

# 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 118

October 2016

- The Tatmadaw targets Rohingya and Muslim civilians during a manhunt against unidentified attackers who killed nine police in Maungdaw, Arakan/Rakhine State.
- The Tatmadaw clashes for over 2 days with the Shan State Army-South, a ceasefire agreement signatory, displacing 2,000.
- The Tatmadaw arrests 49 Kachin youth for attending an agricultural training.
- The Tatmadaw is accused of involvement in drug trade, hosting drug labs.
- By-elections are set for April 2017.
- The Parliament abolishes the Emergency Provisions Act but refuses to review detentions.
- Four National Human Rights Commissioners resign over underage maid scandal.
- A Dutch tourist is jailed for three months for disrupting a Buddhist sermon.
- Three people are charged for insulting Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Chindwin River ferry sinking kills 72.
- President Obama officially lifts the economic sanctions against Burma.

## KEY STORY

### Northern Arakan state becomes military "operation zone"

On 9 October, fresh clashes erupted in Arakan/Rakhine State when unknown assailants attacked three police outposts in Maungdaw Township, northern Arakan State, leaving nine police officers dead.<sup>1</sup> Government forces declared Maungdaw an "operation zone" and began a manhunt. The Office of the President later identified the attackers as 400 members of Aqa Mul Mujahidin, an Islamic organization active in Maungdaw.<sup>2</sup> On October 12, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi said that the government would conduct "a fair and square [investigation] under the rule of law".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Myanmar Times (10 Oct 16) Rakhine border raids kill nine police officers

<sup>2</sup> Myanmar Times (18 Oct 16) 'No choice but to shoot them,' official says of Rakhine manhunt for militants

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Media and local rights groups reported numerous human rights violations against Rohingya civilians after the attack. The Tatmadaw killed at least 33 people during “clearance operations”.<sup>4</sup> Residents and community leaders in Maungdaw Township reported that many of those killed were civilians and not attackers, as the government claimed.<sup>5</sup> Fifty-one people were also arrested for alleged links to the attack.<sup>6</sup> At least two deaths in custody were reported.<sup>7</sup> Hundreds of homes and mosques were burnt down in the villages of Kyet Yoe Pyin, Pyaung Pyit (Ngar Sar Kyu), and Wa Peik (Kye Kan Pyin), in Maungdaw district.<sup>8</sup> State security forces raped or sexually assaulted dozens of Rohingya Muslims during counter-insurgency operations.<sup>9</sup> Aid agencies estimated that up to 15,000 people were displaced.<sup>10</sup> The United Nations’ World Food Programme reported that the lockdown in the area prevented the delivery of rations to tens of thousands of villagers in northern Arakan State.<sup>11</sup>

On 24 October, three UN Special Rapporteurs<sup>12</sup> jointly called on the Burmese government to address the serious violations of human rights in northern Arakan State.<sup>13</sup> Spokesperson Zaw Htay of the Office of the President dismissed reports of violations as just “accusations”. He added that authorities denied access to those seeking to deliver aid to the displaced northern Arakan residents because they wanted to “push them back” to their villages.<sup>14</sup>

On 26 October, the Arakan State Parliament formed an investigation commission composed of members from the Arakan National Party (ANP), Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), and National League for Democracy (NLD).<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the commission was “to help the indigenous people who fled from the clashes”.<sup>16</sup> The ANP uses the word “indigenous” to refer only to the Arakanese Buddhists in the region, while excluding the Muslim population.<sup>17</sup>

## DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

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### Parliament abolishes Emergency Provisions Act; President signs Investment Law

On 4 October, the Union Parliament voted to abolish the Emergency Provisions Act,<sup>18</sup> a law frequently used by the former military regime to jail political activists. The Act gave authorities the ability to detain civilians without filing official charges. The repeal came into force two weeks after members of both houses of the Union Parliament gave their approval.<sup>19</sup> Campaigners urged the government to review the convictions of those who were jailed under the Act.<sup>20</sup> However, unnamed government spokespersons told media that the repeal was not retroactive and that the convictions of the 20 Muslims jailed for allegedly plotting terrorist activities were not being reviewed.<sup>21</sup> The 18 men, 1 woman and 15-

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<sup>3</sup> Myanmar Times (13 Oct 16) Questioning of suspects ongoing as state counsellor addresses Rakhine turmoil

<sup>4</sup> Myanmar Times (17 Oct 17) Death toll rises, more arrests made in troubled northern Rakhine State

<sup>5</sup> Reuters (21 Oct 16) Residents say civilians among dead in Myanmar army lockdown

<sup>6</sup> Reuters (28 Oct 16) Myanmar probes Rohingya Muslim's death in custody during military operation

<sup>7</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) 19 more suspected attackers arrested over two days in northern Rakhine; Mizzima (27 Oct 16) Suspected border police attacker dies in custody

<sup>8</sup> Myanmar Times (24 Oct 16) Calls grow for humanitarian access to troubled northern Rakhine State; Mizzima (31 Oct 16)

Satellite images show fire-damaged villages in Rakhine state: HRW

<sup>9</sup> Myanmar Times (27 Oct 16) Dozens of rapes reported in northern Rakhine State; Reuters (28 Oct 16) Exclusive: Rohingya women say Myanmar soldiers raped them amid crackdown on militants

<sup>10</sup> Reuters (25 Oct 16) U.N. envoys urge Myanmar to probe killings, arrests in Muslim-majority region

<sup>11</sup> New York Times (19 Oct 16) In Western Myanmar, a Lockdown and Fears of More Violence; DVB (19 Oct 16) UN aid not reaching Arakan, as lockdown continues

<sup>12</sup> The statement was made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur on summary executions, Agnes Callamard, and the UN Special Rapporteur on internally displaced persons, Chaloka Beyani

<sup>13</sup> OHCHR (24 Oct 16) UN experts urge Myanmar to address serious violations of human rights in northern Rakhine State

<sup>14</sup> Irrawaddy (25 Oct 16) President's Office Rejects UN Call for Action on Alleged Rights Abuses in Arakan State

<sup>15</sup> Irrawaddy (26 Oct 16 ) Arakan State Parliament Forms Commission to Investigate Maungdaw Attacks

<sup>16</sup> Irrawaddy (26 Oct 16 ) Arakan State Parliament Forms Commission to Investigate Maungdaw Attacks

<sup>17</sup> Irrawaddy (26 Oct 16 ) Arakan State Parliament Forms Commission to Investigate Maungdaw Attacks

<sup>18</sup> New York Times (5 Oct 16) Myanmar Repeals 1950 Law Long Used to Silence Dissidents

<sup>19</sup> Reuters (5 Oct 16) Myanmar asked to review disputed terrorism case after law reform

<sup>20</sup> Reuters (5 Oct 16) Myanmar asked to review disputed terrorism case after law reform; Mizzima (18 Oct 16) Interfaith activists should be released: NGO

<sup>21</sup> Reuters (5 Oct 16) Myanmar asked to review disputed terrorism case after law reform

year old boy were arrested in August 2014 while travelling to a wedding in eastern Shan State, and sentenced to 14 years' jail in January 2015.<sup>22</sup>

On 18 October, President Htin Kyaw signed the 2016 Myanmar Investment Law which essentially combines the Foreign Investment Law and the Myanmar Citizens' Investment Law. Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration (DICA) Dir Gen Aung Naing Oo said that the by-laws for the new law should be drafted by January 2017.<sup>23</sup> Under the new law, tax incentives will only be enjoyed by those who invest into crucial sectors and underdeveloped areas of the country.<sup>24</sup>

### **Union Elections Commission sets by-elections for April 1**

On 11 October, the Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that parliamentary by-elections in 18 constituencies will be held on April 1, 2017.<sup>25</sup> The by-election was called to fill 19 parliamentary seats left vacant by the exclusion of several constituencies from the 2015 general elections, and the appointment of some MPs to cabinet positions.<sup>26</sup> The two major political parties—the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)—confirmed that their parties will compete for all the vacant seats in the Union and regional parliaments.<sup>27</sup>

On 19 October, UEC announced that candidates must register their candidacy from 28 November to 7 December.<sup>28</sup> The UEC will then release the final candidate list on 2 January 2017. The campaign period will run from 30 January until 30 March. The voter lists will be posted at local election commission branch offices from February 1 to 14 to allow voters to double check their inclusion and details.<sup>29</sup>

## **ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND CONFLICT**

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### **Aung San Suu Kyi calls for more signatories to the ceasefire agreement**

On 15 October, during the one-year anniversary of the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA), both Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-Chief Sen Gen Min Aung Hlaing called for more ethnic armed groups to sign the NCA before the national-level political dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Regulations within the NCA allow only signatories to participate in the national-level political dialogue, despite calls from both signatory and non-signatory groups that all groups should be included.<sup>31</sup>

On 28 October, at a two-day meeting of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) in Naypyidaw, committee chair Aung San Suu Kyi announced that she intended to convene the first national-level political dialogues as early as November.<sup>32</sup> UPDJC agreed to begin preparations for a series of state-level political dialogues only in states where ethnic signatories to the NCA are based, including Shan, Karen and Chin States.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, on 16 October, the Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN)—acting as the negotiation body of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an alliance composed of the seven non-signatories to the NCA—reached agreement with the government's peace commission on four out of eight points that it wanted fulfilled before committing to the NCA.<sup>34</sup> DPN delegates said that they

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<sup>22</sup> Reuters (5 Oct 16) Myanmar asked to review disputed terrorism case after law reform

<sup>23</sup> Eleven (28 Oct 16) Economists refined investment law

<sup>24</sup> Myanmar Times (27 Oct 14) New law just a starting point for firms: experts

<sup>25</sup> Myanmar Times (12 Oct 16) UEC announces April 2017 by-election date

<sup>26</sup> Myanmar Times (12 Oct 16) UEC announces April 2017 by-election date

<sup>27</sup> Irrawaddy (28 Oct 16) NLD and USDP to Contest All Seats in By-Elections

<sup>28</sup> Myanmar Times (20 Oct 16) UEC lays out official by-election schedule

<sup>29</sup> Myanmar Times (31 Oct 16) Voter lists to go on display first two weeks of February

<sup>30</sup> Mizzima (22 Oct 16) Myanmar gov't making efforts to pave way for non-signatory armed groups to sign ceasefire accord;

Myanmar Times (17 Oct 16) Ceasefire anniversary prompts calls for more signatories

<sup>31</sup> Mizzima (22 Oct 16) Myanmar gov't making efforts to pave way for non-signatory armed groups to sign ceasefire accord

<sup>32</sup> Myanmar Times (31 Oct 16) First national-level dialogues coming next month: state counsellor

<sup>33</sup> Irrawaddy (31 Oct 16) State-level Political Dialogue Planned for November

<sup>34</sup> Myanmar Times (17 Oct 16) Non-signatories, gov't make strides toward joining NCA

reached agreement on extractive resource issues, as well as on cooperation between the government and ethnic armed groups in assisting local populations.<sup>35</sup>

### **Tatmadaw clashes with ceasefire agreement signatory Shan State-Army South**

On 1 October, the Tatmadaw clashed with the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), one of the eight signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA).<sup>36</sup> The fighting lasted for over two days in Mong Kung Township in central Shan State.<sup>37</sup> The clashes forced over 2,000 locals from their homes, with two monasteries providing temporary shelter.<sup>38</sup> SSA-S spokesperson Col Sai La said that the Tatmadaw provoked the firefight when it attacked a drug rehabilitation camp managed by local villagers in an area operating under SSA-S.<sup>39</sup>

### **Tensions continue in eastern Shan State; UWSA says there is nothing to worry about**

On 28 September, Shan Herald Agency for News reported that around 600 United Wa State Army (UWSA) troops entered an area controlled by its supposed ally, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), also known as the Mongla group.<sup>40</sup> On 24 October, the National Reconciliation and Peace Center—the Burmese government body in charge of facilitating the peace process—sent a letter to the UWSA asking them to withdraw its troops.<sup>41</sup> Fearing the outbreak of fighting, dozens of residents in the town of Mongyang fled south to Kengtung, the administrative capital of eastern Shan State.<sup>42</sup>

On 21 October, the UWSA said that reports of it commandeering posts from the NDAA were based on a “misunderstanding” and they were merely conducting military exercises in a region belonging to their allies, with whom they enjoyed “brotherly relations”.<sup>43</sup>

### **KNU and DKBA splinter group plan to meet and discuss reunion**

On 4 October, the biggest ethnic Karen/Kayin armed group, the Karen National Union (KNU), invited the splinter group Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA-Buddhist) to rejoin them, to strengthen prospects for peace.<sup>44</sup> This invitation is qualified by a condition requiring the splinter group to renounce a statement it made on 16 January announcing its formation as an independent actor among Burma/Myanmar’s myriad ethnic groups.<sup>45</sup> The splinter group broke away from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA-Benevolent) early this year. Ko Kyaw Kyaw, a negotiator for DKBA-Buddhist said his group would meet the KNU in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State, on a date to be confirmed.<sup>46</sup>

### **Other developments:**

**1 Oct:** The Tatmadaw fired an artillery round on Puwang village, Muse Township, Northern Shan State, killing a two-year old girl and injuring two other children, but refused to take responsibility.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Myanmar Times (17 Oct 16) Non-signatories, govt make strides toward joining NCA

<sup>36</sup> Irrawaddy (4 Oct 16) Burma Army Clashes with Nationwide Ceasefire Signatory Group in Shan State; RFA (04 Oct 16) Thousands Flee as Fighting Erupts in Myanmar’s Shan State

<sup>37</sup> Irrawaddy (4 Oct 16) Burma Army Clashes with Nationwide Ceasefire Signatory Group in Shan State; RFA (04 Oct 16) Thousands Flee as Fighting Erupts in Myanmar’s Shan State

<sup>38</sup> Irrawaddy (4 Oct 16) Burma Army Clashes with Nationwide Ceasefire Signatory Group in Shan State

<sup>39</sup> DVB (04 Oct 16) Shans claim Burma army attacked drug rehab centre

<sup>40</sup> Myanmar Times (5 Oct16) Wa and Mongla reported to clash as tensions in Shan continue to escalate

<sup>41</sup> Irrawaddy (24 Oct 16) Tensions Rise as UWSA Refuses to Abandon Mongla Posts

<sup>42</sup> Irrawaddy (25 October 16) Residents Flee as Military Tensions Flare in Eastern Shan State

<sup>43</sup> Irrawaddy (25 October 16) Residents Flee as Military Tensions Flare in Eastern Shan State

<sup>44</sup> Myanmar Times (6 October 16) KNU entreaty seeks to bring splinter group into the fold; Irrawaddy (5 October 16) KNU invites DKBA Splinter Group to ‘Reunite’ Under Its Leadership

<sup>45</sup> Myanmar Times (6 October 16) KNU entreaty seeks to bring splinter group into the fold; Irrawaddy (5 October 16) KNU invites DKBA Splinter Group to ‘Reunite’ Under Its Leadership

<sup>46</sup> Myanmar Times (27 Oct 16) KNU, Karen splinter group to talk reunion

<sup>47</sup> Myanmar Times (03 Oct16) Toddler killed as fighting rages between Tatmadaw and KIA; The Irrawaddy (03 Oct 16) Tatmadaw Takes No Responsibility in Shelling Death of Young Girl, Locals Say

**6 Oct:** The Tatmadaw launched simultaneous air and ground attacks on the frontline outpost of Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Myitkyina District, Kachin State, with two fighter jets and artillery strikes.<sup>48</sup> The attacks caused an unknown number of casualties.

**19 Oct:** The joint forces of the Tatmadaw and the Border Guard Force (BGF) clashed against DKBA-Buddhist in Kawkareik Township of Karen/Kayin State.<sup>49</sup> Four members of the splinter group and one civilian were reported to have been injured.<sup>50</sup>

**26 Oct:** The Tatmadaw shot and killed an ethnic Shan man from Mong Hsu Township in Central Shan State. Local source Nang Seng Hein said that the police tried to stop him at a checkpoint, but he could not control his bike and drove through. He was then shot at the next military checkpoint.<sup>51</sup>

## HUMAN RIGHTS

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### Four MNHRC members resign over underage maid scandal

On 6 October, the Office of the President announced that four members of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) submitted their resignations.<sup>52</sup> This was after a public backlash over MNHRC's mishandling of the underage maid torture case by brokering a financial settlement instead of referring the case for criminal charges [see *September Bulletin*]. The four commissioners who resigned are Zaw Win, Nyan Zaw, Than Nwe and Mya Mya.

On 20 October, one of the teenage victims, Ma Tin Tin Khine, testified in court about the abuses she suffered and witnessed.<sup>53</sup> On 27 October, U Kyaw Soe, a neighbor of the Ava Tailoring shop told the court that everyone in the neighborhood knew that the teenage maids were being abused but no one intervened because the dispute was considered to be an "internal household" issue. Twelve more witnesses are expected to testify for the prosecution.<sup>54</sup>

### Mandalay court sends Dutch tourist to prison for disrupting Buddhist sermon

On 6 October, a court in Mandalay sentenced a Dutch tourist to three months in prison after he unplugged an amplifier broadcasting a Buddhist sermon.<sup>55</sup> Dutch tourist Klaas Haytema told the court he unplugged the sound system because the noise was disturbing his sleep in his hotel room nearby and he was unaware that a religious ceremony was in progress.<sup>56</sup>

### Tatmadaw detains 49 Kachin youth for attending agricultural training

On 11 October, the Tatmadaw arrested 49 Kachin youth under the Unlawful Association Act after a military official accused them of attending a militia training in the Kachin Independence Army-controlled border town of Mai Ja Yang.<sup>57</sup> The group was arrested on their way home to Puta-o Township after attending an agricultural training in Mai Ja Yang and was eventually detained in Bhamo Township.<sup>58</sup> If found guilty, they will face a minimum of two years in prison.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> DVB (10 Oct 16) Burmese military deployed air strikes, say Kachin rebels

<sup>49</sup> Irrawaddy (20 Oct 16) DKBA Splinter Group Clashes with Burma Army, Casualties Reported

<sup>50</sup> Irrawaddy (20 Oct 16) DKBA Splinter Group Clashes with Burma Army, Casualties Reported

<sup>51</sup> Irrawaddy (27 Oct 16) Civilian Shot Dead at Shan State Military Checkpoint

<sup>52</sup> Myanmar Times (06 Oct 16) Amid backlash on tailoring case, rights commission members resign

<sup>53</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) Teenage maid is first to testify in Ava tailoring shop abuse trial

<sup>54</sup> Myanmar Times (28 Oct 16) Why didn't they intervene? Witness tells court neighbourhood knew about child abuse

<sup>55</sup> Reuters (6 October 16) Myanmar court jails Dutchman for three months for disrupting Buddhist sermon

<sup>56</sup> DVB (04 Oct 16) Rage against the machine – Dutchman faces 2 years for insulting Buddhism

<sup>57</sup> Mizzima (14 Oct 16) 49 detained in Kachin State under Unlawful Associations Act; Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) 49 Kachin youths detained after attending agricultural training

<sup>58</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) 49 Kachin youths detained after attending agricultural training

<sup>59</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) 49 Kachin youths detained after attending agricultural training



## NLD files charges against three people for insulting Aung San Suu Kyi

The National League for Democracy (NLD) in Naypyidaw filed charges against two local villagers, Htay Myint and Aung Myint Than, for allegedly insulting the party's chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>60</sup> The two men were accused of violations of the Penal Code—Section 249 for obscene language, 500 for defamation, and 505(b) for causing public alarm. During a drinking session, the two men shouted profanities against Aung San Suu Kyi and called her an “[expletive] hag” who deserved to be murdered. They were apparently angry over a rise in commodity prices.<sup>61</sup>

In a separate case, Lin Lae Lae Hlaing, 18, filed a case against Sandi Myint Aung, 19, for her Facebook posts that were allegedly insulting Aung San Suu Kyi. Sandi Myint Aung was charged with violation of Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.<sup>62</sup>

### Other developments:

**20 Oct:** The World Justice Project ranked **Burma/Myanmar 98th out of the 113 countries** studied by the project for **its annual Rule of Law Index**.<sup>63</sup> Last year, Burma ranked 92<sup>nd</sup> out of 102.<sup>64</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN

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### Sagaing ferry disaster kills 73

On 15 October, a privately-owned ferry sank on the Chindwin River in Sagaing Division's Kani Township while transporting passengers from Homalin to Monywa.<sup>65</sup> The authorities announced on 21 October that the death toll had reached 73, with 159 passengers rescued alive, and 64 people reported missing by the survivors.<sup>66</sup>

Survivors said the ferry was overloaded with both passengers and cargo. The ferry was believed to have carried 300 people when it was licensed to carry only 36 passengers.<sup>67</sup> The survivors added that the Ya Ka Sa—a Burmese acronym for the private vessel supervisory committee—was aware of the ferry's overloading but chose to ignore it.<sup>68</sup> The police arrested four crew members of the vessel.<sup>69</sup>

### Other developments:

**27 Oct:** A 32-year old pregnant foreign woman living in Rangoon/Yangon was found to be infected with the Zika virus. This is the **first confirmed case of Zika in Burma/Myanmar**.<sup>70</sup>

## NATURAL RESOURCES

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### Developments:

**10 Oct:** A **giant jade, weighing between 175 to 210 metric tonnes, was found** from the Hpakant jade mines in Kachin State.<sup>71</sup> The government's Myanmar Gems Enterprise fixed the price of the jade at around Kyat 7 billion (around US\$6 million) but some international observers believe that it may be

<sup>60</sup> DVB (07 Oct 16) Two men charged for obscene rant against Suu Kyi

<sup>61</sup> DVB (07 Oct 16) Two men charged for obscene rant against Suu Kyi

<sup>62</sup> Eleven (30 Oct 16) Teen charged over Suu Kyi FB post

<sup>63</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) WJP study: Rule of law improves slightly, still 98th out of 113

<sup>64</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) WJP study: Rule of law improves slightly, still 98th out of 113

<sup>65</sup> Irrawaddy (17 Oct 16) Sagaing Ferry Accident Kills at Least 29

<sup>66</sup> Reuters (21 Oct 16) Death toll hits 73 in Myanmar ferry disaster; Eleven (21 Oct 16) Ferry death toll reaches 72

<sup>67</sup> Myanmar Times (20 Oct 16) Supervisory body knew of Sagaing ferry's overloading: survivor; Irrawaddy (18 Oct 16) Arrest Warrant Issued for Helmsman of Capsized Chindwin Ferry

<sup>68</sup> Myanmar Times (20 Oct 16) Supervisory body knew of Sagaing ferry's overloading: survivor

<sup>69</sup> Myanmar Times (18 Oct 16) Four arrests, more bodies found after Chindwin ferry disaster

<sup>70</sup> Reuters (27 Oct 16) Myanmar confirms first case of Zika virus infection: state TV

<sup>71</sup> DVB (14 Oct 16) 210-ton slab of jade unearthed in Hpakant

worth as much as US\$170 million.<sup>72</sup> The government announced that the jade will have to stay where it is for now because its owners do not have adequate equipment to move it.<sup>73</sup>

**17 Oct:** Four **Chinese nationals were arrested for illegal silica mining** in Namkham Township in Northern Shan State. The four Chinese men were found with two trucks transporting silica.<sup>74</sup>

## DISPLACEMENT

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### Burmese refugees return from Thailand

On 24 October, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriated 68 Karen/Kayin State refugees from camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border to Myawaddy, Kawkareik, and Kyainseikgyi Townships in Karen State.<sup>75</sup> This is the first official group voluntary repatriation from the more than 120,000 registered Burmese refugees living in Thailand for over 20 years.

The UNHCR called this movement a “milestone” because it is the first time both the Thai and Burmese governments gave their consent for repatriation.<sup>76</sup> However, some rights groups pointed out that the repatriation is still too early considering the recent clashes between a splinter group of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army against the Border Guard Force and the Tatmadaw [see *September Bulletin*], and the continued landmine planting in Burma.<sup>77</sup>

### Other developments:

**10 Oct:** A US Department of State study showed that **Burmese nationals made up the third largest group of refugees who resettled in the US** from 15 October 2015 to September 2016.<sup>78</sup> More than 72 percent of the resettled refugees were women and children.<sup>79</sup>

## MILITARY

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### Tatmadaw hosting 10 jungle drug labs

On 27 October, the Lahu National Development Organisation (LNDO) reported that the Tatmadaw contributed to the growth of the drug trade by backing a number of local militia groups involved in the production of heroin and methamphetamine in eastern Shan State.<sup>80</sup> The report "Naypyitaw's Drug Addiction" said that the Tatmadaw profited from joint investments in drug refineries and transporting refined drugs to distributors, in addition to hosting at least 10 mobile jungle labs for syndicates producing heroin and methamphetamine pills.<sup>81</sup>

## ECONOMY

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### US officially lifts sanctions on Burma

On 7 October, US President Barack Obama signed an executive order formally lifting the US sanctions on Burma/Myanmar,<sup>82</sup> following a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi during her September trip to Washington [see *September Bulletin*]. After the sanctions were lifted, the US Treasury removed over

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<sup>72</sup> Irrawaddy (26 Oct 16) Government Fixes Price for Massive Jade Stone at US\$6 Million

<sup>73</sup> Mizzima (21 Oct 16) Myanmar giant jade stone 'too big to move'

<sup>74</sup> Irrawaddy (19 Oct 16) Chinese Nationals Arrested in Northern Shan State for Illegal Mining

<sup>75</sup> Irrawaddy (25 Oct 16) First Group of Burmese Refugees in Thailand Repatriated

<sup>76</sup> Irrawaddy (25 Oct 16) First Group of Burmese Refugees in Thailand Repatriated

<sup>77</sup> Myanmar Times (21 Oct 16) As 96 refugees prepare to return from Thailand, Karen groups say it is too early for repatriation

<sup>78</sup> Myanmar Times (10 Oct 16) Myanmar refugees comprise third-largest bloc admitted to US

<sup>79</sup> Myanmar Times (10 Oct 16) Myanmar refugees comprise third-largest bloc admitted to US

<sup>80</sup> Mizzima (28 Oct 16) Lahu report exposes militia's involvement in the drug trade in eastern Shan State; Irrawaddy (27 Oct 16) Report Links Increased Militarization and Drug Trade in Eastern Shan State

<sup>81</sup> Irrawaddy (27 Oct 16) Report Links Increased Militarization and Drug Trade in Eastern Shan State

<sup>82</sup> Myanmar Times (10 Oct 16) US officially terminates sanctions order

100 individuals, crony businessmen, and military-related businesses from its blacklist, including Burma's former dictator Snr-Gen Than Shwe.<sup>83</sup>

### Other developments:

**7 Oct:** For the first time, the **Ministry of Planning released a Citizen's Budget**, which provides simple explanations of the government's fiscal policy, and budgetary details of different sectors for the benefit of the public.<sup>84</sup> The Citizen's Budget also outlines the government's budget deficits amassed since 2011-12 financial year, the various debts it incurred, together with simplified explanations.<sup>85</sup>

**22 Oct:** At a meeting with foreign donors, diplomats and investors in Naypyidaw, **Aung San Suu Kyi made a pitch to both local and foreign investors** promising transparency and accountability in Burma/Myanmar's economic system.<sup>86</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi pledged a clearer legal framework and opportunities in untapped economic sectors.<sup>87</sup>

**26 Oct:** The World Bank's annual Doing Business report stated that **Burma ranked 170<sup>th</sup> out of the 190 economies on the ease of doing business.**<sup>88</sup> In last year's report, Burma placed 171.<sup>89</sup> The report acknowledged that Burma is making starting a business easier by reducing the company's cost of registration and removing the requirement to submit a reference letter and criminal history certificate to incorporate a company.<sup>90</sup> However, the report also noted that Burma made foreign trade more difficult with higher costs and time delays because of congestion at the port of Rangoon/Yangon.<sup>91</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### Developments:

**15-17 Oct:** State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi attended meetings of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and of the economic grouping composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, known as BRICS.<sup>92</sup> During her meeting, **Aung San Suu Kyi met with other state leaders** such as Indian PM Narendra Modi, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, and Chinese President Xi Jinping.<sup>93</sup>

**19 Oct: Burma/Myanmar and India signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)** during Aung San Suu Kyi's visit in India. The agreements were in the insurance, power, and banking sectors.<sup>94</sup>

## REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN OCTOBER

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**"ACAPS Briefing Note - Myanmar: Violence in Rakhine, 14 October 2016"** Assessment Capacities Project <https://goo.gl/QiEssQ>

**"Bribes and bureaucracy: Myanmar's chaotic citizenship system"** IRIN <https://goo.gl/3hcNqY>

**"Building Relationships Across Divides : Peace and Conflict Analysis of Kachin State"** Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies <https://goo.gl/84nUKI>

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<sup>83</sup> Irrawaddy (8 Oct 16) Military Officials, Cronies Released from US Blacklist

<sup>84</sup> Myanmar Times (07 Oct 16) Govt releases Citizens Budget in bid to boost finance transparency

<sup>85</sup> Myanmar Times (07 Oct 16) Govt releases Citizens Budget in bid to boost finance transparency

<sup>86</sup> Mizzima (23 Oct 16) Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi makes pitch to local and foreign investors

<sup>87</sup> Mizzima (23 Oct 16) Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi makes pitch to local and foreign investors; DVB (24 Oct 16) Suu Kyi drums up investment after US drops sanctions

<sup>88</sup> RFA (26 Oct 16) Doing Business in Myanmar Has Just Gotten a Little Easier: World Bank Report

<sup>89</sup> RFA (26 Oct 16) Doing Business in Myanmar Has Just Gotten a Little Easier: World Bank Report

<sup>90</sup> RFA (26 Oct 16) Doing Business in Myanmar Has Just Gotten a Little Easier: World Bank Report

<sup>91</sup> RFA (26 Oct 16) Doing Business in Myanmar Has Just Gotten a Little Easier: World Bank Report

<sup>92</sup> Myanmar Times (19 Oct 16) State counsellor meets Indian PM, other leaders at India forums

<sup>93</sup> Myanmar Times (19 Oct 16) State counsellor meets Indian PM, other leaders at India forums

<sup>94</sup> Mizzima (20 Oct 16) Myanmar, India agree cooperation in insurance, power and banking sectors



**“Burma: Satellite Images Show Fire-Damaged Villages”** Human Rights Watch  
<https://goo.gl/50lCyu>

**“Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Myanmar - A Situation Analysis”** Asian Development Bank, UN Population Fund, UN Development Programme, UN Women <https://goo.gl/4HfXki>

**“Myanmar: Dooplaya Field Report - Military conflict, violent abuse, and destruction caused by development projects, January to December 2015”** Karen Human Rights Group  
<https://goo.gl/A0DR3E>

**“Myanmar’s Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue - Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°149”** International Crisis Group <https://goo.gl/VCYYly>

**“Strength in Diversity: Towards Universal Education in Myanmar’s Ethnic Areas”** The Asia Foundation <https://goo.gl/qWixAq>

**“The politics of food aid in Myanmar’s Rakhine state”** IRIN <https://goo.gl/xX1pZe>

**“Two separate landmine incidents happened in Hpapun and Nyaunglebin districts, March and April 2016”** Karen Human Rights Group <https://goo.gl/rOKtqm>