Since 18 August 2011, when the official olive branch to all the armed movements was offered, Naypyitaw has signed ceasefire agreements with 10 of them. The only major movement still fighting – and negotiating-remains the Kachin Independence Organization / Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA).

To all of them, Naypyitaw has promised development. Political dialogue, a standing demand of all the movements including KIO/KIA will come only later. This insertion of development between the ceasefire agreement and political dialogue, understandably, has given rise to suspicion on Naypyitaw's motives both by the groups concerned and, especially, the people who have always borne the brunt of the government's programs, whether they be political, military or economic.

To them, each development project initiated by successive governments in the past has, without exception, left only bitter memories. As one educated farmer said in 1995, "The reason for development is usually given to us as a moral basis for militarization and subjugation. The government likes to say we are partners, but actually we end up as victims."

To add to the suspicion is the standard position of the Burma Army toward ceasefire movements: They are enemies that have taken a break in the fighting against us. And they should be treated as such.

The result is not a surprise. Ceasefire agreements have, to a large extent, brought a cessation of hostilities. But they have not stopped the military expansion and build-up of the Burma Army in the ceasefire areas. Naypyitaw troops have also been pushing the ceasefire movement's units into what has been dubbed as Special Development Zones. The ceasefire movements of course would have none of this, thereby resulting in armed clashes between the two sides, despite the ceasefire agreements.

At a recent meeting on the border, one of the ceasefire representatives thundered, "The development phase is just for the Burma Army to buy time to defeat us. Development, as far as we are concerned, can wait until there is a political settlement. What we may need in the in-between is only relief and rehabilitation for the people who have been displaced by war."

In fact, the KIO has been demanding that a political agreement must come prior to a ceasefire agreement. For most of the movements that had already gone through a 20 year period of frustrated truce without a political settlement acceptable to all those concerned, the "first, ceasefire; then, development; next, political dialogue" formula only serves to bring back a "once bitten, twice shy" deja vu.

However, out of the smoke, one thing seems to be clear: the situation is such, the government is unable to defeat the opposition, both armed and unarmed, at least at the same time. The same situation also applies to the opposition, which is known in the communist terminology, as the second stage or the stage of stalemate.

(According to Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietnamese general famous for his successful struggle against both French and American occupation forces during the last century, a revolution is envisaged into three different stages: Defensive, Stalemate and Counter-offensive.)

The Stage of Stalemate, also called Stage of Equilibrium by the late Robert B. Asprey who wrote the classic "War in the Shadows: The guerrilla in history" (1975), is the period when the guerrillas are preparing to operate as conventional soldiers for the third stage. Militarily, they start training and taking and holding territories. Politically, they begin emerging from the shadow into the open to rigorously instill the belief among the populace that they (the guerrillas) are the wave of the future.

This is a period for political and military tasks and problems they have little training or experience. New opportunities as well as problems and dangers, both within and without, await them.

When they are unable to pass through them successfully, there will be no third stage – counter-offensive – for them. "If the movement falters or suffers serious defeats or setbacks at this point," he wrote, "it will lose its invaluable public image as the wave of the future… If momentum is lost, it must be regained quickly or a gradual decline is likely to begin, and this can hardly be arrested by anything short of a dramatic success."

As to how the opposition, both armed and unarmed, will go through this second stage, none of the leaders has enlightened me much.

However, it seems certain that it will involve unity among themselves as well as with the people and a significant portion of the military to accomplish this stage. Then the third stage will come and go, hopefully with little or no bloodshed.