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MEDIA MONITORING REPORT # 172

ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

[Mon State budget triples due to rise in development projects](#)

Myanmar Times, 24 October 2017

THE Mon State government's budget trebled last year compared with the previous administration, the regional government office said Monday.

State Minister for Planning, Immigration, Labour and Population Department U Wunna Kyaw said the increase in budget allocation was due to rise in the number of development projects being undertaken in the region.

"The state will embark on Municipal projects scheduled for three years within one year period and the Mon State will be improved in the short period," he said.

In the period of the former government, the budget for the development of the state was about K6 billion and the amount have been used up.

"For this government era, the Municipal budget will be increased to over K19 billion in one year," he said.

U Wunna Kyaw said that the present government will work within 5 years, a 15-year development plan for the state, mainly focusing on improving transportation.

"I'll be watching the movement of Mon State Municipal budgets," U Kyaw Kyaw Han, a resident of Mawlamyine, said. "I hope their words will not just be words but will translate into concrete actions and projects."

Mon State has a total budget of K86 billion; of these K76 billion comes from the Union government while the remaining K11 comes from revenue of general taxes.

For the 2017 budget year, the state government made 14 main policies to implement development, focusing on better transportation, regular power supply, better infrastructure, improvement of delivery in basic services in the municipal system and more improvement in rural areas.

In terms of expenditures, a total of K19 billion was allocated for the state government, K23 billion for the road department, K19 billion for the state municipalities, and K4 billion for power.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/mon-state-budget-triples-due-rise-development-projects.html>

[Committee Begins Development of English, Myanmar, and Karen Languages Dictionary](#)

Karen News, 18 October 2017

An effort to compile Myanmar’s first dictionary for English, Myanmar, Sgaw Karen, Western Pwo Karen, and Eastern Pwo Karen languages is underway, the project’s organizing committee said.



The dictionary is intended to keep an up-to-date register of the languages, as well as to make a usable resources for vocational training schools, ethnic language and literature education, and for web searches and future publications, an organizing committee representative said.

“The Ministry of Education has shown interest in our dictionary and asked us how they can assist us. The government doesn’t have any experts on ethnic affairs so they have started relying on us more. This book will become a

historic volume that will last for a long time,” said Naw Pann Thinzar Myo, Karen Ethnic Affairs Minister for Yangon Region and chairperson of the dictionary’s organizing committee.

The committee includes a representative from the Karen Literature and Culture Committees of Ayeyarwady, Bago, Tanintharyi, and Yangon regions and Mon State, while the chief ministers of Ayeyarwady Region and Karen State and the Ethnic Affairs Ministers of Ayeyarwady, Bago, and Tanintharyi regions and Mon State are also serving as patrons.

The committee also includes two representatives from the Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen Baptist Convention, a representative from the Karen State’s Eastern Pwo, as well as Karen State (Eastern Pwo) representatives, donors and linguistic experts.

The Yangon Region government has donated K5 million to support the committee’s efforts. Other notable donations included K4 million from Karen businessman Saw Palar Tu and three million kyat from Karen State Border Guard Force commander Col Saw Chit Thu. Smaller donations have also been collected from the Karen business community in Yangon.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2017/10/committee-begins-development-of-english-myanmar-and-karen-languages-dictionary.html/>

[ASEAN’s largest packaging firm to start Thilawa operations next year](#)

Myanmar Times, 9 October 2017

Kian Joo Group, the largest packaging business in ASEAN, is investing in a packaging plant in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Construction of the plant is expected to be complete by the first quarter of next year.

Malaysia-based Kian Joo is one of the biggest can manufacturers within ASEAN, manufacturing a wide range of products and providing packaging services. The group has manufacturing facilities in Malaysia and Vietnam, with its international procurement and marketing centre in Singapore. Kian Joo first expanded into Thilawa in early 2015.

The company set up Kianjoo Can Myanmar (KJMM) and Boxpak Myanmar (BPMM) with an initial capital of US\$16 million and \$7.5 million respectively for the Thilawa project. The total investment cost is expected to amount to \$75 million for KJMM and \$38 million for BPMM.

At a time of rising demand and promising growth prospects in Myanmar, KJMM will manufacture tin cans, aluminum cans, carry out original equipment manufacturing and packing of beverages and milk powder, while BPMM will produce carton boxes.



Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/aseans-largest-packaging-firm-start-thilawa-operations-next-year.html>

Co-op education programs underway to spur long-term development

Myanmar Times, 9 October 2017

Education programs and discussions are being held over the long-term development of cooperatives (co-ops), which have been providing loans to small-scale farmers and citizens, said U Myo Aung, director of Cooperatives Department under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation.



The Cooperatives Department was a separate department under the Ministry of Cooperatives under the previous government. Under the current government, the two ministries worked together to set policies and procedures for livestock and agriculture businesses in the country to form co-ops to help growth.

A co-op represents an association of persons, farms or businesses owned and run jointly by its members, who unite voluntarily to meet common economic or social goals and share the profits or benefits.

“The main aim is to have continuous long-term development in agriculture and other sectors,” he told *The Myanmar Times* on October 7.

To do so, the Cooperatives Department was divided into five groups to carry out education programs on forming co-ops across the country. “Each group is responsible for three Regions or States,” U Myo Aung added. “There were some complications in forming co-ops in the past, so we are conducting programmes to educate people about the guidelines and procedures on how to form a proper co-op. The programmes are still taking place now.”

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/co-op-education-programs-underway-spur-long-term-development.html>

Schools to get more ethnic language teachers

Myanmar Times, 28 September 2017

Some language teachers teaching ethnic languages at government schools will be appointed as regular teaching assistants this year, according to the Department of Ethnic Literature and Culture.

This was among the decisions made at last month's meeting of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs. It aims at reducing the number of drop-outs among children in ethnic areas and to develop job opportunities for language teachers speaking ethnic languages.

"We are aiming to improve teaching methods. Most of the children from ethnic region can only speak their ethnic language. Course taught in Burmese language can be really difficult for those children, which leads to high drop-out rates in ethnic regions.

"Most of the children leave school before ending the primary level due to the language barrier," U Win Naing, deputy director general for the Department of Ethnical Literature and Culture told *The Myanmar Times* on Tuesday.

The Ministry of Education developed the teaching of ethnic languages in basic education schools in 2013-2014 academic years to preserve and develop local languages, literatures and cultures.

Currently the Ministry of Education provides K30, 000 a month to the ethnic language teachers. If they become teaching assistant their salary will increase. Then, the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs will negotiate with the Ministry of Education to appoint them as permanent teacher, once they graduate.

Teachers wishing to become teaching assistants in basic education schools can submit the application form to the respective regional and state government through the township education offices.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/schools-get-more-ethnic-language-teachers.html>

Shortage of textbooks, teachers and political will stymie Karen literature classes

Burma News International, 2 October 2017

A Kayin (Karen) State official is accusing some school administrators of putting up road blocks to prevent Karen language and literature classes from being offered.

"The textbooks haven't been issued yet this year. Some headmasters don't want ethnic literature to be taught because they worry that it would affect the teaching hours," said Saw Aye Mya, chair of Kayin State's Karen

Literature and Culture Committee. "Some schools have students who want to learn [Karen literature] but there aren't any teachers to teach them. The [qualified] teachers have been transferred to work in non-Karen villages."

He added that finding time to teach Karen literature in multi-ethnic schools was also proving challenging, while Karen parents in urban areas are not necessarily encouraging their children to read and



speak in Karen language.

According to officials from the Karen Literature and Culture Committee, Karen literature can be taught from kindergarten to the second standard. The class is not available in most of the urban schools, however.

“The Department of Education has allowed [Karen literature] to be taught officially in the lower primary level. If there are teachers and schools to teach it, it can even be taught up to the third and fourth standards,” said U Soe Myint, Kayin State’s Education Officer. He said that ethnic literature classes are not offered in urban schools as those classes are multi-ethnic.

But teachers say the largest stumbling bloc preventing Karen language classes is the need to focus on core courses to boost the exam pass rate. Hours spent on “development” subjects such as physical education, music and ethnic literature have been reduced in order to focus on exam preparations for the tests in the fourth and eighth standards

Teaching ethnic literature has been permitted across Myanmar since the 2013-2014 academic year. Some schools in Kayin State have been allowed to fly the Karen national flag and wear traditional Karen costumes on Mondays and Fridays.

Link: <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/3518-shortage-of-textbooks-teachers-and-political-will-stymie-karen-literature-classes.html>

[Senior cards to give elderly a break on costs](#)

Myanmar Times, 3 October 2017

The government in its attempt to create a caring society for the elders, will introduce a special senior card for the elderly people, a concession card that will entitle them to access cheaper healthcare or shopping discounts.

U Aung Kyaw Moe, director of the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement said on Sunday that the cards will be released once the Rules for Elderly Person have been issued.

The topic will be discussed on October 10 and 20, he said.

“Once the rules come out, we will release senior cards,” he said.

With senior citizen cards, the elderly can enjoy services available in other countries, such as access to some form of health care, priority seats for traveling and shopping at designated shops.

Once the Rules for Elderly Person is formulated, further discussions will take place with relevant department to provide the required resources. The Social Welfare Department already collected the number of elderly people.

The state is currently providing K10, 000 per senior citizen for 39,440 elderly people above 90 years old as social pension.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/senior-cards-give-elderly-break-costs.html>

[Water vehicles to launch this Saturday](#)

Myanmar Times, 3 October 2017

AFTER a four-month delay, the new water taxi system is going to officially run on October 7, said Ko Tun Naing Lin, a spokesperson of Tint Tint Myanmar Company.

The press conference for the water taxi was held in last May with hopes for the route to start in early June. But



due to a delay in the lack of permission from the government, the project has only just being given the green light to begin operations this month.

“We will hold the opening ceremony on October 6 and officially run [the system] on October 7 for first route. All passengers must use a prepaid card and can easily buy them at ports. They need to buy the card but we can't say the exact card price. We defined K300 for the trip,” Ko Tun Naing Lin said.

There are a total of six ports along the route from Insein to Botahtaung townships. On October 7, the water taxis will start routes from Botahtaung

Township and near Augn Zaya Bridge, Insein Township. Schedules will be displayed at the ports.

The water transport system will run three routes: the Hlaing River, Nga Moe Yeik creek and the river near Thanlyin Township. The first phase will run a route from Insein to Botahtaung Township. Initially, the government had hoped that the system would rely on just small boats as water taxis.

Daw Tint Tint Lwin, CEO of Tint Tint Myanmar Company, said that they will use a card system with their own platform. But for now, they will use an Anypay card system for riders' convenience.

Water taxis are popular in many countries, such as the Netherlands.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/water-vehicles-launch-saturday.html>

Govt committee proposes up to \$3.50 daily minimum wage

DVB, 4 October 2017

A government-appointed committee has tentatively agreed to set Burma's minimum daily wage at between 4,000 and 4,800 kyat (US\$2.93–\$3.50).

The decision was made during the third consultative meeting of the National Minimum Wage Committee on Monday. Committee members, including MP Thein Swe, had consulted both employers' representatives and workers' representatives before reaching a decision.



Thein Swe, an upper house lawmaker representing the ruling National League for Democracy, said, “The minimum wage will be set uniformly across all regions and states in the country, with no discrimination regarding the nature of the job.”

However, at least one of the committee members has voiced an opinion saying that he does not believe the figure of 4,000 to 4,800 kyat per day is feasible.

“It is unlikely that the employers will accept this amount,” said Naw Aung, who represented employers at the talks.

Regional and state assemblies will be next up; each should hold a debate on the proposed minimum wage and then report back to the committee.

A final deal is expected in December.

In August 2015, the government announced a minimum wage of 3,600 kyat (\$2.80 at that time) for an eight-hour work day, a decision greatly influenced by two years of tense talks between garment factory owners and labor unions.

In the wake of the decision, factory owners threatened to lay off workers rather than pay them the increased rate.

Link: <http://www.dvb.no/news/govt-committee-proposes-3-50-daily-minimum-wage/77735>

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

New Law to Protect Women, Girls against Violence

The Irrawaddy, 17 October 2017

YANGON — after four years of waiting, Myanmar’s first legislation tackling violence against women will be submitted to Parliament during the parliamentary session that reconvened on Tuesday.



The Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Bill has been in development since 2013, drafted by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and women’s rights groups amid calls for an urgent need to cover women and girls with separate legal protection.

In just one recent example of brutality against women, a husband killed his wife and three daughters in Irrawaddy Division’s Bogale Township. He had asked his wife for money in order to buy alcohol, the request escalating into an argument and the attacks. He was later arrested and confessed to the murders.

Upper House Lawmaker Naw Susana Hla Hla Soe, who is also a secretary of the parliamentary Women and Children’s Rights Committee, cited the quadruple murder as an instance of the increasing violence against women.

Offenders are not deterred from committing violence against women—even murder, she said, adding that the rule of law is essential in preventing such cases.

The final version of the bill has been finished, according to women’s right activists who helped draft the legislation. They told The Irrawaddy the draft bill would be submitted during the current parliamentary session.

The bill will better protect women from all forms of violence, including domestic violence, marital rape, sexual violence, harassment and assault in the workplace and public place, they said.

Hla Hla Yee, co-founder and director of Legal Clinic Myanmar, which provides mostly women and children with free legal aid, said when the bill is enacted, survivors of violence will receive more effective legal and healthcare support.

The draft bill carries a life sentence for rape of girls under the age of 18 and disabled women. Those found guilty of marital rape face two to five years in jail. The bill also includes harsher punishments for hurting girls and women.

The Women and Children’s Rights Committee secretary Naw Susana Hla Hla Soe said the committee has been working on the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022) in addition to the new law.

Working committees to implement the action plan were formed soon after lawmakers returned from presenting the government’s report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to the United Nations last year.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/new-law-protect-women-girls-violence.html>

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Government’s Peace Commission will meet DPN

Mizzima, 21 October 2017

Government’s Peace Commission (PC) and Delegation for Peace Negotiation (DPN) will reportedly meet to discuss four unresolved points for the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) Organizing and Information Committee issued a press statement which says this upcoming 7th meeting with PC will be held at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) in Yangon on October 23-24.

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) formed the Delegation for Peace Negotiation (DPN) for negotiating with the government.

The negotiations have been underway between DPN and PC for 15 months on the 8-point proposal made by the UNFC but have not yet reached agreement even though they have met seven times.



DPN second leader Nai Aung Ma Nge said, “Our 8-point proposal is in fact the words included in NCA when we look back. But we reinserted these words to enhance and make the agreement more precise.”

The statement says the PC has agreed four points out of total eight points in principle and assume that they can find complete solution for the four unresolved points through negotiations.

UNFC statement further says this upcoming 7th meeting with the PC will be attended by six delegates including

DPN team leader Khoo Oo Reh, a technical support team and office staff from their side.

UNFC is made up of ethnic armed organizations which have not yet signed the NCA, namely the Arakan National Council (ANC), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), New Mon State Party (NMSP), and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

Link: <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/government%E2%80%99s-peace-commission-will-meet-dpn>

Ethnic Armed Groups Lament ‘Delayed’ Peace Process

The Irrawaddy, 20 October 2017

The new peace process under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government has been sluggish, according to some ethnic armed groups, who cite differences between the Tatmadaw and government as well as a lack of experience and skills in those leading the process.



“It has been delayed,” said Saw Mra Raza Lin, vice chairperson of the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP). “If the government care about the people and the country, it should prioritize how to overcome those delays.”

While there are differences within the government, ethnic armed organizations (EAO) are also not unified, proposing alternative approaches to peace

building, which has hampered the process, she said.

“It is the disunity among the EAOs which is hindering the process to step up. So we, including the government, all have to try to get all of the EAOs on board,” she added.

According to peace observers, clashes between the Tatmadaw and nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA)-signatories reduced by 90 percent after signing the NCA. The Myanmar Army chief has said all EAOs must sign the NCA to join political dialogue, whether they are in clashes with the Tatmadaw or not.

Problems with leadership have strained the peace process, according to EAO leaders, as the country requires decisions from the civilian government and the military, which holds key security powers, to move forward on issues.

Previous chief peace negotiator U Aung Min convinced former president U Thein Sein to support him, enabling U Aung Min to effectively work with Tatmadaw generals. But this aspect of the peace process is missing under the NLD government, said a peace negotiator from the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF).

The peace negotiator who asked for anonymity told The Irrawaddy that if NCA signatories did not sign the NCA under the U Thein Sein administration, signing under the current circumstances would be impossible.

“The current peace negotiators cannot make any decisions. All have to go to the State Counselor, who is the chief peace negotiator. Besides, we have seen some negotiations regress, as the Tatmadaw does not agree on the negotiations although the government has agreed,” he said.

Khun Okker, patron of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, said the government wants to allow ethnic

armed groups to hold national-level political dialogues freely but the Tatmadaw wants controls.

He is optimistic, however, that if the NCA is maintained, the aspiration of peace will not be destroyed despite the country being far from achieving it.

“The slow movement in the peace efforts are due to the people,” he said, tersely appraising the peace process.

Leaders of NCA signatories hold government leaders and the Tatmadaw directly responsible for the delays, although they welcomed the start of political dialogue after 70 years of civil war.

“The main hurdle is how to do the ceasefire. There is no restriction either by the government or the Tatmadaw on whichever status of the delegates joining the [union peace conferences],” said U Min Zaw Oo, advisor to the peace commission, who has been involved in the peace process since its inception.

The government peace commission is still in talks with the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) to sign the NCA. They will meet on Oct 23-24 in Yangon for their seventh round of talks over the nine-point proposal of the UNFC.

The current peace process continues in two different paths. The NCA signatories are moving forward to reach a lasting peace in the southern part of the country, while clashes persist in the north.

The government sticks firmly to the NCA, while new the Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC), led by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) urge for an alternative approach.

Notably, the FPNCC and the UNFC did not join the celebration of the two-year anniversary of eight EAOs signing the NCA last week.

“We invited them [the non-signatories of NCA], they did not come. Same for last year. If I have to frankly criticize, they do not want to acknowledge the work of the eight EAOs and the government and the Tatmadaw. If they come, it shows that they are with us; as they don’t want to show this, they avoid,” said Khun Okker.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/ethnic-armed-groups-lament-delayed-peace-process.html>

Non-Signatories Forgo Sending Delegation to NCA Anniversary

The Irrawaddy, 13 October 2017

YANGON — Non-signatories of the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) will not attend an event in Naypyitaw on Sunday to mark the two-year anniversary of the signing of the accord.

Ethnic bloc United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) stated it would not attend because it had little time to prepare for the event.

The government accepted on Tuesday the request of eight NCA signatories to allow NCA non-signatories to join the event—just four days before the event scheduled on Sunday.



The UNFC comprises the New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) and Arakan National Council (ANC).

NMSP is considering signing the NCA before the third session of the 21st Century Panglong, which is expected to take place in November.

Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC)—a United Wa State Army (UWSA)-led group of seven ethnic armed groups based in northern Myanmar—will not attend the event because the government only invited some of the group’s members and not the entire bloc.

FPNCC comprises the UWSA, Kachin Independence Army (KIA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA).

The Myanmar Army has repeatedly said it would not hold peace talks with the MNDAA, TNLA and AA because they came to existence only after the emergence of a democratic government, in contrast to other long-established ethnic armed groups.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/non-signatories-forgo-sending-delegation-nca-anniversary.html>

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