

Two ethnic armed groups agree to defuse territorial dispute at upcoming talks

• By Ye Mon | Myanmar Times | Tuesday, 24 January 2017

After clashes again broke out between two ethnic armed groups in Tanintharyi Region earlier this month, leaders have agreed to negotiate their territorial feud off the battle field in a January 25 meeting.



Soldiers from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)'s Seventh Brigade get ready for a parade for the 66th Karen Revolution Day in January 2015. Photo: AFP

The Tanintharyi Region government will broker the talks between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP), U Naing Win Hla, the spokesperson of the NMSP told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday.

“This meeting is the first time the regional government will be involved in mediating armed conflict. I hope the meeting is successful,” he said.

The two groups have fought sporadically since September last year due a lingering territorial dispute. The skirmishes have centred around Yephyu township.

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is a signatory of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) refused to sign the agreement because it was not fully inclusive of all ethnic armed organisations.

Most recently, clashes broke out on January 11. Both sides blamed the other for provoking the attack through a territorial invasion.

“There is no demarcation of the KNU-controlled area yet,” said the NMSP’s spokesperson.

The NMSP [Dawei district] released a statement on January 22 requesting that the conflict be resolved away from the firing range.

According to the statement, the fighting between the KNLA – the armed wing of the KNU – and the MNLA – the armed wing of the NMSP – has been touch-and-go since last year.

The KNU’s central executive committee member Padoh Saw Hla Tun yesterday confirmed his group’s intention to attend the January 25 talks, and to work out the demarcation problems at the meeting.

“Demarcation is an important issue. If we resolve this issue, the conflict will be reduced,” he said.

U Hla Htwe, a regional MP (NLD; Yephyu) said yesterday that the clashes have had limited impact on local residents as they have largely occurred away from residential areas.

“The residents have not suffered any injuries,” he said, adding that he believes the upcoming meeting will be successful at brokering a truce.

Saw Lu Kar, the regional minister for Karen ethnic affairs, said that the regional government must stay impartial if it is to mediate the dialogue and reach a compromise between the two ethnic armed groups.

“We want to negotiate an end to the tensions between these two armed groups. But from the government’s side, it is not up to us to determine the demarcation issue,” he said.

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