

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



ALTERNATIVE A S E A N N E T W O R K O N B U R M A
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

Issue 87

March 2014

- **Anti-Rohingya mobs violently attack INGO workers' offices and homes in Arakan State's Akyab [Sittwe], forcing dozens to flee and leaving one girl dead. The regime uses the violence as an excuse to exclude Rohingya from an internationally-funded census.**
- **The international community urges the regime to restore safety and security for aid workers in Akyab, hold those involved in the mob attack accountable, and remain committed to holding a fair census.**
- **The regime pushes forward with discriminatory religious laws, banning interfaith marriage.**
- **The regime allows MSF to resume activities in Rangoon Division and Kachin and Shan States, but leaves tens of thousands of Rohingya without adequate healthcare in Arakan State.**
- **The regime's second investigatory commission releases findings to the public but fails to provide insight into the Du Chee Yar Tan violence.**
- **Tatmadaw troops continue to commit serious human rights violations against civilians in Kachin and Shan States. Offensives against the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Northern Shan State continue.**
- **Media freedom takes a step backwards as the National Parliament approves two restrictive media laws.**
- **Activist Thaw Zin is sentenced to 15 months in prison for helping local villagers protest against land confiscation related to the Monywa (Letpadaung) copper mine.**
- **UN Human Rights Council adopts by acclamation a resolution on the human rights situation in Burma and extends the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma for another year.**
- **10th ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum issues a joint statement calling for more human rights protection mechanisms to be developed in the ASEAN region.**
- **Regime Energy Ministry announces 12 offshore oil block winners in Gulf of Martaban, and off Burma's western and southern coasts.**

IN THIS ISSUE

KEY STORY

- 2 Regime pushes forward with anti-Muslim, anti-Rohingya agenda
- 3 Anti-Rohingya mobs attack foreign aid workers, one child dead
- 4 Int'l community expresses deep concern, regime promises probe

INSIDE BURMA

- 5 Parliament concludes ninth session
- 6 Limitations on journalists continue
- 6 MSF still suspended in Arakan State, no healthcare to Rohingya
- 7 Second investigatory commission holds a double standard
- 8 Shan, Kachin civilians tortured
- 9 Offensives in Northern Shan State
- 9 Slow progress made on ceasefire agreement, trust remains shaky

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 9 A step backwards for press freedom
- 11 More charged, arrested, & sentenced under restrictive laws
- 12 UN: Transition "remains fragile"
- 12 UNHRC adopts Burma resolution
- 13 ACSC/APF calls for more human rights protection mechanisms
- 13 Former General apologizes

ECONOMY

- 13 Regime announces oil block winners
- 14 Burma investment environment high-risk, ranked 2nd most restrictive
- 14 Unsteady progress on SEZ developments

15 OTHER BURMA NEWS

16 REPORTS

Receive the Burma Bulletin monthly!
email publications@altsean.org
Online copies are available for
download at www.altsean.org



Regime pushes forward with anti-Muslim, anti-Rohingya agenda

A new surge in anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim violence, propelled by anger at INGOs for providing humanitarian assistance to Rohingya, and the regime's initial agreement to allow Rohingya to self-identify in the census, led to the expulsion of INGOs from Arakan State, and resulted in the death of an 11-year old girl.¹ The violence also provided the authorities with a convenient excuse to renege on a promise, made under international pressure, to allow Rohingya to self-identify in the national census which began on 30 March.²

The violence is part of an ongoing campaign to isolate Rohingya and other IDPs by expelling NGOs and INGOs which have been subjected to a hate campaign for providing aid to Rohingya and reporting on anti-Muslim violence [See *January 2014 Burma Bulletin*, *February 2014 Burma Bulletin*].

Prior to and after the violence, the regime and other regime-backed groups pushed forward with anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim measures designed to deprive them of their rights and protection:

- **8 March, Commission to draft anti-Muslim laws:** State-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar announced the formation of a 12-member commission, under an order from the regime President's Office, to draft two bills concerning religious conversion and population control.³ The bills, often referred to as "race protection bills," aim to prevent Muslim men from marrying Buddhist women and impose other restrictions targeting Muslims.⁴ President Thein Sein said that sections of the proposals covering interfaith marriage and the law on monogamy would be drafted by the Supreme Court.⁵
- **10 March, Extremist leader rouses anti-Muslim sentiment:** Consistent with previous outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence, leader of the '969' movement extremist Buddhist monk U Wirathu visited the area and joined at least one protest. Over the following days, he held sermons for Buddhist Rakhine on the safeguarding of Buddhism and national identity in Akyab, Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, and Ponnagyun Townships, Arakan State.⁶
- **11 March, Commission denies Du Chee Yar Tan violence:** The commission's report said that it found no evidence that 48 Muslim Rohingya were killed in the January violence [See below, *Second investigatory commission holds a double standard*].⁷
- **13 March, State Parliament bans NGOs & INGOs:** The Arakan State Parliament unanimously approved a proposal to ban all "unregistered" NGOs and INGOs in Arakan State, claiming they were instigating unrest.⁸
- **16 March, Rally denies existence of Rohingya:** Extremist Buddhist monk U Wirathu attended a protest in Myebon Township, Arakan State, to prohibit use of the term 'Rohingya' on the national census and call for the immediate implementation of the 1982 Citizenship Law. He encouraged protestors by saying "there is no such Rohingya name in our country."⁹
- **20 March, New law prevents Rohingya from forming political parties:** The National Assembly approved a bill amending the Political Parties Registration Law, removing the right of temporary ID

¹ RFA (27 Mar 14) Mobs Attack Offices of UN, Aid Groups in Myanmar's Rakhine State; DVB (27 Mar 14) Buddhist mob attacks aid offices in Sittwe; AFP (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid groups, UN targeted by Myanmar mob; NLM (29 Mar 14) Calm returns to Sittway after two days of mob talks; AFP (29 Mar 14) Aid workers leave Myanmar city; RFA (28 Mar 14) Foreign Aid Groups Leave Myanmar's Sittwe as Girl Dies in Mob Violence

² AAP (30 Mar 14) Myanmar says 'Rohingya' term banned; AP (30 Mar 14) Myanmar census bars name Rohingya; DVB (03 Mar 14) Census convention kicks off in Naypyidaw; Irrawaddy (05 Mar 14) Arakanese MPs Oppose Census Classification for Rohingya

³ NLM (08 Mar 14) Commission formed to draft new bills

⁴ Thomson Reuters Foundation (10 Mar 14) Hopes Were High for Burma But Is the Honeymoon Over?

⁵ Irrawaddy (07 Mar 14) Thein Sein Orders Commission, Court to Draft 'Protection of Religion' Law

⁶ Mizzima News (17 Mar 14) Rakhine State protests oppose 'Rohingya' as census category; Irrawaddy (17 Mar 14) Wirathu Joins Arakanese Protest Against Census; Irrawaddy (14 Mar 14) Wirathu Visits Sittwe, Urges Strong Security Presence

⁷ DVB (11 Mar 14) Duchira Dan commission slams UN, media; denies massacre; RFA (11 Mar 14) Myanmar Panel Rejects Claims of Rohingya Killings, Recommends Citizenship; Myanmar Times (12 Mar 14) Investigation team accuses media, INGOs of inflaming Rakhine conflict

⁸ Narinjara News (16 Mar 14) Arakan bans unregistered NGOs; EMG (29 Mar 14) Sittwe calm again; one killed in riot

⁹ EMG (17 Mar 14) Ethnic Rakhine oppose use of "Rohingya" in state census taking; Mizzima News (17 Mar 14) Rakhine State protests oppose 'Rohingya' as census category; Irrawaddy (17 Mar 14) Wirathu Joins Arakanese Protest Against Census; Mizzima News (17 Mar 14) Rakhine State protests oppose 'Rohingya' as census category

holders, held by many Rohingya, to form political parties.¹⁰ The amendment will now go to the People's Assembly for approval.¹¹

- **29 March, Rohingya excluded from census:** President Thein Sein's spokesperson Ye Htut announced Rohingya would not be allowed to identify as such in the national census, saying, "If a household wants to identify themselves as 'Rohingya,' we will not register it".¹² On 30 March, census enumerators began the data collection process, gratifying the All Rakhine Committee for the Census (ARCC) who had previously threatened a boycott.¹³

Anti-Rohingya mobs attack foreign aid workers, one child dead

On 26 and 27 March in Akyab [Sittwe], Arakan State, extremist Buddhist Rakhine mobs took to the streets, angry with international aid agencies for helping the Rohingya population and with the regime for allowing the 'Rohingya' self-identification option on the national census.¹⁴ The hysteria culminated in the destruction of at least 29 houses, seven warehouses and two vehicles, the firing of over 120 warning shots, the death of one 11-year old girl, the emergency relocation of over 70 aid workers, and the imposition of a dusk-to-dawn curfew.¹⁵

The violence was triggered when project coordinator for Germany-based aid agency Malteser Yvonne Dunton removed a Buddhist flag – which has developed into an anti-Rohingya protest symbol – from the Malteser office building. An angry mob gathered outside the office, followed her home, shouted and smashed her windows. Dunton and her husband were taken into police custody for their safety.¹⁶

- **26 March:** At least 300 Buddhist Rakhine surrounded Germany-based Malteser International's office in Akyab, threw stones at the building and smashed the building's windows, forcing staff to flee. Police fired at least 40 warning shots to disperse the mob, which moved on to attack nearby offices.¹⁷
- **27 March:** A Buddhist Rakhine mob, reportedly numbering more than 1,000, returned to stone INGO homes and office spaces despite a police blockade. The police were forced to evacuate INGO workers and bring them into police custody. This included at least 70 aid workers from nine organizations, including around 30 foreigners.¹⁸
- **27 March:** An 11-year old girl died in hospital, shortly after being hit by a stray bullet when police fired warning shots to disperse a mob outside the World Food Program's office in Akyab.¹⁹ A 6 am to 6 pm curfew was imposed on Akyab under Emergency Act 144.²⁰

Malteser revealed that the mob attacked 90% of all offices and facilities of UN and international relief organizations in Akyab.²¹ Affected agencies included OXFAM, World Lutheran Foundation, UNICEF,

¹⁰ EMG (21 Mar 14) Myanmar politics for citizens only: New law

¹¹ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 14) Upper House Approves Ban on Politics for Non-Citizens

¹² AP (29 Mar 14) Myanmar bans 'Rohingya' term from census

¹³ AP (29 Mar 14) Myanmar bans 'Rohingya' term from census , AAP (30 Mar 14) Myanmar says 'Rohingya' term banned , DVB (30 Mar 14) Burma's first census in 30 years begins; DVB (30 Mar 14) Term 'Rohingya' struck from census

¹⁴ RFA (27 Mar 14) Mobs Attack Offices of UN, Aid Groups in Myanmar's Rakhine State; DVB (27 Mar 14) Buddhist mob attacks aid offices in Sittwe; AFP (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid groups, UN targeted by Myanmar mob

¹⁵ Irrawaddy (28 Mar 14) Aid Workers Flee, Girl Killed as Attacks Continue in Sittwe; AP (28 Mar 14) Soldiers, police patrol streets in western Myanmar; Myanmar Times (28 Mar 14) UN condemns attacks on INGOs; AFP (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid workers targeted by Myanmar mob: police; RFA (28 Mar 14) Foreign Aid Groups Leave Myanmar's Sittwe as Girl Dies in Mob Violence

¹⁶ AP (27 Mar 14) Aid workers' homes attacked; DVB (27 Mar 14) Buddhist mob attacks aid offices in Sittwe; RFA (27 Mar 14) Mobs Attack Offices of UN, Aid Groups in Myanmar's Rakhine State; DVB & Reuters (1 Apr 14) Govt pledges safety of UN, INGO workers in Sittwe, NLM (28 Mar 14) Rakhine State Govt to conduct investigation into riots targeting offices, residences of int'l aid groups

¹⁷ AP (27 Mar 14) Aid workers' homes attacked; RFA (27 Mar 14) Mobs Attack Offices of UN, Aid Groups in Myanmar's Rakhine State, Myanmar Times (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid workers to be evacuated from Sittwe; DVB (27 Mar 14) Buddhist mob attacks aid offices in Sittwe; DVB (28 Mar 14) Intl community 'deeply concerned' over Sittwe riots

¹⁸ DVB (27 Mar 14) Buddhist mob attacks aid offices in Sittwe; Irrawaddy (27 Mar 14) Arakanese Mob Attacks Aid Group Offices, Forces Staff to Flee, AFP (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid groups, UN targeted by Myanmar mob

¹⁹ NLM (29 Mar 14) Calm returns to Sittway after two days of mob talks; AFP (29 Mar 14) Aid workers leave Myanmar city; RFA (28 Mar 14) Foreign Aid Groups Leave Myanmar's Sittwe as Girl Dies in Mob Violence

²⁰ Kaladan Press Network (28 Mar 14) Govt reinstates Emergency Act 144

²¹ Malteser (28 Mar 14) Unrest in Sittwe/Rakhine State: Malteser International calls for reopening of humanitarian space

UNOCHA, Solidarity International, ICRC, UNHCR, World Food Program, Malteser International and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).²²

On 28 March, Malteser International stated that their program coordinator had acted to ensure the “absolute ethnic and political neutrality of [their] work”.²³ The INGO also decided to temporarily suspend operations in Akyab, but highlighted the urgency for humanitarian work to resume.²⁴ Malteser International was one of the largest NGOs providing health care in Arakan State, second only to MSF which was expelled from Arakan State last month [See *February 2014 Burma Bulletin*].²⁵

Int'l community expresses deep concern, regime promises a probe

In March, various international actors voiced their concern about the violence:

- **27 March:** EU released a statement expressing its concern with the violence in Arakan State, and called for the restoration of safety and security for relief workers and INGO operations.²⁶
- **27 March:** US Embassy in Rangoon said it was “deeply concerned” by the violence in Akyab and the lack of adequate security forces and rule of law in Arakan State as a whole, and reminded the regime that “unhindered and regular humanitarian access to communities in need” and the “safety and security of humanitarian aid workers” are “core international principles”.²⁷
- **27 March:** French foreign affairs ministry expressed their concern about the violence and called for a safe environment for UN and INGO workers to provide relief services to populations in need.²⁸
- **27 March:** UN Acting Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Burma Toily Kurbanov urged the regime to protect the NGO community and hold perpetrators accountable. He expressed concern that the reduced international humanitarian presence could place vulnerable groups at risk, but asserted UN agencies were “determined” to resume operation in Arakan State.²⁹
- **27 March:** It was reported that Germany-based Malteser’s spokesperson Johannes Kaltenbach said Rakhine Buddhists had planned the violence against almost all the offices of international aid groups in Akyab “in advance”, in a bid to stop them from facilitating the census.³⁰
- **28 March:** It was reported that Human Rights Watch researcher David Mathieson called on governments to demand that the regime “ensure the safety and integrity of humanitarian operations or abrogate its responsibilities as a rational government”.³¹
- **28 March:** Refugees International (RI) highlighted that Rohingya are facing “a deliberate and systematic assault” and that the diminishing international presence in Arakan State means “the international community’s ability to monitor events in the [IDP] camps – and to respond – will decrease”. RI called for pressure on the regime to stop persecution and hate speech against Rohingya, allow them freedom of movement, and enable “full humanitarian assistance” in Arakan State.³²
- **28 March:** UNFPA emphasized that the regime could not back away from its commitment to allow “all respondents” the option to self-identify, stressing the importance for the census to be conducted in a “fair, inclusive and uniform manner in every state and for every community,” and that respondents are made to feel safe to answer questions “without fear or intimidation”.³³

²² DVB (28 Mar 14) Burmese govt pledges to investigate Sittwe riot; Xinhua (28 Mar 14) Myanmar to probe into Rakhine riot targeting int'l aid group premises; AP (28 Mar 14) Soldiers, police patrol streets in western Myanmar; Kaladan Press Network (28 Mar 14) Govt reinstates Emergency Act 144

²³ CNN (28 Mar 14) Concern as Buddhist mobs target foreign aid groups in Myanmar

²⁴ Malteser (28 Mar 14) Unrest in Sittwe/Rakhine State: Malteser International calls for reopening of humanitarian space

²⁵ Kaladan Press Network (28 Mar 14) Govt reinstates Emergency Act 144

²⁶ DVB (28 Mar 14) Intl community ‘deeply concerned’ over Sittwe riots

²⁷ US Embassy Rangoon (27 Mar 14) Press Release: United States Deeply Concerned by Mob Violence in Sittwe; RFA (27 Mar 14) Mobs Attack Offices of UN, Aid Groups in Myanmar’s Rakhine State; CNN (28 Mar 14) Concern as Buddhist mobs target foreign aid groups in Myanmar

²⁸ France Diplomatie (27 Mar 14) Myanmar/Burma – Violence against humanitarian personnel (March 27, 2014)

²⁹ Xinhua (28 Mar 14) Myanmar to probe into Rakhine riot targeting int'l aid group premises; Irrawaddy (28 Mar 14) Aid Workers Flee, Girl Killed as Attacks Continue in Sittwe

³⁰ AFP (27 Mar 14) Foreign aid groups, UN targeted by Myanmar mob

³¹ DVB (28 Mar 14) Intl community ‘deeply concerned’ over Sittwe riots

³² RI (28 Mar 14) Protect Rohingya Rights - Before It's Too Late

³³ Mizzima News (28 Mar 14) UNFPA responds to reports linking Sittwe riots to tensions over census

- **30 March:** UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon called for an end to impunity, protection of all civilians, and enforcement of the rule of law during a phone conversation with President Thein Sein. He also asked the regime to help establish a strong international presence in Arakan State.³⁴

On 28 March, the regime President's Office announced formation of a five-member commission, led by regime Border Affairs Deputy Minister Maung Maung Ohn, to "expose those who led and were involved in" the riots.³⁵ The commission will present its findings directly to President Thein Sein on 7 April.³⁶

INSIDE BURMA

Parliament concludes its ninth regular session

In March, Parliament concluded its ninth regular session. Important developments included:

- **5 March:** The People's Assembly approved an amendment to the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law which deleted (repealed) the provision under Article 18 that allowed local authorities to deny permission to those applying for authorization for a demonstration. Instead, would-be protestors only have to "inform" township administrators about planned demonstrations.³⁷ The amendment reduced the maximum prison sentences for staging an unauthorized protest from one year to six months, with a possible 30,000 kyat fine (US\$30). The penalties would only apply if protestors failed to inform local authorities of a planned protest.³⁸ Authorities can also revoke permission for a protest if protestors violate any of the rules stated under Article 12 of the law.³⁹ The amended bill will now go to the National Assembly's Bill Committee for discussion.⁴⁰
- **11 March:** The National Parliament approved amendments to the Income Tax Law and the Commercial Tax Law in a bid to reduce tax evasion and increase tax revenue from between 3 and 4% to 4.5% of the GDP. The amendments introduced incentives such as deductions on property tax. The laws are set to come into force on 1 April.⁴¹
- **13 March:** The National Parliament approved the Anti-Money Laundering Bill after accepting President Thein Sein's suggested amendments, including a suggestion to reduce prison terms from three years to one year.⁴²
- **17 March:** Regime Information Minister Aung Kyi introduced the Public Service Media Bill to the People's Assembly.⁴³ The bill, drafted by the regime Information Ministry with the assistance of UNESCO, aims to transform state-run media into public service media, funded by the regime.⁴⁴ The bill states that anyone who takes action against editors, reporters and other persons working for the public service media can be subject to a fine of up to 500,000 kyat (US\$500).⁴⁵
- **19 March:** The National Parliament approved a proposal to increase electricity charges, set to begin on 1 April.⁴⁶ Eighteen opposition MPs voted against the price increase. The bill will raise household electricity bills by 40-100%, depending on usage, with companies expected to pay more.⁴⁷

³⁴ UN News Centre (31 Mar 14) In wake of attacks, Ban urges Myanmar to ensure safety of humanitarian workers, property

³⁵ NLM (29 Mar 14) Republic of the Union of Myanmar President Office Notification No. 24/2014

³⁶ Xinhua (29 Mar 14) Myanmar gov't forms investigation commission to probe into Rakhine incident

³⁷ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 14) Protestors Only Required to 'Inform' in Lower House Change to Section 18; DVB (06 Mar 14) Lower House proposes softening Peaceful Assembly Law

³⁸ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 14) Protestors Only Required to 'Inform' in Lower House Change to Section 18; DVB (06 Mar 14) Lower House proposes softening Peaceful Assembly Law; EMG (06 Mar 14) Lower House passes bill to amend Section 18

³⁹ EMG (06 Mar 14) Lower House passes bill to amend Section 18

⁴⁰ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 14) Protestors Only Required to 'Inform' in Lower House Change to Section 18

⁴¹ NLM (12 Mar 14) Parliament passes Bills amending Income Tax Law, Commercial Tax Law; Xinhua (12 Mar 14) Myanmar parliament approves two tax bills; DVB (12 Mar 14) Taxman hopes Burmese will stop evading him; Myanmar Times (17 Mar 14) New tax law sees marked rate reductions

⁴² NLM (14 Mar 14) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves specials funds for construction, rural electrification; Myanmar Times (17 Mar 14) MPs approve changes to anti-money laundering bill; EMG (11 Mar 14) President remarks on reduced punishment for Anti-Money Laundering Bill

⁴³ NLM (18 Mar 14) Public Service Media Bill submitted to parliament

⁴⁴ DVB (19 Mar 14) Public Service Media Bill rejected by Interim Press Council; EMG (19 Mar 14) PSM bill goes to parliament despite objection from journalists

⁴⁵ EMG (19 Mar 14) PSM bill goes to parliament despite objection from journalists

⁴⁶ NLM (20 Mar 14) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves increase in electricity bills; RFA (19 Mar 14) Myanmar's Lawmakers Approve Government Move to Hike Power Rates

⁴⁷ EMG (20 Mar 14) Electricity fee hikes will benefit cronies, hurt small business—Opposition MPs; Mizzima News (20 Mar 14) Joint house approves increase electricity charges

- **21 March:** The People's Assembly approved the National Education Bill with 13 points of amendment from MPs and nine points from the Bill Committee.⁴⁸ The Network for Education Reform (NNER) said that the education bill drafted by the People's Assembly's Education Promotion Committee would bring the curriculum of the education sector under strict regime control.⁴⁹
- **25 March:** The National Parliament approved the national budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year.⁵⁰ Details of the budget remained elusive. On 22 March, state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar reported the budget allocation for education and healthcare, which will account for 5.9% and 3.4% respectively, but failed to mention military expenditure.⁵¹ On 14 January, regime Defense Minister Lt Gen Wai Lwin proposed a 2.36 trillion kyat (US\$2.36 billion) defense budget, i.e. an increase of 120 billion kyat (US\$120 million) compared to the previous year.⁵²
- **26 March:** The National Parliament approved the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Bill. The bill sets out the appointment process for new commission members [See *January 2014 Burma Bulletin*].⁵³

Regime continues to impose limitations on journalists

In March, fears about Burma's press freedom resurfaced as the National Parliament approved two bills restricting media freedom and the regime continued to impose limitations on journalists [See below, *A step backwards for press freedom*]. On 5 March, authorities denied newspaper reporters, including those from Democratic Voice of Burma, Mizzima News, and Myanmar Times, access to Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing's first press conference following the 11th ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces Informal Meeting because of "seating difficulties".⁵⁴ Mizzima News and Myanmar Times reporters had previously been denied entry to a media briefing in January, after reporting on the Du Chee Yar Tan anti-Muslim violence.

On 9 March, President Thein Sein's spokesman Ye Htut announced via his Facebook page that Time magazine reporter Hannah Beech was denied a journalist visa to attend the fourth East-West Center's International Media Conference in Rangoon because her presence could lead to "unwanted consequences".⁵⁵ Ye Htut said that the visa restrictions imposed on foreign journalists since February had "nothing to do" with the international press coverage of the anti-Muslim violence in Arakan State in January [See *January 2014 Burma Bulletin*].⁵⁶ He insisted the restrictions were an "adjustment" after the discovery that about 100 foreign journalists had been working inside Burma for a year without informing the regime Information Ministry or joining the Foreign Correspondents Club.⁵⁷

MSF still suspended in Arakan State, regime fails to provide healthcare to Rohingya

In early March, the regime reversed its decision to expel Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from Burma [See *February 2014 Burma Bulletin*], but continued to block the organization from operating in Arakan State.⁵⁸ On 1 March, two days after the regime took punitive action to shut down its entire operations in Burma, MSF announced it would resume "part of its activities" in Rangoon Division and Kachin and Shan States on 3 March.⁵⁹ On 2 March, the regime Health Ministry denied "rumors" that MSF had been

⁴⁸ NLM (22 Mar 14) Pyithu Hluttaw passes National Education Bill

⁴⁹ DVB (21 Mar 14) Burma's education policy under fire from academics

⁵⁰ NLM (26 Mar 14) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes National Planning Bill, Union Budget Bill

⁵¹ NLM (22 Mar 14) Government's National Planning Bill to provide for increased spending on health, education sectors

⁵² Irrawaddy (15 Jan 14) Burma Defense Ministry Puts Forward Budget Request

⁵³ NLM (27 Mar 14) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concludes ninth regular session, stressing great strides in pursuit of peace and prosperity, rule of law

⁵⁴ Myanmar Times (07 Mar 14) Senior general press meet descends into farce

⁵⁵ Hannah Beech is the author of an article which portrayed extremist Buddhist monk U Wirathu as "the face of Buddhist terror" in June 2013, which was banned by the regime in order to prevent "further racial and religious conflicts".

DVB (10 Mar 14) Ye Htut supports press freedom – on govt terms; Thomson Reuters Foundation (10 Mar 14) Myanmar govt spokesman says new restrictions on foreign journalists not tied to reporting on Rohingya

⁵⁶ Thomson Reuters Foundation (10 Mar 14) Myanmar govt spokesman says new restrictions on foreign journalists not tied to reporting on Rohingya

⁵⁷ Thomson Reuters Foundation (10 Mar 14) Myanmar govt spokesman says new restrictions on foreign journalists not tied to reporting on Rohingya

⁵⁸ NLM (02 Mar 14) Press Release of Ministry of Health; Mizzima News (03 Mar 14) MSF to cease operating in Rakhine State only, says ministry; Myanmar Times (28 Feb 14) MSF ordered out of Rakhine State; Mizzima News (28 Feb 14) MSF declines to comment on Rakhine State expulsion order; Irrawaddy (28 Feb 14) Burma Suspends All Aid Operations of MSF

⁵⁹ AFP (02 Mar 14) Myanmar allows partial resumption of MSF operations

ordered to cease operations throughout the country, saying it had only been ordered to “temporarily suspend” activity in Arakan State due to issues of “public acceptance”.⁶⁰ It also said that the regime would consider allowing MSF to resume operations in Arakan State when it saw “peace and stability”.⁶¹

On 2 March, regime Arakan State Attorney General Hla Thein said MSF would be replaced with the regime’s own health services in Arakan State.⁶² Despite boasting on 3 March that they could take over MSF’s activities “in one week,” on 12 March, the regime Health Ministry admitted it was continuing to accept HIV and TB drugs from MSF for patients in Arakan State.⁶³ MSF expressed concern that tens of thousands of vulnerable people in Arakan State were facing a humanitarian medical crisis as a result of its suspension.⁶⁴ On 10 March, reports began to emerge of Rohingya dying without access to adequate medical care and receiving poor treatment at Rakhine-run state hospitals.⁶⁵ On 13 March, it was reported that at least 150 Rohingya, including pregnant women facing difficult deliveries, had died since 28 February.⁶⁶ On 27 March, a month after MSF’s suspension, it was reported that the regime Health Ministry had taken over MSF’s health services in Arakan State.⁶⁷

Second investigatory commission holds a double standard

On 11 March, the regime-appointed 10-member investigatory commission tasked with looking into the death of Sgt Aung Kyaw and the 28 January fire that broke out in Du Chee Yar Tan Village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, released its findings to the public.⁶⁸ The commission found no evidence – neither bodies nor graves – that 48 Muslim Rohingya were killed in the January violence,⁶⁹ sharply contrasting with its assertion that villagers had likely killed police Sgt Aung Kyaw Thein, whose body was also missing.⁷⁰

The commission said reports of the deaths were false allegations to destabilize Burma’s reform process.⁷¹ Adviser to President Thein Sein and secretary of the commission Kyaw Yin Hlaing claimed that the names of victims cited on Rohingya websites did not match local immigration records and were therefore fake.⁷² The UN and aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) were blamed for propagating false, unverified information which “contributed in no small way to the conflation of this issue”.⁷³

The commission absolved security forces of any blame, claiming that “an entity seeking to discredit” the regime was behind the burning of Rohingya homes and wide-scale looting.⁷⁴ Its recommendations included increasing the weapons capacity of local security forces, enabling Rohingya eligible for citizenship to receive citizenship in order to administer their own communities, and measures to “counter the false allegations made by media”.⁷⁵ Secretary of the commission Kyaw Yin Hlaing challenged critics to “try to come up with better evidence, concrete evidence and refute [their]

⁶⁰ NLM (02 Mar 14) Press Release of Ministry of Health; Mizzima News (03 Mar 14) MSF to cease operating in Rakhine State only, says ministry

⁶¹ NLM (02 Mar 14) Press Release of Ministry of Health; AFP (02 Mar 14) Myanmar allows partial resumption of MSF operations

⁶² Mizzima News (03 Mar 14) MSF to cease operating in Rakhine State only, says ministry; DVB (28 Feb 14) MSF face expulsion from Burma

⁶³ AP (12 Mar 14) Rohingya dying from lack of health care in Myanmar; IRIN (03 Mar 14) Myanmar still talking tough over MSF expulsion from Rakhine

⁶⁴ MSF (02 Mar 14) Myanmar: MSF to resume HIV/AIDS and all other activities in Kachin, Shan, and Yangon but concerns remain; VOA (10 Mar 14) Activists: Burma’s Foreign Aid Group Ban Puts Thousands at Risk

⁶⁵ Myanmar Times (10 Mar 14) Medical gap threatens lives in Rakhine; VOA (10 Mar 14) Activists: Burma’s Foreign Aid Group Ban Puts Thousands at Risk

⁶⁶ NYT (13 Mar 14) Ban on Doctors’ Group Imperils Myanmar Sect

⁶⁷ NLM (27 Mar 14) Health Care Activities by Ministry of Health, Department of Health to continue the activities previously conducted by MSF-H (AZG) in Rakhine State

⁶⁸ DVB (11 Mar 14) Duchira Dan commission slams UN, media; denies massacre

⁶⁹ RFA (11 Mar 14) Myanmar Panel Rejects Claims of Rohingya Killings, Recommends Citizenship; Myanmar Times (12 Mar 14) Investigation team accuses media, INGOs of inflaming Rakhine conflict

⁷⁰ RFA (11 Mar 14) Myanmar Panel Rejects Claims of Rohingya Killings, Recommends Citizenship; Myanmar Times (12 Mar 14) Investigation team accuses media, INGOs of inflaming Rakhine conflict

⁷¹ DVB (11 Mar 14) Duchira Dan commission slams UN, media; denies massacre

⁷² DVB (11 Mar 14) Duchira Dan commission slams UN, media; denies massacre

⁷³ RFA (11 Mar 14) Myanmar Panel Rejects Claims of Rohingya Killings, Recommends Citizenship; Irrawaddy (11 Mar 14) Govt Investigation Dismisses Allegations of Rohingya Killings

⁷⁴ DVB (11 Mar 14) Duchira Dan commission slams UN, media; denies massacre

⁷⁵ Mizzima News (12 Mar 14) Panel recommends citizenship for eligible Muslims in Rakhine State; RFA (11 Mar 14) Myanmar Panel Rejects Claims of Rohingya Killings, Recommends Citizenship; Irrawaddy (11 Mar 14) Govt Investigation Dismisses Allegations of Rohingya Killings

assessment”.⁷⁶ The commission’s report is unlikely to satisfy many observers, who alleged that the results were a foregone conclusion.⁷⁷

Shan, Kachin civilians detained, tortured

In March, Tatmadaw troops continued to commit serious human rights violations against civilians in Kachin and Shan States.⁷⁸ Ongoing offensives against civilian ethnic groups undermined the regime’s ceasefire plans. Reported abuses of civilians included:

- **1-2 March:** Despite being located in a ceasefire zone and no Shan forces being present, Tatmadaw troops shelled 11 villages, causing 2,000 villagers to flee, and tortured a villager, knocking out his teeth, in Nawngkhio Township, Northern Shan State.⁷⁹ Tatmadaw troops moved into the area on 26 February, and began interrogating villagers, extracting forced labor, looting, and shooting livestock.⁸⁰
- **4 March:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 5 extorted money from travelers in Kamaing, Hpakan Township, Kachin State.⁸¹
- **4 March:** Tatmadaw troops set fire to rubber fields and bamboo forests in Bhamo and Waingmaw Townships, Southern Kachin State.⁸²
- **5 March:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 80 demanded money from local residents in Nam Byu, Tanai Township, Western Kachin State.⁸³
- **7 March:** It was reported that Tatmadaw troops harassed and robbed villagers and travelers in U Di Bum Village, Hpakan Township, Kachin State.⁸⁴
- **7 March:** It was reported that Tatmadaw troops had forbidden villagers from using the river crossing at Tar Hsarm Pu base, Monghsu Township, Kachin State.⁸⁵
- **21 March:** Tatmadaw troops from LIBs 77 and 503 attacked Ngar Jarng Village, Kyaukme Township, Northern Shan State, and detained and tortured five villagers suspected of links with the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and the village headman.⁸⁶ On 23 March, when relatives went to visit the village headman in detention, Kyaukme Township police denied them entry.⁸⁷
- **23 March:** Tatmadaw troops from IBs 519 and 53 looted villager property and livestock in Banggeng Village, Mongton Township, Eastern Shan State.⁸⁸
- **24 March:** Tatmadaw troops detained and tortured a restaurant owner in Nam Lin Pone Village, Kyaukme Township, Northern Shan State.⁸⁹

On 24 March, Harvard University’s International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC)’s report “Preventing Indiscriminate Attacks and Willful Killings of Civilians by the Myanmar Military,” said the Tatmadaw, as part of a “centrally planned counterinsurgency” strategy, continued to directly target civilians with “shoot-on-sight” directives, indiscriminate artillery shelling, extrajudicial killings, and use of landmines to inflict civilian casualties.⁹⁰

⁷⁶ CNA (11 Mar 14) Critics question Myanmar’s report on Rohingya killings

⁷⁷ Myanmar Times (12 Mar 14) Investigation team accuses media, INGOs of inflaming Rakhine conflict

⁷⁸ DVB (17 Mar 14) Seven Red Shan allegedly abducted by KIA; DVB (18 Mar 14) Burmese army tortured Shan civilians, says rights group; Kachinland News (07 Mar 14) Abuses Increased as More Government Troops Deployed in Kachin Region; SHAN (26 Mar 14) Burma Army arrests and tortures suspected of associating with SSA; SHAN (07 Mar 14) Burma Army forbids people to cross at Tar Hsarm Pu; KIC (21 Mar 14) 2,000 Civilians Flee Burma Army Attacks; Kachinland News (05 Mar 14) Burmese Army Sends More Troops to Frontline as Peace Negotiators Prepare to Meet

⁷⁹ KIC (21 Mar 14) 2,000 Civilians Flee Burma Army Attacks; DVB (18 Mar 14) Burmese army tortured Shan civilians, says rights group

⁸⁰ KIC (21 Mar 14) 2,000 Civilians Flee Burma Army Attacks; DVB (18 Mar 14) Burmese army tortured Shan civilians, says rights group

⁸¹ Kachinland News (07 Mar 14) Abuses Increased as More Government Troops Deployed in Kachin Region

⁸² Kachinland News (07 Mar 14) Abuses Increased as More Government Troops Deployed in Kachin Region

⁸³ Kachinland News (07 Mar 14) Abuses Increased as More Government Troops Deployed in Kachin Region

⁸⁴ Kachinland News (07 Mar 14) Abuses Increased as More Government Troops Deployed in Kachin Region

⁸⁵ SHAN (07 Mar 14) Burma Army forbids people to cross at Tar Hsarm Pu

⁸⁶ SHAN (26 Mar 14) Burma Army arrests and tortures suspected of associating with SSA

⁸⁷ SHAN (26 Mar 14) Burma Army arrests and tortures suspected of associating with SSA

⁸⁸ SHRF (28 Mar 14) Spreading Burma Army attacks and abuses against civilians in Shan State undermine nationwide ceasefire negotiations

⁸⁹ SHAN (26 Mar 14) Burma Army arrests and tortures suspected of associating with SSA

⁹⁰ Irrawaddy (24 Mar 14) Report Says Tatmadaw’s Targeting of Civilians ‘Ongoing,’ Urges Reforms

Offensives in Northern Shan State continue

On 10 March, Tatmadaw lead negotiator Lt Gen Myint Soe denied that the Tatmadaw had attacked ethnic armed groups in Kachin and Shan States in January and February.⁹¹ However, throughout March, Tatmadaw troops continued to clash with the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Northern Shan State.⁹²

- **2 March:** Tatmadaw troops captured Loi Hkam Bum, a KIA post in Namtu Township, Northern Shan State.⁹³
- **4 March:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 507 clashed with Kachin People's Militia (a militia force affiliated with the KIA) in Yi Hku Village, Muse Township, Northern Shan State.⁹⁴
- **11 March:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with SSA-N forces close to SSA-N headquarters in Wanhai, Kyethi Township, Northern Shan State.⁹⁵
- **24 March:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalion 34 in Mongmit Township, Northern Shan State.⁹⁶

Slow progress made on ceasefire agreement, trust remains shaky

On 10 March, at the regime-supported Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) in Rangoon, the ethnic armed groups' peacemaking team, the regime's peacemaking team, and six military leaders agreed to form a joint committee to combine both peacemaking teams' preliminary drafts into a final draft of a nationwide ceasefire peace agreement.⁹⁷ The committee will consist of 18 members – nine members from each team – including three military commanders, three MPs, and three regime cabinet officials.⁹⁸ The draft agreement will include guarantees for political dialogue, to begin within 60 days of the ceasefire being signed.⁹⁹ Ethnic armed groups negotiating team chairman Nai Hong Sar said ethnic armed groups not represented in the negotiation team, including All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), United Wa State Party (UWSP), Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), and New Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), may participate in the draft discussions, which are set to begin in the first week of April.¹⁰⁰

However, trust in the regime remained shaky. On 10 March, Karen National Union (KNU) Major Saw Kler Doh said the regime had not yet complied with any demands made during peace talks, including the withdrawal of troops.¹⁰¹ Ethnic armed groups' negotiation team member Hkun Okker also asserted that the signing of the ceasefire should not be taken as an acceptance of the 2008 constitution and on 12 March, accused MPC officials of trying to disrupt reconciliation efforts.¹⁰²

HUMAN RIGHTS

A step backwards for press freedom

In March, during its ninth regular session, Parliament approved two parallel pieces of press legislation that raised concern among journalists and press freedom groups. On 4 March, the National Parliament

⁹¹ Mizzima News (12 Mar 14) Military did not launch offensives, says senior officer

⁹² Kachinland News (05 Mar 14) Burmese Army Sends More Troops to Frontline as Peace Negotiators Prepare to Meet; Irrawaddy (04 Mar 14) Army Increases Attacks in North Burma, Seizes 2 Shan Rebel Camps; KLN (03 Mar 14) Government Troops Overrun Another Kachin Military Base; SHAN (04 Mar 14) SSPP leaders in Naypyitaw, but attack at home; DVB (13 Mar 14) Shans plan their own census

⁹³ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 14) Army Increases Attacks in North Burma, Seizes 2 Shan Rebel Camps

⁹⁴ Kachinland News (05 Mar 14) Burmese Army Sends More Troops to Frontline as Peace Negotiators Prepare to Meet

⁹⁵ DVB (13 Mar 14) Shans plan their own census

⁹⁶ Kachinland News (25 Mar 14) Battles Resume in Northern Shan State

⁹⁷ RFA (10 Mar 14) New Committee Formed to Draft Myanmar Nationwide Cease-Fire Pact; Mizzima News (11 Mar 14) Joint committee to draft nationwide ceasefire agreement; Irrawaddy (10 Mar 14) Govt, Ethnic Rebels Form New Committee to Push Peace Talks Forward; EMG (11 Mar 14) Military calls for ceasefire deal to be signed by August 1

⁹⁸ Irrawaddy (10 Mar 14) Govt, Ethnic Rebels Form New Committee to Push Peace Talks Forward

⁹⁹ Mizzima News (11 Mar 14) Joint committee to draft nationwide ceasefire agreement

¹⁰⁰ Mizzima News (11 Mar 14) Joint committee to draft nationwide ceasefire agreement; SHAN (18 Mar 14) Yawdserk dismissed media report on separate ceasefire deal

¹⁰¹ SHAN (18 Mar 14) BURMA'S CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT: One text procedure, trustworthiness, area cleansing & control policy

¹⁰² EMG (13 Mar 14) Gov't-sponsored MPC is not trustworthy, say ethnic federations; SHAN (27 Mar 14) Ceasefire doesn't mean greenlight for 2008 charter: NCCT

approved the Printing and Publishing Bill, which replaced the 1962 Printing and Publishing Act, and the Media Bill.¹⁰³ On 14 March, President Thein Sein enacted the Media Bill into law.¹⁰⁴ The bills were approved after significant delays and several redrafts of the legislation. Neither of the laws met hopes that the legislation would enable a free press without the regime's intervention and oversight.¹⁰⁵ In a letter addressed to President Thein Sein, US-based Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ) urged President Thein Sein to veto the Printing and Publishing Law saying the law would be a step backward.¹⁰⁶ International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said they feared journalists would turn to self-censorship if they were not adequately protected by the media laws.¹⁰⁷

While neither of the two laws carries prison term punishments, stakeholders are concerned that reporters could still end up in prison under other repressive laws that allow for the detention and legal harassment of journalists – such as the Electronics Act, 1923 Official Secrets Act, and criminal defamation – that still remain on the books.¹⁰⁸

The Printing and Publishing Law, drafted by the regime Information Ministry, requires all media enterprises to register with authorities or risk fines.¹⁰⁹ The law empowers the regime Information Ministry to withhold or revoke publishing licenses unilaterally, and gives it control over what is permissible for publication.¹¹⁰ Under the new law, publishing of material that “insults” religion, undermines the rule of law, harms ethnic unity, or provokes subject matters which may threaten national security, risks the immediate suspension of a publisher's license and a possible fine.¹¹¹

The Media Law, drafted by the regime-appointed Myanmar Press Council (MPC), outlines the rights and obligations of the media, through a code and a complaints system, advocating self-censorship.¹¹² The law authorizes a media council to monitor the quality of the news media and report to the President. Comprising industry professionals and experts in the field, as well as three members, nominated respectively by the president, the People's Assembly Speaker, and the National Assembly Speaker, the council will settle disputes and breaches of the law. If disputes cannot be settled by the council, the case can be brought to court.¹¹³

Under the Media Law, the council, rather than law enforcement authorities, will be responsible for prosecuting journalists accused of violating media ethics, with the authority to fine those found guilty up to 1 million kyat (US\$1,000).¹¹⁴ The Media Law also states that the regime may prosecute publications and journalists accused of instigating unrest related to “nationality, religion, and race” through their publications.¹¹⁵

On 19 March, state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar announced that President Thein Sein had signed the Media Bill into law, heralding it as a law which “clearly stipulat[es] press freedom”.¹¹⁶ The New Light of Myanmar said that the Media Law gave journalists the right to “openly criticize and pinpoint the shortcomings of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers,” as well as the “right to conduct investigative journalism” – but only “in conformity with the constitution”.¹¹⁷

¹⁰³ NLM (05 Mar 14) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Development Fund Bill, Printing and Publishing Enterprise Bill, Media Bill; Irrawaddy (05 Mar 14) Burma's Parliament Approves 'Parallel' Media Laws

¹⁰⁴ Myanmar Times (24 Mar 14) Confusion and apprehension over new media laws

¹⁰⁵ Irrawaddy (17 Mar 14) Burma Clampdown Gathers Pace as Legislation Passed

¹⁰⁶ CPJ (17 Mar 14) Passage of Burma media bill would reverse free press gains

¹⁰⁷ IFJ (17 Mar 14) Myanmar Parliament Passes Dual Media Laws

¹⁰⁸ Irrawaddy (17 Mar 14) Burma Clampdown Gathers Pace as Legislation Passed; Myanmar Times (21 Mar 14) Journalists confused over new media laws

¹⁰⁹ RFA (05 Mar 14) Myanmar Parliament Passes First Legislation Granting Media Freedom

¹¹⁰ EMG (05 Mar 14) Parliament approves controversial media bills; Irrawaddy (05 Mar 14) Burma's Parliament Approves 'Parallel' Media Laws; RFA (05 Mar 14) Myanmar Parliament Passes First Legislation Granting Media Freedom

¹¹¹ Irrawaddy (19 Mar 14) President Signs New Media Laws, to Mixed Reaction From Journalists; Myanmar Times (24 Mar 14) Confusion and apprehension over new media laws

¹¹² RFA (05 Mar 14) Myanmar Parliament Passes First Legislation Granting Media Freedom; IFJ (17 Mar 14) Myanmar Parliament Passes Dual Media Laws

¹¹³ Myanmar Times (21 Mar 14) Journalists confused over new media laws

¹¹⁴ Kyodo News (18 Mar 14) Myanmar enacts first media law

¹¹⁵ Kyodo News (18 Mar 14) Myanmar enacts first media law

¹¹⁶ NLM (19 Mar 14) New Media Law signed by President: Investigative journalism and critical reporting backed by gov't

¹¹⁷ NLM (19 Mar 14) New Media Law signed by President: Investigative journalism and critical reporting backed by gov't; Myanmar Times (21 Mar 14) Journalists confused over new media laws

More charged, arrested, and sentenced under restrictive laws

In March, the regime continued to arrest and charge people in connection to land confiscation cases and for holding demonstrations and public meetings without permission.

- **2 March:** Police charged protestor Ye Yint Aung and three other farmers, Nay Win, Zaw Win, and Ko Ko Aung, for trespassing and vandalism – under Articles 447 and 427 – after they staged a protest on 1 March on land that had been confiscated by the regime in Kyauksarit-North Village, Maddaya Township, Mandalay Division.¹¹⁸
- **5 March:** Over 100 policemen raided a camp in a monastery in Yamethin, Mandalay Division, and arrested more than 50 people, including children, who had been seeking shelter in the monastery since being evicted from the site of the Moehti Moemi gold mine in Yamethin Township, Mandalay Division.¹¹⁹ Authorities had warned occupants they would be evicted if they did not leave the monastery by 28 February.¹²⁰
- **7 March:** Police arrested four villagers in Yinmabin Township, Sagaing Division, who were trying to stop police from bulldozing toddy palm trees on land which had been confiscated from them without compensation.¹²¹ Police injured and beat many of the villagers with batons.¹²²
- **10 March:** Shwe Bo District Court, Sagaing Division, sentenced three protestors – Nyunt Swe, Sein Myint, and Tun Linn – to prison for demonstrating against the Kin U Township authority in a land confiscation dispute.¹²³ Nyunt Swe was sentenced to two years in prison under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code, for causing instability in the region, and three months in prison under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law.¹²⁴ Sein Myint and Tun Linn were both sentenced to three months in prison under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law.¹²⁵
- **17 March:** It was reported that Dedaye Township authorities had charged Bassein-based Human Rights Watch and Defense Network (HRWDN) member Htun Htun Oo and three other locals – Cho Lwin, Myint Lwin, and Khin Shwe – under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law for holding public meetings about environmental conservation on 10-11 March, in Dedaye Township, Irrawaddy Division.¹²⁶
- **24 March:** A court in Monywa, Sagaing Division, sentenced activist Thaw Zin to 15 months in prison for helping local villagers protest against land confiscation related to the Monywa (Letpadaung) copper mine.¹²⁷ Thaw Zin was convicted on charges of trespassing and “disturbing public tranquility” and “disobedience duly promulgated by a public servant”.¹²⁸
- **25 March:** Local authorities charged Kyaw Thein for holding a rally for constitutional reform in Magwe, Magwe Division, under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law.¹²⁹
- **26 March:** Local police detained and charged 88 Generation Peace and Open Society group activists Than Naing, Pyone Cho, Mee Mee, and Nilar Thein under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division, for leading a demonstration in support of amending the constitution.¹³⁰
- **26 March:** Local authorities in Rangoon charged two people under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law for protesting against the electricity price increase approved by Parliament earlier in the month.¹³¹ They were later released on bail.¹³²

¹¹⁸ DVB (03 Mar 14) Plough protestors charged with trespassing and vandalism

¹¹⁹ DVB (05 Mar 14) 50 arrested in raid on Moehti Moemi camp

¹²⁰ DVB (05 Mar 14) 50 arrested in raid on Moehti Moemi camp

¹²¹ DVB (07 Mar 14) Police seize land, cut down toddy trees

¹²² DVB (07 Mar 14) Police seize land, cut down toddy trees

¹²³ EMG (12 Mar 14) Residents call for rule of law as more convicted for land-grab protests

¹²⁴ EMG (12 Mar 14) Residents call for rule of law as more convicted for land-grab protests

¹²⁵ EMG (12 Mar 14) Residents call for rule of law as more convicted for land-grab protests

¹²⁶ Irrawaddy (17 Mar 14) Mangrove Campaigners Slapped With Protest Law Charges

¹²⁷ DVB (25 Mar 14) Latpadaung activist Thaw Zin sentenced to 15 months

¹²⁸ DVB (25 Mar 14) Latpadaung activist Thaw Zin sentenced to 15 months

¹²⁹ DVB (27 Mar 14) 88 Generation demonstrators may face charges

¹³⁰ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 14) Four Detained, Charged at Burma Constitutional Amendment Rally; EMG (27 Mar 14) Activists blame regional chief minister for political persecution in Magway

¹³¹ DVB (28 Mar 14) Energy price hike sparks outrage

¹³² DVB (28 Mar 14) Energy price hike sparks outrage; EMG (27 Mar 14) Protesters call on gov't to reverse electricity fee hikes

- **27 March:** Local police in Mandalay arrested four protestors – Thein Aung Myint, Saw Hla Aung, Kyaw Myo Tun, and Tin Tin Khat – under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law during a protest against the electricity price increase.¹³³

UN: Democratic transition “remains fragile”

On 12 March, in his periodic report to the UN Human Rights Council, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana said that the democratic transition in Burma “remains fragile” and warned that if impunity and systematic discrimination were not tackled, especially in Arakan State, they could “jeopardize the entire reform process.”¹³⁴ The report included the following key issues of concern:¹³⁵

- Ongoing violence against Rohingya in Arakan State and the lack of domestic investigations to address allegations of violence.
- Failure to tackle incitement to violence based on national, racial, or religious hatred.
- Detention of political prisoners and ongoing torture in places of detention and the absence of accountability.
- Interference in granting licenses and regulating content under the Printing and Publishing Law.
- Absence of an independent judiciary and the rule of law for victims of land confiscation and evictions.
- The insufficient number of important legislative changes.
- The lack of protection for lawyers, against reprisals, involved in politically sensitive cases.

UNHRC adopts Burma resolution

On 28 March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted by acclamation a resolution on the human rights situation in Burma.¹³⁶ The resolution expressed concern over the following issues:¹³⁷

- Human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, forced displacement, rape, torture, and land confiscation.
- The situation of Rohingya and other minorities in Arakan State, requesting that an independent investigation be undertaken into the Du Chee Yar Tan events and that those responsible be held accountable.
- The intimidation of UN and other humanitarian aid workers operating in Arakan State.
- Further delays in opening a country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The resolution restated its call upon the regime to conduct a “full, transparent, and independent” investigation into all reports of violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law and to “take necessary measures” to ensure accountability and end impunity.¹³⁸ It urged the regime to release all political prisoners, including those detained recently, and to repeal legislation not in line with international human rights standards.¹³⁹ The resolution extended the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma for another year.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ EMG (28 Mar 14) Four arrested for Mandalay protests, demonstrations continue in Yangon

¹³⁴ HRC, 25th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, 12 March 2014, UN Doc A/HRC/25/64

¹³⁵ HRC, 25th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, 12 March 2014, UN Doc A/HRC/25/64

¹³⁶ Myanmar Times (31 Mar 14) UN extends special rapporteur mandate

¹³⁷ HRC, 25th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/25/L.21/Rev.1

¹³⁸ HRC, 25th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/25/L.21/Rev.1

¹³⁹ HRC, 25th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/25/L.21/Rev.1

¹⁴⁰ HRC, 25th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/25/L.21/Rev.1

ACSC/APF calls for more human rights protection mechanisms in the ASEAN region

On 23 March, the three-day ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF 2014), which attracted a record 3,000 participants, making it the largest-ever ASEAN civil society gathering, concluded in Rangoon.¹⁴¹ The conference called for ASEAN governments to develop human rights protection mechanisms.¹⁴²

The ACSC/APF 2014 statement specifically urged the regime to work towards “truth, transparency, accountability, social justice” in order to create lasting peace. It also highlighted the urgency of democratic political, economic, and educational reform and environmental protection in Burma and urged the Burmese authorities to provide an “enabling environment” for civil society and humanitarian actors to operate “without fear of physical or judicial harassment, arrest, imprisonment, killing or other violence, or restrictions on their fundamental freedoms”.¹⁴³

The statement called for protection of the environment and the rights and freedoms of displaced children, sex workers, women, LGBTIQ persons, migrant workers, local and indigenous communities, activists, journalists, civil society organizations, and religious groups.¹⁴⁴

Former General apologizes for wrongdoing

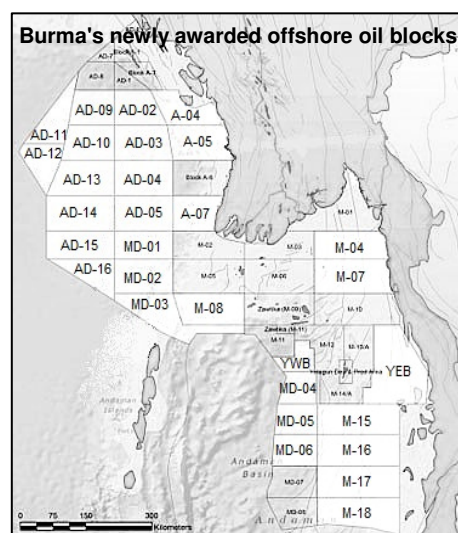
During his keynote speech at the opening session of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF), NLD patron and former Tatmadaw general Tin Oo apologized for the harm he did to people while he served in the Tatmadaw, criticized the peace process, and reiterated the need to stand up for peace, democracy, and human rights by working toward constitutional, legislative, and institutional reforms.¹⁴⁵ He also stressed the ongoing violence against women and children as a result of conflict in ethnic states and the need for Burma to fulfill its obligation as a signatory to the CEDAW and Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁴⁶

ECONOMY

Regime announces oil block winners

On 26 March, the regime Energy Ministry announced the 12 winners of bids to explore ten shallow-water and ten deep-water blocks in the Gulf of Martaban, and off Burma's western and southern coast.¹⁴⁷ An additional ten blocks that attracted no bids will be re-listed.¹⁴⁸

According to the regime Energy Ministry, winners will have to sign a production-sharing contract with the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and invest a minimum of US\$3 billion before receiving 30-year licenses to begin operations.¹⁴⁹ Shallow-water block winners are also required to partner with a local company before receiving their



¹⁴¹ ACSC/APF (24 Mar 14) Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2014

¹⁴² FIDH/Altsean-Burma (25 Mar 14) Largest-ever ASEAN civil society conference urges regional governments to establish human rights protection mechanisms

¹⁴³ ACSC/APF (24 Mar 14) Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2014

¹⁴⁴ ACSC/APF (24 Mar 14) Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2014

¹⁴⁵ ACSC/APF (21 Mar 14) Keynote Speech: U Tin Oo, Patron of the National League for Democracy, Representing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, at the Opening Session of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum, 21 March 2014

¹⁴⁶ ACSC/APF (21 Mar 14) Keynote Speech: U Tin Oo, Patron of the National League for Democracy, Representing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, at the Opening Session of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum, 21 March 2014

¹⁴⁷ DVB (26 Mar 14) Offshore oil and gas exploration block winners announced: Ministry of Energy; AP (26 Mar 14) Myanmar awards 20 oil exploration blocks; Rigzone (27 Mar 14) Press Release: Myanmar Awards Block M07 in Moattama Basin to Tap Oil and its JV Partners

¹⁴⁸ DVB (26 Mar 14) Offshore oil and gas exploration block winners announced: Ministry of Energy

¹⁴⁹ Myanmar Times (26 Mar 14) Offshore block winners announced

license.¹⁵⁰ The MOGE stands to earn US\$226.1 million through the production-sharing contracts.¹⁵¹

Shallow-Water Block Winners
US's Chevron (A-5)
Netherlands' Berlanga Holding (M-8)
Australia's Transcontinental Group (M-15)
India's Reliance Industries (M-17, M-18)
UK's BG Group and Australia's Woodside Petroleum (A-4, A-7)
India's Oil India, Mercator Petroleum, and Oilmax Energy (M-4, YEB)
Australia's ROC Oil and Tap Oil (M-7)

Deep-Water Block Winners
UK's Ophir Energy (AD-3)
Italy's Eni (MD-2, MD-4)
France's Total (YWB)
UK's BG Group and Australia's Woodside Petroleum (AD-2, AD-5)
Netherlands' Shell and Japan's Mitsui Oil Exploration (AD-9, AD-11, MD-5)
Norway's Statoil & US's ConocoPhillips (AD-10)

Burma investment environment high-risk and ranked second most restrictive

On 1 March, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched its report “Investment Policy Reviews: Myanmar 2014” analyzing Burma’s investment policies, saying Burma’s legal restrictions make it the second most restrictive economy for foreign investment.¹⁵² It predicted foreign direct investment (FDI) would rise by more than 30% if restrictions were eased.¹⁵³ The OECD report recommended that the regime provide more “legal protection and predictability” to investors that were “clearly delineated and defined” to reassure investors and protect the regime from becoming liable for violating investors’ rights.¹⁵⁴

On 6 March, Business Monitor International (BMI)’s “South East Asia Monitor Vol 1” said the collapse of negotiations between the regime Civil Aviation Department and the South Korean consortium that initially won the bid to develop Hanthawaddy Airport, Pegu Division was an indication that “there is scope for a breakdown in political stability within [Burma]” that poses a major risk for investors.¹⁵⁵

BMI predicted that it was “increasingly likely” that the regime will not amend the constitution “in a meaningful way” before the 2015 elections, noting that such a failure would affect the “drive” of reform and “could destabilize [Burma’s] already challenging business environment”.¹⁵⁶

Unsteady progress on SEZ developments

Throughout March, Burma’s three Special Economic Zones (SEZ) continued with their slow, unsteady development, while investors exhibited concern about Thilawa and Tavoy SEZ development projects.

Thilawa SEZ’s much-anticipated Initial Public Offering (IPO) launch flopped:

- **3 March:** Thilawa SEZ Holdings launches its IPO through Kanbawza Bank, Ayeyawady Bank, Myanmar Apex Bank, Cooperative Bank and Yoma Bank branches.¹⁵⁷
- **3 March:** Due to poor communication and planning, some local branches did not receive information about the IPO and turned away customers who wanted to buy into Thilawa SEZ Holdings.¹⁵⁸
- **14 March:** Thilawa SEZ sold around 700,000 of its 2.14 million shares which remain up for offer until 9 April.¹⁵⁹

Tavoy SEZ began to show first signs of life after Thai company Italian-Thai Development’s (ITD) dismissal in November 2013 [See *November 2013 Burma Bulletin*]:

¹⁵⁰ AFP (26 Mar 14) Energy giants win Myanmar offshore oil and gas blocks

¹⁵¹ Myanmar Times (26 Mar 14) Offshore block winners announced

¹⁵² Mizzima News (16 Mar 14) The right foundation

¹⁵³ Mizzima News (16 Mar 14) The right foundation

¹⁵⁴ Mizzima News (16 Mar 14) The right foundation

¹⁵⁵ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 14) Burma Infrastructure Projects ‘At Risk’ From Political Uncertainty

¹⁵⁶ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 14) Burma Infrastructure Projects ‘At Risk’ From Political Uncertainty

¹⁵⁷ EMG (05 Mar 14) Delays and confusion over Thilawa IPO

¹⁵⁸ EMG (05 Mar 14) Delays and confusion over Thilawa IPO

¹⁵⁹ EMG (20 Mar 14) Thilawa SEZ public offering sees 700,000 shares sell out

- **7 March:** The Thailand-based Andaman Power and Utility's website announced that it had been chosen to be the main electricity provider for the Tavoy SEZ by the regime Energy Ministry.¹⁶⁰
- **24 March:** It was reported that no investors had submitted bids to develop three projects in the Tavoy SEZ, opened in February for bidding – a Burma-Thailand dual-lane highway, a small port, and an industrial zone.¹⁶¹ Tavoy SEZ management had expected to announce winners of the bids in April.¹⁶²

Kyaukpyu SEZ proceeded with phase two of its development:

- **3 March:** The regime announced the selection of a consortium led by Singapore-based CPG Corporation to do consultancy work for Kyaukpyu SEZ.¹⁶³
- **13 March:** It was reported that the regime also instated an 11-member public company to manage the development of Kyaukpyu SEZ.¹⁶⁴

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN MARCH

1	Local divisional Minister Col Tin Win says that more than 53,000 households in Rangoon Division have been warned to vacate their land under the 1898 lower Myanmar town and village Act.
3	More than 50 people gather at the foot of Pyar Mountain in Monywa Township, Sagaing Division, for a prayer ceremony opposing the destruction of a pagoda and an ancient ordination hall by the Monywa (Letpadaung) copper mine.
3	Myanmar Investment Commission grants permission for Singapore-based Myanmar Fibre Optic Communication Network, Jamaica-based Digicel, and Singapore-based Apollo Towers to work with Ooredoo and Telenor to develop telecom towers in Burma.
3	Thai police in Kantang District, Trang Province, rescue six migrant workers from Arakan State who were forced to work in the Thai fishing industry.
3	Pakokku District Court judge Kyaw Kyaw Htay rejects bail for the four journalists and CEO of Unity Weekly journal charged under the 1923 Official Secrets Act, in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division.
4	UK-based NGO Environmental Justice Foundation report "Slavery at Sea" details new cases of forced labor and trafficking of migrant workers from Burma and other SEA countries in Thai fisheries.
5	World Justice Project releases its Rule of Law Index 2014 ranking Burma 89 th out of 99 nations studied in relation to its global adherence to the rule of law.
5	US Congress makes public a 2013 US Department of Defense report, which includes Burma alongside Iran and Syria as notable recipients of "conventional and ballistic missile-related equipment, components, materials, and technical assistance" from North Korea.
5	Burma and the Republic of Korea sign an MoU on regional development cooperation in Naypyidaw.
6	Regime Election Commission approves the registration of the Arakan National Party.
6	National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann says he is ready for a four party meeting between President Thein Sein, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
7	Regime Vice-President Nyan Tun urges authorities to step up efforts to return confiscated land to their rightful owners and to address the 3,387 complaints from farmers received by the National Parliament.
7	Over 500 people from Rangoon's Taikgyi Township rally for the amendment of the 2008 constitution.
9	At a press conference in Rangoon, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says that media freedom in Burma is lacking because there are no laws that ensure freedom of the press.
9	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets privately with President Thein Sein at his home in Naypyidaw.
10	European Burma Network, a network of 14 Burma-focused NGOs, releases a statement urging the UNHRC to maintain pressure on the regime, highlighting continuing breaches of international law and the regime's unwillingness to put an end to human rights violations in Burma.
11	Maungdaw District Court acquits eight Muslim Rohingya and charges eight other Muslim Rohingya for the murder of police Sgt Aung Kyaw Thein.
12	Local authorities demand local villagers from Kholam Village, Nansang Township, in Southern Shan State sign declarations which state that they will be charged with trespassing should they return to their land once it has been confiscated by the Tatmadaw for the construction of a golf course.
13	Human Rights Watch releases a statement denouncing a UN offer to include Burma's armed forces in UN peacekeeping missions, saying it could lead to abuses and undermine peacekeeping standards.
14	On International Day of Action for Rivers, Burma Rivers Network, and over 100 civil society

¹⁶⁰ Irrawaddy (07 March 14) Dawei Economic Zone 'Lacks Clarity' as Another Thai Firm Claims Deal

¹⁶¹ Bangkok Post (24 Mar 14) Silence on Dawei bids prompt revision of terms

¹⁶² Bangkok Post (24 Mar 14) Silence on Dawei bids prompt revision of terms

¹⁶³ Irrawaddy (03 Mar 14) Singapore-Led Consortium Wins Kyaukphyu SEZ Consulting Tender

¹⁶⁴ EMG (13 Mar 14) Public company formed for Kyaukphyu SEZ project

	organizations and political parties, submit a petition signed by 33,538 people from ethnic groups, calling on the regime to immediately suspend plans to construct six dams on the Salween [Thanlwin] River.
14	Director of Burma Campaign UK Mark Farmaner says that “serious ongoing human rights abuses which violate international law” continue in Burma, urging the UK government to support an international investigation into the crimes against humanity that have taken place against Muslim Rohingya.
16	MSF International President Joanne Liu meets with regime Home Affairs Minister Lt Gen Ko Ko, Health Minister Pe Thet Khin, and Border Affairs Deputy Minister Maj Gen Maung Maung Ohn about maintaining medical services in Arakan State in Naypyidaw.
16	President Thein Sein says that he wants a “lasting peace” and that the Tatmadaw is in full support of Burma’s peace process during a speech in Myitkyina, Kachin State.
17	Unity Weekly journalists Lu Maw Naing, Yarzar Oo, Paing Thet Kyaw, and Sithu Soe, and CEO Tint San appear in Pakokku District Court, Magwe Division, charged under the 1923 Official Secrets Act for the first day of their trial.
18	Regime Deputy Construction Minister Win Myint confirms that the regime turned down a US\$2 billion loan from China to build the Kyaukpyu-Ruili highway that would link Kyaukpyu SEZ with China.
20	Regime Election Commission chairman Tin Aye announces a by-election to be held at the end of the year to fill 30 vacant constituencies in both houses of Parliament and in State and Divisional Parliaments.
22	About 300 protestors including people from civil society groups, NGOs, students, and local residents rally in Rangoon’s Dagon Seikkan Township, calling for amendments to be made to Articles 59(d) and 59(f) of the 2008 constitution.
22	In Mogok, Mandalay Division, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi tells a crowd of about 3,000 people that those who claim that the constitution does not need to be amended and that Burma is on a path to democracy are “cheating the people”.
23	About 100 activists begin a two-month 1,200-kilometer march from Rangoon to the site of the Myitsone dam project in Northern Kachin State, calling on the regime to permanently cancel the project.
23	Nearly 3,000 protestors in six townships across Rangoon, Mandalay, Sagaing, and Irrawaddy Divisions, demonstrate to demand constitutional reform.
24	About 200 people from three wards in Rangoon’s Thingangyun Township, camp out in front of the Rangoon High Court calling for an investigation into land that was confiscated from them by the military in the early 1990s.
24	A fire destroys 19 huts and causes 31 to be demolished to prevent its spreading at Mae La IDP camp, Tak Province, Thailand, leaving nearly 300 people homeless.
24	More than 1,000 people from Rangoon’s Insein and Mayangone Townships stage separate protests calling for constitutional amendments.
24	In Naypyidaw, Japanese FM Fumio Kishida pledges Japan to provide 24 billion yen (US\$234.77 million) in new loans to Burma, and signs over 7.7 billion yen (US\$75.23 million) in grant aid to support initiatives including UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP programs in ethnic areas.
26	During a press conference with National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says that they are waiting for President Thein Sein to respond to a joint request to discuss constitutional reforms with him and Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing.
26	Rakhine burn down seven Rohingya stores in Doe Tan Village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
27	Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing says that the reform of the constitution “must be done following the law prescribes in Chapter 12”, which gives the military an effective veto over constitutional amendments in his speech for Armed Forces Day in Naypyidaw.
30	About 1,000 farmers from Prome District, Pegu Division hold a rally to demand the return of over 20,000 acres of farmland confiscated by the military.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN MARCH

“Slavery at Sea: The Continued Plight of Trafficked Migrants in Thailand’s Fishing Industry”, Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) <http://bit.ly/1dZPHQT>

“WJP Rule of Law Index 2014”, World Justice Project (WJP) <http://bit.ly/MRHZRD>

“Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 2013”, US Department of Defense <http://1.usa.gov/1cWkXq>

“Myanmar: Act Immediately to Protect Displaced People’s Rights”, Refugees International (RI) <http://bit.ly/1j3v5e1>

“Investment Policy Reviews: Myanmar 2014”, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) <http://bit.ly/1kHqxMI>

“Harnessing Myanmar’s Hydropower and Negotiating Conflict”, Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) <http://bit.ly/NNfJzW>

“Marching to Genocide in Burma”, United to End Genocide (UEG) <http://bit.ly/1ljEObI>

“Preventing Indiscriminate Attacks and Willful Killings of Civilians by the Myanmar Military”, International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) <http://bit.ly/1lgs9PM>

“Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar”, Tomás Ojea Quintana <http://bit.ly/1gnmlMy>

“Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014 Myanmar”, World Travel & Tourism Council <http://bit.ly/1rWxEQq>

“Data Corruption - Exposing the true scale of logging in Myanmar”, Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) <http://bit.ly/1hbeyJJ>

“Democracy and Development in Burma”, UK House of Commons International Development Committee <http://bit.ly/1lyXZaH>