

BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



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

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- Aung San Suu Kyi embarks on meetings to pave way for NLD government; formal arrangements commence for transition.
- The outgoing Parliament approves pro-Tatmadaw Supplementary Budget Bill, creating a US\$3 billion deficit for 2016-2017.
- USDP proposes bills to grant former presidents total immunity, curb NLD power in the National Defense and Security Council.
- Women, civil society groups condemn exclusion in upcoming peace talks; armed groups form independent committee.
- Tatmadaw stays on in central Shan State against truce agreement, uses scorched earth tactics & death threats to prevent IDPs' return.
- Up to 70 people feared dead in two new jade landslides as Mines Ministry blames laborers and proposes martial law at related mines.
- Authorities continue attack on free expression, jailing protestors and imprisoning Chaw Sandi Tun for a satirical Facebook post.
- Lawmakers expose "chain of bribery" and systemic corruption in judiciary.
- Burma/Myanmar pledges to protect forests at COP21 climate summit.
- USA eases sanctions on Burma, allowing blacklisted cronies to do more business.
- Serious abuses in textile industry exposed, 90% of workers living hand-to-mouth.
- Burma remains world's second largest producer of opium.

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KEY STORY: TRANSITION

NLD, Suu Kyi take steps towards transition

Throughout December, National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi met with President Thein Sein, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing, National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann, former dictator Sr Gen Than Shwe, legislators and officials in order to pave the way for the incoming NLD government. She reportedly hinted that an NLD-led Cabinet would include ethnic representatives while the party will also trim back government departments for more efficiency.¹

¹ Myanmar Times (21 Dec 15) NLD pledges not to axe bureaucrats; Xinhua (18 Dec 15) Myanmar's new gov't to merge some ministries: Aung San Suu Kyi

The transition train chugs along as talks continue

On 2 December, Aung San Suu Kyi met separately with President Thein Sein, and Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw. It was her fifth meeting with the president since 2012, and her first with Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing.² President's Office spokesperson Ye Htut described the change to a new president as "completely unprecedented" and said the 45-minute meeting focused on stability. He assured the media there would be a peaceful power transfer: "The president gave a promise. I can also guarantee it personally and on behalf of our government."³ Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing reportedly said he agreed on cooperation that would benefit the country.⁴

On 4 December, Aung San Suu Kyi met former dictator Sr Gen Than Shwe, who, according to his grandson, "accepts that she will become the leader of the country."⁵ She said the meeting was an incredible achievement for the country, emphasizing that she would focus on the future rather than old injustices of the military, whose leaders have only met Aung San Suu Kyi 20 times in the last 26 years.⁶

On 7 December, Aung San Suu Kyi had her eighth meeting with National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann since the 8 November elections.⁷ Shwe Mann was the first leader to meet her in November [see *November 2015 Burma Bulletin*].⁸

Process for transition of power formalized

On 10 December, Aung San Suu Kyi met with both Parliamentary speakers Shwe Mann and Khin Aung Myint to discuss the transition of power and cooperation on parliamentary and non-parliamentary matters.⁹ Shwe Mann later announced a dual agreement to systematically and peacefully fulfill the will of the people as expressed in the election results; undertake tasks in accordance with parliamentary policies; prioritize national reconciliation when the new parliament is formed; and to coordinate meetings of the new parliament in accordance with the law.¹⁰

On 10 December, five days after President Thein Sein promised to smoothly cede authority,¹¹ the President's Office announced the establishment of a bilateral committee to ensure a steady transition of power, comprising President's Office Minister Hla Tun, Information Minister Ye Htut, Construction Ministry Director General Maung Maung Ohn and President's Office Director Zaw Htay, alongside NLD leaders Win Htein and Myo Aung, and former Rangoon/Yangon University rector Aung Thu.¹²

The committee met on 16 December to discuss power transfer obligations, with Aung San Suu Kyi in attendance. NLD Spokesperson Win Htein said that the parties are likely to meet about four days per week to discuss the transition.¹³ On 22 December, the committee reported they had met to discuss a ceremony for the transfer of Head of State and ministerial duties to the new government.¹⁴

² DVB (02 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets president, military chief; AP (02 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets Myanmar's outgoing president; Reuters (02 Dec 15) In step towards power, Myanmar's Suu Kyi meets president, top general; EMG (03 Dec 15) Suu Kyi to meet president and commander-in-chief separately

³ EMG (03 Dec 15) Suu Kyi discusses power transfer with president and army chief; RFA (02 Dec 15) Aung San Suu Kyi Talks Transition with Myanmar's President, Military Chief

⁴ DVB (02 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets president, military chief; AP (02 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets Myanmar's outgoing president; Reuters (02 Dec 15) In step towards power, Myanmar's Suu Kyi meets president, top general

⁵ RFA (05 Dec 15) NLD Leader Aung San Suu Kyi Meets With Former Junta Chief Than Shwe: Party Spokesman; Bangkok Post (06 Dec 15) Suu Kyi, Than Shwe discuss Myanmar's future; Xinhua (05 Dec 15) Aung San Suu Kyi meets Myanmar former military gov't leader; DVB (05 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets retired Snr-Gen. Than Shwe; Irrawaddy (05 Nov 15) Suu Kyi Meets Ex-Dictator Than Shwe in Naypyidaw; Myanmar Times (07 Dec 15) Former dictator said to accept Daw Suu as 'future leader'; BBC (06 Dec 15) Former Myanmar military ruler Than Shwe 'supports new leader'

⁶EMG (12 Dec 15) Than Shwe meeting a major achievement: Suu Kyi

⁷EMG (08 Dec 15) Suu Kyi holds 8th post-election meeting with Shwe Mann

⁸ AP (02 Dec 15) Suu Kyi meets Myanmar's outgoing president

⁹RFA (10 Dec 15) Aung San Suu Kyi Meets With Myanmar's Parliamentary Speakers

¹⁰EMG (13 Dec 15) Dual agreement resulted from Suu Kyi's meeting begins implementation

¹¹ Xinhua (05 Dec 15) Myanmar president pledges to form new government, transfer power successfully

¹²GNLM (11 Dec 15) Committee appointed to manage power transfer; Xinhua (11 Dec 15) Myanmar gov't forms support committee to manage power transfer

¹³RFA (16 Dec 15) Myanmar Government Officials Meet With NLD to Discuss Transfer of Power

¹⁴GNLM (23 Dec 15) Govt, NLD hold first coordination meeting on systematic handing over of the duty of the Head of State, ministries; Irrawaddy (16 Dec 15) Bipartisan Transition Committee Holds First Meeting in Naypyidaw

Will she or won't she become President?

On 1 December, NLD spokesperson Win Htein expressed confidence that the Constitution would be amended to allow party leader Aung San Suu Kyi to assume the presidency within five years, but did not explain how the task would be achieved.¹⁵ Despite the absolute majority won by the NLD on 8 November, Aung San Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from the presidency but has said that she will be “above the president” once a new government is formed [see *November 2015 Burma Bulletin, Burma/Myanmar Post-Election Outlook: Trials for Triumph, Burma/Myanmar Election Day: Free-est & Fairest is Not Free & Fair, and Fear and Voting in Burma/Myanmar: Elections 2015*].¹⁶

On 10 December, former senior military officer and outgoing Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) MP Aung Ko proposed suspending Article 59(f) of the Constitution, which bars Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming president, if over 50% of MPs support it.¹⁷

Ethnic inclusion

On 3 December, NLD patron Tin Oo suggested that the new cabinet would include ethnic leaders and incumbent ministers to honor the process of national reconciliation.¹⁸ The sentiment was reflected in the NLD's statement on National Day (6 December) that emphasized that cooperation with all ethnicities and races was essential for reforms in Burma.¹⁹ At a 7 December meeting with ethnic MPs in Naypyidaw, Aung San Suu Kyi highlighted the spirit of the Panglong Agreement which allowed considerable autonomy for ethnic nationalities [see *NLD takes steps to assume leadership in peace process*].²⁰

The Arakan National Party (ANP), known for its nationalist stance, and the largest party in the Arakan/Rakhine State Assembly, has reportedly demanded the chief minister post in Arakan State, causing alarm amongst Rohingya and Muslim minority communities.²² While refusing to comment on the ANP's demands, the NLD plans to meet the United Nationalities Alliance, a loose grouping of eight ethnic political parties, including the ANP early in 2016.²³

Parliament creates US\$3 billion deficit for 2016-2017

On 9 December, the National Parliament approved a near 12% budget increase under the controversial Supplementary Budget Bill, creating a 3.9 trillion kyat (about US\$ 3 billion) deficit for the incoming government. The main beneficiary was the Tatmadaw (additional kyat 417.28 billion/US\$314.18 million).²⁴ Budgets are usually settled in April of the fiscal year, but National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann called for a finalization of the full budget in January so that less experienced incoming lawmakers can focus on creating the new government.²⁵ The 18 budget committees responsible for reviewing the 2016-2017 budget are expected to complete their work by 5 January.²⁶

	Kyat Trillion	% budget
Total	23.6 (US\$18.4 bn)	
Defense	2.88	12.2%
Energy	2.7	11.4%
Electric Power	2.5	10.6%
Education	1.5	6.4%*
Health	0.830	3.5%

*UNESCO recommends 20% for education

¹⁵ Irrawaddy (02 Dec 15) Win Htein: Suu Kyi Can Be President Within 5 Years

¹⁶ Irrawaddy (02 Dec 15) Win Htein: Suu Kyi Can Be President Within 5 Years

¹⁷ Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) New idea floated to allow NLD leader to assume presidency

¹⁸ RFA (03 Dec 15) Interview: 'It Would be Good to Transfer Power as Soon as Possible'

¹⁹ EMG (08 Dec 15) National reconciliation key to prosperity: NLD; Myanmar Times (07 Dec 15) NLD commemorates National Day with eye to reconciliation

²⁰ Irrawaddy (08 Dec 15) Suu Kyi Tells Ethnic Lawmakers, 'We Need to Work Together'; Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) NLD leader says new govt will further the peace process

²¹ Myanmar Times (23 Dec 15) Budget bill proposes \$3b deficit

²² Myanmar Times (04 Dec 15) Arakan National Party stakes claim for post of chief minister

²³ Myanmar Times (04 Dec 15) Arakan National Party stakes claim for post of chief minister

²⁴ Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) Supplementary budget approved without opposition

²⁵ Myanmar Times (23 Dec 15) Budget bill proposes \$3b deficit; Myanmar Times (22 Dec 15) MPs told to approve budget by next month

²⁶ Myanmar Times (22 Dec 15) MPs told to approve budget by next month; Myanmar Times (24 Dec 15) Budget discussion cancelled as inflation concerns grow

Bills provide former presidents blanket immunity, decrease authority of new executive

On 21 December, the Home Affairs Ministry submitted the Former President's Security Bill to the People's Assembly, which guarantees outgoing presidents immunity from domestic prosecution for any and all crimes committed during their term.²⁷ On 23 December, Human Rights Watch compared the bill to Article 445 of the 2008 Constitution, which shields military junta officials (including President Thein Sein) from criminal accountability, including for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Human Rights Watch called on Parliament to reject the bill, and pointed out that "serious crimes may have to be addressed by international or foreign courts, where domestic immunities are irrelevant."²⁸

On 21 December, the National Assembly circulated a bill amending the Union Government Law that would decrease presidential voting powers and strengthen the Tatmadaw's hold on the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC). If passed, the incoming president would only be able to vote on NDSC matters when there is a deadlock, an unlikely scenario as six of 11 Council posts are currently held by pro-Tatmadaw officials. On 29 December, student leaders Nang Lin, Zayyar Lwin, and Paing Ye Thu, currently in Insein Prison facing charges for unlawful assembly, protested against the NDSC Bill.²⁹ Numerous MPs have also criticized the bill, stressing that it should not be rushed through this session.³⁰

INSIDE BURMA

Parliament continues last session

In December, Parliament continued its 13th and final session. Important developments included:

- **1 December:** The National Assembly approved the Basic Education Bill, which bans "bribes" to teachers and allows schools in ethnic nationality areas to teach in the local language.³¹
- **3 December:** The People's Assembly approved the "second amendment bill of the National Parliament," (sic) and the Foreign Exchange Amendment Bill.³²
- **8 December:** The National Parliament approved the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement, making it legally binding, according to Myanmar Peace Center officials.³³
- **15 December:** The National Parliament approved bills amending the Criminal Code, the Insurance Permission Law, and the Savings Bank Law.³⁴
- **16 December:** The People's Assembly amended election laws so that by-elections must be held within six months of an MP vacating their seat, which usually occurs during cabinet promotions.³⁵
- **17 December:** The National Parliament approved amendments that combine the 2012 Foreign Investment Law and the 2013 Myanmar Citizens Investment Law, allowing the Myanmar Investment Commission to delegate investment decisions to state and divisional governments, and supposedly guarding against human rights violations.³⁶
- **22 December:** President Thein Sein signed into law amendments to the Myanmar Excise Act, Foreign Investment Law, the Myanmar Citizens Investment Law, the Insurance Permission Law, the Savings Bank Law, and the Veterinary Council Law.³⁷
- **24 December:** President Thein Sein signed into law bills amending the Mining Law and the Evidence Act.³⁸ The Mining Law amendments permit foreign investors to partner with small/medium-scale firms in value-added or trading activities, legalizes small-scale mining outfits, and authorizes the Mines Ministry to create state and division-level committees to scrutinize prospectors' applications –

²⁷ Myanmar Times (23 Dec 15) Immunity bill causes waves, confusion; Human Rights Watch (23 Dec 15) Burma: Brazen Bid for Presidential Immunity

²⁸ Human Rights Watch (23 Dec 15) Burma: Brazen Bid for Presidential Immunity

²⁹ EMG (30 Dec 15) Detained students protest National Defence and Security Council Bill

³⁰ EMG (30 Dec 15) MPs unhappy at being forced to rush security bill into law

³¹ GNLM (02 Dec 15) Amyotha Hluttaw Roundup; Myanmar Times (02 Dec 15) Education bill bans 'bribes' for teachers

³² GNLM (04 Dec 15) Four bills approved at Pyithu Hluttaw

³³ Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) Parliament approves national ceasefire agreement; Myanmar Times (14 Dec 15) Non-ceasefire groups pin hopes on next govt

³⁴ GNLM (16 Dec 15) Finance Ministry proposes Union Tax Law Amendment

³⁵ Irrawaddy (17 Dec 15) Lower House Approves Fast-Tracking of By-Elections

³⁶ GNLM (18 Dec 15) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes three amendment bills

³⁷ GNLM (23 Dec 15) Hluttaw Round-ups

³⁸ GNLM (25 Dec 15) Bills signed into laws

these same committees will grant concessions with the approval of the Mines Ministry [see *The mining industry's jaded reputation: Hpakant landslides spur calls for action*].³⁹

- **29 December:** The National Parliament approved the establishment of the Kyaukphyu SEZ on 4,289 acres of land in Arakan/Rakhine State, and proposals for Parliament to publicize notifications about the status, logistics, and progress of the project.⁴⁰
- **29 December:** The National Parliament approved the Legal Aid Bill and the Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill.⁴¹
- **30 December:** The People's Assembly approved amendments to the Factories Act 1951, the Shops and Worksites Bill, and the Payment of Wages Bill.⁴²
- **31 December:** The People's Assembly approved amendments to the Presidential Security Bill.⁴³

Lawmakers call for overhaul of corrupt judiciary

On 8 December, the Judicial and Legal Affairs Committee submitted a five-year report to the People's Assembly calling for an overhaul of the judicial system, saying the Supreme Court, state and divisional courts are involved in a "chain of bribery" and corruption that has deadened public trust in the judiciary, and means court cases take five to 15 years to settle. The Committee received 12,360 complaints of judicial misconduct from 1 July 2012 to 18 November 2015, and claimed to have settled 1,071 of these.⁴⁴ On 14 December, Judicial and Legal Affairs Committee Chairman Aung Ko told Parliament that the report found that these bribes and court delays allow government officials, real estate brokers, and business insiders to profit from contested urban development and property seizures by gangsters.⁴⁵

Ethnic armed groups, civil society, and women criticize political dialogue framework

On 16 December, President Thein Sein accepted the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee's (UPDJC) Framework for Political Dialogue (FPD), including the final composition of 700 stakeholders who will participate in political peace talks at the Union Peace Conference from 12-22 January 2016.⁴⁸

Members of the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) rejected the FPD since none of the non-signatory

groups were included in the drafting process and are not granted equal representation in future talks.⁴⁹ On 16 December, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) Chairman Khun Htun Oo compared the FPD to the National Convention (to draft the Constitution) under prior juntas, which excluded ethnic nationalities.⁵⁰ On 24 December, UNFC Joint Secretary Htun Zawt told reporters that the UNFC has set up its own committee to conduct dialogue with Naypyidaw.⁵¹

Participants at Union Peace Conference

150 delegates each for: the Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) who signed the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), and political parties.

75 delegates both for: the Parliament and government.

50 delegates both for: EAOs who have not signed the NCA (invited as observers), and "other invitees."⁴⁶

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Arakan Army, long excluded from the NCA, are not among those invited.⁴⁷

³⁹ GNLM (02 Dec 15) PyidaungsuHluttaw Roundup; Myanmar Times (02 Dec 15) MPs reach compromise on mining amendments

⁴⁰ GNLM (30 Dec 15) SEZ given green light: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Kyaukphyu SEZ on 4,289 acres; EMG (30 Dec 15) Union parliament approves proposal to publicize Kyaukphyu SEZ

⁴¹ GNLM (01 Jan 16) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes two bills

⁴² GNLM (31 Dec 15) Pyithu Hluttaw passes three bills

⁴³ GNLM (01 Jan 16) Pyithu Hluttaw approves amendments to two bills

⁴⁴ Myanmar Times (09 Dec 15) Judicial system in need of major redress, says Pyithu Hluttaw committee review; Irrawaddy (09 Dec 15) Burma's Judicial System Deeply Corrupt, Parliament Told

⁴⁵ Mizzima (16 Dec 15) Touts and government officials exploiting real estate cases

⁴⁶ GNLM (16 Dec 15) UPDJC approves draft framework, sets ratio of stakeholder groups in political dialogue

⁴⁷ EMG (19 Dec 15) Non-signatories to be invited to ceasefire talks

⁴⁸ GNLM (17 Dec 15) Laying the foundation: President says peace will strengthen new democracy; Myanmar Times (17 Dec 15) Peace dialogue to start in early January; GNLM (24 Dec 15) Pre meeting in Yangon; GNLM (16 Dec 15) UPDJC approves draft framework, sets ratio of stakeholder groups in political dialogue

⁴⁹ Myanmar Times (14 Dec 15) Non-ceasefire groups pin hopes on next govt

⁵⁰ SHAN (17 Dec 15) KhunHtunOo: Draft Framework for Political Dialogue reminiscent of military-era convention

⁵¹ Irrawaddy (24 Dec 15) SuuKyi Tells Govt Peace Body: Reach Out to Non-Signatory Armed Groups

On 17 December, the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) and the Swedish Embassy hosted a discussion on the persistent exclusion of women from the peace process. Panelists described nominating themselves as committee members at various phases of the peace process, and being subsequently excluded after advocating for more female participation. The UPDJC reportedly proposed an ideal 30% ratio for women's participation in the FPD, though this is not mandatory.⁵² The UPDJC itself has only three female members who either represent political parties or EAOs, and no female government delegates. The 26-member Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee has no female representatives.⁵³ On 17 December, CSOs across the country called for more civil society representation at the Union Peace Conference.⁵⁴

NLD takes steps to assume leadership in peace process

On 7 December, after meeting with chief negotiator Aung Min regarding the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and the work of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), Aung San Suu Kyi said that the National League for Democracy (NLD) will thoroughly review the MPC's activities.⁵⁵ It was later reported that the state-run and EU-funded MPC has never accounted for numerous allegations of corruption, including non-transparent spending of 20 million euro for humanitarian purposes, and the provision of 1,110 luxury cars to ethnic armed groups, which were either fully or partially tax exempt, costing the country an estimated US\$300 million.⁵⁶ On 23 December, Aung San Suu Kyi advised MPC officials to meet with ethnic groups who have not signed the NCA.⁵⁷

On 17 December, Aung San Suu Kyi met representatives of the eight armed groups that signed the NCA. She explained that she sought to incorporate all ethnic armed groups into the NCA⁵⁸ and would accept their proposal for a joint peace committee, with the agreement of other NLD executives.⁵⁹

Ethnic conflict continues despite 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement

Hostilities continued between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA), non-signatories of the NCA. NCA co-signor Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) also clashed with the TNLA. Reported clashes include:

- **2 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with KIA forces near Hpakant, Kachin State.⁶⁰
- **9 December:** The SSA-S clashed with the TNLA in Mongwi village tract, Namkhan Township, Shan State.⁶¹
- **13 - 17 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with TNLA forces in northern Shan State, in Namhsan, Mantong/Mantung, and Kyaukme Townships, with aerial attacks occurring on 13 and 14 December.⁶²
- **27 - 28 December:** Tatmadaw troops clashed with AA forces near the Akyab/Sittwe-Rangoon/Yangon highway in Kyauktaw Township, Arakan/Rakhine State.⁶³

TNLA and SSA-S trade accusations after conflict, Tatmadaw allegedly exploits divide

On 6 December, the TNLA accused the SSA-S, aided by the Tatmadaw, of triggering conflict from 27-30 November by trespassing into TNLA territory in Kyaukme, Namhsan, and Mantong/Mantung Townships, Shan State.⁶⁴ The same day, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy released a joint statement with a CSO accusing the TNLA of abducting 23 civilians during fighting in Namkhan and

⁵²Irrawaddy (18 Dec 15) Calls for More Female Voices in Burma's Peace Process

⁵³Irrawaddy (18 Dec 15) Calls for More Female Voices in Burma's Peace Process

⁵⁴Myanmar Times (18 Dec 15) Civil societies call for more space at table

⁵⁵RFA (09 Dec 15) Myanmar Chief Negotiator Briefed Aung San Suu Kyi on Peace Process: NLD

⁵⁶EMG (30 Dec 15) Suu Kyi hold talks with top officials from MPC

⁵⁷Irrawaddy (24 Dec 15) SuuKyie Tells Govt Peace Body: Reach Out to Non-Signatory Armed Groups

⁵⁸Irrawaddy (18 Dec 15) NLD, Ethnic Armed Groups Meet to Hash Out Peace Framework

⁵⁹Xinhua (18 Dec 15) Myanmar opposition, armed groups vow to build mutual trust in peace process

⁶⁰EMG (03 Dec 15) Fighting erupts in KIA-controlled area

⁶¹DVB (10 Dec 15) Shan State rebels clash again

⁶²Myanmar Times (16 Dec 15) Shan army meets UNFC to defuse tensions; Irrawaddy (17 Dec 15) TNLA Claims Govt Uses Helicopter Gunships in Latest Clashes

⁶³Irrawaddy (28 Dec 15) Fighting Flares Between Arakan Army and Govt Troops

⁶⁴Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Talks resume on Shan State fighting; SHAN (07 Dec 15) SNLD demands release of detainees amidst Shan and Ta'ang clashes

Mantong Townships.⁶⁵ The TNLA refuted this and said the SSA-S has been increasing its troop presence in TNLA territory since signing the NCA on 15 October.⁶⁶ On 15 December, representatives from the SSA-S and some of the TNLA's partners in the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) met and pledged to ease the conflict.⁶⁷ However, on 20 December, TNLA captain Aik Kyaw said that the Tatmadaw and SSA-S had increased troop numbers in and around TNLA territory in northern Shan State to 5,000 and 1,000 respectively.⁶⁸

Shan State Army-North and Tatmadaw gradually decrease conflict

On 2 December it was reported that Wanhai Village, Kyethi Township, Shan State – the headquarters of the Shan State Progressive Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) – was deserted after routine airstrikes and intense Tatmadaw offensives that erupted on 6 October.⁶⁹ From 6 October to 1 December Shan State witnessed only 5 days without armed conflict.⁷⁰ An SSPP/SSA-N delegation met authorities in Naypyidaw from 7 - 8 December to discuss implementation of a truce drawn up in late November.⁷¹ The truce prioritizes joint efforts to return IDPs to their homes and the re-opening of 17 schools as the SSA-N and Tatmadaw relocate troops; the Tatmadaw also agreed not to build new bases.⁷²

IDPs and other civilians face food shortages and disease, unable to return home

On 22 December, Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) accused over 14 Tatmadaw battalions of making land uninhabitable, destroying property, and laying land mines as part of a “scorched earth” strategy that has also seen villagers shot, killed, and forcibly recruited as porters and human shields in Shan State.⁷³ On 3 December, the US State Department called for a “credible, independent investigation” into abuses reported in previous months.⁷⁴ A coalition of Shan community-based organizations (CBOs) said that over 3,000 IDPs remain fearful of returning home after receiving death threats from the Tatmadaw, who have not relocated their troops despite obligations to do so under the recent truce with the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N). The CBOs reported that in Monghsu Township alone, over 1,000 acres of crops were destroyed, over 200 houses looted and damaged, 13 rice mills destroyed and nearly 4,000 livestock killed or lost.⁷⁵ Other related news includes:

- **1 December:** It was reported that out of more than 1,000 IDPs who are sheltered in Wan Wa Camp in Kyethi Township, Shan State, nearly half have preventable health problems including respiratory illnesses, fevers, chronic diarrhea, and skin rashes. Since authorities have blocked humanitarian access to IDPs throughout central Shan State, Wan Wa Camp has no doctors and only six medics.⁷⁶
- **6 December:** Monk Si Ha Na Da died at Aung Pan military hospital from complications following his leg amputation after he and 3 other monks stepped on a Tatmadaw landmine on 30 November near Military Operations Command 2's base in Mongnawng, Kyethi Township, Shan State.⁷⁷
- **14 December:** It was reported that 300 IDPs on the Kaladan River, who were displaced in early 2015 by fighting between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army near Pyinso Village, Paletwa Township, Chin State, only have enough food stocked for December and are in need of immediate aid.⁷⁸

⁶⁵ Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Talks resume on Shan State fighting; SHAN (07 Dec 15) SNDP demands release of detainees amidst Shan and Ta'ang clashes

⁶⁶ Myanmar Times (11 Dec 15) RCSS denies fighters trespassed in TNLA area; Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Talks resume on Shan State fighting; Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) Palaung students warn fighting is driving intercommunal tensions

⁶⁷ SHAN (16 Dec 15) RCSS/SSA-S: “We never think of the TNLA as our enemy”; Irrawaddy (15 Dec 15) Ethnic Groups Meet to Defuse Tensions in Northern Shan State

⁶⁸ Myanmar Times (21 Dec 15) Fighting continues to expand in Shan State

⁶⁹ DVB (02 Dec 15) Shan rebel capital now a ghost town

⁷⁰ SHAN (01 Dec 15) Preventable diseases spread as Shan State IDPs are denied access to primary health care

⁷¹ Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Talks resume on Shan State fighting

⁷² Irrawaddy (09 Dec 15) SSA-N Agree to Limited Troop Withdrawal after Two-Day Talks; Myanmar Times (09 Dec 15) Forces to withdraw from key flashpoint

⁷³ SHAN (23 Dec 15) Shan CBOs: Over 3000 IDPs in central Shan State threatened with death for trying to return home

⁷⁴ Reuters (03 Dec 15) U.S. calls for probe of reports of Myanmar military atrocities

⁷⁵ SHAN (23 Dec 15) Shan CBOs: Over 3000 IDPs in central Shan State threatened with death for trying to return home

⁷⁶ SHAN (01 Dec 15) Preventable diseases spread as Shan State IDPs are denied access to primary health care

⁷⁷ SHRF (28 Dec 15) Killing, disappearance, land-mine death during Burma Army offensive in central Shan State

⁷⁸ Khonumthung (14 Dec 15) Refugees from Paletwa need immediate aid

- **13 December:** Tatmadaw soldiers held 50 Ta'ang villagers at gunpoint for two hours and fired warning shots to force back 130 families attempting to return home to Koong Nim Village, Monghsu Township, Shan State, after a lull in fighting; warning all residents to stay away for two months.⁷⁹
- **26 December:** A landmine killed three people and injured three more in Chinshwehaw, Hopang Township, Shan State.⁸⁰
- **28 December:** Farmer Loong Sarng Awn of Mongnawng, Kyethi Township, Shan State, told SHRF that Tatmadaw troops from LIB 9 threatened to kill him, his family, and close friends for returning to harvest their fields in November. They warned they would lay land mines around the LIB 9 base.⁸¹

On 23 December, Shan State government secretary Myint Aung told media that government officials have been instructed by the Tatmadaw to prevent IDPs from returning home, but are planning to clear landmines and secure paths home for IDPs.⁸²

HUMAN RIGHTS

Authorities continue to prosecute peaceful activists

In December, the Burmese authorities continued to arrest, charge and imprison people for exercising their rights to free expression and free assembly:

- **8 December:** Tharawaddy Township Court, Pegu/Bago Division, approved the hospitalization of four imprisoned Letpadan student activists – Min Thway Thit, Mar Naw, Mya Gyi and Htein Linn Aung – for treatment for serious health conditions; nine other students are reported to have already been hospitalized due to health problems.⁸³
- **12 December:** It was reported that Prome/Pyay Township Court, Pegu Division, sentenced activist Myo Thu Htut to four months in prison with hard labour under Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for a 2014 protest calling for a proportional representation voting system.⁸⁴
- **14 December:** Police arrested fugitive student activist and chairman of the Dagon University Student Union Nan Lin, charged him under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code and detained him in Insein Prison for an anti-regime protest in June.⁸⁵
- **17 December:** Yankin Township Court, Rangoon/Yangon Division, sentenced two brothers to two years in prison under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code for their participation in an industrial strike at Shwepyithar industrial zone in February.⁸⁶
- **17 December:** Poet Maung Saungkha, arrested in November for a crude poem referencing President Thein Sein, was subjected to new charges under Article 505(b) of the Criminal Code at a hearing regarding existing charges under the Telecommunications Law.⁸⁷
- **18 December:** Kyauktada Township Court, Rangoon Division, sentenced journalist Shwe Hmone of the Thamaga News Journal to 15 days in prison or a 10,000 kyat (US\$7.64) fine under Article 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for a prayer protest against the imprisonment of journalists.⁸⁸
- **22 December:** Yadanabon University students Naing Ye Wai, Aung San Oo, Jit Too, and Nyan Lin Htet were released from Obo Prison, Mandalay, after serving six-month sentences for a graffiti protest in July.⁸⁹
- **25 December:** Police arrested student activist Ye Yint Paing Hmu in Mandalay and sent him to Obo Prison for his participation in the same July graffiti protest.⁹⁰

⁷⁹SHAN (15 Dec 15) Burma Army tells displaced people not to return home; Mizzima (22 Dec 15) Displaced persons in Shan State reluctant to go home ; Myanmar Times (24 Dec 15) Tatmadaw blocks Shan IDPs from returning home

⁸⁰AFP (27 Dec 15) Three killed, three wounded in Myanmar IED blast

⁸¹SHRF (28 Dec 15) Killing, disappearance, land-mine death during Burma Army offensive in central Shan State

⁸²Myanmar Times (24 Dec 15) Tatmadaw blocks Shan IDPs from returning home

⁸³DVB (09 Dec 15) More jailed students hospitalized

⁸⁴EMG (12 Dec 15) Activist jailed for four months

⁸⁵Irrawaddy (16 Dec 15) Fugitive Student Leader Arrested over July Constitution Protest; Myanmar Times (17 Dec 15) Another student activist detained over June protest

⁸⁶DVB (18 Dec 15) Labour activists jailed; Irrawaddy (18 Dec 15) Activists Get Two Years for Role in Shwepyithar Industrial Strikes

⁸⁷Irrawaddy (17 Dec 15) 'Penis Poet' Slapped with Fresh Charges

⁸⁸RFA (18 Dec 15) Myanmar Court Sentences Journalist For Protesting Without a Permit; Irrawaddy (18 Dec 15) Reporter Guilty of Praying for Persecuted Journalists Illegally

⁸⁹Irrawaddy (22 Dec 15) Graffiti Students Released, Vow to Continue Protest Campaign

- **28 December:** Maubin Township Court, Irrawaddy/Ayeyarwady Division, sentenced 25-year-old activist Chaw Sandi Tun to six months jail under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for a satirical Facebook post deemed insulting to the military [see *October 2015 Burma Bulletin*].⁹¹ On 14 December, the Court dropped additional charges under Article 500 of the Criminal Code.⁹²

In an interview published on 26 December, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, hoped for the release of all political prisoners before the transfer of power.⁹³

Meanwhile, PEN International's report, "Unfinished Freedom: A Blueprint for the Future of Free Expression in Myanmar," found freedom of expression, particularly media freedom and free assembly had declined in Burma/Myanmar over the past two years, partly due to the continued existence of repressive laws.⁹⁴ In its 2015 prison census, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that Burma was the joint seventh worst country for jailing journalists in 2015, with five Unity Newspaper journalists still imprisoned for reporting on an alleged chemical weapons factory in 2014 [see *July 2014 Burma Bulletin* and *UNGA 2015: Developments Since the 2014 UNGA Resolution on Burma*].⁹⁵

DISPLACEMENT

Calls for rights protections as ASEAN nations meet on irregular migration

On 4 December, representatives from ASEAN and its member states, International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and UNDP, among others, met in Bangkok, Thailand, for the Second Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean.⁹⁶ The much-publicised 'boatpeople crisis' in April and May 2015 [see *April and May 2015 Burma Bulletins*] put regional authorities under more pressure to address the situation. Ahead of the meeting, Amnesty International stressed the need for international protection of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, and called on governments who haven't done so (which includes Burma/Myanmar) to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention.⁹⁷

Htin Lynn, leader of the Burma delegation, highlighted the importance of providing protection to "migrants" in recipient countries at the meeting.⁹⁸ However, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk insisted, "the heart of the matter lies in ensuring a legal identity for all people on Myanmar's territory and the fundamental freedoms that must go with it..."⁹⁹

On 2 December, Burmese immigration officials returned 48 people to Bangladesh, among the last of nearly 1,000 rescued from boats in the Andaman Sea in May by the Burmese Navy [see *June 2015 Burma Bulletin*].¹⁰⁰ On 3 December, the Bangladesh Embassy in Rangoon/Yangon stated it was the last group the country will accept, as the remaining people are not from Bangladesh.¹⁰¹

⁹⁰ Irrawaddy (26 Dec 15) Student Activist Arrested in Mandalay for Mid-Year Graffiti Protest

⁹¹ Reuters (28 Dec 15) Dressing down: Myanmar activist jailed for 'ridiculing' army and uniform

⁹² DVB (14 Dec 15) Charge dropped for online satirist; Irrawaddy (14 Dec 15) Court Drops 1 of 2 Defamation Charges in Suit Over Military Insult; Myanmar Times (15 Dec 15) First charge dropped in Tatmadaw defamation case

⁹³ Irrawaddy (26 Dec 15) UN Rights Envoy: 'When You Gain Power, You Can't Just Change Things Overnight'

⁹⁴ PEN American Center (02 Dec 15) Unfinished Freedom: A Blueprint for the Future of Free Expression in Myanmar; Irrawaddy (04 Dec 15) New Govt Urged to Protect Freedom of Expression

⁹⁵ CPJ (01 December 2015) 2015 prison census: 199 journalists jailed worldwide

⁹⁶ GNLM (05 Dec 15) Combat people smuggling: Delegation meets to discuss trafficking of migrant labourers

⁹⁷ Amnesty International (03 Dec 15) Press Release: Southeast Asia: Governments must turn commitments into reality to stem Southeast Asian migrant and refugee crisis; Amnesty International (03 Dec 15) Press Release: Southeast Asia: Governments must turn commitments into reality to stem Southeast Asian migrant and refugee crisis; UN Treaty Collection, Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (21 Dec 15) https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtmsg2&lang=en

⁹⁸ GNLM (05 Dec 15) Combat people smuggling: Delegation meets to discuss trafficking of migrant labourers

⁹⁹ UNHCR (04 Dec 15) UNHCR: Bay of Bengal boat movements manageable with regional cooperation

¹⁰⁰ GNLM (03 Dec 15) 48 boat people repatriated to Bangladesh; Xinhua (03 Dec 15) Myanmar sends back 48 more "boat people" to Bangladesh; DVB (03 Dec 15) Burma repatriates 48 Bangladeshi trafficking victims

¹⁰¹ Myanmar Times (03 Dec 15) Last group of rescued migrants in limbo

The mining industry's jaded reputation: Hpakant landslides spur calls for action

On 3 December, over 300 CSOs urged the authorities to act against mining companies responsible for dumping debris that caused the 21 November Hpakant landslide in Kachin State, killing up to 213 people.¹⁰² On 14 December, it was reported that locals who set up a roadblock to halt the dumping of debris in Hpakant were threatened with criminal charges, and seven protestors were abducted by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), eventually released on 23 December.¹⁰³ Two new landslides occurred in Hpakant on 14 and 25 December, with one confirmed death and up to 20 people still missing in the first incident, and 50 feared dead in the second – numbers which local authorities dismissed as “impossible.”¹⁰⁴

Mines Ministry blames victims, calls for martial law in jade mining areas

Mines Ministry official Win Htein reportedly blamed the landslide victims for the disaster,¹⁰⁵ and on 21 December Deputy Mines Minister Tun Aung told the National Assembly that the government would work with the Tatmadaw and local armed groups to remove small-scale scavengers from jade mining sites in and around Hpakant.¹⁰⁶

During parliamentary debates on 28 December, lawmakers criticized Win Htein's description of jade sifters as “greedy” and his plan to criminalize them without any mention of how the government could reduce poverty in the area.¹⁰⁷ National Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann told President Thein Sein that the government should pursue more comprehensive strategies for ensuring safety in jade mining areas other than the Mines Ministry's proposals of banning jade mining, or imposing curfews or martial law in vulnerable areas.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile Environmental Conservation and Forestry Minister Win Tun has reportedly formed a committee to investigate conditions in the sector.¹⁰⁹

Laws promoting greater sector investment at odds with corruption

On 24 December, President Thein Sein approved amendments to the 1994 Mining Law that will allow for more foreign investment in the industry [see *Parliament's last session continues*].¹¹⁰

On 3 December, Global Witness highlighted connections between jade mining companies and Chinese drug lord Wei Hsueh Kang, and urged the incoming National League for Democracy (NLD) government to reform the sector to prevent it from being controlled by drug lords and military cronies.¹¹¹ Global Witness is a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) board, and its jade reports could have a negative impact on Burma's possible membership.¹¹² Burma will submit its first EITI report in January 2016, disclosing information on its extractive industries, including the jade trade.¹¹³ On 7 December, the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control confirmed that the US still prohibits importation of Burma-sourced jadeite.¹¹⁴

¹⁰² EMG (03 Dec 15) CSOs urge government to take action against negligent mining companies

¹⁰³ Irrawaddy (14 Dec 15) Hpakant Villagers Threatened with Legal Action after Jade Mine Blockade; Irrawaddy (23 Dec 15) Jade Mine Protesters Freed After Alleged KIA Detention

¹⁰⁴ Myanmar Times (16 Dec 15) Another jade mine disaster hits Hpakant; Irrawaddy (15 Dec 15) One Dead, 10 Missing after Fresh Hpakant Landslide; Xinhua (26 Dec 15) About 50 migrant workers missing in renewed landslide in Myanmar; GNLM (27 Dec 15) Authorities refute Hpakant landslide death toll report

¹⁰⁵ DVB (18 Dec 15) Mining ministry shrugs off safety concerns

¹⁰⁶ Myanmar Times (23 Dec 15) Govt promises tougher stance on jade scavengers

¹⁰⁷ EMG (30 Dec 15) MPs take deputy mines minister to task for Hpakant comments

¹⁰⁸ GNLM (30 Dec 15) Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker suggests govt review strategies to prevent jade casualties

¹⁰⁹ RFA (21 Dec 15) Myanmar's Parliament Seeks Answers About Jade Mining Industry From Government

¹¹⁰ GNLM (25 Dec 15) Bills signed into laws

¹¹¹ Myanmar Times (03 Dec 15) NLD govt urged to reform lucrative jade sector; Irrawaddy (04 Dec 15) Wa Tycoon's Jade Ties Exposed in New Report

¹¹² DVB (18 Dec 15) Mining ministry shrugs off safety concerns; Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Myanmar to submit EITI report next month; Myanmar Times (18 Dec 15) US sanctions force jade into a corner, say traders

¹¹³ Irrawaddy (07 Dec 15) First Report on Extractive Industries' Revenues Due This Month; Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) Myanmar to submit EITI report next month

¹¹⁴ RFA (08 Dec 15) US Temporarily Lifts Ban on Trade Through Myanmar Ports

On 15 December it was reported that jade mining, predominantly by Chinese-owned companies, had surged in Hpakant ahead of the change in government and possible reforms.¹¹⁵ Commerce Minister Tin Ye Win initiated an investigation of heavy mining machinery in Hpakant to detect whether vehicles are illegal imports from China as many vehicles have been spotted without license plates.¹¹⁶

Temporary ease of US sanctions on imports and exports

On 7 December, the US Treasury Department issued General License 20, temporarily lifting sanctions on imports and exports passing through ports owned by blacklisted cronies, in order to stop “unintended interruptions” to trade.¹¹⁷ The decision loosens restrictions on the use of Burma/Myanmar’s largest shipping hub, the Port of Yangon, run by blacklisted Steven Law of the Asia World conglomerate.¹¹⁸ General License 20, however, preserves the ban on direct engagement with blacklisted entities, posing uncertainties for the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) which opened on 9 December and is 51% owned by blacklisted state-entity Myanma Economic Bank.¹¹⁹ Several of its 10 tentative underwriters are also affected by sanctions, including Innwa Bank and Asia World-affiliated Global World Securities.¹²⁰ The creation of the YSX has been slow and so far only six companies are listed. The market is not expected to begin public trading until early next year.¹²¹

Burma/Myanmar second in Climate Risk Index; COP21 plan focuses on forests

On 3 December, the NGO German Watch issued its “Global Climate Risk Index 2016” on the sidelines of the UN Conference on Climate Change (COP21). It ranked Burma second in a list of countries most affected by extreme climatic events from 1995 to 2014, with Cyclone Nargis causing the most damage during that period.¹²² Environmental Conservation and Forestry Minister Win Tun and other officials who attended COP21, presented Burma’s Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC).¹²³ These included pledges to preserve 30% of forest as public forest and 10% of ecosystems by 2030 to help offset greenhouse gas emissions, and to increase hydropower to a total of 9.4GW by 2030.¹²⁴ Burmese activists at COP21 called on the government to ensure that it fully implements its proposed policies and urged effective cooperation across sectors and with the public.¹²⁵

Garment workers trapped in poverty: Oxfam report

On 9 December, Oxfam’s report, “Made in Myanmar: Entrenched poverty or decent jobs for garment workers?” highlighted poor working conditions in Burma/Myanmar’s garment industry:¹²⁶

- The 3,600 kyat daily minimum wage (US\$2.89) does not enable workers to meet basic needs, with 43% of the workers remaining debt-ridden and nearly 90% unable to accumulate savings.
- Thirty-nine percent of the workers reported injuries at work and many are afraid of poor fire safety in the factories, including blocked or locked exits.

¹¹⁵ EMG (03 Dec 15) Jade mining firms break agreement to stop dumping waste into lake in landslide-prone Hpakant; BNI (21 Dec 15) Interview with newly elected NLD MP from jade rich Hpakant; EMG (15 Dec 15) Locals ask actions against increased jade mining in Hpakant within the last months of current administration; Reuters (15 Dec 15) Chinese jade miners in overdrive ahead of new Myanmar government

¹¹⁶ EMG (19 Dec 15) Jade diggers face probe

¹¹⁷ US State Department (07 Dec 15) Issuance of Burma General License; DVB (08 Dec 15) Sanctions lifted temporarily, says US official

¹¹⁸ Reuters (07 Dec 15) U.S. temporarily lifts trade restrictions on Myanmar shipping hubs; Irrawaddy (07 Dec 15) US Set to Ease Sanctions for Asia World Port in Rangoon; Myanmar Times (08 Dec 15) US relaxes sanctions on Yangon port

¹¹⁹ US State Department (07 Dec 15) Issuance of Burma General License; Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) Yangon Stock Exchange to be opened to foreign investors next year

¹²⁰ Myanmar Times (10 Dec 15) Yangon Stock Exchange to be opened to foreign investors next year; Myanmar Times (04 Dec 15) List of 10 YSX underwriters revealed

¹²¹ Myanmar Times (09 Dec 15) Six companies to trade on Yangon Stock Exchange;

¹²² German Watch (Dec 15) Global Climate Risk Index 2016: Who suffers most from extreme weather events? Weather-related loss events in 2014 and 1995 to 2014; Irrawaddy (03 Dec 15) In Paris for Climate Talks, Burmese Activists Urge Govt to Follow Through on Action Plan

¹²³ Myanmar Times (04 Dec 15) Myanmar to fight climate change by protecting forests

¹²⁴ Myanmar Times (04 Dec 15) Myanmar to fight climate change by protecting forests

¹²⁵ Irrawaddy (03 Dec 15) In Paris for Climate Talks, Burmese Activists Urge Govt to Follow Through on Action Plan

¹²⁶ Oxfam (09 Dec 15) “Made in Myanmar: Entrenched poverty or decent jobs for garment workers?”; GNLM (11 Dec 15) Oxfam report exposes poor working conditions in garments industry

- Verbal abuse is common, with 31% of workers reporting verbal and other abuse, and 22% reporting cases of forced overtime (at times unpaid) to meet high production targets.
- Seventy-six percent of surveyed workers reported that they have had their pay cut for sick leave days taken and nearly 40% of the workers reported that excessive overtime affects their health.
- Of the 60% of workers who reported labor complaint mechanisms, only 13% had used them. Fear of repercussions, lack employer feedback, and language barriers deterred workers from raising concerns.

On 14 December, over 200 garment workers at Hteik Tan Myanmar Garment Factory in Rangoon’s Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone marked the seventh day of their strike against the factory for refusing to pay full salary in November, to punish workers for unmet production targets.¹²⁷

Opium production in Burma “stabilized,” still driven by conflict, poverty

On 15 December, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its annual survey of drug production in Southeast Asia, which found that Burma's opium poppy cultivation is down by 3.65% from 2014, and has stabilized over the past three years.¹²⁸ Its report, “Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015 – Lao PDR, Myanmar,” found that:¹²⁹

- Significant decreases in opium cultivation occurred in Chin and Kachin States.
- The farm-gate price of fresh opium dropped by 34% from 2014.
- Prohibition by local authorities was important - in Northern Shan State, insurgent groups caused 19% of poppy farmers to cease cultivation.
- Poverty, lack of food and property rights, debt, and conflict were push factors in poppy cultivation.
- Burma remains the world’s second-largest opium producer after Afghanistan, producing 647 tons of opium in 2015.

Jeremy Douglas, the UNODC's chief in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, described the marginal decrease a “stabilization” and warned that displaced farmers without alternatives may return to growing poppy. He also called opium eradication a massive challenge to the NLD government – which will not have control over the Defense, Border Affairs and Home Affairs Ministries – especially as drug smugglers look to exploit ASEAN’s economic integration.¹³⁰

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN JULY

3	The Election Commission reported that voter turnout in the 8 November election was 69%, down from 77% in 2010, and that advanced votes stood at 5-6% for both chambers of the National Parliament, while 6% of votes were disqualified. ¹³¹
3	It was reported that the national police force recorded 422 complaints of election law breaches at police stations across the country between November 8 - 24 under Chapter 13 of the Union Election Law, which covers criminal cases. ¹³²
4	It is reported that a joint delegation of Tatmadaw, Karen National Union, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, Karen National Liberation Army/Peace Council, and Myanmar Peace Center personnel arrived in Colombia to study the country’s ongoing peace accord as a model for resolving Burma/Myanmar’s conflicts. ¹³³
4	Thanlyin Township Court, Rangoon/Yangon Division, sentences a 47-year-old man, Tin Myint, to death for murder; he had previously been jailed for other murders and sexual assaults but was released in two presidential amnesties in 2008 and 2014. ¹³⁴
6	It is reported that around 80 farmers stage a protest in Taungoo Township, Pegu/Bago Division, demanding the return of land seized by Kaung Myanmar Aung Company. ¹³⁵

¹²⁷ RFA (14 Dec 15) Hundreds of Myanmar Garment Workers Mark Seventh Day of Labor Strike

¹²⁸ UNODC (15 Dec 15) Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015 - Lao PDR, Myanmar

¹²⁹ UNODC (15 Dec 15) Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015 - Lao PDR, Myanmar

¹³⁰ Reuters (15 Dec 15) Myanmar’s high opium output a huge test for Suu Kyi government: U.N.; UNODC (15 Dec 15) Opium production in Myanmar and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic stabilizes at high levels

¹³¹ Myanmar Times (03 Dec 15) UEC puts election turnout at 69 percent

¹³² Myanmar Now (03 Dec 15) Litany of election complaints submitted to Myanmar police; DVB (06 Dec 15) Police receive flood of election complaints

¹³³ Irrawaddy (04 Dec 15) Burma Army, Karen Rebels Visit Colombia

¹³⁴ DVB (04 Dec 15) Death penalty for three-time police killer

8	It is reported that authorities in Bhamo/Bamaw Township, Kachin State, seized over 1,000 tons of timber about to be smuggled to China. ¹³⁶
9	Burma's controversial Paunglaung hydropower station in Naypyidaw's Pyinmana Township starts operating after mass displacements and protests against the dam. ¹³⁷
11	The United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) issues a statement saying Parliament should not approve the non-inclusive 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement since it was signed by only eight armed groups and will not establish lasting peace and that the UNFC will continue to work with the current and upcoming governments in order to achieve a nationwide peace settlement. ¹³⁸
15	The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) releases its monthly chronology report, showing that in November, 32 political activists were sentenced to prison terms of between one month and two years and 23 activists were arrested. ¹³⁹
23	It is reported that the UN Population Fund is launching a three-year US\$11.8 million health project for women and girls in Arakan, Kachin, and northern Shan State to provide support for expectant and new mothers and emergency care for trauma victims, such as post-rape treatment and counselling. ¹⁴⁰
23	The UN General Assembly's 70 th Session approves a resolution on the Situation of human rights in Myanmar without a vote [see <i>November 2015 Burma Bulletin</i>]. ¹⁴¹

Please visit www.altsean.org/ChronologyHome.php to access Altsean-Burma's full database of chronology entries covering Burma-related events.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN AUGUST

“Unfinished Freedom: A Blueprint for the Future of Free Expression in Myanmar” PEN America <http://goo.gl/m5hnok>

“Lords of Jade: How a narcotics kingpin and his associates used opaque company structures to take a dominant role in Myanmar’s most valuable natural resource business” Global Witness <https://goo.gl/Hfu56h>

“Made in Myanmar: Entrenched poverty or decent jobs for garment workers?” Oxfam <https://goo.gl/2vpL1V>

“Early Warning Watch List: December 2015” International Crisis Group <http://goo.gl/BtynC6>

“The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications” International Crisis Group <http://goo.gl/kw5ft5>

“Humanitarian Response Plan: January - December 2016” UNOCHA <http://goo.gl/zSPbjm>

“Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015: Lao PDR, Myanmar” UNODC <http://goo.gl/Vs0bzO>

“October/November Update – Burma Army Offensives Against KIA No. 8 Brigade Headquarters and SSPP/SSA Headquarters” Free Burma Rangers <http://goo.gl/hCfq5o>

“Burmese government troops torch Ta’ang village in northern Shan State; farmer forced to guide troops shot dead in battle” SHRF <http://goo.gl/bKaCDu>

“Killing, disappearance, land-mine death during Burma Army offensive in central Shan State” SHRF <http://goo.gl/gq4luR>

¹³⁵EMG (06 Dec 15) Farmers protest against company owned by bank chairman

¹³⁶EMG (08 Dec 15) Over 1,000 tonnes of timber seized in Bhamo

¹³⁷Myanmar Times (11 Dec 15) Controversial Upper Paunglaung dam joins national grid; GNLM (09 Dec 15) New hydropower station opened at Upper Paunglaung power project in Pyinmana

¹³⁸IMNA (18 Dec 15) Hluttaw's approval of flawed NCA can't bring genuine peace, says UNFC

¹³⁹EMG (17 Dec 15) AAPP slams govt over continued arrests

¹⁴⁰Reuters (23 Dec 15) UN: Myanmar conflict-zone women face rape, lack healthcare

¹⁴¹UN (23 Dec 15) Concluding Main Part of Seventieth Session, General Assembly Approves \$5.4 Billion Budget for 2016-2017 Biennium, as Recommended by Fifth Committee