

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



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- The ongoing problem of Rohingya boatpeople spirals into a regional humanitarian crisis when human traffickers abandon thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi victims at sea in reaction to a Thai crackdown.
- Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand's initial response to push back those stranded in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits turns into search and rescue mode after intense international, regional and domestic pressure.
- The Thai crackdown on human traffickers comes after the discovery of mass graves in southern Thailand. More graves are discovered in Malaysia.
- UNHCR estimates that approximately 25,000 people left irregularly by sea from the Bay of Bengal in the first quarter of 2015, twice as much as the last year.
- The US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) find signs of genocide in Arakan State. Minority Rights Group International (MRG) ranks Burma eighth worldwide in its 2015 "Peoples under Threat" index.
- Fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) continues for the fourth consecutive month in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State.
- Tatmadaw offensives against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) escalate and attacks against civilians in Kachin and northern Shan States continue.
- The regime releases the controversial nationwide census results, minus data on religion and ethnicity.
- The National Assembly approves the amended the Interfaith Marriage Bill, part of the 'National Race and Religion Protection' package during Parliament's 12th session.
- President Thein Sein signs the controversial Population Control Bill into law.
- Using repressive laws, the regime sentences 13 activists and 12 farmers to prison for conducting peaceful protests across Burma.
- The regime Human Rights Commission reveals that in November 2014 a military court acquitted two Tatmadaw soldiers charged with the killing of freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing (aka Par Gyi).
- US President Barack Obama renews economic sanctions banning US investment in Burma.

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KEY STORY

Discovery of mass graves in Thailand leads to Rohingya stranded at sea

In the first week of May, Thai authorities discovered the remains of 32 bodies at two abandoned human trafficking camps and a series of mass graves in other camps close to the Malaysian border in Songkhla Province.¹ The discovery of the camps, used as transit stations until victims could be transferred to Malaysia, led to a crackdown by Thai authorities on traffickers.² Later in the month, Malaysian authorities also discovered at least 139 mass graves in 28 similar camps, where they found several partial remains and at least 35 heavily decomposed bodies in Perlis State, bordering Thailand.³

As a result of the crackdown, human traffickers fled the camps, and left at least 276 Rohingya and Bangladeshi survivors stranded in the forest.⁴ Traffickers also abandoned boats in the Andaman Sea, the Malacca Strait, and nearby international waters, leaving a further estimated 7,000-8,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi boatpeople stranded at sea, according to the Arakan Project.⁵ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that the boatpeople were stranded without adequate food, water, or sanitation. They had also faced significant abuse: traffickers starved, constrained, and beat the victims, while women and girls were particularly at risk of sexual violence.⁶ [See box, *'Maritime ping-pong' in Southeast Asia.*]

'Maritime ping-pong' in Southeast Asia

The initial response to the crisis was a navy blockade by Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to repel the stranded boatpeople. In some instances, individual navies towed boats out of their waters to other neighboring countries.

- **10 May:** Indonesian rescuers in Aceh Province brought about 600 suspected Rohingya and Bangladeshi boatpeople to shore after the crew abandoned the boat.⁷
- **11 May:** Around 1,018 suspected Rohingya and Bangladeshi boatpeople – 865 men, 101 women, and 52 children – arrived in Langkawi, Kedah State, after the crews abandoned the boats.⁸
- **11 May:** Indonesian naval vessels pushed back a boat carrying approximately 500 Rohingya and Bangladeshis, and told them to continue on to Malaysia.⁹
- **12 May:** A boat near Langkawi, Kedah State, Malaysia, carrying an estimated 350 Rohingya, including 50 women and 84 children, sent out a distress call asking to be rescued, after the crew abandoned the boat.¹⁰
- **13 May:** Malaysia turned back a boat carrying about 500 Rohingya and Bangladeshis off the coast of Penang State.¹¹
- **14 May:** Thai naval vessels and private fishing boats intercepted a boat carrying hundreds of suspected Rohingya and Bangladeshis near Malaysian border waters.¹²
- **14 May:** Malaysia pushed back a boat carrying about 300 suspected Rohingya and Bangladeshis near Langkawi, Kedah State.¹³
- **15 May:** Thai officials turned back a boat carrying 300 Rohingya from Thai waters near Koh Lipe, Satun Province.¹⁴
- **15 May:** Indonesian naval vessels pushed back a boat carrying hundreds of Rohingya, preventing them from landing in Aceh Province.¹⁵
- **15 May:** Indonesian fishermen in Aceh Province rescued around 794 Rohingya and Bangladeshis whose boats sank off the coast.¹⁶
- **16 May:** Thailand pushed back a boat carrying hundreds of Rohingya and Bangladeshis after the crew abandoned the boat six days earlier.¹⁷
- **17 May:** Indonesian Armed Forces Spokesman Fuad Basya said Indonesia's Navy intercepted a boat and pushed it back after it was spotted heading across the Malacca Strait from Malaysia.¹⁸
- **18 May:** Burma naval vessels discovered two Thai trafficking boats off the coast of Arakan State, one carrying around 200 and the other empty, and said all the boatpeople were from Bangladesh and would be deported.¹⁹
- **20 May:** Local Indonesian fishermen rescued more than 400 Rohingya off the coast of Aceh Province.²⁰
- **21 May:** Burma naval vessels carried out their first rescue of a boat from the Bay of Bengal, bringing 208 Bangladeshis to shore.²¹
- **29 May:** A Burma naval vessel intercepted a boat carrying 727 Rohingya – 608 men, 74 women and 45 children – east of Pyapon Township, Irrawaddy Division, and took the detained Rohingya to a nearby island.²²

¹ AFP (05 May 15) Second grave site uncovered in southern Thailand; AFP (07 May 15) Six more bodies found as smuggling investigation continues; Reuters (06 May 15) Thai army finds six more bodies near suspected human trafficking camp; Bangkok Post (07 May 15) Thirty more graves unearthed in Thailand

² AFP (28 May 15) Thai police seek local help in people smuggling crackdown; Bangkok Post (07 May 15) Thirty more graves unearthed in Thailand

³ Bernama (29 May 15) Another 22 Skeletons Exhumed, Post-Mortem Begins June 7; Al Jazeera (26 May 15) Malaysian police exhume bodies from mass grave; AP (24 May 15) Malaysia finds graves of suspected trafficking victims; Bernama (26 May 15) Suspected Human Trafficking: Second Body Exhumed

⁴ RFA (13 May 15) Thailand Announces Summit to Tackle Migrant Crisis

⁵ AP (11 May 15) 1,600 Rohingyas, others land in Indonesia and Malaysia

⁶ IOM (27 May 15) Appeal: Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea Crisis

⁷ Reuters (10 May 15) Nearly 600 rescued off northern Indonesia, thought to be Rohingyas

International concern over boatpeople crisis in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Strait

The international community condemned the forcible pushback of stranded boatpeople by Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia's navies.²³ Burma's role in the creation of the crisis was also denounced.²⁴

- **13 May:** The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it was “extremely alarmed at reports” that Indonesia and Malaysia were pushing boats back to sea.²⁵
- **14 May:** Malaysian Deputy Home Affairs Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar condemned Burma's treatment of Rohingya, calling it the source of Southeast Asia's growing refugee problem.²⁶
- **15 May:** The US State Department urged countries in the region not to push back the boats.²⁷
- **15 May:** UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al said the desperate situation would continue unless the regime addressed the “institutional discrimination” against Rohingya.²⁸
- **17 May:** UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon voiced his concern over those stranded at sea, reiterating the need to protect those stranded on boats and uphold international law obligations.²⁹
- **18 May:** UK FM Hugo Swire met Burma's Ambassador to the UK Kyaw Zwar Minn and voiced “deep concern” and urged Burma to address the root causes of the humanitarian crisis in the region.³⁰
- **21 May:** In a resolution, EU MPs called on Burma to end the persecution and discrimination against Rohingya and allow them full citizenship.³¹
- **22 May:** US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Burma to extend citizenship to Rohingya to address the ongoing boatpeople crisis.³²
- **26 May:** At a conference in Oslo, Norway, South African former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Iranian activist Shirin Ebadi, and former East Timor President Jose Ramos-Horta called for an end to the persecution of Rohingya, describing the situation as “nothing less than genocide.”³³
- **28 May:** The UN Security Council (UNSC) held its first closed-door briefing on the Rohingya's dire human rights situation and “institutional discrimination” Rohingya faced in Burma.³⁴
- **31 May:** The regime Foreign Ministry rejected the “unbalanced and negative” comments made at the Oslo conference by Desmond Tutu and OIC Special Envoy to Burma Syed Hamid Albar.³⁵

⁸ AFP (11 May 15) About 1,400 migrants rescued off Indonesia, Malaysia; AP (11 May 15) 1,600 Rohingyas, others land in Indonesia and Malaysia

⁹ AP (11 May 15) Up to 6,000 Rohingya, Bangladeshi migrants stranded at sea; Reuters (11 May 15) Indonesian navy assists migrant boat, sends it to Malaysia; AP (12 May 15) Malaysia to push back Rohingya unless boats are sinking; AP (11 May 15) Up to 6,000 Rohingya, Bangladeshi migrants stranded at sea; AFP (12 May 15) Indonesian navy tows boat people out to sea

¹⁰ BBC (13 May 15) Myanmar Rohingya migrants 'begging for help' from boat

AP (12 May 15) Activist: Rohingya at sea without food, water beg for rescue

¹¹ AP (14 May 15) Malaysia turns away 2 boats with more than 800 migrants

¹² AP (14 May 15) Thai authorities spot boat carrying migrants near Malaysia

¹³ AP (14 May 15) Malaysia turns away 2 boats with more than 800 migrants

¹⁴ AFP (15 May 15) Thais push away Rohingya boat people; IB Times (15 May 15) Migrant boat drifting away from Thai waters as Malaysia waits to turn it back; BBC (14 May 15) 'Ten deaths' on stranded Myanmar migrant boat

¹⁵ DPA (15 May 15) Thailand, Indonesia turn back migrant boats

¹⁶ Reuters (15 May 15) More than 700 migrants land in Indonesia's Aceh - search and rescue official; IB Times (15 May 15) Southeast Asia Migrant Crisis: Over 700 Asylum Seekers Rescued Off Indonesia's Coast

¹⁷ Myanmar Times (18 May 15) Rains heap more misery on migrants as 'maritime ping-pong' continues; Myanmar Times (18 May 15) 'Maritime ping-pong' continues off Thai island

¹⁸ AFP (18 May 15) Boat people crisis: Indonesia gets tough; Bangkok Post (18 May 15) Indonesia turns away migrant boat

¹⁹ Reuters (22 May 15) Myanmar's Rakhine State denies persecution at root of migrant crisis

²⁰ AFP (20 May 15) Hundreds of migrants rescued from Indonesian sea; AFP (20 May 15) 426 rescued as Myanmar offers first help to migrants; RFA (21 May 15) Hundreds More Migrants Rescued off Indonesia

²¹ AFP (22 May 15) 1st Myanmar rescue operation saves 208 migrants; Reuters (24 May 15) Rohingya Muslims found on boat rescued by Myanmar navy

²² Reuters (29 May 15) Myanmar finds boat with 727 migrants off south coast; DVB (29 May 15) Burmese navy detains 727 boat people in Irrawaddy

²³ Reuters (16 May 15) Migrants in 'maritime ping-pong' as Asian nations turn them back; Bangkok Post (18 May 15) Indonesia turns away migrant boat

²⁴ The Guardian (17 May 15) South-east Asia migrant crisis: Burma faces blame over influx of boat people

²⁵ UNHCR (13 May 15) UNHCR alarmed at reports of boat pushbacks in South-east Asia

²⁶ AFP (14 May 15) Malaysia calls on Burma to stop oppressing Rohingyas

²⁷ US State Department (15 May 15) Daily Press Briefing

²⁸ Reuters (15 May 15) Myanmar must protect Muslim minority to end migration: U.N

²⁹ UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon (17 May 15) Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on the situation in the Andaman Sea and the Straits of Malacca

³⁰ UK FCO (19 May 15) FCO Minister urges Burma to address root causes of Rohingya boat crisis

³¹ EUbusiness (21 May 15) EU Parliament targets Thailand in boat people resolution; AP (21 May 15) EU urges Myanmar, Thailand to take action over Rohingya

³² AFP (22 May 15) US pushes 'citizenship' for Rohingya

³³ AP (28 May 15) Nobel laureates appeal for end to persecution of Rohingya

³⁴ Reuters (28 May 15) U.N. council has first-ever briefing on rights in Myanmar

ASEAN countries backtrack on decision to push back boats

The regime continued to deny responsibility for the boatpeople crisis and instead shifted blame on Bangladesh.³⁶ On 14 May, Arakan State Chief Minister Maung Maung Ohn denied that any of the boatpeople were from Burma.³⁷ On the same day, regime Deputy Foreign Minister Thant Kyaw stated that the regime would not discuss the flood of boatpeople if it was framed as a Rohingya issue.³⁸

In the first two weeks of May, after receiving an initial influx of over a thousand boatpeople on their shores, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand pushed back several boats, citing inability to accommodate so many people.³⁹ Following international condemnation and domestic pressure, several ASEAN countries backtracked on their decision to turn back the boats. On 19 May, the Philippines offered to help the Rohingya and Bangladeshi boatpeople.⁴⁰ On 20 May, both Malaysia and Indonesia announced they would no longer turn away boats – provided that the people on them could be resettled or repatriated within one year – and ordered search and rescue operations.⁴¹ The same day, the regime said it was prepared to offer humanitarian assistance to boatpeople.⁴² On 27 May, Thailand began air missions looking for boats in the Andaman Sea.⁴³

On 29 May, Thailand hosted a “Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean” in Bangkok to discuss the crisis. Officials from ASEAN, Australia, India, Bangladesh, Japan, the US, Switzerland, and international agencies including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) attended.⁴⁴ Ahead of the meeting, UNHCR estimated that about 2,500 boatpeople were still trapped at sea, and repeated its appeal for immediate action to rescue them.⁴⁵

While the meeting produced a list of proposals and recommendations, participants failed to reach a binding agreement with specific obligations.⁴⁶ The statement released at the end of the meeting did not mention Rohingya, instead using the terms “migrants” and “trafficking victims” without mentioning their origin.⁴⁷ Notably, Burma, Indonesia, and Malaysia sent low-level bureaucrats to the meeting.⁴⁸

UNHCR report shows increases in exodus

On 8 May, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released its report “Irregular Maritime Movements: January – March 2015.” The report found that since the beginning of 2015, approximately 25,000 people, including many Rohingya, had fled Burma and Bangladesh by boat, twice the number over the same period in 2014. The report estimated that at least 300 died during the crossings.⁴⁹

The report also found that most boatpeople transited through Thai jungle camps near the Malaysian border, where they were held in inhumane conditions until relatives were able to pay about US\$2,000 in ransom money for the victims to be transported to Malaysia.⁵⁰

³⁵ GNLM (31 May 15) Myanmar categorically rejects unbalanced, negative comments; AP (30 May 15) Myanmar rejects 'unbalanced' Rohingya remarks in Oslo

³⁶ AFP (11 May 15) Myanmar says boat people belong to Bangladesh, not its shores

³⁷ RFA (14 May 15) UN Alarmed at Southeast Asian Actions Toward Migrant Boats

³⁸ Irrawaddy (15 May 15) Burma Not Ready to Discuss Rohingya Exodus

³⁹ BBC (14 May 15) Why has Rohingya crisis blown up?

⁴⁰ AFP (19 May 15) Philippines says prepared to help boat people

⁴¹ AFP (20 May 15) Malaysia, Indonesia agree to shelter boat people; Reuters (21 May 15) Malaysia orders rescue of migrants, Myanmar to attend conference

⁴² CNA (20 May 15) Myanmar 'ready' to provide humanitarian assistance to boatpeople

⁴³ AFP (27 May 15) Malaysians clear graves as Thais comb seas for more boat people

⁴⁴ Reuters (29 May 15) Asia's migrant crisis meeting unlikely to yield solutions; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand (29 May 15) Summary: Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean

⁴⁵ Reuters (28 May 15) Over 2,500 migrants still adrift, U.N. says ahead of SE Asia meeting

⁴⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand (29 May 15) Summary: Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean; AP (29 May 15) No 'Miracle' Solution at Asian Migrant Crisis Meeting

⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand (29 May 15) Summary: Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean

⁴⁸ Bangkok Post (29 May 15) Finger-pointing, rebukes bog down migrant-crisis meet

⁴⁹ UNHCR (08 May 15) Irregular Maritime Movements: January – March 2015

⁵⁰ UNHCR (08 May 15) Irregular Maritime Movements: January – March 2015

Freedom for anti-Rohingya protests but not for media

On 27 May, more than 300 people protested in Rangoon against the international community and the UN's response for "blaming" Burma over the Rohingya boatpeople crisis.⁵¹ The protest, which took place ahead of a special meeting hosted by Thailand, [See *ASEAN countries backtrack on decision to push back boats*] also opposed international community pressure to take back the Rohingya.⁵²

Meanwhile on 30 May, Burma navy officials detained and turned back journalists trying to access an island near Hainggyi Island, Ngapudaw Township, Irrawaddy Division, where navy vessels were keeping 727 Rohingya boatpeople intercepted the previous day. Navy officials also questioned several international journalists, including from Associated Press and Reuters, forced them to delete photos and videos, and to sign documents saying they would not return.⁵³

Regime's persecution of Rohingya "consistent with genocide"

In May, two reports based on research in Arakan State found indicators of genocide in Burma.

- **1 May:** The US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) report "They Want Us All to Go Away: Early Warning Signs of Genocide in Burma" found that the Rohingya population was at grave risk for mass atrocities and genocide, and called for urgent action to prevent future atrocities.⁵⁴
- **16 May:** The International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) stated that the regime's ongoing persecution of Rohingya had driven tens of thousands to flee on boats. It also said that the current exodus was "a manifestation of persecution consistent with genocide."⁵⁵

In addition, on 20 May, in their "Peoples under Threat" index for 2015, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) ranked Burma eighth worldwide. MRG also found that the recent conflict in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, raised doubt about the regime's commitment to reform and that persecution of Rohingya was driving thousands to flee and fall into trafficking networks.

INSIDE BURMA

Fighting escalates in Kachin and Shan States, more attacks against civilians

In May, Tatmadaw clashes with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) forces continued in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, for the fourth consecutive month. The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) supported MNDAA in some instances. Tatmadaw troops also escalated attacks by launching air strikes against Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and TNLA forces in Kachin and Shan States. On 19 May, President Thein Sein formally extended the state of emergency imposed in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, for another 90 days.⁵⁶

Clashes in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State

- **11-12 May:** Tatmadaw troops attacked MNDAA forces based in Nan Tien Men hills, near Laogai, using mortar shells and rockets.⁵⁷
- **12 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with TNLA forces in Konkyan Township.⁵⁸
- **13 May:** Tatmadaw air force personnel used two fighter jets and two helicopters to bomb MNDAA forces in Nan Tien Men hills, near Laogai.⁵⁹
- **15 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with MNDAA forces on six occasions on the road linking Konkyan and Laogai towns.⁶⁰
- **16 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with MNDAA forces and launched two air strikes on the road linking Konkyan and Laogai towns.⁶¹

⁵¹ Reuters (27 May 15) Hundreds rally in Myanmar over 'boat people' crisis

⁵² DVB (28 May 15) Anti-Rohingya demonstrators take to the streets

⁵³ Reuters (31 May 15) Myanmar navy blocks journalists as migrant boat held in limbo; AFP (31 May 15) Reporters banned from Myanmar migrant island; AP (31 May 15) Myanmar Detains Journalists Covering Boat People 'Rescue'

⁵⁴ USHMM (01 May 15) Burma: A Bearing Witness Trip

⁵⁵ ISCI (16 May 15) Humanitarian crisis affecting Rohingya Muslims is the product of genocide

⁵⁶ Xinhua (19 May 15) Myanmar announces extension of state of emergency in Kokang region

⁵⁷ Myawady (13 May 15) Gov't troops control three more hill posts of Kokang insurgents; DVB (13 May 15) Kokang conflict intensifies north of Laogai

Clashes in Mandalay Division, Kachin and northern Shan States

- **4 May:** Tatmadaw troops from IB 23 clashed with TNLA forces in Hsipaw Township, Shan State.⁶²
- **4 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with TNLA Battalion 717 forces on the road connecting Mogok and Maymyo Towns, Mandalay Division.⁶³
- **4 May:** Tatmadaw troops from IB 23 clashed with unknown ethnic armed forces near Toan Sant Village, Hsipaw Township, Shan State.⁶⁴
- **4 May:** Tatmadaw troops launched air strikes against KIA forces in Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁶⁵
- **6 May:** Tatmadaw troops from LIBs 15 and 142 clashed with KIA Battalion 12 near Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁶⁶
- **7-8 May:** Tatmadaw ground forces from LIBs 86, 15, and 142 and two fighter jets attacked and bombed KIA Battalion 12 forces near Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁶⁷
- **9 May:** Tatmadaw troops from LIBs 15, 86, 142, 601, and 319, clashed with KIA Battalion 12 forces near Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁶⁸
- **10 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with TNLA forces in Hsenwi Township, Shan State.⁶⁹
- **10 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces in Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁷⁰
- **12 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalions 9, 38, and 39 forces in Muse Township, Shan State.⁷¹
- **14 May:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA Battalion 36 forces near Mung Lung Village, Muse Township, Shan State.⁷²
- **18 May:** Tatmadaw troops from LIBs 56, 86, 143, and 321 clashed with KIA Battalions 1 and 12 in Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁷³
- **18 May:** Tatmadaw troops from IB 123 attacked TNLA forces in Namphatka Village, Kutkai Township, Shan State.⁷⁴
- **20 May:** Tatmadaw ground forces from LIBs 15, 56, 86, and fighter jets attacked and launched air strikes on KIA Battalion 1 and 12 forces on La Ait Bum hill and in Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁷⁵
- **23 May:** Tatmadaw troops from LIBs 56 and 86 clashed with KIA Battalion 12 forces in La Ait Bum and Nam Hpalang Bum hills and Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁷⁶
- **24 May:** Tatmadaw ground forces from LIB 437 and fighter jets attacked and bombed KIA Battalion 12 forces in Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁷⁷

Tatmadaw forces continued to target civilians during military operations in Kachin and Shan States.

- **2 May:** A Tatmadaw soldier killed a civilian when he shot at a vehicle at a checkpoint near Pang Wan Village, Kunlong Township, Shan State.⁷⁸
- **4 May:** Tatmadaw troops from LIB 415 fired mortar shells at a school and homes, and shot at two Kachin civilians in Kap Maw Village, Hpakant Township, Kachin State.⁷⁹
- **8 May:** Tatmadaw troops from IBs 15 and 142 tortured and killed a 40-year-old man, and shot and injured a 30-year-old woman near Man Gau Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁸⁰

⁵⁸ Irrawaddy (13 May 15) As Fighting Rages in Northeast Burma, Govt Claims Territorial Gains; RFA (13 May 15) Myanmar Military Hilltop Offensive Kills Seven Kokang Fighters: State Media

⁵⁹ Kachinland News (13 May 15) Locals Say One Burmese Fighter Jet Shot Down

⁶⁰ Myawady (22 May 15) Military columns still combating Kokang insurgents

⁶¹ Myawady (22 May 15) Military columns still combating Kokang insurgents

⁶² SHAN (06 May 15) Burma Army base attacked by unknown armed group

⁶³ Kachinland News (06 May 15) Kap Maw Villagers Shelled by Burmese Army Troops; SHAN (06 May 15) Burma Army base attacked by unknown armed group

⁶⁴ SHAN (07 May 15) Burma Army battalion HQ attacked by unknown forces

⁶⁵ EMG (18 May 15) Myanmar Army and KIA continue fighting in Mansi

⁶⁶ Kachinland News (08 May 15) Myanmar Air Force Fighters Bomb KIA's 12th Battalion Positions near Nam Lim Pa

⁶⁷ Kachinland News (08 May 15) Myanmar Air Force Fighters Bomb KIA's 12th Battalion Positions near Nam Lim Pa; RFA (08 May 15) Myanmar Attacks Rebels With Fighter Jets in Kachin State

⁶⁸ Kachinland News (12 May 15) Battles Continue Unabated in Kachin and Northern Shan State

⁶⁹ Irrawaddy (13 May 15) As Fighting Rages in Northeast Burma, Govt Claims Territorial Gains; Myanmar Times (14 May 15) Tatmadaw pursues retreating Kokang forces; RFA (13 May 15) Myanmar Military Hilltop Offensive Kills Seven Kokang Fighters: State Media

⁷⁰ FBR (23 May 15) FBR Ranger Injured By Burma Army Mortar Fire and Airstrikes on Kachin Positions Photographed

⁷¹ Kachinland News (13 May 15) Locals Say One Burmese Fighter Jet Shot Down

⁷² Kachinland News (14 May 15) Battle Rages in KIA's 36th Battalion Area

⁷³ Kachinland News (18 May 15) Battle Rages Between KIA Troops and Burmese Army in Southern Kachin State

⁷⁴ DVB (20 May 15) Fresh clashes between TNLA and govt troops in Kutkai

⁷⁵ Kachinland News (20 May 15) Two Burmese Fighter Jets Launched Bombing Raids for the Second Time in a Day; Kachinland News (20 May 15) A Burmese Army Fighter Jet Bombs KIA Positions in Mansi Township

⁷⁶ Kachinland News (24 May 15) Battles Intensify in Southern Kachin State

⁷⁷ Kachinland News (24 May 15) Battles Intensify in Southern Kachin State

⁷⁸ DVB (07 May 15) Military to take action against trigger-happy soldier

⁷⁹ Kachinland News (06 May 15) Kap Maw Villagers Shelled by Burmese Army Troops

⁸⁰ FBR (15 May 15) Burma Army Tortures and Murders Injured Civilian and shoots woman as Kachin Refugees are Forced to Flee; KIC (16 May 15) Burma Army Kills Farmer, Attacks Village, Civilians Flee; Mizzima News (15 May 15) Farmer allegedly murdered by govt troops

- **10 May:** A stray mortar shell injured a civilian during a clash between Tatmadaw troops and KIA forces in Nam Lim Pa Village, Mansi Township, Kachin State.⁸¹
- **12 May:** Tatmadaw troops shot at a teenager on a motorcycle passing a checkpoint near Nawng Long Village, Muse Township, Shan State.⁸²
- **13 May:** At a Shan State border checkpoint with Yunnan Province, China, Tatmadaw troops detained three Chinese volunteer schoolteachers, on suspicion of spying for the Chinese Army.⁸³

Stray shells land in China, sparking backlash

In May, reports surfaced of shells from clashes in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, injuring civilians in China's Yunnan Province. On 14 May, two stray mortar shells hit Nansan, Yunnan Province, injuring five civilians.⁸⁴ This was the fifth incident of incursions into Chinese territory since March, when Tatmadaw air strikes landed in China on four separate occasions. [See *March 2015 Burma Bulletin*] The next day, in Beijing, Chinese FM Spokesperson Hua Chunying expressed strong dissatisfaction and lodged an official protest.⁸⁵ On 18 May, during a meeting in Naypyidaw, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing denied that the Tatmadaw was responsible for the shelling to Chinese Ambassador to Burma Yang Houlan.⁸⁶ On 20 May, in Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry demanded effective measures to prevent a recurrence.⁸⁷

In other conflict-related news:

- **1 May:** A Transnational Institute (TNI) report, "The Current State of Counternarcotics Policy and Drug Reform Debates in Myanmar" found that opium cultivation in the country has more than doubled since 2006, with civil war and military rule stimulating drug production and consumption.⁸⁸
- **6 May:** An Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) report, "Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence" found that Burma has the highest number of IDPs in Southeast Asia, with 645,300 people fleeing in 2014 due to conflict and violence.⁸⁹
- **9 May:** Regime ethnic affairs ministers, 64 political parties, seven ethnic armed groups, and other organizations met in Rangoon and issued a statement calling for political dialogue between the regime and ethnic armed groups prior to and after the 2015 general election.⁹⁰
- **13 May:** Over 1,000 Kachin civilians protested in Num Lang Village, Bhamo Township, Kachin State, demanding justice over the 13 April attempted rape of a 72-year-old woman by a Tatmadaw soldier.⁹¹
- **18 May:** Kyauktaw Township Police Station, Arakan State, reported that since 2 May, they had arrested 22 people under the Unlawful Association Act for their alleged ties to the Arakan Army.⁹²
- **26 May:** It was reported that police in Kyauktaw Township, Arakan State, arrested another eight people under the Unlawful Association Act for their alleged ties to the Arakan Army.⁹³

⁸¹ FBR (23 May 15) FBR Ranger Injured By Burma Army Mortar Fire and Airstrikes on Kachin Positions Photographed

⁸² DVB (15 May 15) Teenager allegedly shot by govt troops in Muse

⁸³ RFA (14 May 15) Myanmar Army Holds Three Chinese Nationals on Suspicion of Spying; DVB (16 May 15) Arrest of Chinese teachers highlights Kokang refugees' concerns

⁸⁴ DVB (15 May 15) Beijing protests as stray shells land in China; Reuters (15 May 15) China says five injured by artillery shells from Myanmar; Global Times (16 May 15) Shell harms five in Yunnan; Mizzima News (16 May 15) Chinese villagers injured by Myanmar shell fire; Irrawaddy (18 May 15) Military Blames Kokang Rebels for Artillery Fire in China

⁸⁵ DVB (15 May 15) Beijing protests as stray shells land in China

⁸⁶ Irrawaddy (18 May 15) Military Blames Kokang Rebels for Artillery Fire in China; Myawady (19 May 15) Commander-in-Chief: no artillery shells by Tatmadaw landed on Chinese territory; AP (19 May 15) Myanmar Army blames ethnic rebels for shelling inside China; DVB (19 May 15) Burmese military denies shelling China; EMG (20 May 15) Military chief urges China to tackle MNDAA

⁸⁷ Xinhua (20 May 15) China urges Myanmar to fully investigate shell falling; Reuters (20 May 15) China lodges protest with Myanmar after artillery shells injure five; Global Times (21 May 15) Beijing urges Myanmar to probe border blasts

⁸⁸ Transnational Institute (01 May 15) The Current State of Counternarcotics Policy and Drug Reform Debates in Myanmar

⁸⁹ Myanmar Times (08 May 15) Myanmar has region's most IDPs; IDMC (06 May 15) A record 38 million internally displaced worldwide as 30,000 people fled their homes each day in 2014

⁹⁰ IMNA (11 May 15) Political talks to be held before 2015 elections; Xinhua (10 May 15) Forum calls for holding political dialogue before election in Myanmar

⁹¹ Kachinland News (13 May 15) Kachin Civilians Held a Demonstration Against Attempted Rape and Murder

⁹² Narinjara News (19 May 15) 22 to be prosecuted for Arakan Army involvement; DVB (21 May 15) Arakan Army members detained in Kyauktaw

⁹³ Narinjara News (26 May 15) Eight More People Arrested for Arakan Army Involvement

Nationwide census data released, excluding 1.2 million

On 29 May, the regime Immigration and Population Ministry released the final results of Burma's controversial nationwide census, without disclosing data on ethnicity and religion.⁹⁴ The 2014 census data collection excluded 1.2 million people in Arakan, Kachin and Karen States, including Rohingya and other minorities.⁹⁵ [See *March 2014, April 2014 Burma Bulletin.*] Key findings included:⁹⁶

- The official population stands at 51,486,253, with women accounting for 51.78%.
- The rural population accounts for over 70% of the total population.
- Rangoon Division is the most populated administrative division, with 7.36 million inhabitants, followed by Irrawaddy Division with 6.18 million, and Mandalay Division with 6.16 million.
- The least populated states are Karenni State, with 280,000 people, and Chin State with 470,000.
- Sixty-two out of every 1,000 children born die before the age of one, with the infant mortality rate almost 40% higher in rural areas. Chin State has the highest fertility rate in Burma and also has a high infant mortality rate.
- Life expectancy is 63.9 years for men and 69.9 years for women. Half of the population is under the age of 27.
- Only 16% of households have electricity, with 69.2% depending on firewood. One in ten homes has running water. One third of households have a telephone, and 6% have internet access.

Parliament's 12th session continues

In May, Parliament continued its 12th regular session. Important developments included:

- **14 May:** National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann urged the regime Home Affairs Ministry to finish drafting a bill to protect the 2008 constitution, intended to replace the 1959 Constitution (Protection) Act.⁹⁷
- **15 May:** The National Parliament agreed to extend the state of emergency in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, Shan State for another 90 days.⁹⁸
- **20 May:** The People's Assembly rejected a proposal to revoke the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act, which has been used to detain political dissidents. The Act makes it illegal to "spread false news," "rally people," "jeopardize the state," or "make the public lose trust in the economy."⁹⁹
- **25 May:** The People's Assembly approved three election laws revoking the right of temporary ID card holders to vote in elections for the National Assembly and People's Assembly, and State and Divisional legislatures.¹⁰⁰
- **27 May:** The National Assembly approved the amended Interfaith Marriage Bill, which is part of the 'National Race and Religion Protection' package and would require Buddhist women and men of other faiths who wish to marry to apply for permission from local authorities. The amendment reduced prison sentences for violations to two years and a maximum fine of 1.5 million kyat (US\$1,500).
- **29 May:** The People's Assembly passed a bill authorizing the holding of a nationwide referendum on amending the 2008 constitution.¹⁰¹

President Thein Sein signs Population Control Bill into law

On 19 May, President Thein Sein signed into law the Population Control Bill, one of the four pieces of legislation making up the 'National Race and Religion Protection' package. The law will allow the

⁹⁴ Reuters (29 May 15) Myanmar releases census data, but excludes Rohingya minority

⁹⁵ DVB (29 May 15) Census a reminder of how far Burma has to go; Irrawaddy (29 May 15) Final Census Results Released, Sans Ethnic and Religious Data

⁹⁶ DVB (29 May 15) Census a reminder of how far Burma has to go; Irrawaddy (29 May 15) Final Census Results Released, Sans Ethnic and Religious Data

⁹⁷ Myanmar Times (15 May 15) Concern as Speaker calls for bill to 'protect' constitution; Myanmar Times (25 May 15) Constitution protection law to be based on 1959 predecessor

⁹⁸ GNLM (15 May 15) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves call to extend 'state of emergency' period

⁹⁹ DVB (21 May 15) Emergency Provisions Act endures abolition vote; Irrawaddy (21 May 15) Lower House Votes to Keep Emergency Provisions Act

¹⁰⁰ Irrawaddy (25 May 15) Lower House Passes Election Laws Nixing 'White Card' Suffrage

¹⁰¹ Myanmar Times (29 May 15) MPs slam constitution referendum bill

regime to designate areas, based on socioeconomic indicators, where women would have to wait 36 months between pregnancies.¹⁰² The methods of enforcement and penalties for those who violate the law have not been specified.¹⁰³

The bill was signed despite objections from rights groups and concerns raised by the international community that it could be used to repress religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Rohingya.¹⁰⁴

- **19 May:** The US State Department issued a statement expressing deep concern that the bill could provide legal basis for discrimination through “coercive, uneven application of birth control policies.”¹⁰⁵
- **21 May:** In a meeting with President Thein Sein, US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned that the bill could “exacerbate ethnic and religious divisions.”¹⁰⁶
- **25 May:** Two local women’s organizations objected to the law on the grounds that it “targets one religion, one population, in one area,” and could lead to increased tensions between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya.¹⁰⁷
- **27 May:** Three UN Special Rapporteurs – the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health Dainius Pûras, and the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsák – expressed alarm at the enactment of the bill, which Lee called a setback for women’s rights.¹⁰⁸

Daw Suu tours Mon, Kachin States

On 16-17 May, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi celebrated her father’s 100th birthday by touring Mon State and holding public rallies in Thaton, Moulmein, Mudon, and Thanbyuzayat Townships.¹⁰⁹ On 16 May, at a rally in Moulmein Township, Daw Suu said that if President Thein Sein was serious about peacefully solving Burma’s problems, he needed to hold another six-party dialogue.¹¹⁰ On 17 May, at a rally in Thaton Township, Daw Suu urged the public to nurture a union spirit above ethnic identity.¹¹¹

Daw Suu also visited Kachin State. On 23 May, she addressed thousands at a public rally in Putao Township, Kachin State, saying she wanted to amend the 2008 constitution through Parliament.¹¹²

In other political news:

- **13 May:** Regime Election Commission rejected the registration application of the Women’s Party, Burma’s first all-female political party, on the basis that its name is too general.¹¹³
- **20 May:** Regime Election Commission approved the registration of the Guiding Star Party.¹¹⁴
- **20 May:** Regime Election Commission approved the registration of the Red Shan (Tailai) and Northern Shan Ethnic Solidarity Party.¹¹⁵
- **26 May:** Regime Election Commission signed an MoU with the Carter Center, allowing international observers to monitor the 2015 general election.¹¹⁶

¹⁰² AP (23 May 15) Myanmar President signs off on contested Population Law; Myanmar Times (25 May 15) President signs off on population control law; AP (24 May 15) Burma President Signs Off on Contested Population Law

¹⁰³ Reuters (25 May 15) Rights groups slam Myanmar birth law as anti-Muslim

¹⁰⁴ Mizzima News (16 May 15) Rights group raps discriminatory draft population law; HRW (16 May 15) Burma: Reject Discriminatory Population Bill

¹⁰⁵ US State Department (19 May 15) Concerns about Burma’s Health Care for Population Control Bill

¹⁰⁶ AP (23 May 15) Myanmar President signs off on contested Population Law; Myanmar Times (25 May 15) President signs off on population control law; AP (24 May 15) Burma President Signs Off on Contested Population Law; The Guardian (25 May 15) Burma’s birth control law exposes Buddhist fear of Muslim minority;

¹⁰⁷ Reuters (25 May 15) Rights groups slam Myanmar birth law as anti-Muslim

¹⁰⁸ UNHRC (27 May 15) Myanmar: UN rights experts express alarm at adoption of first of four ‘protection of race and religion’ bills

¹⁰⁹ Myanmar Times (18 May 15) NLD chief woos voters in unofficial campaign

¹¹⁰ DVB (18 May 15) Suu Kyi calls for more dialogue with president

¹¹¹ EMG (17 May 15) Suu Kyi says country comes before NLD

¹¹² EMG (22 May 15) Suu Kyi calls for peaceful change

¹¹³ DVB (13 May 15) Women’s Party registration bid rejected by UEC

¹¹⁴ GNLM (21 May 15) Guiding Star Party allowed to register as political party

¹¹⁵ GNLM (21 May 15) Red Shan (Tailai) and Northern Shan Ethnic Solidarity Party allowed to register as political party

¹¹⁶ EMG (28 May 15) UEC, Carter Centre signs MoU to observe electoral process

Regime continues to sentence peaceful protesters and farmers

In May, the regime continued to imprison peaceful protesters and farmers across Burma.

- **4 May:** A court in Loikaw, Karenni State, sentenced six farmers to either 15 days in jail or a 500 kyat (US\$0.50) fine for an August 2014 plow protest against land confiscation by the Tatmadaw in the 1990s.¹¹⁷
- **15 May:** Rangoon's Dagon Township Court sentenced six activists – Naw Ohn Hla, Nay Myo Zin, Than Swe, Tin Htut Paing, Sein Htwe, and San San Win (aka Lay Lay) – to four years and four months in prison with hard labor. The court charged the activists under Articles 147, 353, 505(b) of the Criminal Code, and Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law. The charges stemmed from a demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon on 29 December 2014 against the police shooting of villager Khin Win near the Letpadaung (Monywa) copper mine project site in Salingyi Township, Sagaing Division.¹¹⁸
- **20 May:** Rangoon's Kyauktada Township Court sentenced three activists – Ba Myint, Htay Aung, and Lay Lay Myint – to jail terms of three months each. The court sentenced them under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law for a 3 February 2014 protest in front of Rangoon City Hall against offensive comments made by regime Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development Minister Ohn Myint to villagers in Magwe Township, Magwe Division, on 28 January 2014.¹¹⁹
- **22 May:** Bassein Township Court, Irrawaddy Division, sentenced university lecturer Wai Yan Aung to three months in prison with hard labor under Article 18 of the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law for leading a 5 March 2015 student protest in Bassein Township against the National Education Law.¹²⁰
- **26 May:** Meikhtila District Court, Mandalay Division, sentenced six farmers to five months in prison under Articles 447 and 427 of the Criminal Code for a plow protest in 2013 against land confiscated by the Tatmadaw in 1991. The court also sentenced three farmers' rights activists to two months in prison under Article 447 of the Criminal Code for their involvement in the protest.¹²¹

Military tribunal acquits two Tatmadaw soldiers over killing of journalist

On 8 May, the regime Human Rights Commission (HRC) released a statement disclosing that a secret military tribunal had acquitted two Tatmadaw soldiers who were facing charges for the 4 October 2014 killing of freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing (aka Par Gyi).¹²² [See *October 2014 Burma Bulletin*] The tribunal reached the verdict on 27 November 2014, before the regime HRC made its recommendation, in December 2014, that the case be tried in a civilian court.¹²³ The hearings for the civilian court case are ongoing.¹²⁴

Regime warns off journalists from ethnic summit, parliament

In May, the regime continued to restrict press freedom:

- **3 May:** The Tatmadaw Accurate Information Team issued a letter to the interim Myanmar Press Council threatening legal action against media outlets if they reported on statements released by the

¹¹⁷ DVB (04 May 15) 'Plough protest' supporters rally in Loikaw; Myanmar Times (07 May 15) Kayah farmers unite to fight convictions, land confiscations

¹¹⁸ Irrawaddy (15 May 15) Activists Get 4-Plus Years for Embassy Protest of Letpadaung Killing

¹¹⁹ Myanmar Times (22 May 15) Three activists jailed for protests

¹²⁰ Myanmar Times (25 May 15) Lecturer who led protests sentenced to three months; DVB (23 May 15) Teacher jailed for leading Irrawaddy protest 'column'

¹²¹ DVB (27 May 15) Nine sentenced for plough protest in Meikhtila

¹²² MNHRC (08 May 15) Statement of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission with regard to the case involving the death of Ko Aung Naing (a) Ko Aung Kyaw Naing (a) Ko Par Gyi Statement No (6/2015)

¹²³ Myanmar Times (12 May 15) Military acquittal raises fresh doubts about civilian inquest; MNHRC (02 Dec 14) Statement No. 3/2014 of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission on Death of Aung Kyaw Naing (aka Par Gyi)

¹²⁴ DVB (25 May 15) Fifth civilian court hearing in Par Gyi case

Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) during a summit of ethnic armed groups in Panghsang, Shan State.¹²⁵

- **26 May:** The National Parliament banned access to reporters to parliament's media room after photos of MPs falling asleep during parliamentary debates went viral on social media.¹²⁶ On 28 May, a parliamentary official announced that journalists would be allowed back from 1 June.¹²⁷
- **30 May:** Burma navy officials detained, questioned, and turned back journalists trying to interview Rohingya kept on an island near Haingyi Island, Ngapudaw Township, Irrawaddy Division, and forced them to delete photos and video footage [See above, *Freedom for anti-Rohingya protests but not for media*].¹²⁸

DISPLACEMENT

Burmese migrants face detention in Thailand

In May, Burmese migrants continued to face detention in Thailand.

- **4 May:** Thai police arrested 36 undocumented Burmese migrant workers trying to enter Thailand via Kanchanaburi Province.¹²⁹
- **5 May:** Thai police arrested 61 undocumented Burmese migrant workers trying to enter Thailand via Kanchanaburi Province.¹³⁰
- **12 May:** Thai authorities detained 76 undocumented Burmese migrants after stopping two trucks in Kanchanaburi Province.¹³¹
- **16 May:** Thai police detained ten undocumented Burmese migrant workers during a raid on a construction site in Samut Prakan Province.¹³²

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

US renews sanctions against Burma

In mid-May, the US renewed the existing National Emergencies Act for another year,¹³³ prohibiting new US investment in Burma or business with individuals in Burma involved in repression of the democracy movement.¹³⁴ US President Barack Obama informed Congress of the sanctions extension on 15 May, citing concerns for ongoing conflict and human rights abuses, particularly in ethnic minority areas and Arakan State, and the military's continued role in political and economic activities.¹³⁵

ECONOMY

Demonstrations against large-scale development, mining, and dam projects

In May, residents and community-based organizations (CBOs) held demonstrations against development projects and related land confiscation issues.

- **2 May:** Over 10,000 Shan farmers demonstrated in Mong Nai Township, Shan State, against land confiscation and pollution from mining, and demanded protection of natural resources.¹³⁶

¹²⁵ DVB (04 May 15) Media warned off covering Kokang statements; Irrawaddy (04 May 15) Burma Army Issues Media Gag Order on Kokang Rebel Statements

¹²⁶ DVB (27 May 15) Reporters banned after filming sleeping MPs

¹²⁷ DVB (28 May 15) Journalists readmitted following 'Nap-pyidaw' reports

¹²⁸ Reuters (31 May 15) Myanmar navy blocks journalists as migrant boat held in limbo; AFP (31 May 15) Reporters banned from Myanmar migrant island; AP (31 May 15) MYANMAR DETAINS JOURNALISTS COVERING BOAT PEOPLE 'RESCUE'

¹²⁹ Bangkok Post (06 May 15) 97 Myanmar migrants detained

¹³⁰ Bangkok Post (06 May 15) 97 Myanmar migrants detained

¹³¹ Bangkok Post (12 May 15) 76 illegal migrants crammed in 2 pickup trucks; The Nation (12 May 15) Two arrested for smuggling 77 Myanmar workers into Thailand

¹³² Bangkok Post (16 May 15) 85 illegal migrants held in Samut Prakan

¹³³ AP (15 May 15) Obama renews authority for US sanctions on Myanmar

¹³⁴ AP (15 May 15) Obama renews authority for US sanctions on Myanmar

¹³⁵ White House (15 May 15) Message – Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to Burma

¹³⁶ SHAN (06 May 15) Shan farmers voice concerns about environmental damage

- **5 May:** About 6,000 residents from villages in Ye Township, Mon State, protested in Inn Din Village, Ye Township, against the regime's agreement with Thai company Toyo-Thai to build a 1,280 megawatt coal-fired power plant there.¹³⁷ On 22 May, an economic revenue report for Inn Din Village revealed the annual revenue from local farming and fishing was 5.8 billion kyat (US\$5.29 million), significantly higher than the US\$1.5 million local development incentive Toyo-Thai offered to Inn Din residents.¹³⁸
- **6 May:** Residents of Kyaukpyu Township, Arakan State, expressed opposition to a proposed coal-fired power station, in a meeting with officials from US company MCM Energy, Korean conglomerate Daewoo, and the regime Electric Power Ministry, who plan to jointly build the power station.¹³⁹
- **10 May:** Residents of Taungtoo Township, Pegu Division, protested against US Treasury blacklisted company Asia World's newly built 40 megawatt hydropower project, for swamping surrounding areas and blocking commonly used waterways in the area.¹⁴⁰
- **10 May:** More than 100 residents and representatives from CBOs in Thandaung Township, Karen State, demonstrated at the site of the Thaukyekat dam in Thandaung Township, demanding an end to dam projects, the return of confiscated land, and building new bridges for transporting crops.¹⁴¹
- **16 May:** Karenni NGO Thaw-Thi-Kho Social Assistance Group issued a statement saying residents of Pasawng Township, Karenni State, voiced opposition to a mining company's proposal to test for tin and tungsten in the locality, for fear of negative impacts on farmland in the project area.¹⁴²

On 18 May, regime Deputy Electric Power Minister Aung Than Oo told the National Assembly that construction on the Tha Htay Chaung hydropower project in Sandoway [Thandwe], Arakan State, which began in 2003, would need another four years and an additional 230 billion kyat (US\$210 million) to be completed.¹⁴³ On 20 May, when asked in the National Assembly whether the regime would cancel any of the coal-based projects due to public opposition, Aung Than Oo said that the regime intended to increase Burma's reliance on coal-based projects to 33% of total energy generating capacity by 2030.¹⁴⁴

Rangoon factory workers' demands remain unmet

In May, negotiations for higher wages and better working conditions continued in Rangoon's industrial zones. On 1 May, thousands of factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar, Shwepyithar and Mingaladon Industrial Zones held a Workers' Day strike demanding that the minimum wage be increased to a daily rate of 5,000 kyat (US\$4.60) from 1,500 kyat (US \$1.40).¹⁴⁵ Another group of 500 workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone issued 11 demands, this time calling for the minimum wage to be raised to 5,600 kyat (US\$5.60) per day.¹⁴⁶

The last national minimum wage was set in 1993 at 20 kyat per day.¹⁴⁷ Although the Minimum Wage Law and subsequent by-laws were passed in 2013, the regime has delayed setting a national minimum wage, citing the need to do a survey on living costs.¹⁴⁸ The delay has left employers free to set their own minimum daily wages, currently between 900-1,300 kyat.¹⁴⁹

¹³⁷ Irrawaddy (05 May 15) Mass Protest Held Against Mon State Coal Plant Proposal; Myanmar Times (06 May 15) 'No coal, no Toyo-Thai': Mon villagers rally against plant; EMG (06 May 15) Yay residents stage protest against proposed Andin coal-fired power plant

¹³⁸ IMNA (24 May 15) Proposed coal-fired plant area's economic revenue inquest summary released

¹³⁹ RFA (06 May 15) Villagers Voice Opposition to Coal-Fired Power Plant in Western Myanmar; Narinjara News (12 May 15) Coal fired power plant planned for Arakan State

¹⁴⁰ DVB (11 May 15) Govt must act over dam project chaos, say Pegu villagers

¹⁴¹ KIC (19 May 15) Villagers Protest Hydropower Dam – "This Is Our Land – We Want It Back..."

¹⁴² Kantarawaddy Times (18 May 15) Residents reject mining company plans

¹⁴³ Myanmar Times (22 May 15) IGE's power project to face further delays

¹⁴⁴ Irrawaddy (21 May 15) Govt Defends Plan to Ramp-Up Reliance on Coal

¹⁴⁵ RFA (01 May 15) Burmese, Cambodians Mark International Workers' Day With Wage Protests

¹⁴⁶ DVB (02 May 15) Thein Sein addresses minimum wage concerns

¹⁴⁷ Myanmar Times (07 May 15) Miners seek K8000-a-day minimum wage

¹⁴⁸ GNLM (05 May 15) Step taken toward establishment of national minimum wage; GNLM (04 May 15) We are trying our best to begin political dialogue as soon as possible; Irrawaddy (19 Nov 14) As Lawmakers Raise Pay, Minimum Wage Law Languishes; Myanmar Times (07 May 15) Miners seek K8000-a-day minimum wage

¹⁴⁹ Xinhua (05 May 15) Myanmar seeks establishment of national minimum wage for workers

On 7 May, the regime Labor Tribunal Commission ordered Korean-owned Costec and Hong Kong-owned Ford Glory garment factories in Shwepyithar Industrial Zone to re-hire 158 striking workers within 30 days.¹⁵⁰ The workers, who also took part in the 1 May demonstration, first began striking in February [See *February 2015 Burma Bulletin*]. However, on 14 May, Costec’s owner submitted an appeal to the Commission to overturn the 7 May ruling.¹⁵¹

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN MAY

4	Save the Children releases their annual “State of the World’s Mothers” index, ranking Burma 158th out of 179, the lowest rank for any ASEAN country.
15	State-owned Myanmar Railways signs a 2.4 billion yen (US\$20 million) contract with Japan’s Mitsubishi and Hitachi to supply and install railway signaling systems in Burma, using grant aid from JICA.
21	A 63-year-old farmer in Taunggyi Township, Shan State, sets himself on fire in protest against the seizure of his land by the Tatmadaw.
25	In Naypyidaw, the Central Land Use Management Committee reports to Parliament that it processed 7,697 of the 14,499 land-grab complaints between November 2013 and May 2015.
27	Wikileaks releases 904 cables from the US Embassy in Rangoon from 1978, providing insight to the deteriorating political and economic conditions inside Burma under Gen Ne Win.
29	In a press release, the Central Bank announces that it will issue new 10,000 kyat notes and put them into circulation on 1 July, and that the new notes will not affect the status of the last ones issued in 2012.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN MAY

“**Monthly Chronology of Burma’s Political Prisoners for April 2015**”, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) <http://goo.gl/VjCqmi>

“**Peoples under Threat 2015**”, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) <http://goo.gl/tGajbN>

“**Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence**”, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) <http://goo.gl/VYgOxS>

“**They Want Us All to Go Away – Early Warning Signs of Genocide in Burma**”, US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) <http://goo.gl/0ZnBky>

“**South-east Asia Irregular Maritime Movements: January – March 2015**” UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <http://goo.gl/5PQCQz>

“**Myanmar: Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue: 1 to 30 April**”, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) <http://goo.gl/2qr0be>

“**Myanmar Quarterly Monitoring report, January-March 2015**”, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) <https://goo.gl/M82V4Y>

“**Keeping the Faith: A Study of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in ASEAN**”, Human Rights Resource Centre (HRRC) <http://goo.gl/xMx2Mv>

“**Peace for whom? The institutionalization of gender inequality in Myanmar’s reform processes**”, Swedish Burma Committee <http://goo.gl/bEo0SK>

“**The Current State of Counternarcotics Policy and Drug Reform Debates in Myanmar**”, Transnational Institute (TNI) <http://goo.gl/NQpH1p>

“**The Challenge of Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia and Oceania**”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) <http://goo.gl/6HGZZ7>

“**Marching to the Same Tune?**”, Burma Partnership <http://goo.gl/gIRHIX>

¹⁵⁰ Myanmar Times (14 May 15) Arbitration council orders Costec to rehire workers; EMG (14 May 15) Garment labourers ordered to resume work

¹⁵¹ EMG (20 May 15) Owner of Costec garment factory refuses to let workers return to work