

Prospect of Myanmar Peace Process through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

Transitory Political Background

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The civil war in Burma or Myanmar broke out after the country's independence in 1948, as successive central governments of Burma fought numerous radical and racial rebellions. Some of the earliest insurgencies were made by Marxist groups – Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and Red Flag Communist Party - and by the Karen National Union (KNU). One year after Burma's independence from the British in January 1949, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) was established to challenge against the U Nu's Government. The KNDO later became KNLA and its political wing became the Karen National Union (KNU).

The KNU fought to create an independent Karen state from large part of Lower Myanmar. Other ethnic revolutions broke out in the early 1960s after the central government ignored considering a federal union government. By the early 1980s, ethnic-based rebellions continued on the go thru the armed struggle.

In the 1980s, ethnic rebel groups controlled most of the country's border areas. The two major organizations fighting against the Burma Socialist Programme Party-led government, were two umbrella groups, the pro-Chinese Communist Party of Burma (allied to local Kokang Chinese, Wa and Shan groups), based along the Chinese-Burmese border; and the pro-West National Democratic Force (made up of ethnic Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan opposition groups), based along the Thai-Burmese border.

By the late 1980s, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) had weakened due to decreasing of China's funding and internal dissension. During the 1988 Uprising, the CPB failed to seize the opportunity to do well from political turning point. In September 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), a military council, staged a coup d'état. Coincidentally, ethnic Wa and Kokang armed forces launched a rebellion against CPB and successfully set up the United Wa State Party (UWSP) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) respectively.

SLORC exploited this opportunity to organize cessation of hostilities with the ethnic armed rebellious parties that had just torn apart, under a policy schemed by Khin Nyunt, the then the Chief of Military Intelligence. The treaty was unsuccessful to reach nationwide promoting, with seven of the fifteen armed groups invited declining to sign as a consequence of disagreements thru the procedure and constant distrust of Myanmar's semi-civilian government with its influential military. [[Ceasefires in Myanmar](#)]

Ethnic conflict needs to be resolved in order to create a long-lasting political solution. Without a political agreement that addresses ethnic minority's desires and objectives it is exceedingly uncertain changing to peace and democracy in Myanmar. Instead of quarantining the ethnic cease-fire groups, all national and international actors concerned with peace and democracy in

Burma should actively engage with them in dialogues concerning political modernization in the nation. Page | 2

To resolve the deep-rooted ethnic problems, the existing government should review the mistakes of past rulings and the political aspirations of the ethnic communities. The original argument of the nation's ethnic political miscalculation is the successive military regimes' antagonism towards a democratic federal union. The late dictator, Ne Win, who seized power in a military coup in 1962, opposed sharing equal power in order to allow self-determination to respective ethnic minorities.

Burma's Military Council headed by Ne Win declared that the military coup had taken place because of the —Federalism, which he said could lead to the disintegration of the nation. When Ne Win seized power, he demolished the 1947 Constitution and dismissed the 1947 Panglong Agreement, which promised autonomy of the ethnic states. The result of the 1947 agreement reached nowhere after ten years in 1958, after gaining independence from the British in 1948. Many ethnic armed rebellions broke out to stand up for autonomy. The 1947 constitution had granted the right of secession to Karenni and Shan States.

Despite the fact that the Supreme Executive Council of the United Hill Peoples was making an effort to amend the union constitution in 1961-62 to reconstruct a true federal union with the Premier U Nu's Government, Gen. Ne Win made a military coup on 2 March in 1962 and all ethnic states had been occupied by the treacherous Burma armed forces.

In actual fact, it is a fair demand for self-sufficiency among the respective ethnic minorities. No government should use guns to govern ethnic minorities. If one looks back to 1960-61, many leaders from ethnic states criticized the weakness of the constitution as well as the government's failure to provide political autonomy of the ethnic minorities. They pointed the finger at the central government for not allowing the representatives of ethnic states to manage their own affairs in areas of economy, judiciary, education, and customs and so on.

According to the military drawn 2008 constitution's Article 436, most of the provisions can be amended by a vote of more than 75% of the representatives of the joint Upper and Lower House assembly (666 seats). The military occupies 25% of the seats in each house (110, 56).

Without addressing and honoring the ethnic people's demand for self-determination, the latest parliament-based government seems unable to stop political and civil strife throughout ethnic areas. In reality, ethnic people's demand for equal rights is not a new one but already mentioned in the 1947-Panglong agreement.

Many ethnic leaders assert that they do not believe in the new 2008 constitution. They consider that it will not create a genuine federal union since the armed forces take 25 percent of all seats in the existing parliament. So, the current constitution will not grant the democratic freedom and the fundamental rights for the ethnic groups of the nation. The existing government ought to resume with Panglong initiative which is accepted by majority ethnic people.

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Question on deployments of armed troops

In the ongoing peace process, the issues on demarcation of ethnic territories and deployment of both troops are unresolved as yet. On 8 September 2013, a peacemaking meeting was held between the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) and President U Thein Sein's government peacemaking team led by President's Office Minister U Aung Min in Chiang Mai, Thailand. U Aung Min's true intention was selling the central government plan to ethnic armed groups to join nationwide ceasefire signing ceremony in October, according to sources close to the ethnic federation. However, the UNFC was reluctant to agree since its members had already signed a state-level ceasefire accords which the government army didn't always abide by.

In fact, the government should declare a 'nationwide ceasefire' including the government armed forces, before a nationwide negotiating period, the Karen National Union's Joint Secretary-2 Padoh Mahn Mahn told the media. At that time, it seems there was a big question to tackle the deployments of both sides' armed troops.

When the current NLD government introduced the peace process, some ethnic armed groups were still under negotiation and some had not accepted the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as yet. For those ethnic armed organizations in non-signatory groups, the government has been calling them for involvement and looks forward to initiate peace negotiations.

The State Counselor used to say frequently that political dialogues were aimed to achieve fundamental principles acceptable to all interested party. Her government welcomes all non-signatory groups to participate in the process of formulating the principles towards a 'Democratic Federal Union' in the future. She also used to say that the NCA is not an end in itself, but just the first step towards national reconciliation in the country.

During the NCA talks, two specific confrontations – DDR, or disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation, and SSR, or security sector reform – caused a deadlock right until the final day of drafting. To overcome the deadlock, an agreement was made as an alternative to talk over security-related matters during political dialogue.

The Emergence of ‘National Ceasefire Agreement’

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) seeks to achieve a negotiated settlement between the Myanmar Government and non-state ethnic armed organizations (EOs) that paves the way peace-building and nationwide dialogue. Consisting of seven chapters, the —draft text of the NCA agreed on March 31, 2015, stipulates the terms of ceasefires, their implementation and monitoring, and the roadmap for political dialogue and peace ahead. Basically, if signed by all parties, the NCA would represent the first major step in a time-consuming nationwide peace process. While the government mainly hopes to conclude the NCA before national elections take place on November 8, 2015, demands for amendments in the final text, ongoing skirmishes, and the issue of which groups might be excluded from the agreement have proven stumbling blocks in negotiations.

There are some points of disagreement including the Tatmadaw’s demand for an NCA to be in line with the military’s 6-point guidelines which has been resisted by EOs, as this would imply an implicit acceptance of the controversial 2008 Constitution. Another contentious issue between EOs and Tatmadaw representatives has centered on implementation of —Security Reintegration. While the government side has emphasized Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of ethnic armed groups, the latter underline the necessity of Security Sector Reform (SSR) that involves the formation of a —federal army comprising of ethnic combatants.

Speaking at the 12th meeting of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) on 30 October 2017, the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that the Union Government was placing great importance on the contribution of the non-signatories to the NCA in the national reconciliation and peace processes. The state counsellor highlighted the NCA as a starting point. The NCA is not the end of the peace process but the beginning of the peace process, she said.

Conclusion of the NCA was merely the first step in a long, difficult process needed to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. Many of the most challenging issues, including a possible form of federalism, how revenue would be shared, future status of the armed groups and their possible integration into the military, were deferred to the political dialogue, as were some technical military issues on ceasefire monitoring and code of conduct.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called on members of the UPDJC to make firm commitments to complete works for laying down the basic principles for a federal union in 2018. The biggest hindrance to peace is to convince all ethnic armed groups to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

As stated by the National Ceasefire Agreement, the ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw have

agreed on paper to support the three national causes that have been defended by the successive military governments: non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty.

As said by the NCA, all signatories have agreed to remain in the union approving to the non-disintegration of the union, by opposing any activity that could break up the country. Moreover, they would not call for an independent state in the union. In brief, no demand will be allowed for secession.

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Eight ethnic armed groups signed the NCA in October, 2015; the New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union signed the NCA on 13 February, 2018. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi expressed confidence on February 13 that challenges to the peace process would be overcome. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi made peace her top priority when her civilian administration took office in 2016 to end five decades of military domination. The signing ceremony of NMSP and LDU was witnessed by 18 representatives from the government, parliament, Tatmadaw, political parties and NCA signatory groups as well as representatives from China, India, Japan, Thailand, the European Union and the United Nations.

However, fighting has continued in northern Myanmar between the Tatmadaw and several ethnic armed groups that are members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC). The FPNCC was founded on 19 April 2017, by the 4th Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) Pangkham summit with the task of —discussing with the government of Union of Myanmar regarding the issues of peace-building in Myanmar. The FPNCC, however, still refused to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), insisting on their call for the replacement of NCA with a more justified peace treaty.

The FPNCC is a political alliance of armed groups based in northern Shan and Kachin states. It has seven members: the United Wa State Army (UWSA); Kachin Independence Army (KIA); National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA); Shan State Progress Party (SSPP); TNLA; Arakan Army (AA); and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

The NCA is to be followed by a political dialogue, consisting of a Union Peace Conference (The 21st Century Panglong Conference) to reach a comprehensive peace agreement that would be the basis for revising, revoking and adding provisions to the constitution and laws. It would be in keeping with approved processes – i.e., through the parliament – with armed group disarmament and security sector reform.

People who watch the progress of the peace process are doubtful with the NCA path which they think may not be the only way to effective dialogue. So, the prospect of NCA's future should be watched closely since the government keeps the NCA as its key policy.

The signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire in October 2015 officially marks the beginning of the end of nearly seventy years of Myanmar's civil war. However as in previous years, seeming breakthroughs in the peace process have not solved ongoing conflict in parts of the country, and more worryingly, have given rise to increases in military preparedness on both the government and ethnic sides. The apparent end of military dictatorship following the NLD's sweeping victory in the 2015 elections, and overall optimism in the country's political reform have not healed deep distrust between the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and government. Page | 6

The eight out of twenty-one recognized EAOs that signed the NCA have nevertheless decided to press ahead with the government and other stakeholders from political parties and civil society groups to find a political settlement for ethnic self-determination. Accepting that the ceasefire will not be perfect, the final peace structure on the other hand is meant to write into law the rights that each group demands to end armed struggle. While the door remains open for non-signatory groups to join later, the ratification of the NCA into law has formally institutionalized the multi-stakeholder structure for conflict control and political settlement laid out in the document.

Myanmar now reaches at a critical juncture as it attempts to carry out a federal structure to quiet down the large number of various ethnic groups in the nation. The NCA framework consist of probable conflict control mechanisms, but answer to the crucial topics of demilitarization, territorial demarcation and power sharing remains indefinable. At the end of 2016, a major counter offensive on the Chinese border by the Northern Alliance made up of four combatant groups, three of which are denied participation in the NCA process, is one example of growing frustrations and grievances. Moreover attacks by alleged Rohingya militants in October 2016 have prompted a new large-scale security crackdown by the Myanmar Army in northern Rakhine in October 2016, sending tens of thousands of new refugees into Bangladesh.

This analysis is a contribution to efforts attempting to make sense of the complicated peace mechanisms, numerous committees, stakeholders, issues and events for those seeking a solution to Myanmar's conflicts and its impacts on internal security.

Situation of Peace Process through Myanmar's Ceasefire Agenda

What's going on with peacemaking process in Burma? After six decades of domestic war, one remarkable event - *the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference* - was organized by the State Counselor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi. The 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference was held in Nay Pyi Taw started on 31 August and ended 4 September. It has been launching a new chapter of peace process. The conference was attended by nearly most of the armed groups. However, three ethnic armed groups – Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) -

delaying to sign the national ceasefires accord (NCA).

The State Counselor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi made an opening address at the conference. It was followed by speeches from the lower and upper house speakers, the commander-in-chief, the KNU chairman, NLD patron Tin Oo (an ex-commander-in-chief), the KIO vice chairman and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Page | 7

There were signs of disapproval by some ethnic armed groups to be present at the 21st Century Peace Conference and many challenges were likely to come about. The new government has stated that it designates to hold six-monthly conferences.

Over a dozen clashes since 30 August between Karen splinter group and government's border guard forces in Karen state. As a result, around 4,000 displaced villagers and dozens of soldier casualties reported. In rare confirmation of responsibility, military court martial on 15 September found that 7 Burma Army soldiers including 4 officers were guilty of murdering 5 villagers in Shan state in June. They were sentenced to 5-year imprisonment with hard labor.

Peace talks between government and warring ethnic minorities started conference on 31 August in a bid to end decades of conflict that have claimed thousands of lives and kept the country stuck in poverty. A sea of color filled the vast conference hall in the capital Nay Pyi Taw as delegations from Myanmar's numerous ethnic groups mixed with unfriendly military officers decorated in full ceremonial uniform. The conference is the State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's much declared effort to reshape Myanmar as a federal democracy following decades of dictatorial military rule.

The State Counselor has made networking with the ethnic groups that have splintered the nation since its 1948 independence a priority of her new government, which took office in March 2016. The description of this Conference is clear from its title, which recalls the spirit of the original Panglong Conference convened in 1947 by General Aung San, the National Hero of the nation. This 21st Century Panglong Conference is bringing together Myanmar's various ethnic groups in a joint responsibility to build a federal union based on equality, democracy and self-determination. This is the first kind of such a peace process introduced in a seven-decade history of civil war between the Central Government and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).

The 21st Century Peace Conference marks a historic transition since former President U Thein Sein opened the doors of democratic reforms in March 2011. The United Nations has been a steady partner in support of Myanmar's reforms towards a peaceful federal democratic nation, particularly the national reconciliation practice. It is promising that the different ethnic armed organizations with different interests and aspirations came together to discuss the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

This agreement was essentially important, and the new Government has launched commitments to make it more comprehensive. The 21st Century Panglong Conference represents the result of those efforts. Seventeen rebel groups have joined the talks in the 21st Century Peace Summit, but some others have not laid down their arms and remain locked in conflict with the military.

The 2nd session of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference - started on May 24 and ended on May 29 – was held receiving some 1,400 representatives from the government, the parliament, the military, invited political parties, ethnic armed organizations, and civil society groups.

The conference had reached settlement on 37 points out of 41-- covering political, economic, social, security, and land and environmental issues -- mostly in a consensus manner. The final target is reaching a Union Peace Accord backing foundation for durable peace in a federal republic. The approved points consist of a Union based on democracy and federalism plus the right to self-determination.

Constitutional crisis and unending armed conflicts

The key question of ending current domestic war is also intertwined with the constitutional crisis. The 2008 constitution approved by the previous junta is inundated with misleading principles. It says the country must be united under one military command. To bring the ethnic groups in line with this condition, the military regime has ordered all armed rebel groups to become part of Burma's border guard force ahead of the 2010 election.

Ethnic minorities have been suffering through five decades of immoral military operations in the name of national unity. Attacks on these rural civilians continue on a daily basis. There is a constant demand from Burma's ethnic groups to enjoy equal political, social and economic rights. The Constitution must guarantee the rights of self-determination and of equal representation for every ethnic group in the Parliament. It must also include provisions against racial discrimination.

To go over the main points, Burma/Myanmar's optimism for peace seems uncertain as the military is accelerating its offensives on some ethnic armed groups especially on KIO/KIA. The current offensive against the KIA is a way to force the armed group to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). The KIO along with the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) or the majority of the country's armed groups determined not to be one of the signatories in October 2015, mentioning a lack of all-inclusiveness.

Due to the Burma Army's aggressive demand of laying down arms to the ethnic armed groups,

the peace making process may not be reached a nationwide ceasefire agreement in an agreeable way. Besides, under the command of the 2008 constitution, military faction will not retreat from the parliamentary supremacy which controlled 25 percent of seats with a veto power. Without making amendments of the 2008 constitution, ethnic armed groups may not take part in the

peacemaking process which looks like a military controlled pattern. So, the peace making process of Myanmar or Burma is easier said than done. Although Burma has been carrying out a democratic transition, destination toward peace and reconciliation is still far away. Page | 9

Then, the mass media groups together with the civil society organizations need to take responsibility to watch the democratic transition as well as ongoing peace process in Myanmar in support of freedom of the press and access to information.

Who failed to follow the NCA's promises?

2015-2016 was a notable binary era in Myanmar's continuous democratic transition and national reconciliation. After over two years of hard negotiations, the government and EAO representatives settled a single text nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in March 2015. It is based on a 2013 framework proposed by the Working Group of Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), made up of EAO representatives. The NLD's sweeping victory in the 2015 elections and new leadership in government appear to mark the end of military dictatorship and optimism that real political change can be achieved. However, as in previous years, the contradictory increases in military preparedness and offensives by the government, reveal an unresolved security dilemma remains unaddressed.

While the mainstream NCA process has been ratified into law and has strong backing of the international community, only eight out of twenty-one recognized EAOs have signed and are officially participating in the peace process. Chapter 3 outlines the ongoing parallel efforts to include non-signatory groups in the political dialogue to ensure their interests are reflected in the final federal constitution. Currently these can be categorized into six main groups: the self-autonomous camp such as the UWSA; the NSCN-K that is preoccupied with creating an independent Nagaland with its Indian counterpart; those that want more political guarantees and all inclusive participation before signing; combatant groups that are not recognized as dialogue partners by the government; small groups that are also not recognized; the combatant KIO that demands a political settlement before signing. As of the end of 2016, these groups continue to oppose participation in the current NCA process.

Efforts for reintegration and to address ethnic grievances outside the peace process are crucial to ensure overall national reconciliation. These efforts are briefly summarized in Chapter 4. International actors also play a crucial role in determining the success of the peace process. Chapter 5 highlights important international stakeholders, the impact of the conflict on domestic

security (especially Myanmar's two powerful neighbors China and India) and their contributions to the peace process.

While 2016 ends with two fresh outbreaks of conflict and formidable challenges lay ahead, stakeholders inside and outside the country remain dedicated to achieving long-term peace in Myanmar. Much more work needs to be done to understand the complex roots of conflict to prevent the deterioration of security in the country and a sophisticated political solution to Myanmar's complex ethnic issues. Page | 10

For the time being, it is reasonable to say that the 21st Century Panglong Peace Process has stalled. The [third session of] the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong—has been put off three times after the second session in 2017. The government said that it would be held in early May, but the preconditions have not been fulfilled. There is a big hurdle facing signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) holding national-level political dialogue. This problem has been unresolved due to lack of national-level political discussions. And as long as this problem remains unresolved, there may not be way for all-inclusive political dialogues plus national reconciliation. Then and there series of session of the 21st Panglong Conference can be stalled or at a standstill. As a result, armed clashes may be taking place between the Northern Alliance and the government military. As a general rule, the peace process seems stalled rather than making progress as the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) program didn't go well.

The NCA seems too complicated to comprehend for ordinary citizens. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement or NCA is a multi-layered legal document containing one hundred and three points under seven chapters. However, it is a useful document covering ceasefire, reconciliation, humanitarian and national security.

The peace process is wide-ranging and questionable. There are two main parts - cooperation between NCA signatories and the government on implementation of the NCA and negotiations between non-signatories and the government. Moreover, all-inclusiveness is significant for the ongoing peace process. If there were one faction or group absent in the process, the solution would not be completed as a whole.

It is notable that the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) lately signed the NCA in which eight ethnic groups had already been signed. Although the peace process is based on the NCA, signing the NCA does not mean the end of peace process. It is just an important step to address the political problems through negotiation.

The NMSP and the LDU signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement at the Myanmar International Convention Center -II in Nay Pyi Taw on 13 February 2018, an event that State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi described as —only the beginning of a long quest for peace.

—The NCA is not the end of the peace process. The NCA is the beginning of the peace process, the State Counsellor said.

—The beginning of political dialogues, the beginning of reduction of armed conflicts; it is the beginning of the political process that will result from the resolution of political problems through negotiations, discussions and the joint search for solutions. (State Counsellor: Do not waste this opportunity)

This Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ethnic Armed Organizations, recognizes that the Tatmadaw and the Ethnic Armed Organizations will abide by the provisions governing the free movement of troops:

- a. Free movement of unarmed troops is allowed in all areas except in security restricted areas.
- b. Movement of armed troops in the areas controlled by the other is allowed only after obtaining prior agreement.

However, it seems Tatmadaw has failed to abide by the NCA promises. For example, the Tatmadaw has launched over 500 military offensives against the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army – North (SSPP/SSA-N) - within five years since it signed the union-level ceasefire agreement with the Union Government in Taunggyi, according to a statement released by SSPP/SSA-N on 13 January 2018.

The SSPP/SSA-N's central committee held its plenary meeting and 2017 year-end summary meeting from January 6 to 13. On the next day after the meeting ended, the SSPP/SSA-N issued a six-point announcement where it claimed that the Tatmadaw has launched over 500 military offensives against them within five years of peace-building and arrested over 40 SSPP/SSA-N members.

The Tatmadaw has been launching military offensives against the FPNCC members who have refused to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement. It has also been frequently clashing with the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army – South (RCSS/SSA-S) even though the RCSS/SSA has signed the NCA. The RCSS/SSA soldiers, who have been detained by the Tatmadaw, have not been released yet, as said by the Shan Herald Agency for News. Such military offensives seem to be major reason that damages the trust between the government and the EAOs that signed the NCA along with the non-signatories.

Even though, the NCA signatories have decided to support the ongoing series of 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference. The NCA signatories' group has been trying to persuade the non-signatories' group especially the Northern Alliance or FPNCC. Ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that have signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) have decided to exclude issues that are hindering the peace process between the government, Tatmadaw, and the EAOs during the 3rd session of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong.

Pu Zing Cung, chair of the Chin National Front and spokesperson of the NCA signatories' Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), told the reporters that the ethnic leaders made the decision

during the 21st PPST meeting held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on June 12, 2018.

One more example is a report from the Free Burma Rangers. The FBR said Burma Army continued troop reinforcement and attacked civilians on the back of the displacement of villagers

in Papun District in late August. The frontline humanitarian organization, Free Burma Rangers has reported that the Burma Army is continuing to attack civilians and reinforce its troops in Karen State. It clearly showed violation of the National Ceasefire Agreement's proclamation to prevent displaced villagers still in hiding from receiving aid. A senior Karen National Union official who spoke to Karen News with condition of anonymity said that the action of the Burma Army is provocative and it shows disrespect to the ceasefire agreement and its signatories.

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The Third Session of the Union Peace Conference

The Third Session of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong was held in Myanmar International Convention Centre II, Nay Pyi Taw from 11 to 16 July 2018. The conference was attended by 700 delegates from all groups, 29 specially invited guests, 204 observers, 27 facilitators and 152 support group members, and sector-wise and group-wise meetings were conducted in stages and proposals obtained were signed as Part Two of the Union Accord.

In addition to this, conference delegates attending the Third Session of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong pledges to strive toward achieving the following aims.

(a) Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong meetings will be held according to political dialogue framework, once in 2018 and twice in 2019.

(b) Meetings at all levels leading toward the next conference will be held successfully and after the three conferences are held, the basic principles related to democracy and federal, which are the basic foundation of a Union based on democracy and federal system, are to be established.

(c) In the subsequent conferences, all groups are to strive toward setting up the basic principles related to democracy and federal as foundation.

(d) In 2020, Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong meetings are to be held as required.

Aiming toward non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty, based on freedom, equality and justice and in accordance with the Panglong spirit, the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong delegates will continue to strive toward establishing a Union based on democracy and federal system that assures democracy, national equality and self-determination rights, founded according to the outcomes of the political discussions.

During the two-day 10+10 summit in Naypyidaw, no decision has been made on the issues relating to non-secession, self-determination, and establishing a unified army, which are vital for Myanmar peace process. Although the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min

Aung Hlaing gave opening remarks on the first day of the summit on October 15, he did not attend the afternoon session as well as the second day of the summit. Page | 13

Is the NCA on backtrack?

Of the ten ethnic armed groups that have signed the NCA, the Karen National Union (KNU) sent a letter on Oct. 27, 2018 to Aung San Suu Kyi, chairperson of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center, saying that it is taking a break involvement in the peace talks in the middle of ongoing complications within the peace process. They need to review the issues discussed at the Peace Summit regarding right to self-determination and non-secession from the Union, a single army, and the planned conclusion of the ongoing peace dialogues by 2020, with their central committee members.

The KNU stated dissatisfaction with topmost dialogues among the government, Myanmar military, and the NCA signatories that took place earlier in October to try to kick-start the country's stalled peace process. Besides, the KNU also said that it will not take part in the political dialogue framework review meeting on 1-3 November in Yangon, nor in the meeting of Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) made up of NCA non-signatory groups which the KNU chairs, on 5-7 November in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Hence, numerous ethnic group organizations consider that the Tatmadaw shouldn't continue playing the war game while the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference has been convening. For instance, the Tatmadaw has been launching offensive upon the KIO and has ruled out taking part in the NCA. In addition, it also not allowed the northern alliance FPNCC including the MNDAA, TNLA and AA. On this limited basis, the NCA is already weakened and destabilized.

In contrast, clashes also occurred during the past couple of years between the Tatmadaw and some of the NCA-signatory EAOs as well, most recently with the KNU and RCSS/SSA. As a result, the position of EAOs in the NCA and peace processes continues to be imbalanced and volatile.

Perspectives

To sum up, the government and its military demand the armed ethnic groups to join the negotiations after laying down arms and sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) has barred some of the country's most powerful ethnic armed organizations to stay away from the political talks. Their rejection to join the NCA agreement destabilized the dialogue prospective. Moreover, the demand for non-secession from the Union and a single army issue was one reason for the delayed continuation of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference after the third round. So, The NCA process in Myanmar is not yet effective, as it is facing stagnation at present.

On the other hand, China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Mr. Sun Guoxiang played a key role in progress of the peace negotiating among the Myanmar government and non-signatory ethnic armed organizations. It has been paving a way for the Wa-led northern alliance groups to attend the conference.

The Chinese government has been assisting the peace process, although China has been accused of

backing up ethnic armed organizations on its border. Accordingly, it was clear that big challenges armed conflicts and political changeover while the peace conference has been stalled.

Unexpectedly, optimistic news came at the end of the year 2018. The Myanmar Military's Commander-in-Chief released an announcement of a temporary ceasefire effective in conflict zones in the north and northeast of country which prompted notes of welcome from the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) run by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. some and observers. The two strongest EAOs of the FPNCC, the UWSA and KIO, also issued statements welcoming the Tatmadaw's 21st December announcement.

The first-time move of the Tatmadaw has been hailed as a positive sign but it has also met with cautious optimism questioning among ethnic groups for credibility. Kachin, Karen and Karenni groups have welcomed the Tatmadaw's four-month ceasefire but they also called for a nationwide ceasefire cooperatively.

In a few words, the Tatmadaw's temporary ceasefire was welcomed by EAOs. It is more or less a helpful step toward peace and stability. In an optimistic point of view, 2019 will have a chance to become a year of reconciliation, something not seen in the past decades. However, NCA schedule has been under pressure as some EAOs are complaining to review the treaty.

Tatmadaw needs to reinstate the waning confidence of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), especially those signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), namely the Kayin National Union (KNU) and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). The KNU has been temporarily staying away from the peace process since October 2018. Following the KNU's example, the RCSS said top-level summits with the government and military had miscarried to reach a breakthrough on important issues with peace process.

In the next four-month ceasefire period, no one can predict whether talks relating to the NCA are going to be fruitful or not. Bilateral ceasefires with some ethnic groups along the northern border are essential. The ongoing dialogues with the UWSA leaders have been seemed to get good results until now. But it is uncertain to settle for NCA agreement with leaders of KIO/KIA, TNLA and AA ethnic armed groups.

Therefore, prospect of peace negotiation won't be stress-free to make a blameless summing-up. The military's latest sign of 4-month unilateral ceasefire shouldn't be helpful to convince the EAOs, signatories or non-signatories, to follow the NCA path. Finally, the existing government's dream of building democratic federal union via the NCA trail seems incredible and the 21st Century Panglong

Peace Conference may not be helpful for compulsory national reconciliation which is the cornerstone for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

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