

THAILAND

1 – 16 May 2018

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT # 182

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MADB revises loan system to farmers, enabling more to receive funds

Myanmar Times, 1 May 2018

The Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank (MADB) will start disbursing loans on an individual basis, moving away from the current group-based lending system, “said Daw Khin Nan Myint, deputy general manager at the MADB.



“Starting this year, we will extend loans to individual farmers. If a farmer successfully pays off his loans, he can apply for a fresh loan,” she told *The Myanmar Times* yesterday.

Under the new system, farmers will be able to provide their own guarantees. This will differ from the old system, under which the MADB provides loans to groups of three farmers who guarantee each other.

The main issue is if two farmers in a group have paid off their loans, they are still unable to apply for fresh loans if the third farmer has not repaid his loan.

“The problem is that if one farmer in a group is unable to repay his loan, the others hold off from repaying as well as they are worried that they will not be able to get loans again,” said Daw Khin Nan Myint.

The MADB, which was formerly under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI), was moved under the remit of the Ministry of Planning and Finance (MOPF) last year. Under MOALI, loans were given out to farmers at interest rates of 8 per cent per month. Since moving under the MOPF though, interest rates were reduced to 6.2pc, *The Myanmar Times* understands.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/madb-revises-loan-system-farmers-enabling-more-receive-funds.html>

Bago to get massive elephant sanctuary

Myanmar Times, 3 May 2018

One of Myanmar’s biggest elephant sanctuaries will be established in Bago Region to preserve

endangered elephants in the country, said U Ohn Win, minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

Elephant Lake sanctuary, named by the international animal welfare organisation Four Paws, has initiated a long-term project which aims to protect elephants, both wild and captive, on a 17,000-hectare area in Bago Region, according to the Forest Department.

“Here, we don’t let people ride elephants. Elephants will be released in nature and we don’t tie them with a chain,” said U Ohn Win on Tuesday.

The first step of the Elephant Lake project is to build a sanctuary close to Ye New Dam. The park will include paddocks and enclosures to provide a permanent home to elephants that cannot be released or a temporary home and full-time assistance to orphans, according to the Myanmar Timber Enterprise.

“There will be a hospital with a mobile unit to provide medical care for sick or injured elephants,” said Dr Phone Win, CEO of Mingalar Myanmar.

The department will provide land for the project, Myanmar Timber Enterprise will provide the elephants, Mingalar Myanmar will focus on community development and conservation awareness, and Four Paws will design the infrastructure required and take care of the elephants.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/bago-get-massive-elephant-sanctuary.html>

Agricultural marketing centre to be built in Nay Pyi Taw with help of KOICA

Eleven Myanmar, 5 May 2018

Myanmar will build an agricultural marketing centre in Nay Pyi Taw with the help of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

The centre will be located near Aharathukha Market in Pobbathiri Township, and an agreement signing ceremony on the project took place in Nay Pyi Taw on May 3.

The first post-harvest technology research centre was also opened near the Agriculture Department in Yezin, Nay Pyi Taw, on May 3.

The research centre was built with financial and technological help from KOICA plus Myanmar government’s fund. The centre is responsible for doing research on classification of agricultural products, packaging, stockpiling, distribution and procedures in post-harvest. The outcome of the research will be taught at Htonebo Post-Harvest Technology Training School in Mandalay Region.

Link: <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/business/13863>

Kayin State opens tender for Hpa-an mall

Myanmar Times, 7 May 2018

The Kayin State government is calling tenders for building the first shopping mall in the state capital of Hpa-an, a senior planning official said.

U Than Naing, minister of the municipality as well as of the planning and finance departments of the state government, said the project was planned to be built within a two-and-a-half-year period.

“It will be the very first shopping mall in Kayin. The state government plans to build it before 2020,” he said.

The state government also welcomes investors in other businesses such as private hospitals, clinics, international-standard hotels, and travel and tour businesses in Kayin, he said.

The shopping mall will be built on 3.34 acres of land near the old highway bus station of Hpa-an.

The tender closing date is May 15, and over 20 applicants want to invest in the project, according to the Tender Cooperating Committee.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/kayin-state-opens-tender-hpa-mall.html>

Government pledges to use best solar devices to light rural households

Myanmar Times, 7 May 2018

The government will ensure that it will only select the best quality solar devices to light rural households as part of its national electrification programme (NEP), UKhant Zaw, director of the Department of Rural Development, said.

“No matter the country of origin or the brand, we will select them if they are in accordance with international competitive bidding (ICB) system, said U Khant Zaw, whose office is under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.

“According to the benchmarks, the warranty period for a battery is three years, while a solar panel is ten years. I want to say that we’re doing the right thing and we will also take responsibility and accountability,” he said during a news conference on Friday.

As a part of the NEP, the Rural Development Department started installing solar systems in village households in the 2016-17 fiscal year.

In the current fiscal year, the solar systems will be installed in the rural areas in Chin, northeast Shan, Rakhine, Kayin, Mon, Tanintharyi, Bago, Mandalay, Ayeyarwady, Sagaing, and Magwe regions as well as in Nay Pyi Taw, which are far from the Mahar transmission line.

The five-year project will be carried out in more than 5100 villages, where each village household will receive a small-scale power system.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-pledges-use-best-solar-devices-light-rural-households.html>

EU approves €221 mln grant to Myanmar to promote quality education

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 9 May 2018

EU member states have decided to approve a €221 million (Ks356 billion) grant for Myanmar to expand quality education across the country.

Ambassador of the European Union to Myanmar Mr. Kristian Schmidt made the announcement in his message of greeting at the Europe Day ceremony held at the Kempinski Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday evening.

“We think education is the best possible investment in your country’s democratic future”. Union Minister for the Office of the Union Government U Thaung Tun also attended the ceremony and extended a greeting and thanks.

The EU is already the world’s leading donor, accounting for 57 per cent of global official development assistance (ODA) in 2017. All of the assistance is donated in the form of grants.

Link: <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/eu-approves-e221-mln-grant-myanmar-promote-quality-education/>

Over 5000 workers earn skills certificates in 2017

Myanmar Times, 9 May 2018

The Myanmar National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA) has issued more than 5000 certificates recognising workers' skills during the 2017-2018 fiscal year, said Minister of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population U Thein Swe.

A total of 5855 workers who applied to the NSSA took the examinations and 5164 workers were issued a certificate confirming their skills according to international standards, said U Thein Swe at a certificate awarding ceremony recognising national-level skilled workers in the Mandalay Industrial Zone on May 5.

The numbers exceeded the estimate target of the NSSA with a success rate of 88 percent, said the minister.

To receive this certificate, everyone can apply to the Myanmar Occupational Competency Standards Group for any of the four levels offered: semi-skilled worker 1, skilled worker 2, advanced skilled worker 3, and supervisor 4.

"For example, a level 1 worker must have about six months of work experience. His employer must confirm his experience. Practical experience is the main requirement. If he has the experience he can sit for the certificate exam. We abide by international standards adapted to the work environment of Myanmar. For instance, other countries may use high tech machines but we reflect the use of machines in Myanmar," he said.

Certificates are divided into 18 skill categories such as electrical installation, agricultural maintenance, furniture, construction, hotel servicing, small-scale maintenance, marketing staff, and welding. In the future, certificates will cover 30 different skills categories.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/over-5000-workers-earn-skills-certificates-2017.html>

Industrial Zones Planned in 11 Yangon Townships

The Irrawaddy, 11 May 2018

YANGON — Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein has announced plans to establish industrial zones in 11 townships on the outskirts of Yangon with the aim of addressing unequal development in the commercial capital.

He unveiled the plan on the side-lines of the Yangon Investment Forum 2018 on Wednesday.

The move aims to bring about equitable development among townships in Yangon Region, the chief minister said. "I want to have industrial zones in those 11 townships. They are lagging behind in terms of development," U Phyo Min Thein said.



The industrial zones will provide jobs for internal migrants who come to the city in search of greener economic pastures, while also improving local residents' standard of living, he said.

“We will establish industrial zones in order to reduce development gaps between the townships. We have earmarked 1,000 to 2,000 acres in each of the 11 townships for future industrial development projects,” said U Than, joint secretary of the Yangon City Development City.

He added that farmland would be purchased for the project, at fair prices.

“We will seek approval from the Union government to use land owned by local farmers for industrial purposes, and compensate the farmers according to market prices,” U Than said.

According to the plan, owners of farmland taken by the government for industrial development will retain ownership of 20 percent of the land, and the government will control the remaining 80 percent.

U Phyo Min Thein said that “Businessmen [earlier] bought land from farmers and applied for permission to use that land for other purposes. The farmers sold the land for just 2 million kyats per acre or so. After the businessmen sought industrial-use permits for the land, the value of the land soared to 100 million kyats. So the farmers are really sad.”

The YCDC has 25 plots of land above 3 acres in area and 120 plots that are less than 3 acres available for lease to private investors for the purpose of establishing factories and workshops, U Than said.

The plan calls for industrial zones to be built in Hmawbi, Taikkyi, Hlegu, Htantabin, Twante, Kawhmu, Kunchangon, Thanlyin, Kyauktan, Kayan and Thongwa townships.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/industrial-zones-planned-11-yangon-townships.html>

Women in Kayah State provided with cash

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 13 May 2018

UNION MINISTER for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr. Win Myat Aye presented cash assistance to women who are leading their households and handicapped people in Dimawhso Township, Kayah State, and yesterday.



At the ceremony, a local ethnic woman expressed her thanks for cash assistant of Ks 24.5 million provided for handicapped people and Ks 16.8 million provided for woman headed households in Dimawhso Township. The Union Minister cordially met with the people attending the ceremony and took commemorative group photo.

The Union Minister and party then attended the cash assistant ceremony held in Prusho for handicapped and woman headed households where the Union Minister delivered an opening speech. Kayah State Chief Minister U L Phaung Sho

expressed thanks for cash assistance of Ks. 9.8 million provided for handicapped persons and Ks. 77.4 million for women headed households.

Afterwards, the Union Minister inspected the site in Prusho Township where the Department of Social Welfare office is to be built and the status of constructing a kindergarten in Dimawhso Township and provided necessary coordination for the earliest opening of the kindergarten.

After this, the Union Minister and party discussed about opening 'mother circles' for the people in Loikaw, Shadaw, Bawlake, Pasawng townships at Kayah State, Loikaw Town, town hall and attended the cash assistant ceremony of Ks 11.6 million for handicapped persons, Ks 19.3 million for woman headed households and Ks 970,000 to expand 'mother circles.' A total of Ks. 131,788,100 cash assistant was provided for Kayah State in fiscal year 2018-2019.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/13_may_18_gnlm

Yangon to implement new urban development projects

Mizzima, 14 May 2018

Myanmar has laid out new urban development projects for the Yangon region inviting local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in the master plan through a recent Yangon Investment Forum held in the commercial city, according to a Xinhua report on 13 May.

The Yangon Region Investment Committee said that sub-centers, new towns, railway stations and industrial zones will be established as part of the new urban development plan.

The four sub-center projects are planned for Mindanma Secondary Central Business District with a trade center, convention center, social service center, logistics, information technology and software center, commercial, business and tourist centers, a sports complex, an amusement park and an inland port.



New town projects are planned for Thilawa New City, Southwest New City, Dagon East New City and Dala New City, the report said.

Link: <http://www.mizzima.com/development-news/yangon-implement-new-urban-development-projects>

Ks4, 800 daily minimum wage set officially

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 15 May 2018

THE NATIONAL Committee on Minimum Wage announced yesterday that the minimum wage will be Ks600 per hour and Ks4,800 per eight-hour work day irrespective of the type or location of work.

This minimum wage does not apply to small and family-owned businesses with less than 10 employees, it was noted in the committee's Notification No. 2/2018.

The decision for the minimum wage of Ks600 per hour, Ks4,800 per day of eight working hours irrespective of type and location of work is in accordance with the Minimum Wages Act 2013 section 10, sub-section (a), officials said.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/15_may_18_gnlm

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

By-elections scheduled for Nov 3

Myanmar Times, 9 May 2018

By-elections for vacant parliamentary seats will be held on November 3, the Union Election Commission announced Tuesday evening.

Voters in four townships – Kanpalat of Chin State, Lechar of Shan State, Tarmwe of Yangon Region and Myingyan of Mandalay Region will cast their ballots to elect Pyithu Hluttaw representatives.

Myitkyina's No (2) state constituency is the only one that has a vacant Amyotha Hluttaw seat.

Eight vacant state and regional constituencies include Matupi of Chin State, Tamu of Sagaing Region, Oktwin of Bago Region, Thabeikkyin of Mandalay Region and Rathaedaung of Rakhine State, Minbu of Magwe Region, Seikkan of Yangon Region, and the seat for ethnic Shan affairs minister for Mandalay regional parliament.

On April 1 of last year, by-elections were held for 19 vacant seats - nine for Pyithu Hluttaw, three for Amyotha Hluttaw and seven for states and regional parliament.

Candidates of the the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led governemnt, which took over in 2016, have dominated the by -elections last year and analysts expect the same outcome this year.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/elections-scheduled-nov-3.html>

LAND AND PROPERTY

Confiscated farmland returned to farmers in Myittha, Mandalay Region

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 16 May 2018



MORE than 120 acres of confiscated farmland was returned to their original owners in Myittha, Mandalay Region, yesterday in the presence of Vice President U Henry Van Thio, bringing the amount of farmland released to farmers to 2,156 acres.

Speaking at the ceremony to return the farmland to 53 farmers that had been confiscated by the Ministry of Defence, Vice President U Henry Van Thio urged the institutions concerned to continue to release the farmland they have confiscated as part of efforts for the development of the agricultural sector, on which more than 70 per cent of the rural population depends on for their livelihood.

“In some cases, it is found that land ownership disputes and squatters issues have caused delays for returning the farmland to owners, (even) though the ministries concerned had abandoned the farmland,” said the Vice President.

Myanmar’s agricultural products exports in the 2017-2018 fiscal year was worth more than US\$3 billion, and income from rice exports in the same fiscal year reached more than US\$ 1.1billion, making up more than 37 per cent of the income of the agricultural exports this year.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/16_may_18_gnlm

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

No decisions to be set down during Mon national-level political dialogue

Burma News International, 8 May 2018

All similar and different views from the three-day national-level political dialogue for ethnic Mon will be collected without considering them as an outcome from each sector, according to the coordination committee.

“Both similarities and differences will be compiled. Then, they will be submitted to the UPDJC (Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee) via the supervisory committee. No decisions will be made,” Min Kyaw Zeyar Oo, secretary (2) of the coordination committee, told Hinthar Media.

The coordination committee plans to compile similar and different views and draft them as a paper instead of deciding which views will be submitted from the discussions. It will submit them to the next session of the 21st Century Panglong Conference via the UPDJC in order to seek a decision.



Members of the coordination committee informed the press on May 6 that the economic, social, and land and natural resources sector have completed the discussions on May 6 and discussions will continue in the political sector on May 7 morning.

The coordination committee plans to send the outcomes of each sector to different sectors in order to seek and collect their suggestions.

Around 500 participants took part in the national-level political dialogue for ethnic Mon including 137 people in the political sector, 120 people in the economic sector, 106 people in the social sector, and 108 people in the land and natural resources sector.

Link: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/no-decisions-be-set-down-during-mon-national-level-political-dialogue>

KNU Renews Call for Tatmadaw to Halt Militarization of Papun

The Irrawaddy, 10 May 2018

CHIANG MAI, Thailand – The Karen National Union has urged the Myanmar military, or Tatmadaw, to stop deploying troops and doing roadwork in an area controlled by its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army, in Papun district, Karen State.



The Karen group is worried recent moves by the Tatmadaw are undermining trust-building between the two sides and may result in more clashes in the state, where the Tatmadaw has been engaged in an apparent militarization effort since March.

“If the Tatmadaw continues its activities before a meeting between the KNU and Tatmadaw has happened yet, any problems or consequences will be the

responsibility of the Tatmadaw,” the KNU said in a statement on Thursday that provided an update on the situation in Papun (Mutraw) district.

It has been more than a month since the KNU called for a meeting between Tatmadaw representatives and the KNU/KNLA’s Military Affairs Negotiation Team. The Tatmadaw has stalled on agreeing to the talks, however, citing the absence of the commander of KNLA Brigade 5, which operates in Papun, from the negotiations.

Military-to-military engagement between the KNU and the Tatmadaw has emerged as a potential channel to end the current clashes, following the Tatmadaw’s deployment of more troops in the KNLA-controlled area in early March. The clashes have caused more than 2,000 local villagers from Ler Mu Plaw in Luthaw Township to flee their homes since Mar.4.

Since April 30, more bulldozers have arrived in the area to continue rebuilding an old road while six more Tatmadaw units have been deployed in crop-growing areas of local villagers, forcing the villagers to abandon their homes.

Disappointed by the current peace process, even though the KNU and the Tatmadaw are both signatories to the NCA, observers of the process lamented that peace is nowhere to be seen.

The Myanmar military has insisted that the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee at the regional level has discussed the issue and how to resolve it. The JMC at the union has level also suggested military-to-military engagement as an approach to end the clashes.

However, the chief of the Bago Region JMC is also the commander of the Tatmadaw’s Southern Command and it is he who has overseen the militarization in Papun district. Therefore, the KNU doubts the Tatmadaw’s sincerity.

The KNU and the ethnic armed organization have proposed bringing in independent local and international monitoring for the JMC.

“The JMC also should review its stand,” he added.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-renews-call-for-tatmadaw-to-halt-militarization-of-papun.html>

New Mon Party to Register with Election Commission

The Irrawaddy, 15 May 2018

A new Mon party under the name the Mon National Representative Party will soon register with the Union Election Commission (UEC), according to the party organizing committee.

In preparation to secure votes in the upcoming 2020 election, Mon politicians, monks, legal experts, civil society groups, youth and women's rights activists have come together to try to form a strong party.

Participants at the second Mon Political Conference held from May 12-14 in the Mon State capital Moulmein shared their support for the new party.



Mi Sandar Nan, the spokesperson of the party organizing committee, said the committee “would submit the registration of the Mon National Representative Party to the UEC after a meeting between organizers in next two weeks.”

So far, the party leaders, chairman or secretary have not been appointed, she said, adding that the 21-member committee would need to discuss leadership further.

The party organizing committee has a 27-member advisory board to which the NMSP – a recent signatory to the nationwide ceasefire agreement – is a member.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/new-mon-party-register-election-commission.html>

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Regional funding and funding for Thailand was also received through private donations from Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States of America.