

BURMA BULLETIN

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- **State-owned enterprises operate without oversight as trillions of kyat stagnate in savings accounts.**
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- **However, clashes continue in Karen, Kachin and Shan states. Tatmadaw rapes and kills six ethnic female medics.**

KEY STORY: Human rights chief attacks “investigative whitewashing”

On 4 July, United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad al-Husseini, accused Burma/Myanmar of a pattern of “investigative whitewashing”.

Referring to the Commission of Enquiry (CoE) established by Burma on 31 May, he said that another internal inquiry will “seek to whitewash the terrible crimes which have occurred”. Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), he stated that he did not believe Burma was ready to receive returning refugees, despite the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UN last month [see *June Bulletin*]. Zeid also encouraged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to immediately refer Burma to the International Criminal Court (ICC).¹ Burma’s representative to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun, labeled the accusations “distorted or exaggerated”, saying that finding a solution is among Burma’s top priorities. He also claimed the root cause of the conflict was “terrorism, and terrorism cannot be condoned.”²

¹ OHCHR (4 July 18) Thousands of Rohingya refugees continue to flee violence

² Reuters (4 July 18) Rohingya still fleeing violence, persecution in Myanmar: U.N. rights boss

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On 9 July, UN Special Rapporteur to Burma Yanghee Lee expressed doubt over the likelihood of Burmese officials being held accountable for their crimes. Speaking during a visit to Bangladesh, Lee said that members of the Tatmadaw were being protected by powerful international allies – alluding to China and Russia – who would prevent an ICC referral. “Referral to the ICC under the current structure of the international fora is that UNSC has to refer to the ICC,” she said. “There are two permanent seats in the ICC that are friends of Myanmar that will not make this happen.”³

Advisory panel member resigns, citing “short leash”

On 10 July, Kobsak Chutikul resigned from his role as secretary of the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State. Chutikul, a retired ambassador and former member of Thai parliament, said the panel, initially established by the government in January to advise on implementing the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission, had “been kept on a short leash” by officials. Chutikul said the panel gave the “false impression that things are being done”. He revealed they were barred from accepting international funding and setting up a permanent office – being told to conduct meetings online – while military representatives refused to meet them. In January, US politician Bill Richardson, one of five original international members of the panel, also called the initiative a “whitewash”, resigning only weeks after its formation [see *January Bulletin*].⁴

Former Thai foreign minister and acting chairman of the panel, Surakiart Sathirathai, labeled the accusations “incorrect and unfair”, citing the recent Burma-UN repatriation MoU and the visit of UN Security Council representatives to Burma [see *April Bulletin*] as indications of the panel’s impact.⁵

Members of “sham” internal inquiry announced

On 30 July, the members of the new four-person Commission of Enquiry (CoE) to probe allegations of human rights abuses in Arakan State were announced. The commission will be chaired by Filipino diplomat Rosario Manalo, while Kenzo Oshima, Japan’s former ambassador to the UN, will be the second international member of the four-person panel. The two Burmese members are lawyer Mya Thein and Dr. Aung Tun Thet, an economist and former UN official. The commission was initially announced in late May, and according to the office of president Win Myint will “investigate the allegations of human rights violations and related issues, following the terrorist attacks by ARSA.”⁶

The CoE has been met with widespread skepticism, with critics regarding it as further effort to evade international accountability over accusations of ethnic cleansing. The lack of details provided about the commission – with its remit, powers, and timeframe given to complete its report still unclear – have only heightened concerns over its credibility. International Commission of Jurists legal advisor, Sean Bain, pointed out that previous inquiries had produced no tangible results, saying that they “tend to be ad hoc, rarely if ever lead to prosecution [and] fail to provide redress.”⁷ Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth questioned the appointment of Aung Tun Thet, highlighting previous comments in which he denied “ethnic cleansing even took place.”⁸ The commission is also unpopular among Burmese nationalists, who refute allegations of rights abuses and oppose the presence of international experts presiding over what they claim is a domestic issue.⁹ The CoE is the eighth domestic investigation on Arakan State since 2012 [for details on 2012-2016 investigations, see ALTSEAN factsheet: [Flawed Domestic Investigations Necessitate UN Commission of Inquiry on Serious Crimes](#)].

³ Frontier Myanmar (9 July 18) Little chance of Myanmar ICC trial: Yanghee Lee

⁴ Reuters (21 July 18) Exclusive: Citing lack of progress, secretary to Myanmar's Rohingya panel quits

⁵ Channel News Asia (22 July 18) Myanmar's Rohingya panel head refutes criticism by outgoing secretary

⁶ Reuters (31 July 18) Myanmar appoints panel to probe Rohingya abuses

⁷ Frontier Myanmar (31 July 18) New Myanmar Rakhine commission denounced by observers

⁸ Radio Free Asia (31 July 18) Myanmar's New Rohingya Panel Disappoints Nationalists And Rights Groups

⁹ Radio Free Asia (31 July 18) Myanmar's New Rohingya Panel Disappoints Nationalists And Rights Groups

2018 COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY: ACCOUNTABILITY OR “SHAM” INVESTIGATION?	
Biased & inappropriate members of the inquiry	<p>CoE Chair, Rosario Manalo, has been criticized for playing the "go along to get along" game, with more interest in playing politics than protecting rights.¹⁰ Said in August 2018 that “there will be no blaming of anybody, no finger-pointing” as part of the CoE.¹¹</p> <p>Japanese member of the CoE, Kenzo Oshima, said in August 2018 that the commission has been brought in to “bring in more balance, set the record straight” against existing narratives shaped by many “too one-sided” reports.¹²</p> <p>Aung Tun Thet said “there’s no desire to get rid of the so-called evidence” when responding to February 2018 reports that Rohingya villages were bulldozed to eliminate evidence of rights abuses.¹³ In March 2018 he said “there is no ethnic cleansing or genocide” when responding to a UN report implicating Burmese officials in genocide.¹⁴ In April 2018 he admitted that “tortures happened” to the Rohingya but that “it’s not my concern” if it amounted to ethnic cleansing or war crimes. He also said repatriating Rohingyas demonstrates “there was no intention of ethnic cleansing.”¹⁵</p>
Long track record of dubious internal investigations absolving the military of wrongdoing	<p>In 2017 alone there were three investigations carried out into military rights violations in Arakan State:</p> <p>Feb 17: The Police Departmental Inquiry led by Brig Gen. Win Htun was formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. No conclusive final report was published.¹⁶</p> <p>Feb 17: A Military Inquiry Board led by Lt. Gen. Aye Win was formed by the Tatmadaw. The Board concluded in May 2017 that a UN report alleging military rights abuses was “totally wrong”.¹⁷</p> <p>Oct 17: Another internal inquiry launched by the Tatmadaw to investigate August 2017 violence in Maungtau concluded in November 17 that there were “no deaths of innocent people” and all security forces “strictly abided by orders”.¹⁸</p>
Refusal to cooperate with existing inquiries	<p>The Burmese government refused to cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council’s Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar established in March 2017, banning members from entering Burma to investigate rights abuses.</p> <p>Since July 2017, the Burmese government has also refused to cooperate with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee after it objected to her end-of-mission statement, also barring her from entering the country.¹⁹</p>

Physicians for Human Rights report “forensic evidence” for Rohingya abuses

On 19 July, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) released a body of forensic medical evidence supporting Rohingya accounts of being shot, hacked, and wounded by explosives [see *Reports*]. The report – entitled “Please Tell the World What They Have Done to Us - The Chut Pyin Massacre: Forensic Evidence of Violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar” – revealed the findings of forensic medical evaluations of 22 Rohingya survivors of a six-and-a-half hour assault on the village of Chut Pyin, northern Arakan State in August 2017. The report labeled Chut Pyin a prime example of a brutal campaign of violence carried out against the Rohingya, calling for it to be investigated as crimes against humanity. “The power of science, of medicine, is that injuries do not lie. Each laceration, blunt-force

¹⁰ UCA News (1 Aug 18) Cover-up claim over Myanmar's new Rohingya abuse probe

¹¹ Coconuts Yangon (17 Aug 18) Suu Kyi's Rakhine Enquiry Commission says will not seek accountability for rights abuses

¹² Coconuts Yangon (17 Aug 18) Suu Kyi's Rakhine Enquiry Commission says will not seek accountability for rights abuses

¹³ Reuters (26 Feb 18) Bulldozing Rohingya villages was not 'demolition of evidence', Myanmar official says

¹⁴ New York Times (14 Mar 18) Myanmar Rejects U.N. Findings: 'No Ethnic Cleansing or Genocide in Our Country'

¹⁵ The Daily Star (20 Apr 18) 'Not my concern'

¹⁶ The Arakan Project (15 Mar 17) Investigation Commissions to whitewash atrocities?

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch (24 May 17) Burma: Army Investigation Denies Atrocities

¹⁸ Tatmadaw True News Information Team (13 Nov 17) [Facebook post](#)

¹⁹ OHCHR (20 Dec 17) Myanmar refuses access to UN Special Rapporteur

trauma, burn, and gunshot wound tells a story, and we use this forensic medical evidence to shed light on what likely happened on that day,” said Homer Venters, PHR’s director of programs.²⁰

Also on 19 July, Fortify Rights claimed security forces made “extensive and systematic preparations” for attacks against Rohingya civilians prior to the escalation of violence in August 2017 blamed on the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) by Burmese officials. They identified 22 Tatmadaw and police officials, claiming there are reasonable grounds for the ICC to issue arrest warrants [see *Reports*].²¹ The report follows a Reuters exposé showing the Tatmadaw 33rd and 99th light infantry divisions committed atrocities in advance of the ARSA attacks in August 2017 [see *June Bulletin*].

Rohingya leaders reject MoU as calls for “safe and secure” conditions continue

On 6 July, Rohingya community leaders rejected the UN-Burma MoU on repatriating refugees. “We have long been seeking a guarantee from the Burmese government of restoration of our citizenship rights...but, they have skirted this issue of citizenship in the MoU to our disappointment,” a spokesperson said.²² Meanwhile, calls for safe and secure conditions in Arakan State for returning refugees continued. On 23 July, the UN Security Council urged Burma to step up efforts to create conditions that will allow Rohingya to safely return to the country, stressing that progress is needed on implementing agreements with the UN refugee and development agencies, and Bangladesh.²³ While on 24 July, US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan told the Bangladeshi FM that Washington will continue to pressure Burma to create safe and secure conditions in Arakan State for repatriation.²⁴

HUMAN RIGHTS

After months of deliberation, judge rules that Reuters journalists to be tried

On 9 July, the judge presiding over the case of Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo ruled that the pair will stand trial, concluding six months of preliminary hearings. They were charged under Article 3.1(c) of the Official Secrets Act for allegedly obtaining secret documents regarding Burmese security forces with the intention to harm national security [see *January Bulletin*]. US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said the decision was a “major setback” for Burmese press freedom.²⁵ Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo had exposed the Inn Din massacre which led to Reuters to publish a sensational report in February implicating military personnel in widespread abuses.²⁶

On 16 July, the trial opened with the prosecution’s cross-examination of Wa Lone, as he gave the first detailed account from the journalists regarding the night of their arrest. He told the court that Police L Cpl Naing Lin insisted on meeting the night he was arrested, abruptly handing him documents in a Rangoon/Yangon restaurant. “The documents had nothing to do with our conversation. He just suddenly took them out. I didn’t ask him to,” Wa Lone said.²⁷ On 17 July, Wa Lone claimed that police questioning after their arrest focused on their reporting of the Inn Din massacre [see *February Bulletin*], rather than their possession of secret state documents. He added that during the interrogation an officer offered a “negotiation” over their arrest if they agreed not to publish the massacre story. If true, this supports defense claims that the pair was the victims of a sting operation intended to halt their investigation.²⁸ He also claimed that they were deprived of sleep, hooded, and driven to a secluded spot for questioning.²⁹ On 24 and 30 July, Kyaw Soe Oo also corroborated Wa Lone’s claims that during two weeks of questioning the pair was covered with a hood, deprived of sleep, and forced to kneel for hours at an interrogation site. “They didn’t let us rest and asked questions for three days straight while I was in handcuffs,” he said.³⁰

²⁰ Physicians for Human Rights (19 Jul 18) The Chut Pyin Massacre: Forensic Evidence of Violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar

²¹ Fortify Rights (July 18) Preparations for Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity Against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar

²² The Guardian (06 July 18) Rohingya refugees reject UN-Myanmar repatriation agreement

²³ Associated Press (24 Jul 18) UN urges Myanmar to create conditions for Rohingya return

²⁴ BDNews24 (25 Jul 18) US to keep pressure on Myanmar to solve Rohingya issue

²⁵ Reuters (09 Jul 18) Myanmar court files secrets act charges against Reuters reporters

²⁶ Reuters (8 Feb 18) How Myanmar forces burned, looted and killed in a remote village

²⁷ Reuters (16 Jul 18) Myanmar police insisted on meeting, gave documents: Reuters reporter

²⁸ Reuters (17 July 18) Myanmar police focused interrogation on Rohingya story: Reuters journalist

²⁹ Reuters (23 July 18) Myanmar reporter says Myanmar police planted ‘secret’ papers

³⁰ Reuters (24 Jul 18) Black hoods, kneeling, no sleep: Reuters reporter details Myanmar custody; Reuters (30 Jul 18) Reuters reporter jailed in Myanmar denies collecting secret documents

Prominent government critic arrested under sedition law

On 12 July, prominent government critic Ngar Min Swe was arrested at his home on suspicion of violating sedition laws, a crime carrying a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Though the reasons for his arrest remain unverified, a post on a Facebook page he operates claimed that he was arrested under Article 124(a) of the Criminal Code, outlawing ‘disaffection towards government’. Ngar Min Swe is already facing separate charges under the Telecommunications Act for writing a Facebook post about Aung San Suu Kyi last year.³¹

ECONOMY & NATURAL RESOURCES

State-owned enterprises operate without oversight as trillions of kyat stagnate in savings accounts

A 10 July report by the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) and the Renaissance Institute stated that Burma/Myanmar’s state-owned enterprises (SOEs) primarily operate in secrecy and lack critical oversight [see *Reports*]. The report, named the State-Owned Economic Enterprise Reform in Myanmar: The Case of Natural Resource Enterprises, revealed that SOEs – like Myanmar Gems Enterprise (MGE) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) – have lost more than US\$2 billion in purchasing power over the past three years, caused by the hoarding of company profits in non-interest bearing savings accounts at Myanmar Economic Bank (MEB). It is estimated that the savings total K11.45 trillion (US\$8.6 billion) – money that could have been invested in the Burma’s infrastructure or social services. Stockpiling is intended to keep SOEs financially independent, but the report stressed that these savings have not increased efficiency, estimating that “excess savings from MOGE and MGE alone could provide more than MMK 2.8 trillion [US\$1.9 billion] in available financing for the Union budget in this coming fiscal year.”³²

A lack of oversight was highlighted as a further issue with SOEs, as less than 25% of all transactions in the jade and gemstone sector are considered formal transactions, resulting in many stones being sold below their market value. Revenue would increase by K1 trillion (US\$680 million) – a figure higher than the 2017 healthcare budget – if MGE regulated and collected taxes on jade production.³³

Kyaukphyu SEZ to be reduced, as Annan environmental recommendation dropped

On 3 July, Planning and Finance Minister Soe Win said that Burma will reduce the size of the China-led Kyaukphyu special economic zone (SEZ) in western Arakan/Rakhine State, in order for the project to be “as lean as possible”.³⁴ State-owned China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC) won the bid to develop the approximately US\$7.5 billion SEZ in 2015,³⁵ which is a key location on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

However in recent weeks, fears that the project would lead the country into a debt trap grew after several experts criticized the extreme cost of the project, likening it to Sri Lanka’s Chinese-led Hambantota port project in which the government was forced into a 99-year lease with China in exchange for debt relief [see *May Bulletin*].³⁶

Soe Win expressed that the government is now focused on generating adequate revenue from the SEZ in order to “repay all the debt regarding the project.” At the end of 2017, 40% of Burma’s US\$9.6 billion foreign debt was owed to China, a figure Soe Win labeled “not recommendable.”³⁷

³¹ Reuters (13 Jul 18) Myanmar arrests government critic under sedition law

³² Natural Resource Governance Institute & Renaissance Institute (10 Jul 18) State-Owned Economic Enterprise Reform in Myanmar: The Case of Natural Resource Enterprises

³³ Myanmar Times (16 Jul 18) Myanmar’s economic future hinges on reforming state-owned enterprises

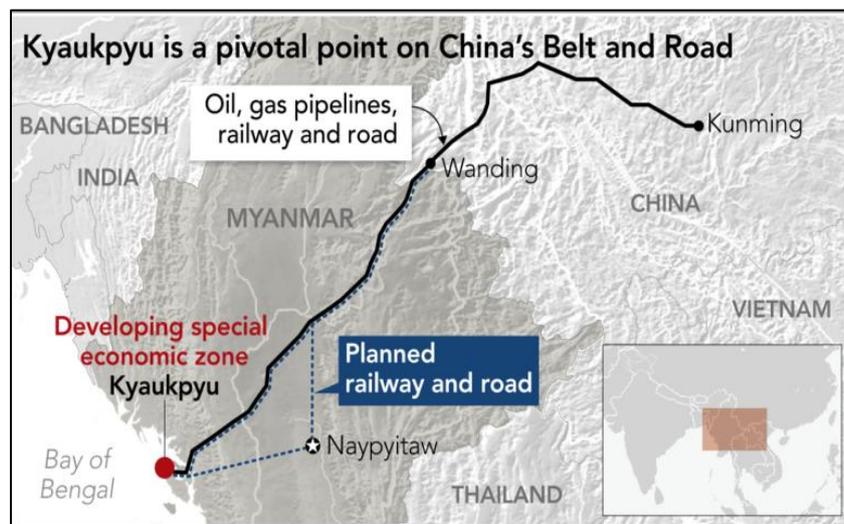
³⁴ Nikkei Asian Review (04 Jul 18) Myanmar will ask China to downsize project, minister says

³⁵ Bloomberg [Bloomberg (25 May 18) China’s \$7.5 Billion Myanmar Port ‘Crazy,’ Suu Kyi Adviser Says

³⁶ Business Standard (11 May 18) How Myanmar’s Kyaukyu fishing port could become a \$10 bn Chinese debt bomb

³⁷ Nikkei Asian Review (04 Jul 18) Myanmar will ask China to downsize project, minister says

The newly appointed chairperson of the Kyaukphyu SEZ Management Committee, Set Aung, is also in negotiations with China to increase Burma's stake in the project from 15% to 30%.³⁸ Research firm BMI Research said the move is "positive for debt and growth sustainability over the long-run" and "in line with the government's intention of...reducing its reliance on Chinese investment."³⁹ CEO of the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation Ray Washburne also cautioned



Map from Nikkei Asia Review (04 Jul 18) Myanmar will ask China to downsize project, minister says

that China's BRI was creating a debt trap for many poor nations.⁴⁰ Despite these concerns, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Chinese President Xi Jinping are known to be discussing the creation of further BRI-related projects.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the government committee tasked with implementing the recommendations of the Kofi Annan chaired Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has seemingly dropped its recommendation to have a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) for Kyaukphyu SEZ. The Commission's June progress update made no mention of the SEA despite a previous announcement that it would be conducted before any environmental and social impact assessments – both of which are already under way. The International Commission of Jurists agreed that an SEA would help the government avoid "another Myitsonne scenario", referring to the controversial mega hydropower project in Kachin State.⁴²

Revival of Dawei SEZ conflicts with Environmental Conservation Law

On 6 July, the SEZ Central Working Body announced its plans to revive the Dawei SEZ this October, despite having completed no environment impact assessments (EIA) – a violation of the 2015 Environmental Conservation Law. The Environmental Conservation Law requires projects that may cause adverse environmental impacts to conduct a site-wide EIA before construction⁴³. The governing body is yet to specify how its current plan will conform to this requirement. Thai company, Italian-Thai Development, will begin construction on the megaproject – intended to be "ten times larger than Thilawa SEZ" – that will consist of a port, a highway connecting Burma and Thailand, and industrial zones.⁴⁴ Dawei SEZ project was first proposed in 2008 and has been met with opposition from local community and civil society groups, who provided a list of demands for the project in February [see *February Bulletin*].

NGO reports highlight negative impact of hydropower and land grabbing

On 10 July, the Karen Human Rights Group and Karen Rivers Watch released a report calling on the government to reform the hydropower sector and address the negative impacts of dam projects on ethnic communities in southeast Burma [see *Reports*]. Research collected in Karen/Kayin State demonstrated large-scale hydropower dam projects are often implemented without proper community consultation, lack remedy mechanisms, and result in escalated conflict and land confiscation from local villagers.⁴⁵ There are currently 50 hydropower projects planned; 42 are located in ethnic minority areas

³⁸ Irrawaddy (14 Jul 18) Deputy Finance Minister Named New Chair of Kyaukphyu SEZ

³⁹ Myanmar Times (12 Jul 18) Myanmar to trim Kyaukphyu cost but drops Annan's strategic review suggestion

⁴⁰ Reuters (16 Jul 18) China overloading poor nations with debt, top U.S. official says

⁴¹ Nikkei Asian Review (04 Jul 18) Myanmar will ask China to downsize project, minister says

⁴² Myanmar Times (12 Jul 18) Myanmar to trim Kyaukphyu cost but drops Annan's strategic review suggestion

⁴³ Myanmar Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (29 Dec 15) Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure

⁴⁴ Myanmar Times (13 Jul 18) Clashing with the law, SEZ body to resurrect Dawei megaproject

⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (12 Jul 18) Transparency Concerns Raised About 7 Dam Projects in Southern Myanmar

like Kachin, Karen, and Shan states where the Tatmadaw are engaged in armed conflict with ethnic armed groups.⁴⁶

On 17 July, Human Rights Watch released a report calling on the government to address the historical impact of illegal land confiscation [see *Reports*]. Farmers in Southern Shan State, the Irawaddy/Ayeyarwady, and Rangoon/Yangon regions described how land grabbing negatively impacted their livelihoods, healthcare, and their children’s education. Official statistics show that in the early 1990s the military government seized hundreds of thousands of acres, while activists believe the actual figure to be in the millions.⁴⁷ The Tatmadaw’s Col Zaw Min Tun said: “The military has been returning unused lands to their owners...many acres of land- as much as it can.”⁴⁸

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

Nearly 70 candidates register for 13 open seats in November by-election

OPEN LEGISLATIVE SEATS FOR NOVEMBER 2018 BY-ELECTION		
<p>1</p> <p>UPPER HOUSE</p> <p>KACHIN STATE - Myitkyina 2</p>	<p>4</p> <p>LOWER HOUSE</p> <p>CHIN STATE – Kanpetlet SHAN STATE – Lechar MANDALAY REGION – Myingyan YANGON REGION - Tamwe</p>	<p>8</p> <p>STATE/REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS</p> <p>CHIN STATE - Matupi 1 MAGWE REGION - Minbu 2 BAGO REGION - Oktwin 1 RAKHINE STATE - Rathedaung 2 YANGON REGION – Seikkan SAGAING REGION - Tamu 2 MANDALAY REGION - Thabeikkyin 1 MANDALAY REGION - Shan Ethnic Affairs Minister</p>

Sixty-nine candidates, representing 24 political parties, registered for the upcoming 3 November by-election. There are 13 vacant parliamentary seats across the national and state legislatures, with four seats open in the Lower House of Parliament, one in the Upper House, and eight across the state and regional legislatures.⁴⁹ The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) will have candidates competing for all 13 open seats in the upcoming election.⁵⁰

ACC teams up with Chambers of Commerce to fight corruption

On 2 July, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry signed a joint anti-corruption declaration, committing to combat corruption together. ACC Chair Aung Kyi announced new anti-corruption initiatives, including the formation of Corruption Prevention Units in governmental departments, the creation of an anti-bribery code of conduct and educational programs, as well as the implementation of corruption risk assessments for governmental and private organizations. These activities can “prevent a monopoly in organizations, reduce individual power play and encourage accountability,” said Aung Kyi.⁵¹

WOMEN’S RIGHTS

NLD Women’s Committee does not support quota for women’s participation, defends Tatmadaw’s role in politics

On 2 July, the head of the National League for Democracy’s (NLD) Central Women’s Committee, Dr. May Win Myint, announced the party will not implement a quota system to ensure women’s political participation. At a three-day Women’s Work Committees Congress, Dr. Myint said she was advised by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi “to empower women and to build up their skills and not to talk about a quota”, adding that empowering women “will take up to 50 or 60 percent (of the leadership positions), not only a 30 percent quota.”⁵² Women currently hold only 15% of leadership roles in the

⁴⁶ RFA (10 Jul 18) Myanmar Urged to Review Hydropower Dam Projects Seen Damaging to Rural Communities

⁴⁷ HRW (17 Jul 18) Myanmar: Farmers Seek Return of Seized Land

⁴⁸ RFA (18 Jul 18) Unused Land Seized From Farmers Has Been Returned, Myanmar Military Says

⁴⁹ DVB (12 Jul 18) Nearly 70 candidates register for November by-election

⁵⁰ Xinhua (25 Jun 18) Myanmar’s ruling party to compete for all seats in parliamentary by-election

⁵¹ Xinhua (03 Jul 18) Roundup: Myanmar steps up anti-corruption activities; Myanmar Times (04 Jul 18) Anti-graft body to set up government units to curb corruption

⁵² Irrawaddy (03 Jul 18) NLD Won’t Support Quota for Women in Political Positions

NLD Central Committee.⁵³ Dr. May Win Myint also defended the military’s political role, telling the congress: “The Tatmadaw has been around since independence, and we cannot remove them from politics.”⁵⁴ Her comments run contrary to the NLD’s long held stance seeking the removal of the military’s mandatory 25% parliamentary quota.

MILITARY

Tatmadaw request yet another budget increase for 2018-19, while education projects suspended

On 25 July, the Ministry of Defense requested a budget of K3.26 trillion (US\$2.2 billion) for the new October 2018 to September 2019 fiscal year. 2018 will be the first fiscal year to run from 1 October-30 September, replacing the previous 1 April-31 March timeframe.⁵⁵ The request was equivalent to 13.07% of the annual budget, estimated at nearly K25 trillion (US\$17 billion). Explaining the increase, Maj-Gen Myint New said the higher budget is necessary to implement the Tatmadaw’s long-term plan to transform itself into a “standard Army, Navy and Air Force.”⁵⁶

	Overall Budget (Kyat, Trillion)	Military Budget (Kyat, Trillion)	% Year to Year Difference	Military % of Overall Budget
2011-2012	K 7.6	K 1.2		15.79%
2012-2013	K 13.0	K 1.9	+ 58.33%	14.62%
2013-2014	K 16.7	K 2.2	+ 15.79%	13.17%
2014-2015	K 19.5	K 2.3	+ 4.55%	11.79%
2015-2016	K 20.8	K 2.7	+ 17.39%	12.98%
2016-2017	K 23.6	K 3.3	+ 22.22%	13.98%
2017-2018	K 20.6	K 3.19	-3.33%	15.49%
Budget for April-Sept 2018 to cover bridging period to new fiscal year timeframe not available				
2018-2019 (proposed)	K 25	K 3.26	+2.19%	13.07%

On 25 July, the Education Ministry suspended its project to construct about 6,000 educational facilities, including basic schools across the country, due to budget constraints. “We have a deficit of 100 billion kyats to pay the ministry staff. And we are not allowed to ask for extra funds because it is the six-month interim budget,” the deputy minister of the Education Ministry explained, referring to the April-September interim budget currently in place before October’s adoption of the new time-frame.⁵⁷

ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND CONFLICT

Panglong Peace Conference concludes with 14 points of agreement

On 11-16 July, roughly 2,000 representatives of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), political parties, civil society groups, and the Tatmadaw attended the third session of the Panglong Peace Conference in Naypyidaw. At the government’s invitation, the peace conference was also attended by EAOs who have not yet signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Leaders of non-signatory groups observed the conference and met separately with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw commander-in-chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing. These included; United Wa State Army, Kachin Independence Army (KIA), National Democratic Alliance Army, Shan State Progressive Party/Shan State Army-North, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Arakan Army, and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).⁵⁸

On 11 July, Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing marked the first day of the conference by stating that neither EAOs, nor the country’s political parties, can claim to represent the entire country, claiming instead that the Tatmadaw is the sole representative of the Burmese people. In response to his

⁵³ Irrawaddy (03 Jul 18) NLD Won’t Support Quota for Women in Political Positions

⁵⁴ RFA (02 Jul 18) NLD-backed Women’s Congress Rejects Talk of Removing Myanmar Military From Politics

⁵⁵ The Irrawaddy (25 Jul 18) Education Ministry Suspends Construction of 6,000 New Schools

⁵⁶ The Irrawaddy (25 Jul 18) Military Requests Slightly Higher Budget than Last Year for 2018-19

⁵⁷ The Irrawaddy (25 Jul 18) Education Ministry Suspends Construction of 6,000 New Schools

⁵⁸ The Irrawaddy (16 Jul 18) Peace Strategy Needed to Achieve National Goals, Suu Kyi Says

comments, many Burmese posted ‘The Tatmadaw doesn’t represent me’ on their social media pages.⁵⁹

The conference concluded with participants signing 14 points of agreement relating to politics, economics, social matters, and land/environmental issues. These will be added to the 37 that formed the Union Accord signed at the May 2017 Panglong negotiations [see *May 2017 Bulletin*], bringing the total points of agreement to 51.⁶⁰

Clashes continue in Karen, Kachin, and Shan states, female medics raped and killed

On 12 and 15 July, the Tatmadaw clashed with the Karen National Liberation Army, a group in attendance at the Panglong Peace Conference.⁶¹ Daily fighting also continued in Kachin and northern Shan states, as early July witnessed nine clashes and nine attacks displacing over 2,800 civilians in Namtu, Mongkaing, and Namhkan townships, Shan State. Fighting was reportedly between the Tatmadaw and NCA signatory the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), as well as between the RCSS/SSA and the TNLA. As of 23 July, most of the displaced people had returned to their homes.⁶²

On 11 July, the KIA reported that the Tatmadaw captured, tortured, raped, and killed six TNLA female medics after LIB 301, under LID 88, ambushed vehicles carrying them. The Tatmadaw also killed one TNLA soldier in the attack. On 14 July, the bodies were discovered with severe wounds on two of the medics’ heads, multiple wounds on their bodies, and signs of mutilation and rape.⁶³

Other NCA updates:

14 Jul: The government released figures saying that women accounted for 17% of the delegates at the third session of the Panglong Peace Conference, a 2% increase on the previous session.⁶⁴

16 Jul: Government spokesperson Zaw Htay said that a faction of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland will not be allowed to sign the NCA. He cited the ethnic Naga armed group’s core demand for an independent homeland straddling the Burma-India border as the reason.⁶⁵

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⁵⁹ The Irrawaddy (12 Jul 18) Military Chief’s Comment on Tatmadaw ‘Representing’ the People Draws Backlash Online

⁶⁰ DVB (16 Jul 18) Panglong III wraps with delegates tacking 14 points onto ‘Union Accord’

⁶¹ Myanmar Times (18 Jul 18) Military and Karen fight in Kayin during talks in capital

⁶² UN OCHA (23 Jul 18) Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (17-23 July 2018); The Irrawaddy (16 Jul 18) Hundreds Flee Fighting Between Rival Ethnic Groups in Namtu

⁶³ Free Burma Rangers (26 July 18) Burma Army Tortures and Kills Six Female Medics, Continues Campaign Against Civilians

⁶⁴ The Irrawaddy (15 Jul 18) Women Playing Larger Role at This Year’s Peace Conference

⁶⁵ Myanmar Now (16 Jul 18) Demand for independent Naga homeland bars NSCN-K from nationwide ceasefire