

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.19

OFFICIAL MEDIA

5th CEASEFIRE NEGOTIATIONS MAKES PROGRESS ON DRAFT PEACE AGREEMENT

The government's Union Peacemaking Working Committee (UPWC) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) of the ethnic armed organisations held ceasefire talks from 15 to 17 August in Yangon. The 3-day meeting discussed the implementation of Union based on democracy and federal system which will result from political dialogues; the possible formation of Federal Tatmadaw to be inserted in political dialogues; the establishment of a political culture through political ways without choosing political confrontation and armed conflicts; the end of civil war. Both sides discussed and produced 26 agreements out of 31 paragraphs of the draft agreement.

Special Advisor of Myanmar Peace Centre Hla Maung Shwe said that the remaining five paragraphs left for further deliberations are objectives and aims under the chapter 2, and truce affairs under the chapter 3, the guarantees of political dialogues under the chapter 5, the working process during the negotiation period under the chapter 6 and the general issues under the chapter 7. Another round of ceasefire talks are expected to be held in September 2014.¹

PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MEETS ETHNIC LEADERS

President Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing held separate meetings with Central Committee member of Wa Special Region (2) Kyauk Kaw Ann, Vice-Chairman of Shan State Progressive Party and Shan State Army Sao Khae Tai and Vice-Chair of Mongla Special Region (4) San Pae in Naypyitaw on 25 August. The President urged ethnic leaders to adopt a common aspect of patriotic spirit for the unity of country and that all the parties concerned are responsible for the development of the country. He also gave assurances for development programmes of education, healthcare services and rehabilitation works in the ethnic areas.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing invited the leaders of the ethnic armed organizations to frankly discuss the six principles for achieving peace and their willingness to participate in the nationwide ceasefire negotiations. The SSA/SSPP delegation also requested financial assistance for regional development and promised to combat narcotic drugs phase by phase.

The ethnic leaders also called on the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Thura Shwe Mann and Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) Khin Aung Myint.²

¹ UPWC, NCCT making efforts to conclude nationwide ceasefire agreement, to hold political dialogues as soon as possible – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-18-red.pdf> (NLM) 18 August 2014 (p. 1)/
Fifth ceasefire negotiation makes 26 agreements – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-18-red.pdf> (NLM) 18 August 2014 (p. 1)
Ceasefire talks turn out “fruitful results”: Ethnic parties – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 August 2014 (p. 1 & 2)/
Govt, ethnic armed groups heal rift in draft ceasefire agreement – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 August 2014 (p. 1)/
UPWC, NCCT aim at ending dissent in draft nationwide ceasefire – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-16-red.pdf> (NLM) 16 August 2014 (p. 1 & 2)

² President U Thein Sein meets ethnic armed group leaders – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/26/08/2014/id-12752> (NLM) 26 August 2014 (p. 3)/
Senior General discusses peace process with national race leaders – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/26/08/2014/id-12752> (NLM) 26 August 2014 (p. 3)/
Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Speaker meets ethnic armed group leaders – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/27/08/2014/id-12783> (NLM) 27 August 2014 (p. 3)/

1st EVER MEETING BETWEEN PEACE AND CEASEFIRE BODIES AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) met for the first time with political parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the National Unity Party (NUP) and more than 30 ethnic political parties on 18 August in Yangon. Special Advisor to the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) Hla Maung Shwe described the meeting as an initial step to all-inclusiveness in the future politics of the country as well as in political dialogues, adding that the meeting will be an opportunity for ethnic parties to express their stances for reciprocal discussions.³

INFORMATION MINISTER DISCUSSES MEDIA REFORM WITH PRESS COUNCIL

A meeting on media reform plans was held on 18 August in Yangon, between the Ministry of Information and Myanmar Press Council (Interim). At the event titled 'Media Development Thematic Meeting', Minister for Information Ye Htut gave a briefing on the reform processes of the media sector and Secretary of the MPC (Interim) Kyaw Min Swe presented a report on the activities of the MPC. The topics of the 2-day meeting included covering news in line with journalistic ethics, the role of socially responsible media, reform processes in TV and public service media, broadcasting channels for ethnic languages, covering elections news, and the impact of laws, rules and regulations on press freedom. The meeting was attended by representatives from UNESCO, BBC Media Action, Myanmar Media Lab, Inter News Europe, USAID, DVB Support and EU, as well as members of MPC (Interim) and officials from the Ministry of Information.⁴

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MEETS PAKISTAN'S AIR FORCE CHIEF

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received Pakistan's Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafique Butt on 25 August in Naypyitaw. The two leaders discussed promotion and further strengthening of relations between the defence services of the two countries. Myanmar and Pakistan established diplomatic relations on 1 August 1947. The Pakistani Embassy was opened in Yangon in 1949 and the two countries signed an agreement for bilateral relations on 25 June 1952.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC LEADERS WANT SUU KYI TO OBSERVE SIGNING OF NATIONAL CEASEFIRE

Leaders from ethnic armed organizations met with NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon on 18 August to discuss the ongoing peace process. Nai Hong Sar, head of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), said the meeting was informal. "We decided to meet her because we were in Rangoon. She was interested when we told her our peace process plans," he said.

Ethnic leaders declined to comment when asked whether they sought advice from Suu Kyi as they negotiate with the government to sign a national ceasefire accord. Nyan Win, a spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party, also declined to comment. This is the second time ethnic leaders have met with the NLD leader. Ethnic leaders say they want her to participate more in the peace process and perhaps serve as an eyewitness during the signing of the nationwide ceasefire accord, which could come as early as October later this year.

Ethnic delegations call on Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker –

<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/27/08/2014/id-12783> (NLM) 27 August 2014 (p. 9)

³ First ever meeting between peace and ceasefire bodies and political parties on 18 Aug –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-18-red.pdf> (NLM) 18 August 2014 (p. 1)

⁴ Information Minister discusses media reform with press council –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/NLM2014-08-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 August 2014 (p. 3)

⁵ Senior General pledges to promote military relations with Pakistan –

<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/26/08/2014/id-12752> (NLM) 26 August 2014 (p. 2)

“We proposed this to the government already, but there has been no response yet,” said Khun Okkar, Secretary of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). Suu Kyi has expressed a desire to take a greater role in the peace process as the country attempts to recover from decades of civil war.⁶

ARMY WILL DISCUSS FEDERALISM

The Tatmadaw has agreed to discuss the potential formation of a federal army, one of the ethnic armed groups’ key demands in the ongoing peace process. The pledge came as the ethnic armed organisations, the government and the military discussed the last few sticking points in the latest draft of the nationwide ceasefire accord held at the Myanmar Peace Center in Yangon on from 15 to 17 August.

“The government has accepted the federal military demand in principle. The details will be discussed during the political dialogue. The military has also agreed to it,” said Naing Han Thar, the leader of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT). While the Tatmadaw has said it will discuss the possibility of a federal army, they made it clear that they don’t want it to be labelled as such.

Major General Gun Maw of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) said the military had insisted on the title of Pyidaungsu Tatmadaw or union military, instead of the federal military, the title that the ethnic armed groups had pushed for. “[The agreement] is to discuss the formation of the Pyidaungsu Tatmadaw in the political dialogue, not the restructuring of the Tatmadaw under the title of the Federal Tatmadaw,” he explained.

The title still needs the approval of the government’s Union Peacemaking Working Committee led by the president, said Hla Maung Shwe, a member of the technical team from Myanmar Peace Center.

Maj Gen Gun Maw said that he believed the government and military commanders will endorse the agreement. “We have found that the military’s sentiments have changed, especially in this round of meetings. We have seen that the military officials have held very patient discussions,” he said.

The military had continuously opposed a federal military structure, arguing that the current military fairly represents the country. But ethnic groups continue to view the military as overly representative of the country’s majority ethnic group, the Bamar.

“Only if the military is restructured into a new one representing all races, will they [ethnic groups] see it as their own military,” said Sai Paung Nut, the Chair of the Wa National Democratic Party.

“The current military includes a considerable number of ethnic people but the influence of the Bamar is still huge,” said U Man Aung Pyi Soe, the vice-chair of the Palon-Sawaw Democratic Party.

When the restructuring of the military is discussed in the political dialogue, the future of existing ethnic armed forces will also be discussed, Naing Han Thar said.

But ethnic leaders admitted that there is still a considerable amount of work to be done on the issue, as it is still unclear what a federal military would look like. Details on the specific structure remain scarce.

“[The ethnic groups] just want the military to be in line with the federal principles when the country is transformed into a federated structure,” said Dr Tun Jar, chair of the Kachin Democracy Party.⁷

⁶ Ethnic Leaders Want Suu Kyi to Observe Signing of National Ceasefire – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ethnic-leaders-want-suu-kyi-observe-signing-national-ceasefire.html> (Irrawaddy) 19 August 2014

⁷ Army will discuss federalism – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11448-army-will-discuss-federalism.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 August 2014

ONE CIVILIAN KILLED AFTER TNLA, GOVT TROOPS CLASH

One civilian was shot dead and another hospitalized with a gunshot wound following a clash between government troops and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) on 18 August in northern Shan State, according to the ethnic armed organization.

The two civilians Nyi Nai Jar and Yai Tun Than were fired upon and killed while walking in the area shortly after the clash took place in Namkham Township, said TNLA spokesperson Mai Aie Kyaw, who claimed that the Burmese Army suffered 10 casualties in the preceding fighting and accused the government's Infantry Division 88 of killing the men. The TNLA spokesperson said the two sides met along a road while travelling about 10 miles south of the town of Namkham and faced off for 15 minutes in Namkham Township's Mansep-Oilaw village. "The fighting stopped when our troops withdrew after 15 minutes. Our ground troops reported that 10 troops from Infantry Division 88 were killed and wounded," said Mai Aie Kyaw.

The TNLA spokesperson said TNLA troops also reported another clash on 17 August in Kyauk Mae Township, which claimed the lives of two government soldiers. The Burmese Army continues to move troops in the area, which the ethnic Palaung armed group lays claim to, according to Mai Aie Kyaw. Fighting has been less frequent this month compared with July, he said, when the TNLA reported clashes every week.⁸

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION PROPOSES OPEN LIST PR SYSTEM

In another step towards introducing the controversial proportional representation (PR) electoral system, a parliamentary commission has recommended to the Amyotha Hluttaw that an open-list proportional representation system should be introduced for next year's general election. If approved, PR would replace the current first-past-the-post system, by which the candidate who receives the most votes in any constituency becomes a member of parliament. The opposition National League for Democracy opposes PR because they believe the government's purpose in introducing it is to reduce the size of an anticipated NLD majority in the 2015 elections.

"We decided to recommend the open-list system after considering various kinds of PR systems in use around the world. Now we will prepare a draft electoral law for submission to the coming session," said commission member Phone Myint Aung.

The 35-member commission was formed on 11 July to study PR systems. Its recommendation follows a 3-day debate over a proposal from National Democratic Force candidate Daw Khin Waing Kyi to change the electoral system from first-past-the-post to PR for the 2015 general election.

Parties who support PR told parliament they wanted to introduce the system so that all parties could have a voice in parliament. However, the National League for Democracy and ethnic parties who oppose PR say the change would be premature and inappropriate for the transition to democracy, and asked parliament not to change the voting system.

"People think representatives elected by PR cannot represent them because they are not directly elected. That's why we decided to introduce an open-list system, so that people can vote both for the party and its candidates," said U Phone Myint Aung. Under the proposed system, voters choose individual candidates from a list provided by each party.

"The commission was tasked with identifying a suitable electoral design and proposing it to parliament, but the final decision depends on the Union Election Commission and parliament," said commission chair Zaw Myint Pe.

⁸ One Civilian Killed After TNLA, Govt Troops Clash – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/one-civilian-killed-tnla-govt-troops-clash.html> (Irrawaddy) 18 August 2014

The commission formed on 29 July by the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) to analyse the electoral system for the country's regions has plans to meet. Most observers agree that the introduction of a proportional representation system would benefit the ruling USDP party at the expense of the NLD, and critics say a switch to PR could violate the constitution and electoral law.

Speaker Thura Shwe Mann told a press conference on 11 August that if parliament approved a PR system, committees would draft a new electoral law. "Any contradiction with the 2008 constitution would be subject to a decision from the constitutional tribunal court," he said.⁹

POLITICAL PARTIES PREPARE FOR BY-ELECTION IN KAREN STATE

Four political parties are preparing to contest an up-coming by-election in Karen State at the end of the year. The parties contesting the election are the Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP), Karen Democratic Party (KDP), National League for Democratic Party (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

"Currently, for advanced preparation, the PSDP party is still working under the process of representatives' selection, field survey and organizing and approaching the local civilians in order to contest the by-election. However, we have to work under a little strictly condition in currently as we have not been officially informed whether possibility of bi-election will take place or not, said PSDP Vice-Chair Mahn Aung Pyi Soe. The four parties have been preparing to contest in spite of the fact that the government has yet to officially announce the date of the by-elections.

"We started to organize the committees from headquarter through state, district and village levels. The successful committees have been providing training to start the campaigns for the by-election," said Karen State NLD chairperson Nan Khin Htwe Myint. Karen State Union Solidarity of Development Party (USDP) chairman Saw Htar Lone said that the USDP has already selected a former assistant education as its candidate.

Currently, there are six political parties in Karen state. However, two of these, the Kayin State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP) and National Unity Party (NUP) have reported that they have no plans to compete in the up-coming by-election.¹⁰

PARTIES COVET VACANT SEATS IN KACHIN STATE

With by-elections due across Burma by year's end, several political parties have noted an interest in fielding candidates in the vacant constituencies of Kachin State, where previous elections were cancelled due to ongoing conflict.

Dr Tuja, a former Kachin Independence Organisation member who founded the Kachin State Democracy Party last year, said his party will field candidates in at least three, if not all four, constituencies where by-elections will be held in the state.

"We will compete for three, perhaps all four of the seats available in Kachin State," he said. "In our opinion, the size of the party doesn't matter. Several major parties lack public support, while many small parties are popular. The most important thing is to be on the side of the people." He said the campaign period of 30 days, passed under a new regulation by the Union Election Commission (UEC), is too short.

⁹ Parliamentary commission proposes open list PR system – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11449-parliamentary-commission-proposes-open-list-pr-system.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 August 2014

¹⁰ Political Parties Prepare for By-election in Karen State – <http://karennews.org/2014/08/political-parties-prepare-for-by-election-in-karen-state.html/> (Karen News) 19 August 2014

“We have learnt that the UEC has cut the campaign periods for elections from 60 days to 30 days, but that they will try this at the by-elections and may extend the period if it turns out to be too short. From our perspective, a 30-day campaign period is not enough.” According to official announcements, by-elections will be held in four constituencies in Kachin State: Waingmaw, Hpakant, Bhamo and Mogaung.

National Democratic Force chairman Khin Maung Swe said his party is looking to field candidates in all four constituencies. “In the previous by-elections, we did not field candidates in Hpakant, Bhamo or Mogaung, but we plan to compete in each of these townships, plus in Waingmaw for the regional parliament,” he said.

Burma’s two largest parties, the National League for Democracy and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party, have also revealed plans to run in Kachin by-elections. The ethnic alliances of the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF) and its sister-party, the Federal Union Party, say they will also nominate candidates for each of the vacant seats in Kachin State.

The National Unity Party (NUP), formed mainly from the remnants of former dictator Ne Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party, plans to compete in 18 constituencies throughout the country – six for the Lower House; six for the Upper House; and six for regional parliaments in Rangoon, Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe and Irrawaddy Regions, Kachin and Arakan states, but will not field candidates in Karen State. UEC Chairman Tin Aye said in March this year that by-elections will be held around the end of November or beginning of December.¹¹

GOVERNMENT DENIES POLITICAL PRISONERS REMAIN BEHIND BARS

The government denied reports from some rights organizations that 29 political prisoners remain behind bars despite the government’s promise of an amnesty for all political prisoners by the end of 2013. Deputy Minister of the President’s Office and the Secretary of the Committee for Scrutinising Remaining Political Prisoners Aung Thein said that those 29 prisoners had violated other laws. “Some of them imprisoned [for political offences] were found to have broken other penal codes. Some related to drug-abuse cases, some are murderers and bombers. The President has removed the part of their sentences connected to political activities. But they still have to pay for their committed crimes other than political activities,” he said.

Another committee member, Sai Nyunt Lwin from the SNLD party, predicted that the remaining 29 political prisoners will be given an amnesty because some are members of ethnic armed groups and it would facilitate the ongoing ceasefire talks with the armed groups. He added that the committee only deals with political prisoners who were imprisoned during military rule, meaning that prisoners charged under existing laws, such as protest laws, under the current government are discounted.

A report by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) released in July said that many individuals remain behind bars and the government continues to arrest and incarcerate new political prisoners. By the end of July, there were 70 political prisoners incarcerated in Burma, with approximately 114 accused activists awaiting trial, the group said. A statement by Amnesty International about remaining political prisoners, also released in July, said, “So far in 2014, at least 59 individuals have been charged and 17 of them imprisoned under a range of laws which restrict the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.”

Ko Ko Gyi, a spokesperson from the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, said that some political activists have recently been charged with unrelated crimes. “The general definition of the term ‘political prisoners’ encompasses those who are imprisoned while they are trying to protect citizens’

¹¹ Parties covet vacant seats in Kachin State –

<http://english.dvb.no/news/parties-covet-vacant-seats-in-kachin-state-burma-myanmar/43329> (DVB) 18 August 2014

rights. Or they are imprisoned for asking for the rights they deserve. Due to politically related activities, the activists are often accused of unrelated offences," he said.¹²

UN ADVISOR NAMBIAR CONCLUDES TRIP TO BURMA

The UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Burma Vijay Nambiar concluded his 8th official visit to the country on 25 August. Nambiar met senior officials in Naypyidaw, discussed the resumption of international aid with community leaders in Arakan State and attended a round of ceasefire talks in Rangoon as an observer.

According to a UN statement, Nambiar attended tripartite talks between the a government, ethnic representatives and political party leaders on 18 August in Yangon, where he "conveyed a key message to all stakeholders to take a leap of faith and to set aside all narrow agendas in the common interest of peace and a unified Myanmar [Burma]."

The UN Special Advisor also met President Thein Sein and held discussions with senior officials, including: Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, President's Office Ministers Soe Thein and Aung Min, Minister for Immigration and Population Affairs Khin Yi, and the new Chief Minister of Arakan State, Maung Maung Ohn.

He also met with parliamentary House Speaker Shwe Mann and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice-Snr-Gen Soe Win, before holding consultations with members of political parties, ethnic armed organizations, civil society groups, aid agencies, women and youth organisations, as well as with diplomatic representatives, the UN Information Centre in Yangon said. Nambiar did not, on this occasion, meet with NLD opposition leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi, whom he spoke with on an earlier visit in July this year.

Visiting restive Arakan State, where communal mob violence has forced 140,000 people from their homes and into shelters over the past two years, Nambiar discussed with local authorities the need for the urgent resumption of humanitarian aid, saying such a move "would help address prevailing tensions and pave the way for sustainable solutions". But the UN envoy was met in part with resistance among members of the Arakanese community who took exception to his views on human rights and citizenship with regard to Rohingya Muslims.

Khine Kaung Zan, a representative of the Wonlet Foundation, said, "We told the UN envoy that the Bengalis [Rohingyas] should follow and respect the Constitution and laws of our country. And, we told him, we know from experience that some external influences are supporting the Bengalis." He added that the Arakanese Buddhist representatives urged the UN Special Advisor to ensure that aid is provided equally to both communities in Arakan State by international agencies.¹³

HPA-AN FARMERS DEMAND FOR RETURN OF SEIZED LANDS

More than a hundred farmers from nine villages in Hpa-an Township, Karen State, staged a rally on 25 August demanding the return of lands they say were seized by the military many years ago. The farmers were joined by members of the 88 Generation Karen Students Group, in a 2-hour march which began in downtown Hpa-an.

Karen parliamentarian Nan Say Awa, who observed the demonstration, said the rally was peaceful and included farmers from the villages of Taungthugon, Hlarkamyin and Hlarkadaung. Local news

¹² Government denies political prisoners remain behind bars – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11366-government-denies-political-prisoners-remain-behind-bars.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 August 2014

¹³ UN advisor Nambiar concludes trip to Burma – <http://english.dvb.no/news/un-advisor-nambiar-concludes-trip-to-burma-myanmar/43552> (DVB) 26 August 2014

media reported that demonstrators dispersed at 11:00 when township authorities arrived and began questioning the participants.

MP Nan Say Awa said he called the farmers before the rally and explained that it will take time to get their lands back. He said he also requested that the farmers not hold the protest.

Since the Thein Sein government took office in 2011, thousands of farmers and villagers have staged similar rallies calling for the return of lands which were confiscated by the Burmese army, mostly in the 1990s.

Recently, Burma's Ministry of Defence announced that, to date, more than 200,000 acres of seized land had been handed over to state and regional governments. In a report submitted to the government on 27 August, the ministry said more than 50,000 acres were seized in Sagaing Division, 38,000 acres in Kachin State, and many more around the country. According to the report, only about 46,000 acres have so far been transferred back to their original owners.¹⁴

LAND GRABS WORKSHOP HELD IN MAGWAY REGION

A workshop on land grabbing was held in Magway region in central Burma from 19 to 20 August. The 2-day event organised by farmers' rights activist Aung Kyaw Kyaw was attended by more than 60 delegates representing farmers from all 25 townships in Magway. The participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of current legislation on farmland and forests so that they could prepare a more robust report on the crime to submit to the Union government and Parliament.

"More than 30,000 acres of land were grabbed by No. 25 Defence Equipment Factory in Saw Township," delegate Tun Myint from the township's Ngat Pyar Kyin village said. Of this amount, more than 700 acres had been taken from farmers in his village, he said. "We are planning to submit our grievance against land grabbing to the Magway Regional chief minister in cooperation with local farmers," he added.

About 13,000 acres of farmland have been seized by a defence equipment factory in Taungdwingyi Township, farmer Than Naing said, adding that the Ministry of Industry had grabbed another 700 acres. Than Naing said the land taken had been cultivated by farmers. "We discussed how to regain our land or receive compensation, and signed a report on land grabbing to give to authorities," Than Naing added. The workshop was the second of its kind in the region and the participants discussed ways to collect signatures for a petition against land grabbing and how to amend or remove contentious articles or sections of current laws.¹⁵

ANALYSIS

The meeting between the President, Commander-in-Chief and ethnic leaders from the Shan State is a step in the right direction towards the on-going national reconciliation process. In its efforts to ending more than six decades of civil war, the government has managed to sign ceasefire agreements with 14 ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), but to date none of these agreements have been able to deliver genuine and sustainable peace. This once again highlights the need to conduct political dialogue where the interests of all stakeholders including the government, the military (Tatmadaw), EAOs, political parties, civil society and the people can be addressed in a democratic and transparent manner.

¹⁴ Hpa-an farmers march for return of seized lands – <http://english.dvb.no/news/hpa-an-farmers-march-for-return-of-seized-lands-burma-myanmar/43526> (DVB) 25 August 2014

¹⁵ Central Myanmar holds Workshop on Peasants' Affairs – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7276:central-myanmar-holds-workshop-on-peasants-affairs&catid=44:national&Itemid=384 (Eleven News Media) 20 August 2014

More importantly, the latest round of peace talks has seen a breakthrough on the existing draft cease-fire framework agreement. The fact that both sides have agreed to incorporate a monitoring mechanism vis-a-vis the formation of a peacekeeping task force into the final cease-fire agreement is encouraging.

Furthermore, the government's willingness to discuss sensitive issue and the demand for a federal union by the EAOs is an indication that the two sides are committed towards achieving lasting peace. Nonetheless, "federalism" needs to be defined more precisely; however the acceptance by the authorities to discuss the issue at a later stage of the peace process is indeed a positive step.

At the same time, it is important to note that the nature of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) is twofold: 1) to end military activities and strengthen all ceasefires and 2) to commence a political dialogue with the aim of resolving the long-standing political, economic and social conflicts between the government and the EAOs. The recent developments in the past week are indeed encouraging and it is incumbent upon for the government and the EAOs to seize this window of opportunity and to help ensure the peace process becomes a reality for Burma.