

JULY CHRONOLOGY 2018

Summary of the Current Situation:

275 individuals are oppressed in Burma due to political activity:

33 political prisoners are serving sentences,

53 are awaiting trial inside prison,

189 are awaiting trial outside prison.

Protestors detained for protesting the creation of a cement Factory in Pyigyidagun Township in Mandalay Region



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Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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ACRONYMS

ABFSU	All Burma Federation of Student Unions
CAT	Conservation Alliance Tanawthari
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KNU	Karen National Union
MFU	Myanmar Farmers' Union
MNHRC	Myanmar National Human Rights Commission
MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
NLD	National League for Democracy
NNC	Naga National Council
PAPPL	Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
RCSS/SSA	Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army – South
SHRF	Shan Human Rights Foundation
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
YUSU	Yangon University Students' Union

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POLITICAL PRISONERS

CHARGES

Karenni Youth Activists Sued for Aung San Statue Protest in Loikaw

On July 3, about 1,000 Karenni locals marched against plans to erect a statue of General Aung San in Loikaw. During the demonstration, residents distributed pamphlets outlining their protest against the plan to erect the statue. After the protest, the state's chief minister met with the statue's opponents and agreed to postpone the project. He ordered local officials to survey their constituents on whether they were in support of the statue and said he would make a final decision on whether to proceed at the end of the month. Despite the reprieve, 23 Karenni youth activists were later sued in connection with their protests against the statue and for distributing pamphlets that explained the history of Karenni State. 16 of the youth activists who organized the protest were then sued by under Sections 19 and 20 of PAPPL, according to a police letter posted online. Ten were sued under Section 505 (b) and (c) of the Penal Code for allegedly defaming the Government. Seven of the ten were later released on 3 million kyat (USD \$2,071.11) bail each by a court in Loikaw, which set the next hearing in the case for July 12. Four people were charged under Section 505 (b) only of the Penal Code.

Activists stated that they will halt the protests in the meantime but will continue if plans for the statue proceed.

Villagers Charged in Mandalay for Protesting against Cement Factory

On July 24, villagers in Aung Thabyay village, Pyigyidagun Township were allegedly blocked by police on their way to Nay Pyi Taw to protest the construction of a cement factory in their community. The

protesters had submitted a request on July 22 to stage a protest from Patheingyi, Mandalay Division to Nay Pyi Taw, which had been approved by authorities. They were later informed that five of them, Shwe Ohn, Win Zaw Latt, Nyein Htay, Win Mar Than and Yin Yin Aung, are being sued under Article 19 of PAPPL. Than Paing, Daw Aye, Mya Mya, Min Naing, Maung Ko, Thar Htay and Nyein Htay, seven other protesters, also had charges brought against them under Section 22 of the Roads and Bridges Law.

The Aung Thabyay village administrator, Kyaw Myo Oo, was also reportedly sacked from his position for standing with the villagers in protest against the cement factory.

Locals say the factory, which is owned by China's Myint Investment Company, will be powered by coal and fear the damage it might do to the local environment and their livelihoods. They say the project has already blocked off some communal grazing land and that most locals want it stopped.

MP and Education Officer File Lawsuit Against Each Other under Section 66 (d)

On July 21, Shwegyin Township, Bago Division, Regional Parliament MP Hla Hla Win, and Shwegyin Township Education Director, Soe Thein, filed lawsuits against each other under Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law.

On July 12, Hla Hla Win posted on Facebook about education staffs' salaries being cut due to corruption. Soe Thein took a screenshot of Hla Hla Win's post and posted on his Facebook; "saying things that are untruthful can lead to charges under Section 500 of Defamation".

Hla Hla Win said she filed a lawsuit against Soe Thein taking the screenshot of her post, which was simply written, and then threatening her. That evening, Soe Thein

filed a lawsuit against her under the same law.

ARRESTS

Seven People Arrested for Allegedly Working as EAO Guides

according to activist San Aung Myo, seven people were arrested by the Military for allegedly working as guides and porters in Hpakant and Namati, Kachin State. Three of the men, from Saitaung and Labankahtaung, were arrested on July 15. Another two residents were arrested on July 18. Two residents from Namati were also arrested on July 26.

Facebook User Charged for Post on Parliament's Visit

On July 10, Kaung Htet Zin wrote on Facebook that students and teachers should not be forced to welcome the Parliament on its visit to Kwin Kalay village, Myaungmya Township, Irrawaddy Division. He was charged under Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law.

Teachers, students and community organizations welcomed the Myaungmya Township MP, Mann Htun Kyaing, the regional MP, Khaing Zin Oo, and other MPs. Sat Ka posted photos to record the trip on Facebook, which Kaung Htet Zin then allegedly shared on his own account and criticised students being made to fold their hands and welcome MPs.

A member of the NLD said that they asked him to delete the post but he refused to do it, so a resident, Pyue, sued him.

TRIAL

Updates in Reuters Reporters Case

On July 9, a judge accepted charges brought against Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo under the Official Secrets Act for allegedly holding classified Government documents relating

to security deployments in Arakan State. On the same day, numerous international advocacy organizations released statements calling for the charges to be dropped. The upcoming hearings will involve the court hearing from six defense witnesses.

In the journalists' first time testifying in court on July 16, Wa Lone said that during the police interrogation, officers tried to induce him and Kyaw Soe Oo not to publish their investigation into a Military-led massacre in Inn Din village, Arakan State. Officers told the reporters that if *Reuters* declined to publish their investigation, they could negotiate their early release. The report was published on February 8. Wa Lone said that, in two video-recorded meetings in Insein Prison held separately with him and with Kyaw Soe Oo, "they made us read the *Reuters* report and asked us to sign to certify the accuracy of the report."

Wa Lone also stated that the report was 80% complete when they met with police officers in the restaurant where they were arrested, and that they had arranged the meeting to give Government officials a chance to respond to their findings. He said that the reporters were then framed by police who handed them papers without asking. The officers then left abruptly, and the two reporters were arrested upon leaving the restaurant before police even looked at the documents, Wa Lone told the court.

On July 30, Kyaw Soe Oo told the court that the information in documents police say were found on his mobile phone was already public, and that he does not know how the documents got on to his phone.

Delay in Case against Four Protesters

Four protest leaders, Wunna Saw, Tin Hlaing, Myo Lwin and Shwe Tun, have had their case delayed as the prosecution witness failed to attend court. They are facing charges under Section 19 of PAPPL for allegedly protesting against MOGE and

CNPC on April 25 without permission from authorities. Residents are demanding compensation for land and crops damaged by the companies. On July 20, they will attend their next hearing.

Case of Students Sentenced for Anti-War Play Remains Ongoing

The Military is not satisfied with the sentence given by a Patheingyi Township Judge, Win Aung, to eight students under Section 500 of the Penal Code for staging an anti-war play. Therefore, the Military appealed and the case was reopened. The first hearing was held on July 16 at Patheingyi Tract Court.

Although the Military filed a lawsuit more than a year ago against nine students who participated in the January 2017 production, one youth, Myo Ko Ko, was absent from the hearing. On April 4, students received fines ranging from 30,000 to 50,000 Kyats (USD \$22.50 to \$37.50).

The next hearing is on July 25 for eight students who have appealed the Court's decision.

Township Court Rejects Plea to Dismiss Case against Kachin Anti-War Activists

On July 9, a Kachin State court rejected a plea to drop the case against three Kachin activists, Lum Zawng, Jau Jat and Nang Pu, who were sued for defamation under Section 500 of the Penal Code. On July 3, the three activists' lawyer pleaded at the State Court to drop the case as it is no valid.

Although the court rejected the plea, the defendants will continue to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Aung Than Wai Appears in Court for the Third Time

Aung Than Wai appeared in court for the third time on July 18 for the questioning of the prosecution's witnesses in the case. Aung Than Wai was arrested on June 21 after posting a picture of Tin Maung Swe, the Arakan State's Government Secretary,

under the title, 'Who is responsible for the Mrauk U Murder?' alongside a video of the meeting with the Arakan State Government. He is facing charges under Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law and Section 10 of the Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens. Although he is able to be released on bail for charges under 66 (d), Section 10 of the Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens prohibits bail. Therefore, Aung Than Wai has to face trial inside detention.

SENTENCES

Two Sentenced for Participating in Kachin Anti-War Protests, Mandalay

On July 5, a court in Aung Myay Tharsan Township sentenced Than Htike and Thet Hnin Aung to three months' imprisonment for participating in peace protests in Mandalay in May 2018. The men were convicted of violating Section 19 of PAPPL. They were arrested on May 12 in a shopping district in Mandalay as they handed out questionnaires in a bid to elicit locals' views on the peace process and armed conflicts around the country.

Plainclothes police officers arrested them for participating in anti-war protests earlier in the month. The two men were eligible for bail but opted to defend themselves from behind bars. The two months they have spent in detention will be put toward their sentence, leaving them with one month left to serve.

Three other peace protesters from Mandalay who were arrested during the anti-war protests in May; Poet Kalint, Aung Hmine San and Soe Naing, were earlier sentenced to two months in prison. All three have since been released after completing their sentences. In addition to being imprisoned, Poet Kalint, who also worked in the civilian staff of the Military's Central Command based in Mandalay, was fired for

participating in the protest. His younger brother, who worked in the civilian municipal staff at the same Military office, was also fired for being the brother of a peace protester.

Tanintharyi Journal's Appeal Rejected

On July 31, Tanintharyi Division High Court rejected the appeal filed by Tanintharyi Journal for publishing an article headlined "Electioneering Smile". The article, which was published under the pseudonym "Mu Say Ooh" in November 2017, mocked orders made by the Government Office's Deputy Director. The Township Court sued the journal for alleged violation of media ethics under Article 25 (b) of the Media Law on December 21, 2017.

On May 21, an appeal was submitted by the journal to drop the case at Tanintharyi Division High Court. The Court heard from both sides on June 12 before rejecting the appeal in July.

Five Farmers Form Myittha Township Sentenced For Ploughing

On July 17, five farmers, including Khin Nyo from Thaysoe village, Myittha Township, Mandalay Division, were sentenced to a fine of 200 kyats (USD \$0.14) or to two weeks in prison by Mandalay Division High Court. They were sued for ploughing on confiscated land under Sections 447 and 427 of the Penal Code. Farmers refused to pay the fine as they did not agree with the sentence. Their lawyer said that they are not in prison yet as the court has to send the order to Myittha Township Court in order for it to be valid.

Myittha Township Court dropped the case in August, 2017 and Mandalay Division High Court gave a sentence on July 17 due to an appeal from the plaintiff.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation seized over 8,000 acres of farmers' land on the border of Myittha Township and Kyaukse Township between 1963 and 1984 for researching an Agriculture Project. On October 18, 2015, Thaysoe villagers

ploughed on the confiscated land. Therefore, the research's farm manager, Win Myint, sued five farmers under Sections 447 and 427 of the Penal Code.

CONDITIONS OF IMPRISONMENT

Frontier Myanmar Interviews ICRC on Prison Conditions and Monitoring

On July 4, Frontier Myanmar released an interview with ICRC, which has been working in Burma's prisons since 1999. ICRC monitors prison conditions, and ensures that all detainees are humanely treated during their detention. The organization interviews inmates, tours prisons, and holds discussions with prison authorities, before sharing confidential reports with prisons detailing their findings. ICRC has implemented various projects in prisons, including helping authorities to build a school in Mandalay Central Prison and a multi-purpose room at Lashio Prison. It has also supported authorities in building a tuberculosis ward in Nyaung Shwe Prison, and it is currently working on a large project at Insein Prison. In the interview, ICRC officials stated that they would like to see changes to the 1894 Prison Law, which they believe is outdated.

MNHRC Investigates Human Rights Abuses in Prisons

MNHRC investigated reports of human rights violations in Pakokku prison on July 9, Ohbo prison on July 10, prisons and police cells in Kyaukse Township, Mandalay Division on July 11, and Mandalay Prison on July 12-13. As well as a male quarrying camp and a female quarrying camp. According to their findings, some prisoners have been wrongfully imprisoned for crimes they did not commit,, said a member of the Commission on July 15.

Another MNHRC member said that Pakokku prison has capacity for 400 inmates, but

currently it holds more than 500 prisoners. There are not enough tents for leisure activities in the quarrying camps and the female quarrying camps contain heavy rocks.

In Ohbo prison, there are approximately 9,000 prisoners and 40 mothers, so there is a kindergarten for children. Additionally, there are prisoners who are studying Grades 9, 10 and 11. In Ohbo prison, 184 people met with MNHRC and told them their difficulties.

Moreover, the Commission asked the Prison Department staff to tell them their difficulties and called on them to respect prisoners' human rights.

MNHRC Finds Human Rights "Grievances" in 42 Prisons

After finishing its survey, 42 prisons out of 47 were found Human Rights grievances, said Yu Lwin Aung, a member of MNHRC. MNHRC has conducted surveys in 42 prisons between 2014 and July 2018. Of the 47 prisons that will be investigated, Laukkaing, Magway and Kyaikmaraw prisons are still under construction.

MNHRC found that in most of the prisons, inmates do not have enough space, there are not enough doctors and nurses or medicine, and there are not enough toilets. Prisoners cannot shower properly as there is not enough water. Moreover, prisoners are beaten. Overcrowding was deemed the main problem in prisons. MNHRC said that these constitute human rights grievances rather than human rights abuses. MNHRC said it has already reported findings to the President. It plans to finish the surveys in other prisons in August.

RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Military Accused of Torturing Shan Civilians in Loilem Township

On July 19, SHRF released a statement accusing the Military and local militias in southern Shan State of engaging in torture and other human rights violations against civilians in Loilem Township south of Mong Kung.

The alleged violations occurred before and during armed clashes between the Military and the RCSS between June 8 and July 8. According to the foundation, troops from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 430, together with the local militias, tortured residents of Nawng Leng village tract and accused them of having links to the RCSS/SSA. SHRF said that soldiers searched the residents' homes, beating villagers and warning them that anyone who assisted Shan troops would face 20 years in prison. SHRF also documented a case in which over 100 soldiers from LIB 576 looted livestock from residents of Wan Nam Oat, Ham Ngai village tract in Mong Kung on July 11. The combined value of the stolen livestock was 3.5 million kyats (around USD \$2,457). On June 27, the soldiers searched the home of Wan Mu Ser village head Loong Karng Tawng. When they found dynamite, commonly used to catch fish, they accused him of working as a recruiter for the RCSS/SSA. When he denied the allegation, the soldiers severely tortured him, SHRF said.

Police Break Up Protest against Erection of Aung San Statue in Loikaw

On July 3, around 1,000 people participated in a protest against the erection of a statue of General Aung San in Loikaw. Locals from multiple towns in Karenni State traveled to protest in the state capital, where the statue

was under construction. It was later revealed on Martyrs' Day, July 19. Residents took to the streets after an open letter, sent on June 18, asking to meet with the State Government to voice objections to the statue, went unanswered. Erecting the statue in the state is inappropriate, as Aung San's promises to Karenni leaders have not been fulfilled, said one protest leader. Demonstrators later accused police of beating protesters who were marching peacefully with batons while they were waiting for permission from authorities to march to the park where the statue is located. Police arrested one of the leaders and handcuffed villagers involved in the protest. Other participants organized a sit-in protest to have them released at once. After they were released, the protesters dispersed.

Other protests took place in Karen, Chin and Mon States in opposition to similar statues that are being constructed in other states and regions.

Ten Naga ethnic organizations, including the NNC, also protested against the plan to build a statue of General Aung San in Kani Town, Sagaing Division. Naw Aung San, of the NNC, cited concerns that, if the General is to be accepted as a symbol of the country, ethnic histories may perish. The Naga Self-Administered Zone Leading Group reported that Naga CSOs are against the statue as it does not represent all the Naga ethnic communities.

Civil societies, MPs, residents and ethnic community leaders formed the committee to build Aung's statue in 2017. The opening ceremony of the statue in Kani Town is planned to take place on July 21.

The NLD has criticized the protesters objections to the statues, saying that it did

not instruct party members to persuade locals to erect statues and that their construction is not an attempt to 'Burmanize' ethnic minority regions.

RCSS/SSA Accused of Forcibly Conscripting over 50 Men

More than 50 young men from villages in Mong Pan Township, Shan State have allegedly been forcibly recruited by the RCSS/SSA. The accusation was reported by RFA on July 16, which quoted a local official from the NLD. RCSS/SSA soldiers were accused of taking men from villages in Mong Pan, Nay Zaw Naing, according to an NLD chairman in nearby Namhsan Township. Four of the 50 men are allegedly NLD members. On July 15, the NLD sent a letter to RCSS/SSA asking to release the four members. RCSS/SSA replied that they will release them immediately. He said he has heard that all the young boys have already been sent to a RCSS/SSA training center. Lieutenant Colonel Sai Oo, a RCSS/SSA spokesmana told RFA that he was not aware of the forced recruitment in the villages and could not confirm it.

MNHRC Receives Increasing Number of Complaints on Police Human Rights Abuses

Each year, MNHRC receives an increasing number of complaints concerning human rights violations perpetrated by police groups. More complaints are received from Irrawaddy Division out of all states and regions. Highlighted problems include a lack of adherence to police discipline rules, human rights abuses carried out during police investigations, and violations occurring more frequently in rural villages than urban areas.

The Police Department needs to reform the police's behavior immediately, according to MNHRC. As well as taking action against police officers who abuse the law, MNHRC

also called for raises in the standard of living for members of the police force.

University Authorities Prohibit Poster Commemoration Campaign, Rangoon

On July 6, university authorities prohibited a poster campaign aimed at commemorating the violent Military suppression of a student movement at Rangoon University on July 7, 1962. The attempt to stage the campaign was organized by YUSU in the Physics Department of the university, where students tried to hang posters reading "Don't Forget 7.7.62". Teachers would not allow the posters under the premise that the campaign would allegedly disrupt peaceful learning conditions.

7th July Ceremony Prohibited on Yadanabon University Campus, Mandalay

On July 19, the 71st anniversary of the Martyrs Day ceremony was prohibited from being held on the Mandalay Yadanabon campus. It was instead held outside the University and was led by the Federation of Students Union. Students requested permission from University authorities, but they were not allowed to hold the event inside Yadanabon University.

Punishment for Student Political Activity Continues Despite Revised Rules

While the rules governing students at universities, degree colleges and colleges have been revised, ABFSU at Yadanabon University said this month that the changes hardly make a difference. According to ABFSU, although the Ministry of Education revoked strict rules prohibiting students from participating in political activities last year, the amendment only amounts to a change in the headings and makes no real difference.

The severest form of punishment under the new rules remains expulsion from university

students found to have participated in political unrest. ABFSU stated that, as the rules are used to expel students, they still threaten freedom of learning.

Villagers Protest Appointment of Village Administrators

On July 24, over 120 villagers from 12 villages in Taungtha Township, Mandalay Region, protested alleged irregularities in the Township Management Committee's appointment of village administrators. The Committee only chose to appoint administrators that it liked, according to a protest organizer. Villagers also claimed that some of the village administrator candidates were unqualified for the position but were still selected because the Committee knew them. They added that in some instances, those selected were accused of criminal acts, such as demanding bribes and electoral fraud. The protesters said they gave the committee proof of their accusations, but the documents were ignored. The Committee Chairman, Wai Lin Tun, insisted that the villagers' complaints were properly investigated.

134 Cases Filed under Telecommunications Law

On July 4, the Freedom of Expression Activist Organisation (Athan) reported that there were 134 cases filed under the Telecommunications Law.

11 cases were filed during the former presidency; 90 cases before the amendment to the law under the current Government, and 33 cases after the amendment to the law, said Athan's Executive Director, Mg Saung Kha.

Leader of Ten Households Shot in Hsipaw Township

During the night of July 6, a leader of ten households, Kyaw Win Naing, was shot three times in Khun Panhael village, Hsipaw Township, northern Shan State. He is a farmer in Se Sone village. It is not yet known

which armed group shot him. Hsipaw residents are worried for their safety as gunshots often occur in Hsipaw.

The Military, as well as militias, the police, EAOs - including the RCSS/SSA, the TNLA and the SSPP/SSA - all operate within Hsipaw Township.

Kachin Refugees Attempt Return to their Homes and are Expelled

About 60 IDPs were expelled from Namsaryan village, Waingmaw Township, Kachin State by the Military, according to Kachin ethnic organisations. Residents returned to their village to resettle at the end of June, but the Military did not let them stay. Therefore they took shelter in IDP camps located in Bhamo and Myitkyina.

Namsaryan village is situated on the Laiza road which leads to the KIA headquarters. It is an ideal location for the Military to combat the KIA, residents noted.

MNHRC Reports Death of Civilian due to Police Torture to the Ministry of Home Affairs

MNHRC reported that 26 year-old man died during police detention in Hlaingtharyar Township in Rangoon. The Commission asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to solve the case. On June 21, Khaing Min Wai was taken by police for questioning and was investigated at a police outpost. He died six hours later. His mother reported to MNHRC that her son had died due to police torture. On July 10, Khaing Min Wai's 15 year-old cousin, who was detained with him for one night, said that police locked the door and tortured Khaing Min Wai. This included holding Khaing Min Wai's hands on the table and beating his finger joints, forcing Khaing Min Wai to lie down and beating his back, and kicking Khaing Min Wai when he knew nothing. His cousin said that he was also beaten at the police outpost by the Ward Leader, Aye Kyaing, but he was released at 4 am. On July 14, the Insein Township

Superintendent, Tin Aye, formed a tribunal and is currently investigating the case.

MNHRC Finds that Police do not Take Action over Police Discipline

On June 26, Zaw Min Tun from Nyaung Tapin village, Dedaye Town, Irrawaddy Division was accused of stealing fishing nets and was arrested by the leader of one hundred households. He was taken to the police station and died during investigations of multiple wounds. His family complained to MNHRC so on July 24, MNHRC found that police did not follow police discipline rules. Zaw Min Tun's family saw his wounds and also complained to the police and the police investigated the case. The nine police officers who were involved in the murder case are currently having action taken against them.

Six Medics Killed by Military in Northern Shan State

On July 17, the TNLA announced that the Military had killed six female medics who were being held in captivity in northern Shan State. On July 11, the medics were ambushed by the Military's Infantry Battalion 301 in Arlaw village, Mangton Township. A TNLA soldier trying to protect the medics was killed by Military soldiers. The medics were arrested and taken as prisoners of war. Their bodies, along with that of the TNLA soldier, were found together in a grave on July 14. Two had gunshot wounds and the other four had stab wounds and bruises from beatings, according to a statement issued by the TNLA. The Military has provided a conflicting account of the events, saying the bodies of three men and five women in camouflage uniforms were seized from TNLA insurgents. One Ta'ang resident from Namsang township denounced the incident as a war crime and believes it was "meant as a warning to discourage girls and women from working for their people".

LAND RIGHTS

Military Claims to be Returning Confiscated Land

On July 18, the Military said that it has been returning unused lands it confiscated from farmers over the course of decades to its rightful owners. It also stated that some of the confiscated land not used by the Military has been transferred to a Government team that includes Vice President Myint Swe. The announcement was made a day after a report was released by Human Rights Watch. The report had accused the Government of largely failing to deliver on a pledge to seek justice for those whose farmland was seized in southern Shan State, Ayeyarwady region and Yangon region since the 1990s.

Protesters Reject Meeting on Coal-fired Factory

A meeting to discuss a coal-powered cement factory project in Patheingyi Township, Mandalay Region was cancelled because officials of the company involved in the project planned to attend the meeting. The meeting was to be held between the Mandalay Government and township residents.

Myint Investment Company began constructing a coal-fired cement factory near Aung Tha Pyay village in Patheingyi in 2016. Local residents have held protests against it several times. Villagers are concerned that wells, water tanks and natural springs are included in the project area. Shade trees on both sides of village path have been felled, and locals worry that religious buildings and pagodas will be destroyed by the project.

Transparency Concerns Raised about Proposed Dam Projects

A report released in June by two NGOs, KHRG and Karen Rivers Watch, highlights the detrimental effects that seven proposed

dam projects will have on villagers in Karen State. Residents are concerned about the lack of transparency surrounding the projects, which are backed by international companies. Some have already resulted in forced displacement, land, and loss of crops. The projects are: Thauk Yay Hkat in Thandaung Township, Hatgyi in Hlaingbwe Township, Thawkahtar in Kyaukkyi Township, Bilin in Bilin Township, Pata in Kawkareik Township, Mehkatha in Kyain Seikgyi Township, and Tanintharyi in Hteekhee Township.

According to the report, along with the local company Asia World, the major investors are from Thailand, Japan and Norway. Many of the projects are designed primarily to export electricity to Thailand or China. Construction on three of the projects is expected to begin in 2021 to be completed in 2022. The Asia World Group of Companies denied its alleged involvement. A coordinator at Karen Rivers Watch said that the Government has not provided any information and there has been no public consultation with residents. KHRG stated that some companies have started building roads and bringing equipment to the dam sites and have urged local people to move, as well as destroying their villages without discussing compensation. A number of residents have already been displaced from proposed project sites. According to KHRG, villagers from five of ten dam sites that were investigated have reported cases of land confiscation and property damage. Compensation was not provided for land seizures nor for extensive damage to crops and natural fauna.

Farmers in Tanintharyi Protest Shwe Kanbawza Palm Oil Company

On July 8, over 200 farmers from six villages in Tanintharyi Township, Myeik District, Tanintharyi Region staged a protest urging

authorities and Shwe Kanbawza palm oil company to return confiscated lands in Yay Phyu Village. More than 200 farmers from Shan Inntaw, Yayphyu, Kontyaw, Htonekha, Tarplug and Chaunglamu villages participated in the march.

The reasons for staging the protest are because the farmers' lands were confiscated and their crops were destroyed, all without compensation. Although they complained to the relevant Government departments, they are yet to resolve the issue. When farmers grew crops [on the confiscated lands], the company came and destroyed them, and when the farmers subsequently complained, the company threatened them. Shwe Kanbawza has also sued some farmers.

Letpadaung Residents Continue to Protest Copper Mining Project

On July 4, residents from Letpadaung staged a protest outside the Myanmar-Wanbao Company in Monywa calling for a stop to the Letpadaung copper mining project. They said the company failed to follow the recommendations outlined in the Letpadaung copper mine inquiry report. After losing their land due to the project, farmers are dissatisfied with the 1,900 acres of substitute farmland provided as compensation, as it will be located in an undesirable location approximately 40 miles away from the farmers' villages in Letpadaung. This was the reason for the latest protest, the fourth that has taken place this year over the mine.

MFU Claims it has Helped Return over 18,000 Acres of Seized Farmland

MFU has helped to return over 18,000 acres of seized farmland over the past five years, according to Chairperson Su Su Nway. She disclosed the information during a protest organised by MFU (Central) and local farmers demanding the return of seized farmland to its original owners. "From 2012 to 2017, over 10,000 acres of

farmland seized by the Military were returned. Over 8,000 acres seized by companies and several other acres seized by authorities have also been reclaimed", said Su Su Nway. However, she said that they have experienced difficulties settling land disputes and helping return the seized farmland under the new Government. She said that some farmers claimed they were officially told not to go to the farmers' union to solve their problems.

After the protest, on July 1, Su Su Nway, Zaw Yan and Ko Ko Naing, the protest leaders, were charged under Section 19 of PAPPL by the Seikkan Township Superintendent for not asking for permission to demonstrate. According to Su Su Nway, she is the only person who led the protest. The other two were not involved in the protest, and were only guest preachers. Su Su Nway then sued the Superintendent under Section 500 of the Penal Code for allegedly being wrongly charged which has affected her reputation.

Conservation Project in Karen State Violates Right to Consent and Prior Consultation

On July 16, CAT submitted a formal complaint concerning the violation of the residents' right to free prior and informed consent by GEF, which is carrying out a conservation project, called Ridge to Reef, in Tanintharyi Region. CAT claims that the project threatens the land and resource rights of thousands of Karen people. An inception workshop was planned for Ridge to Reef on July 17, but local communities were not consulted. CAT's complaint calls for the suspension of Ridge to Reef until all communities who will be affected by the project are consulted and have given informed consent.

Authorities Demolish Buildings on State-Owned Land Returned by Military
Since July 17, authorities in Karen State have been demolishing and clearing unauthorized buildings on land that was

previously released by the Military in San Pa Ree Village Group, Hpa-an Township. 929 acres out of 1,128 acres were released by the Military and later designated “State-owned land” by the Government. However, on June 30 the Government ordered the relocation of the people that had allegedly been living and working on the land without its permission. Residents’ houses were then demolished. According to KNU, after the Military released the land due to its inability to work on it, the land became vacant land, so KNU allocated plots and land documents to the public. A KNU spokesperson also said that he has heard the State Government will scrutinize and reallocate the land. KNU has submitted the issue to the central Government, and is awaiting a response.

Residents to Petition Union Government to Halt Gold Mining Project in Shan State

On July 23, residents of eastern Shan State’s Mong Hpyak Township agreed in a meeting to send a petition to the Union Government in protest of a proposed gold mining project in their area. Although residents have previously sent letters to the State Government opposing the project, they are yet to receive a response.

The Australian company, Access Resources Asia Company Limited, currently has permission to mine for gold in Mong Hpyak. Company representatives held meetings with locals in 2017 and 2018 to discuss the project. In all three meetings, community members opposed the gold mining venture, citing a negative impact to 13 village tracts in the township through the destruction of paddy fields and pollution to local waterways. The latest gold extraction project will unearth more than 140,000 acres of paddy field.

Farmers Win Land Ownership Dispute

Tensions are rising between seven farmers (landowners) and other residents in Chaungtu village, Kyauktaw Township,

Arakan State. Farmers want to work the land, while the other residents want the land to become grazing land. The seven farmers asked that the Government resolve the tension in a press conference that was held in Sittwe Town. The Chaungtu Village Administrator, Kyaw Thaung, along with most residents, is trying to convert the 40 acres of the farmers’ land into grazing land, and they destroyed the farmers’ plantations twice in June and July.

The judge decided that the seven farmers legally own the land as it has been passed down the generations for many years.

Farmers Hold Press Conference in Dagon Myothit East

On July 28, farmers from Dagon East, Dagon South, Dagon North and Dagon Seikkan Township, held a press conference in Dagon East with the aim of suing companies for land confiscation. In 2013, Myawaddy Agricultural Company, Dagon International Company, Yuzana Company, Seinshweli Company, and Zayar Marimiyar worked together with the Ministry of Agriculture to seize 20,000 acres of land.

The case has been reported to the Government, but the farmers have not got back their lands yet.

Land and Resources Discussion Canceled by Authorities

On July 21, a planned discussion on the detrimental effects of a gas pipeline project on farmers livelihoods was canceled by authorities as it was allegedly not in accordance with the law. The discussion, titled “The Land and Resources of Farmers” was planned to take place at Shwe Ann Taung Hall, in Ann Township, Arakan State. 100 people were registered to attend the event, with three leaders who had been given permission by the police to guide the discussion. The discussion was then prohibited, as an extra two leaders arrived to host the event. One was a Land and Resources activist in Kyaukphyu Township,

Tun Kyi, and the other was an anti-pipeline activist from Ann Township, Myo Lwin.

Residents Protest Confiscated Land

On July 13, over 100 residents protested against land confiscations which were seized by Nawaday sugar mill and the No. 10 police battalion in 1996-1997. In August, 2012, the Land and Other Lands Recruiting Committee Submitted a report to parliament that the over 200 acres of confiscated land should be returned to residents in Shan Su and Shan Kone villages, Pyay Township. However, until now no land has been returned, according to protest leader, Zaw Tun.

In 2017, the Land Department defined the land as grazing land and refused to return the land to farmers. Previously, farmers had been planting sesame on the land as well as cotton and sugarcane. Additionally, they paid tax. Approximately 60 farmers had been planting on the 200 acres of land.

Residents Demand Compensation for Land Seized for Chintwine Bridge

Residents have not received compensation for farmland that was seized to to build Chintwine bridge in Kani Town, Sagaing

Division. Six residents from Tharsi district claimed that 11 acres of their land were seized when building the bridge in 2016. They sent a complaint letter to the General Administration Directorate in Kani Township after the bridge opening ceremony on July 16, as some residents who had previously complained about their land being seized had already received compensation, but the other six residents had not.

Kani Township Regional MP, Thein Hlaing Win, said that the land was confiscated because it was vacant land. He also said that residents who were affected by the land seizures did not request compensation, which was the reason why they were only able to compensate the residents who had sent a complaint letter previously.

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