

# USAID/BURMA

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This report has been written by Kimetrica LLC ([www.kimetrica.com](http://www.kimetrica.com)) and Mekong Economics ([www.mekongeconomics.com](http://www.mekongeconomics.com)) as part of the Myanmar Analytical Activity, and is therefore the exclusive property of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Melissa Earl (Kimetrica) is the author of this report and reachable at [melissa.earl@kimetrica.com](mailto:melissa.earl@kimetrica.com) or at Kimetrica LLC, 80 Garden Center, Suite A-368, Broomfield, CO 80020. The author's views in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

## MAY 2019 AT A GLANCE

### The Tatmadaw extended its unilateral ceasefire in northern and northeastern Myanmar to June 30.

The announcement came just after the Tatmadaw met with Northern Alliance members. Most analysts believe the Tatmadaw extended the ceasefire to concentrate on fighting the Arakan Army in Rakhine State. (Page 1)

**Fighting between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw moved further south** to Ann Township in Rakhine State. While investment in the state is concentrated in southern Rakhine, fighting in central Rakhine is worrisome for the Government's plans for development in the state. (Pages 2-4)

**The Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and the Restoration Council of Shan State agreed to stop fighting** and pursue a peace agreement. (Pages 4-5)

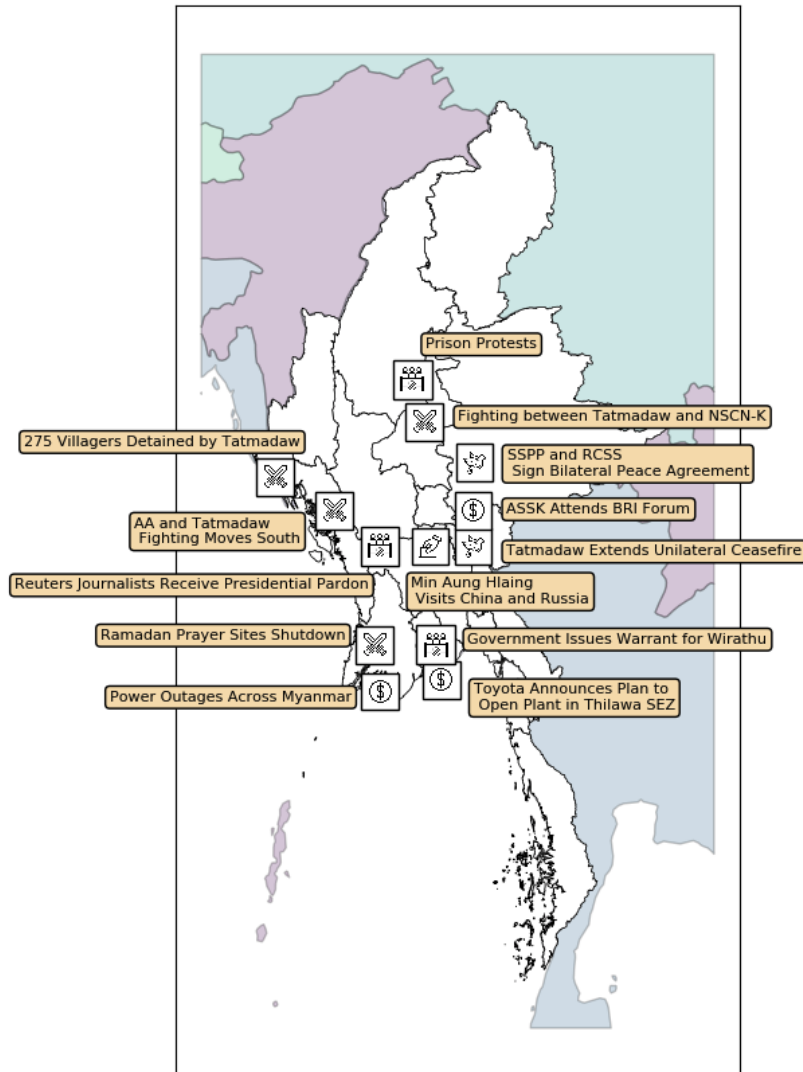
**The USDP submitted four additional proposals to amend the constitution.** The proposed amendments focus on decentralization and will likely be sent to the Constitutional Amendment Committee for review. (Pages 7-8)

**Three agreements were signed by the Myanmar and Chinese governments following Aung San Suu Kyi's attendance of the Belt and Road Initiative Forum in Beijing last month.** The agreements are considered relatively non-committal and did not focus on the more controversial China-Myanmar Economic Corridor projects. (Pages 9-10)

**Buddhist nationalists forcefully shut down three residential buildings in Yangon that had official permits to serve as temporary places of worship for Muslims during Ramadan.** The local authorities' initial inadequate response to the nationalists was followed by a "White Rose Campaign" led by Buddhists as a sign of solidarity with the Muslim worshippers. (Pages 12-13)

**An arrest warrant for Buddhist monk and nationalist, Ashin Wirathu, was issued after he made incendiary comments, including insulting Aung San Suu Kyi, at a rally in April.** (Page 13)

**The Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, received a presidential pardon on May 7,** two weeks after their final appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court, but the pardon is not considered a sign that the Myanmar Government is loosening its control over the press in Myanmar. (Page 14)



## CONFLICT

On April 30, the Tatmadaw extended its unilateral ceasefire to June 30. The extension was ostensibly announced to allow further peace talks between the Government and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that make up the Northern Alliance.<sup>i</sup> However, the continued exclusion of Rakhine State from the ceasefire amidst continued conflict in Rakhine have led to suspicions that the true motives behind the ceasefire and its extension are to concentrate efforts to quell the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine. Conflict in Rakhine moved further south into Ann Township.

Conflict resurged in two northern townships in Sagaing State as the Tatmadaw and Indian armed forces united to carry out offensives against the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K). This month, active conflict declined in Shan State, which is attributed to the extension of the Tatmadaw ceasefire and a bilateral peace agreement between the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS).

### TATMADAW EXTENDS CEASEFIRE

Following a meeting on April 30 between the Northern Alliance and the Government's National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), the Tatmadaw announced a two-month extension of its unilateral ceasefire to June 30.<sup>ii</sup> Notably, China's special envoy for Asian Affairs attended the meeting, speaking individually with both sides. His presence testifies to China's continued role in the peace process.<sup>iii</sup> At the meeting, the Northern Alliance presented a draft plan proposing a bilateral ceasefire and the return of the more than 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDP) living in camps in Kachin and northern Shan through a joint effort by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Tatmadaw.<sup>iv</sup> The Government requested the inclusion of a clause committing the Northern Alliance members to sign the NCA within a certain period after signing a bilateral ceasefire.<sup>v</sup> The Tatmadaw and Northern Alliance planned further discussions on the possible bilateral

ceasefire later in May, but the talks were delayed over disagreements on a neutral meeting place due to EAO leaders' concerns for their safety.<sup>vi</sup>

While the ceasefire extension was welcomed by the UN and China as a sign of progress in the peace process, the Tatmadaw's motivations remain unclear.<sup>vii</sup> The extension could indicate a genuine desire for progress towards peace by the Tatmadaw, and its willingness to meet with the Northern Alliance groups to reach an agreement through negotiation. However, many analysts view the extension to be a strategy by the Tatmadaw to avoid fighting on multiple fronts in order to concentrate its efforts in Rakhine, as suspected with the announcement of the original ceasefire.<sup>viii</sup>

The extension of the ceasefire is unlikely to significantly decrease conflict in Myanmar because it excludes Rakhine, where fighting continued throughout the month (see Figure 1). Although the Tatmadaw claims it cannot extend the ceasefire to Rakhine due to the threat posed by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), many suspect it is to allow the Tatmadaw to continue its offences against the AA in Rakhine.<sup>ix</sup> Fighting continued between the AA and the Tatmadaw in Rakhine, notably spreading to previously conflict-free zones in central Rakhine this month.<sup>x</sup>

The AA's alliances with other EAOs make it difficult for the Tatmadaw to isolate its conflict with the AA from other EAOs and states and reduces the success of its divide-and-conquer approach.<sup>xi</sup> The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) announced in March 2019 that it would fight alongside the AA if the Tatmadaw did not end its military operations in Rakhine.<sup>xii</sup> The Northern Alliance also previously announced that it will not adhere to the ceasefire if the Tatmadaw does not end its offenses in Rakhine.<sup>xiii</sup> Thus, although unlikely that the other Northern Alliance EAOs will send forces to fight alongside the AA, the Northern Alliance EAOs may indirectly support the AA by providing resources, training and other support. Conflict may also continue in areas outside Rakhine, regardless of the extension.<sup>xiv</sup>

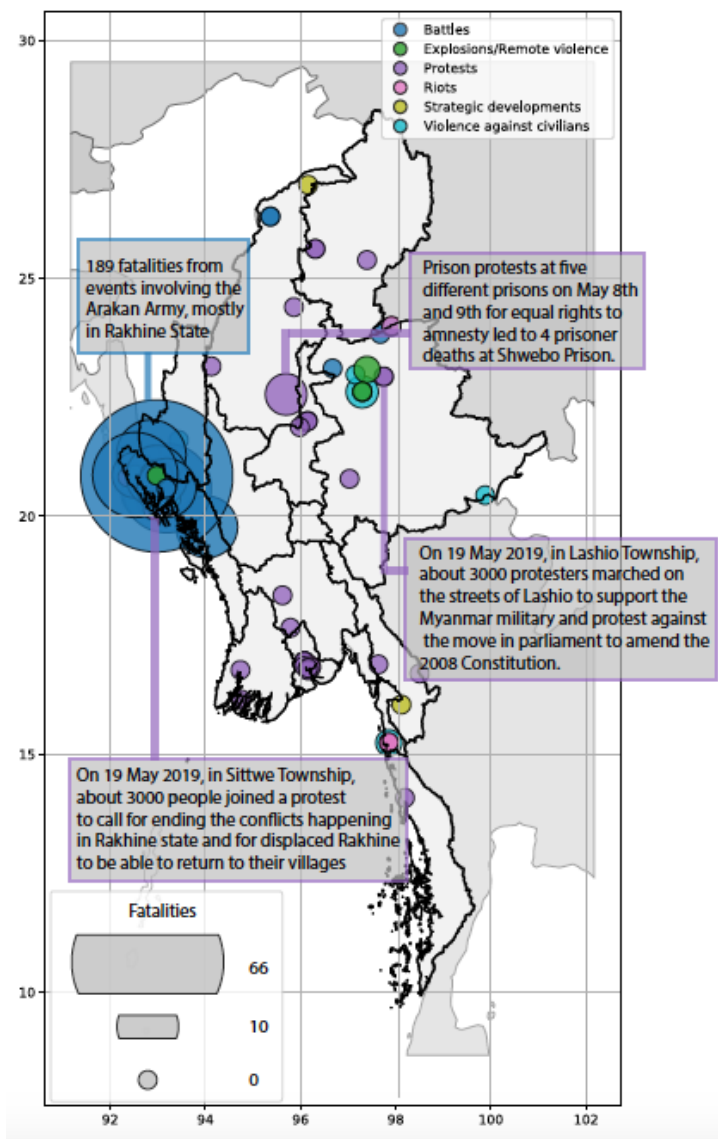


Figure 1. Conflict Hot Spot Map (May 1 – May 24, 2019)  
KIMETRIC LLC, DATA SOURCE: ACLED

## RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine State was excluded from the Tatmadaw ceasefire extension, and conflict has continued unabated in the region. Between May 1 and 24, there were 44 instances of violence between the AA and the Tatmadaw as reported by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, mostly in Kyauktaw and also in Mrauk-U and Ponnagyun townships, which have resulted in casualties on both sides.<sup>xv</sup> In northern Rakhine, the AA used landmines twice this month landmines to attack military convoys, in Kyauktaw on May 7, and in Ponnagyun on May 9.<sup>xvi</sup> In response, the Tatmadaw shelled the border of Ponnagyun and Kyauktaw townships, and shot and killed a motorbike ferry driver returning home in Phayar

Paung Village, Kyauktaw Township. The Tatmadaw claim the driver was an AA member attempting to detonate a landmine.<sup>xvii</sup>

Most notably this month, the AA attacked a Tatmadaw convoy using landmines and fought Tatmadaw forces on the Ann-Sittwe Highway in Ann Township on May 12.<sup>xviii</sup> According to the Tatmadaw, only one soldier was injured, but the AA claims to have killed several. The fight in Ann is conspicuous because it could indicate that conflict is spreading to central areas of Rakhine State, contrary to the Government's insistence that conflict affects under 10 percent of Rakhine State's land area and is confined only to northern areas of the state.<sup>xix</sup> Should conflict expand in Rakhine State, plans for state and foreign investment could be put in jeopardy, which would further incentivize the military to expand its efforts—and human rights abuses—to quell the conflict in northern Rakhine.

Several civilians were injured or killed by landmines in Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, and neighboring Buthidaung this month.<sup>xx</sup> On May 21, a Rohingya man and his eight year old son were killed by a stray shell during armed conflict between the AA and Tatmadaw in Alae Gyun, Kyauktaw; however, the AA and Tatmadaw both deny fighting in the area at that time.<sup>xxi</sup> A young boy was also killed by an abandoned artillery shell in Mee Yat Pyin Village, Kyauktaw Township.<sup>xxii</sup> Two civilians, a man on a boat travelling from Say Taung Village to Si Taung Village in Buthidaung, and a boat ferry operator docking a boat in Kyauktaw Township, were both shot and injured by unknown assailants, though the man from Buthidaung claims it was the Tatmadaw stationed in Sapahtar Village. According to a recent report by the Development Media Group, the number of civilian casualties from landmines in Rakhine state is increasing, and there is a strong need for education and risk awareness about explosive hazards in the state.<sup>xxiii</sup>

On May 19, five civilians were killed and three injured, including young children, when the Tatmadaw opened fire in Myauk Taung village, Kyauktaw. A Tatmadaw spokesperson claims both the AA and Tatmadaw were firing at each

other, but the AA denies fighting with the Tatmadaw at that time, and accused the army of deliberately targeting civilians following the deaths of approximately 50 Tatmadaw soldiers during fighting on May 13 and 14.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In addition to protests within Myanmar, such as a protest attended by thousands in Sittwe on May 19, the Tatmadaw's poor treatment of civilians in conflict areas and the fighting is beginning to gain global attention.<sup>xxv</sup> Rakhine, Shan and Kachin people living in the US held a demonstration in Washington D.C. on May 13.<sup>xxvi</sup> Amnesty International released a report on May 29 accusing both the AA and the Tatmadaw of war crimes in Rakhine, which gained global media attention.<sup>xxvii</sup> Both the AA and the Tatmadaw deny the accusations.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### KYAUK TAN VILLAGERS' DETAINMENT

On April 30, 275 male villagers from Kyauk Tan Village in Rathedaung Township were rounded up by the Tatmadaw and held at a school compound for interrogation. On May 2 at around 2:00 AM, six were killed and eight injured.<sup>xxix</sup> The Tatmadaw claims the detained villagers attempted to seize the soldiers' weapons, who were forced to fire as a last resort, but this story conflicts with accounts from witnesses who claim the soldiers began shooting at the sleeping villagers when a mentally disabled detainee became distressed and started shouting.<sup>xxx</sup> On May 8, four detainees who reportedly confessed to being AA members along with another two suspected associates were transferred to Sittwe police station, and all remaining villagers were freed on May 14.<sup>xxxi</sup> Reports indicate that the village faced food and water shortages as well as livestock deaths during the detainment.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Many have cast doubt on the course of events reported by the Tatmadaw. Human Rights Watch called for an independent investigation due to the lack of transparency surrounding the incident.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Tatmadaw announced the formation of a commission to investigate the incident, but have not yet set a deadline for the investigation or submission of a report.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The incident parallels the detainment of 27 villagers from Letka Village in Sittwe in April, where three detainees died and were cremated without their families' knowledge, and 24 villagers remain in police custody. Families and the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, are skeptical of the Tatmadaw's explanations that the deaths were due to heart failure. More likely, the men were tortured and shot.<sup>xxxv</sup> The incidents illustrate the Tatmadaw's ruthlessness towards civilians as it tries to find and capture AA members and sympathizers. While the Tatmadaw claims it entered Kyauk Tan in pursuit of AA fighters fleeing from a captured AA training camp in Buthidaung Township, the AA denies that the Tatmadaw captured any camp in the area, and purports the Tatmadaw is carrying out mass detainments and killings purely to instill fear and terrorize Rakhine civilians.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

### ROHINGYA VILLAGE ARSON

On May 9, an Islamic school, a government primary school, and 41 shops in the Rohingya village, Kun Taing, in Buthidaung Township were torched by an unidentified group.<sup>xxxvii</sup> One Rohingya resident said the attack on Kun Taing was unprecedented, as the village has been living peacefully for generations and until now, had never had problems. Rohingya eyewitnesses claim they saw a group of Rakhine extremists, disguised as frog-catchers, set the properties on fire. However, experts on the Rohingya crisis believe the fire could have been caused by the Tatmadaw in an effort to divide communities and detract attention from the Tatmadaw's human rights abuses on Rakhine civilians.

### CHIN STATE

This month, the Tatmadaw sustained significant casualties, including several high-ranking officers during armed conflict with the AA in Paletwa Township. On May 17, Captain Aung Moe Myint was killed alongside several Tatmadaw soldiers in an attack by the AA on a military column.<sup>xxxviii</sup> On May 26, over 20 Tatmadaw soldiers were killed during a fight in a remote part of Paletwa, including some high-ranking officers.<sup>xxxix</sup> The Tatmadaw has denied the death of any of the high-ranking officers, but its denials are

questionable as the Tatmadaw rarely provides information about fallen Tatmadaw officers.

Civilians in Paletwa are facing food shortages as the Tatmadaw placed restrictions on rice entering the township in early May in an effort to restrict food supplies for the AA forces based there.<sup>xi</sup> The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) reports that village authorities seized more than 300 bags of rice donated by a Roman Catholic Church as relief aid for Chin villagers, and another 150 bags of rice donated by the Church of the Province of Myanmar were seized and sold for profit by the same local authorities. A foreign advisor to pro-democracy and human rights movements in Myanmar told Kimetrica researchers that the food shortages in Chin are a result of the Tatmadaw's efforts to intimidate local ethnic minorities to reduce support for the AA, along with corruption as village authorities profit off of the seizures.

## SHAN STATE

Following peace negotiations initiated at the end of April at the request of Shan civil society and political parties, the Shan State Army-North, the armed wing of the SSPP and the Shan State Army-South, the armed wing of the RCSS, signed a bilateral peace agreement on May 11.<sup>xii</sup> In a joint statement, the Shan EAOs outlined the four points of the agreement, which includes a bilateral ceasefire, a continuation of peace

negotiations, a cessation of provocative social media posts, and cooperation to eradicate drugs in Shan State.<sup>xliii</sup>

The two EAOs have been in conflict for over a year, which has resulted in civilian casualties, including children, and thousands displaced.<sup>xliiii</sup> Also significant is the role played by the monastic community in the Shan ceasefire: Though long-requested by the public, civil society and political groups in Shan, the two EAOs ultimately agreed to hold peace negotiations on the official request of well-known and respected Shan Buddhist monk Maing Hpone Sayadaw, and the ceasefire was brokered by Shan Buddhist monks.<sup>xliv</sup> Although the ceasefire will decrease conflict in Shan and is a major step towards peace, conflict is unlikely to cease completely in the state, for the SSPP-RCSS ceasefire includes neither the TNLA nor the Tatmadaw.

Elsewhere in Shan State, five men were shot by unknown groups in three separate incidents, resulting in two casualties. One civilian was killed and another injured by landmines in Namtu and Hsipaw townships, respectively. These areas that have seen frequent fighting between the Shan EAOs and the Tatmadaw.<sup>xlv</sup>

Fighting between the KIA and the Tatmadaw, which intensified throughout April and was mostly concentrated in Muse and Kutkai

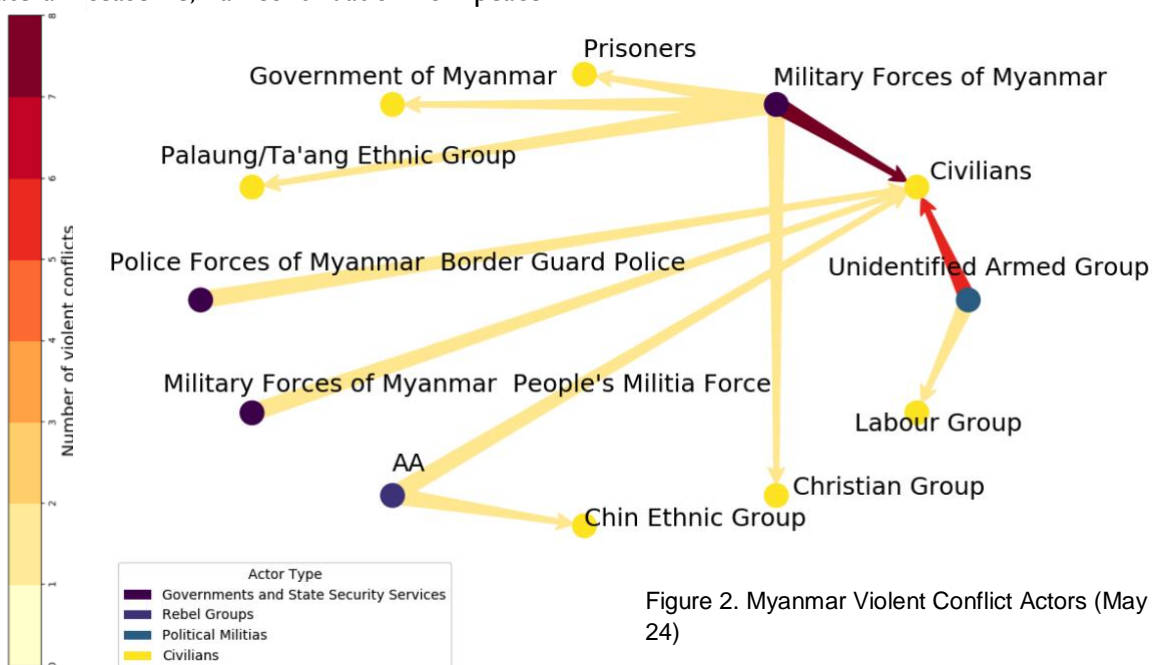


Figure 2. Myanmar Violent Conflict Actors (May 1 – May 24)

townships in Shan State, slowed this month. Despite the ceasefire extension, the two forces fought in Muse on May 2, and in Mongmit on May 8, with no casualties reported for either incident.<sup>xlvi</sup> The fighting is believed to be motivated by the Tatmadaw's desire to take over KIA-controlled areas.<sup>xlvii</sup>

## **SAGAING REGION**

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and the NSCN-K in Lahe and Nanyun townships in Sagaing occurred this month.<sup>1</sup> On May 16, the Tatmadaw conducted a clearance operation against the NSCN-K near the India-Myanmar border, and fighting between the two forces continued through the next day.<sup>xlviii</sup> The Tatmadaw claims to have attacked the NSCN-K for harboring members of northeastern Indian militant insurgency groups including the United Liberation Front of Asom, National Democratic Front of Boroland and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation, in violation of the 2012 ceasefire between the NSCN-K and the Tatmadaw.<sup>xlix</sup> These insurgency groups, as well as the NSCN-K, are all considered to be terrorist organizations by the Indian Government.<sup>1</sup>

The NSCN-K accused the Tatmadaw of breaching the 2012 ceasefire, as well as creating a "war-like situation" and inciting fear and panic by firing artillery near populated areas in Konyak Naga region in Sagaing, while "aggressively forcing [the NSCN-K] to sign the NCA."<sup>ii</sup> The violence was condemned by Naga CSOs and the northeast Indian faction of the NSCN-K for its impact on civilians and their livelihoods.<sup>lii</sup>

The Tatmadaw's conflicts against the NSCN-K illustrates the close relationship between the Indian and Myanmar militaries. This month's crackdown was reported to have been initiated under pressure from India, and also to return the favor for India's help to block Rakhine rebels

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<sup>1</sup> The overarching Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is active in northeast India and northwest Myanmar. In 1988, the NSCN split into two distinct groups: NSCN-K (NSCN-Khaplang), which operates in Myanmar and parts of Nagaland in India, and NSCN-Isak-

entering Mizoram (India) during the Tatmadaw's operations.<sup>liii</sup> It was also reported that the Indian and Myanmar soldiers are working together in active combat against the NSCN-K in Sagaing.<sup>liv</sup>

## **TWO ROHINGYA TERROR SUSPECTS ARRESTED IN MALAYSIA**

Two Rohingya men were among four arrested in Malaysia in early May on suspicion of involvement in a foiled Islamic State terrorist plot during Ramadan.<sup>lv</sup> The attacks were motivated by the death of a Muslim fireman who was attacked at a Hindu temple in November 2018.<sup>lvi</sup> One Rohingya suspect was a 25-year-old laborer who admitted to being part of a local Islamic State cell.<sup>lvii</sup> The second Rohingya suspect, a 20-year-old waiter, reported he had a UNHCR identification card, and conflicting reports state he either told police he supported ARSA or he was an ARSA member.<sup>lviii</sup> If the Rohingya suspect entered Malaysia as a refugee, this could raise fears of extremism brewing in Rohingya refugee camps.

The Director General of Myanmar's President's Office, Zaw Htay, along with other political figures in Myanmar and in the region, issued statements expressing concern that Myanmar Muslim communities, particularly Rohingya refugees, are at risk of becoming radicalized.<sup>lix</sup> Political analysts continue to generally agree that Muslims in Myanmar are unlikely to become radicalized.<sup>lx</sup> However, as political analyst Richard Horsey, pointed out on Twitter, Myanmar is poorly equipped to uncover or deal with such a threat should it occur.<sup>lxi</sup> Continued monitoring of radical or extremist ideologies or groups remains necessary.

## **FEMALE RECRUITS IN ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS**

Muivah (NSCN-IM) which operates in northeast India. NSCN-IM has not entered into conflict with the Indian government since 1997, but NSCN-K was labeled a terrorist group by the Indian government in 2015.

While women have always held positions in EAOs, their numbers have remained relatively small and primarily in roles in the clerical, education and medical fields. Recent ethnic military celebrations and parades highlight a noticeable increase in the number of female soldiers in EAOs. Several sources with ties to EAOs have noted this trend to Kimetrica researchers, and interviews with leaders from six EAOs conducted by an expert who works with multiple EAOs and ethnic civil society organizations (CSOs) in Myanmar confirm that female enlistment increased since last year in those EAOs. The main reasons for enlistment are a mixture of economic factors, dwindling resources and opportunities, fading hope in the current strategy, fear of becoming a victim of sexual abuse, and a growing belief that women can make a difference.

The informal poll conducted by the expert who works with EAOs and ethnic CSOs found that female enlistment across the six EAOs increased by 23 percent relative to 2018. The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) reported an increase of 15 percent in the number of female recruits since last year. A KNLA member told Kimetrica researchers that many female recruits are former IDPs and were either teachers, administrators, or nurses or midwives. Outside of the KNLA, there is little opportunity for women to use their skills. Still, the highest rise in female recruits was in the AA, with a 35 percent increase since 2018. An AA leader explained that about 50 percent of all its current recruits are women. These women are mostly single and in their twenties with “a genuine spirit to fight.” The increased recruitment of women is indicative of the grassroots support enjoyed by the KNLA and AA.

## **POLITICS**

The peace process made some progress in May with talks between the Government, the Tatmadaw, and the Northern Alliance fueling hopes that bilateral ceasefire agreements could be reached in the near future. The talks were facilitated by the extension of the Tatmadaw’s unilateral ceasefire until June 2019.

Opportunities for NCA non-signatories to engage with the peace process were enhanced when the Karen National Union (KNU) proposed a Peace Process Consultative Meeting.

The Government announced a formal plan for its proposed GAD reforms, while the NLD’s efforts to pursue greater civilian control of the government through constitutional reform did not make noticeable progress this month. The USDP sought to capitalize on the perceived inertia surrounding constitutional reform by proposing four additional charter amendments.

### **PEACE PROCESS**

Talks between the NRPC and the political wings of the Northern Alliance were witnessed by the Chinese special envoy for Asian Affairs. The Tatmadaw’s extension of its unilateral ceasefire until the end of June 2019 allows for continued negotiation between the Government, the Tatmadaw and the Northern Alliance. Each EAO-member of the Northern Alliance provided a bilateral ceasefire proposal, with the Government expected to propose its own amendments to the proposals through further rounds of negotiations. The Tatmadaw, Government, and the Northern Alliance were scheduled to meet again on May 24. However, the groups could not agree on a suitable venue as the AA was concerned about security in the Government’s proposed locations.<sup>lxii</sup> The meeting is postponed until June.<sup>lxiii</sup>

A summit of Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), which includes all 10 signatories of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), was held from May 14 to 18 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. NCA non-signatories, the KIO and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), attended as observers. The KNU proposed a Peace Process Consultative Meeting (PPCM) to replace the PPST. The PPCM would help NCA signatories and non-signatories “[set] common goals and agendas, exchange of information, and mutual discussion.”<sup>lxiv</sup>

The summit was marked by the KNU submitting its withdrawal from the PPST. The KNU was eventually persuaded to remain until a second



phase of the summit convenes in the near future. KNU spokesman and general secretary, Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo, cited the inability to reform the PPST since 2017 as the reason behind the KNU's desire to withdraw from the group, although he did not mention which specific reforms the KNU had pursued.<sup>lxv</sup>

On May 19, General Yawd Serk, Chairman of the RCSS, formally took over leadership of the PPST from the KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Sae Poe who led the group since its formation in 2016. Yawd Serk criticized the lack of progress that had been achieved in the peace process as concerned entities stuck rigidly to their principles during the four Union Peace Conferences in the past three years, and called for a move beyond a focus on "technical issues."<sup>lxvi</sup>

The summit was preceded by informal discussions between the KNU and the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on May 11. The bilateral meeting itself is significant because these meetings have not occurred since the KNU's temporary withdrawal from the formal peace process in May 2018.<sup>lxvii</sup> Although no agreements were forged at the meeting, both sides indicated progress had been made towards reviving regular monthly meetings between the KNU and the Tatmadaw.

### **MIN AUNG HLAING VISITS TO CHINA AND RUSSIA**

In April, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia and China to strengthen strategic military ties between the three countries. The visits came just before Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to China for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Forum and also coincided with the UWSA's military parade. The Tatmadaw's visit could be a subtle message to the Chinese-backed Wa, that the Tatmadaw, too, maintains a mostly good relationship with China. The visit focused mainly on military partnerships. Following the visits, during a press conference in Naypyidaw on May 3, Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun declared that "the good relations between the Tatmadaw and Russia and China have been strengthened."<sup>lxviii</sup> China requested the extension of the unilateral

ceasefire which was extended shortly after the visit, and Min Aung Hlaing assured the Chinese President that the Tatmadaw would cooperate over the implementation of the BRI.<sup>lxix</sup> In Russia, Min Aung Hlaing confirmed the Tatmadaw's intentions to acquire advanced military weapons from the Russians, stating that he looked towards Russian weapons for the modernization of the Tatmadaw in the future.<sup>lxx</sup>

### **GENERAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT REFORM**

The transfer of the General Administration Department (GAD) from military to civilian control advanced this month when the the creation of a reform plan was announced. On May 22, the minister of the Office of the Union Government, Min Thu, met with GAD staff to discuss the specifics of the reform. The reform documents include revisions of the department's staff manuals, code of conduct, and the curriculum of the Institute of Development Administration.<sup>lxxi</sup>

The release of the reform plans follows the Government's timetable for the GAD transfer. The first three months after the original announcement in December were set aside for the physical requirements of the transition and the subsequent three-month period is devoted to transforming the department's core functions. The Government stated its intentions for the GAD transfer to take another six months before the agency is fully under civilian control. The gradual and piecemeal nature of the reforms emphasizes the government's caution in implementing large scale reforms and upsetting the balance of power in an institution still predominantly staffed by former-military personnel.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM**

Following months of debate, on May 14, the Union Parliament voted for the USDP's proposal to amend Article 261 of the constitution to be examined by the Constitutional Amendment Committee, rather than as a standalone amendment for a vote by Parliament.<sup>lxxii</sup> The amendment, submitted to Parliament by the

USDP on March 5, would authorize the state/region chief minister to be elected by the state and regional parliaments. USDP and military members of parliament (MPs) voted against incorporating this proposed amendment within the scope of the joint committee.

On May 28 the USDP and military MPs proposed amendments to four additional articles of the 2008 Constitution. The draft amendments, which will first be scrutinized by the draft bill committee, propose the following:

1. **Article 248 (c):** amend to allow the President to negotiate with Chief Ministers to decide the number of ministries in each respective state and region;
2. **Article 264:** amend to allow the dismissal of Chief Minister or Minister if found to be failing in the duty of safeguarding the constitution;
3. **Article 322:** amend to authorize the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union to assess the conformity of Union-level government agencies and the parliament to the Constitution; and
4. **Article 402:** amend for electoral disputes to be determined by the parliament—currently the final decision is made by the Union Election Commission, a body appointed by the winning party.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

The USDP's proposed charter amendments seek to limit the executive's authority over states and regions. Following on from the proposal to amend Article 261, the new set of amendments re-emphasize the USDP and military's focus on decentralization and are a public demonstration of the military's supposed commitment to building a federal union, as well as an attempt to build alliances with EAOs and EPPs. The set of proposals are, however, unlikely to be successful in their passage through parliament and will likely be subsumed under the work of the joint committee.

USDP and military MPs are trying to portray the joint committee on constitutional amendments as slow and as a way to weaken the rule of law. The leader of the military's bloc in Parliament,

Brigadier General Maung Maung said the decision to have the amendment to Article 261 scrutinized by the joint committee “could lead to distrust between each other, resulting delays and difficulties in the country's democratic transition.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> The USDP and military MPs' attempt to once again bypass the joint committee indicate that they are trying to portray their efforts for reform as democracy building and the NLD's efforts as “democracy-bullying.”<sup>lxxv</sup> Regardless of politics, in the longer term, the proposed amendments signify that further decentralization is a likely outcome of constitutional reform.

### MYITSONE DAM

In late May, the Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar, Hong Liang, briefed a select group of journalists about the Myitsone Dam and its relation to the China-Myanmar bilateral relationship. On May 21, the Ambassador highlighted that the current NLD-led government and China will reach an agreement that will please both sides and not damage Myanmar and China's relationship. He also hinted that a particular group is spreading misinformation about the Myitsone Dam project with the aim to disturb the project itself and the relationship between China and Myanmar, although declined to provide details of the identity of the group.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Ambassador Hong Liang was recalled to Beijing at the end of May. A Yangon-based journalist told Mekong Economics researchers that that this dismissal is thought to signal the Chinese government's dissatisfaction with his handling of the Myitsone Dam issue, which has been locally perceived as overly aggressive and tactless.

Pressure from Chinese companies appears to be increasing as well. A foreign advisor to pro-democracy and human rights movements in Myanmar told Kimetrica researchers that the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI), the underwriter for the Myitsone Dam, arrived at the site of the Myanmar IDPs who were displaced in 2009 for the construction of the dam, to distribute free emergency rice donations. Only villagers who did not openly

protest the Myitsone Dam project received food supplies. While the withholding of food and emergency supplies from IDPs is a well-documented and common strategy used by the Tatmadaw, this is the first known report of a Chinese company working in Myanmar employing a similar tactic.

Myanmar government officials, however, have not revealed any information on the agreement made with their Chinese counterparts, despite Aung San Suu Kyi's promise to be transparent with any agreements regarding Myitsone.

### **2020 ELECTION UPDATE: THE UNION ELECTION COMMISSION**

The USDP and 25 additional political parties sent an open letter on May 23 to request a meeting with the UEC, with a USPD spokesperson explaining that the purpose was to discuss the election issues with the UEC in sufficient time. The nine-point open letter questioned the credibility of the current UEC, saying that it is not transparent, limited in cooperation, and unfavorably compares the current UEC with the Thein Sein administration. The letter explains that current UEC has met with political parties three times in three years, while the previous UEC met political parties 37 times over the same amount of time, and the former President joined the meetings once a year. The UEC spokesperson Myint Naing responded in the local media that the UEC had not received an open letter as of May 27, and would not comment further on the issue. He did, however, assure that meetings with political parties will be done "when needed" in the near future.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

## **ECONOMICS**

Since the second BRI Forum, it became clear that three bilateral agreements were signed. The agreements, however, are regarded as fairly non-committal. The Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MOEE) warned that the daily power outages experienced in May will get worse in years to come if major infrastructure investments do not take place in the near future. Despite US warnings against Huawei, Myanmar publicly

backed the company, eager for the foreign investments into infrastructure. Toyota announced intentions to follow the footsteps of competitors and build a production plant in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone.

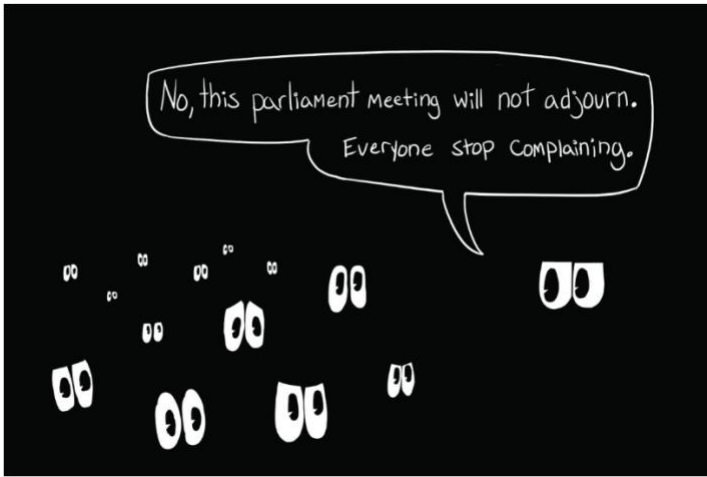
### **THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE FORUM**

In the weeks following the second BRI Forum, in Beijing, news slowly came out about what was signed, and perhaps more importantly, what was not signed by Myanmar and China. Three bilateral agreements were signed in late April, including: an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on China-Myanmar Economic Corridor Cooperation Plan (2019-2030), and a MoU on the Formulation of the Five-year Development Program for Economic and Trade Cooperation.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

The documents signed are perceived as non-committal and will not have a direct and serious impact on Myanmar, unlike agreements on major infrastructure projects such as Myitsone and Kyaukphyu. In the months running up to the Forum, China pressured Myanmar to commit to the BRI, CMEC, and specific infrastructure projects, and many analysts thought agreements on Myitsone and Kyaukphyu would be made at the BRI Forum. It now appears the Government of Myanmar is cautiously moving forward with the implementation of the CMEC.

At the forum, Aung San Suu Kyi at the Forum stated that BRI projects should "not only be economically feasible but also socially and environmentally responsible, and most importantly, the projects must win the confidence and support of local people."<sup>lxxix</sup> This closely relates to the objectives of the Project Bank, which will include BRI projects. During a speech at an event attended by Mekong Economics and Kimetrica researchers on May 13, Special Economic Consultant to the State Counsellor, Sean Turnell, said that BRI projects such as Kyaukphyu will follow open tendering and financing procedures. The implication is that bids for BRI projects are, in theory, open to non-Chinese investors and consortia. It remains to be seen whether this will also be the case in reality,

as projects might not be economically viable or attractive to other investors.



### POWER OUTAGES ACROSS MYANMAR

Throughout May, Myanmar's major cities faced daily blackouts due to power shortages of up to 400 megawatts. This number is expected to rise to shortages of up to 1,588 megawatts by 2020, according to the MOEE. The NLD-led Government aims to achieve full electrification coverage by 2030, a laudable goal that is unlikely unless electricity infrastructure development is prioritized and initiated quickly.

Figure 4 shows actual demand and supply of power since 2011 and two scenarios for future demand. Despite the newly opened 145 megawatts gas power plant in Kyaukse and the 980 megawatts Sembcorp Energy Independent Power Plant, Myanmar is still facing power shortages and will continue to do so in the coming years. There are nine gas power plants projects under development. Nevertheless, current approved power plant projects will only generate an additional total of 7,319 megawatts which is insufficient to meet the needs of full electrification by 2030.<sup>lxxx</sup> The high-demand projection of Figure 4 shows an exponential growth in power demand. Even the low-demand projection will be very challenging for the Myanmar Government to meet.

As a short-term solution, the Myanmar Government is preparing to procure 1,000

megawatts from China to counter seasonal power shortages over the next two years, increasing its dependency on its neighbor.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Other short-term options under official consideration by the MOEE are: to call a tender for power supplied from barges in three ports (Thilawa, Patheingyi, Kyaukse); to import power from Laos; and to issue a call for expressions of interest for on-grid solar Photovoltaic (PV) projects.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Any of these short-term solutions are expensive, and a government official told *Frontier* that future demand can only be met if electricity prices rise.<sup>lxxxiiii</sup> Currently, the Government heavily subsidizes electricity. With an average tariff of USD .03/kWh, residential rates in Myanmar are the lowest in the region and among the lowest in the world, but the average cost of supply is increasing. On average the Government loses between MMK 59 and MMK 74 on every residential unit sold. Businesses are charged higher prices, but it is not enough to recuperate losses.<sup>lxxxv</sup> The Government lost between MMK 500 and 600 billion in FY 2018-2019. A rise in electricity tariffs is planned for 2019 and will likely affect everyone connected to the grid. Businesses in the industrial zones are intended to carry most of the burden, but, to a lesser extent, households will carry some of the burden.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> The impact of the increased price will only become clear once the new tariffs are announced. Reportedly, Aung San Suu Kyi has yet to give her approval on the new tariff system.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> This hesitancy could be due to concerns about raising tariffs before the 2020 elections.

Power outages have serious consequences for economic productivity. A managing director of a Japanese garment company, with a factory in one of Yangon's Industrial Parks, told Mekong Economics researchers that his operations fell to 80 percent of production capacity due to the power cuts. Lack of steady power has a detrimental effect on profitability and makes it

Figure 3. Power Cuts in Myanmar. ASEAN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

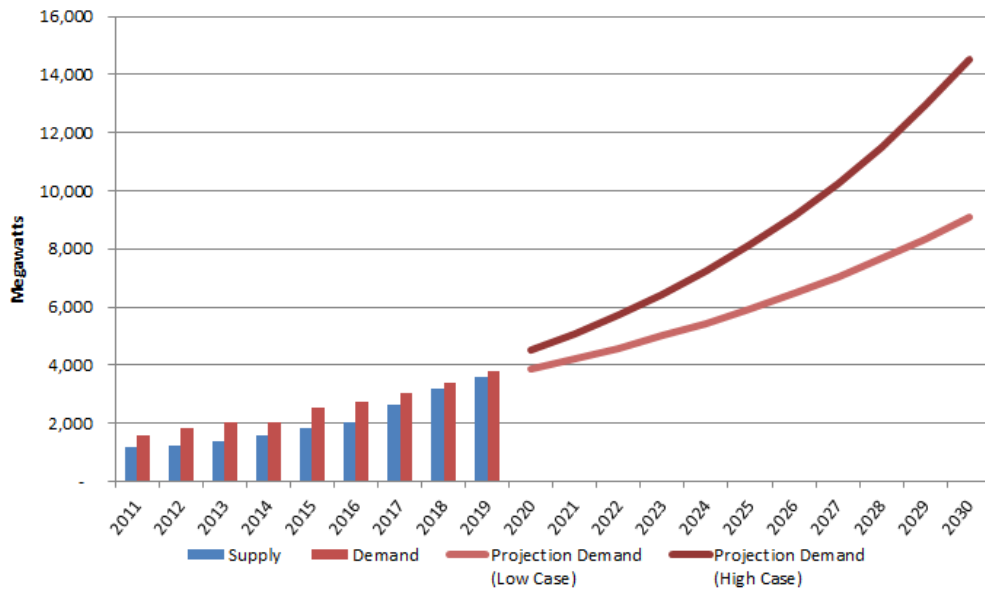


Figure 4. Power Demand Projections, MEKONG ECONOMICS, DATA SOURCE: MOEE AND

hard for Myanmar to attract investors interested in more complex manufacturing plants. Electricity, most notably, a stable supply and high voltages, are crucial for the garment industry. Moreover, the Japanese managing director indicated his concern about how price increases would impact his business. Businesses understand the necessity of increases in tariffs, however they want this price hike to be accompanied with improvements in the power supply. It is questionable whether the Myanmar Government can deliver this in parallel.

## HUAWEI

Huawei was added to the US Department of Commerce’s Entity List, thereby blacklisting the company and banning US companies to sell parts to the Chinese technology giant. At the same time, the US has actively lobbied other countries not to use Huawei equipment in 5G networks.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Huawei is, however, rolling out this network in Myanmar. The Chinese company has been working with the Ministry of Transport and Communications to introduce 5G network in Myanmar since December 2018. Huawei expects it will take two to three years to achieve 5G coverage in Myanmar.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Myanmar’s Deputy Director General Soe Naing of the Posts and Telecommunications Department and in response to the US ban, has publicly backed Huawei by calling it a “strategic partner” for the country.<sup>lxxxix</sup> The Government of Myanmar regards the company as an important player in

the development of its communications infrastructure. Huawei is also a large player on the consumer market, selling more than one million phones in Myanmar in 2018, thereby strongly contributing to the company’s global earnings.<sup>xc</sup>

Other countries in the world and around the region, most notably Vietnam, are more skeptical about Huawei’s presence and involvement with 5G networks.<sup>xcii</sup> Myanmar’s positive attitude towards Huawei may stem from its eagerness and need for investment into the country’s infrastructure at a low cost. It also showcases its growing dependence on investment from its neighbor.

## TOYOTA

Toyota is the latest to join Suzuki, Nissan, Kia, and Ford in establishing an automobile manufacturing plant within Myanmar. The plant is expected to be placed at the Thilawa SEZ. The plant will require tens of millions of USD in investment.

The move is assumed to be partially due to the Myanmar Government’s tactics of encouraging automotive companies to invest in production within the country. The Government has been raising barriers to imports through both taxation and the restriction of certain goods such as new right-hand vehicles. Preferential treatment has also been given to companies that manufacture

cars within the country. These restrictions have raised the prices of Toyota imports relative to other manufacturers, contributing to the domination of Suzuki, despite Toyota having a high level of brand recognition because of the second-hand car market.

Toyota's investment may also be due to alternative push and pull factors, some of which are linked to Thailand's rising labor prices, where Toyota currently has significant production operations. A Japanese automotive battery company established in Thilawa SEZ is already demonstrating the efficiencies of producing in Myanmar and exporting to Thailand, which can be the expected strategy of many companies in the future.<sup>xcii</sup> These factors, along with Myanmar's growing market and projected economic growth have outweighed the concerns Toyota has previously expressed about Myanmar's smaller market and challenges with local suppliers.<sup>xciii</sup>

The impact of Toyota's move is expected to not only revolve around the direct increase in FDI, but also by encouraging suppliers to follow suit. Toyota's investment will initially focus on a semi-knocked down (SKD) model of assembly, meaning that the parts will be manufactured in another country before being exported to Myanmar for final assembly. The SKD production model minimizes the impact initially beyond employment. One important aspect of Toyota's move, however, is the assumed success of the Government's tactics, which have encouraged the move.

## **HPAKANT MINES**

The permanent secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Min Min Oo, announced that jade and gem mining will be halted in Hpakant, Kachin State, for three months during monsoon season. The reason for the shut-down is two-fold: partially due to recent fatal landslides such as the incident which killed 54 workers on April 22 and that the cessation of operations would also provide a window for the Ministry to grant new licenses under the new mining law. New licenses

would give the Government more responsibility in assessing the status and environmental impacts of mines before issuing long-term permits.<sup>xciv</sup> The impact of the suspension is projected to be minimal as the monsoon season makes many areas less accessible, naturally reducing operations. The previous Government under Thein Sein reportedly prevented mining annually from May to September, but whether the NLD-led government can enforce the suspension is unknown.<sup>xcv</sup>

## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **FORCED SHUTDOWN OF RAMADAN PRAYER SITES IN YANGON**

Buddhist nationalists forcefully shut down three residential buildings that were officially approved as temporary places of worship for Muslims in South Dagon during Ramadan. According to a Yangon regional parliamentarian interviewed by *Irrawaddy*, Muslims in South Dagon Township have long been prevented from having a permanent place of worship in the area, as a result of objections from non-Muslim residents.<sup>xcvi</sup> On May 14 and 15, the temporary prayer spaces were mobbed by 200 Buddhist nationalists led by Michael Kyaw Mint, who claimed that performing Islamic prayers in houses was "unacceptable."<sup>xcvii</sup>

According to a GAD officer, the nationalists entered the temporary prayer halls, taking photographs, while others surrounded the areas demanding the halls be shut down.<sup>xcviii</sup> Another witness reported that the protesters carried sticks and knives and also vandalized vehicles.<sup>xcix</sup> Local Islamic leaders were forced by the Buddhist nationalists to sign pledges to end religious services and remove the temporary infrastructure built for prayer services. One report described local authorities as "helpless" to take action during the incident, and witnesses claim that the police present at the event took no action as nationalists stormed the temporary prayer houses.<sup>c</sup> The lack of action by authorities to prevent the incident prompted criticism from political figures.<sup>ci</sup>

Local police granted permission to the leaders to reopen the sites three days after the incident and pledged to protect them. For the remainder of Ramadan, worship continued without incident.<sup>cii</sup> Local authorities filed lawsuits against Kyaw Mint and one of his accomplices, Thiha Myo Naing, for causing public fear or alarm under section 505(b) of the Penal Code, both of whom have reportedly gone into hiding with an unnamed armed group that has signed the NCA.<sup>ciii</sup>

Local Buddhists demonstrated their support for the Muslim community by conducting a “White Rose Campaign,” handing out flowers to Muslims attending prayers as a sign of solidarity.<sup>civ</sup>

### **AUNG SAN STATUE PROTESTS**

Tensions remain high in Loikaw over the contested statue of General Aung San. The statue was erected in February and sparked mass protests by Karenni activists, which were brutally put down by the police.<sup>cv</sup> There have been several rounds of tense formal negotiations since between the Kayah State government and a committee of rights activists, the most recent of which, held on May 14, lasted only twenty minutes before activists walked out in protest after Kayah State Chief Minister L Paung Sho said the statue would not be removed.<sup>cvi</sup> The state government deployed extra security forces around the statue in anticipation of further protests.<sup>cvi</sup> In a worrying move for freedom of speech, on May 16, the state government filed lawsuits against six activist leaders.<sup>cvi</sup> The KNPP released a statement on May 16 announcing the formation of a KNPP committee to help resolve the issue, urging the Kayah State government to continue negotiations towards a solution acceptable to all in order to avoid further conflict.

### **WIRATHU ARREST WARRANT**

On May 28, a judge issued an arrest warrant against “firebrand nationalist” monk Ashin Wirathu.<sup>cix</sup> In early May the Government announced it was considering taking legal action against Wirathu for making obscene comments about Aung San Suu Kyi in a speech at a rally in early April.<sup>cx</sup> The warrant for his arrest was filed

under Article 124a, which prohibits the incitement of “hatred,” “contempt,” or “disaffection” towards the Government.<sup>cx</sup> At time of writing, Wirathu is believed to be in Yangon, and despite his public announcement that he “will face the arrest,” he has not yet been apprehended by police.<sup>cxii</sup>

Dubbed the “Buddhist Bin Laden” by *Time* magazine in 2013, Wirathu has long been infamous for his incendiary political views and hate speech towards Muslims. Early in May, he was banned from visiting Phuket, Thailand due to fears that his visit could incite tensions.<sup>cxiii</sup> At a rally on May 5 in Yangon, Wirathu compared military-appointed lawmakers to Buddha and claimed they should be “worshipped.”<sup>cxiv</sup> Two men accused of heckling Wirathu during his speech were assaulted by other demonstrators and later charged by the police with violating the Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law.<sup>cxv</sup> That the two men protesting Wirathu were charged, and not the demonstrators who assaulted the men, while not surprising, is noteworthy.

According to one report, under article 124a, Wirathu could be sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>cxvi</sup> A serious punishment could prove to be a significant blow to other nationalists and be a step towards countering the rise of dangerous nationalist rhetoric.<sup>cxvii</sup> However, it does not appear likely that this reflects a growing concern for ethnic minorities’, particularly Muslims, rights by the Myanmar Government. Myanmar analyst David Mathieson theorized that the NLD is reacting to a decline in Wirathu’s public image and working under the belief that moving against Wirathu would increase their popular support ahead of the 2020 elections. Furthermore, human rights activists note that charging Wirathu for sedition disregards his incitement of violence against Muslims.<sup>cxviii</sup> While some charges against other ultra-national Buddhist leaders have been brought by the Religious Affairs and Cultural Ministry, the courts have not acted on the charges.

## FREE SPEECH WATCH

### REUTERS JOURNALISTS RECEIVE PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo received a presidential pardon on May 7, two weeks after the Supreme Court rejected their last appeal on April 23. Their arrest was condemned around the world but was widely supported by the Myanmar public and within the Government.

Although the NLD-led government tries to “maintain the illusion of due process,” as the Committee to Protect Journalists’ Senior Southeast Asia Representative, Shawn Crispin, said in an interview, the Reuters case has drawn the world’s attention to Myanmar’s increased suppression of free speech rights. It is unlikely that the presidential pardon was a sign that this trend is changing. Instead, it was likely that the Government felt it had no choice but to concede to international pressure over this particular incident. In particular, the release of the Reuters journalists coincided with a meeting of the international advisory commission on Rakhine State, which included a number of senior diplomats and officials. Lord Darzi, a member of the commission, stated that the pardon had been the result of “months of negotiation” between the Myanmar Government, Reuters, the UN, and other international organizations.<sup>cxix</sup> Since the NLD came to power in 2015, at least 47 journalists have been arrested using what Human Rights Watch describes as “draconian laws.”<sup>cxx</sup>

### CHANNEL MANDALAY JOURNALIST ARRESTED

A broadcast reporter for Channel Mandalay, identified as Nanda, was detained without charge on May 15 while covering a land rights protest against a cement factory. Three other people were arrested during the protest. At least 18 people were injured when police fired rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd.<sup>cxxi</sup> Nanda, who was live broadcasting the protest on Facebook, was standing apart from the crowd and did not partake in the protests according to Channel Mandalay executive Min Din.<sup>cxii</sup> As of May 31, Nanda has not been released.

### BLUE SHIRT CAMPAIGN

Approximately 50 CSOs launched a movement called the Blue Shirt Campaign on May 17 to coincide with the hearing for members of the Peacock Generation Thangyat Group—a satirical, traditional performing arts group—who were arrested for criticizing the military. The Blue Shirt Campaign is protesting the military’s infringement on citizens’ freedom of expression. The Peacock Generation Thangyat Group was sued under Article 505(a) of the Penal Code. The military has used this law to sue three other people who were critical of the military in recent weeks including: a monastic leader from Mandalay, Sayadaw U Thawbita; former military captain Nay Myo Zin; and film director Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi.<sup>cxiii</sup>

### PRISON PROTESTS AND RIOTS

On May 8 and 9, coordinated protests broke out in seven prisons across the country in Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Bago and Ayeyawaddy regions, and Karen and Kachin states. Protesters accused President Win Myint of unfairly selecting prisoners for amnesty and insisted that all inmates who were jailed for drug offenses should be treated equally. Protests turned violent in Shwebo Prison in Sagaing where prison authorities used tear gas and fired bullets at protestors, killing four inmates and injuring at least five others.<sup>cxiv</sup> A lawyer interviewed by the *Irrawaddy* suggested that the riots could have occurred because of a misunderstanding among inmates between amnesties and presidential pardons, but may have also been sparked by prison overcrowding.<sup>cxv</sup> Currently there are an estimated 171 prisoners per 100,000 of the national population in Myanmar.<sup>cxvi</sup>

The prisoners’ simultaneous and coordinated demands for equality in prisons across the country is the first large-scale prison protest of its kind.<sup>cxvii</sup> The President’s office claimed the protests were organized as a campaign to cause unrest, citing the fact that the prisoners’ demands across locations were identical and some inmates live-streamed videos of the riots on social media.<sup>cxviii</sup> The Assistance Association



for Political Prisoners has called for an independent investigation into the protests and the prison service's reaction.<sup>cxix</sup>

## **ROHINGYA REFUGEES**

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) registered over 270,000 refugees over the past few months, providing them with identification cards. The card contains a photograph and basic information with the country of origin listed as Myanmar. In an article published by the UNHCR, the UN agency mentioned the upcoming cyclone and monsoon season as one reason for the push to register as many refugees as possible as it will help families reunite should a major cyclone hit the camps.

Concerns about cyclones hitting the camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh or the monsoons flooding the area are of major concern to humanitarian organizations working in the camps, yet the expected cyclone and monsoon season started late this year.<sup>cxix</sup> This year's monsoon season is not expected to begin until

June, and the exceptionally low level of rainfall during the dry season combined with the high temperatures this month have led to a water shortage in the camps. UNHCR and its partners have started rationing water and have resorted to using water trucks, an expensive but necessary measure until the rains come.<sup>cxix</sup>

On May 3, a bilateral meeting between Bangladesh and Myanmar was held in Naypyidaw. It was the fourth meeting of the joint working group on Rohingya repatriation. During the meetings, Bangladesh called for the Myanmar Government to take concrete steps to begin repatriation.<sup>cxix</sup> A few weeks later, the Minister of Labour, Immigration and Population, Thein Swe, and the Minister of Border Affairs, Lt. Gen. Ye Aung, met with the UNHCR separately on May 23 in Naypyidaw to talk about repatriation of refugees. Despite the Myanmar Government's assertion that it is ready to receive "verified displaced persons," there is a widely held belief that the most Rohingya refugees will remain in the camps for now.<sup>cxix</sup>

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<sup>cxxxiii</sup> “Daily News Brief on Rakhine State Affairs: Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung and Union Minister U Thein Swe Receive UNHCR Chief Separately,” Ministry of Home Affairs (Naypyidaw, Myanmar) May 23 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/mofamyanmar/photos/pcb.1155280514672242/1155278564672437/?type=3&theater>