



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

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Burmese Army steps up attacks in Kachin and Shan State

The Burmese Army has stepped up attacks in Kachin State and northern Shan State since the beginning of September, despite an agreement in May to “to work towards a cessation of hostilities” and continued talks aimed at agreeing a ceasefire. There was fighting in several areas in northern Kachin State and reports that the Burmese Army continues to send more troops and supplies to the area.

A spokesman for the Shan State Army-North’s (SSA-North) brigade near Namatu Township in northern Shan State told the Irrawaddy that they have been attacked more than a dozen times by the Burmese Army in September.

Burma Campaign UK called on the British government to cancel plans to offer training to the Burmese Army, in light of the escalation of Burmese Army attacks in Kachin and Shan State, and ongoing human rights abuses being committed by the Burmese Army. The British government announced during President Thein Sein’s visit to the UK that the UK would provide training for 30 serving Burmese Army soldiers. The Burmese Army is not under civilian control and continues to commit human rights abuses which violate international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

More anti-Muslim attacks in Arakan State

In September, anti-Muslim violence flared up again in Arakan State. The violence began on 29 September, when a Buddhist mob in Thandwe set fire to at least two Muslim houses. The violence continued over the next few days, resulting in at least five people killed, including a 94-year-old woman, several injured, and hundreds of civilians displaced. Arson attacks destroyed dozens of homes and several mosques.

Speaking at the UN on 30 September, Burma’s Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin promised “zero tolerance” towards those responsible for religious violence. However, in reality, the government has created a culture of impunity and has failed to protect Muslim communities in Burma. Anti-muslim attacks have been well planned and organised and yet no action has been taken to prevent the attacks or bring those responsible to justice.



Burnt homes in Arakan State.
Credit: Restless Beings

Burma refuses to sign Sexual Violence Declaration

On 24th September 115 countries signed a new declaration of commitment to end sexual violence in conflict. However, despite high level lobbying by the British government, the government of Burma failed to support the declaration.

The declaration of commitment to end sexual violence in conflict was launched by British Foreign Secretary William Hague and Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, at the United Nations in New York. The declaration contains practical and political commitments to end impunity, promote accountability, and provide justice and safety for victims of sexual violence in conflicts.

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Since Thein Sein became President, there has been renewed conflict in Kachin State and Shan State, and Burma Campaign UK has received an increased number of reports of rape and sexual violence by the Burmese Army. No action has been taken to end impunity for rape by the Burmese Army, and Thein Sein and his government do not even acknowledge that such abuses take place.

The failure of Burma to sign the declaration also calls into question the effectiveness of British government policy on Burma. Since reforms began in Burma, the British government has performed a dramatic u-turn on Burma policy, no longer supporting strong pressure as a means to promote human rights, and instead arguing that building a closer relationship with the government of Burma would give it more influence to promote human rights.

However, this approach does not appear to be delivering results. Foreign Office Minister Hugo Swire asked for Burmese government participation in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative when he visited Burma in December 2012. Foreign Secretary William Hague also requested President Thein Sein to participate when Thein Sein visited the UK in July 2013.

On 12 September Valerie Vaz MP handed in more than 2,000 letters and campaign postcards from Burma Campaign UK supporters to the Foreign Office in London calling for action to end rape and sexual violence against women in Burma.



Valerie Vaz MP and Burma Campaign UK staff deliver more than 2,000 letters to the FCO to call for action to end rape and sexual violence against women in Burma.

‘High risk of genocide in Burma’

A new report by The Sentinel Project assessing the risk of genocide against Muslim minorities in Burma has found that the Rohingya are at “high risk of genocide, whether by violent extermination or by the slow destruction of the group through isolation and starvation.”

The Sentinel Project found that the government, local authorities, and Burmese security forces were either complicit or actively involved in ethnic cleansing campaigns.

The report concludes that Burma “currently presents a textbook case for a country on the brink of genocide. There are many key indicators of genocidal intent, such as the Burmese government’s attempts to limit reproduction amongst the Rohingya ethnic group; proposed restrictions on intermarriage between Muslims and Buddhists; continued employment of hate speech against this minority (both Rohingyas specifically and Muslims in general); and forced registration of Rohingyas under a “foreign” ethnic identity, thus attempting to provide documentary denial of the existence of the group.”

The Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention works to identify communities vulnerable to genocide and prevent the crime of genocide worldwide.

UN delivers aid in Kachin state but still no free aid access

The UN was allowed to deliver two convoys of aid to internally displaced in Laiza, Kachin state in September. However, the military-backed government continues to restrict aid to displaced people in Kachin state.

Speaking to Democratic Voice of Burma after the first aid delivery, UN spokesperson Aye Win said the aid would only last one month, and that they were still waiting for approval from the Burmese authorities to deliver further supplies. “Obviously [this delivery of aid] is not much given that there are around 53,000 IDPs in non-government controlled areas, and 18,000 around Laiza alone,” he said.

Regime’s billions held in Singapore banks

Burma’s government has finally admitted the existence of billions of dollars held by the regime in overseas banks. Revenues from Burma’s extensive natural resources, such as gas, oil, coal, timber and gemstones, have long been reported to have been siphoned off to offshore accounts during the decades of military rule.

Recent reports from The Banking Information Center (BIC) have claimed that Burma’s military-backed government holds up to US\$11 billion worth of foreign reserves in several bank accounts in Singapore. In response, the government released a denial on 12th September, with the Deputy Minister of Information Ye Htut stating “The government doesn’t stash away the national budget in foreign banks.”

However, only a week later, Burma's Central Bank chairman, Kyaw Kyaw Maung, confirmed that the government does hold billions of dollars of foreign reserves in overseas bank accounts. He stated that a total US \$7.6 billion was kept in offshore accounts, including national budget funds.

State Sangha bans anti-Muslim organisations

A government-appointed committee that regulates Burma's Buddhist monks has banned the creation of formal organisations based on the 969 ideology – a monk-led movement which has been accused of promoting violence against Burma's Muslim minority.

At least 237 people have died in violence since last June, and more than 150,000 displaced, with the vast majority of the victims being Muslims. This ongoing violence has been associated with the 969 movement, which seeks to protect the Buddhist faith from a perceived threat from Islam.

On 2 September, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee released a decree stating that although they did not object to monks promoting the 969 ideology, they had gone too far in drafting proposed laws such as banning Buddhist women from marrying outside their religion. For this reason, they announced the ban on any official 969 organisations.

'Significant drop in happiness levels' according to World Happiness Report

Burma has seen a significant drop in happiness levels over the past several years, according to the latest World Happiness Report, which ranked Burma 121st on an index of 156 countries. Of all countries in the survey, Burma saw the third-biggest decline in happiness levels between 2005-07 and 2010-12. Larger drops in happiness were only recorded in Greece and Egypt.

The report ranked countries based on international data on how people rate their emotions and their lives as a whole. The World Happiness Report is published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

New Reports

'Drawing the Line' The Case Against China's Shwe Gas Project, For Better Extractive Industries in Burma

Shwe Gas Movement

www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/drawing-the-line-the-case-against-chinas-shwe-gas-project

Burma Risk Assessment: High risk of genocide in Burma

The Sentinal Project

www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/burma-risk-assessment-high-risk-of-genocide-in-burma

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**