The regime releases 6,966 prisoners, of which only 13 are political prisoners. At least 120 political prisoners remain behind bars, with another 444 awaiting trial.

Authorities arrest and charge students protesting the military’s presence in Parliament. The Letpadan student trials continue, and Tharawaddy Prison authorities use the 1894 Prison Act to ban 35 jailed activists from receiving visits and place them in solitary confinement.

An Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Burma Partnership report reveals human rights activists in Burma face increasing regime surveillance and threats to their safety.

The regime Election Commission announces that national polls will be held on 8 November.

Military MPs veto a second constitutional amendment bill, and the National Parliament passes the Interfaith Marriage Bill, while the People’s Assembly passes the Monogamy Bill.

Tatmadaw troops intensify clashes with the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin and Shan States, as the regime engages in fresh ceasefire negotiations with ethnic armed groups.

Tatmadaw troops clash with Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and Klo Htoo Baw forces in Karen State in violation of the 2012 ceasefire. A Karen Human Rights Group report finds that land confiscation in southeastern Burma has increased since the 2012 ceasefire.

Wikileaks publishes emails revealing that the regime sought to obtain technology for online domestic surveillance between 2012 and 2014.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passes a resolution on the human rights situation of Rohingya and other minorities in Burma.

A Reuters report reveals Rohingya in border areas of Arakan State are still regularly subjected to forced labor by the Tatmadaw.

The annual US State Department trafficking report finds “pervasive” corruption and impunity are behind Burma’s failures to address trafficking. Employers and laborers continue to dispute minimum wage proposals after the regime tries to introduce a minimum daily wage of 3,600 kyat (US$3.20).
Political prisoners: 13 released, at least 120 still in jail

On 30 July, President Thein Sein ordered the release of 6,966 prisoners in a presidential amnesty, soon after the regime Election Commission announced the date of the upcoming general election. However, as in previous mass releases [See Table Thein Sein’s prisoner amnesties], most of those freed were criminals and former military intelligence officers jailed in 2004. Only 13 (or 0.19%) of those released were political prisoners, including five journalists. The release also included 155 Chinese loggers jailed on 22 July, and 55 more foreign nationals. [See below, Kachin court hands life sentences to 153 Chinese loggers]

The political prisoners freed include:

- Three Bi Mon Te Nay Journal employees and two publishers, each sentenced on 16 October 2014 to two years in prison under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code for publishing an article claiming that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic politicians had been appointed to form an interim government.
- Land rights activist Sein Than, sentenced six times between 19 August and 10 September 2014 to a total of two years in prison with at least eight months of hard labor for peaceful protests.
- Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF) activist Tin Maung Kyi, sentenced in 2014 to one and a half years in prison for peacefully protesting and distributing pamphlets criticizing the regime.
- Four Rohingya men who were re-sentenced by Arakan State Divisional Court in March 2015 to between five and eight years in prison, after they were released in the October 2014 presidential amnesty. Both sentences were for involvement in an April 2013 protest against attempts by regime immigration officials to register Rohingya IDPs as ‘Bengali’.

As of 31 July, at least 120 political prisoners remain incarcerated, with 444 activists facing criminal charges for political actions. In a statement released on 14 July, Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the recent surge in political prisoners casts doubt on the regime’s commitment to a genuine democratic election in November. On 21 July, in response to a question on the definition of “political prisoner” by National League for Democracy (NLD) MP May Win Myint, regime Deputy Minister of Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun told Parliament that the term is “unconstitutional”.

Students protesting military veto of constitutional amendments arrested

In July, protests took place in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Tenasserim Divisions in response to the military veto of constitutional amendments, calling for an end to the military presence in Parliament and demanding the release of student activists. Many were charged or sentenced for peaceful protests.

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1 Al (30 Jul 15) Myanmar: Prisoners of conscience released in amnesty but scores remain behind bars; Irrawaddy (30 Jul 15) Burma Frees Thousands of Prisoners in Advance of Polls
2 Myanmar Times (30 Jul 15) Presidential amnesty for 6966 prisoners includes 210 foreigners
3 AAPP (09 Jul 15) Monthly Chronology of June 2015
4 Reuters (30 Jul 15) Political prisoners, Chinese loggers among thousands freed in Myanmar amnesty; AP (30 Jun 15) Myanmar Pardons China Loggers Among Nearly 7,000 Prisoners; AAPP (31 Jul 15) Presidential Amnesty does little to Liberate Burma’s Political Prisoners
5 Irrawaddy (16 Oct 14) Court Sentences 3 Journalists, 2 Media Owners to 2 Years in Prison; DVB (16 Oct 14) Journalists sentenced to 2 years for sedition
6 Al (18 Sep 14) Myanmar: Further information: Further sentence for protestor in Myanmar
7 Irrawaddy (17 Jul 14) Court Sentences 2 Activists to Prison Terms for Anti-Govt Pamphlets
8 Al (27 Mar 15) Rohingya Community Leaders Imprisoned
9 AAPP (31 Jul 15) Presidential Amnesty does little to Liberate Burma’s Political Prisoners
10 HRW (14 Jul 15) Dispatches: Stilling Student Dissent in Burma
11 DVB (22 Jul 15) MPs debate definition of ‘political prisoner’
• 1 July: Police charged five student leaders under Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for leading a 30 June protest in Rangoon involving around 200 people.¹²
• 7 July: Around 60 students gathered at Rangoon University to commemorate the 1962 massacre and to protest against the regime. Police later arrested student leaders Zeyar Lwin and Paing Ye Thu, both of whom had previously been charged for the 30 June protest.¹³
• 8 July: Tavoy [Dawei] District Court, Tenasserim Division, sentenced five student activists to either a fine of 30,000 kyat (US$26) each or a month in prison under the Peaceful Assembly Law for a prayer protest. All five chose to pay the fine.¹⁴
• 10 July: More than 100 people joined officially permitted protests in Chauk and Pakkoku Townships, Magwe Division.¹⁵
• 15 July: Pabedan and Kyauktada Township Courts, Rangoon Division, began the trials of Zeyar Lwin and Paing Ye Thu, charged under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code and Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly Law.¹⁶
• 17 July: Amarapura Township Court, Mandalay Division, began the trial of four students arrested and detained on 29 June for an anti-regime graffiti protest on 26 June.¹⁷

Trials continue for Letpadan student activists

In July, Tharawaddy District Court, Pegu Division, continued hearings for 23 of the 70 students detained after the police crackdown in March on student protests in Letpadan, Pegu Division.

• 7 July: Tharawaddy District Court granted 11 student activists bail on the condition that 12.47 million kyat (US$10,000) of assets, held by no more than two guarantors, could be proven for each student.¹⁸
• 14 July: Tharawaddy District Court granted 12 student activists bail set at 10 million kyat (US$8,016).¹⁹
• 21 July: Defense lawyer Aung Thein, representing student activists Nanda Sit Aung, Min Thway Thit and Phyo Phyo Aung, submitted a video to Tharawaddy Township Court, Pegu Division, apparently showing police torturing the students in detention.²⁰
• 24 July: National League for Democracy (NLD) MP Win Myint told the People’s Assembly that the treatment of students during the Letpadan crackdown in March, where students were kicked, beaten and loaded onto trucks, breached the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²¹
• 28 July: Defense lawyer Robert San Aung filed charges at Tharawaddy District Court, Pegu Division, against Police Commander Phone Myint and Deputy Commander San Myint for the unlawful detention of students for a 24 hour period before they were officially charged, and for the detention of two minors as adults for two months.²²

Since their arrest, many student activists held in prison have suffered serious health problems [see March, June 2015 Burma Bulletins]. On 14 July, students’ parents expressed concern that the regime was intentionally compromising the students’ mental health, after Tharawaddy Prison authorities banned 35 students from receiving visits and placed them in solitary confinement on 30 June. The ban, put in place under the 1894 Prisons Act, was in response to students bringing cigarettes and betel nut back into prison after family visits. On 20 July, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

References:

¹²Reuters (30 Jun 15) Myanmar students in peaceful march to protest political role of military; Irrawaddy (02 Jul 15) Student Protesters Charged for Rally Against Military MPs
¹³DVB (07 Jul 15) Students mark anniversary of Rangoon massacre; Irrawaddy (07 Jul 15) Student Leader Arrested Following July 7 Commemoration
¹⁴DVB (09 Jul 15) 5 Tavoy student activists sentenced
¹⁵EMG (13 Jul 15) Pakokku, Chauk students join protest calling Section 436 amendment
¹⁶EMG (17 Jul 15) Student leaders tried for protesting military MPs
¹⁷EMG (17 Jul 15) Yadana Bwarchi four stand trial
¹⁸DVB (07 Jul 15) 11 Letpadan activists granted bail; Irrawaddy (07 Jul 15) Bail Set at $10k for 11 Letpadan Activists
¹⁹Myanmar Times (15 Jul 15) Twelve education protestors granted bail
²⁰EMG (24 Jul 15) Detained students’ trial continues
²¹EMG (24 Jul 15) Handcuffing students breaches rights; MP
²²RFA (28 Jul 15) Lawyer For Detained Myanmar Student Activists Files Charges Against Police Chief; EMG (31 Jul 15) Detained students countersue Letpadan police for illegal detention
²³Irrawaddy (01 Jul 15) Several Jailed Letpadan Activists Placed in Solitary Following Court Appearance; Myanmar Times (15 Jul 15) Twelve education protestors granted bail; EMG (02 Jul 15) Detained students lose visitation rights for six weeks
released a statement in response to a case filed by Myanmar Lawyers Network, saying it had interviewed detained students and found that authorities are within their rights to place the students in solitary confinement and that the students are receiving regular health checkups.\textsuperscript{24}

**Burma’s human rights defenders face increasingly dangerous environment: Report**

On 24 July, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Burma Partnership released their joint report, “How to Defend the Defenders: A Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Burma and Appropriate Protection Mechanisms.”\textsuperscript{25} The report was based on interviews with 75 human rights defenders working on various issues, particularly land rights, women’s rights, and interfaith issues. Interviewees came from Rangoon, Mandalay, Irrawaddy and Magwe Divisions, Southern Shan and Kachin States, as well as some based in Thailand. The report’s findings included:\textsuperscript{26}

- Burmese human rights defenders work in “as dangerous an environment as ever” with little protection, and 98% of interviewees had “little or no faith in the judicial system.”
- Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly Law and Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code are frequently used against defenders conducting legitimate work. Although the six-month maximum prison sentence under Article 18 appears lenient compared to longer sentences from the former SPDC regime, it was frequently used on multiple counts to create longer sentences.
- Women activists face regular threats of sexual violence: 45% of women interviewed had faced sexual harassment, intimidation and/or assault. Women activists working on interfaith issues are increasingly targeted by religious extremists since the introduction of the Interfaith Marriage Bill.
- Regime monitoring of human rights defenders has become more obvious. Special Branch Police are stationed outside embassies and UN offices in Rangoon and often follow activists and question them about their work. Online threats have increased, and the regime is involved in a variety of online monitoring, including hacking and monitoring Facebook accounts.

**INSIDE BURMA**

**Regime announces 8 November general election date**

On 8 July, the regime Election Commission (EC) announced that the 2015 general election will take place on 8 November. The EC informed parties that they could submit candidate lists from 20 July to 8 August, withdraw until 11 August, and the EC would scrutinize submissions from 12 to 21 August.\textsuperscript{27} On 9 July, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and some ethnic parties said the time period for submitting candidate lists was too short to nominate and choose parliamentary candidates.\textsuperscript{28} However, in a meeting with political parties on 19 July, the EC rejected suggestions to postpone the 2015 election, despite concerns over voter list irregularities.\textsuperscript{29}

After the election date announcement, several political developments emerged:

- **19 July**: 88 Generation Peace and Open Society (88GPOS) student leader Ko Ko Gyi confirmed that his group planned to campaign with the NLD.\textsuperscript{30}
- **21 July**: A local regime-supported militia group allegedly defaced and tore down NLD signs and party flags in 20 villages in Nansang Township, Shan State.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{24}Irrawaddy (27 Jul 15) Victims of Student Crackdown Meet Human Rights Commission
\textsuperscript{26}AAPP & BP (24 Jul 15) How to Defend the Defenders: A Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Burma and Appropriate Protection Mechanisms
\textsuperscript{27}Reuters (08 Jul 15) Myanmar sets date for election that may define scope of reform; Bangkok Post (08 Jul 15) Myanmar announces election date; EMG (13 Jul 15) Political parties struggle with candidate list submission deadline
\textsuperscript{28}EMG (13 Jul 15) Political parties struggle with candidate list submission deadline
\textsuperscript{29}DVB (22 Jul 15) Election Commission rules out postponing polls
\textsuperscript{30}Myanmar Times (20 Jul 15) Activists seek to run as NLD candidates
\textsuperscript{31}Myanmar Times (24 Jul 15) Parties race to meet deadline as ‘candidate virus’ strikes
\textsuperscript{32}Irrawaddy (23 Jul 15) Four Arrested, Released After NLD Campaign Materials Destroyed by Militia
• 22 July: At a press conference in Rangoon, EC Chairman Tin Aye announced polls would be held in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, but was uncertain if they would be held in the Wa Self-Administered Zone, also in Shan State. The EC previously stated that the election would not be held in areas as northern Shan State and parts of Kachin State.

• 23 July: The NLD Central Executive Committee issued an order to would-be candidates to avoid posting on social media and stop giving media interviews until the party selects its candidates.

• 29 July: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi officially filed her candidature forms.

From 20 to 26 July, a total of 46 candidates submitted their names to the EC to contest in the upcoming election. The names of candidates and their proposed seats can be viewed on the EC’s website (www.uecmyanmar.org). The EC has designated a total of 1,171 seats on four levels of parliamentary representatives.

• 330 seats for the People’s Assembly
• 168 seats for the National Assembly
• 644 seats for Division or State Parliaments
• 29 seats for Division or State Parliaments’ ethnic representatives

Interfaith Marriage Bill, Monogamy Bill move forward in Parliament’s 12th session

In July, Parliament convened for its 12th regular session in Naypyidaw. Important developments included:

• 1 July: MPs debated a second constitutional amendment bill in Parliament to amend Articles 261 and 436(a) of the constitution. Military MP Brig-Gen Aung Kyaw said Burma is not ready to permit state-level parliamentarians to nominate chief ministers. [See below, Military MPs veto second constitutional amendment bill.]

• 1 July: National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann announced that the referendum on amending Article 59(d) of the constitution will be held at the same time as the 2015 election.

• 2 July: Ethnic MPs spoke out in Parliament in favor of changing Article 261(b), (c), (d), and (e).

• 3 July: The People’s Assembly approved the Border Areas and Ethnic National Races Development Law.

• 7 July: The National Parliament passed the Interfaith Marriage Bill, which has been heavily criticized domestically and internationally for restricting women’s rights and discriminating against Muslims and other religious minorities.

• 9 July: USDP MP Khin Maung Nyo submitted an urgent proposal to parliament to maintain the

Constitutional articles debated in Parliament in July

59(d): Requires any presidential or vice-presidential candidate to be familiar with “political, administrative, economic and military” affairs. Proposed amendment would substitute the word “military” with the word “defense.”

261(b): Requires the President to submit a list of nominees to Division/State Parliament for the post of Chief Minister of that Division/State. (c): The President is to appoint the Chief Minister nominee chosen from the President’s list by the Division/State Parliament. (d) Allows State/Division Parliament to reject a presidential nominee for the post of Chief Minister if the nominee is proven to have not met the qualifications in 261(a). (e): Authorizes President to resubmit a new nominee for Chief Minister of States and Divisions if a previous nominee is not approved.

436(a): Requires over 75% parliamentary support for any constitutional amendment to be approved. Since Article 141(b) reserves 25% of parliamentary seats for unelected military appointees, this makes it impossible to pass an amendment without the approval of the military. Proposed amendments to 436(a) would reduce the majority vote required.

39 RFA (22 Jul 15) Myanmar Government And Armed Ethnic Groups Resume Peace Talks
34 RFA (22 Jul 15) Myanmar Government And Armed Ethnic Groups Resume Peace Talks
35 Myanmar Times (24 Jul 15) NLD warns would-be candidates to stay off social media
36 Irrawaddy (29 Jul 15) USDP Offers Glimpse of 2015 Field as Suu Kyi Officially Files to Contend
37 GNLM (27 Jul 15) 46 persons submit their names for candidacy of Nov 8 elections
38 GNLM (27 Jul 15) 46 persons submit their names for candidacy of Nov 8 elections
39 Xinhua (01 Aug 15) Myanmar opposition party announces all its nominees to contest in forthcoming election
40 Myanmar Times (01 Jul 15) Struggle for control of USDP enters parliament; EMG (10 Jul 15) Military blocks reform again
41 Irrawaddy (02 Jul 15) Military Slams Proposal for States to Choose Chief Ministers
42 DVB (01 Jul 15) Referendum to take place alongside general election
43 Myanmar Times (03 Jul 15) Military opposes chief minister selection reform
44 GNLM (04 Jul 15) Pyithu Hluttaw discusses irrigation facilities and allowance for far-flung areas
45 RFA (07 Jul 15) Myanmar’s Parliament Approves Controversial Interfaith Marriage Law
country’s current retirement age of 60, following suggestions that it might be raised to 63.66

- **12 July**: The National Parliament approved a proposal to keep the retirement age for civil servants at 60 years of age.47
- **15 July**: The People’s Assembly approved a bill concerning reform of the Criminal Code, and floors the bill amending president and vice-president election criteria.48
- **16 July**: The National Parliament passed amendments to the Union Judiciary Law, the Constitutional Tribunal Law and the Union Civil Services Board Law, and permitted a restructuring of Parliament’s Joint Bill Committee.49
- **20 July**: A parliamentary bill committee recommended customers of sex workers be sentenced with a prison term up to one year with hard labor and a fine as part of the amendments being made to the 1949 Suppression of Prostitution Act.50
- **21 July**: The People’s Assembly Bill Committee approved the draft Banks and Financial Institutions Law and submitted it to the People’s Assembly.51
- **22 July**: The National Parliament voted to postpone the national referendum to amend Section 59(d) of the Constitution so that potential extra expenditures can be spent on election logistics and infrastructure.52
- **22 July**: The People’s Assembly Bill Committee decided that the draft Religious Conversion Law would be submitted for voting without amendments, saying the National Assembly’s modifications are sufficient and that MPs wishing to propose amendments must register by 10 August.53
- **22 July**: The People’s Assembly passed the Monogamy Bill, part of the National Race and Religion Protection package, and approves ten year prison sentences for bigamy.54
- **23 July**: National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann urged a re-drafting of the Recall Bill, saying that it could damage measures for national consolidation, reconciliation and democratic reforms, perhaps obstructing the general election.55 The bill introduces a mechanism for constituents to unseat their MPs, requiring investigation if a single person registers a complaint with the regime Election Commission about a military MP, and investigation of an elected MP if the regime Election Commission receives a petition signed by at least 1% of his or her constituency members.56
- **24 July**: The regime Election Commission told the People’s Assembly that people with temporary National Registration Cards will not be eligible to vote in the November election.57

**Military MPs veto second constitutional amendment bill**

On 8 July, military MPs vetoed a second constitutional amendment bill addressing Articles 436(a) and 261 in the National Parliament.58

Military MPs strongly opposed the bill in parliamentary discussions, and stated that Burma is not ready for change.59 Supporters from the National League for Democracy (NLD) and ethnic parties criticized the regime for ignoring the will of the people.60 In parliamentary discussions on 6 July, NLD MP Myint Oo warned of the increasing risk of civil war if the military continued to oppose constitutional change.61
Tatmadaw offensives intensify in Kachin and Shan States

From 22 to 24 July, the ethnic armed groups’ newly formed delegation held talks on their proposed amendments to the nationwide ceasefire agreement with the regime peacemaking team in Rangoon. Although both sides were optimistic about reaching an agreement, clashes intensified in Kachin and Shan States between the Tatmadaw and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

- **5 July**: TNLA Battalion 773 forces attacked a base belonging to Tatmadaw troops from LIB 324 in Namtu, Shan State.
- **5 July**: Tatmadaw troops from LID 77 clashed with KIA Battalion 38 near Nam Jak Village, Muse Township, Shan State.
- **6 July**: Tatmadaw troops from LID 33, LIBs 46 and 138, clashed with KIA Battalion 7. Fighter jets bombed a KIA post in Mali Yang Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.
- **11 July**: Tatmadaw troops from IBs 46, 137, 138, 29, and 27, LID 33, and MOC 3 launched airstrikes and clashed on the ground with KIA forces in Mali Yang Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.
- **19 July**: Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalion 7 forces in Htingbai Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.
- **20 July**: Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalion 7 forces in Lung Sha Yang Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.
- **21 July**: Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalion 7 forces in Nkhri Yang Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.
- **22 July**: Tatmadaw troops from LIB 381, 385, and 389 clashed with KIA Battalion 7 forces near Sumpyi Yang Village, Sumbrabum Township, Kachin State.

Incidents of civilian abuse were also reported. On 4 July, Tatmadaw troops shot and injured two civilians in Namtu Township, Shan State. On 13 July, Tatmadaw troops fired mortar shells at civilians in Kaung Kha Village, Muse Township, Shan State, leaving one civilian dead and two others injured. As of 23 July, fighting had forced 1,500 Kachin civilians to flee their homes.

**Conflict resumes in Karen State**

In July, Tatmadaw troops and regime-backed militia clashed with ethnic armed groups in Karen State, including the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and Klo Htoo Baw forces, despite the existing 2012 ceasefire between the regime and the Karen National Union (KNU). The initial dispute was over the DKBA practice of collecting tolls along the section of the Asia Highway between Myawaddy and Kawkareik towns in Karen State.

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62 KIC (22 Jul 15) Ethnic Armed Groups and Govt Nationwide Ceasefire Talks Get Off To Positive Start; Irrawaddy (22 Jul 15) Ceasefire Talks Resume After Months of Tension; Irrawaddy (24 Jul 15) As Third Day of Peace Talks Resumes, Key Ethnic Demands Still Unresolved
63 GNLM (24 Jul 15) Gov’t, ethnic armed groups optimistic of ceasefire deal after Day 2; Irrawaddy (24 Jul 15) Ceasefire Talks End Without Resolve, Will Resume in August
64 DVB (06 Jul 15) Burmese army outpost attacked in Shan State; DVB (07 Jul 15) Palauung army talks peace; EMG (08 Jul 15) Rebels attack army base
65 Kachinland News (06 Jul 15) Battles Rage as TNLA Offers a Nationwide Ceasefire
66 Kachinland News (06 Jul 15) Battles Rage as TNLA Offers a Nationwide Ceasefire; Kachinland News (12 July 15) Burmese Army Fighter Jets Bomb KIA Positions in Mali Yang
68 Kachin News (23 Jul 15) Battles Rage in Kachin as NCA Talks Resume in Yangon
69 Kachinland News (23 Jul 15) Battles Rage in Kachin as NCA Talks Resume in Yangon
70 Kachin News (23 Jul 15) Battles Rage in Kachin as NCA Talks Resume in Yangon
71 Kachin News (23 Jul 15) Battles Rage in Kachin as NCA Talks Resume in Yangon
72 SHAN (06 Jul 15) Burma Army Shoots Civilians in Shan State's Nantau Township
73 Irrawaddy (14 Jul 15) Shelling Sends Civilians Fleeing in Shan State
74 Kachin News (23 Jul 15) Battles Rage in Kachin as NCA Talks Resume in Yangon; Kachin News Group (18 Jul 15) Airstrikes, clashes in Kachin state's Putao district displace civilians; KIC (23 Jul 15) Karen State: Fighting Continues – Displaced Civilians Now in Desperate Need of Aid
75 Irrawaddy (02 Jul 15) Asia Highway Closed as Burma Army, DKBA Exchange Fire; KIC (02 Jul 15) Gov’t troops and DKBA Clash Over New Asia Highway; DVB (03 Jul 15) DBKA, Burma govt clash over Asian Highway
1 July: Tatmadaw troops from IBs 28, 230, 231 and 546 launched at least 30 mortar shells at and clashed with DKBA Battalion 907 between Kawkareik and Myawaddy towns.  

2 July: Tatmadaw troops from IB 231 clashed with DKBA forces in Kawkareik, causing the closure of the Asia Highway. 

6 July: Tatmadaw troops launched mortar shells and clashed with DKBA forces in Kawkareik Township, injuring two civilians. 

7 July: Tatmadaw troops clashed with DKBA forces near Kaw Moo Village, Kawkareik Township. 

9 July: Tatmadaw troops clashed with DKBA forces near Kaw Moo Village, Kawkareik Township. 

13-14 July: Tatmadaw troops clashed with Klo Htoo Baw forces in Kawkareik Township, seized weapons, and detained two Klo Htoo Baw members. 

24 July: Tatmadaw troops raided Kaungmu Village, Kawkareik Township, and seized weapons. 

Regime-backed Karen Border Guard Force troops clashed with DKBA forces in Singon Village, Kawkareik Township. 

The fighting displaced 116 civilians from Kawkareik, who sought shelter at a nearby monastery. 

**Land confiscation on the rise in southeastern Burma despite ceasefire: KHRG**

On 15 July, Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) launched a report, “With only our voices what can we do?” that documents increasing land confiscation in Karen and Mon States and Tenasserim and Pegu Divisions, based on 126 cases in 2013 and 2014. The report found that the regime’s 2012 ceasefire with the Karen National Union (KNU) has enabled land confiscation in southeastern Burma. Increased militarization by the Tatmadaw in the form of new barracks and renovated bases occurred in tandem with three types of development projects: infrastructure, natural resource extraction, and commercial agriculture. Key findings included:

- Regime officials, domestic and foreign corporations, and state and non-state armed groups were responsible for nearly all of the land confiscation in southeastern Burma. Regime and state-backed groups operated with impunity in ethnic areas, often threatening violence and justifying seizures by saying it is “fallow” land. Meanwhile, armed groups colluded with private businesses to seize private and communal land for developers, or secure holdings for them. 

- Militarization and civilian abuse have eroded villagers’ faith in the legitimacy of the 2012 ceasefire. 

- The proliferation of Karen armed groups with varied allegiances in the wake of the ceasefire has jeopardized civilian livelihoods, villagers’ land and food security, and environmental integrity. 

- Liberalization of the economy, coupled with a lack of strong regulatory mechanisms or independent oversight, contributed to the crisis.

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76 Myanmar Times (03 Jul 15) DKBA, Tatmadaw fight over illegal highway tolls 

77 Irrawaddy (02 Jul 15) Asia Highway Closed as Burma Army, DKBA Exchange Fire; KIC (02 Jul 15) Gov’t troops and DKBA Clash Over New Asia Highway; DVB (03 Jul 15) DBKA, Burma govt clash over Asian Highway; DVB (10 Jul 15) Asian Highway reopens as conflict simmers 

78 Irrawaddy (06 Jul 15) Clashes Continue at DKBA Asia Highway Toll Booth; KIC (06 July 15) Continued Fighting Makes Highway Travel Deadly. 

79 KIC (08 July 15) Talks to End Fighting Between Burma Army and DKBA Fail 

80 Irrawaddy (09 Jul 15) Clashes Continue on Asia Highway Between DKBA, Govt Troops 

81 GNLM (15 Jul 15) Tatmadaw, BGF seize arms, ammunition from KKO outposts; Xinhua (15 Jul 15) Myanmar gov’t forces clash with armed group 

82 GNLM (27 Jul 15) Military seizes weapons, ammunition from rebels 

83 DVB (27 Jul 15) Video: One dead in Karen rebel shootout 

84 Irrawaddy (02 Jul 15) Asia Highway Closed as Burma Army, DKBA Exchange Fire; KIC (02 Jul 15) Gov’t troops and DKBA Clash Over New Asia Highway; DVB (03 Jul 15) DBKA, Burma govt clash over Asian Highway; DVB (10 Jul 15) Asian Highway reopens as conflict simmers 

85 KIC (22 Jul 15) KHRG: Land Theft Continues to Rise in Karen State 

86 Karen Human Rights Group (30 Jun 15) With Only our Voices what can we Do?
Regime efforts to obtain surveillance technology revealed

On 8 July, emails released by Wikileaks revealed that the regime attempted to obtain domestic surveillance technology between 2012 and 2014, soon after EU sanctions were dropped. The emails, between Italian spyware company The Hacking Team and Naung Yoe Technologies, a company representing the regime, also hinted at discussions with other companies on obtaining the technology. While a deal was not ultimately reached, an 11 March 2014 email shows that The Hacking Team offered remote monitoring technology as well as “active IT intrusion” services to the regime.

Human Rights Watch described the emails as “deeply worrying,” and said the news showed how important international sanctions were in preventing the regime from accessing this type of technology and using it to stifle dissent.

UNHRC adopts resolution on treatment of Rohingya and other minorities in Burma

On 3 July, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in its 29th Session adopted a resolution entitled “Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar.” The resolution was tabled by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and was adopted by consensus. The resolution:

- Condemned human rights abuses, including forced displacement, against Rohingya Muslims and “persons belonging to other minorities.”
- Condemned “systematic and gross violations of human rights” in Arakan State, in particular against Rohingya Muslims.
- Called on the regime to address human rights violations including discrimination and incitement of religious hatred against Muslims.
- Called on the regime to address the root causes of trafficking, grant full citizenship to Rohingya Muslims through a review of the 1982 Citizenship Law, and allow humanitarian access for the distribution of aid.

The resolution came in response to the Southeast Asia boatpeople crisis, and unlike previous UNHRC resolutions addresses Rohingya Muslims and minorities in particular, noting with concern the crisis in the Andaman Sea. [See May 2015 Burma Bulletin.]

Tatmadaw soldiers use Rohingya as forced labor in border areas: Reuters

On 2 July, a Reuters investigative report found that the Tatmadaw still regularly subjects Rohingya living in Arakan State near the Bangladesh border to forced labor, threatening or physically abusing them if they refuse. Villagers interviewed anonymously revealed that they are often forced to work as porters, tend fields or maintain infrastructure for Tatmadaw soldiers for little or no pay and under threat of violence.

According to the Arakan Project, the Tatmadaw subjected 8,000 Rohingya, including hundreds of children, to forced labor in 2014. Despite a decrease in the practice across the rest of Arakan State, the report found that forced labor continued unaddressed in border areas due to the presence of multiple military bases and the lack of protection for Rohingya.

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67 Irrawaddy (24 Jul 15) Revealed: Domestic Surveillance Company in talks with Burma Govt
68 Wikileaks (08 Jul 15) Hacking Team emails, Myanmar MoD’s interest in HT
69 Wikileaks (08 Jul 15) Hacking Team emails, RE: Myanmar
90 Irrawaddy (24 Jul 15) Revealed: Domestic Surveillance Company in talks with Burma Govt
91 HRC, 29th Session, Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/29/L.30/Rev.1
92 HRC, 29th Session, Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, UN Doc A/HRC/29/L.30/Rev.1
93 Reuters (02 Jul 15) Forced labor shows back-breaking lack of reform in Myanmar military
Burma maintains poor rating in US Trafficking in Persons Report

On 28 July, the US Department of State issued its “Trafficking in Persons Report 2015.” Burma was placed on the Tier 2 Watch List for the fourth consecutive year, the second lowest ranking. The report states that Burma only avoided a downgrade to Tier 3 due to an anti-trafficking plan which the regime has “committed” to implementing. The report stated that “pervasive” corruption and impunity contributed to failures in addressing trafficking. The findings included:

- Burma is a major source country for trafficking of men, women and children into forced labor and sex trafficking. Forced labor and recruitment of child soldiers by the Tatmadaw is still common.
- Regime officials are complicit in trafficking in Burma, and while an unknown number of military personnel faced “disciplinary action” for involvement, no regime officials have faced prosecution.
- Widespread corruption and impunity hinder police investigations into trafficking, particularly those cases relating to military officers or well-connected persons.
- People in ethnic areas – particularly IDPs in Kachin, northern Shan and Arakan States – are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. In Arakan State, the regime’s denial of legal status and documents to Rohingya significantly increases their vulnerability to trafficking.

Kachin court hands life sentences to 153 Chinese loggers

On 22 July, Myitkyina Township Court, Kachin State, sentenced 153 Chinese citizens to life in prison under Article 6(a) of the Public Property Protection Act for illegal logging in Kachin State. Two Chinese minors received ten year sentences for the same offense, while one woman received an additional 15 years on a drug charge. The loggers were arrested in January 2015 in Kachin State near the Chinese border during a crackdown by the military, police, and Forestry Department. On 23 July, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Lu Kang released a statement condemning the harsh sentencing. On 30 July, all of the Chinese loggers were released in a presidential amnesty.

Workers, employers dispute over minimum wage continues

The regime National Minimum Wage Committee’s 29 June move to mandate a minimum daily wage of 3,600 kyat (US$3.20) was criticized by employers and laborers throughout July.

- 2 July: In Rangoon, 200 garment manufacturers appealed for a 2,500 kyat (US$2.20) daily wage and 30 foreign-backed factories threatened to close in September if the National Minimum Wage Committee’s proposed minimum wage is implemented.
- 3 July: Myanmar Trade Unions Federation and other labor agencies compiled over 200 letters from workers appealing for a 4,000 kyat (US$3.55) daily minimum wage. Regime Labor, Employment,
and Social Security Minister Aye Myint approved minimum compensation rates for laid-off employees ranging from two weeks to 13 months pay.\(^{104}\)

- **5 July:** In Rangoon, 60 South Korean firms joined 30 Chinese factories in threatening closure in September if the minimum wage was raised to 3,600 kyat (US$3.20); the latter also vowed not to pay laid-off workers any compensation.\(^{105}\) In a press release, Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar supported the 3,600 kyat (US$3.20) daily wage.\(^{106}\)

- **7 July:** All-Myanmar Network of Trade Unions denounced the 3,600 kyat (US$3.20) wage, calling on workers to proceed with demands for a 4,000 kyat (US$3.35) minimum wage.\(^{107}\)

- **12 July:** In Rangoon’s Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone, hundreds of workers demonstrated in support of a 4,000 kyat (US$3.35) minimum wage.\(^{108}\)

- **12 July:** In Rangoon, Aye Myint told the press that the 3,600 kyat (US$3.20) wage increase will stay in place for a trial period, after which time vested parties may work to amend the measure.\(^{109}\)

- **14 July:** International labor watchdogs Ethical Trading Initiative and Fair Labor Association sent letters to Aye Myint and to the regime National Minimum Wage Committee saying that an equitable and transparent minimum wage attracts foreign business investment.\(^{110}\)

- **25 July:** Chinese and Korean garment firms met with the regime Labor Ministry and agreed to the 3,600 kyat (US$3.20) wage as long as worker productivity is boosted and overtime pay reduced, two concessions the regime National Minimum Wage Committee says are unlikely.\(^{111}\)

- **27 July:** Rangoon Division officials announced that a final minimum wage negotiation session will take place on 1 August.\(^{112}\)

### IMF advises close financial sector monitoring as kyat devalues by 21% since January

On 2 July, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) finished its two week country survey in Burma. IMF advised Burma’s Central Bank to allow the kyat to devalue and to reduce foreign currency hoarding.\(^{113}\) The survey followed the Central Bank’s attempts to float the value of the kyat by controlling US dollar flow within Burma.\(^{114}\) IMF’s assessment echoed other criticisms of the Central Bank as being overly subject to intervention from the President’s Office.\(^{115}\) After IMF’s findings were shared, the Central Bank introduced various changes:

- **13 July:** The Central Bank auctioned off more than US$6 million to private banks for later sale to importers,\(^{116}\) and merged the official exchange rate to the higher, informal index.\(^{117}\)

- **20 July:** The Central Bank set a new exchange rate of 1,230 kyat to the US dollar, while the informal rate remained at 1,300 kyat, matching 2007 levels.\(^{118}\)

- **21 July:** Following a meeting of regime, Central Bank, and commercial bank officials, the Central Bank announced plans to scrutinize commercial bank activities to end US dollar speculation.\(^{119}\)

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104 EMG (15 Jul 15) Govt announces minimum compensation rates for terminated workers
105 EMG (06 Jul 15) Garment manufacturers threaten to close factories if minimum wage implemented
106 DVB (06 Jul 15) Trade union backs 3,600-kyat minimum wage
107 DVB (07 Jul 15) Minimum wage tug-of-war goes on
108 DVB (13 Jul 15) Foreign garment firms could face legal action; AP (12 Jul 15) Myanmar workers demonstrate for higher minimum wage
109 GNLM (13 Jul 15) Garment industry bosses urged to adopt proposed minimum wage on trial basis
110 Myanmar Times (28 Jul 15) Proposed minimum wage gains traction with employers
111 GNLM ((28 Jul 15) Final meeting on minimum wage negotiations set for 1 August
112 GNLN (13 Jul 15) IMF warns of downside risks despite strong economic growth
113 Bangkok Post (06 Jul 15) Exchange-rate roulette; GNLN (02 Jul 15) IMF warns of downside risks despite strong economic growth
114 EMG (24 Jul 15) Rising deficit leads to gloomy forecasts
115 EMG (15 Jul 15) Central Bank to sell dollars to importers
116 Myanmar Times (15 Jul 15) Petrol retailers face twin fears; EMG (15 Jul 15) Central Bank to sell dollars to importers
117 The Nation (20 Jul 15) Myanmar currency falls to new low against dollar; EMG (24 Jul 15) Kyat continues to weaken
118 Myanmar Times (29 Jul 15) Central Bank on the look-out for dollar hoarding by banks and firms
119 IMF advises close financial sector monitoring as kyat devalues by 21% since January
OTHER BURMA NEWS IN JULY

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<td>The Central Bank introduces a new edition of the 10,000 kyat (US$8.80) bank note.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Indonesia announces the arrest of two traffickers believed to be key figures in the trafficking of fishermen into forced labor on remote Indonesian Islands, many of whom are Burmese.</td>
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<td>The World Bank upgrades Burma’s rank in its developmental index from amongst the world’s least developed countries to a low-middle income country.</td>
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<td>Thailand, Japan, and Burma launch the US$50 billion Dawei Special Economic Zone with the signing of an agreement in Tokyo.</td>
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<td>In Rangoon, 122 CSOs launch the Save the Salween campaign to protest six massive dams slated for the Salween in Shan, Karen, and Karenni States.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Burma ratifies the UN Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Burma signs the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).</td>
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*Please visit [www.altsean.org/ChronologyHome.php](http://www.altsean.org/ChronologyHome.php) to access Altsean-Burma’s full database of chronology entries covering Burma-related events.*

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN JULY

“Monthly Chronology of Burma’s Political Prisoners for June 2015” Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) [http://goo.gl/wf0bnH](http://goo.gl/wf0bnH)


“State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples”, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) [http://goo.gl/2gYBSs](http://goo.gl/2gYBSs)


“With only our voices, what can we do? Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar”, Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) [http://goo.gl/eGZvAV](http://goo.gl/eGZvAV)
