

# BURMA BULLETIN

XXXXXXXX A month-in-review of events in Burma XXXXXXXX

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

Issue 115

July 2016

- The State Buddhist authority, the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (Ma Ha Na), disavows the notorious Ma Ba Tha.
- Government releases census data showing that Burma's Muslim population declined, contradicting claims by the Ma Ba Tha.
- The Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population removes 607 foreign and Burmese nationals from Burma's blacklist. Thousands are still banned.
- NLD-led government launches five-year, 12-part economic policy in Naypyidaw.
- First 100 days of new government analyzed, progress disappointing.
- United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) announces coordinated platform ahead of planned 'Panglong Peace Conference'.
- Parliament receives 2,000 new complaints of farmland seizure during the first five months of new NLD-led government, adding to 6,000 'inherited' from previous parliament.
- BBC correspondent Nay Lin sentence halved, walks free on appeal.
- Ministry of Education announces that human rights will be taught in primary schools from the start of the 2017-18 school year.
- Burma under review by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Heavy monsoon rains cause significant floods in northern and western parts of Burma.
- 19 trafficked Burmese migrants rescued from slave-like conditions in Thailand.
- 3,000 Burmese migrant workers will be sent home from Malaysian detention camps in August.
- Tatmadaw admits to killing five villagers during an interrogation in Shan State.
- U.S. Department of State raises reporting threshold from US\$500,000 to US\$5,000,000.

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## KEY STORY:

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### **'Ma Ba Tha' disowned by State Buddhist authority**

On 12 July, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (Ma Ha Na) agreed to disband the Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion, otherwise known as the Ma Ba Tha.<sup>1</sup> The news was broadcast by state television MRTV after documents were leaked on social media stating that “Since the first to the fifth Sangha conventions of all Buddhist orders from 1980 to 2014, none had endorsed Ma Ba Tha’s legitimacy or even used the term, ‘Ma Ba Tha’.” The statement said there must be only one Sangha association composed of all Buddhist orders in the country, and clarified “[...]Ma Ba Tha is not a Buddhist organization that was formed in accordance with the basic Sangha rules, regulations and directives of the State Sangha authority.”<sup>2</sup>

Also on 12 July, the Ma Ba Tha backed down from their threat of nationwide protests if the government did not reprimand the Rangoon/Yangon Region Chief Minister, Phyo Min Thein, for calling the Ma Ba Tha “Redundant” and “unnecessary”.<sup>3</sup> National League for Democracy (NLD) spokesperson Win Htein responded to the ultimatum by saying “According to the 2008 Constitution and the NLD’s policy, religion and politics must be divided. We will not stand for using religion for political benefit, or mixing religion and politics in any way.”<sup>4</sup>

On 20 July, several respected Buddhist monks across the country spoke out against the Ma Ba Tha including:<sup>5</sup>

- Ariya Bhivamsa, an abbot at Myawaddi Mingyi Monastery, Mandalay Division, who said some monks had initially viewed Ma Ba Tha as a protector of Buddhism, but most had come to realize that it was radical and close to the military-linked Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) adding that “The majority of the Sangha community do not support Ma Ba Tha. But while the good and disciplined monks keep silent to avoid disputes, Ma Ba Tha monks are being boastful.”
- Sandar Siri, an abbot at Shwe Thein Monastery, Yangon, who participated in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, said Ma Ba Tha was a malign influence and caused disagreements among monks adding that “Myanmar’s Sangha never experienced any rift since Theravada Buddhism started to flourish here. But Ma Ba Tha has now caused a rift”.
- Eissaria from Vimutisukha Viraha Monastery, Hpakant Township, Kayin/Karen State, another leading monk during the Saffron Revolution, said Ma Ba Tha’s attacks on other religions and its support for the USDP during the 2015 elections had undermined relations between the public and the clergy, adding “There has been a remarkable division among people and monks. The works of Ma Ba Tha are disturbing Myanmar’s communities - instead of protecting race and religion.”
- Cintika, an abbot from Maha Vijitarama Monastery, Mandalay Division, said Ma Ba Tha’s supporters were so aggressive that they would even threaten moderate monks who publicly questioned the movement adding “There have been disputes and accusations between pro- and anti-Ma Ba Tha monks.”

On 13 July, Thet Daw Saunt, a charity group, filed a complaint with police in Tamwe Township, Rangoon, against the leader of the Ma Ba Tha, Wirathu, for comments he made during a demonstration in 2015 where he called Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma/Myanmar, a “whore” for criticizing the government’s treatment of the Rohingya.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar Times (13 Jul 16) State Sangha disowns Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion

<sup>2</sup> Myanmar Times (13 Jul 16) State Sangha disowns Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion; DVB (13 Jul 16) Ma-Ba-Tha in spat with Buddhist clergy

<sup>3</sup> DVB (13 Jul 16) Ma-Ba-Tha in spat with Buddhist clergy; Myanmar Times (13 Jul 16) State Sangha disowns Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion

<sup>4</sup> Myanmar Times (11 Jul 16) NLD refuses to heed Ma Ba Tha’s request; RFA (07 Jul 16) Buddhist Group Wants Myanmar Government to Reprimand Official For Remark

<sup>5</sup> Myanmar Now (20 Jul 16) Ma Ba Tha monks a “divisive” minority, other clergymen say; Myanmar Times (21 Jul 16) Ma Ba Tha a ‘divisive’ minority, other monks say

<sup>6</sup> Myanmar Times (14 Jul 16) Ma Ba Tha suffers another blow as defamation suit filed against U Wirathu

## Release of census data contradicts Ma Ba Tha claim of “Islamization”

On 21 July, the government finally released religion data from the 2014 census, which contradicted claims by the Ma Ba Tha that Muslims accounted for at least 10% of the population in Burma.<sup>7</sup> The results from the Myanmar Population and Housing Census were withheld since 2014, and released one year after the main census results, due to fears that they would agitate tensions between the country's Buddhist and Muslim populations.<sup>8</sup> The data showed Burma's Muslim population fell from 3.9% of the overall population in the 1983 census, to just 2.3% in 2014.<sup>9</sup> The figure does not include around 1.09 million mainly Rohingya Muslims in western Arakan/Rakhine State, who were excluded from the census.<sup>10</sup> The Ma Ba Tha has accused Muslims of attempting to ‘Islamize’ Burma, which has a population of about 51 million.<sup>11</sup> Data showed that nearly 90% of Burma's population registered as Buddhist, while the Christian population increased from 3.9% in 1983 to a little over 6% in 2014; about 0.5% identified as Hindu, 0.8% animists, while about 0.3% said they had no religion or marked “other.”<sup>12</sup> The 2014 census was the first in over 30 years.<sup>13</sup>

## DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

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### Government removes over 600 blacklisted names, thousands still banned

On 28 July, 607 foreign and Burmese nationals were removed from Burma's blacklist by the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population.<sup>14</sup> Union minister Thein Swe said the removal of more than 200 Burmese and 300 foreigners from the blacklist was part of the ministry's 100-day plan. The removed names constituted about 7.5% of 8,000 names included on the previously existing blacklist, excluding those wanted by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).<sup>15</sup>

On 25 July, about 40 civil society organizations (CSOs) sent an open letter to State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, requesting the disclosure of the names of blacklisted Burmese activists and the restoration of their original citizenship so they could take part in the country's transition process.<sup>16</sup>

The Ministry's Department of Immigration and Population told media that those who “Serve for the good merit of the country” would continue to be removed from the list, and refused to provide further information.<sup>17</sup>

### NLD releases vague economic policy

On 29 July, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government announced the launch of its five-year, 12-part economic policy in Naypyidaw. The long-awaited economic policy was three pages long and outlined 12 vague policy goals, emphasizing the need for national reconciliation and fair distribution of resources as its first priority.<sup>18</sup> Minister of National Planning and Finance Kyaw Win told the press that the 12-part policy would be “People-centered,” and would involve a fair distribution

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<sup>7</sup> Xinhua (22 July 16) Buddhists make up 87.9 pct of Myanmar's population: census

<sup>8</sup> AA (23 Jul 16) Myanmar census data on Muslim population raises doubts; BNI (22 Jul 16) UNFPA welcomes release of Myanmar census data on religion

<sup>9</sup> AA (23 Jul 16) Myanmar census data on Muslim population raises doubts

<sup>10</sup> BNI (22 Jul 16) UNFPA welcomes release of Myanmar census data on religion

<sup>11</sup> AA (23 Jul 16) Myanmar census data on Muslim population raises doubts

<sup>12</sup> AA (23 Jul 16) Myanmar census data on Muslim population raises doubts; GNLM (22 Jul 16) Religious data from 2014 Census released

<sup>13</sup> GNLM (22 Jul 16) Religious data from 2014 Census released

<sup>14</sup> The Irrawaddy (28 July 16) Burma Removes Hundreds of Names from Blacklist; DVB (28 Jul 16) Burma Removes Hundreds of Names from Blacklist

<sup>15</sup> The Irrawaddy (28 July 16) Burma Removes Hundreds of Names from Blacklist

<sup>16</sup> The Irrawaddy (28 July 16) Burma Removes Hundreds of Names from Blacklist

<sup>17</sup> The Irrawaddy (28 July 16) Burma Removes Hundreds of Names from Blacklist

<sup>18</sup> WSJ (29 July 16) Myanmar Government Releases Economic Policy Goals Without Specifics; Reuters (29 July 16) Myanmar Government Launches Thin Economic Policy; WSJ (29 July 16) Myanmar Government Releases Economic Policy Goals Without Specifics

of natural resources between the states and divisions of Burma, in support of national reconciliation and the building of a “federal democratic country.”<sup>19</sup>

Prominent business tycoons spoke at the event about the need for better statistics in Burma -- including for job, unemployment, birth and mortality rates -- to develop more targeted economic growth engineering.<sup>21</sup> The policy also identifies 11 main challenges to industrial development, including inadequate electricity and energy supply, poor transportation infrastructure, a lack of skilled labor and high prices for land.<sup>22</sup>

The launch of the policy followed an economic forum in Naypyidaw on 26 July co-organized by the Renaissance Institute, an NLD-linked think-tank focused on economic and social reform and the US Agency for International Development.<sup>23</sup>

Since April, the government has approved 19 foreign and domestic investment projects after reforming the Myanmar Investment Commission.<sup>24</sup>

### First 100 days of the new government

July marked the conclusion of the NLD's first 100 days in power. The new government has made national reconciliation a key priority, while international organizations have expressed disappointment in stalled progress for constitutional reform, legislative reform, clear economic policy and continued discrimination against Rohingya.<sup>25</sup> Main areas which have come under criticism include:<sup>26</sup>

### Twelve Policy goals outlined<sup>20</sup>

1. National reconciliation based on a “Just balancing of sustainable resource mobilization and allocation across states and regions.”
2. Support competition and a market-oriented system in every sector, cut unnecessary red tape, dilute the power of monopolies and expand access to credit.
3. Strengthen government financial management and work on fiscal prudence and macroeconomic stability.
4. Develop an infrastructure policy which focuses on producing and distributing power, building and maintaining rural roads, and developing better port facilities.
5. Support for the agriculture and livestock sectors to promote inclusive growth, enhance food security, increase exports, and boost living standards. Increasing farmers' access to credit, strengthening land tenure and improving production chain sectors.
6. Focus on job creation to reduce domestic poverty and inequality and encourage migrant workers and displaced persons to return from overseas.
7. Increase foreign direct investment (FDI) by creating a stable environment where companies feel secure to invest; improving property rights and the rule of law. (A more detailed FDI policy will be produced separately).
8. Develop a skilled workforce to fill jobs created in the manufacturing and services sectors; improve healthcare and academic and vocational education, and enforce international standards on labor rights.
9. Continue developing fiscal stability and the creation of a financial system that can sustainably provide capital to businesses, farmers and households.
10. Reform state-owned enterprises, making them more accountable and responsive to the public, privatizing them where necessary.
11. Help small and medium enterprises by improving the ease of doing business in Myanmar, increasing access to financial services and developing a more skilled workforce.
12. Promote inclusive economic growth and development, “To enable our country to escape poverty and achieve the prosperity our people deserve”.

**Constitutional reform:** Amending the 2008 charter was central issue of the NLD’s 2015 election campaign yet the agenda has been put on hold, pending successful conclusion of the peace process.

**Legislative reform:** Despite proposed amendments to problematic legislation such as the 2011 Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law and the 2012 Ward or Village-Tract Administration Law, many other repressive laws that have been used to arbitrarily detain or prosecute activists, human rights defenders, and members of ethnic and religious minorities are still in force.

<sup>19</sup> The Irrawaddy (29 July 160 Govt Releases Economic Policy Outlines, Deferring Detail; Myanmar Times (29 July 16) Government reveals 12-point economic policy

<sup>20</sup> Myanmar Times (29 July 16) Government reveals 12-point economic policy

<sup>21</sup> The Irrawaddy (29 July 160 Govt Releases Economic Policy Outlines, Deferring Detail

<sup>22</sup> Frontier (28 July 16) The NLD's industrial vision

<sup>23</sup> Frontier (25 July 16) NLD set to reveal economic policy details

<sup>24</sup> Reuters (29 July 16) Myanmar Government Launches Thin Economic Policy

<sup>25</sup> FIDH & ALTSEAN-Burma (10 Jul 16) Government’s first 100 days fail to impress on human rights

<sup>26</sup> FIDH & ALTSEAN-Burma (10 Jul 16) Government’s first 100 days fail to impress on human rights

**Ratification of core international human rights treaties:** During its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2015, Burma accepted many recommendations that called for the ratification of core international human rights treaties, however little progress has been made.

**Political prisoners:** Despite President Htin Kyaw's 17 April 2016 amnesty that freed 83 political prisoners, and orders to drop criminal charges against at least 160 individuals awaiting trial for their political activities, at least 123 political prisoners remained imprisoned as of 1 July 2016, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

**Anti-Rohingya policies and restrictions:** The NLD government maintained the previous administration's official policy of avoiding the use of the term 'Rohingya.' On 20 June 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi told UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee that the government would avoid using the term 'Rohingya.'

**Anti-Muslim violence and hate speech:** Anti-Muslim violence continued during the first 100 days of the NLD government. On 1 July 2016, a Buddhist mob torched a Muslim prayer hall in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, while members of the Ma Ba Tha continued to spread anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya rhetoric.

**Military impunity for human rights violations:** Attacks against civilians continue to be reported amid ongoing hostilities between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups in Rakhine, Kachin, and Northern Shan States. Reports emerged of arbitrary arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings.

**Women's rights:** In its 2015 election manifesto, the NLD stated it would "Take action as necessary to end the persecution, insecurity, violence, and other forms of harassment and bullying suffered by women." However, Parliament has failed to enact relevant laws. No progress has been made on the National Prevention of Violence against Women Bill, after more than three years in the making.

Women's participation in the peace process and in government remains extremely limited. On 31 May 2016, the President's Office announced the formation of a 10-member committee aimed at transforming the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) into the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC). No women were appointed to this committee. Apart from State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, who is also Foreign Minister and Minister in the President's Office, no women serve in the 21-member Cabinet.

**Freedom of opinion and expression:** The positive trend of greater respect for the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the expansion of the space for civil society, which began under former President Thein Sein, continues. The authorities however have imposed restrictions on sensitive issues relating to the criticism of the military and allegations of human rights abuses committed by members of the Tatmadaw. Media access to legislatures is limited.

**UN rights monitoring office:** No progress had been made on the opening of a country office of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

## **ETHNIC AFFAIRS & CONFLICT**

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### **Second 'Panglong Conference'**

On 22 July, the Myanmar's United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) announced that it was working on the creation of a coordinated platform ahead of the government's planned 'Panglong Peace Conference' in late August.<sup>27</sup> The group, which consists of 17 ethnic groups, including the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy the Mon National Party, Kayan National Party, Karen National Party, Arakan National Party, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Zomi Democracy Federation, Kachin National Democracy Congress Party, Khume (Khami) National Party, Rakhine Patriotic Party, Mro National Democracy

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<sup>27</sup> RFA (22 Jul 16) Political Alliance Crafts a Common Policy For Myanmar Peace Conference

Party, and Danu Nationalities Democracy Party, met on 26 July in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State, to discuss these common policies.<sup>28</sup>

Three non-ceasefire groups did not attend: United Wa State Army (UWSA); Kokang-based Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA); and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). A TNLA spokesperson, Mong Aik Kyaw, said the group decided not to attend the Mai Ja Yang to avoid causing delays to the peace process.<sup>29</sup>

### **Armed conflict: clashes, civilian abuse**

In July, hostilities continued in Shan State between the Restoration Council of the Shan State (RCSS) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). On 14 July, the Shan State Regional Parliament approved an urgent proposal asking for government intervention to bring an end to conflict between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups in the state's north.<sup>30</sup>

- **6 July:** A landmine killed one villager, and injured seven others, just outside Namtu Township, Kyaukme District, Shan State.<sup>31</sup>
- **11 July:** It was reported that over 350 villagers were forced to flee Man Lwe village, Kyaukme District, Shan State, after fighting broke out in their village between the RCSS and the TNLA.<sup>32</sup>
- **11 July:** It was reported that over 320 villagers were forced to flee Mong Maw village, Kyaukme District, Shan State, after a landmine killed one villager.<sup>33</sup>

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

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### **Land grab protests in Bago Division as 40,000 acres returned in Shan State**

On 6 July, Ba Myo Thein, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee, confirmed that parliament had received over 2,000 additional complaints of farmland seizure during the first five months of the new NLD-led government, adding to the 6,000 outstanding cases from the previous parliament.<sup>34</sup>

On the same day, nearly 30 farmers from Bago Division took part in a protest demanding the return of over 4,000 acres of land which had been grabbed from them over 25 years ago.<sup>35</sup> One protesting farmer said that they had decided to stage the protest because they had become aware of the NLD-led government returning seized land in other parts of the country.<sup>36</sup>

On 5 July, the Shan State Minister for Planning and Finance, Soe Nyunt Lwin, said that government would be returning more than 40,000 acres of land to residents this month.<sup>37</sup>

### **Amnesty International calls for relocation of acid factory away from village**

On 20 July, Amnesty International called for the relocation of a sulphuric acid factory, built within 50 meters of a secondary school in Kankone Village, Sagaing Division, which is operating despite concerns over its impact on the environment and health of citizens.<sup>38</sup> The factory restarted operations in

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<sup>28</sup> DVB (27 Jul 16) 17 ethnic delegations meet in Maijayang to plan for 21CPC; RFA (22 Jul 16) Political Alliance Crafts a Common Policy For Myanmar Peace Conference

<sup>29</sup> DVB (27 Jul 16) 17 ethnic delegations meet in Maijayang to plan for 21CPC

<sup>30</sup> Myanmar Times (18 Jul 16) Shan State parliament urges government to intervene in conflict

<sup>31</sup> Myanmar Times (11 Jul 16) Shan villagers flee after landmine blast

<sup>32</sup> RFA (11 Jul 16) New Clash Between Ethnic Rebel Groups in Myanmar's Shan State Forces Villagers to Flee

<sup>33</sup> Myanmar Times (11 Jul 16) Shan villagers flee after landmine blast

<sup>34</sup> Irrawaddy (06 Jul 16) Parliament Receives Thousands of New Complaints of Confiscated Farmland

<sup>35</sup> RFA (07 Jul 16) Farmers in Myanmar's Bago Region Protest Land Grabs by Army

<sup>36</sup> RFA (07 Jul 16) Farmers in Myanmar's Bago Region Protest Land Grabs by Army

<sup>37</sup> RFA (07 Jul 16) Farmers in Myanmar's Bago Region Protest Land Grabs by Army

<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International (20 Jul 16) Myanmar: Sulphuric acid factory behind health fears must be relocated; GNLM (20 Jul 16) Amnesty International calls to relocate sulphuric acid factory

June after local authorities temporarily ended the factory's license.<sup>39</sup> The factory is owned by the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), which itself is owned by the Tatmadaw.<sup>40</sup>

Sagaing Region Chief Minister, Than Htay, said that the regional government has no power to stop factory operations and can't force it to relocate, without proper environmental assessment.<sup>41</sup> The township committee has refused to renew the factory's operating license and it is currently unknown if this will stop production.<sup>42</sup>

### **BBC reporter wins appeal and walks free**

On 21 July, BBC Burmese service correspondent, Nay Myo Lin, jailed for assaulting a policeman during a student protest, walked free after a Mandalay District Court judge halved his sentence, on appeal. The judge accepted that there was no bad feeling between the police and the reporter, and that a reduced sentence could improve police-press relations.<sup>43</sup> The reporter's lawyer, Thein Than Oo, said the court's decision was a sign of positive reforms taking place in the judicial sector.<sup>44</sup>

### **Human Rights added to the school curriculum for 2017-18**

On 18 July, it was announced that human rights classes will be taught in primary schools from the start of the 2017-18 school year.<sup>45</sup> The new curriculum, the result of an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC), will have input from experts at UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).<sup>46</sup>

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

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### **Rights groups lead calls at UN review for improved women's rights in Burma**

On 7 July, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women subjected Burma/Myanmar to the first international scrutiny of women's rights under the NLD-led government.<sup>47</sup> A government delegation included members of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the police force.<sup>48</sup> Burma ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997, and was last reviewed by the UN panel in 2008.<sup>49</sup>

Several women's organizations from Burma, including CEDAW Action Myanmar, the Gender Equality Network (GEN), the Women's Organisation Network, the Women's League of Burma, and Women Peace Network-Arakan, submitted reports to the committee on discrimination against women in the country. Amnesty International's Researcher for Burma, Laura Haigh, led calls for the government to review the four discriminatory 'race and religion' laws, and restrictions imposed on Rohingya women and girls.<sup>50</sup> Soe Kyi, the Director General of the Department of Social Welfare, said that the government had "No plan" to repeal the laws.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> GNLM (20 Jul 16) Amnesty International calls to relocate sulphuric acid factory

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International (20 Jul 16) Myanmar: Sulphuric acid factory behind health fears must be relocated

<sup>41</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Jul 16) Township takes on military-run sulphuric acid factory

<sup>42</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Jul 16) Township takes on military-run sulphuric acid factory

<sup>43</sup> Myanmar Times (22 Jul 16) BBC reporter walks free after judge halves sentence

<sup>44</sup> DVB (21 Jul 16) BBC reporter wins appeal, walks free

<sup>45</sup> Myanmar Times (18 Jul 16) Human Rights to be taught to primary school students

<sup>46</sup> Myanmar Times (18 Jul 16) Human Rights to be taught to primary school students

<sup>47</sup> DVB (05 Jul 16) Plight of Rohingya women raised at CEDAW review

<sup>48</sup> Myanmar Times (08 Jul 16) As Myanmar comes under CEDAW review, rights groups present legacy of stigma, victim-blaming

<sup>49</sup> Myanmar Times (08 Jul 16) As Myanmar comes under CEDAW review, rights groups present legacy of stigma, victim-blaming

<sup>50</sup> DVB (05 Jul 16) Plight of Rohingya women raised at CEDAW review

<sup>51</sup> Myanmar Times (06 Jul 16) New govt to defend 'race and religion' laws at UN meeting

Maung Wai, head of Burma's delegation to the committee, defended its record on women's rights saying that "Participation of women in parliament has now increased to 13.5% in 2016 from 4.42% in 2012."<sup>52</sup> May Sabe Phyu, director of the GEN, said that, although the government was still resistant to criticism, the government delegates were "Quite positive and welcoming."<sup>53</sup> GEN also called on the government to implement severe punishments for those who commit rape or sexual violence so that the climate of impunity can be eliminated.<sup>54</sup>

## **DISPLACEMENT**

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### **Over 20,000 displaced by floods after heavy monsoon rains**

During July 2016, heavy monsoon rains caused significant floods in northern and western parts of Burma/Myanmar, most notably in Arakan/Rakhine State, but also in other regions and states including Mandalay Division, Magwe Region, and Chin State.<sup>55</sup>

In Rakhine State, more than 20,000 people across five townships were displaced, with over 5,000 homes damaged and 19 swept away by the floods.<sup>56</sup> Worst hit was Minbya Township with 13,123 people, from 3,164 homes, being displaced.<sup>57</sup> The Rakhine State Government distributed relief aid to flood victims.<sup>58</sup>

### **19 trafficked Burmese migrants rescued from slave-like conditions**

On 10 July, it was reported that the Myanmar Association in Thailand (MAT) and the Anti-Human Trafficking Division of the Royal Thai police had rescued 19 trafficked Myanmar fishermen aged between 13-34 who were forced to work aboard an Indonesian fishing boat in slave-like conditions off the southern Thai city of Pattani on the Thai/Malaysian border.<sup>59</sup>

Thai police have arrested a Thai businessman and a female from Mon state. The rescued migrants testified that about 80 other trafficked fishermen from Myanmar are being held against their will at unknown location in the South of Thailand.<sup>60</sup> On 26 July, 14 of the 19 men returned to Burma after the Burmese government and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranged for their release. The status of the remaining 5 is unknown.<sup>61</sup>

### **Thousands of migrant workers to return home from Malaysia**

On 26 July, the Burmese government announced that it will bring 3,000 Burmese migrant workers back from Malaysian detention camps starting in August.<sup>62</sup> Thein Swe, Minister of the Labor, Immigration and Population Department, stated that the migrants have served their term for illegally entering Malaysia. It was previously reported that nearly 2,000 Burma migrant workers were being held in Malaysian camps and more than 300 workers who had served their sentences were unable to return to Burma because they had no money. In July, more than 60 workers left the camps and returned home earlier after authorities confirmed their citizenship status.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Myanmar Times (11 Jul 16) 'Women do not face social barriers', Myanmar CEDAW delegation tells experts in Geneva

<sup>53</sup> DVB (11 Jul 16) Govt 'welcoming', but women's groups question political will

<sup>54</sup> DVB (11 Jul 16) Govt 'welcoming', but women's groups question political will

<sup>55</sup> World Health Organization (11 Jul 16) WHO and Health Cluster partners support rapid health assessments and response in flood-affected areas, Rakhine State

<sup>56</sup> Myanmar Times (8 Jul 16) 20,000 people flooded out of their homes in Rakhine State

<sup>57</sup> DVB (13 Jul 16) 1,000 people evacuated in Latpadaung due to flood

<sup>58</sup> Myanmar Government (12 Jul 16) Aid sent to flood victims in Rakhine; GNLM (08 Jul 16) Flood affected people in Rakhine evacuated, provided with aid

<sup>59</sup> RFA (11 Jul 16) 19 Trafficked Burma Migrants Rescued From Fishing Boat off Thailand

<sup>60</sup> RFA (11 Jul 16) 19 Trafficked Burma Migrants Rescued From Fishing Boat off Thailand

<sup>61</sup> RFA (26 Jul 16) Burma Migrants Found on Fishing Boat in Thai Waters Return Home

<sup>62</sup> RFA (26 Jul 16) Burma Migrants Found on Fishing Boat in Thai Waters Return Home

<sup>63</sup> RFA (26 Jul 16) Burma Migrants Found on Fishing Boat in Thai Waters Return Home

## MILITARY

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### Burmese military admits Tatmadaw soldiers killed five villagers

On 20 July, it was reported that the Tatmadaw had admitted to killing five villagers during an interrogation in Burma's northern Shan State.<sup>64</sup> The unprecedented public admission of wrongdoing was made at a press conference by the chief of military intelligence, Lieutenant General Mya Tun Oo. He disclosed a court martial was under way and that the verdict would be made public, but did not say how many soldiers were being tried or what charges they faced.<sup>65</sup>

## ECONOMY

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### U.S. civil society criticize raised reporting threshold on business and human rights

On 29 July, nine leading United States-based civil society organizations focused on Burma and corporate accountability, criticized the State Department for raising the reporting threshold of the "Reporting Requirements on Responsible Investment in Burma" from US\$500,000 to US\$5,000,000. In a letter to US State Secretary John Kerry, the activists said the raised threshold significantly increased the risk of human rights abuses going unreported. The change means that all US business investments in Burma under five million dollars are now exempted from reporting on their human rights due diligence.<sup>66</sup>

In the letter, the International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR), the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (ALF-CIO), US Campaign for Burma (USCB), Amnesty International, Global Witness, Human Rights Watch, Earthrights International, Investors against Genocide and the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights also urged the State Department to publicly justify their action. The Reporting Requirements were established in 2013 to ensure that US investment complemented Burma reform efforts.

More than 50 civil society organizations and companies, including Coca-Cola and The Gap, have submitted public comments in support of the renewal of the Reporting Requirements and called for them to be further strengthened.<sup>67</sup>

The decision to raise the reporting threshold for business investment in Burma comes during the time of the NLD governments release of Burma's new economic policy plan [*see government*] which emphasizes the government's aim to help small and medium enterprises by improving the ease of doing business in Myanmar, increase foreign direct investment (FDI), and bolster the agriculture sectors.<sup>68</sup> With new lowered reporting thresholds, human rights groups have criticized the growth capability of Burma's economic sector, especially in regards to U.S. small and medium business investments, without increased risk of human rights abuses.<sup>69</sup>

## OTHER BURMA NEWS IN JULY

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01	Naypyidaw Council Chairman, Dr Myo Aung, announced that cases of confiscated farmlands in the Naypyidaw Council Area will be settled completely within six months. <sup>70</sup>
06	The 53rd Myanmar Gems Emporium in Naypyidaw earned more than US\$597 million in total sales from jade, gem and pearl lots, at its annual expo. <sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Reuters (20 July 16) In rare move, Myanmar military admits soldiers killed five villagers

<sup>65</sup> Reuters (20 July 16) In rare move, Myanmar military admits soldiers killed five villagers

<sup>66</sup> ICAR (20 July 16) ICAR and Co-signers Submit Letter to Secretary Kerry on the Relaxation of the Burma Reporting Requirements

<sup>67</sup> ICAR (20 July 16) ICAR and Co-signers Submit Letter to Secretary Kerry on the Relaxation of the Burma Reporting Requirements

<sup>68</sup> Frontier (28 July 16) The NLD's industrial vision

<sup>69</sup> EarthRights International (24 June 16) Is the State Department weakening a key human rights tool in Myanmar based on a secret business survey?

<sup>70</sup> GNLM (01 July 16) Nay Pyi Taw Council to settle seized farmland cases 'within six months'

10	It was announced that the Rangoon Region Hluttaw Judicial, Rule of law, Complaints and Appeals Scrutiny Committee (JRLCASC) has received over 70 complaints between February and June this year. JRLCASC announced it would undertake a study on the difficulties of courts of law, police stations and those in custody or prison from within 44 townships of Rangoon Region. <sup>72</sup>
13	It was reported that the electoral tribunal under the Union Election Commission (UEC) decided to de-gazette Aung Kyaw Nyunt as a Shan State Parliament representative of Yatsawk Township Constituency 1. <sup>73</sup>
13	State Counselor, Aung San Suu Kyi, is appointed as head of the re-named National Reconciliation and Peace Centre <sup>74</sup>
14	Min Aung, the Rakhine/Arakan State Minister for Urban Development, said departments have begun implementing many initiatives within the thrice-delayed 100 day plan for the Rakhine State. Earlier in July, the Rakhine State Peace, Stability and Development Committee held its second meeting in Naypyidaw, establishing a 142-point agenda for Rakhine State. <sup>75</sup>
14	It was reported that the Irrawaddy Region Minister for Planning and Finance re-submitted blueprints for a 300-acre industrial zone in Maubin Township to the Union Government. Maubin Development Public Company, a farmer's cooperative formed in 2014 with 134 shareholders, would put up 30 percent of the US\$246 million investment. <sup>76</sup>
15	It was reported that residents from all 17 Rakhine State townships have drafted a petition demanding they be given local control over their natural resources, most notably oil extraction. Over 300,000 signatures were expected to be collected <sup>77</sup>
15	It was reported that the Union Election Commission (UEC) pronounced the election of the NLD representative Saw Than in Karen state as valid, and ordered the plaintiff, Naing Maung Maung Lwin of the USDP, who accused the NLD candidate of voter fraud, to pay a fine of K30,000 (US\$25.33) as lawyer's expenses. The UEC also dismissed the complaint against elected NLD MP Dein Khan Phon of Kachin state, and ordered that USDP candidate Chan Gyaung Hsar, the complainant, pay K200,000 to the defendant as court expenses. <sup>78</sup>
16	President Htin Kyaw attended a session of the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit under the heading "Enhancing the three pillars of ASEM" in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. <sup>79</sup>
17	It was reported that the Ministry of Construction formed a master plan to build staff quarters to house 1,000 employees in Rakhine State within five years. Kyaw Lin, permanent secretary for the Ministry of Construction said it already started constructing 210 rooms in Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, Thandwe, Taungup, Buthitaung, Maungtaw and Myebon.
19	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has blamed the government for the continued arrest and detention of activists, threatening their freedom of expression. They estimate 82 political prisoners remain in prison <sup>80</sup>
22	It was reported that 15,000 Myanmar migrants started work in seven different countries in June, legally dispersed by 200 different employment agencies, according to the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population. <sup>81</sup>
22	It was reported that 337 development projects, mainly infrastructure, are to be undertaken over the next five years with the assistance of US\$1bn from international donors. <sup>82</sup>
22	A letter was distributed to all People's Assembly MPs, signed by Speaker Win Myint,

<sup>71</sup> GNLM (07 Jul 16) Myanmar earns €533.49m of jade, gems and pearl sales at latest expo

<sup>72</sup> GNLM (10 Jul 16) Hluttaw Scrutiny Committee undertakes study to identify problems in Yangon's legal systems; GNLM (10 Jul 16) Over 70 complaints received by Hluttaw Scrutiny Committee in five months

<sup>73</sup> GNLM (13 Jul 16) Electoral tribunal degazettes Shan State Hluttaw representative

<sup>74</sup> Myanmar Times (13 Jul 16) Govt speeds up peace process planning, appoints state counsellor to head rebranded peace centre

<sup>75</sup> Myanmar Times (14 Jul 16) Rakhine govt launching thrice-delayed 100-day plan

<sup>76</sup> Myanmar Times (14 Jul 16) Ayeyarwady minister backs Maubin industrial zone

<sup>77</sup> Myanmar Times (15 Jul 16) Rakhine State residents petition for local control of resources

<sup>78</sup> GNLM (15 Jul 16) UEC's electoral tribunal upholds eligibility of NLD's representatives-elect

<sup>79</sup> GNLM (17 Jul 16) President U Htin Kyaw describes ASEM 11th Summit as fruitful and productive

<sup>80</sup> Myanmar Times (19 Jul 16) Political prisoners group pushes NLD to do more

<sup>81</sup> GNLM (22 Jun 16) 15,000 job seekers head abroad in June

<sup>82</sup> GNLM (22 Jul 16) 300 development projects to be conducted over five years

	which ordered MPs to give prior information to the speaker's office concerning invitations to attend meetings, workshops or training activities. <sup>83</sup>
25	The second session of the National Assembly began in Naypyidaw with a question and answer session and submission of a proposal calling for eradication of drug trafficking and illicit use of narcotic drugs and the establishment of drug rehabilitation centers. <sup>84</sup>
25	The revised Union budget for 2016-17 was submitted to the national Parliament with minimal changes. The most significant change is the K23.6 trillion (US\$20 billion) saved by the government's decision to reduce the number of ministries from 33 to 21. The savings are now slated to fund the two new ministries – the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs and the Ministry of the State Counselor. <sup>85</sup>
26	Police Bridge-Gen, Win Naing, of Rangoon Region Police Force said that the department's crime crackdown operations will be extended to eight other townships of the region. The next crime crackdown plan will begin 1 August, targeting Thakayta and Dagon Myothit (North) Townships in Yangon's East District, Mayangon and Sangyoung in West District, Dala and Twantay in South District and Insein and Mingaladon in North District. <sup>86</sup>
27	It was reported that Htin Lynn, Director-General of the International Organizations and Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was appointed as the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations and other International Organizations, Geneva. <sup>87</sup>
27	National Parliament Joint Bill Committee held a work coordination meeting on legislation and law drafting in Naypyidaw in order to address outdated laws and begin enacting new ones, said People's Assembly Speaker U Win Myint. <sup>88</sup>
27	People's Assembly MPs discussed a bill to amend the 2012 Ward or Village Tract Administration Law. The existing law requires any resident to report to the ward or village tract administrator the names of overnight guests from other wards or village tracts, the amendment would allow for action only to be taken against those who failed to report overnight guests "On purpose." <sup>89</sup>
28	State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar from the 49 <sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Minister's Meeting (AMM) in Vientiane, Laos. AMM began on 23 July and it was reported Aung San Suu Kyi participated in discussions about ASEAN Connectivity for 2025 and met with representatives from European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States about trade, investment, relations and communications. <sup>90</sup>
28	The White House issued a statement that State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi will visit Washington D.C. in September. <sup>91</sup>

\*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

“Myanmar Humanitarian News Digest - June 2016” UN OCHA <http://goo.gl/TwxOwS>

“Review of Myanmar’s fourth and fifth combined report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women” Amnesty International <http://goo.gl/bsfZcq>

“Burma – Complex Emergency Fact-Sheet #3, Fiscal year 2016” USAID <http://goo.gl/tbMsAh>

“Active USG Programs for the Burma Response” USAID <http://goo.gl/HjJ8wj>

<sup>83</sup> Frontier (26 Jul 16) Opposition lawmakers blanch at Pyithu speaker edict

<sup>84</sup> GNLM (26 Jul 16) Second regular session of Amyotha Hluttaw begins

<sup>85</sup> Myanmar Times (27 Jul 16) Few alterations to 2016 budget in amended draft

<sup>86</sup> GNLM (27 Jul 16) Yangon's crime crackdown operations to be extended to other locations

<sup>87</sup> GNLM (27 Jul 16) U Htin Lynn appointed as Permanent Representative to UN

<sup>88</sup> GNLM (28 Jul 16) Legislation and law drafting coordination meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw

<sup>89</sup> Myanmar Times (29 Jul 16) Law behind 'midnight inspections' reviewed

<sup>90</sup> Eleven (28 Jul 16) Aung San Suu Kyi returns from Laos; GNLM (28 Jul 16) AMM concludes with outcomes  
Union Foreign Affairs Minister Daw Aung San Suu Kyi returns home

<sup>91</sup> NY TIMES (28 Jul 16) Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi to Visit Washington in September

**“Rakhine CCCM Dashboard 1/Jun/2016”** UNHCR <http://goo.gl/y7wbuu>

**“Myanmar: Kachin & Northern Shan CCCM Dashboard”** UNHCR <http://goo.gl/1zjg70>

**“Will Myanmar’s Rohingya finally become citizens in their own country?”** Irinnews <http://goo.gl/8ecjbQ>

**“Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviews the situation of women in Myanmar”** UNHCR <http://goo.gl/X6yfQh>

**“Early Recovery Multi-Sector Assessment of Mrauk-U District”** World Food Programme <http://goo.gl/bC5JI0>

**“GIEWS Country Brief Myanmar”** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations <http://goo.gl/pM35VN>

**“Thailand/Myanmar: Top 5 Townships in Top 5 States - Places of Origin (June 2016)”** UN High Commissioner for Refugees <http://goo.gl/LZf74g>

**“WFP Myanmar Country Brief, June 2016”** World Food Programme <http://goo.gl/3kgq2p>

**“The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: The Union Report: Religion, Census Report Volume 2-C”** The Republic of the Union of Myanmar <http://goo.gl/IxXESv>

**“Myanmar/Burma – Regional implications of the Rohingya Crisis”** Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) <http://goo.gl/7sWKua>