Serk. A Senior Advisor to the Myanmar Peace Center Hla Maung Shwe, said that Lt Gen Yawd Serk agreed during the meeting to pull back his troops to the old RCSS territorial boundaries. While the fighting appeared to have entered a lull on 19 February, in recent days fresh reports of clashes have emerged from both the Kyaukme and Namkham areas.

According to an RCSS sergeant based on the front lines in Kyaukme, the Tatmadaw's Battalion 77 had clashed with TNLA troops at Mine Gone village in Kyaukme township - the site of the alleged murder of the villagers earlier this month - on 22 February. RCSS Sgt Sai Tee said that his troops were on high alert and expecting more clashes. "TNLA soldiers have shot two or three times at us this afternoon," he said. "I think they will launch an offensive against us tonight." While he was aware that the Tatmadaw planned to clear the area of troops from both sides, Sgt Sai Tee said he could not leave without orders. "So far, we haven't got any command from our superiors."

TNLA Liaison Officer Mai Eik Kyaw, said the Tatmadaw attacked using a helicopter gunship on 22 February, leaving one Palaung soldier injured. The same day, the TNLA clashed with the RCSS in Namkham township. "The situation is still tense between the troops in northern Shan State. We have had 20 clashes in recent months," he said.

The first serious clashes between the RCSS and TNLA broke out in late November, shortly after the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement.¹⁸

SSPP OFFERS MEDIATION TO EASE TENSIONS BETWEEN TA'ANG AND SHAN GROUPS

In an effort to reduce escalating tensions and violence between the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) has offered to mediate between the two groups to reach a political solution. Maj-Gen Say Htin, of the SSPP, reportedly took on the role of mediator after meeting with Chairman Lt-Gen Yawd Serk of the SSA-S on 14 February. He also leads the Shan State Joint Action Committee (SSJAC), which is comprised of Shan politicians and armed group leaders. Both the SSA-S and the TNLA recently released public statements stating that they were prepared to begin talks, but neither side could yet confirm when and where such a dialogue would be held. Conflict in northern Shan State's Kyaukme, Namhsan and Namkham Townships has intensified since 7 February, but dates back to 27 November 2015, as both the TNLA and the SSA-S claim control over parts of the territory. The SSA-S, also referred

¹⁸ Military sends warning to Shan, Palaung armies – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/19161-military-sends-warning-to-shan-palaung-armies.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 February 2016

to by its political wing, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), was a signatory to the so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) with the government in October last year. The NCA was signed by 8 out of 15 eligible ethnic armed organizations, but others, including the TNLA, were excluded from participation.

“Only if the RCSS retrieves its 1,500-plus troops from the area will the fighting subside,” said Ta Parn La, a spokesperson for the TNLA. “The RCSS reinforced its troops in the region, where they had only 80 troops in both Kyaukme and Namkham before the NCA.” Ta Parn La appealed to the SSPP/SSA-N—a fellow member of the armed group coalition known as the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)—to intervene on the issue, as the TNLA claims they have not been able to communicate directly with the RCSS. As early as December, UNFC leaders committed to reducing the tension, and have scheduled a meeting this week to work toward a resolution.

Col Sai La, the RCSS/SSA-S spokesperson in speaking to news media on 15 February said that they are ready to hold talks with the TNLA leadership, adding that they have been open to such talks since December. The group alleges that the TNLA never responded to requests to meet. “We are not able to discuss details as we are now communicating with the mediator,” Sai La said. “Effective results will come only when the stakeholders meet peacefully.” Sai La said that Lt-Gen Yawd Serk and his organization are “ready to negotiate peacefully, as we are not enemies with other ethnic armed groups in our state.” “We would not have to fight back if we were not attacked,” he added.¹⁹

UNA DEMANDS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) has marked Union Day by urging the new government to create a federation based on fairness and harmony. On the 69th Anniversary of Union Day when the General Aung San met Shan, Kachin and Chin to sign the Panglong Agreement, the alliance of ethnic minorities said it was time for the new government to revive the agreement. “The new government must acknowledge the rights longed for by the national races such as equality, harmony and for the emergence of a federal system,” the UNA said. 8 ethnic minority parties make up the UNA.²⁰

LAND RIGHTS SEMINAR HELD IN MON STATE’S CAPITAL

A two-day seminar on “Farmers and Land Users” concerning land rights in the Mon area of eastern Salween [Thanlwin River] convened from 14 to 15 February in Moulmein (Mawlamyaing) the capital of Mon State. The core topics discussed at the seminar included the 6th Draft of the Land Use Policy, Farmland Law, laws regarding Fallowed Land and Wild Land as well as the Weaknesses and Strengths of the Protection of Farmer’s Rights.

“After 1995, Mon farmers, rubber plantation owners and land users have lost their lands. Land that was passed on from their ancestors. Until now, they have not had anyone to help re-mediate the loss of their lands,” said Nai Sawor Mon, primary organizer the seminar. He added that although the current government have enacted laws protecting the rights of farmers and their farmland, the laws still have many weaknesses. Concurrently, the laws are threatening land rights.

The objectives of holding this seminar are to form a land policy for ethnic groups in the Mon region as well as establish both a stable network of ethnic farmer organizations and strengthen existing farmer organization networks in the region.

¹⁹ As Tensions Rise Between Ta’ang and Shan, SSPP Offers Mediation – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/as-tensions-rise-between-taang-and-shan-sspp-offers-mediation.html> (the Irrawaddy) 15 February 2016

²⁰ UNA demands federal government – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/una-demands-federal-government> (Eleven Myanmar) 13 February 2016

“Whether it is an individual or an organization, we cannot solve land issues that we are facing at the moment. We have many difficulties. So, it is necessary for us to work for land rights with techniques in accordance with justice and unity,” said Nai Aung Htaw Mon, a representative from Ye Township.

The 2-day seminar was sponsored by Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) and organized by people involved in Mon farmer affairs and land rights. The seminar attracted about 80 participants including farming representatives from Mon and Karen states and Tenasserim Division.²¹

ANALYSIS

The statement by the Union Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC-U) stating that it would take action against any violators of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and the recent skirmishes between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS-SSA-South) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) are signs that the mechanisms established by the on-going peace process is beginning to take effect.

The motion tabled in parliament by MPs as well as the offer made by the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) to mediate between the two groups to reach a political solution also provides some hope that a peaceful solution can be found.

The continued fighting between the ethnic armed organisations and also with the Tatmadaw (military) does not augur well for the country’s future. Although seen by some as being non-inclusive, the NCA is the only available mechanism to promote peace and national reconciliation with the right to “self-determination, self-autonomy and equality” being taken on board. It therefore will be important for the next government to address and to accommodate such demands and at the same time strike the right balance and close cooperation with the military to resolve the challenges facing Myanmar.

²¹ Land rights seminar held in Mon State’s capital – <http://monnews.org/2016/02/16/land-rights-seminar-held-in-mon-states-capital/> (IMNA) 16 February 2016