

BURMA BULLETIN

XXXXXXXX A month-in-review of events in Burma XXXXXXXX

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

Issue 124

April 2017

- **By-elections: NLD wins 50% of contested seats; opposition parties accuse Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD of violating regulations.**
- **Burma is declared 3rd highest at risk of state-led mass killings.**
- **Aung San Suu Kyi acknowledges problems in Arakan State, but denies it is ethnic cleansing. National Security Advisor opposes UN Human Rights Council fact-finding mission to Arakan.**
- **Some Arakan State IDPs return home but are not permitted to rebuild houses.**
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- **An NLD MP apologizes for slapping a constituent after vide of incident goes viral.**
- **President Htin Kyaw visits China: China now willing to shelve notorious Myitsone dam project in exchange for other natural resource and economic opportunities.**

KEY STORY: BY-ELECTIONS

On 1 Apr 2017, Burma/Myanmar held by-elections to fill 19 vacant parliamentary seats in national and state parliaments (3 in the Upper House, 9 in the Lower House, 6 in the Shan State Parliament, and 1 in the Karenni State Parliament).¹ The vacancies were the result of incumbents taking up cabinet posts and seats excluded from the 2015 general election due to security concerns.² Twenty-four political parties contested the seats in 5 states and 3 divisions: Arakan/Rakhine, Shan, Chin, Karenni/Kayah and Mon State; Rangoon/Yangon, Bago, and Sagaing divisions.³

¹ The Irrawaddy (03 Apr 17) 2017 by-elections: The wrap-up

² GNLM (03 April 17) Results of 2017 by-elections

³ The Irrawaddy (02 Apr 17) NLD wins nearly half of by-election seats amid low voter turnout

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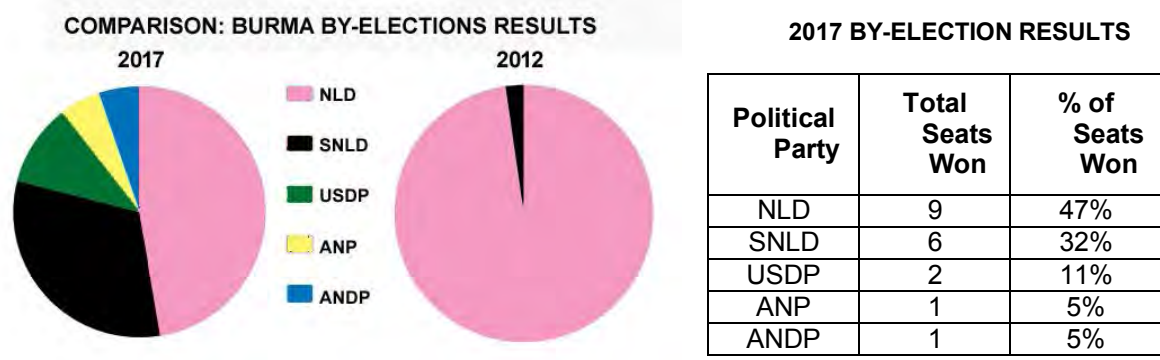
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The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) won 9 out of 18 contested seats. The NLD was defeated by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in Mon State's Chaungzone Township.⁴ The NLD also failed to impress in Shan State, where 6 out of 7 available seats went to candidates representing the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and 1 seat went to the USDP.⁵ The Arakan National Party (ANP) won a seat in Arakan State. The All Nationalities Democracy Party (ANDP) won a seat in Karenni State, the only seat not contested by the ruling party.⁶

Though the NLD won only 50% of 18 contested seats, the results of the by-elections will not affect its significant majority in the National Parliament. The results could serve as an indicator of growing dissatisfaction among ethnic groups.⁷ The results were a sharp contrast with the NLD's overwhelming victory in the 2012 by-elections (where it won 43 out of 44 contested seats, of 45 available seats):



On 2 Apr, NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Win Htein attributed the NLD's poor showing to the language barrier in Shan State, and the low voter turnout nationally.⁸ In total, 784,909 out of 2.13 million eligible voters (about 35%) cast their ballots.⁹ On 4 Apr, NLD spokesperson Nyan Win said that they expected these results because “[i]t is normal for ethnic people to vote for their ethnic parties”. However, Nyan Win admitted they would need more preparation for future elections.¹⁰ SNLD vice Secretary Sain Kyaw Nyint expressed satisfaction for his party's victory of 6 seats. “It is good to have our members of parliament in conflict areas so that they can participate in any peace process and regional development as representatives of the SNLD,” he said.¹¹ The military-backed USDP party – which won only 2 seats – said “it was obvious” that the NLD was losing the support of Burmese voters and that public support for the USDP was on the rise.¹²

Aung San Suu Kyi accused of violating election regulations

On 30 Mar, the 1st anniversary of the NLD taking office and 2 days before the 1 Apr by-elections, State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi delivered a State of the Union Address broadcasted on state-run television and printed in state media.¹³

Several political parties said Aung San Suu Kyi's Union Address was a “party campaign message in disguise”. USDP spokesperson Nanda Hla Myint said that during her speech, Aung San Suu Kyi referred to the 2015 NLD slogan “Time to Change” and announced the party's new slogan “Together with the People”.¹⁴ Nanda Hla Myint said that this violated Article 232 of the 2008 Constitution

⁴ DVB (02 Apr 17) By slimmer margin than 2015 triumph, NLD emerges on top in by-election
⁵ DVB (02 Apr 17) By slimmer margin than 2015 triumph, NLD emerges on top in by-election; RFA (03 Apr 17) Ethnic Political Party Sweeps By-elections in Myanmar's Restive Shan State
⁶ DVB (02 Apr 17) By slimmer margin than 2015 triumph, NLD emerges on top in by-election
⁷ RFA (03 Apr 17) Ethnic Political Party Sweeps By-elections in Myanmar's Restive Shan State
⁸ DVB (03 Apr 17) Low voter turnout prevented NLD clean sweep: Win Htein
⁹ The Irrawaddy (02 Apr 17) NLD wins nearly half of by-election seats amid low voter turnout; Shan Herald Agency for News (07 Apr 17) THE AFTERMATH OF BY-ELECTION: Shan Party's success indicates abandonment of tactical voting that brought NLD to power
¹⁰ RFA (04 Apr 17) Interview: 'We Need More Preparation for Future Elections'
¹¹ RFA (03 Apr 17) Ethnic Political Party Sweeps By-elections in Myanmar's Restive Shan State
¹² DVB (06 Apr 17) NLD losing support, says USDP
¹³ The Irrawaddy (31 Mar 17) State Counselor Pledges to Try Harder to Earn Public's Support and Trust; The Irrawaddy (10 Apr 17) USDP Protest Over NLD Party Message in State Counselor's Speech
¹⁴ The Irrawaddy (10 Apr 17) USDP Protest Over NLD Party Message in State Counselor's Speech

prohibiting ministers from taking part in party activities during their term in office. Aung San Suu Kyi is foreign minister. President's Office spokesperson Zaw Htay said that Aung San Suu Kyi only wanted to give the people an overview of what the government did over the past year.¹⁵

The political parties also accused the NLD of breaking election regulations after two party leaders – NLD patron Thura Tin Oo and CEC member Win Htein – commented on the NLD-led government's performance on state media on 31 Mar, when campaigning was prohibited.¹⁶

HUMAN RIGHTS

Govt denies ethnic cleansing, Burma is declared 3rd highest at risk of mass killings

On 5 Apr, during a televised interview with BBC, Aung San Suu Kyi acknowledged problems in Arakan/Rakhine State, but said that ethnic cleansing was “too strong an expression to use for what is happening” to the Rohingya minority. She said that it was not a matter of ethnic cleansing, but “a matter of people on different sides of the divide”, and she denied that the Tatmadaw was free to rape and torture. Speaking of Rohingya who fled Burma/Myanmar due to violence in Arakan State [See *October Bulletin*], Aung San Suu Kyi said that the country would welcome any returnees with open arms.¹⁷

On 11 Apr, speaking at the National Peace and Reconciliation Centre in Rangoon/Yangon, National Security Advisor Thaug Tun claimed that a UN Human Rights Council resolution was “less than constructive” because it allegedly did not reflect the situation on the ground and did not consider the government's efforts to comply with the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State [See *March Bulletin*]. Thaug Tun denied that the treatment of the Rohingya minority amounted to ethnic cleansing and encouraged refugees to return to Burma. He also declared that humanitarian aid access had opened up and that authorities were addressing the issue of Rohingya statelessness.¹⁸

However, on 12 Apr, the Early Warning Project identified Burma as the 3rd most at risk country of “onset of a new episode of state-led mass killing”.¹⁹ The report explained that the country was already experiencing state-led mass killing, and there was a significant risk of a new distinct episode occurring. For the 3rd year in a row, Burma made it to the top 3, along with Sudan and Yemen, ahead of Nigeria, Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali and Pakistan.²⁰

Govt press tour reveals more rape, and another witness is killed

A 3-day press tour organized by the Ministry of Information (MOI) to Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships in Arakan State exposed more cases of rape by the armed forces and the fatal lack of witness protection.²¹ On 30 Mar, 3 Rohingya women from Kya Kaung Taung village, Maungdaw Township, told the journalists that they were raped by the Tatmadaw. Fatma and Moria, two sisters aged 16 and 20, declared that Tatmadaw soldiers beat, tortured, and raped them 2 months earlier, along with a 30-year-old woman named Ujala. Moria said that soldiers raped her despite the fact that she was pregnant. All women said that they were reluctant to file a complaint.²² On 31 Mar, police Brig Gen San Lwin from Border Guard Police Force said that there were 18 cases of rape and murder by security forces under investigation in Maungdaw Township.²³

¹⁵ Myanmar Times (11 Apr 17) Parties accuse State Counsellor, NLD of violations

¹⁶ Myanmar Times (11 Apr 17) Parties accuse State Counsellor, NLD of violations; The Irrawaddy (10 Apr 17) USDP Protest Over NLD Party Message in State Counsellor's Speech

¹⁶ Myanmar Times (11 Apr 17) Parties accuse State Counsellor, NLD of violations

¹⁷ BBC (06 Apr 17) Aung San Suu Kyi: No ethnic cleansing of Myanmar Muslim minority

¹⁸ RFA (11 Apr 17) Myanmar government official says UN resolution on Rakhine 'less than constructive'; DVB (11 Apr 17) Security adviser swats away criticism of Arakan operations

¹⁹ Early Warning Project (12 Apr 17) Countries Most Likely to Experience State-Led Mass-Killing: Statistical Risk Assessment 2016

²⁰ Early Warning Project (12 Apr 17) Countries Most Likely to Experience State-Led Mass-Killing: Statistical Risk Assessment 2016; Asian Correspondent (14 Apr 17) Burma ranked third as global risk of genocide reaches 10-year high

²¹ The Irrawaddy (31 Mar 17) Three women in Maungdaw allege rape by Burma army soldiers; The Irrawaddy (02 Apr 17) Man Killed in Buthidaung After Talking to Journalists

²² The Irrawaddy (31 Mar 17) Three women in Maungdaw allege rape by Burma army soldiers

²³ The Irrawaddy (31 Mar 17) Three women in Maungdaw allege rape by Burma army soldiers

On 2 Apr, media reported that Hamid Dullah, a Rohingya man from Tinn May village, Buthidaung Township, was found dead 2 days after being interviewed by journalists on the same press tour. Maungdaw district administrator Ye Htut warned that those who talked to media were targeted. Myanmar Journalist Network (MJN) general secretary Myint Kyaw urged the government to prevent state media from publishing sensitive images and personal information of interviewees and detainees.²⁴

On 6 Apr, Time magazine reported how Tatmadaw soldiers killed 13-year-old Ali Ayaz and 20-year-old Ali Muhammed in Myo Thu Gyi village, Maungdaw Township, during the first day of the security crackdown [See *October Bulletin*].²⁵ On 25 Apr, Reuters reported how, after unsuccessfully pressuring villagers for a month to hand over the rebels, the Tatmadaw used helicopter gunships to fire upon Dar Gyi Zar and Yae Khat Chaung Gwa Son villages on 12-13 Nov, killing dozens of people.²⁶

In a related development, on 31 Mar, Ata Ullah – identified as the leader of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation insurgency group – said that they will fight until the government takes action to protect the Rohingya minority.²⁷

In April, two cases of intimidation targeting Muslims were recorded:

17 Apr: During the celebration of Burmese New Year, some monks from the extremist Union of Nationalist Monks seized properties of a Muslim vendor and expelled him from the public market near the Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon, claiming that Muslims had no right to do business around Buddhist sacred places. Media reported that at least 3 other Muslims faced the same criminal intimidation and a Muslim man was beaten by the monks.²⁸

28 Apr: Authorities closed 2 Muslim schools in Rangoon following protests by ultra-nationalist monks. Protestors claimed that the 2 buildings were built illegally and were used as religious centers, without official permission.²⁹

Telecommunications Law: More developments

On 7 Apr, the Kamaryut Township Court, Rangoon/Yangon, sentenced National League for Democracy (NLD) researcher Myo Yan Naung Thein to 6 months in detention under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for criticizing Tatmadaw commander-in-chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing on social media.³⁰ Myo Yan Naung Thein has been in jail since 3 Nov 2016 [See *November Bulletin*]. On 12 Apr, the researcher was freed as part of an amnesty for around 1,800 prisoners who had almost completed their jail terms. Myo Yan Naung Thein declared that he would work to have Article 66(d) amended.³¹

On 10 Apr, the Ministry of Transport and Communications said that it was holding intra-ministry discussions to amend Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.³² Eight people have been jailed under the Telecommunications Law since the National League for Democracy (NLD) took office. As of 8 Apr, there have been 54 cases filed, with 6 defendants currently being denied bail and facing trial in custody because of the law.³³

Legal experts argued that the law should be amended because there is no bail granted to the defendants, a third party can sue on behalf of the person defamed, and its provisions are technically vague.³⁴

²⁴ The Irrawaddy (02 Apr 17) Man Killed in Buthidaung After Talking to Journalists

²⁵ Time (06 Apr 17) Rohingya Villagers Bear Witness to a Brutal Crackdown in Myanmar

²⁶ Reuters (25 Apr 17) Special Report - How a two-week army crackdown reignited Myanmar's Rohingya crisis

²⁷ Reuters (31 Mar 17) Exclusive – Rohingya rebel leader challenges Myanmar's Suu Kyi, vows to fight on

²⁸ M-Media (17 Apr 17) In Myanmar, some Buddhist monks behave like gang stars against Muslims

²⁹ Fox News (28 Apr 17) Yangon protesters force closure of Muslim schools in Myanmar; Myanmar Times (01 May 17) Two Arabic schools temporarily shut down by authorities

³⁰ RFA 907 Apr 17) Myanmar Ruling Party Researcher Jailed For Insulting Military Chief

³¹ RFA (12 Apr 17) Jailed Myanmar ruling party researcher freed during prison amnesty

³² The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) Communications Ministry Discusses Amending Article 66(d) of Telecommunications Law

³³ The Irrawaddy (08 Apr 17) Number Jailed Under Article 66(d) Rises to Eight Since NLD Govt

³⁴ The Irrawaddy (08 Apr 17) Number Jailed Under Article 66(d) Rises to Eight Since NLD Govt

However, on Apr 21, the Kyauktada Township Court, Rangoon, rejected a defamation charge against Myanmar Now's chief editor Swe Win on the ground that the lawsuit had not been directly filed by the aggrieved party.³⁵ On 28 Feb, Swe Win reported that senior monks thought that Wirathu's gratitude to Ko Ni's assassins was an "unforgivable offence in the monastic practice" [See *March Bulletin*]. In March, Thet Myo Oo – follower of the nationalist Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (Ma Ba Tha) – filed the case, accusing Swe Win of defaming monk Wirathu and insulting Buddhism on social media. The judge decided that the complaint had to be submitted by Wirathu himself to be valid, and that Swe Win's comment had not harmed the religion. However, the journalist continued to face defamation charges in Mandalay Division, where another Ma Ba Tha follower – Kyaw Myo Shwe – sued him in relation to the same comment.³⁶

In a related development, on 5 Apr, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, which had no legal jurisdiction, released a statement rejecting the charges brought against journalist Swe Win. The Ministry said that Swe Win was not guilty of defaming Wirathu because the journalist was just doing his job by reporting the news, and was not guilty of insulting Buddhism because his criticism of the event was based on facts.³⁷ Opposition parties and the Ma Ba Tha condemned the Ministry's position.³⁸

Ko Ni's assassination case: Updates

On 7 Apr, Yangon North District Court, Insein Township, continued hearing the trial against the 4 accused in Ko Ni's assassination [See *January Bulletin*]. The Court started examining witnesses and the Prosecutor applied for an additional arrest warrant against Aung Win Khaing, the alleged mastermind [See *February Bulletin*].³⁹ On 28 Apr, media reported that the lawyer of Ko Ni's family requested that the judge issue an additional arrest warrant in Naypyidaw for fugitive Aung Win Khaing.⁴⁰

On 10 Apr, chief of police Maj Gen Zaw Win said police would go "to the ends of the earth" to find Aung Win Khaing.⁴¹ The Burma Police Force alerted INTERPOL which issued a 'Red Notice' – a request to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition – on this suspect.⁴²

Other developments:

5 Apr: Media reported that the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC) opened an official inquiry for human rights violations into the Thai-owned Heinda tin mine in Burma's Tanintharyi region.⁴³

10 Apr: The Mrauk U police arrested a monk of Mratazaung monastery for organizing a football match – titled "Arakan Army Cup" – and a literary talk on the 8th anniversary of the establishment of the Arakan Army (AA). The monk was charged under Article 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act and was sent to prison in Sittwe.⁴⁴

16 Apr: Wai Yan Heinn, publisher and editor of Iron Rose weekly newspaper, was found stabbed to death in his Rangoon office.⁴⁵ Observers it was in retaliation of his critical coverage of the military, political and business establishment.⁴⁶ On 21 Apr, media reported that the police arrested 2 suspects in the murder and said the publisher was killed for allegedly having an affair with a married woman.⁴⁷

³⁵ The Irrawaddy (21 Apr 17) Rangoon Judge Throws Out Defamation Case Against Journalist; Eleven Media (22 Apr 17) Courts rejects Buddhist complaint against journalist

³⁶ The Irrawaddy (21 Apr 17) Rangoon Judge Throws Out Defamation Case Against Journalist

³⁷ RFA (05 Apr 17) Myanmar's Ministry of Religious Affairs Backs Journalist Facing Defamation, Religious Insult Lawsuit

³⁸ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) Opposition Parties, Nationalist Group Denounce Ministry's Defense of Journalist

³⁹ Eleven Media (08 Apr 17) Court examines witness in Ko Ni case

⁴⁰ The Irrawaddy (28 Apr 17) Lawyer in U Ko Ni Murder Calls for Naypyidaw Arrest Warrant in Search for Fugitive

⁴¹ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) Burma Police Chief: We Will Go to the Ends of the Earth to Find Aung Win Khaing

⁴² GNLM (09 Apr 17) INTERPOL Red Notice on suspect Aung Win Khaing; DVB (11 Apr 17) Search continues for fugitive in Ko Ni killing as Interpol wades in

⁴³ Channel News Asia (05 Apr 17) Thai-owned mine in Myanmar investigated for human rights violations

⁴⁴ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) Monk Arrested for Organizing 'Arakan Army Cup' Football Tournament

⁴⁵ The Irrawaddy (19 Apr 17) Police Hunt for Killer of Publisher Who Criticized Former Regime

⁴⁶ Reuters (18 Apr 17) Myanmar publisher who criticized establishment is found stabbed to death

⁴⁷ RFA (21 Apr 17) Myanmar Police Arrest Married Couple in Murder of Yangon Publisher; The Irrawaddy (21 Apr 17) Police: Ship officer killed publisher over affair with wife

19 Apr: A landmine exploded in a farm near the Tatmadaw camp in Mansi Township, Bhamo District, Kachin State, killing 9-year old Htu Tawng and injuring her 2 sisters, Ji Pan and Seng Pan.⁴⁸

21 Apr: To commemorate the 3rd anniversary of the death of former political prisoner and leading activist Win Tin, national and international non-governmental organizations called for the immediate release of all individuals detained or imprisoned on politically motivated charges.⁴⁹ The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said that there were 178 political prisoners in Burma's jails for demanding human rights, criticizing the military or government, or allegedly having links to outlawed armed groups.⁵⁰

24 Apr: Nawngcho Township court sentenced 10 farmers to 16 months' imprisonment for refusing to vacate lands in Nan Lin Kham village, northern Shan State, that were seized in 2013 to start a state-owned coffee plantation project. Activist Myo Win said that they would file an appeal.⁵¹

26 Apr: The police arrested 4 college students outside the Department of Higher Education in Mandalay, for protesting against draconian rules, such as not allowing mobile phones on campus and strict timetables, at Sagaing Teacher Training College. The students urged the college to respect freedom and human rights, to practice democracy, and to stop oppressing students.⁵²

26 Apr: the World Press Freedom Index ranked Burma 131st out of 180 countries surveyed, while Thailand was ranked 142nd. In 2016, Burma was ranked 143rd and Thailand was ranked 136th. The media reported that Burma's step up "may be reflective not of improvement as much as the country's relative position on a global map that looks 'ever darker' where press freedom is concerned".⁵³

MILITARY

Tatmadaw chief Min Aung Hlaing heads goodwill visit to Germany and Austria

On 23 Apr, a delegation led by Tatmadaw commander-in-chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing enjoyed red carpet treatment during a goodwill visit to Austria and Germany. They met with the Chief of Defense Staff of Austrian Armed Forces, and the Chief of Defense of the German Armed Forces Gen Volker Weiker.⁵⁴ Burma Campaign UK reported that Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing was given gifts, taken sightseeing, invited to special dinners and even taken to the factory of a supplier of military aircraft while he was in Austria. Austria also offered military training to the Tatmadaw.⁵⁵

Burma Campaign UK Director Mark Farmaner said that "[b]eing given red carpet treatment like this will encourage Min Aung Hlaing to continue to believe he and his soldiers can continue to violate international law without facing any consequences."

Former Tatmadaw official visits North Korea

On 19 Apr, media reported on a leaked document recording the trip of former Tatmadaw chief of general staff Gen Thura Shwe Mann to Pyongyang, North Korea, from 21 to 29 Nov, before heading to China. The leaked document stated that the trip's purpose was to study the military in North Korea and China. Gen Shwe Mann and his North Korean counterpart Gen Kim Kyok Sik also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), the contents of which were never verified.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Kachin News Group (24 Apr 17) Child killed, two girls injured in Kachin landmine blast

⁴⁹ Relief Web (20 Apr 17) Myanmar: Establish an independent prisoner review mechanism to end politically motivated imprisonment – Report; DVB (20 Apr 17) Blue shirt campaign calls for release of all political prisoners

⁵⁰ The Irrawaddy (20 Apr 17) Blue shirt campaign demands release of political prisoners; DVB (20 Apr 17) Blue shirt campaign calls for release of all political prisoners

⁵¹ Myanmar Times (27 Apr 17) Farmers facing jail time to file appeal

⁵² The Irrawaddy (26 Apr 17) Police arrest student protestors in Mandalay

⁵³ DVB (26 Apr 17) Despite tough 2016, Burma rises in global media freedom rankings

⁵⁴ The Irrawaddy (24 Apr 17) Burmese Military Delegation Continues European Goodwill Visit

⁵⁵ Burma Campaign UK (25 Apr 17) Germany & Austria Host War Criminal Min Aung Hlaing

⁵⁶ The Irrawaddy (19 Apr 17) From Foes to Friends: Military Trip Rekindles Burma-North Korean Relations

KNU holds elections, divisions more obvious

On 7 Apr, Karen National Union (KNU) held its elections at the organization's 16th Congress. Former chairperson Mutu Say Poe was re-elected to the post; former general secretary Kwe Htoo Win was elected as vice chairman; former Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Ta Doh Moo was elected as general secretary.⁵⁷ KNU did not re-elect other experienced leaders, including former vice chairperson Zipporah Sein, former joint secretaries Mahn Mahn and Thaw Thee Bwe, and Gen Baw Kyaw Heh, vice chief-of-staff of the Karen National Liberation Army (the KNU's armed wing).⁵⁸

The election results showed divisions within KNU that emerged in 2012 when chairperson Mutu Say Poe signed a ceasefire agreement with the Thein Sein administration. Vice chairperson Zipporah Sein led an attempt to dismiss Mutu Say Poe, creating camps described as "KNU A" and "KNU B".⁵⁹

UNFC: Panghsang attendees form new committee, DPN meets Peace Commission

In Apr, the United Nationalities Federation Council's (UNFC) internal disagreement on the peace process continued: The New Mon State Party and the Karenni National Progressive Party wanted to negotiate peace in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), while the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) wanted a new path to peace in line with the Panghsang Pact [See *March Bulletin*].⁶⁰

On 15-19 Apr, KIO and SSPP attended a 2nd meeting of 7 ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in Panghsang. The 7 EAOs reiterated that they were prepared to engage in political dialogue with the government, but did not agree with the current NCA framework.⁶¹ Representatives from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Arakan Army (AA) also attended.⁶²

On 20 Apr, the 7 EAOs formed a new political negotiation committee — to be known as the "Union Political Negotiating Dialogue Committee" — which will represent them in talks with the government. The committee said that its members will not talk to the government individually.⁶³

On 28-29 Apr, the UNFC's Delegation of Political Negotiation (DPN) met the Peace Commission in Chiang Mai, Thailand. They discussed the UNFC's 9-point proposal and said that they would meet again in May to continue negotiations before the second 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference.⁶⁴

Other NCA updates:

8-9 Apr: Fourteen EAOs met in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and agreed upon 8 basic federal principles: sovereignty; self-determination; establishment of a genuine federal union; protection of ethnic rights, democratic rights and basic human rights; gender equality; multi-party democratic system; and secularism.⁶⁵ The EAOs – both signatories and non-signatory to the NCA – called for all EAOs to have equal and dignified status in the second 21st Century Panglong Conference.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ The Irrawaddy (07 Apr 17) KNU Leadership Committee Shakeup: Chairperson Wins, Vice Chairperson Loses Re-Election; The Irrawaddy (08 Apr 17) KNU Leaders Close to Naypyidaw Re-elected

⁵⁸ The Irrawaddy (08 Apr 17) KNU Leaders Close to Naypyidaw Re-elected

⁵⁹ The Irrawaddy (20 Apr 17) How the KNU's 'hardliners' tried and failed to win the election

⁶⁰ Frontier Myanmar (06 Apr 17) UNFC splits as peace process falters

⁶¹ DVB (21 Apr 17) NCA is not working, say northern ethnic armies; Frontier Myanmar (DATE) UNFC splits as peace process falters

⁶² DVB (21 Apr 17) NCA is not working, say northern ethnic armies

⁶³ DVB (21 Apr 17) NCA is not working, say northern ethnic armies

⁶⁴ Myanmar Times (02 May 17) Peace Commission, DPN to meet again before May 24

⁶⁵ The Irrawaddy (10 Apr 17) Ethnic Armed Group Leaders Agree to Basic Federal Principles; Myanmar Times (11 Apr 17) Armed groups call for equality at peace summit

⁶⁶ Myanmar Times (11 Apr 17) Armed groups call for equality at peace summit

23-25 Apr: Regional-based national-level political discussions took place in Taunggyi, Shan State.⁶⁷ Representatives from political parties, self-administered regions and zones submitted papers that would be sent through the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) to the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference for discussion.⁶⁸ However, authorities did not permit Shan representatives to hold preliminary ethnic-based talks, a decision that was strongly criticized by the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS).⁶⁹

24 Apr: The Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) to review NCA peace activities took place in Naypyidaw between the government, Tatmadaw officials, and the EAOs signatory to the NCA. They agreed to start the second 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference on 24 May.⁷⁰ EAOs' leaders warned that the peace process course had derailed in some aspects and would require a review of the NCA implementation.⁷¹

Other key developments:

5 Apr: Tatmadaw's LIB No. 246 clashed with Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), the armed wing of the NCA signatory Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) in Panglong, southern Shan State. There were no casualties or injuries reported.⁷²

8 Apr: The police broke into the liaison office of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Lashio, northeastern Shan State.⁷³ Police arrested and detained UWSA liaison office deputy economic coordinator Ah Hong — also known as Tun Tun Aung — and reportedly seized thousands of detonators and ammunition following the search. The UWSA condemned the “unlawful action of the police” and demanded an apology. President's Office spokesperson Zaw Htay said that UWSA's allegations were not true and that the police lawfully acted with search warrants.⁷⁴

21 Apr: The Tatmadaw seized 2 outposts from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) near the border with China. The Tatmadaw said that it seized an arsenal, including RPG launchers, rifles, ammunitions and hand grenades.⁷⁵

DISPLACEMENT

Refugee and IDP crisis in Arakan State

On 6 Apr, Bangladesh Border Guard Additional Director General Anisur Rahman said that border agencies of Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar agreed to close the borders between the 2 countries if there was a repeat of the recent Rohingya refugee crisis.⁷⁶ On 23 Apr, China offered to help solve the diplomatic row between Burma and Bangladesh over the influx of Rohingya refugees.⁷⁷ On 26 Apr, President's Office spokesperson Zaw Htay said that the Burmese government would not accept China's offer, but would collaborate with Bangladesh in addressing the refugee crisis.⁷⁸

On 11 Apr, National Security Advisor Thaug Tun said that the government started closing 3 long-term displacement camps in Sittwe, Kyauk Phyu and Rambree townships, Arakan/Rakhine State. He did not give details of where the internally displaced persons (IDPs) would be moved to.⁷⁹

⁶⁷ The Irrawaddy (21 Apr 17) Shan State regional dialogue to proceed, but ethnic dialogue stalled

⁶⁸ GNLM (25 Apr 17) Third day of National Level Political Dialogue for Shan State

⁶⁹ RFA (20 Apr 17) Myanmar Allows Regional-Level Political Talks to be Held in Volatile Shan State; The Irrawaddy (21 Apr 17) Shan State regional dialogue to proceed, but ethnic dialogue stalled

⁷⁰ RFA (24 Apr 17) Myanmar Military Won't Accept Revision of Peace Agreement: Deputy Commander-in-Chief; Myanmar Times (25 Apr 17) Second 21st-Century Panglong Conference to begin on May 24

⁷¹ Myanmar Times (25 Apr 17) Second 21st-Century Panglong Conference to begin on May 24

⁷² The Irrawaddy (06 Apr 17) RCSS/SSA-S Clashes with Burma Army

⁷³ DVB (10 Apr 17) UWSA warns of action after police raid Lashio office; The Irrawaddy (12 Apr 17) Police Search UWSA Liaison Office, Seize Detonators

⁷⁴ The Irrawaddy (12 Apr 17) Police Search UWSA Liaison Office, Seize Detonators

⁷⁵ Eleven Media (23 Apr 17) Army occupies two MNDAA outposts

⁷⁶ Dhaka Tribune (07 Apr 17) Bangladesh and Myanmar to seal border if Rohingya crisis recurs?

⁷⁷ Reuters (25 Apr 17) China ready to mediate between Myanmar, Bangladesh over Rohingya row

⁷⁸ The Irrawaddy (28 Apr 17) Burma Turns Down Chinese Assistance in Addressing Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh

⁷⁹ The Daily star (12 Apr 17) Myanmar closing 3 Rakhine camps

Meanwhile, some IDPs returned home and built temporary shelters in Arakan State, but authorities barred them from permanently rebuilding their homes citing "security restrictions". Instead, authorities devised a plan to resettle some 1,152 households in "camp-like" "model villages". On 25 Apr, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that "[a] forced relocation to the 'model villages' would not progress stabilisation" and would risk stocking tensions.⁸⁰

Malaysian Human Rights Commission issues report on immigration detention center

On 4 Apr, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) published its annual report, finding that 118 foreigners died in Malaysia's immigration detention centers in 2015 and 2016.⁸¹ SUHAKAM reported that most of the detainees lived in inhumane conditions and that the causes of death were mostly related to preventable and/or treatable diseases. It recommended improvements to hygiene and provision of adequate medical facilities at immigration detention centers.⁸²

More than half of the 118 dead were reportedly from Burma/Myanmar.⁸³ Fortify Rights called on the Malaysian government to investigate the deaths and the human trafficking of Rohingya.⁸⁴

HUMANITARIAN

OCHA's 'Burma Humanitarian Snapshot': Over 237,000 IDPs, restricted aid

On 20 Apr, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a humanitarian snapshot showing the surge in new displacement in Kachin, northern Shan, northern Arakan/Rakhine, and Karen/Kayin states [See *Reports*]. According to the OCHA report, humanitarian organizations had limited or restricted access in 21 townships in Kachin, northern Shan, and Arakan states. Over 237,000 persons were currently displaced due to intensified conflict in the 4 states, and 52% of them were women and girls.⁸⁵

Other developments:

18 Apr: Cyclone Maarutha hit the Irrawaddy Delta, killing 4 people and destroying about 60 houses.⁸⁶

24 Apr: Media reported that about 20 villages in Pindaya and Kalaw townships, Shan State, were facing water shortages.⁸⁷

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

NLD MP slaps his constituent; video goes viral

A video of National League for Democracy (NLD) MP from Tenasserim/Tanintharyi Division, Ye Myint, slapping one of his constituents during a village meeting went viral on Facebook on 22 Apr.⁸⁸ The incident happened on 8 Apr during the MP's inspection of a new school building in Pawa village, when villagers complained about the building's workmanship. A man identified as Tun Hla kept yelling even after the MP told him not to interrupt. The MP then walked up to him and slapped him on the face. The video received over a million views on social media.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Reuters (27 Apr 17) Exclusive - U.N. criticises Myanmar plan to resettle Rohingya in "camp-like" villages

⁸¹ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (04 Apr 17) Public Release of Annual Report; Fortify Rights (04 Apr 17) Malaysia: Investigate Human Trafficking and Deaths in Immigration Detention Centers

⁸² HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (04 Apr 17) Annual Report 2016

⁸³ Reuters (30 Mar 17) Exclusive: More than 100 die in Malaysian immigration detention camps in two years

⁸⁴ Fortify Rights (04 Apr 17) Malaysia: Investigate Human Trafficking and Deaths in Immigration Detention Centers

⁸⁵ Relief Web (20 Apr 17) Myanmar: Humanitarian Snapshot (20 April 2017)

⁸⁶ DVB (18 Apr 17) 4 killed as Cyclone Maarutha hits Irrawaddy Delta

⁸⁷ Myanmar Times (24 Apr 17) Water shortage hits 20 Shan villages

⁸⁸ DVB (24 Apr 17) 'Slapstick' NLD MP video viewed over 1m times on Internet; The Irrawaddy (24 Apr 17) NLD Spokesperson Reminds Lawmakers to Act 'With Dignity' Following a Recent Incident

⁸⁹ DVB (24 Apr 17) 'Slapstick' NLD MP video viewed over 1m times on Internet

On 24 Apr, the MP publicly apologized to Tun Hla at a press conference in Pawa. The NLD in Tenasserim Division said that they would investigate the incident and would act according to the instructions from the NLD's headquarters in Rangoon/Yangon.⁹⁰

Other developments:

19 Apr: President Htin Kyaw appointed Aung Htoo, former ambassador to Indonesia, as the deputy minister of commerce.⁹¹

26 Apr: Burma's police chief Maj Gen Zaw Win announced his retirement and said that he would step down next month. There is no information on who will succeed him.⁹²

PARLIAMENT WATCH

Important developments:

1 Apr: The Ministry of National Planning and Finance officially released the Burma/Myanmar language version of the country's investment by-law on the DICA website.⁹³

3 Apr: Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Aung Ko said that State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi was adding provisions to the fourth draft of the law criminalizing hate speech after receiving feedback and suggestions from the international community.⁹⁴

ECONOMY

Burma/Myanmar strengthens ties with China

On 6 Apr, Burma/Myanmar's President Htin Kyaw left Naypyidaw for a 6-day state visit to China where he met with China's President Xi Jinping and PM Li Keqiang.⁹⁵ Burma and China signed an agreement on a partially-completed crude oil pipeline between the two countries.⁹⁶ The crude oil pipeline is expected to begin operation in May after a two-year delay.⁹⁷ The oil pipeline which is part of China's "One Belt, One Road" ambitions, will link it to central Asia and Europe, and would provide a more direct alternative route for transporting Middle Eastern oil.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, China shifted its position over the Myitsone dam and signaled its willingness to abandon the notorious project in exchange for other economic and strategic opportunities in Burma. China was reportedly discussing alternative options with Burma, including a number of smaller hydropower projects and securing preferential access to the deep sea port of Kyauk Phyu on the Bay of Bengal as compensation for shelving the mega dam project.⁹⁹

The two countries also signed 9 cooperative agreements on areas spanning public health, sports, and transportation.¹⁰⁰ They agreed to work together to better manage security in northern Burma.¹⁰¹

On 25 Apr, Wang Yajun — the assistant minister of the international department of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) central committee — together with a regional official from the Chinese CITIC

⁹⁰ DVB (25 Apr 17) Myeik MP apologises for slapping his constituent

⁹¹ The Irrawaddy (20 Apr 17) Burma President Appoints New Deputy Minister of Commerce

⁹² The Irrawaddy (27 Apr 17) Burma's Police Chief Retires

⁹³ The Irrawaddy (04 Apr 17) Govt to Announce Foreign Investment Details

⁹⁴ The Irrawaddy (03 Apr 17) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi Alters Draft of Hate Speech Law

⁹⁵ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) China Says Accord Reached at Last With Burma on Oil Pipeline; Mizzima (07 Apr 17) Economic ties, border issues on agenda in Beijing for President Htin Kyaw

⁹⁶ Frontier Myanmar (11 Apr 17) China, Myanmar ink oil pipeline deal

⁹⁷ Myanmar Times (03 Apr 17) Myanmar-China crude oil pipeline to commence next month

⁹⁸ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) China Says Accord Reached at Last With Burma on Oil Pipeline

⁹⁹ Reuters (06 Apr 17) China may scrap divisive dam in Myanmar to advance other interests - sources

¹⁰⁰ Myanmar Times (03 Apr 17) Myanmar-China crude oil pipeline to commence next month

¹⁰¹ The Irrawaddy (11 Apr 17) China Says Accord Reached at Last With Burma on Oil Pipeline

investment conglomerate and several diplomats, held talks with local authorities and business people during a trip to Arakan/Rakhine State's Kyaukphyu Township. Wang Yajun said that China aims for the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to be up and running as soon as possible. Kyaukphyu Rural Development Association coordinator Tun Kyi criticized the meeting for its lack of transparency. Tun Kyi added that until the SEZ more clearly addresses rates for farmland compensation, "there will be no advantages for locals if the government proceeds with the project with the [current] SEZ laws."¹⁰²

The Chinese delegates led by CITIC chairman Chang Zhenming also met with Burma's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi the week before and discussed their joint venture projects in Burma's energy and transportation sectors, including the Kyaukphyu deep sea port.¹⁰³

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Important developments:

19 Apr: Media reported a leaked document about the trip of the former Tatmadaw chief of general staff Thura Shwe Mann to Pyongyang, North Korea [See *Military*].

23 Apr: A military delegation led by Tatmadaw commander-in-chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing to Austria and Germany enjoyed red carpet treatment and controversy.[See *Military*]

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¹⁰² The Irrawaddy (25 Apr 17) Chinese Officials Push for Kyaukphyu SEZ to Move Forward

¹⁰³ The Irrawaddy (25 Apr 17) Chinese Officials Push for Kyaukphyu SEZ to Move Forward