

MARCH CHRONOLOGY 2016

Summary of the Current Situation:

There are **110** political prisoners incarcerated in Burma.

428 activists are currently awaiting trial for political actions,

130 of whom are incarcerated.



Picture from Irrawaddy © 2016
Accessed March 10, 2016

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Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများ ကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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MONTH IN REVIEW

This month, 9 political activists were arrested in total, 30 individuals were sentenced and 11 were released. Ten political prisoners are reported to be in bad health. Also this month, 8 new charges were piled on activists.

On March 15, Htin Kyaw, former political prisoner and resident of Rangoon's infamous Insein prison, was elected as Burma's first elected civilian President to the incoming NLD-led government. Despite the political transition and hopes for a Presidential Amnesty in the last days of Thein Sein's rule, Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act, the Telecommunications Law, Unlawful Association Act and the Immigration (Emergency Provisions) Act continued to be used to detain political activists.

March 10 marked the one year anniversary of the brutal crackdown at Letpadan on student protesters and supporters. Forty four student protesters and supporters remain incarcerated for their participation in the National Education Bill protests that lead to the crackdown. This month, four students detained for their involvement in the protests were released on bail due to their deteriorating health. However, on March 4, Nandar Sitt Aung and Phyo Phyo Aung had additional charges piled on under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Profession Act for their involvement in the protests. On March 9, Kyaw Ko Ko, Nay Myo Zin and Mi Mi also faced additional charges under Section 18 for their involvement in National Education Bill protest in mid-November 2014. Activists have continued to face charges for this protest over a year after their involvement under multiple different townships.

Also of concern this month was ongoing use of the Telecommunications Law to detain activists critical of Thein Sein's government on Facebook. On March 9 and March 31 respectively, Hla Hbone, the alleged owner of the 'Kyat Pha Gyi' Facebook account, received additional charges under Article 505 (b) of the Penal Code and Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for defaming President Thein Sein and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Also this month, lawsuits were filed against four individuals under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for defaming the prime

minister of Chin State. Chaw Sandi Tun was released this month after a serving six-month sentence under the Telecommunications Law for alleged defamation of government figures on Facebook.

The ongoing offensive by the Burma Army in Northern Shan State intensified this month, with more than 100 villagers arbitrarily arrested by the Burma Army on allegations of supporting the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Further, twenty nine Arakanese were sentenced to three to five year's imprisonment under the Unlawful Association Act for their alleged involvement with the Arakan Army (AA). Also worryingly this month, a Shan Coalition meeting was cancelled under pressure from the military.

U Gambira, former monk and leader of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, continues to be detained after formal charges were brought against him on the March 10, almost two months after his initial arrest. He is charged under Section 13(1) of the Immigration Act (Emergency Provisions) and is expected to be sentenced in April. Also of note, on March 31, activist-turned candidate Myat Nu Khaing received one year imprisonment with hard labor under Article 147 of the Penal Code for participating in a peaceful protest in December 2014 against the killing of a woman who was shot at the controversial Letpadaung Copper Mine protest.

ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

Arakanese Man Transferred to the Police Station after Two Months in Detention

On March 22, Bo Than, a 25-year old Arakanese man from Minbya Township, was transferred to the Kyauktaw police station after spending two months in detention. On January 28, he was arrested by number 378 Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) on suspicion of association with the AA. It is likely that he will face charges under Section 17(1)/17(2) of the Unlawful Association Act.

It has been reported that there are currently 36 Arakanese people detained at Kyauktaw police station for their suspected links to the AA.

[\(23 March 2016 - Narinjara/Burmese\)](#)

Burma Army Detained Civilian in Northern Shan State

Between March 6 and 18 human rights organizations have documented the arrest and detention of over 100 villagers from settlements in the three townships of Kut Kai, Nam-Sam and Kyuat-Mae following offensives by the Tatmadaw.

On March 6, 20 villagers were detained in Kut Kai Township by soldiers from Burma Army Light Infantry Division No.99 for links with the TNLA. Of these, 16 were released and four remain detained.

On March 9, twelve innocent villagers of Kaung-Leing village, Kut Kai Township were arrested by the Burma Army.

On March 10, 39 people from Nam-Sam and Kyuat-Mae Township were arrested, 6 were detained and 33 were used as porter forced labor.

On March 16, 64 villages were arrested at four villages in Kyuat-Mae Township, namely Par Lain, Pan Lone, Kyauk Phyu and Kwinslan village.

[\(2 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/ Burmese\)](#) [\(16 March 2016 - Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(18 March 2016 - Burma Link\)](#) [\(21 March 2016 - Myanmar Times\)](#)

SENTENCES

Eleven Arakanese Sentenced to Imprisonment

On March 31, 11 Arakanese people, who were accused of being associated with the AA, were sentenced to imprisonment under Section 17(2) and 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act by the Kyauktaw Township court.

Tun Aung Phyu, Kyaw Win and Sein Kyaw Than were sentenced to five years imprisonment under Section 17(1)/(2) of the Unlawful Association Act. A further eight people; Tun Soe Naing, Tun Win, Min Min Tun, Win Myint, Zaw Hlaing, Kyaw Win Hlaing, Than Win and Tin Shwe were sentenced to three years imprisonment under Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act. They were sent to the Sittwe prison.

There are now 36 people from Kyauktaw Township, who have been arrested for their suspected links to the AA.

[\(31 March 2016-Eleven/Burmese\)](#)

Activist-Turned-Candidate in 2015 Poll Gets 1 Year Prison Term

On March 31, Myat Nu Khaing, an independent candidate in November's general election, has been sentenced to one year in prison with hard labour under Article 147 of the Penal Code by Dagon Township court, Rangoon. She was arrested on October 16, 2015 while contesting a Lower House seat in Pegu division's Phyu Township. Myat Nu Khaing was also charged under Article 149, 152, 294, 353 and 505 (b) of the Penal Code and Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act, however the court dismissed these charges. Her charges relate to her participation in a peaceful protest on December 29, 2014. The protest involved around 100 people marching to the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon to honor Khi Win, a woman who was shot dead during a protest against the Letpadaung copper mine.

[\(31 March 2016-Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(1 April 2016 - Eleven\)](#)

Twelve Arakanese Sentenced to Imprisonment

On March 30, 12 Arakanese people, who were accused of being associated with the AA, were

sentenced to imprisonment under Section 17(2) and 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act by the Kyauktaw Township court. They were convicted because they confessed that they are from the AA.

The lance corporal of the AA, Tun Naing, and corporals Shwe Thein and Zaw Naing Oo, were sentenced to five years imprisonment under Section 17(2) of the Unlawful Association Act.

The other nine people; Maung Gyi, Maung Win, Soe Myint Than, Ko Lin, Zaw Naing Thain, San Shwe Maung, Tun Win Hlaing, Aung Khin Win and Aung Win Htay were sentenced to three years imprisonment under Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act.

There are over 50 people from Sittwe, Butheedaung, Taung Gok, Kyauktaw, Kyaukpyu and Yann Bye, who have been arrested for their suspected links to the AA. [\(30 March 2016 - BBC/Burmese\)](#) [\(30 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(31 March 2016-Narinjara/Burmese\)](#) [\(31 March 2016 - DVB/Burmese\)](#) [\(31 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(31 March 2016 - Eleven\)](#)

USDP Leader Sentenced to Six Months for Defamation

On March 28, Than Tun, a USDP official, was sentenced to six months in prison with hard labor under Article 66(d) of Telecommunications Law for defaming pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi on Facebook. Sithu Aung, a volunteer with the Hand to Hand Free Education Network, filed the lawsuit against Than Tun in October, alleging that he was the owner of the account. The decision came after a four month trial at Kangyidaunt Township court.

Sithu Aung, the plaintiff, said he was satisfied with the court's decision.

[\(28 March 2016 - Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(28 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(28 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(28 March 2016 - Mizzima/Burmese\)](#) [\(28 March 2016 - The Voice/Burmese\)](#) [\(29 March 2016 - DVB/Burmese\)](#)

SENTENCES

Two Arakanese Sentenced to Three Years Imprisonment

On March 16, two Arakanese, Kyaw Moe Hlaing from Kyauktaw Township and Aung Than Tin from Minbya Township, were sentenced to three years imprisonment under Section 17(1), 17(2) of the Unlawful Association Act, accused of affiliation with the AA by the Kyauktaw Township Court.

They were arrested by the Burma Army during the clashes between AA and the Burma Army at Pe-Chaung region in Kyauktaw Township in April 2015. According to their lawyer, U Tun Hla, neither intend to appeal the case to the higher court.

[\(16 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(16 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(16 March 2016 - Narinjara/Burmese\)](#) [\(17 March 2016 - Narinjara\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Mizzima\)](#)

Four Arakanese Sentenced to Three Years

On March 3, Khaing Myo Min (alias Aung Tun Mra), Thein Soe (alias Kyaw Hla), Own Khin (alias Own Tin) and Soe Min Tun were convicted of violating Section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act for allegedly being affiliated with the Arakanese Army and sentenced to three years imprisonment by Buthidaung township court. They were arrested by Burma Army personnel on the Burma and Bangladesh border between June and July 2015.

[\(4 March 2016 - Narinjara\)](#) [\(4 March 2016 - Narinjara/Burmese\)](#) [\(4 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(4 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#)

RELEASES

Facebook Satirist Chaw Sandi Tun Released

On March 30, Chaw Sandi Tun was released from Maubin prison after serving her six month sentence for defamation under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law. She was arrested in October while at a meditation conference for allegedly posting a photo on Facebook which defamed General Min Aung Hlaing. Her lawyer, U Robert San Aung argued in court that the incriminating image wasn't even posted by the defendant. She has also criticized poor conditions in the prison.

[\(30 March-Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(30 March- RFA/Burmese\)](#)
[\(31 March 2016-Myanmar Times\)](#)

Activists San Aung Win and Kyaw Zin Latt Released from Insein Prison

On March 25, activists San Aung Win and Kyaw Zin Latt were released from Insein prison. The pair were sentenced to three months imprisonment on December 31, 2015, under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law by the Kyauktada Township court for staging a protest in front of the Rangoon City Hall on April 29, 2015 urging people not to vote for former military members. Earlier in the year, on April 29, 2015 the pair were sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for another protest under Section 18 and were later released July 22, 2015.

[\(AAPP's Source\)](#)

Letpadan Student Released on Bail

On March 22, Kyaw Swar Lin, a Letpadan student protester detained at Tharawaddy prison was released on bail. He was taken to Rangoon General Hospital on March 1 to have an operation for his appendicitis. He was discharged from the hospital on March 11 and sent back to Tharawaddy prison before being released on bail.

[\(Aye Aye Khaing's Facebook Page\)](#)

Arakanese MP Released after Winning Appeal

On March 14, Hla Aung Nyunt, an Arakanese MP who was sentenced to one year under Article 451 and Article 506 of the Penal Code on charges of criminal

intimidation and trespassing has been released after winning an appeal at Mrauk-U court. The court dismissed the charges due to a lack of evidence of his guilt. He was stripped of his MP status when he was convicted, however upon the dismissal of his charges and his release he has been reinstated as an MP.

[\(14 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(14 March 2016 - DVB/Burmese\)](#) [\(14 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(14 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(16 March 2016 - DVB\)](#) [\(16 Mar 2016 - Narinjara\)](#)

Three Student Supporters Released on Bail

Khin Maung Win, San Lwin Oo and Aung Ko Ko, who have been detained at Tharyarwaddy Prison since March for their involvement in a protest against the National Education Bill, were granted bail for medical reasons. On March 8, Khin Maung Win and San Lwin Oo were released on bail by the Tharyarwaddy Township Court. The pair were reported to have been suffering from heart disease, hypertension, eye aches, ear aches and backaches. Aung Ko Ko, was released on bail by the Tharyarwaddy Township Court on March 22 for medical reasons, however his medical condition is unknown.

[\(AAPP's Source\)](#)

Chief Executive Officer of the Hpa Si Than Journal Released after 14 days in Detention

Zaw Ye Htet, the CEO of the Hpa Si Than Journal, was released on March 21, having spent 14 days in Taungkalay prison, after the court dismissed the charge under the Telecommunications law due to a lack of evidence.

He was first charged under Sections 34(a) and 38 of the Electronic Transaction Act in February for revealing illegal border trade on his Facebook account. He was arrested on March 8 when his charges were changed to Article 66(d) of the Telecommunication Law by the Hpa-An Township court.

[\(8 March 2016 - Mizzima/Burmese\)](#) [\(21 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(29 March 2016 - BNI\)](#)

CONDITIONS OF DETENTIONS

Myat Nu Khaing Denied Medical Treatment at Rangoon General Hospital

On March 24, Myat Nu Khaing, an independent candidate in November's general election detained in Insein Prison since October, 2015 had her request to receive medical treatment at Rangoon General Hospital denied. She suffered from diabetes and hypertension prior to her arrest. Her diseases have worsened, due to a lack of adequate medical treatment in Insein prison. During her imprisonment, she was transferred from Insein Prison Hospital to the Insein Township Hospital as the vein in her eye burst due to her severe diabetes, which lead to a loss of vision. ([26 March 2016-VOA/Burmese](#))

Penis Poet attacked in Prison

On March 21, Maung Saungkha, accused of defaming the president, was assaulted by a fellow inmate outside the courtroom after guards allegedly let the other inmate out of his cell. The fellow inmate was accused of using his handcuffs to choke Maung Saungkha.

Following the attack Maung Saungkha was sent to Insein Hospital for an X-ray. He was sent back to prison where the prison doctor advised that he needed to be monitored for 24 hours. Subsequently he was sent back to Insein hospital. On March 22 he was sent back to the prison. He was sent to Rangoon General Hospital for a CT scan on March 25. On March 25 he had an X-ray and the the hospital scheduled the CT scan for March 28. When he returned for the CT scan the hospital decided he didn't need it and he was sent back to prison.

He is currently not allowed to see his family. He is not receiving adequate medical treatment. ([21 March 2016 - Mizzima/Burmese](#)) ([22 March 2016 - The Voice/Burmese](#)) ([22 March 2016 - Coconut Yangon](#)) ([25 March 2016 - Coconut Yangon](#))

Two Detained Students Allowed to Take Exam, One Denied

After having appealed to authorities Paing Phyo Min and Phoe Thar, student activists from the Students Union of Dagon University were granted permission to take their exams in the prison on March 18. Min

Kyaw Thu, chairman of Student Union of Rangoon Economic University, had his request denied. ([14 February 2016 - RFA/Burmese](#)) ([25 February 2016-RFA/Burmese](#)) ([9 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese](#))

Three Student Leaders Request for Prison Transfer Granted

On March 28, Phyo Phyo Aung, Nanda Sitt Aung attended a court hearing at Botahtaung and Tamwe Township Court where they stated that their request to transfer to Insein Prison was granted by Tharyarwaddy District Court. The date of the transfer is yet to be confirmed.

Student leaders Phyo Phyo Aung, Nanda Sitt Aung and Min Thway Thit requested the transfer from Tharyarwaddy Prison, where they are currently detained, to Insein prison on March 8 because of the difficulties they face travelling from Tharayarwaddy to different townships in Rangoon almost daily to attend court hearings.

Currently, Min Thway Thit faces trials at Thanlyin, Kamaryut and Lanmadaw Township courts while Phyo Phyo Aung and Nanda Sitt Aung face trials at the Mayangone, Kamaryut, Pabedan, Hlaing, Mingalar Taungyunt and Kyauktada Township courts. The transfer to Insein prison will make these journeys less cumbersome. ([8 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese](#)) ([28 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese](#))

Letpadan Student Protester Health Condition Worsens

On March 7, Letpadan student protester, Khaing Mar Nyein was granted permission to receive medical treatment at Insein Hospital for her nerve disease. She was sent back to Tharyarwaddy Prison later that evening.

According to Honey Oo, a fellow student protester detained at Tharyarwaddy Prison, Khaing Mar Nyein's health condition has worsened despite receiving eight months of medical treatment in prison. ([Ye Phaw Pae Gyi's Facebook Page](#))

DEMONSTRATIONS & RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL & CIVIL LIBERTIES

Activist Su Su Nway Arrested for Educational Speech

Su Su Nway was arrested on March 28 for an educational talk to illegal tenants in Hlaingthaya Township, Rangoon, in 2014. She appeared in Hlaingthaya Township court on the same day, was charged under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act and sent to Insein prison after deciding not to apply for bail. She is also facing charges under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act from the Pyin Oo Lwin Township court for her participation in another protest concerning land grabbing in June 2014.

[\(28 March 2016-Eleven\)](#) [\(31 March 2016 - DVB/Burmese\)](#)

Detained Students to Continue Boycotting Courts

On March 15, the detained student leaders of the All Burma Federation of Student Union announced their decision to boycott the ‘chaotic judicial system’. The students claimed ‘we are fighting against the disorderly judicial system. We are not opposing the government, neither the out coming nor the incoming. The judicial system is not effective.’

On March 24, the detained student leaders boycotted their 44th court hearing, while expressing their hope that the National League Democracy could accelerate the judicial reform in the future.

[\(15 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(15 March 2016 - RFA/ Burmese\)](#) [\(15 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(15 March 2016 - Mizzima/Burmese\)](#) [\(15 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(15 March 2016 - Asian Human Rights Commission\)](#) [\(18 March 2016 -Eleven\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Eleven\)](#) [\(29 March 2016-Eleven\)](#)

Shan Coalition Meeting Forced to End under Military Pressure

Due to the pressure from the local military in Rangoon, the three-day annual meeting of the

Committee for the Shan State Unity was forced to ended after having only one day at Micasa Hotel on March 3.

Sai Leik, the spokesperson for the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, stated that members of a local military affairs security team started to question the legality of the meeting after having been rejected to monitor the meeting on March 3. He also expressed that hotel managers were under pressure from the authorities.

[\(4 March 2016 - Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(8 March 2016 - BNI\)](#)

Hla Bhone Faced Additional Charges for the Controversial “Kyat Pha Gyi” Facebook Account

Hla Bhone, the alleged “Kyat Pha Gyi” Facebook account user, was informed by Mayangon Township Court that he faced additional charges under Article 505(b) of the Penal Code and Article 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law on March 9 and March 31, respectively for defaming president Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on a Facebook post. He has already been charged under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications law for this incident.

[\(9 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(11 March 2016 - Eleven\)](#)

Three Student Activists Faced Additional Charges

On March 9, just short of one year anniversary of Letpandan protest, the leader of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (Known as Ba-Ka-Tha), Kyaw Ko Ko, activist Nay Myo Zin and Mi Mi from the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society were charged under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act by Mingala Taungnyunt Township court for their involvement in a protest against the National Education Law in mid-November 2014 in Rangoon.

The three defendants said that they would not contest the charges as they do not trust the legal system and Section 18. Mi Mi was sent to Insein

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prison as she refused to apply for bail. Kyaw Ko Ko and Nay Myo Zin remain incarcerated.

[\(9 March 2016 - DVB/Burmese\)](#) [\(9 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(9 March 2016 - Irrawaddy/Burmese\)](#) [\(9 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Eleven\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Irrawaddy\)](#)

Four People Arrested and Detained for Defaming the Chin State Minister on Facebook

Three Christian priests and one ninth grade student from Mindat Township have been arrested and detained after a lawsuit was filed against them under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunication Law. They are accused of defaming the minister of Chin State, after posting on their Facebook accounts that he was responsible for a fire at the municipal market of Mindat Township on February 23.

[\(8 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#)

Two Student Leaders Charged under Section 18

On March 4, two student leaders, Nanda Sitt Aung and Phyoe Phyoe Aung, received additional charge under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act from Pabedan Township Court. The charge related to their alleged involvement in a protest on February 8, 2015, regarding the National Education Bill.

Nanda Sitt Aung has said that he does not accept the charge under Section 18 as he denies their role in leading the protest.

[\(4 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#)

Gambira Formally Indicted on Immigration Charge

On March 10, six weeks after his arrest, U Gambira was formally charged under Section 13 (a) of the

Immigration Act by Maha Aung Myay Township Court, Mandalay. The alleged immigration offence will bring a maximum five years prison sentence to U Gambira if convicted.

Earlier in the month, on March 1, he was denied bail for the fourth time since his arrest on January 19, on the grounds that he appeared physically healthy.

On March 30, U Gambira attended court again but was sent back to prison. Another hearing is scheduled for April 5. Lawyer U Robert San Aung has expressed his concern that the legal system will not provide U Gambira with a fair trial.

[\(1 March 2016-Myanmar Times\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Frontier Myanmar\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Myanmar Times/Burmese\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(11 March 2016 - DVB\)](#) [\(11 March 2016 - Myanmar Times\)](#) [\(31 March-Myanmar Times\)](#)

Student Arrested Under Section 18

On March 1, Paing Phyoe Min, a student from the Dagon University Students Union, was arrested by the Pabedan Township Police and detained in custody at the Pabedan Police Station. He was later transferred from the Pabedan Police Station to Insein Prison.

On February 16, he was charged under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, accused of participating a protest which called for an end to military representation in parliament and a change to the 2008 Constitution, along with Zayar Lwin, Paing Ye Thu and Nan lin from the University Students Union on June 30, 2015. All four are now awaiting trial in Insein prison.

[\(Shar Yamone's Facebook Page\)](#) [\(14 February 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#)

RELATED HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS

“Ceremony Honoring Fallen Political Prisoners” held by AAPP and FPPS

On March 23, the “Ceremony Honoring Fallen Political Prisoners” was held in Rangoon in honor of all those who lost their lives in their fight for freedom and democracy. More than 500 people attended the ceremony, among them were 130 family members of fallen political prisoners. They received Certificates of Honor as formal recognition of the fallen political prisoner’s contribution to the democracy movement.

Amnesty Report Called on NLD to Release Political Prisoners, Despite Challenges

On March 24, Amnesty International released their new report entitled “New Expression Meets Old Repression” calls on the incoming government to end the “vicious cycle of political arrests” targeting activists and human-right defenders. The report documents the patterns of repression used by authorities and how they used laws to silence dissent. The report provides recommendations to end this cycle.

[\(24 March 2016 - DVB\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Irrawaddy\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Amnesty\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Mizzima\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - BBC/Burmese\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - RFA/Burmese\)](#) [\(24 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#) [\(25 March 2016 - Mizzima/Burmese\)](#) [\(25 March 2016 - Mizzima\)](#) [\(25 March 2016 - Frontier\)](#)

Calls for a Justice Ministry

On March 17, the day newly-elected president U Htin Kyaw to submit his list of ministries to the Union Parliament, lawyers and former political prisoners called on the National League for Democracy to form a Ministry of Justice saying that it is an essential step toward judicial reform.

[\(17 March 2016 - Myanmar Times\)](#)

On Letpadan Anniversary Rights Groups Called for the End of “Relentless Crackdown”

On March 10, a year after the heavy police crackdown of student protest at Letpadan, international and domestic rights groups called for the release of the students and supporter still detained.

Amnesty International urged authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all student

protesters and supporters detained in the crackdown, and continued to call for an independent investigation into excessive police force. Fortify Rights and the Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic released a joint report to mark the one year anniversary. Compiling evidence from dozens of eyewitness accounts, more than 500 photographs, and 40 videos, Fortify Rights and the Clinic found that police brutally punched, kicked, and beat unarmed protesters with batons on their heads, backs, and legs in the town of Letpadan on March 10.

[\(9 March 2016 - Radio Free Asia\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Amnesty\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 -Frontier Myanmar\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Fortify Rights\)](#) [\(10 March 2016 - Mizzima\)](#) [\(11 March 2016 - Eleven/Burmese\)](#)

FPPS calls on Incoming Government to form Political Prisoners’ Affairs Committee

Tin Maung Oo, a leading member of the Former Political Prisoner’s Society (FPPS), has urged the incoming government to form a committee to deal with political prisoner’s affairs. He claimed that the existing committee was ineffective and that the new government should create a new body in order to open a ‘channel for negotiating political prisoners’ affairs’.

[\(2 March 2016-Eleven\)](#)

Human rights violations continue: Forum Asia & Burma Partnership

Burma Partnership and Forum Asia have released a briefing paper detailing continuing human rights violations in Burma. It highlights the ongoing power held by the Burma Army despite the NLD’s election victory.

The report also notes the incompetence of the MNHRC, particularly in relation to human rights violations involving political prisoners and the Rohingya. It calls for amendments to the MNHRC enabling law, to grant the body the power and authority to act on human rights violations in accordance with international standards independent of the Burma Government.

[\(2 March 2016-Burma Partnership & Forum Asia\)](#)

CONCLUSION

This month, arbitrary arrests and sentences of activists have continued despite the political transition and transfer of power to the NLD-led government. Authorities have continued to suppress dissent, primarily using laws such as the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act, the Unlawful Association Act, the Immigration (Emergency Provisions) Act and the Telecommunications Law to arrest and detain activists. Hopes for a last minute Presidential Amnesty of political prisoners were left unmet as authorities continued to arrest and detain activists during the last days of Thein Sein's rule.

Authorities have continued to pile charges onto activists involved in the crackdown on Letpadan student protests in March last year. Student leaders Phyoe Phyoe Aung and Nandar Sitt Aung have been victims of authorities' cruel abuse of power, being forced to commute over an hour between Tharyarwaddy Prison and courts in Rangoon almost daily. Forty four student protesters and supporters remain incarcerated, while members of the police force who are accused of using undue force at the protest are yet to be held accountable.

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While it is the expectation that political prisoners will be released under the new government, structural issues may limit the power of the new government to achieve this.

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The revolving door of releases and convictions of political prisoners has continued this month. While Chaw Sandi Tun was released this month after serving 6 months for a Facebook post defaming the military, two more charges under Article 505(b) of the Penal Code and Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law were piled on Hla Bhone for a similar offence. Lawsuits were filed against a further four individuals under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications law for allegedly defaming the prime minister of Chin State. Further arrests and charges this month under the Telecommunications Law indicate that authorities have added this law to their repertoire of laws used as tools to stifle freedom of expression and suppress dissent. The increasing number of defamation charges related to Facebook posts indicates that authorities are intent on stifling freedom of expression in the digital sphere.

The intensification of ongoing conflict between ethnic armed groups and the Burma Army is of grave concern. The sentencing of twenty nine Arakanese to three to five year's imprisonment under the Unlawful Association Act for their alleged association with the AA demonstrates ongoing use of legislation to oppress ethnic minority groups and the urgent need the removal of repressive legislation.

Further, the arrest of over 100 villagers for their alleged support of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army evidences the continued arbitrary arrests of civilians by the Burma Army used as a tactic to instil fear in the population. The arbitrary arrests are in violation of international law and must be immediately stopped. Also this month, a Shan Coalition meeting was cancelled due to pressure from the military, mirroring events last month whereby a community peace-building forum was blocked by President Thein Sein. This indicates a systematic shutdown of events and forums perceived to be a threat to oppressive authorities.

The use of the outdated 1947 Immigration (Emergency Provisions) Law to detain U Gambira and the sentencing of Myat Nu Khaing more than a year after the alleged offence is an example of the inefficient and unjust legal system which allows for activists to be arrested on the whim of authorities.

This month, the transition of power to the NLD created widespread hope for the future of Burma and the release of political prisoners. While it is the expectation that political prisoners will be released under the new government, structural issues may limit the power of the new government to achieve this. Progress toward democracy and the fulfillment of human rights is being made, however, without urgently needed structural and legislative reforms, authorities will continue to be able to arbitrarily detain activists and civilians.

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