

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA

campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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- UN says that violations targeting Rohingya may amount to crimes against humanity.
- Controversial green card program ramps up after immigration officials give out more than 1,000 new National Verification Cards.
- Authorities progress 'Thitsar' program which may result in faith-based segregation of school children in Rakhine State.
- Parliament approves amendments to Peaceful Assembly and Procession Bill safeguarding protestors against multiple charges.
- Rangoon Division Government bans release of torture report in ethnic conflict areas.
- Second 'Panglong Conference' confirmed to take place in the last week of August.
- 130 community-based and international organizations call for end to endemic culture of impunity once and for all in Kachin State.
- US State Department names Burma as one of the world's worst human trafficking offenders.
- BBC Burmese-language service reporter sentenced to three months of hard labor under section 332 of the penal code.
- Committee chaired by Vice President Henry Van Thio sets out ambitious plan to settle all land grabbing cases within six months.
- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation has declared it is unable to reign in illegal logging.
- Authorities investigate officials from Ministry of Mines and the Myanmar Gems and the Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association over disappearance of nearly US\$100 million.
- Women's organizations Network (WON), Gender Equality Network, CEDAW Action Myanmar, Women's League of Burma and the Women Peace Network – Arakan, submit reports to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- New agreement on Burmese migrant workers signed aiming to make it easier for Burmese workers to work legally in Thailand.

IN THIS ISSUE

KEY STORY: SITUATION WORSENS FOR ROHINGYA

- 2 UN: Rohingya - crimes against humanity
- 2 Green card program ramps up
- 3 „Thitsar“ program
- 3 Formation of Central Committee
- 3 Ma Ba Tha monk denounces protest

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

- 4 Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law

ETHNIC AFFAIRS & CONFLICT

- 5 Authorities ban release of torture report
- 5 Second „Panglong Conference“ in Aug
- 5 Armed conflict: clashes, civilian abuse

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 6 Burma: human trafficking update
- 6 Gambira released, for now
- 6 BBC Reporter jailed

- 7 Mosque Destroyed in Bago
- 7 Plan to settle land grab cases

NATURAL RESOURCES

- 7 Govt struggles to reign in illegal logging
- 8 Gems Scandal: missing US\$100 million

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

- 9 Preparations begin for CEDAW report

DISPLACEMENT

- 9 Suu Kyi inks deal with Thailand

ECONOMY

- 9 Burma: top investment destination
- 10 Farming debt on the rise

10 OTHER BURMA NEWS

11 REPORTS

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United Nations: Rohingya may be victims of crimes against humanity

On 20 June, the UN issued a report stating that human rights violations targeting the Rohingya community may amount to crimes against humanity.¹ The report said that Rohingya have been deprived of nationality, undergone systematic discrimination and severe restrictions on movements, and they have also suffered from executions and torture.²

On 16 June, the Ministry of Information issued a letter instructing state-run media to refer to „Rohingya“ as the „Muslim community in Rakhine“ during a visit to the country by the UN’s special envoy on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee.³ Aung San Suu Kyi told the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights that the government will avoid using the term “Rohingya” to describe a persecuted Muslim minority explaining that the term is “controversial” and should be avoided according to Aung Lin, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴

Meanwhile, on 22 June, the European Union said it would give the Burmese Government “space” when it comes to resolving the Rohingya situation, and would respect the call by the government to avoid using the „Rohingya“ term.⁵ Roland Kobia, the EU ambassador to Burma/Myanmar, said “we understand that the term „Rohingya“ is emotionally charged in Myanmar and we have heard the call of the government to avoid creating tension by using polarizing terminology.” In response, Wai Wai Nu, a prominent Rohingya activist from Women Peace Network Arakan, said “the government should address the targeted persecution and discrimination against minorities and ensure protection of their rights by respecting their ethnicity, identity and name.”⁶

Controversial green card program ramps up

On 16 June it was reported that since May, immigration officials gave out more than 1,000 new National Verification Cards (NVC), otherwise known as „green cards“, in Arakan/Rakhine State.⁷ The NVC is part of the citizenship verification process introduced under the 2014 Rakhine State Action Plan, which was shelved in 2015 and then relaunched last month as a “100-day plan”.⁸

After the previous government abolished „white cards“ for Rohingya in 2012, it introduced „green cards“ in 2014 which allowed Rohingya access to basic services, as long as they identified themselves as „Bengali“. Green card holders had to reapply for „naturalized citizenship“, or be expatriated after two years, when the validity of the green card expired. The scheme was controversial because it did not guarantee applicants would get „naturalized citizenship“, which is inferior to the full citizenship stripped from Rohingya and other minorities by the 1982 Citizenship Law [see *2014 and 2015 Burma Bulletins*].¹⁰

The scheme was suspended in March 2015, with valid cards revoked, following a protest in Rangoon over a bill which granted green card holders the right to vote in a planned referendum on constitutional amendments [see *April 2015 Burma Bulletin*].¹¹

¹ UN Human Rights Council (20 Jun 16) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar

² Reuters (21 Jun 16) Suu Kyi meets UN rights envoy, repeats stance on „Rohingya“

³ RFA (21 Jun 16) Myanmar Government Orders State Media Not To Use „Rohingya“

⁴ Guardian (21 Jun 16) Aung San Suu Kyi tells UN that the term 'Rohingya' will be avoided

⁵ Reuters (23 Jun 16) EU says Burma needs „space“ on Rohingya issue

⁶ Reuters (23 Jun 16) EU says Burma needs „space“ on Rohingya issue

⁷ GNLM (09 Jun 16) Citizenship IDs to be issued in Rakhine State in accordance with Citizenship Law; MyanmarTimes (16 Jun 16) „Green cards“ distributed to stateless Muslims

⁸ GNLM (09 Jun 16) Citizenship IDs to be issued in Rakhine State in accordance with Citizenship; Frontier (03 Jun 16) Untangling the Rakhine Citizenship Mess

⁹ RFA (15 Jun 16) Myanmar Officials Issue Green Cards to Muslims in Rakhine State

¹⁰ UCA News (17 Jun 15) Myanmar officials offer new ID cards to skeptical Rohingya

¹¹ Altsean (Feb 15) Burma Bulletin

On 17 June, media reported that several factors had complicated the „citizenship“ program, including delays in reclaiming all white cards and questions about what would be required of the Rohingya community to apply for citizenship on the basis of the new identification cards.¹² According to Khin Soe, an immigration officer in the state capital Sittwe, holders of green cards were able to stay in Burma indefinitely without applying for naturalized citizenship, by repeatedly filing for extensions.¹³

On 9 June, the director of the Immigration and National Registration Department, Win Lwin, said that distribution of NVCs in Ponnagyun was met with opposition from villagers who refused to provide information because they are not allowed to mention their race and religion, including self-identifying as Rohingya, in order to qualify for the national identification cards.¹⁴ Village administrator, Maung Ni said they would participate in the census once the NVCs included such information.¹⁵ On the same day, Win Lwin said that those who refused to take part in the identity card process have been given another week to reconsider.¹⁶

‘Thitsar’ program: faith-based segregation of school children?

On 9 June, Deputy Head of Rakhine State Immigration Department, Ko Ko Latt, confirmed that citizenship scrutiny certificates had already been issued to 67,746 students in 1,225 schools under its „Thitsar“ 100-day plan.¹⁷ „Thitsar cards“, meaning „faith cards“ in the Burmese language, are being given to students from the age of 10 and above in schools in Rakhine State - where there are 3,143 schools - in cooperation with regional immigration departments and school heads in respective townships.¹⁸ The program has so far reached the townships of Sittwe, Mrauk-U, Maungdaw, Kyaukphyu and Thandwe, places where lethal anti-Muslim violence has been documented since 2012. No known Rohingya children are included in this scheme, effectively segregating children based on their religious faith from an early age.¹⁹

Formation of Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State

On 1 June, it was reported Burma’s president Htin Kyaw had established a new high-level committee to handle Rakhine State affairs. The 27-member Rakhine State Peace, Stability and Development Committee was officially formed on 30 May and is headed by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, who told the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights that the government would continue to avoid using the term “Rohingya” to describe a persecuted Muslim minority in Rakhine State [see Human Rights section]. Union Minister for Border Affairs and the Rakhine State Chief Minister are co-vice chairs of the committee, while the General Administration Department and the Deputy Minister for Border Affairs Head of Rakhine State act as secretary and joint secretary respectively.²⁰

Ma Ba Tha monk denounces anti-Rohingya protest

Ashin Kawthala, Chairperson of the Magwe Division chapter of the Ma Ba Tha, has criticized the 13 June anti-Rohingya protest that took place in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division. The monk accused the 1,000 protestors of trying to “whip up hatred” although he also stated he had no problem with the message conveyed.²¹

¹² UCA News (17 Jun 15) Myanmar officials offer new ID cards to skeptical Rohingya

¹³ RFA (15 Jun 16) Myanmar Officials Issue Green Cards to Muslims in Rakhine State

¹⁴ RFA (07 Jun 16) Muslim Villagers in Myanmar’s Rakhine State Refuse to Participate in Census

¹⁵ RFA (07 Jun 16) Muslim Villagers in Myanmar’s Rakhine State Refuse to Participate in Census

¹⁶ GNLM (09 Jun 16) Efforts stepped up for improvement of socio economy in Rakhine State

¹⁷ GNLM (12 Jun 16) „Thitsar“ project underway to issue ID cards to schoolchildren in Rakhine State

¹⁸ GNLM (12 Jun 16) „Thitsar“ project underway to issue ID cards to schoolchildren in Rakhine State

¹⁹ Confidential source (05 Jul 16)

²⁰ MyanmarTimes (01 June 16) President forms senior-level committee for Rakhine State; The Guardian (21 Jun 16) Aung San Suu Kyi tells UN that the term 'Rohingya' will be avoided

²¹ DVB (14 Jun 16) Ma Ba Tha monk denounces anti-Rohingya protest

Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law amended

On 1 June, it was reported that the Upper House approved new amendments to the Peaceful Assembly and Procession Bill. The most significant changes to the bill include a safeguard against multiple charges for a single procession across multiple townships, lowered penalties, and that organisers merely need to notify authorities in advance instead of seeking official permission.²²

How the Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law was changed

	Amended 2016 ²³	Old 2014 ²⁴
Permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authorities do not have specific power to veto assemblies. Requires notification 48 hours prior to assembly. Multiple notifications required for assemblies that “pass by” more than one township Does not clearly explain how to submit notification, creating possible confusion and uncertainty²⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permission required from police, details on “purpose” and “topic” of proposed assembly also required. Police authorized to veto assemblies at their discretion.²⁶
Multiple charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protestors can only be prosecuted in the first township of incident and not any multiple townships they pass through.²⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protestors can be charged in multiple townships for an incident.²⁸
Maximum penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to three months in jail and/or a fine not exceeding K30,000 (US\$25) for failing to notify authorities, or engaging in conduct “prohibited” at assemblies. On second offense, up to one year in prison and/or a fine of no more than K100,000 (US\$85).²⁹ 15-day statute of limitations on prosecuting violators and protects protestors.³⁰ Anyone that “disturbs, destroys, obstructs, annoys, assaults, bullies or harms” the attendees of a lawful assembly can be charged with a criminal offense.³¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to K30,000 (\$25) for failing to get prior authorization or engaging in conduct “prohibited” at assemblies. Up to one year imprisonment and/or a fine of K50,000 (US\$42) for “disturb, destroy, obstruct, annoy, assault, bully, or harm” the attendees of a peaceful assembly
Key criticisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act does not address spontaneous assemblies.³² Restrictions on what can be said and done at assemblies effectively empower authorities to prevent or shut down assemblies that they disagree with, or are annoyed or inconvenienced by.³³ Criminal sentences can be levied against protestors.³⁴ Notification policies are vague³⁵ Limits freedom to engage in counter-assemblies.³⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act does not address spontaneous assemblies Unnecessary burden on providing detailed information about protests e.g. what chants will be sung.³⁷ Criminal sentences can be levied against protestors³⁸ Multiple charges in multiple townships for a single incident.³⁹ Limits freedom to engage in counter-assemblies.⁴⁰

²² Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

²³ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

²⁴ Myanmar: Amended Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law

²⁵ AAPPB (2015) Repressive Domestic Legislation

²⁶ Myanmar: Amended Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law

²⁷ Thai PBS (09 May 16) New less restrictive public assembly bill in Myanmar parliament

²⁸ AI (2014) Myanmar: Stop Using Repressive Law Against Peaceful Protesters

²⁹ GNLM (01 Jun 16) Amyotha Hluttaw approves Peaceful Assembly and Procession Bill with amendments; AAPPB (2015) Repressive Domestic Legislation

³⁰ The Irrawaddy (03 Jun 16) Protest Bill Passes Upper House, Disappoints Rights Groups

³¹ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

³² AI (12 May 16) Open Letter On Amending The Peaceful Assembly And Peaceful Procession Act In Line With International Human Rights Law And Standards

³³ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

³⁴ The Irrawaddy (03 Jun 16) Protest Bill Passes Upper House, Disappoints Rights Groups

³⁵ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

³⁶ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

³⁷ Article 19 (Aug 2014) Myanmar: Amended Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law

³⁸ Article 19 (Aug 2014) Myanmar: Amended Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law

³⁹ AI (2014) Myanmar: Stop Using Repressive Law Against Peaceful Protesters

⁴⁰ Article 19 (2016) Myanmar: Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Bill

Authorities ban release of torture report

On 25 June, the Rangoon/Yangon Division Government banned the release of a report on torture in ethnic conflict areas by the Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO) at the last minute, without explanation.⁴¹ The report alleges that the Tatmadaw had committed war crimes against ethnic Ta'ang people in northern Shan State during its ongoing offensive against the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) [see Reports section].

Lway Poe Nyein, a spokesperson for TWO said "we have the evidence for the allegations in the report - it highlighted the Burmese army's systematic and widespread use of torture, alleging that this is a war crime, but the government decided to block us since it is concerning the Tatmadaw." Khin Ohmar, coordinator of the Burma Partnership, criticized the ban saying it "... gave us a clear signal that under the current NLD government, freedom of expression is still restricted".⁴²

Second 'Panglong Conference' to take place in August

On 28 June, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of eight ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) that signed last year's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) confirmed that peace talks, dubbed the second „Panglong Conference“, would take place no later than the last week of August.⁴³

Throughout June, a Burmese Government peace delegation has been reaching out to non-signatories of the NCA to take part in this conference:

- 3 June: The United Nationalities Federal Council's (UNFC), an alliance of armed ethnic groups, agreed to join the conference.⁴⁴
- 6 June: The United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) agreed to join the convening committee of the conference.⁴⁵
- 8 June: The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Chin National Front (CNF) said they would support the conference plans.⁴⁶

On 10 June, delegates from the government and seven EAOs met at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Rangoon/Yangon to discuss the organization of the conference, with a focus on how to amend the Framework for Political Dialogue within the structure of the NCA. Dr Tin Myo Win, chair of the Second Subcommittee for Preparation of the 21st Century Panglong Conference, said that the talks focused on inviting non-signatories to the NCA to the conference.⁴⁷

On 29 June, Burma/Myanmar's military commander-in-chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also confirmed that the military will "fully cooperate" with negotiators and EAOs to ensure the success of the peace conference.⁴⁸

Armed conflict: clashes, civilian abuse

On 9 June, to mark five years since the resumption of war in Kachin State, 130 community-based and international organizations issued a statement urging the military and government to "end the endemic culture of impunity once and for all."⁴⁹

⁴¹ DVB (28 Jun 16) Torture report ban shows limits of rights under NLD: CSOs

⁴² DVB (28 Jun 16) Torture report ban shows limits of rights under NLD: CSOs

⁴³ DVB (28 Jun 16) Suu Kyi, NCA groups agree to start „Second Panglong“ in August

⁴⁴ RFA (03 Jun 16) Myanmar Envoy Reaches Out to Non-Signatories of Peace Pact

⁴⁵ RFA (06 Jun 16) Myanmar Government Peace Envoy to Meet With Shan Groups

⁴⁶ RFA (08 Jun 16) Shan and Kachin Ethnic Groups Show Support For Myanmar's Panglong Conference

⁴⁷ GNLM (11 Jun 16) Political dialogue framework to be amended within NCA framework; Myanmar Times (10 Jun 16) NCA groups, govt and military meet over framework reform

⁴⁸ RFA (29 Jun 16) Myanmar's Military to Cooperate With Stakeholders at Panglong Peace Conference; Myanmar Times (30 Jun 16) Tatmadaw chief stresses NCA as bedrock for peace

In June, human rights violations continued amidst armed conflicts in Shan and Kachin states:

- **1 June:** A 22 year old villager died after stepping on a land mine near Namhkam Township, Shan State.⁵⁰
- **3 June:** Two ethnic Ta'ang villagers were murdered in an area where armed hostilities escalated near Namhkam Township, Shan State.⁵¹
- **8-11 June:** It was reported that nearly 40 civilians had been detained by the Restoration Council of the Shan State (RCSS) in Manton Township, Shan State, although the group deny the claims.⁵²
- **20 June:** A university student was shot dead by the Tatmadaw in Myitkyina, Kachin State, after an altercation where the soldiers said they were acting in self defense.⁵³
- **21 June:** The Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) claimed they were attacked by the Arakan Army (AA) and that one of its fighters was missing in action, although the AA denied that any attack took place.⁵⁴
- **25 June:** Tatmadaw soldiers from Division 33 arrested five villagers in Lashio Township, Shan State, with news later reporting that two of the villagers had been killed.⁵⁵
- **29 June:** Five villagers from Lashio Township, Shan State, were found dead close to a Tatmadaw base.⁵⁶

HUMAN RIGHTS

Burma named one of world's worst countries for human trafficking

On 30 June, the US State Department named Burma as one of the world's worst human trafficking offenders, demoting the country from the Tier 2 watch list to a Tier 3 country, citing the use of child soldiers and forced labor as the reason behind the decision.⁵⁷ The downgrading increases the possibility of sanctions by the US Government.⁵⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Thet Naung, national head of the police Anti-Human Trafficking Team, in response said "the U.S. pointed out some points that we police have been working on. It also pointed out the child soldier issue, which the military is working on."⁵⁹

Gambira released but not without further threat

On 1 July, Gambira, one of the Buddhist monks best known for leading the 2007 Saffron Revolution, was finally released following a 6-month prison sentence for allegedly crossing the Thai/Burmese border illegally as he returned to the country to apply for a new passport.⁶⁰ On 27 June, in the week leading up to his scheduled release, Gambira was transferred to Insein Prison in Rangoon/Yangon and threatened with a trespassing charge backdated to 2012. The charge was later dropped.⁶¹

BBC Reporter jailed

On 6 June, BBC Burmese-language service reporter Nay Myo Lin was sentenced to three months of hard labor after the Chan Mya Tharsi Township Court convicted him under section 332 of the penal code for attacking a police officer during student protests in Mandalay, on 27 March 2015.⁶² Nay Myo Lin accused the police officer of knocking a man off a motorbike, and his defence lawyer, Thein Than

⁴⁹ DVB (09 Jun 16) Kachin conflict reaches five-year mark with calls for govt action

⁵⁰ DVB (10 Jun 16) 2 Ta'ang men brutally murdered, says women's group

⁵¹ Myanmar Times (06 Jun 16) Two farmers killed in Namhkam

⁵² Myanmar Times (13 Jun 16) Shan civilians still missing in Namhkam as 40 more allegedly detained

⁵³ Myanmar Times (14 Jun 16) Turkish foreign minister offers to help with Rakhine issue

⁵⁴ DVB (24 Jun 16) Arakan militia claims it was ambushed

⁵⁵ S.H.A.N. (30 Jun 16) Five Lashio villagers found dead near Burma Army camp

⁵⁶ S.H.A.N. (30 Jun 16) Five Lashio villagers found dead near Burma Army camp

⁵⁷ The New York Times (30 Jun 16) U.S. Criticizes Myanmar Over Human Trafficking

⁵⁸ Washington Post (30 Jun 16) State Department names Burma one of world's worst countries for human trafficking

⁵⁹ RFA (28 Jun 16) Myanmar Takes a Tumble on Annual U.S. Human Trafficking Report

⁶⁰ DVB (01 Jul 16) Gambira released as trespassing charges dropped

⁶¹ DVB (28 Jun 16) Gambira faces extended term in prison; Myanmar Times (04 Jul 16) U Gambira released, cleared of charges

⁶² Myanmar Times (07 Jun 16) BBC reporter jailed for assaulting police officer

Oo, told Reuters that a widely circulated witness video showed this was the case.⁶³ The reporter added that he “didn’t mean to hurt that policeman” and that he was trying to “give protection to a citizen who was being treated unjustly.”⁶⁴ His lawyer confirmed an appeal against the sentence will be submitted.⁶⁵

Media organizations have criticized the verdict: Burma News International called for a review of the case and the Foreign Correspondents Club of Myanmar said the sentence “could tarnish the image of the new civilian government.”⁶⁶ The BBC said it would support Nay Myo Lin's appeal.⁶⁷

Mosque Destroyed in Bago Division as tensions escalate

On 23 June, a group of men destroyed a mosque in Thayethamein Village, Bago Division, damaged homes and injured at least one Muslim man, according to a police spokesman.⁶⁸ The Bago Region Chief Minister, Win Thein, said that the destruction was sparked by a Facebook post about an argument between a Muslim and a Buddhist man. The post led a mob of about 200 Buddhist residents from neighboring villages to destroy the Muslim man’s house, and attack neighbouring Muslim homes and buildings.⁶⁹

Plan to settle land grab cases within “six months”

On 30 June, the Central Committee on Confiscated Farmlands and Other Lands, chaired by Vice President Henry Van Thio, set out an ambitious plan to settle all land grabbing cases in Burma/Myanmar within “six months” said Naypyidaw Council Chairman Myo Aung.⁷⁰ Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Tun Win, told media that resolving land disputes was one of the priorities of the new government which “... wishes to give back land to the rightful owners”, although this may be difficult in some circumstances where land has already been officially resold.⁷¹

On 25 June, more than 6,000 acres of land confiscated was returned to their rightful owners in the Irrawaddy Division during a ceremony where 3,166 acres seized by Yuzana Company in Pantanaw Township were returned to 252 farmers while 3,268 acres taken by the Ministry of Industry in Pyapon Township were returned to 72 owners.⁷² Vice President Henry Van Thio, in his Central Committee Chairman role, said the government is making systematic efforts to ensure transparency in order to hand over confiscated lands back to farmers but that in some cases, farmers should wait as the work needs to be carried out in conformity with the existing rules and regulations of the land law. During the ceremony, Irrawaddy Region Chief Minister Mahn Jonny said land rights permits would be granted to the farmers in accordance with the 2012 Farmland Law.⁷³

NATURAL RESOURCES

Government struggles to reign in illegal logging

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation has declared it is unable to reign in illegal logging. On 30 June, it was reported that Ministry director general Nyi Nyi Kyaw said that most of the illegal logging in Burma took place in Kachin State and Sagaing Region where logs were smuggled to China, but the ministry could not control the situation.⁷⁴ The Ministry has reported that 12,844 tons of illegally logged timber was seized in Myanmar/Burma from the beginning of April until

⁶³ DVB (06 Jun 16) BBC Burmese reporter jailed for hitting policeman

⁶⁴ DVB (06 Jun 16) BBC Burmese reporter jailed for hitting policeman

⁶⁵ Myanmar Times (15 Jun 16) Convicted BBC journalist to appeal sentence

⁶⁶ Myanmar Times (15 Jun 16) Convicted BBC journalist to appeal sentence

⁶⁷ Myanmar Times (15 Jun 16) Convicted BBC journalist to appeal sentence

⁶⁸ DVB (24 Jun 16) Mosque destroyed in central Burma

⁶⁹ RFA (24 Jun 16) Mosque Destroyed in Myanmar Village as Tensions Flare Between Muslims And Buddhists

⁷⁰ Irrawaddy (01 Jul 16) Govt Committee to Settle All Land Grab Cases in Six Months

⁷¹ Irrawaddy (01 Jul 16) Govt Committee to Settle All Land Grab Cases in Six Months

⁷² Irrawaddy (27 Jun 16) Confiscated Land Returned To Rightful Owners

⁷³ GNLM (26 Jun 16) More than 6,400 acres of confiscated land in Ayeyawady Region returned to farmers

⁷⁴ Myanmar Times (30 Jun 16) Ministry struggles to control illegal logging

23 June. The largest seizures were in Sagaing Division, at nearly 3,450 tons, followed by over 2,178 tons in Karenni/Kayah State and 1,406 tons in Pegu/Bago Division.⁷⁵

Myanmar was listed in 2015 as the third worst country in the world for deforestation, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.⁷⁶

On 1 June, Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Ohn Win, told the Upper House that Myanma Timber Enterprise (MTE) would be tasked with protecting remaining forests in Burma and that a list of forest resources would be made prior to timber extraction.⁷⁷ Last month, an independent report called for the dismantling or privatization of MTE to strengthen protection of Burma's forests [see May 2016 Burma Bulletin].

The export of raw timber logs was banned as of 1 April 2014.⁷⁸ In April, Ohn Win told media that a nationwide ban on logging would be imposed by the end of the current fiscal year in March 2017.⁷⁹

Gems Scandal: Officials investigated over missing US\$100 million

On 8 June, Win Htein, director general of the Department of Mines under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, confirmed that authorities had investigated officials from the Ministry of Mines and the Myanmar Gems and the Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association over the alleged disappearance of nearly US\$100 million in funds belonging to the Association.⁸⁰

However, former President Thein Sein and former minister of the President's Office, Soe Thein have been excluded from the investigation despite allegations that US\$1.1 million of the funds went to Thein Sein, who is also Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) Chairman.⁸¹

The fund which was established under the Ministry of Mines during the Thein Sein administration, originally held about US\$104 million, but had dwindled to less than US\$800,000. The original funds came from a one percent tax charged for sales at the Myanmar Jade and Gems Emporium and was supposed to be administered by the Emporium's Central Committee, comprised of officials from the Association and the government.⁸²

On 2 June, central executive committee member of the Association, Kyaw Kyaw Oo, alleged that €1 million (more than US\$1.1 million) was taken from the association and given to Thein Sein, and another €6 million (more than US\$6.5 million) was contributed [to the ex-president's project] by gems traders. Former Minister of Mines, Myint Aung, claimed that the missing funds were used legitimately, including for corporate social responsibility purposes.⁸³

On 3 June, it was reported that the USDP would sue two weekly newspapers in Burma – the Myanmar Herald and the Messenger, along with other individuals – for defaming former President Thein Sein and the USDP in their coverage of the alleged embezzlement.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, the Ministry has announced that it has raised the required deposit for traders intending to buy jade at the 53rd Myanmar Gems Emporium which will be held from 24 June to 6 July. The deposit was raised from €10,000 to €50,000 (US\$56,000) for foreign traders, and to € 20,000 (US\$22,000) for

⁷⁵ The Irrawaddy (29 Jun 16) Seizure of Large Quantities of Illegal Timber Continues

⁷⁶ Myanmar Times (30 Jun 16) Ministry struggles to control illegal logging

⁷⁷ GNLM (02 Jun 16) Myanmar to stop logging completely this fiscal year: Union

⁷⁸ GNLM (02 Jun 16) Myanmar to stop logging completely this fiscal year: Union

⁷⁹ The Irrawaddy (29 Jun 16) Seizure of Large Quantities of Illegal Timber Continues

⁸⁰ RFA (09 Jun 16) Team Investigating Missing Gem Funds Submits Report to Myanmar Government

⁸¹ RFA (09 Jun 16) Team Investigating Missing Gem Funds Submits Report to Myanmar Government; The Irrawaddy (02 Jun 16) Gems Traders Accuse Ex-President of Misusing More Than US\$1 Million

⁸² RFA (09 Jun 16) Team Investigating Missing Gem Funds Submits Report to Myanmar Government

⁸³ The Irrawaddy (03 Jun 16) USDP to Sue Newspapers Over Gems Corruption Story; The Irrawaddy (02 Jun 16) Gems Traders Accuse Ex-President of Misusing More Than US\$1 Million

⁸⁴ The Irrawaddy (03 Jun 16) USDP to Sue Newspapers Over Gems Corruption Story

locals. The move was to overcome the problem of foreign traders who made bids on gems but didn't complete their purchases. The 2015 gems emporium netted approximately US\$ 62 million in sales.⁸⁵

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Preparations begin for CEDAW report to UN

On 10 June, it was reported that the Women's Organizations Network (WON), Gender Equality Network, CEDAW Action Myanmar, the Women's League of Burma and the Women Peace Network – Arakan had all submitted reports to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is scheduled to review Burma/Myanmar's performance on July 6.⁸⁶ Burma/Myanmar ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997, making the country legally bound to put its provisions into practice. The meeting will be covering the fourth and fifth reporting periods from 2008-2015.⁸⁷

DISPLACEMENT

Suu Kyi inks deal over migrants with Thailand

On 23 June, State Counsellor and Foreign Affairs Minister Aung San Suu Kyi began a 3-day visit to Thailand to visit migrant workers.⁸⁸ During the visit, a new agreement on Burmese migrant workers was signed, aimed at making it easier for Burmese workers to work legally in Thailand. The agreement which is also meant to improve protections for migrant workers, covers the issuance of identity documents, and shortens the waiting period between expired and new working visas from 3 years to 30 days, allowing Burmese workers to return to work in Thailand much sooner. Burma estimates there at 4 million migrant workers in Thailand, half of whom are documented, while Thailand estimates more than 1.4 million.⁸⁹

During the trip, Thai authorities cancelled a visit on 25 June to the Tham Hin refugee camp in Ratchaburi province, west of Bangkok.⁹⁰ No reason was given for the cancellation.

On 29 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that 196 refugees in Thailand, displaced by clashes, would be repatriated to Burma/Myanmar although no timescale was given.⁹¹ According to the UN Refugee Agency, more than 110,000 refugees from Burma currently live in Thailand with most being ethnic minorities displaced by fighting between ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw.⁹²

ECONOMY

Burma named top investment destination, New MIC members announced

On 25 June, it was reported that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) listed Burma/Myanmar as a top-15 prospective destination for investment among the executives of multinational enterprises (MNE) in its annual World Investment Report. Four percent of the MNE executives who responded to a survey selected Burma among their three most promising countries for future foreign direct investment (FDI) for the years 2016-18.⁹³

⁸⁵ MT (16 Jun 16) Gems emporium courts foreign traders

⁸⁶ Irrawaddy (10 Jun 16) Burma's Gender Issues to Take Center Stage in Geneva

⁸⁷ Irrawaddy (10 Jun 16) Burma's Gender Issues to Take Center Stage in Geneva

⁸⁸ RFA (20 Jun 16) Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi to Meet With Migrant Workers in Thailand

⁸⁹ Bangkok Post (21 Jun 16) Suu Kyi, Thai govt to sign new migrant deal; Myanmar Times (22 Jun 16) State counsellor to sign MoU with Thailand on upcoming trip; RFA (22 Jun 16) Aung San Suu Kyi to Sign Pact to Allow Myanmar Workers Smoother Access to Jobs in Thailand

⁹⁰ The Irrawaddy (22 Jun 16) Suu Kyi's trip to refugee camp in Thailand scrapped

⁹¹ The Irrawaddy (22 Jun 16) Suu Kyi's trip to refugee camp in Thailand scrapped

⁹² Myanmar Times (30 Jun 16) Nearly 200 refugees to be repatriated from Thailand

⁹³ The Irrawaddy (25 Jun 16) The Irrawaddy Business Roundup (June 25, 2016)

On 7 June, the President's Office announced the new members of the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC):

Kyaw Win (Chairman) – Union Minister, Ministry of Planning and Finance
Than Myint (Vice-Chairman) – Union Minister, Ministry of Commerce
Aung Naing Oo (Secretary) – Director General, Directorate of Investment & Company Administration (DICA)
Mya Thuzar (Joint-Secretary) – Deputy Director General of DICA (Retired)
Tun Tun Oo (Member) – Union Attorney General
Khin Maung Yee (Member) – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation
Toe Aung Myint (Member) – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce
Tun Tun Naing (Member) – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning and Finance
Htay Chun (Member) – Deputy Director General of DICA (Retired)
Kyaw (Member) – Director, General Administration Department (Retired)
Aye Lwin (Member) – Joint-Secretary, Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry⁹⁴

Aung Naing Oo, who is also Director General of the Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration said, that since April, the MIC had scrutinized 102 investment proposals (around 50 local and 50 foreign, including some from the US).⁹⁵ Later in the month, he said the MIC would encourage eco-friendly investments. Currently, over 90 companies with investment proposals amounting to a total value \$2.3 billion have been held up since April, the MIC secretary also said.⁹⁶

Farmers face prosecution over debt

On 22 June, the Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank (MADB) announced that over 400 farmers from across 15 townships within Pegu/Bago Division were facing prosecution for failing to repay agricultural loans issued to them, some were due in 2012. As a result, 67 farmers are being prosecuted in Thegon township, 56 in Waw township and 47 in Thanatpin township.⁹⁷ Media reported on 17 June, that MADB announced that farmers accumulated over K8 billion (nearly US\$7 million) in outstanding debts from credit loans issued by the bank since 2012.⁹⁸

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN JUNE

01	Australia based Woodside Energy has begun drilling in two blocks off the Arakan/Rakhine coast that are expected to have 83 million barrels of liquefied natural gas. ⁹⁹
01	People's Assembly representative Pe Than called on the government to define „political prisoner“, stressing the need to separate political prisoners from criminal detainees. ¹⁰⁰
14	Twilight Over Burma, about the relationship between a Shan prince and an Austrian woman, was pulled from the opening night of the human rights film festival in Burma. ¹⁰¹
15	It was reported that from January to 12 June, 689 arrests were made in 469 drug-related cases. As part of a special project under the 100-day plan, another 319 suspects were arrested in 218 cases from 1 May to 12 June. ¹⁰²
15	It was announced that foreign investors will be unable to buy shares on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) as long as the Myanmar Companies Act is not amended. ¹⁰³

⁹⁴ FocusCore (17 Jun 16) New members Announced for Myanmar's Investment Commission; The Irrawaddy (08 Jun 16) New Members Appointed to Burma's Investment Commission

⁹⁵ The Irrawaddy (06 Jun 16) US Investment in Burma Forecasted to Increase

⁹⁶ GNLM (17 Jun 16) MIC to encourage eco-friendly investment; Reuters (10 Jun 16) INTERVIEW-Myanmar's new investment commission to tackle \$2.3 bln backlog

⁹⁷ GNLM (22 Jun 16) Over 400 Bago farmers prosecuted for failure to repay loans

⁹⁸ GNLM (17 Jun 16) Bago farmers accumulate K8 billion in debt since 2012

⁹⁹ GNLM (01 Jun 16) Eighty-three million barrels of liquefied natural gas expected to be in two offshore blocks

¹⁰⁰ GNLM (02 Jun 16) Union government urged to adopt political prisoner definition

¹⁰¹ BBC (15 Jun 16) Twilight Over Burma: Myanmar censors pull film from festival

¹⁰² GNLM (15 Jun 16) Yangon Gov't targets four hotspots as part of crime crackdown

¹⁰³ Irrawaddy (15 Jun 16) Rumors of Foreign Investors Soon Accessing YSX Quashed

19	It was reported that France would finance US\$ 1 million to the Ministry of Electricity and Energy to conduct a feasibility study on a hydropower project in the town of Laymyo, Arakan/Rakhine State. ¹⁰⁴
24	Mandalay Region authorities announced a program to help improve lives of street children around the city within 100 days. The new plan aims to reduce the number of children living on the streets of Mandalay Region. ¹⁰⁵
24	It was reported that forests in northern Burma are to be nominated by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for world heritage listing. ¹⁰⁶
25	It was reported that the Myanmar Minerals Extraction Monitoring Network was formed with 35 Community Based Organizations (CBOs), during a forum that focused on mineral extraction issues and traditional customary land rights, held in Myitkyina, Kachin State. ¹⁰⁷
27	Police and armed forces in Kalaw and Shan State seized K4 billion (US\$3.4m) worth of yaba (methamphetamine) pills and narcotics. ¹⁰⁸
28	The Tatmadaw is planning to sue the 7Days newspaper over publication of a speech by Shwe Mann, claiming the article implied that the military was not willing to cooperate with the new government, and was therefore disloyal to the country. The article was later retracted. ¹⁰⁹
29	Three Burmese migrants trafficked into Thailand, and forced to work aboard a fishing boat, were rescued after the advocacy group Myanmar Association in Thailand (MAT) had tracked their case for several months. ¹¹⁰
30	It was reported that Lieu Zan, director-general of China's State Power Investment Company's international business department told members of the Kachin State government that Burma faced three options over the suspended Myitsone Dam: the government could cancel the dam and be liable to pay \$800 million in compensation, resume work on the project and earn \$500 million a year in revenue when it is completed, or do nothing and pay \$50 million in interest costs for as long as it is suspended. ¹¹¹

Please visit www.altsean.org/ChronologyHome.php to access Altsean-Burma's full database of chronology entries covering Burma-related events.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN JUNE

“Trained to Torture” Ta’ang Women’s Organization (TWO) <http://goo.gl/QQwUtu>

“South East Asia 2016 Funding Update” UNHCR <http://goo.gl/tAieXx>

“Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar” UN Human Rights Council <http://goo.gl/rlfH2s>

“Council conclusions on EU strategy with Myanmar/Burma” European Union <http://goo.gl/Gs5J3s>

“Building a robust civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanism in Myanmar: challenges, successes and lessons learned; working paper and recommendations report” Mercy Corps <http://goo.gl/oruouA>

“Taking the EU-Myanmar partnership to the next level: an EU strategy in support of Myanmar's reforms” European Commission <http://goo.gl/psEMSV>

“EU-Myanmar Relations Factsheet” European Union <http://goo.gl/E2c5FC>

¹⁰⁴ GNLM (19 Jun 16) France to finance Myanmar electricity needs

¹⁰⁵ GNLM (24 Jun 16) Programme aims to improve lives of street kids

¹⁰⁶ GNLM (24 Jun 16) Myanmar's natural forests to be UNESCO listed by 2018

¹⁰⁷ GNLM (25 Jun 16) CBOs to form Minerals Extraction Monitoring Network

¹⁰⁸ GNLM (27 Jun 16) One million Yaba pills seized in southern Shan State

¹⁰⁹ Myanmar Times (28 Jun 16) Military files lawsuit against local paper; Myanmar Times (29 Jun 16) Lawsuit against local media outlet continues, despite report

¹¹⁰ DVB (29 Jun 16) 3 Burmese rescued from slavery on Thai fishing boat

¹¹¹ Frontier (26 June 16) The Myitsone dam: China's three options

“Myanmar: Floods - Emergency appeal operations update” International Federation of Red Cross And Red Crescent Societies <http://goo.gl/CVvuVS>

“Wa Operational Brief, June 2016” World Food Programme <https://goo.gl/MDcsbz>

“Myanmar June 2016 Operational Report” World Food Programme <https://goo.gl/CcwxP1>

“Rakhine - Health Sector Snapshot June 2016” World Health Organization <http://goo.gl/9YyDuu>

“Kachin - Health Sector Snapshot June 2016” World Health Organization <http://goo.gl/seSeFI>

“Health Cluster Bulletin, Issue 3 (June 2016)” World Health Organization <http://goo.gl/58uJmz>

“They Can Arrest You at Any Time - The Criminalization of Peaceful Expression in Burma” Human Rights Watch <https://goo.gl/dlbqm8>