

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



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

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- President Thein Sein announces two separate amnesties for political prisoners. Despite his pledge to release all political prisoners by the end of the year, scores remain detained at the start of 2014, including INGO workers and Rohingya human rights defenders.
- Fresh arrests and detentions of human rights defenders continue in early December. Two activists are rearrested and sent back to prison within hours of their 'release.'
- Naypyidaw's pledge to achieve a nationwide ceasefire by the end of the year remains unfulfilled as Tatmadaw attacks in Kachin and Northern Shan States continue.
- Authorities jail a journalist and take aim at a weekly news journal for publishing articles critical of the regime.
- Regime authorities use force against peaceful protestors in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township, injuring eight people.
- Reports emerge of official Thai involvement in the trafficking of Rohingya asylum seekers detained in Thailand.
- The UNODC reports that opium poppy cultivation in Burma in 2013 increased for the seventh consecutive year.
- US Treasury Department adds a regime official and three Burmese firms to its Specially Designated Nationals list for their involvement in purchasing military equipment from North Korea.

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KEY STORY

Scores still detained despite year-end amnesty for political prisoners

In a bid to stave off pressure over his pledge to release all dissidents by the end of the year, in December President Thein Sein announced two separate amnesties for political prisoners in Burma.

- **11 December:** President Thein Sein ordered the release of 41 political prisoners in an amnesty that coincided with the opening ceremony of the 27th Southeast Asian Games in Naypyidaw.¹ Among those released were numerous activists and human rights defenders imprisoned under the Peaceful

¹ Reuters (11 Dec 13) Myanmar releases 41 political prisoners

Gathering and Demonstration Law, including Generation Wave leader Moe Thway, Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF) leader Htin Kyaw, and activists Aye Thein and D Nyein Linn.²

- **30 December:** President Thein Sein announced an amnesty for all political prisoners convicted or currently facing charges under the Unlawful Association Act; the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law; the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act; the 1975 State Protection Law; and Articles 505, 122, and 124(a) of the Criminal Code.³

On 31 December, at least five political prisoners were released under the amnesty, leaving scores still detained into 2014.⁴ The pardon did not include Rohingya human rights defenders Kyaw Hla Aung and Tun Aung, or three INGO workers detained since mid-2012 in Buthidaung Prison, Arakan State.⁵ Prior to the latest amnesty, approximately 40 political prisoners remained behind bars and at least 200 people faced charges under repressive laws, including many under the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law.⁶

‘Released’ prisoners and other activists continue to be arbitrarily arrested

In the lead-up to the amnesty announcements, the regime continued to arrest and sentence human rights defenders, including former political prisoners. Two activists were rearrested only hours after they were ‘released’ in the 11 December presidential amnesty.⁷

- **3 December:** Police in Rangoon’s Dagon Township arrested Generation Youth activist Tin Htut Paing in connection with a 29 November protest outside the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon to mark the one-year anniversary of the regime’s crackdown on peaceful protestors at the Monywa copper mine site in Salingyi Township, Sagaing Division.⁸
- **5 December:** A court in Rangoon’s Hlaing Township sentenced activists Yan Naing Htun and Aung Min Naing to seven months in prison under the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law for organizing a peace march from Rangoon to Laiza in Momauk Township, Kachin State, in January 2013.⁹
- **6 December:** Regime authorities arrested human rights defender Naw Ohn Hla in connection with the 29 November protest outside the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon.¹⁰ The arrest of Naw Ohn Hla came only weeks after she was released from prison in a presidential amnesty on 15 November [See *November 2013 Burma Bulletin*].
- **11 December:** A court in Rangoon’s North Okkalapa Township ordered activist Htin Kyaw back to prison on charges of sedition, only hours after he was released in a presidential amnesty.¹¹
- **11 December:** Regime authorities reimprisoned activist Aye Thein on charges including sedition on the same day he was released from Mandalay Prison in a presidential amnesty.¹²
- **19 December:** A court in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State, sentenced two Kachin IDPs to five years in prison each in connection with an alleged bomb plot on a regime office in Myitkyina in 2012.¹³ The pair were sentenced to two years in jail each in November under the Unlawful Association Act [See *November 2013 Burma Bulletin*].

² Irrawaddy (11 Dec 13) Burma Releases 41 More Political Prisoners; FIDH (17 Dec 13) Burma: It is time to free all human rights defenders and stop ongoing arbitrary arrests and imprisonment

³ NLM (31 Dec 13) Republic of the Union of Myanmar President Office (Order No. 51/2013) Pardon

⁴ Irrawaddy (31 Dec 13) Protesters Gather at Insein Prison After Presidential Pardon

⁵ UN News Centre (31 Dec 13) Myanmar: UN human rights office welcomes presidential pardon for political prisoners

⁶ AFP (31 Dec 13) Myanmar president grants prisoners amnesty; Irrawaddy (31 Dec 13) Protesters Gather at Insein Prison After Presidential Pardon; FIDH (17 Dec 13) Burma: It is time to free all human rights defenders and stop ongoing arbitrary arrests and imprisonment

⁷ Reuters (11 Dec 13) Myanmar releases 41 political prisoners

⁸ Myanmar Freedom Daily (10 Dec 13) Activist Daw Naw Ohn Hla faces another charge

⁹ DVB (05 Dec 13) Peace marchers sentenced to 7 months

¹⁰ Myanmar Freedom Daily (10 Dec 13) Activist Daw Naw Ohn Hla faces another charge; Front Line Defenders (06 Dec 13)

Burma: Arrest of human rights defender, Mr Tin Htut Pai

¹¹ DVB (13 Dec 13) Pardoned activists return to their cells

¹² DVB (13 Dec 13) Pardoned activists return to their cells

¹³ Irrawaddy (20 Dec 13) Two Kachin Sentenced to Five More Years in Prison for Alleged Bomb Plot

No ceasefire, just more fighting in Kachin and Northern Shan States

No formal talks between the regime and ethnic armed groups took place in December, leaving the regime's pledge to achieve a nationwide ceasefire before the end of the year unfulfilled.¹⁴ In December, fighting continued between Tatmadaw troops and both the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Southern Kachin State and Northern Shan State.

- **4-5 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with joint KIA and TNLA forces in Kutkai Township, Northern Shan State.¹⁵
- **11 December:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 125 clashed with KIA forces near Mung Si in Kutkai Township, Northern Shan State.¹⁶
- **16 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces near Pangasai, Muse Township, Northern Shan State.¹⁷
- **16 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces in Kutkai Township, Northern Shan State.¹⁸
- **20 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces near Nam Lim Pa, Mansi Township, Kachin State.¹⁹
- **20 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces in Mung Ding Pa, Mansi Township, Kachin State.²⁰
- **22 December:** Tatmadaw troops from IB 143 attacked KIA forces in Kutkai Township, Northern Shan State.²¹
- **22 December:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 17 used artillery to attack TNLA forces in Kyaukme Township, Northern Shan State.²²
- **24 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces in Nam Lim Pa, Mansi Township, Kachin State.²³

In addition, Tatmadaw troops continued to target civilians during military operations. On 9 December, Tatmadaw troops shelled civilians working in a rice field near Mung Ding Pa in Mansi Township, Kachin State.²⁴

Opium poppy cultivation increases for seventh consecutive year

On 18 December, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its "Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2013." With regard to Burma, the report found that in 2013:²⁵

- Opium production increased for the seventh consecutive year – a 26% increase from the previous year.
- Opium poppy cultivation increased by 13% (from 51,000 to 57,800 hectares) from the previous year.
- The country remained the world's second largest opium poppy grower.
- Ninety-two percent of Burma's opium poppy was grown in Shan State.

¹⁴ Mizzima News (03 Dec 13) 2nd-round Myanmar gov't-ethnic armed groups ceasefire talks put off: report

¹⁵ EMG (06 Dec 13) Thirteen killed in fresh skirmishes between gov't troops, Kachin rebels

¹⁶ Kachinland News (17 Dec 13) Battles Continue in Kachin and Northern Shan State as Ethnic Armed Groups Prepare for the Next Meeting

¹⁷ Kachinland News (17 Dec 13) Battles Continue in Kachin and Northern Shan State as Ethnic Armed Groups Prepare for the Next Meeting

¹⁸ Irrawaddy (19 Dec 13) Kokang Rebels Blamed for Deadly Shan State Blasts

¹⁹ Kachinland News (20 Dec 13) Battles rage in Namlim Pa and Mungding Pa

²⁰ Kachinland News (20 Dec 13) Battles rage in Namlim Pa and Mungding Pa

²¹ Kachin News Group (24 Dec 13) Remote controlled mines target Burma army troops in Kachin state

²² DVB (24 Dec 13) Ta'ang army claim govt offensive in Kyaukme

²³ Kachin News Group (25 Dec 13) Christmas clashes between Burma army and KIA

²⁴ Kachinland News (17 Dec 13) Battles Continue in Kachin and Northern Shan State as Ethnic Armed Groups Prepare for the Next Meeting

²⁵ UNODC (18 Dec 13) Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2013

HUMAN RIGHTS

Regime cracks down on peaceful protestors

On 7 December, a group of Tatmadaw-backed “workers” attacked protestors in Rangoon’s Thingangyun Township, injuring at least eight people.²⁶ The protestors had been holding a sit-down protest since 26 November to demand the return of land confiscated from them by the military in the early 1990s.²⁷ Following the clash, regime authorities ordered the shutdown of the protestors’ camp by 9 December.²⁸ After initially defying the regime’s order, protestors agreed on 12 December to end their demonstration after People’s Assembly MP Aung Thein Linn pledged that the parliamentary committee tasked with investigating reports of land confiscation would examine their claims.²⁹

Weekly journal targeted, reporter jailed

In December, the imprisonment of an Eleven Media Group (EMG) journalist, as well as the regime’s call for action against a weekly news journal, underscored concerns regarding press freedom in Burma.

- **13 December:** The regime Information Ministry called on the Myanmar Press Council to take action against weekly journal Sun Rays, for allegedly publishing “unethical” articles damaging to the regime.³⁰
- **17 December:** A court in Loikaw Township, Karenni State, sentenced EMG reporter Ma Khine to three months in prison on charges of trespassing, defamation, and using abusive language, after the reporter sought comment from Loikaw-based lawyer Aye Aye Phyto at the latter’s home in connection with an alleged video piracy case.³¹

DISPLACEMENT

Thai officials implicated in trafficking of Rohingya; exodus continues

As Rohingya continued to flee by boat to Burma’s regional neighbors, details emerged of an unofficial policy of deporting Rohingya asylum seekers detained in Thailand. On 4 December, it was reported that since October Thai officials had sold hundreds of Rohingya to human trafficking networks that operated secret camps in Southern Thailand.³² According to the report, armed guards in the camps beat and killed many Rohingya and demanded money from their friends or relatives for their release.³³ It was reported that from October to early December, the number of Rohingya left in Thailand’s immigration detention centers had shrunk from over 2,000 to only 154.³⁴

Rohingya asylum seekers continued to undertake perilous boat journeys from Burma and Bangladesh in search of safety abroad.

- **9 December:** Three asylum seekers, including two Rohingya, drowned after their Australia-bound boat carrying an estimated 32 asylum seekers sank off West Java Province, Indonesia.³⁵ Indonesian fisherman rescued the remaining asylum seekers.³⁶

²⁶ DVB (09 Dec 13) Michaungkan protestors face forceful removal; RFA (10 Dec 13) Myanmar’s Migyaungkan Protesters Demand Written Assurances; DVB (10 Dec 13) Michaungkan protestors hold down the fort; Myanmar Times (09 Dec 13) Protesters clash with military

²⁷ EMG (08 Dec 13) Migyaungkan protestors, workers clash at dispute site

²⁸ EMG (08 Dec 13) Yangon protestors’ camp ordered to shut down

²⁹ RFA (12 Dec 13) Myanmar’s Migyaungkan Land Protesters End Sit-In

³⁰ RFA (13 Dec 13) Myanmar Government Seeks Action Against ‘Unethical’ Journal

³¹ Irrawaddy (23 Dec 13) Prison Term for Reporter Leads to Outcry Over Media Freedom; EMG (18 Dec 13) Statement by Eleven Media Group against the imprisonment of reporter Ma Khine as ruled by Deputy Judge of Loikaw Township Court on 17 December 2013

³² Reuters (04 Dec 13) SPECIAL REPORT-Thailand secretly dumps Myanmar refugees into trafficking rings

³³ Reuters (04 Dec 13) SPECIAL REPORT-Thailand secretly dumps Myanmar refugees into trafficking rings

³⁴ Reuters (04 Dec 13) SPECIAL REPORT-Thailand secretly dumps Myanmar refugees into trafficking rings

³⁵ AFP (10 Dec 13) Burmese toddler drowns as refugee boat sinks en route to Christmas Island

³⁶ AFP (10 Dec 13) Burmese toddler drowns as refugee boat sinks en route to Christmas Island

- **25 December:** A boat carrying 139 Rohingya asylum seekers arrived in Thailand's Phang Nga Province.³⁷ The asylum seekers said that the Burmese Navy had turned them over to a group of human traffickers who killed 12 of the Rohingya and severely beat many others during the boat journey from Burma to Phang Nga Province.³⁸

On 12 December, the Bangkok-based Arakan Project said that an estimated 9,000 Rohingya fled by boat from Bangladesh and Burma's Arakan State in November.³⁹

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

US blacklists regime official and three Burmese firms

After adding the regime's Directorate of Defense Industries (DDI) Chief Lt Gen Thein Htay to its Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list in July [See *July 2013 Burma Bulletin*], the US continued to target Burmese firms and individuals with links to North Korea. On 17 December, the US Treasury Department added companies Asia Metal Company, Soe Min Htike, and Excellence Mineral Manufacturing, as well as a Tatmadaw staff officer linked to DDI, Lt Col Kyaw Nyunt Oo, to its SDN list for their alleged involvement in procuring military equipment from North Korea.⁴⁰ The designation of Lt Col Kyaw Nyunt Oo and the three companies prohibits US citizens from engaging in business with them and freezes any US assets they may own.⁴¹

Burma and Japan strengthen aid, investment ties

On 13-17 December, President Thein Sein visited Japan.⁴² During his trip, Thein Sein met with Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, and attended the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit Meeting and the Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting in Tokyo.⁴³ During their meeting on 15 December, Thein Sein and Abe discussed the development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ), investment prospects in the Tavoy SEZ, the development of rural regions, poverty alleviation initiatives, and the reform of Burma's postal system.⁴⁴ Abe pledged 63 billion yen (US\$610.53 million) in loans towards projects to develop Burma's railways, water supply, and irrigation.⁴⁵ The two sides also signed a bilateral investment agreement to improve transparency and enshrine rights and protections for Japanese investors and an agreement for cooperation in the health sector.⁴⁶

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN DECEMBER

1	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attends an event to mark World AIDS Day in Melbourne, Australia.
1	State-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar reports that regime authorities will take action against protestors who carried banners insulting Islam during a protest against the OIC's visit to Burma on 15 November in Rangoon's Bahan Township.
1	In his monthly radio address to the nation, President Thein Sein says that all parties involved in peace talks should seek positive results through negotiation without resorting to "extreme approaches."
2	NLD issues a statement reiterating its call for four-party dialogue on constitutional reform and calls the regime's rejection of the proposal "unacceptable".
2	Hundreds of ethnic Shan gather in Rangoon to celebrate Shan new year.
3	ICJ releases "Right to Counsel: The Independence of Lawyers in Myanmar," a report that finds that endemic corruption, low-standard legal education, and interference from regime authorities in politically

³⁷ Phuketwan (26 Dec 13) North of Phuket, Rohingya Tell of Killings, Beatings on Nightmare Voyage from Burma

³⁸ Phuketwan (26 Dec 13) North of Phuket, Rohingya Tell of Killings, Beatings on Nightmare Voyage from Burma

³⁹ Phuketwan (13 Dec 13) Boatpeople Passing Through Secret Thai Camps in Record Numbers: No Reaction So Far to UN, US Investigation Plea

⁴⁰ Xinhua (18 Dec 13) U.S. imposes sanctions on Myanmar entities over arms trade with DPRK

⁴¹ US Department of Treasury (17 Dec 13) Treasury Designates Burmese Companies and an Individual with Ties to the Directorate of Defense Industries

⁴² NLM (19 Dec 13) President U Thein Sein back home; NLM (14 Dec 13) President U Thein Sein arrives in Tokyo of Japan

⁴³ NLM (19 Dec 13) President U Thein Sein back home

⁴⁴ Kyodo News (15 Dec 13) Japan to finance Thilawa project, Xinhua (15 Dec 13) Japan to provide fresh 610 mln dollars' loans to Myanmar, AP (15 Dec 13) Japan signs investment protection deal with Burma

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (15 Dec 13) Japan-Myanmar Summit Meeting

⁴⁶ NLM (16 Dec 13) Japan to grant 63.2 billion ¥ for projects

	sensitive legal cases continue to undermine the rule of law and impede the work of lawyers in Burma.
4	Myanmar Press Council and INGO International Media Support sign an agreement in Rangoon to draft a code of ethics for journalists.
5	In Manila, Philippines President Benigno Aquino and President Thein Sein sign agreements on trade and investment, renewable energy development, agricultural cooperation, information sharing, and visa exemptions.
6	National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann says that failure to amend the constitution may hinder national reconciliation.
6	Parliament's constitutional review committee says that as of 5 December, it has received 440 submissions with a total of 2,512 recommendations for amending the constitution.
6	Over 700 workers from Great Wall Shoe Factory in Rangoon's Shwe Lin Pan Industrial Zone go on strike to demand a wage increase and respect for labor rights.
6	A joint-delegation including EU Ambassador to Burma Roland Kobia, US Ambassador to Burma Derek Mitchell, and UNODC representative Jason Eligh, concludes a five-day visit to Shan State where they met with Shan, Pa-O, Lahu, Lisu, Wa, and Akha communities and regime officials.
6	Two separate landmine explosions kill a Palaung man and two Palaung women in Kyaukme Township, Shan State.
9	A court in Akyab, Arakan State, sentences two Rakhine men to 10 years in prison and one Rakhine man to two years in prison in connection with anti-Muslim violence in Mrauk U Township, Arakan State, in October 2012.
9	President Thein Sein meets with Laos President Choummaly Sayasone in Naypyidaw to discuss bilateral cooperation in rural development, poverty reduction, tourism, trade, education, agriculture, and livestock breeding.
10	ICRC begins a four-day seminar on international policing standards attended by 35 senior Burmese police officers from Burma, in Akyab, Arakan State.
10	Representatives from Chinese company Wanbao brief NLD representatives on the company's role in the Monywa copper mine during a meeting in Beijing, China.
10	In a statement to mark Human Rights Day, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Burma Bertrand Bainvel says that "space" for human rights defenders in Burma must be "vigorously defended."
10	Taiwan Foundation for Democracy awards their 2013 Democracy and Human Rights Award to Karen Human Rights Group.
10	Vice-President Nyan Tun and Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong sign agreements on the provision of a 50 million yuan (US\$8.26 million) grant towards economic and technical cooperation and a 10 million yuan (US\$1.65 million) grant to assist Burma with performing its functions as ASEAN chair.
10	President Thein Sein meets with Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Board Chair Clare Short in Naypyidaw to discuss Burma's preparations to join the EITI.
11	Regime Election Commission approves the registration of the Kachin National Democracy Congress Party.
15	Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing says that if ethnic armed groups "really want democracy" they should lay down their arms.
16	Parliament's constitutional review committee says that its committee members will meet in Naypyidaw on 7 January to discuss suggested amendments to the 2008 constitution.
16	Council of the European Union Foreign Affairs issues a press release urging Burma's regime to end arbitrary arrests, address the underlying causes of "inter-communal violence", guarantee respect for human rights, and ensure unhindered humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Arakan and Kachin States.
17	Regime Election Commission approves the registration of the Lisu National Development Party.
17	Regime Election Commission approves the registration of the Dawei Nationalities Party.
18	Nine ethnic and political parties – the National Democratic Force; the Democratic Party (Myanmar); the Democracy and Peace Party; the Party for Unity and Peace; the Union Democratic Party; the Kayin People's Party; the Peace and Diversity Party; the United Democratic Party, and the Chin Development Party - announce they will merge to form a single party called the Federal Democratic Alliance.
19	Forty human rights and civil society organizations issue a joint-letter to US President Barack Obama urging him to press Burma to release all political prisoners unconditionally and cease the continued arrest and prosecution of activists.
21	Cambodian PM Hun Sen holds talks with National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann in Phnom Penh.
23	National Assembly MP J Yaw Wu says that development projects that have forced villagers from their lands and deprived them of their livelihoods in Northern Burma have led to a rise in opium poppy cultivation.
24	Burma's Parliament announces that the People's Assembly, National Assembly, and National Parliament will all reconvene for the ninth regular session on 13 January 2014.
24	Regime Election Commission approves the registration of the Federal Union Party.

24	Regime authorities release Myint Myint Aye, Khin Mi Mi Khine, and Thant Zin Htike from Paungde Prison, Paungde Township, Pegu Division, after the Pegu divisional court on 23 December upheld their appeal against charges they faced for assisting farmers to protest against land grabs.
27	NLD member Win Myint says that the NLD will recommend amending around 150 clauses in the 2008 constitution.
27	UN General Assembly adopts by consensus a resolution on the situation of human rights in Burma.
28	NLD says it will contest the 2015 general elections.
28	A fire in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand's Tak Province leaves two injured and 120 homes destroyed.
28	Three-day Myanmar People's Forum begins in Rangoon.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN DECEMBER

“Right to Counsel: The Independence of Lawyers in Myanmar”, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
<http://bit.ly/1khFyC9>

“Corruption Perceptions Index 2013”, Transparency International (TI)
<http://bit.ly/1fi18bK>

“Not a Rubber Stamp: Myanmar’s Legislature in a Time of Transition”, International Crisis Group (ICG)
<http://bit.ly/1cvDJgI>

“Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2013 – Lao PDR, Myanmar”, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
bit.ly/18PPBJu

“Seminar: Ethnic Conflict in Burma/Myanmar: From Aspirations to Solutions”, Transnational Institute and Burma Centrum Nederland (TNI-BCN)
<http://bit.ly/18V31nu>

“Mid-Year Trends 2013”, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
<http://bit.ly/1bupLL5>