

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



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

Issue 125

May 2017

- Burma holds the second round of the 21st Century Panglong Conference to secure peace; stakeholders agree on 37 out of 41 basic federal principles, however a deadlock emerges over 'non-secession' principle.

- Several non-signatories to the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement are invited as 'special guests' to the conference. UNFC boycotts on the principle that all ethnic groups must be treated equally, but 2 members join the meeting anyway.

- Ahead of the peace conference, fighting between the Tatmadaw and ethnic groups, mainly in Kachin and Shan states, results in civilian deaths and displacement. The Tatmadaw is accused of torturing and killing 3 Kachin men.

- Video showing Tatmadaw's violence and abuses against civilians in Shan State goes viral on social media; authorities say they will investigate.

- Aung San Suu Kyi visits Europe and faces criticism over ongoing human rights violations and rejection of UN fact-finding mission.

- The Turkish director of a Rangoon international school is deported despite risks he might face upon his return to his country.

- NLD dismisses rumors that President Htin Kyaw is resigning and threatens legal action against those who spread such rumors.

- Union Election Commission rejects a complaint lodged by 13 political parties against the NLD over the April by-election.

- The Attorney General's Office reviews a proposal to amend the Telecommunications law before it is submitted to parliament.

- China National Petroleum Corp. starts loading crude oil through its Burma-China pipeline; affected residents still uncompensated.

- The Rangoon screening of Global Witness' new film showing the Tatmadaw's role in jade trade is canceled despite a favorable advanced screening in Naypyidaw.

- Cyclone Mora destroys over 2,000 houses; no reports, to date, inform about government efforts to aid affected IDPs.

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KEY STORY: SECOND 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE

The second 21st Century Panglong Conference took place in Naypyidaw during 24-29 May. Some 700 representatives from the government, political parties, Tatmadaw, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that signed the ‘Nationwide’ Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) discussed the basic principles for building a future federal state.¹ The Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) noted an increase in women participants at 20%, although it did not reach the minimum target of 30%.²

The political dialogue covered 5 sectors: political, security, economic, social, and natural resources. The political sector outlined 21 principles related to sovereignty, equality, self-determination, and federalism. The security sector had only 1 topic: The existence of a ‘sole’ Tatmadaw and the fate of armed groups.³ The discussions faced a deadlock over the principle of ‘non-secession’ from the country, demanded by the Tatmadaw.⁴ EAOs said this conflicted with the spirit of the 1947 Panglong agreement, which was based on the free cooperation between ethnic groups and the then Interim Burmese Government to achieve independence,⁵ hence the 1948 Union of Burma Constitution provision: “... every State shall have the right to secede from the Union”.⁶

On 29 May, participants signed part 1 of the Union Accord, meant to reach further agreements on the basis of the NCA. It covered 37 out of 41 basic federal principles that were agreed upon on political, economic, social, and natural resources sectors.⁷ State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi said that the stakeholders’ agreements marked a ‘significant step’ towards future democratic federalism.⁸

On 20 May, President Htin Kyaw released 186 Burmese nationals and 73 foreigners from jail as part of an amnesty that included activists, a move that media described as a “celebration” of the Conference.⁹ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners noted that only 10 political prisoners were freed.¹⁰

NCA non-signatories allowed

The government invited all the 7 members of the Panghsang bloc [see *February Bulletin*] as ‘special guests’, i.e. they were allowed to submit papers, but not speak in the sessions.¹¹ The Panghsang bloc –

THE 2ND 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE	
Positives	Negatives
	Attacks escalated in Kachin & Shan ahead of Conference, incl airstrikes & daily shelling. More civilian deaths & displacement.
The 700 reps agreed on 37 out of 41 basic principles, signed part 1 of the Union Accord.	Deadlock persisted over principle of "non-secession" and 'sole' army → key factors in armed conflict.
The Panghsang bloc* aka FPNCC - UWSP/UWSA, KIO/KIA, PSC/NDAA, SSPP/SSA-N, PSLF/TNLA, ULA/AA & MNTJP/MNDAA - admitted as "special guests"/ observers, had meetings with Peace Commission & Aung San Suu Kyi. (*Wa, Kachin, Mongla, Shan, Ta'ang, Arakan & Kokang).+	The UNFC - formally comprising NMSP/MNLA, KNPP/KA, WNO/WNA, LDU, ANC, KIO/KIA, SSPP/SSA-N - boycotted on principle that all EAOs should have equal rights in the peace dialogue. (*Mon, Karenni, Wa, Lahu Arakan, Kachin & Shan).+
259 prisoners released to "celebrate" conference.	Only 10 were political prisoners.
More women were included.	Women representation at 20%, lower than 30% target.
+ KIO/KIA and SSPP/SSA-N were members of the UNFC but joined the peace conference under FPNCC. KIO/KIA has previously submitted its resignation to UNFC.	

¹ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) State Counselor: Peace Conference Agreements ‘A Significant Step’ for Burma

² The Irrawaddy (30 May 17) Gender Alliance Reports 20 Percent Women’s Participation in Peace Conference

³ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Security and Political Sector Discussions in Deadlock at Peace Conference: Delegates

⁴ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Security and Political Sector Discussions in Deadlock at Peace Conference: Delegates; The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) State Counselor: Peace Conference Agreements ‘A Significant Step’ for Burma

⁵ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Security and Political Sector Discussions in Deadlock at Peace Conference: Delegates

⁶ The Constitution of the Union of Burma, 1948, Chapter X.

⁷ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) State Counselor: Peace Conference Agreements ‘A Significant Step’ for Burma

⁸ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) State Counselor: Peace Conference Agreements ‘A Significant Step’ for Burma

⁹ RFA (24 May 17) Myanmar Government Opens Second Session of Key Peace Talks

¹⁰ Frontier Myanmar (24 May 17) Interfaith activists among released convicts in prisoner amnesty

known as the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) – includes the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSP/UWSA), Kachin Independent Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA), Peace and Solidarity Committee/National Democratic Alliance Army (PSC/NDAA), Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N), Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), and Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party/Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNTJP/MNDAA). It recently rejected the NCA and formed a new committee to handle peace negotiations [see *April Bulletin*]. The FPNCC accepted the invitation,¹² considering the new status an upgrade in their participatory rights. This happened after China brokered negotiation between the FPNCC members and the Burmese government.¹³

On 24 May, the opening dinner of the Peace Conference in Naypyidaw featured EAOs from the Panghsang bloc, but it was Aung San Suu Kyi's jade necklace that attracted the most attention.¹⁴ On 25 May, the Peace Commission had a closed-door trust-building meeting with the FPNCC. On 26 May, Aung San Suu Kyi met with the 7 FPNCC members in 2 sessions on the side-lines of the formal peace conference.¹⁵ On 27 May, the FPNCC left the conference without reaching agreements, but accepted the idea of further dialogue.¹⁶

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) boycotted because its members were invited as 'special guests' instead of full participants, and demanded that all EAOs – signatory and non-signatory – have equal rights in the peace dialogue.¹⁷ Weeks earlier, the KIO/KIA and Wa National Organization/Wa National Army (WNO/WNA) submitted resignations to the UNFC,¹⁸ widening the internal divide which affected the coalition in the past months [see *April Bulletin*].

Outside the conference, fighting and human rights abuses continue

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups further escalated in the lead up to the second round of the 21st Century Panglong Conference. Ethnic leaders feared that the Tatmadaw created "war against peace to show that power is in their hands".¹⁹

27 Apr-9 May: After the Thingyan water festival, the Tatmadaw launched an offensive against the TNLA in Shan State. On 9 May, the TNLA reported 20 separate clashes with the Tatmadaw in 2 weeks.²⁰

1-7 May: Renewed clashes broke out between the TNLA and NCA signatory Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) in Mantone, Namhkam, Kyaukme and Hsipaw townships, Shan State.²¹

8-9 May: The Tatmadaw used artillery to shell a MNDAA base in the Kokang region, Shan State. The MNDAA said that clashes occurred on an almost daily basis in the area since 27 Apr.²²

14 May: Fighting between the Tatmadaw and KIA reignited after the Tatmadaw entered KIA-controlled areas in Kachin State. A Chinese logger was reportedly killed in a Tatmadaw airstrike.²³

19 May: Media reported that the Tatmadaw launched airstrikes in Kachin and Shan states. Residents of Maji Gung Kaba, Bum Ja and Jay Seng villages, Kachin State, fled their homes.²⁴

¹¹ United States Institute for Peace (26 May 17) Q&A: What's Next for Burma's National Dialogue

¹² The Irrawaddy (25 May 17) State Counselor Will Meet Northeastern Armed Group Delegation: Spokesperson

¹³ The Irrawaddy (25 May 17) State Counselor Will Meet Northeastern Armed Group Delegation: Spokesperson

¹⁴ The Irrawaddy (25 May 17) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Jade Necklace at Peace Dinner Raises Questions

¹⁵ The Irrawaddy (25 May 17) State Counselor Will Meet Northeastern Armed Group Delegation: Spokesperson

¹⁶ Mizzima (30 May 17) 7 non-ceasefire signatory armed groups leave peace conference without reaching agreements in Myanmar; United States Institute for Peace (26 May 17) Q&A: What's Next for Burma's National Dialogue

¹⁷ The Irrawaddy (23 May 17) Peace Parley: Northern Alliance Flies In, UNFC Stays Out

¹⁸ Mon News (09 May 17) Ethnic Alliance's Unity Undermined as Key Players Resign; Network Media Group (26 May 17) UNFC

to decide on KIO, WNO resignation next month

¹⁹ The Irrawaddy (09 May 17) Fighting Escalates in Northern Shan State as Peace Conference Looms

²⁰ The Irrawaddy (09 May 17) Fighting Escalates in Northern Shan State as Peace Conference Looms

²¹ Mizzima (09 May 17) SSPP urges TNLA and RCSS to find peaceful solution to end fighting

²² The Irrawaddy (09 May 17) Fighting Escalates in Northern Shan State as Peace Conference Looms

²³ The Irrawaddy (19 May 17) Burma Army Airstrikes Bombard Kachin, Shan States

19 May: The Tatmadaw clashed with KIA Battalion 6 in Hpakant Township, Kachin State.²⁵

21 May: More fighting between the TNLA and RCSS broke out in Kyaukse Township, Shan State, displacing around 100 villagers.²⁶

On 25 May, soldiers of Tatmadaw Battalion 319 arrested 3 Kachin civilians from Maihkawng internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, Mansi Township, Kachin State, while they were collecting firewood.²⁷ The families went to search for the missing relatives and found their bodies buried near the IDP camp. They had extensive head injuries, as well as knife and bullet wounds, leading to the conclusion that the Tatmadaw tortured and killed them.²⁸ Maihkawng IDP camp official Brang Nu said that the Tatmadaw was the only armed group moving in the area.²⁹ On 27 May, the Office of the Commander-in-Chief said that the Tatmadaw was investigating the crime.³⁰

On 27 May, a 17-minute video surfaced online that showed Tatmadaw members torturing 3 out of 6 handcuffed civilians accused of being members of the TNLA.³¹ In the video, Tatmadaw soldiers beat men, kicked them in the face, and held a machete to a man's throat.³² TNLA Brig Gen Tar Phone Kyaw said that the footage was from an incident in June 2015 in Kutkai Township, Shan State, where the Tatmadaw arrested TNLA members and tortured other villagers. On 28 May, the State Counsellor's Office said that it will investigate the violence.³³

HUMAN RIGHTS

Tatmadaw rejects UN report; UN prepares for fact-finding mission in Burma

On 23 May, the Tatmadaw rejected the allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya reported by the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) in February.³⁴ The OHCHR report documented cases of arson, torture, extrajudicial killing, and sexual violence against Rohingya in Arakan/Rakhine State. It found that the violence was 'unprecedented' and could amount to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity [see *February Bulletin*]. The Tatmadaw claimed that "[o]ut of 18 accusations included in OHCHR's report, 12 were found to be incorrect, with the remaining six found to be false and fabricated, based on lies and invented statements".³⁵ The denial was consistent with the Burmese authorities' rejection of the UN Human Rights Council resolution establishing a fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar [see *March Bulletin*].

On 26 May, civil society groups called on the government to fully cooperate with the UN mission to uphold human rights, foster the rule of law, and prevent further atrocities.³⁶ On 30 May, the UN appointed a trio of independent experts to investigate the allegations: Indira Jaising, an advocate of the Supreme Court of India, Radhika Coomaraswamy, a human rights lawyer from Sri Lanka, and Christopher Sidoti, an Australian human rights expert and former human rights commissioner.³⁷ In response, the Burmese government repeated that it would not accept the UN fact-finding mission.³⁸

²⁴ The Irrawaddy (19 May 17) Burma Army Airstrikes Bombard Kachin, Shan States

²⁵ The Irrawaddy (19 May 17) KIA Reports Clashes with Burma Army

²⁶ SHAN (24 May 17) More families displaced by TNLA, RCSS fighting

²⁷ The Irrawaddy (31 May 17) Burma Army Investigates Kachin State Deaths

²⁸ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) Burma Army Accused of Torturing, Killing Three Kachin Civilians

²⁹ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) Burma Army Accused of Torturing, Killing Three Kachin Civilians

³⁰ The Irrawaddy (31 May 17) Burma Army Investigates Kachin State Deaths

³¹ Reuters (27 May 17) Rights group calls on Myanmar to probe alleged military abuse after beating video emerges; The

Irrawaddy (31 May 17) State Counselor's Office to Probe Allegations of Army Abuse in Viral Video

³² The Irrawaddy (30 May 17) Viral video Renews Allegations of Burma Army Abuses

³³ The Irrawaddy (31 May 17) State Counselor's Office to Probe Allegations of Army Abuse in Viral Video

³⁴ Reuters (23 May 17) Myanmar Army rejects U.N. findings of abuses in Rohingya crackdown

³⁵ Reuters (23 May 17) Myanmar Army rejects U.N. findings of abuses in Rohingya crackdown

³⁶ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Civil Society Groups Urge Govt to Accept UN Fact-finding Mission

³⁷ Reuters & The Irrawaddy (30 May 17) UN Names Fact-Finding Mission Members

³⁸ The Irrawaddy (31 May 17) Govt Reiterates Rejection of UN Fact-Finding Mission

Aung San Suu Kyi visits Europe, faces critics

On 2 May, European Union (EU)'s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini clashed with visiting State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi over the UN-mandated fact-finding mission in Burma.³⁹ Federica Mogherini publicly supported the international mission at a news conference and said that the mission would help establish the truth. Aung San Suu Kyi replied that Burmese authorities dissociated themselves from the UN resolution because it did not reflect the situation on the ground.⁴⁰

On 8 May, Aung San Suu Kyi received the Freedom of the City of London award amid a 3-hour protest of activists and refugees. Demonstrators said that the recognition was disappointing in the light of ongoing human rights abuses in Burma. They called for the release of political prisoners, end of military violence, and an end to religious hate speech.⁴¹

Religious hate speech and violence still on the rise

Anti-Muslim incidents continued in Rangoon/Yangon [see *April Bulletin and Reports*]. On 9 May, a group of monks, Buddhist ultra-nationalists, police, and immigration officers raided a Muslim neighborhood in Mingala Taungnyunt Township, Rangoon, claiming that Rohingya were 'illegally' hiding in the area.⁴² Monk Thuseitta said that they found 'illegal' people and long swords in one apartment. The police later found that the accused were living in the building legally. A witness said that police and the monks had found nothing. Hla Htay, a regional lawmaker from the same neighborhood, confirmed that the police found nothing and said that "[b]ecause the officials didn't do anything, the monks got into an argument with them and created tension with the people from the neighborhood". Two residents were injured in the confrontation between the locals and the monks, and police fired warning shots in the air to disperse the crowd.⁴³ Former lawmaker Phyu Phyu Tin said that the monks and police overstepped their boundaries.⁴⁴

On 11 May, police arrested and charged 2 monks and 5 Buddhist ultra-nationalists over the confrontation.⁴⁵ On 15 May, police detained 2 more suspects. Threats of further violence against the neighborhood circulated on social media, increasing insecurity. The controversial Association for the Protection of Race and Religion – known as Ma Ba Tha – denied its involvement in this violence.⁴⁶

On 23 May, the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (Ma Ha Na) – the main Buddhist authority in Burma – ordered the Ma Ba Tha ultra-nationalist group to end all its activities, including the use of its name.⁴⁷ Previously, the Ma Ha Na banned Ma Ba Tha monk Wirathu from giving public sermons after the latter praised Ko Ni's assassins [see *March Bulletin*].

On 28 May, the ultra-nationalist group said that they would no longer use the name Ma Ba Tha, but would rebrand themselves as the Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation. Ma Ba Tha member Maung Thway Chon also declared that they would soon form a political party named '135 United Patriots'.⁴⁸ On 25 May, it was reported that Religious Affairs and Culture Minister Aung Ko asked for the cooperation of the Central Bank of Myanmar in tracing funds used for ultra-nationalist activities.⁴⁹

³⁹ Reuters (02 May 17) Myanmar, EU at odds over Rohingya rights mission

⁴⁰ Reuters (02 May 17) Myanmar, EU at odds over Rohingya rights mission

⁴¹ The Irrawaddy (08 May 17) Activists Protest Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's London 'Freedom' Award

⁴² RFA (10 May 17) Two Injured in Tussle Between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar's Yangon

⁴³ RFA (10 May 17) Two Injured in Tussle Between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar's Yangon

⁴⁴ RFA (10 May 17) Two Injured in Tussle Between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar's Yangon

⁴⁵ RFA (11 May 17) Myanmar Police Arrest Seven in Yangon Scuffle Between Buddhist Nationalists And Muslims

⁴⁶ RFA (16 May 17) Myanmar Ultrationalist Monk Group Denies Involvement in Yangon Scuffle

⁴⁷ RFA (23 May 17) Buddhist Authorities Ban Myanmar's Ultrationalist Ma Ba Tha Group; The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) Ma Ba Tha Lay Members Announce Plan to Form Political Party

⁴⁸ The Irrawaddy (29 May 17) Ma Ba Tha Lay Members Announce Plan to Form Political Party

⁴⁹ The Irrawaddy (25 May 17) Religion Minister Seeks Banks' Help to Track Nationalist Funds

Burma's notorious Telecommunications Law: More developments

10 May: Human Rights Watch (HRW) recommended amending section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law to make offenses bailable and restrict third parties from filing criminal complaints under the law. HRW noted that there have been at least 54 cases filed under the law and at least 8 people sentenced to imprisonment since the National League for Democracy (NLD) took office in its letter to officials of Burma's Ministry of Transport and Communications, Transport, Communication and Construction Committee, and the Attorney General's Office.⁵⁰

17 May: The Tatmadaw filed a lawsuit against 'The Voice Daily' newspaper chief editor Kyaw Min Swe and writer Kyaw Zwa Naing, over charges of intent to damage Tatmadaw's dignity.⁵¹ Kyaw Zwa Naing, who used the pen name Ko Ko Maung, wrote a satirical article mocking the Tatmadaw-produced film "Union Oath" that was aired over state- and military-owned television channels in early March to commemorate Burma's 72nd Armed Forces Day.⁵² The lawsuit was filed before the completion of the Myanmar Press Council's mediation between the Tatmadaw and the newspaper.⁵³ On 2 June, the police detained both Kyaw Min Se and Kyaw Zwa Naing.⁵⁴

23 May: A Pegu Division court sentenced Sandi Myint Aung to 6 months in prison for Facebook posts that used foul language against State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.⁵⁵

Other developments:

4 May: An explosion of handmade bombs killed 2 people and injured 3 others in Theni village, Buthidaung Township, Arakan State.⁵⁶

8 May: A landmine explosion injured 8 young Buddhist monks who were playing with 2 rusty landmines in a temple compound in Mong Yen Tract, Namtu Township, northern Shan State.⁵⁷

9 May: The Chanayethazan Township Court in Mandalay sentenced 4 student-protesters to 4 months in prison under the Peaceful Assembly Act for protesting against draconian rules of Sagaing Teacher Training College, such as not allowing mobile phones on campus [see *April Bulletin*].⁵⁸

11 May: Media reported that Tatmadaw Battalion No. 286 seized villagers' land and erected barbed-wire fencing around local properties near Kong Kham village, Mong Nong Sub-township, Kehsi Township, southern Shan State.⁵⁹

19 May: One village administrator was beheaded and another went missing after unknown assailants abducted them in Pazonchaung village, Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. Local media reported that the 2 men assisted authorities in investigating the 9 Oct attacks on border guard outposts [see *October Bulletin*], but another local administrator denied any such link.⁶⁰

24 May: Burmese authorities forced Turkish man Muhammet Furkan Sokmen to leave Burma for being suspected by the Erdogan government of links to a July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Muhammet was

⁵⁰ HRW (10 May 17) Burma: Letter on Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law

⁵¹ The Irrawaddy (17 May 17) Burma Army Files Article 66(d) Lawsuit Over Satirical Piece; Myanmar Times (18 May 17) The Voice Daily chief editor, writer face defamation suit

⁵² Myanmar Times (18 May 17) The Voice Daily chief editor, writer face defamation suit; The Irrawaddy (04 May 17) Military Submits Complaint to Press Council Over Satirical Article; RFA (17 May 17) Myanmar Military Files Defamation Lawsuit Against Independent Newspaper

⁵³ The Irrawaddy (04 May 17) Military Submits Complaint to Press Council Over Satirical Article

⁵⁴ The Irrawaddy (02 June 17) Burmese Newspaper's Chief Editor and Satirist Taken Into Police Custody Over 66(d) Charge

⁵⁵ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Woman Sentenced Under Article 66(d) for 'Insults' to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

⁵⁶ RFA (08 May 17) Explosion of Handmade Bombs Kills Two in Myanmar's Rakhine State

⁵⁷ SHAN (08 May 17) Bomb blast injures 8 novice monks in Namtu

⁵⁸ The Irrawaddy (09 May 17) Student Protesters Jailed in Mandalay

⁵⁹ SHAN (11 May 17) Burmese army accused of land seizure in Mong Nong

⁶⁰ RFA (19 May 17) One Village Official Killed, Another Missing in Myanmar's Restive Rakhine State; The Irrawaddy (20 May 17) Village Administrator Found Beheaded in Arakan State

the director of the recently closed Horizons International School in Rangoon.⁶¹ Muhammet and his family tried to board a flight to Bangkok, Thailand, when Burmese officials detained them at Rangoon International Airport at the request of Turkish authorities who cancelled his passport.⁶² On 26 May, authorities sent Muhammet to Thailand, from where he was deported to Turkey, while his wife and daughter remained in Rangoon.⁶³ On 27 May, the UN expressed grave concern and strongly urged authorities not to deport those deemed at risk. UN said that Muhammet was at least the sixth person to be deported from Southeast Asia over alleged links to the US-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen.⁶⁴

26 May: Rangoon's northern district court ordered the police to reexamine the investigation of fugitive Aung Win Khaing, including the possibility of a nationwide search, as part of Ko Ni's assassination trial.⁶⁵

HUMANITARIAN

Cyclone Mora devastates Arakan State; no news of government aid to affected IDPs

On 1 June, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement said that cyclone Mora destroyed 4,702 houses and damaged 13,595 houses in Arakan/Rakhine State, Chin State and Irrawaddy Division. Official figures also said that 325 schools, 32 office buildings and 57 religious buildings were completely destroyed, while 429 non-residential buildings, 23 hospitals and 3 bridges were damaged.⁶⁶ The most intense destruction was in Maungdaw Township, northwestern Arakan State.

On 30 May, the storm destroyed hundreds of structures in internally displaced person (IDP) camps and damaged refugee camps housing Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.⁶⁷

Reuters reported that the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) provided relief to the refugees. To date, there are no reports about any government efforts to aid affected IDPs and refugees. IDPs living in Arakan State, Burma/Myanmar complained that they "haven't had anything from anyone yet". Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh said that "they have been left to fend for themselves" by Bangladeshi authorities.⁶⁸

Other developments:

22 May: A fire destroyed 11 houses and 42 shops in Thae Chaung IDP camp, Sittwe Township, Arakan State. Police reported that the fire started from wiring and that there were no casualties.⁶⁹

23 May: The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) called for a renewed effort to protect children in conflict areas of Burma [see *Reports*]. It called on the government to increase access to conflict areas for humanitarian organizations. UN agencies were not given permission to deliver aid to more than 40,000 displaced people in Kachin State and to more than 20,000 IDPs northern Shan State. It also noted that 67,000 women and children are in 142 IDP camps in Kachin State; about 2.5 million people are still affected by conflict in Karen/Kayin State; and 120,000 IDPs continue to live in camps in Arakan State after the outbreak of intercommunal conflict in 2012.⁷⁰

⁶¹ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Burma Forces Turkish Man To Leave Country Amid Crackdown; HRW (01 June 17) Burma/Thailand: Deported Turkish Man at Risk

⁶² The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Burma Forces Turkish Man To Leave Country Amid Crackdown; HRW (01 June 17) Burma/Thailand: Deported Turkish Man at Risk

⁶³ HRW (01 June 17) Burma/Thailand: Deported Turkish Man at Risk

⁶⁴ Reuters (27 May 17) U.N. expresses grave concern over Myanmar, Thai deportation of Turkish national

⁶⁵ The Irrawaddy (26 May 17) Court Orders Police to Reexamine Fugitive in Ko Ni Murder Trial

⁶⁶ DVB (02 June 17) Cyclone Mora damaged or destroyed 20,000 houses in Burma

⁶⁷ The Irrawaddy (30 May 17) Cyclone Mora Flattens Hundreds of Homes in Arakan state

⁶⁸ Reuters (31 May 17) For Rohingya refugees, makeshift homes no match for Cyclone Mora; RFA (31 May 17) Cyclone Mora Wreaks Devastation Along Myanmar's West Coast, Killing One

⁶⁹ The Irrawaddy (24 May 17) Fire Razes More Than 50 Structures in Sittwe IDP Camp

⁷⁰ UNICEF (May 2017) Lives on Hold: Making sure no child is left behind in Myanmar

24 May: IDPS in Ei Tu Hta camp, Papun District, Karen state, protested against the Tatmadaw occupying their lands and preventing their safe return. They called for the Tatmadaw to withdraw its troops so that the IDPs could return home.⁷¹

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Rumors spread about Burma President's resignation

On 4 May, the Burmese government warned the public about false news and rumors being spread to allegedly cause “political instability” during the term of the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government.⁷² This followed rumors that President Htin Kyaw would step down due to poor health and be replaced by former general Thura Shwe Mann, who was close to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.⁷³

NLD spokesperson Win Htein said that actions would be taken against those who spread these rumors.⁷⁴ Htein added that it was “difficult to say [who is behind the rumor]... It’s hard to guess if it was [spread] by the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] or some military organizations, or IT guys who hate us”.⁷⁵ On 5 May, the Tatmadaw “seriously condemned the groundless accusation” of the NLD spokesperson and said that they will make the “necessary responses”. This was the first time that the Tatmadaw openly condemned NLD since 2012.⁷⁶

Parties file an election complaint case against NLD; UEC rules in favor of NLD

On 8 May, leaders of 13 political parties sent a letter to the Union Election Commission (UEC) to complain about the NLD’s violations of the 2008 Constitution and UEC directives during the April by-elections [see *April Bulletin*].⁷⁷ On 18 May, UEC decided that it would not take any action against the NLD because the NLD did not violate election regulations. UEC explained that the speeches of the NLD party leaders merely explained government activities to the public.⁷⁸ The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) said that UEC “did not come to a fair decision”.⁷⁹

Other important developments:

4 May: The Union Civil Service Board (UCSB) said that it stopped allowing transfer of Tatmadaw officers to senior posts in the civilian administration under the NLD-led government, although there were exceptions when the government could allow it. Currently, senior management positions including permanent secretary, director-general, and managing director are held by Tatmadaw appointees.⁸⁰

17 May: NLD patron Tin Oo was hospitalized after suffering from a stroke. Doctors said that his condition was improving.⁸¹

⁷¹ Karen News (24 May 17) Thousands of Displaced Karen Villagers Call for Burma Army to Get Off Their Land; The Irrawaddy (31 May 17) KNU Calls for Withdrawal of Burma Army Troops

⁷² Reuters (05 May 17) Myanmar says fake news being spread to destabilise Suu Kyi government

⁷³ Reuters (05 May 17) Myanmar says fake news being spread to destabilise Suu Kyi government

⁷⁴ The Irrawaddy (04 May 17) Burmese President's Resignation Rumors to Prompt Legal Action

⁷⁵ The Irrawaddy (05 May 17) Army 'Condemns' NLD Assumption of Military Involvement in Presidential Resignation Rumors

⁷⁶ The Irrawaddy (05 May 17) Army 'Condemns' NLD Assumption of Military Involvement in Presidential Resignation Rumors

⁷⁷ The Irrawaddy (09 May 17) Party Leaders Object to Electoral Commission Over NLD By-Election Campaign

⁷⁸ The Irrawaddy (18 May 17) Election Commission: NLD Did Not Violate Regulations in By-Election

⁷⁹ Myanmar Times (22 May 17) UEC's no action decision shocking: USDP

⁸⁰ The Irrawaddy (05 May 17) New Govt Cuts Military Personnel Appointed to Civil Service

⁸¹ The Irrawaddy (19 May 17) NLD Patron U Tin Oo Suffers Stroke, Remains in Critical Condition

PARLIAMENT WATCH

Amendments to the Telecommunications Law likely to be discussed as parliamentary session resumes

On 18 May, the fifth parliamentary session resumed. A proposal to amend section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law would be among the bills likely to be discussed in the Parliament.⁸²

Union Attorney General Office (AG) permanent secretary Nu Nu Yin said that the AG's office was reviewing a bill submitted by the Ministry of Transport and Communications to amend the Telecommunications Law.⁸³ One of the proposed amendments included bail for those charged under the law. The reviewed bill would then be forwarded to the government and Parliament by the Ministry.⁸⁴

The Upper House had 7 draft bills set aside for discussion and approval, including the "narcotics and psychotropic substance law". The Ministry of Home Affairs submitted the narcotics law for amendment to reduce the punishment for drug addicts. Other draft amendments to be discussed were the Myanmar Companies Draft Law, 2017 Myanmar Gemstone Draft Law, Legal Document Registration Draft Law, Oil and Petroleum Products Draft Law, and Conservation of Water Resources and Rivers Draft Law.⁸⁵

ECONOMY

Burma's role in China's "One Belt, One Road" project progresses

On 16 May, Burma/Myanmar and China signed 5 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) regarding cooperation in economic development, health, and the preservation of historic monuments in Bagan.⁸⁶ On 12 May, State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi arrived in Beijing, China to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The forum was in relation to China's "One Belt, One Road" project to build a network of highways, railroads and maritime routes, known as the modern Silk Road, linking China to Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.⁸⁷

On 2 May, China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) announced that it started loading crude oil through its Burma-China pipeline, which was part of China's "One Belt, One Road" ambitions [see *April Bulletin*].⁸⁸ Local residents said that they did not receive any compensation due to them for damage to their crops caused by digging works on the pipeline even after waiting for more than 5 years.⁸⁹

The US \$7.3 billion deep sea port of Kyauk Phyu, Arakan/Rakhine State, also fit in the "One Belt, One Road" infrastructure investment plan. A consortium led by China's CITIC Group proposed taking a 70-85% stake in the strategically important sea port in Burma. The proposed stake was bigger than the 50/50 joint venture arrangement proposed by Burma last year, which CITIC rejected.⁹⁰ Reuters previously reported that China signaled its willingness to abandon the Myitsone dam project in exchange for a number of smaller hydropower projects and preferential access to the deep sea port of Kyauk Phyu on the Bay of Bengal [see *April Bulletin*].

On 22 May, about 600 residents of Kyauk Phyu, Arakan State drove more than 100 motorboats to protest against the local office of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), located at Maday Island. The residents were angered because the Fisheries Department allowed the Chinese oil tankers to operate there but banned the residents from fishing in the area.⁹¹

⁸² Myanmar Times (11 May 17) Parliament to prioritise pending legislations

⁸³ Myanmar Times (05 May 17) Bail being considered for Section 66 (d)

⁸⁴ The Irrawaddy (05 May 17) Attorney General Office Recommends Changes to Article 66(d)

⁸⁵ Myanmar Times (11 May 17) Parliament to prioritise pending legislations

⁸⁶ The Irrawaddy (17 May 17) China, Burma Sign Five Agreements

⁸⁷ GNLM (14 May 17) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi arrives in Beijing to attend Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation; The Irrawaddy (12 May 17) Where Does Burma Stand on China's 'One Belt, One Road'?

⁸⁸ Reuters (02 May 17) CNPC loads first crude oil into Myanmar-China pipeline

⁸⁹ Myanmar Times (08 May 17) Residents yet to get Myanmar-China pipeline compensation

⁹⁰ Reuters (05 May 17) Exclusive: China seeks up to 85 percent stake in strategic port in Myanmar

⁹¹ RFA (22 May 17) Hundreds Protest Presence of Chinese Oil

Other developments:

15 May: Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (Neda) reported that the Burmese government would have to finance the construction of the proposed road connecting Kanchanaburi province with Dawei special economic zone (SEZ). Neda president Newin Sinsiri said that the private sector believed that the project would offer low returns and was thus not interested in the project.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Global Witness' screening of film showing Tatmadaw's role in jade trade cancelled

On 17 May, a hotel in Rangoon/Yangon, Burma/Myanmar cancelled the screening of the NGO Global Witness' new documentary entitled "Jade and the Generals". Global Witness timed the release of the documentary ahead of the second Panglong Peace Conference [see *Key Story*] to show the role of the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups in Burma's jade industry and their impact on the peace process.⁹² The Park Royal Hotel said that it could not show the video because of lack of permission from Rangoon regional authorities.⁹³ The cancellation of the screening came as a surprise to Global Witness, which had a "very positive" meeting with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation representatives in Naypyidaw on 15 May for an advanced screening.⁹⁴

On the same day, 4 scavengers were shot dead and 11 were injured in a mine site in Hkamti, Sagaing Region. Scavengers searching for jade tried to enter the without permission and security guards from Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited opened fire.⁹⁵

Other important developments:

17 May: Sixty people from Yuzana Company Ltd. threatened farmers with knives and sticks in Nawngme village, Hpakant Township, Kachin State, in a dispute over farming land. The farmers then called for assistance from other locals and the confrontation eventually de-escalated.⁹⁶

REPORTS

"2017 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2017)" Internal Displacement Monitoring Committee & Norwegian Refugee Council <https://goo.gl/8GFFZp>

"Burned, Stabbed and Shot – Physical Evidence of Atrocities Committed against the Rohingya" Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK <https://goo.gl/FtyOZY>

"Creating an Inclusive Burmese Peace Process" US Institute of Peace <https://goo.gl/Hm3i8M>

"ECHO Factsheet – Myanmar/Burma – May 2017" European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations <https://goo.gl/4qeswj>

"ECHO Factsheet – The Rohingya crisis – May 2017" European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations <https://goo.gl/rhWHmc>

⁹² The Irrawaddy (17 May 17) Screening Cancelled of Film Showing Army's Role in Jade Trade; Reuters (17 May 17) Myanmar screening of film on army's role in jade trade canceled; DVB (17 May 17) Screening of film on jade trade's ills blocked in Rangoon

⁹³ The Irrawaddy (17 May 17) Screening Cancelled of Film Showing Army's Role in Jade Trade; Reuters (17 May 17) Myanmar screening of film on army's role in jade trade canceled; DVB (17 May 17) Screening of film on jade trade's ills blocked in Rangoon

⁹⁴ The Irrawaddy (17 May 17) Screening Cancelled of Film Showing Army's Role in Jade Trade; DVB (17 May 17) Screening of film on jade trade's ills blocked in Rangoon

⁹⁵ Frontier Myanmar (18 May 17) Four men shot dead by security guards at Sagaing jade mine

⁹⁶ The Irrawaddy (19 May 17) Yuzana Reps and Farmers Clash in Kachin State

“Re-Asserting Control: Voluntary Return, Restitution and the Right to Land for IDPs and Refugees in Myanmar” Transnational Institute <https://goo.gl/V3dQB5>

“Report: Several Anti-Muslim Incidents Signal Worrying Trend in Yangon” Burma Human Rights Network <https://goo.gl/4Fwpvw>

“The People’s Republic of China and Burma: Not Only Pauk –Phaw” Bertil Lintner <https://goo.gl/09cz5G>

“UNICEF Child Alert - Lives on Hold: Making sure no child is left behind in Myanmar” UN Children’s Fund <https://goo.gl/vV2LQw>