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THE JUNTA

‘BURIES’ THE LADY

Aung San Suu Kyi's last case sees her incarcerated for life

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EDITORIAL

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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WARNING FOR THE NEW YEAR

As Myanmar marks the coming of the Western New Year in a low-key fashion, there is nothing to celebrate. On the contrary, it would be wise to remain alert.

The Myanmar generals have tricks up their sleeves. The conflict between the fighters of the Spring Revolution and the Myanmar military is intensifying, with a number of local and international forces at play.

Naypyitaw realizes it is pressed on the battlefield and in the international halls of power. But we should not underestimate what the Men in Green are capable of.

Divide-and-rule is there forte. They have demonstrated this over the last six decades since General Ne Win grabbed power.

Where things are different now, say compared to the democracy uprising of the 1980s and 1990s, is a sense that this really is “make or break” or “do or die”. Many in Myanmar’s

Generation Z, who are spearheading the Spring Revolution, say there is no other choice than to get rid of military rule once and for all.

This is a sad reflection on how the military over the decades have essentially trashed General Aung San’s dream. And to add insult to injury, they have just signed off on the final sentence against his daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, giving her 33 years in prison – essentially a life sentence.

In this issue of Mizzima Weekly, we highlight the injustice and outcry over the junta’s push to “bury” Aung San Suu Kyi as a political player, as they brazenly try to slap a fig-leaf of respectability on junta rule through a corrupt election, which may take place in August of this year.

The Myanmar generals are getting desperate and are attempting to dig in. Let’s be careful not to underestimate what lengths they will go to remain in power.

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RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

People gather in Yangon to look at the display and fireworks during a rather subdued New Year's Eve celebration.
Photo: AFP

MAGWE PDFS INFLICT CASUALTIES IN AMBUSH OF MYANMAR JUNTA COLUMN

A resistance fighter Wai Gyi of Yaesagyo People's Defense Force said that on 22 December, local resistance

forces ambushed a Military Council column in Htanpinchaung village, Yaesagyo Township in Magwe Region.

As a result of the ambush, three junta soldiers died and many were wounded.

"We waited for the junta's column on the hill of Ywartharaye village before attacking. We exchanged fired for about half-hour. We saw

dead bodies and injured soldiers because we were shooting at the hill. As far

as we know, three junta soldiers were killed and numerous others were injured" a resistance fighter Wai Gyi of Yaesagyo People's Defense Force said.

According to Yaesagyo People's Defense Force, the junta column set fire to two houses near Ywartharaye village before moving on to the villages near the foot of Shinma Mountain.

Since 14 December,

Military Council troops have been torching villages in Yaesagyo Township, while local resistance forces have also carried out resistance attacks.

The Yaesagyo People's Defense Force, Myaing PDF, Pakokku People Defense Force, King Cobra People Defense Force, Urban Underground Revolution Force, and Pakokku Urban Guerrilla Force all collaborated in this attack.

TAIWANESE OWNED ADIDAS SHOE SUPPLIER REFUSES TO REINSTATE DISMISSED WORKERS

The Pou Chen Group is refusing to reinstate 26 workers at its Yangon factory that produces shoes for Adidas after they were fired for protesting against their low pay.

The workers said that the situation remains unresolved despite them having negotiated for two months with the factory, which is owned by the Taiwanese Pou Chen Corporation and located in the Thar Du Kan Industrial Zone, in Yangon's Mingaladon Township. Workers' rights activists and workers have also been in discussions with the Department of Labour, but as of 20 December there was still no resolution, according to a worker who spoke to Mizzima then.

According to workers' rights activists assisting the sacked

factory workers, factory officials said that they cannot re-appoint the sacked workers, but they can give them three months' severance pay. The sacked workers said that they were not looking for severance pay and just wanted to be re-instated.

On 8 December the Department of Labour said that the workers could file a lawsuit against the factory in a civil court. but, according to the rights activists the workers do not want to file a lawsuit because they do not believe that they will receive a fair trial in the junta administered courts. Because of this, the workers are now trying to negotiate directly with the factory.

Workers who have been dismissed from the factory are having difficulties finding more employment as

employers do not like to hire workers who have previously taken part in protests.

A worker who was fired said: "I haven't had a job for almost two months now, so I need a job. Our negotiations with the employer were not fruitful." They added: "We staged a peaceful protest because our wages were insufficient, because of that we were sacked."

In 2018 the Myanmar minimum daily wage was raised from 3,600 kyats a day to 4,800 kyats a day.

Since the February 2021 coup employers in Myanmar have ignored workers' rights and a majority of workers have become vulnerable to exploitation.

PYU SAW HTEE MILITIA MEMBER SHOT DEAD IN TANINTHARYI'S LAUNGLON TOWNSHIP

A Local People's Defence force attacked and killed a pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia member last week in the Tanintharyi Region.

According to locals, the member of Pyu Saw Htee was shot and killed on 23 December at 10:00 am in Launglon Township, Dawei District in Tanintharyi Region.

A local resident said that Nay Lin Tun, a member of Pyu Saw Htee was shot and killed near Wedi Village, Launglon Township, returning home after attending

a meeting at Launglon police station, A local witness said: "He was found dead with six bullets wounds all over his body, and he died on the spot."

According to local residents, Nay Lin Tun is a member of the Pyu Saw Htee militia under the Military Council and is always traveling with the junta soldiers. He is said to have been compiling voter lists in the villages in the Launglon Township for the upcoming junta national elections in 2023.

The Military Council's general election is expected to be held in Myanmar in 2023 between 1 February and 1 August.

It is only known that the Local People's Defense Force opened fire on the Pyu Saw Htee member, and it has not yet been revealed which forces were responsible for the attack.

THREE 88 GENERATION MEMBERS SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS IN PRISON

Three 88 Generation Peace and Open Society members, Ma Nu Nu Aung, Ma Khet Khet Aung and Ko Myat Thu were each sentenced to 15 years in prison.

They were sentenced to 10 years in prison under section 50(j) and five years in prison under section 51(c) of the counter- terrorism law at the Kyaikmaraw Prison Court on 23 December.

Ma Nu Nu Aung's sister said: "All three were arrested in Hpa-An Town. My sister is not a terrorist. The Military council charged her under the Terrorism Act, I am very unhappy. At some point the Military Council will have to take responsibility for its actions."

Ma Nu Nu Aung was arrested with her friend Ma Khet

Khet Aung and her son Ko Myat Thu after they had visited a clinic in Hpa-An Township in Karen State.

The three of them were interrogated at an interrogation centre in Mawlamyine for 12 days before being sent to Kyaikmaraw Prison.

Ma Nu Nu Aung and Ma Khet Khet Aung are both 53 years old, Ko Myat Thu is 24 years old.

FOUR CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE IN MAGWAY

Four civilians died when the junta launched two airstrikes on Nyaung Kan Village in Magway's Saw Township at about 1:00 p.m. on 26 December.

The dead were named as Daw Saw Waing, age 65; U Zaw Min, age 46; U Zaw Htay Win, age 48; and U Kyaw Htay Lin, age 35, all were from Nyaung Kan Village. Local villagers also told Mizzima that six more civilians were

seriously injured in the airstrikes.

A Nyaung Kan villager said: "There was no fighting with resistance forces going on at the time. The military forces just mercilessly attacked civilians from the air." Six houses were also hit and damaged in the airstrikes.

A local news source said to Mizzima: "They launched an unexpected attack on a civilian

area. They carried out airstrikes and fired machine guns. During the attack, four villagers were killed and six were injured. Six houses, I believe, were also destroyed."

Saw People's Defence force (PDF) Battalion 2 issued a statement on junta airstrikes saying that locals must watch out for junta drones and fighter jets and try to take cover in safe locations.



Aung San Suu Kyi - prior to her arrest. Photo: AFP

THE JUNTA 'BURIES' THE LADY

Aung San Suu Kyi's last case sees her incarcerated for life

A Myanmar junta court sentenced ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to seven years in prison for corruption on Friday last week, ending the 18-month trial of the Nobel laureate.

Aung San Suu Kyi was jailed on five counts of corruption related to the hiring and maintaining of a helicopter that had caused a "loss to the state", the source said.

A prisoner of the military since the 2021 coup, Aung San Suu Kyi, 77, has been convicted on every charge levelled against her, ranging from corruption to illegally possessing walkie-talkies and flouting Covid restrictions.



Photo : AFP

“All her cases were finished and there are no more charges against her,” said the source, who requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Aung San Suu Kyi appeared in good health, the source added.

Jailed for life

This last case and conviction effectively imprisons Aung San Suu Kyi for life, with a total of 33 years of incarceration.

Journalists have been barred from attending the court hearings and Aung San Suu Kyi’s lawyers have been banned from speaking to the media.

Since her trial began, she has been seen only once -- in grainy state media photos from a bare courtroom -- and has been reliant on lawyers to relay messages to the world.

Last week, in the United Nations Security Council’s first resolution on the situation in Myanmar since the coup, it called on the junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi.

It was a moment of relative unity by the council after permanent members and close junta allies China and Russia abstained, opting not to wield vetoes following amendments to the wording.

Turmoil

Aung San Suu Kyi is currently imprisoned in a compound in the capital Naypyidaw, close to the courthouse where her trial was held, and has been deprived of her household staff and pet dog Taichido.

Since the coup, she has largely disappeared from public view, seen only in grainy state media photos from the bare courtroom.

The country has been plunged into turmoil, with some established ethnic rebel groups renewing fighting with the military in border areas, and the economy in tatters.

“People’s Defence Forces” eschewing Aung San Suu Kyi’s strict policy of non-violence have also sprung up to battle the junta and have surprised the military with their effectiveness, observers say.

Analysts say the junta may allow Aung San Suu Kyi to serve some of her sentence under house arrest while it prepares for elections it has said will take place this year – possibly in August.

The military alleged there was widespread voter fraud during 2020 polls won resoundingly by Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy party, although international observers said the elections were largely free and fair.

The shock decision to add one more conviction cuts Myanmar’s democracy icon off from her people and the world.

AFP/Mizzima

Photo: Aung San Su Kyi with the President Win Myint- AFP



INCITEMENT, GOLD BARS, WALKIE TALKIES: THE CHARGES AGAINST MYANMAR'S SUU KYI

Myanmar's junta has thrown the book at Aung San Suu Kyi since it ousted her government last year, charging the democracy figurehead with a clutch of offences from illegally possessing walkie talkies to corruption.

She has been found guilty of every charge so far in proceedings that critics and rights groups have slammed as a sham designed to banish the military's most famous opponent from the political scene.

AFP takes a look at the allegations against the Nobel laureate during her closed-door trial.

Walkie-talkies, Covid regulations, incitement

After her detention in a dawn raid on the day of the coup last February, Suu Kyi was charged under an obscure import and export law over walkie-talkies found in her home.

The former state councillor was later charged with breaching a telecommunications law for owning a set of telephone jammers.

Soon after, the junta levelled two charges that Suu Kyi had breached Covid regulations when she held an election campaign event ahead of 2020 polls in which her National League for Democracy (NLD) trounced a military-backed rival.

Suu Kyi was also accused of incitement against the military over a letter written by the NLD asking international organisations not to support the coup.

She was found guilty of the incitement charge, both counts of violating Covid rules and both charges under the telecommunications law, and jailed for six years.

Corruption

The junta has filed a raft of corruption allegations that critics say are aimed at tarnishing Suu Kyi's reputation.

In one charge, the prosecution claimed a former chief minister had admitted giving Suu Kyi \$600,000 and more than 10 kilograms of gold as a bribe.

Another charge alleged she had accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars from a tycoon and convicted drug trafficker.

Suu Kyi has called the charges "absurd", according to a source with knowledge of her case.

Each conviction carries a maximum jail term of 15 years. Suu Kyi has received sentences of between one and a half to two years per charge, for a total of 14 years in jail.

She faced five other corruption charges related to the rental of a helicopter for a government minister, a case in which Suu Kyi allegedly did not

follow regulations and caused "a loss to the state".

Official Secrets Act

Suu Kyi was accused of breaching a colonial-era secrecy law alongside Australian economist Sean Turnell, who was detained shortly after last year's coup.



Photo: Aung San Suu Kyi - AFP

The exact details of their alleged offences have not been made public, though state television said Turnell had access to “secret state financial information” and tried to flee the country.

Suu Kyi and Turnell were both jailed for three years in September after being found guilty.

Turnell was released in November and flew home to Australia, where he told the Financial Times that Suu Kyi was

in “good spirits” and following world events.

Electoral fraud

Suu Kyi was charged alongside former president Win Myint with influencing Myanmar’s election commission during the 2020 polls.

They were both found guilty in September and jailed for three years.

The junta cancelled the

2020 election results in July last year, saying it had found 11.3 million instances of fraud.

Independent monitors said the polls were largely free and fair.

AFP



MYANMAR'S SUU KYI: PRISONER OF GENERALS

Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has racked up a total of 33 years in jail as her trials in a junta-controlled court come to a close, with the country's military once again transforming the democracy figurehead into a political prisoner.

The Nobel laureate, 77, has been detained since a coup ousted her government in February 2021, ending Myanmar's brief democratic experiment and sparking huge protests.

Months before, her National League for Democracy (NLD) party swept nationwide elections and she had been preparing for another five-year term as the nation's de facto leader.

The daughter of an independence hero, Suu Kyi had already spent nearly two decades under house arrest during a former military regime.

On Friday, a junta court jailed Suu Kyi for seven years for corruption, the latest in a clutch of convictions on charges that included illegally importing walkie-talkies, breaching Covid-19 regulations and violating the official secrets act.

While Suu Kyi remains immensely popular in Myanmar, her legacy abroad was deeply tarnished by her government's handling of the Rohingya crisis.

There was global revulsion at a 2017 army crackdown that forced roughly 750,000 members of the Rohingya minority to flee their burning villages to neighbouring Bangladesh.

And for many fighting for democracy in Myanmar, the revolution must now go beyond the movement Suu Kyi led decades ago to permanently root out the military's dominance of politics and the economy.

Daughter of a hero

Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945, in Japanese-occupied Yangon during the final weeks of World War II.

Her father, Aung San, fought for and against both the British and the Japanese colonisers as he jostled to give his country the best shot at independence, achieved in 1948.

Suu Kyi spent most of her early years outside Myanmar -- first in India, where her mother was an ambassador, and later at Oxford University, where she met her British husband.

After General Ne Win seized full power in 1962, he forced his brand of socialism on Myanmar, turning what was once Asia's rice bowl into one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries.

Suu Kyi's elevation to a democracy champion happened almost by accident when she returned home in 1988 to nurse her dying mother.

Soon afterwards, at least 3,000 people were killed when the military crushed protests against its authoritarian rule.



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

The bloodshed was the catalyst for Suu Kyi.

A charismatic orator, the then-43-year-old found herself helming a burgeoning democracy movement, delivering speeches to huge crowds before leading the NLD to a landslide 1990 election victory.

The generals were not prepared to give up power. Ignoring the result of the vote, they confined Suu Kyi to her Yangon home, where she lived for around 15 of the next 20 years.

She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize while detained in 1991.

The junta offered to end her imprisonment at any time if she left the country permanently, but Suu Kyi refused.

That decision meant not seeing her husband before his death from cancer in 1999 and missing her two sons growing up.

Troubled relationship

The military eventually granted her freedom in 2010, just days after elections that her party boycotted, but which brought in a nominally civilian government.

She swept the next poll five years later, prompting jubilant celebrations by massive crowds. The vote in 2020 increased her party's majority, but the military claimed fraud had marred the polls.

During Suu Kyi's tenure, her administration was beset with trouble and marked by an uneasy relationship with the military, which maintained a powerful political role.

The government and the military appeared in lockstep after the 2017 Rohingya crackdown, however.

Her office denied claims that fleeing refugees had suffered rape, extrajudicial killings and arson attacks on their homes by Myanmar troops.

She personally defended the army's conduct, even travelling to The Hague in 2019 to rebut charges of genocide at the UN's top court.

Just over a year later, she was the military's prisoner again and she now faces the possibility of spending the rest of her life in detention.

AFP



MYANMAR'S NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY CONDEMNS AUNG SAN SUU KYI JAIL SENTENCE

The political party headed by jailed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi condemned her latest sentence and said on Saturday it would continue to oppose the junta whose court imposed it.

Suu Kyi was handed a seven-year jail term for corruption on Friday in the last of a slew of trials in a junta court that rights groups have said were a sham.

The Nobel laureate, 77, has now been sentenced to a total of 33 years in prison.

Former president and Suu Kyi ally Win Myint received the same sentence on Friday.

The junta-appointed judge “did not respect the law”, the National League for Democracy’s (NLD) central committee said in a statement.

Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi “worked for development in the country during the time they were in power, and they worked according to the law”.

The NLD “will continue to work with the people... for the release of all political prisoners, to get rid of the military dictatorship and fight for justice”, it said.

The military has cited alleged widespread voter fraud during elections in November

2020, which were won resoundingly by the NLD, as a reason for its coup, which sparked huge protests and a bloody crackdown.

International observers said at the time the polls were largely free and fair.

The NLD was decimated by the February 2021 coup, with many senior members in hiding or in jail.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since, with the junta razing villages and conducting mass extrajudicial killings and air strikes on civilians, according to rights groups.

AFP



Photo: EPA

US, EU AND OTHERS CONDEMN MYANMAR JUNTA INCARCERATION OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND WIN MYINT



Governments and NGOs have been speaking out over the incarceration of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Both the United States and the European Union have condemned the Myanmar junta for its affront to justice in jailing Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi for a total of 33 years.

The United States on Friday condemned Myanmar's junta for handing ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi a total of 33 years in prison in its final sentencing on Friday and demanded her release.

"The Burma military regime's final sentencing of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi is an affront to justice and the rule of law," a State Department spokesperson said, using the veteran leader's title before she was ousted in February 2021.

The European Union on Friday condemned the jailing of ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi for a total of 33 years after "purely politically

motivated" trials by the ruling junta.

"These trials were carried forward with no respect for due legal procedure or necessary judicial guarantees and are a clear attempt to exclude democratically elected leaders from political life," an EU spokesman said. He also slammed the sentencing of ex-president Win Myint, Suu Kyi's co-accused, to a total of 12 years in prison.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has spoken out against the litany of cases against Aung San Suu Kyi that effectively imprison her for life.

Here is the statement by Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director, on the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi for corruption related to helicopter cases, 30 December 2022 and what it means for Myanmar's former civilian leader.

"The Myanmar junta's farcical, totally unjust parade of charges and convictions against Aung San Suu Kyi amount to politically motivated punishment designed to hold her behind bars for the rest of her life. The

convictions aim to both permanently sideline her, as well as undermine and ultimately negate her NLD party's landslide victory in the November 2020 election. From start to finish, the junta grabbed whatever it could to manufacture cases against her with full confidence that the country's kangaroo courts would come back with whatever punitive judgements the military wanted. Due process and a free and fair trial were never remotely possible under the circumstances of this political persecution against her. Since Suu Kyi is now 77 years old, these 33 years of cumulative imprisonment amount to an effective life sentence against her."

Robertson adds: "By issuing these verdicts during the New Year's holiday, the junta is obviously hoping the international community will miss this news, and there will be little global publicity about the final result of the military's blatantly unjust campaign against Suu Kyi. The international community should respond with strong, meaningful sanctions that target the oil and gas revenue of the junta, starting with the US government sanctioning the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). As long as international action consists of just jaw-boning the junta without cutting off their revenue sources, Myanmar's generals will keep brushing those actions aside, committing rights abuses with impunity, and holding a Nobel Prize winner as a political prisoner."

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER YWAT NU AUNG SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS PRISON WITH HARD LABOUR



Human rights lawyer Daw Ywat Nu Aung was sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labour in Mandalay City's Obo Prison Court on 28 December.

She was charged under Section 50 (j) of the Counter Terrorism Law.

A lawyer from the Mandalay Region said: "She was sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labour. The

Military Council accused her of providing financial support to people's defence forces (PDFs)."

Daw Ywat Nu Aung was arrested after leaving Mandalay Chief Minister Dr. Zaw Myint Maung's trial at Obo Prison Court on 28 April 2022.

She is a human rights lawyer who is well-known for working on Naypyitaw child-abuse cases and for previously defending Ko Swe Win, the editor-in-chief of the Myanmar Now News Agency.

FIGHTING ON ASIA HIGHWAY GREATLY REDUCES THAI-MYANMAR BORDER TRADE

Border trade between Thailand and Myanmar has almost stopped since fighting broke out on the Asia Highway in Karen State's Kawkaik Township, according to border traders.

The Asia Highway runs from Myawaddy on the border to Kawkaik and then on into Myanmar. All goods that have crossed from Mae Sot in Thailand to Myawaddy have to go through Kawkaik before they can be distributed elsewhere in Myanmar.

Since 16 December fighting between Myanmar junta troops and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) has intensified along the Asia Highway and in Kawkaik Township.

The junta forces have used air strikes, rocket launchers and other heavy weapons. These have destroyed sections of the road and two bridges have also been destroyed by mines.

A border trader said that since fighting broke out trucks can no longer use this section of the Asia Highway and as a result the Thai-Myanmar border trade has almost stopped.

Also, because of the fighting, trucks carrying vegetables have been delayed for so long their vegetables started to spoil and go rotten, causing traders to lose large sums of money. Some traders cut their losses and sold their vegetables at greatly reduced price in Kawkaik and nearby Kyondoe.

Currently, there are still hundreds of trucks stuck on the Asia Highway between Myawaddy and Kawkaik, but some small vehicles and motorcycles are still managing to get through by using a minor road that goes through Htokawcoe.

Border traders said that if the fighting continues along the Asia Highway border trade with Mae Sot in Thailand will completely stop and commodity prices in Myanmar will go up.

The goods that Myanmar imports the most from Thailand are foodstuffs, textiles, fabrics, cosmetics, machinery and construction materials. Myanmar mainly exports corn, broken rice and fishery products to Thailand.



UNHCR WELCOMES INDONESIA'S 'ACT OF HUMANITY' IN RESCUING REFUGEES ADrift AT SEA



Indonesian fishing crews and local authorities who took part in rescuing more than 200 people adrift at sea, were hailed on Tuesday by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, for their “act of humanity”.

UNHCR issued a statement explaining that two groups of survivors had been brought to shore off the coast of north-west Indonesia.

Believed to have been at sea for more than a month, the UN agency expressed relief that they are now safe in Indonesia.

After highlighting their plight, Ann Maymann, UNHCR Representative in Indonesia said, “we welcome this act of humanity by local communities and authorities in Indonesia”.

“These actions help to save human lives from certain death, ending torturous ordeals for many desperate people.”

Attending to the new arrivals

Urgent medical care has been provided to treat survivors for exhaustion and dehydration.

According to the survivors, dire conditions onboard triggered the deaths of 26 people at sea.

UNHCR, local authorities, and humanitarian partner staff are caring for those brought ashore.

“Many require urgent medical attention to stabilize their condition”, the UN agency reported. “The agency is also rushing more supplies and staff to help local communities and local authorities support those rescued.”

Deadly passage

So far this year, more than 2,000 people have taken risky sea journeys in the

Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, during which nearly 200 have reportedly perished.

Many of the refugees are Rohingya men, women and children, who fled persecution in Myanmar for Bangladesh in 2017.

Humanitarian obligation ignored

UNHCR is also working to confirm reports that one additional boat with 180 people on board is still missing at sea – with all passengers presumed dead.

All States in the region “must fulfil their legal obligations” to save people on boats in distress to avoid further misery and deaths, the UN agency insisted.

Indonesia's commitment

Latest UN data indicates that over the past six weeks, Indonesia has helped to save 472 people from four boats.

This demonstrates “its commitment and respect of basic humanitarian principles for people who face persecution and conflict”, UNHCR said.

“Many others did not act despite numerous pleas and appeals for help”, lamented the UN refugee agency, urging other countries in the region to follow Indonesia's example.

Courtesy of UN News

MYANMAR JUNTA SUPPORTERS PROTEST OUTSIDE US AND UK EMBASSIES

Supporters of the Myanmar junta held protests against the United States' (US) ratification of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) outside the Yangon US embassy on University Avenue and the UK embassy on Strand Road.

The 2022 Burma Act was part of the 2023 NDAA that was ratified into law by US President Biden on 23 December 2022.

A member of the legal professions who is involved with the Civil disobedience Movement (CDM) said: "Protesters held placards condemning the United Nations and the United States. They also held vinyl signs saying things like 'We condemn the unilateral agreement of the United Nations Security Council against Myanmar' and 'we do not want the terrorist NUG or PDFs'. They protested for more than 30 minutes."

The Military Council's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 27 December saying that the NDAA interferes with Myanmar's internal affairs and encroaches on the country's sovereignty. It also said that the NDAA encourages terrorism because it supports the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and people's defence forces.



GLOBAL ALARM GROWS OVER CHINA'S COVID SURGE

The United States has joined a growing number of countries in imposing restrictions on visitors from China after Beijing announced it would remove curbs on overseas travel as Covid cases surge at home.

Hospitals across China have been overwhelmed by an explosion of infections following Beijing's decision to lift strict rules that had largely kept the virus at bay but tanked the economy and sparked widespread protests.

This week the country said it would end mandatory quarantine on arrival - prompting many jubilant people in China to make plans to travel abroad.

In response, the United States and a number of other countries announced they would require negative Covid tests for all travellers from mainland China.

"The recent rapid increase in Covid-19 transmission in China increases the potential for new variants emerging," a senior US health official told reporters in a phone briefing.

Beijing has provided only limited data to global databases about circulating variants in China, the official said, and its testing and reporting on new cases have diminished.

The US move came after Italy, Japan, India and Malaysia announced their own measures in a bid to avoid importing new variants from China.

Beijing has hit out against "hyping, smearing and political manipulation" by the Western media concerning its Covid response.

"Currently China's epidemic situation is all predictable and under control," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a briefing Wednesday.

China still does not allow foreign visitors, however, with the issuance of visas for overseas tourists and students suspended.

Visitors to China must also provide a negative PCR test taken no more than 48 hours before entering the country.

The lifting of mandatory quarantine sparked a surge in interest in overseas travel by Chinese citizens, who have been largely confined to their country since Beijing pulled up the drawbridge in March 2020.

But Italy on Wednesday also said it would make coronavirus tests for all visitors from China mandatory.

France's president said he had "requested appropriate measures to protect" citizens and Paris was closely monitoring "the evolution of the situation in China".

The European Commission is set to meet Thursday to discuss "possible measures for a coordinated approach" by EU states to China's explosion of Covid cases.

'Discriminatory'

Chinese citizens on Thursday mostly reacted with understanding towards the measures at Beijing's Capital International Airport, where most people AFP spoke to were domestic travellers.

"It's good to see our borders opening," said a passenger bound for the Hungarian capital of Budapest.

"Every country has their own policies. We just follow them and still go where we need to go."

"Each nation has its own worries about protecting itself," 21-year-old Huang Hongxu told AFP, adding that the potential spread of virus variants around the world was a cause for concern.

But a man surnamed Hu, 22, told AFP he thought the rules were "unnecessary".



Chinese passengers arrive in France.
Photo: AFP

“It’s a bit discriminatory,” he said. “Our Covid policy for international arrivals is applied equally.

“Why do other countries need to give arrivals from China special treatment?”

On the frontlines

On the front lines of China’s Covid wave, hospitals are battling surging cases that have hit the elderly and vulnerable hardest.

In Tianjin, around 140 kilometres (90 miles) southeast of the capital Beijing, AFP visited two hospitals overwhelmed with patients.

Doctors are being asked to work even if they are infected, one said.

AFP saw more than two dozen mostly elderly patients lying on gurneys in public areas of the emergency department, and at least one dead person being wheeled out of a ward.

“It’s a four-hour wait to see a doctor,” staff could be heard telling an elderly man who said he had Covid.

“There are 300 people in front of you.”

China’s National Health Commission last week said it would no longer release an official daily Covid death toll.

A national disease control body has been keeping a tally, adding just over 5,000 new local cases and one death on Thursday.

But with the end of mass testing - and China’s decision to reclassify Covid deaths in a move analysts said would dramatically play down the fatalities - those numbers are no longer believed to reflect reality.

AFP

US APPROVES \$180 MILLION ANTI-TANK WEAPONS SALE TO TAIWAN

The US State Department approved on Wednesday the \$180 million sale of vehicle-launched anti-tank systems to Taiwan, the Pentagon said, the latest weapons deal between the self-governed island and its main ally.

Taiwan would receive Volcano anti-tank munition-laying systems, cargo trucks, ammunition, logistics support packages and a myriad of other related services under the deal, according to a Pentagon statement.

"This proposed sale serves US national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability," the statement said.

Beijing claims democratically run Taiwan as part of its territory, to be taken one day, and has become more aggressive toward the island under President Xi Jinping.

It has responded with growing anger to visits by US and other foreign politicians this year and staged huge military drills to protest against US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taiwan in August, sending tensions to the highest level in years.

US President Joe Biden signed into law a defense spending bill last week that included

up to \$10 billion in military grant assistance to Taiwan.

The bill authorizes up to \$2 billion a year in assistance to Taiwan from 2023 to 2027.

Beijing said in response to the bill's earlier passage by the US House of Representatives it was "firmly opposed to the US using the National Defense

a "strike drill," conducted in response to unspecified "provocations" and "collusion" between the United States and the self-ruled island.

The US statement on the latest arms sale said Taiwan's purchase of the new anti-tank systems would "not alter the basic military balance in the



Taiwan soldiers on an exercise.
Photo: AFP

Authorization Act to pass negative content related to China".

Taiwan's defense ministry said on Monday China had deployed 71 warplanes to conduct weekend military exercises around Taiwan, including dozens of fighter jets.

The aircraft had committed one of the largest daily incursions into Taiwan-controlled airspace to date.

The Chinese military described the exercises as

region."

"The proposed sale will improve the recipient's capability to meet current and future threats by providing a credible force capable of deterring adversaries and participating in regional operations," the statement said.

AFP

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AFTER YEAR OF CLIMATE DISASTERS, WORLD OFF-TRACK TO CURB WARMING



A drought-stricken area in Juijiang, China. Photo: AFP

Catastrophic floods, crop-wilting droughts and record heatwaves this year have shown that climate change warnings are increasingly becoming reality and this is “just the beginning”, experts say, as international efforts to cut planet-heating emissions founder.

The year did see some important progress, with major new legislation particularly in the United States and Europe as well as a deal at UN talks to help vulnerable countries cope with an increasing onslaught of devastating climate impacts.

But the goal of keeping warming within a safer limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era appears in peril, with carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels -- the main driver of global heating -- on track to reach an all-time high in 2022.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned world leaders at a climate summit in Egypt in November that humanity faces a stark choice between working together in the battle against global warming or “collective suicide”.

They opted to put off the most

important decisions for another time, observers say.

This year UN climate science experts issued their strongest warning yet of the dangers facing people and planet, with a landmark report on climate impacts in February dubbed an “atlas of human suffering”.

Since then a series of extreme events has illustrated the accelerating dangers of climate change, at barely 1.2C of warming.

Record heatwaves damaged crops from China

to Europe, while drought has brought millions to the point of starvation in the Horn of Africa.

Floods super-charged by climate change engulfed Pakistan, affecting 33 million people and causing some \$30 billion in damage and economic losses.

“The year 2022 will be one of the hottest years on earth, with all the phenomena that go with higher temperatures,” said climate scientist Robert Vautard, head of France’s Pierre-Simon Laplace Institute.

“Unfortunately, this is just the beginning.”

This year is on track to be the fifth or sixth warmest ever recorded despite the impact, since 2020, of La Nina -- a periodic and naturally occurring phenomenon in the Pacific that cools the atmosphere.

When this phenomenon reverses, potentially within months, the world will likely climb to a “new level” in warming, said Vautard.

Still polluting

Economy-battering climate extremes, which amplified the energy price surge for many countries as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, provided the backdrop to last month’s high-stakes UN climate talks in Egypt.

The negotiations did make history, with wealthy polluters agreeing to a fund to pay for climate damage increasingly unleashed on poorer countries.

Pakistani climate minister Sherry Rehman called the move a “down payment on the longer investment in our joint futures”.

But vulnerable nations and campaigners said the conference failed to deliver on the emissions reductions needed to curb climate losses and damages in the future.

“COP27 tackled the consequences of climate change, but not the cause -- fossil fuels,” said Harjeet Singh of Climate Action Network.

To keep the 1.5C limit in play, planet-heating emissions need to be slashed 45 percent by 2030, and be cut to net zero by mid-century.

At 2021 UN talks in Glasgow, nations were urged to ramp up their emissions reduction commitments.

But only around 30 countries have heeded that call, leaving the world on track to heat up by about 2.5C.

‘Emergency room’

Guterres decried the failure of the climate talks to address the drastic emissions cuts needed, adding: “Our planet is still in the emergency room.”

A crunch meeting in Montreal in December aimed to address another existential crisis facing the planet -- biodiversity loss -- as human activity gravely damages nature.

Nations agreed on a

roadmap to reverse decades of environmental destruction threatening species and the land and ocean ecosystems that provide Earth’s life support.

Guterres hailed the deal as a “peace pact with nature”, but some environmentalists warned the plan did not go far enough.

A series of potentially crucial climate milestones will stretch through next year.

These will include spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, following “a formal request to look at the international financial system and to review the role of international financial institutions” from the Egypt climate talks, said Laurence Tubiana, who leads the European Climate Foundation.

The next UN climate meeting in November 2023 -- held in fossil fuel exporter the United Arab Emirates -- will see the publication of a “global stocktake” of progress on the 2015 Paris Agreement goal to limit warming to well below 2C, and preferably 1.5C.

Tubiana, a key architect of the Paris deal, said the talks in Dubai will likely be dominated by discussion of the oil and gas industry and its financial contribution.

The issue is likely to create “great tension”, she predicted.

AFP

2022 YEAR IN REVIEW: 100 MILLION DISPLACED, 'A RECORD THAT SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN SET'

A hundred million people were forced to leave their homes in 2022. The UN continued to help those in need in a myriad of ways, and push for more legal, and safe ways for people to migrate.

The 100 million figure, which includes those fleeing conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution, was announced by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in May and described by Filippo Grandi, the head of the agency, as "a record that should never have been set".

The figure is up from some 90 million in 2021. Outbreaks of violence, or protracted conflicts, were key migration factors in many parts of the world, including Ukraine, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Syria, and Myanmar.

Thousands of desperate migrants looked to Europe as a preferred destination, putting their lives in the hands of human traffickers, and setting off on perilous journeys across the Mediterranean.

All too often these journeys ended in tragedy.

Worsening conditions for migrants in Yemen

It has now been more than seven years since the protracted conflict began in Yemen, between a Saudi-led pro-Government coalition and Houthi rebels, together with their allies. It precipitated a humanitarian catastrophe, and has forced more than 4.3 million people to leave their homes.



In May, The UN migration agency IOM and the European Union's Humanitarian Aid wing (ECHO), announced that they were scaling up efforts to respond to the needs of more than 325,000 displaced by the conflict, including migrants and the communities that host them.

"The situation is also getting worse for migrants in Yemen, especially women, who are living in dire conditions in Yemen with little control over their lives," said Christa Rottensteiner, Chief of the IOM Mission in the country.

Despite the dire situation in Yemen, it remains a destination and transit point for migrants leaving countries in the Horn of Africa.

Upon arrival, travellers face perilous journeys, with many heading north, en route to Gulf countries in search of work.

They are often forced to journey across local frontlines, at risk of suffering grave human rights violations, such as detention, inhumane conditions, exploitation, and forced transfers.

Little prospect of safe return to Syria

In Syria, war has now been upending lives for 11 years: nearly five million children born in Syria have never known the country at peace. More than 80,000 Syrians call the huge Za'atari camp, in Jordan, home: many of them may have to remain outside of their country for the foreseeable future.

"Prospects for return for the time being do not look promising", said Dominik Bartsch, UNHCR Representative in the Jordanian capital Amman, in July. "We are not seeing an environment in Syria that would be conducive to returns."

Overall, Jordan hosts around 675,000 registered refugees from Syria, and most of them live in its towns and villages among local communities: only 17 per cent live in the two main refugee camps, Za'atari and Azraq.

Rohingya continue to flee Myanmar

More than five years ago, hundreds of thousands of

Rohingya fled their homes in Myanmar, after a military campaign of persecution. Almost a million live in the vast Cox's Bazar camp across the border in neighbouring Bangladesh.

In March, the UN launched its latest response plan, calling for more than \$881 million for the refugees, and neighbouring communities (more than half a million Bangladeshis), who are also highly reliant on aid.

This year, Rohingya continued to leave Myanmar, many attempting to cross the Andaman Sea, one of the deadliest water crossings in the world.

When more than a dozen migrants, including children, reportedly died at sea off the coast of Myanmar in May, Indrika Ratwatte, the UN refugee agency's Asia and Pacific Director, said the tragedy demonstrated the sense of desperation being felt by Rohingya still in the country.

'Double standard' in treatment of Ukraine refugees

10 months on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February, and seems likely to continue into 2023, UN refugee agency figures show that, by December, more than 7.8 million Ukrainian refugees had been recorded across Europe.

Soon after the conflict began, UN agencies mobilized to provide support. UNHCR coordinated the refugee response together with sister UN agencies and partners, in support of national authorities.

In neighbouring Poland, for example, staff supported the authorities with registering refugees and providing them with

accommodation and assistance.

Filippo Grandi praised European countries for their willingness to take in Ukrainians, the majority of whom sought shelter in neighbouring countries, but expressed his sorrow for the country and its citizens.

'Ripped apart'

"Families have been senselessly ripped apart. Tragically, unless the war is stopped, the same will be true for many more," he said. However, this generosity of spirit was not always in evidence, when it came to some members of minority communities. In March, Mr. Grandi spoke out the discrimination, racism, and violence they faced.

Speaking on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Mr. Grandi said that the UN refugee agency had born witness "to the ugly reality, that some Black and Brown people fleeing Ukraine – and other wars and conflicts around the world – have not received the same treatment as Ukrainian refugees".

Mr. Grandi's concerns were echoed, in July, by González Morales, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. Mr. Morales alleged that there was a double standard in the way that refugees are treated in Poland and Belarus, particularly when it comes to people of African descent, and other racial and ethnic minorities.

'Desperate situation' in Ethiopian camps

In Ethiopia, millions remain displaced due to the armed conflict

in the Tigray region, which began on 3 November 2020 between Ethiopian national forces, Eritrean troops, Amhara forces and other militias on one side, and forces loyal to the Tigrayan People's Liberation front on the other.

By the end of this year, a fragile internationally-brokered truce seemed to be holding with aid returning to embattled northern regions inaccessible for months, along with many returning home to rebuild their shattered lives.

Back in January, the UN refugee agency issued the stark warning that, due to deteriorating conditions, refugees in the region were struggling to get enough food, medicine, and clean water, and risked death unless the situation improved.

"The desperate situation in these camps is a stark example of the impact of the lack of access and supplies affecting millions of displaced persons and other civilians throughout the region," said UNHCR spokesperson Boris Cheshirkov.

Refugees also found themselves under direct attack: in February, for example, thousands of Eritreans were forced to flee a camp in the Afar region, after armed men stormed in, stealing belongings and killing residents.

By August, UN agencies put out an urgent appeal for funding to help more than 750,000 people seeking refuge in Ethiopia. The World Food Programme warned that, unless it received the funding, many refugees would have nothing to eat.

Courtesy of UN News

2022 YEAR IN REVIEW: CELEBRATING WOMEN FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS

In this Year In Review feature, we honour the work of activists helping to protect women's rights, which once again, came under attack in many countries throughout 2022.

It often takes considerable bravery to stand up for the rights of women. The UN, which is committed to empowering women and girls, works relentlessly with activists and organizations across the world, to protect women from abuse, support health initiatives, and improve lives.

Women living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan

August marked one year since the Taliban seized control once more, of Afghanistan, sparking widespread fears for women's rights there, which were severely eroded during the regime's previous time in power during the late 1990s.

Twelve months on, UN Women announced that the agency was committed to continue the struggle for women's rights in Afghanistan, the only country in the world where girls are banned from going to high school, and effectively barred from political participation.

We marked the anniversary of Taliban rule by telling the stories of some of the women who have decided to stay in the country, even though their lives have been turned upside down.

They include Zarina*, formerly one of Afghanistan's youngest entrepreneurs, who was forced to close her formerly thriving bakery, amid growing restrictions on women-owned businesses; Nasima*, a



Photo: UN News

peacebuilder and women's rights activists, who was forced to shut down most of her projects, but later managed to restart some initiatives; and Mahbouba Seraj, a veteran rights defender, who vowed to stay on and bear witness to what is unfolding in her country.

Ms. Seraj had a sobering message for those who think that Afghanistan is an exceptional case: "what is happening to the women of Afghanistan can happen anywhere, she said. "Roe v. Wade [the case that led to the national right to abortion in the US, which was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2022] destroyed years of progress, taking away the rights of women over their own bodies. Women's rights being taken away from them is happening everywhere and if we are not careful, it will happen to all the women of the world".

*Names changed to protect identities

Mahsa Amini: the inspiration for widespread Iranian protests

In November, The UN human rights office, OHCHR, condemned the response of the Iranian regime to protestors

demonstrating against the government, in the wake of the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman who died in police custody in September, after being detained for wearing her hijab incorrectly, according to the so-called morality police.

Her death led to demonstrations in many Iranian cities, including protest by high-school age girls. The Iranian government responded by arresting thousands of protestors, including women, children, youth, and journalists.

On 22 November, OHCHR stated that, in just one week, more than 40 people had been killed in protests, including two teenagers, and two days later, the Human Rights Council created a fact-finding mission in relation to the demonstrations.

"It pains me to see what is happening in the country," UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Türk told those attending the session which voted in favour of the mission. "The images of children killed. Of women beaten in the streets. Of people sentenced to death".

The growing international condemnation of the Iranian crack-down was reflected in the decision

by members of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on 14 December.

The CSW, which meets annually in March at UN Headquarters in New York, is described as the biggest gathering of gender equality advocates in the world.

The United States introduced the resolution, which received 29 votes in favour and eight against, with 16 countries abstaining.

Women tackling the climate crisis

The climate crisis has been shown to disproportionately affect women and girls. In the weeks leading up to International Women's Day, which is celebrated on 6 March, we highlighted the ways in which women activists improve their local environment, and help their community to adapt to an increasingly hostile climate.

They include Mexican violinist Martha Corzo, who led and inspired a group of some 17,000 local environmental activists, devoted to protecting the remote and beautiful Sierra Gorda; a group of women in Niger who have integrated refugees and migrants in their bid to stave off desertification by creating a thriving market garden; and a mechanical engineer in Kenya who had to fight gender discrimination to develop practical and affordable energy solutions.

In May, Cameroonian activist Cécile Ndjebet's efforts to improve the lives of those who depend on forests were recognized, when she was awarded the 2022 Wangari Maathai Forest Champions Award, which is chaired by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

In Cameroon, roughly 70

per cent of women live in rural areas and are dependent at least in part on harvesting wild forest products for their livelihoods. However, in some communities, women cannot own forest land, inherit it if their husband dies, or even plant trees on degraded land.

"Men generally recognize the great role women play in improving families' living standards," she said at the ceremony, "but it is important for them also to agree that, for women to continue to play that role, and even improve in that role, they need secure access to land and forests".

Women in blue

UN women peacekeepers and police, continued to serve with distinction in some of the most dangerous postings in the world, facing challenges such as threats from terrorist attacks, and violence fuelled by a COVID-era surge in misinformation and disinformation, amid increasing political tensions, and deteriorating security situations.

On the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, in May, Major Winnet Zharare of Zimbabwe was presented with the Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award, in recognition of her work with the UN Mission in South Sudan, where she was a strong champion for gender equality and women as decision-makers and leaders.

"Her diligence and diplomatic skills quickly gained the trust of local military commanders who sought her advice on women's rights and protection", said UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the ceremony. "Her approach helped UNMISS strengthen bonds with local communities and deliver on its mandate."

In July, at a historic ceremony in South Sudan, members of the first-ever deployment of UN

Peacekeepers from Liberia, including several women, were honoured with the prestigious UN Medal.

Their achievement symbolized the huge turnaround in the fortunes of Liberia, which suffered a brutal civil war in the 1990s and early 2000s, before reaching a ceasefire, monitored by the UN Mission in the country, UNMIL, which also supported humanitarian and human rights activities; and assisted in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military.

"Our experience of a 14-year civil war and the impact that UN peacekeepers had, is real and tangible for the people we are on the ground to serve," said UN Police (UNPOL) officer Elfreda Dennice Stewart. "We benefited so much from peacekeepers, and it is our honour to now serve in this young nation under the iconic blue flag."

amplifyHER: celebrating exceptional women artists

Finally, we encourage you to subscribe to amplifyHER, a new series from UN Podcasts, celebrating the work and inspiring careers of some of the most exciting women singers, from around the world.

Many women produce art in the face of, and sometimes inspired by, the challenges they face in society, whether related to insecurity, human rights, climate change, inequality, or simply because of their gender.

In amplifyHER, we hear directly from talented women singers about their experiences in the music industry, from teenage Thai rapper Milli, to EDM powerhouse Faouzia, and Emel, the voice of the Tunisian revolution.

Courtesy of UN News

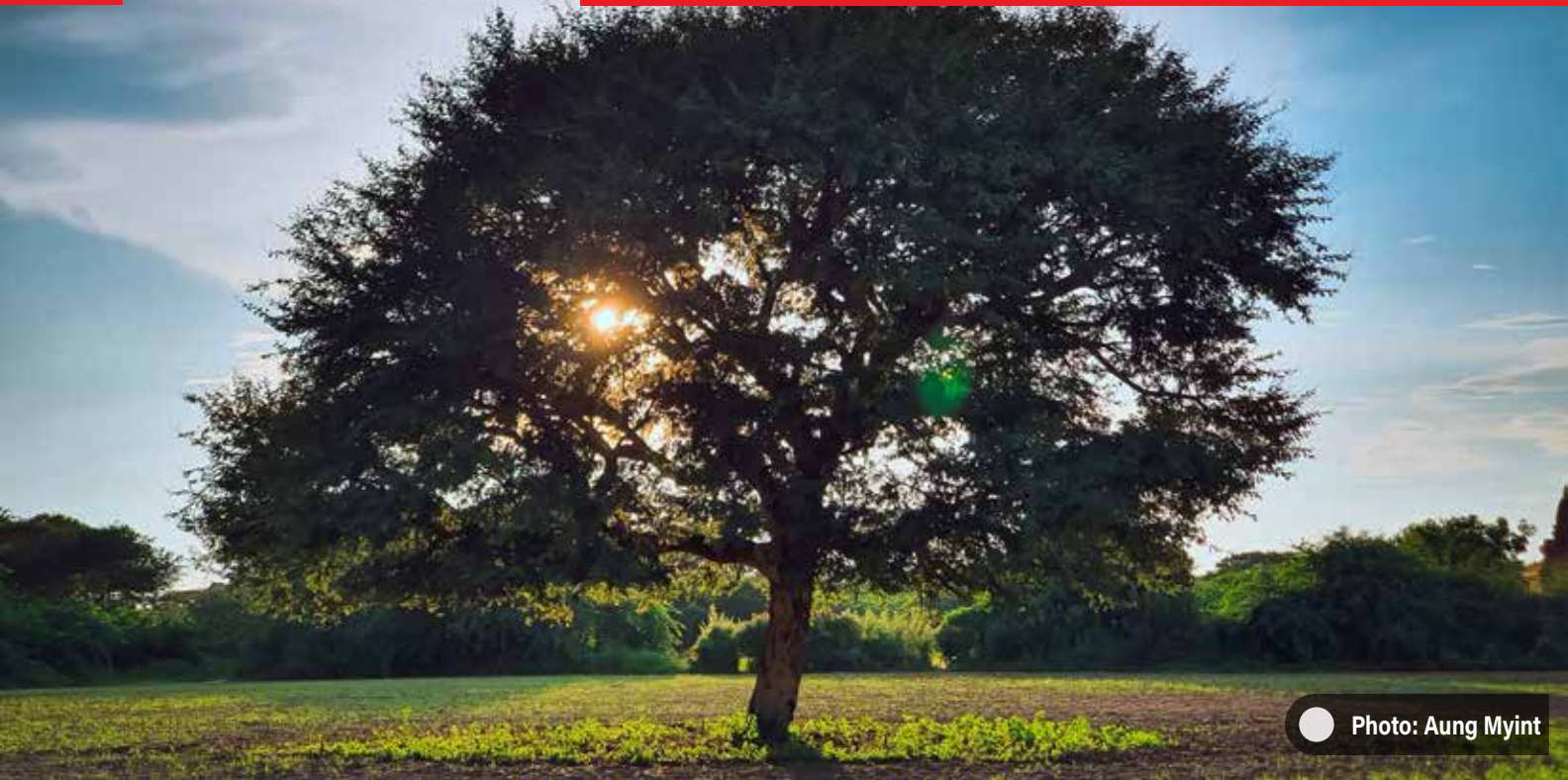


Photo: Aung Myint

CHIN STATE

Myanmar passport issuing office resumes operations in Chin State's Hakha Town. Locals reported that Myanmar passport issuing office in Hakha town, Chin State resumed operations since 19 December. In mid-November 2022, the Myanmar passport issuing office temporarily closed due to the frequent clashes in Chin State. "We don't need to go all the way to Yangon to get a passport in hand," said a local resident, noting the benefits of the office. People can currently obtain applications for a passport from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm, Monday through Sunday, excluding holidays, according to local residents. Due to a lack of local jobs, many young people throughout the country have been paying overpriced fees to acquire a passport to work abroad since the 2021 Military Council coup.

KAREN STATE

One monk killed, two injured in Kawkaik monastery shelling. A monk was killed and three other monks were seriously injured when an artillery shell landed on Shwe Kyat Min Monastery in Karen State's Kawkaik Township at about 10:00 a.m. on 26 December. The head of a local volunteer organisation said: "Early in the morning junta soldiers from 44th Division arrived at the monastery. After they left, the monastery was hit by an artillery shell. I'm not sure why they came to the monastery. When the shell exploded a monk died on the spot and three others were injured and taken to Hpa-An Hospital." He added that at the time of the explosion there were 20 monks living in the monastery. From 16 December until the time of reporting the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Kaw Thoo Lei Army, local PDFs and defence forces have been attacking military council checkpoints and bases in and around Kawkaik Township, inflicting numerous casualties on the junta soldiers, who have fought back with artillery and airstrikes, according to the local volunteer organisation head.

MON STATE

Two Myanmar junta soldiers die in vehicle attack in Mon State's Ye Township. A Myanmar junta military vehicle was attacked with small arms fire killing two soldiers and injuring another two in Mon State's Ye Township at about 8:15 a.m. on 27 December. Two soldiers died and another two were injured when a Myanmar junta military vehicle was attacked in Mon State's Ye Township at about 8:15 a.m. on 27 December. The vehicle, from the 591st Infantry Battalion based in Ye Township, was attacked with small arms fire by members of the Yebilu Force People's Defence force (PDF) as it entered Kyaung Village in Ye Township. The vehicle was carrying five junta soldiers, three soldiers in the front seats and two soldiers in the rear seats, according to a Yebilu Force representative. He said: "Although we were able to kill two junta soldiers as part of our mission, we didn't confiscate any weapons and we didn't completely destroy the vehicle." He added that the PDF will continue carrying out missions in Mon State and that they will be more successful in the future. Yebilu Force PDF is based in Ye Township.



CHINA'S NEW SPECIAL ENVOY MEETS MIN AUNG HLAING

Deng Xijun, China's new special envoy to Myanmar, arrived in the country's capital Nay Pyi Taw on 28 December, to hold talks with the junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, according to local news outlets.

Before that, Deng Xijun met some of Myanmar's ethnic armed groups separately from from 24 to 26 December, according to the United Wa State Party, which is the ruling party of Wa State, an autonomous region in northern Shan State and the political wing of the United Wa State Army.

Deng Xijun was recently appointed to replace former China's envoy Sun Guoxiang. Deng was a former Ambassador of China to ASEAN.

Despite the appointment of a new envoy to Myanmar, political analysts say that China's attitude towards Myanmar is unlikely to change.

During his meeting with Min Aung Hlaing on 29 December, they discussed the political progress of Myanmar, the State's endeavors in holding peace talks with ethnic armed organizations, and assistance of China to Myanmar's peace processes, the standing of China with Myanmar in the international arena, continuous assistance of China in humanitarian measures, investments of China, according to junta-run newspaper.

MYANMAR JUNTA TIGHTENS RULES FOR WAVE MONEY TRANSFER SERVICE USERS

Junta ward administrators in many townships in Myanmar recently have given instructions to Wave Money agent shops that the shops must take the pictures of customers who use the Wave Money service for the first time and must record the National Identification Card or National Registration Card numbers of all customers, according to some customers and Wave Money agent shops.

Wave Money is an over-the-counter financial service operating with over 65,000 Wave Money shops across Myanmar, according to the official website of Wave Money.

A Wave Money agent from Tamwe (Tarmway) Township in Yangon said that Wave Money shops with CCTV

have been instructed to keep video records as much as possible.

The Wave Money agent said in late December, "From the last few days, they [junta's administrators] wanted us to take photos of Wave Money customers [who use the service for the first time] and to record the National Identification Card/ National Registration Card numbers of all customers."

A Wave Money customer living in Pazundaung Township in Yangon recently said that in his township, the administrators have made the same instruction since October.

"In Pazundaung Township, it started around October. Under the new system, if you use the service for the first time, they will take a photo

of you, and you must show your National Registration Card," said the customer. "A difficulty is that sometimes when I forget to bring my National Identification Card, I cannot withdraw money at the agent shop because of that new rule."

Analysts say that the junta's move seems to aim at preventing people from anonymously using money transfer services such as Wave Money to make money donations to the exiled National Unity Government and People's Defense Forces.

The junta also tightened mobile bank account regulations to reduce the flow of money to armed resistance groups and activists. On September 16, the junta-controlled Central Bank of Myanmar announced that it would permanently close mobile bank accounts with incomplete or false personal information.



Photo: Wave Money-AFP

THAILAND TEMPORARILY CLOSES A THAI-MYANMAR BORDER TRADE GATE



Thailand is reported to have temporarily closed a border trade gate temporarily where Myanmar fishery and aquatic products are being exported and traded.

This gate is the Mawtaung-Sinkhun Thai-Myanmar border in Myeik District, Tanintharyi Region. This border trade gate was opened on 1 August 2022.

The border trade gate closed for three days in New Year holiday from 30 December to 1 January 2023.

Mawtaung gate in Myanmar side is the permanent gate but Sinkhun gate in Thai side is the special temporary gate so that immigration and trade are still restricted and limited.

Currently only the frozen goods can be traded from this gate and the Myanmar traders must get one-day prior permission from the Prajubkhirikhan District Deputy Commissioner's Office in Thailand by producing complete set of Invoice and Packing List.

Truck drivers coming from Myanmar need to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE)

or must wear raincoat, gloves, mask and cap. Myanmar workers are not allowed to operate on the Thai side of the border.

Under these restrictions, the Myanmar traders are facing many difficulties as they cannot make negotiations on trade volume, bargain on prices, and sometimes cannot export fishery products.

According to the figures released by Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the trade values at this border trade gate are US\$ 8.1 million in export in the 2022-23 financial year up to mid-December and import value is US\$ 0.541 million.

Moreover Myawady-Kawkereik highway is still closed after the fighting erupted again and then the people are facing difficulties in travelling on this highway.

The fighting between Military Council's troops and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) had been intensified in Kawkereik and Kyarinseikgyi areas since early December 2022 and the situation is still tense between them.

CHINA'S MANUFACTURING ACTIVITY DROPS DESPITE LIFTED COVID RESTRICTIONS

China's manufacturing activity contracted sharply in December for the third month in a row, according to official figures released Saturday, despite Beijing's loosening of Covid restrictions at the beginning of the month.

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) -- a key gauge of manufacturing in the world's second-biggest economy -- came in at 47 points, down from November's 48 and well below the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

For more than two years, China had insisted on a zero-Covid strategy of stamping out outbreaks with strict quarantines, lockdowns and mass testing -- a hardline policy that reverberated across the global economy.

On December 7, Beijing abruptly loosened pandemic restrictions, but despite that, the country is still struggling to recover due to a surge in Covid cases.

"In December, due to the impact of the epidemic and other factors... China's economic prosperity has generally declined," NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement.

"The epidemic has had a significant impact on business production and demand, staff presence, logistics and distribution."

The index has not been in positive territory since September, and December's figure was lower than the 47.8 reading predicted by Bloomberg analysts.

Zhao, however, struck a note of optimism in his statement.

"As the epidemic situation gradually improves, the market trend is expected to pick up later," he wrote.

China's zero-Covid strategy was based on widespread testing, strict monitoring of movement, and quarantine for those testing positive.

Those measures, which led to unannounced plant closures, disrupted supply chains and forced some companies to close permanently.

For its part, the non-manufacturing PMI - which includes the services and construction sectors - also contracted further this month, to 41.6 points from 46.7 in November.

The government has set a growth target of about 5.5 percent this year, after reaching its goal of over 8 percent in 2021.

But many economists now consider the 2022 target unrealistic.

China will unveil its gross domestic product (GDP) performance for the year in January.

AFP



Photo: AFP

Penrose Thitsa

CHINA-BASED SOLAR TECHNOLOGY COMPANY BACKS MYANMAR'S 20 MW PV PROJECT

China-based Sungrow, the global premier inverter which focuses on solar technologies, announced that the Taung Daw Gwin 20 megawatt photovoltaic plant installed with its 1500V string inverter solution was commissioned in Mandalay, Myanmar, according to a statement published on the company's official website.

As part of Myanmar's second tender for utility-scale photovoltaic projects built on an independent power producer (IPP) and build-operate-own (BOO) basis, the project can generate 45 gigawatt hours of electricity every year, according to the statement.

"The project exhibits a unique combination of environmental extremes including extremely high temperatures and high solar radiation levels. This environment makes it an ideal solar hub, though it poses great challenges to the equipment," according to the website.

"Sungrow's extensive and proven experience as a solar inverter leader contributed greatly to the completion of the Taung Daw Gwin project," said Thaung Kyaing, Chairperson of Green Power Energy Company Limited, developer of the Taung Daw Gwin project.

Green Power Energy is one of the leading businesses in Myanmar, with interests in infrastructure and renewable energy, according to Sungrow's official statement.

Luis Xu, Director of Sungrow APAC Region, said, "Our actions are firmly grounded in customer demands, to offer best-in-class products and services needed to thrive in a low-carbon world. The 20 megawatt photovoltaic project can not only offer our customers maximum return on investment but also provide grounding benefits for local communities, such as offering more households and creating more jobs."

Since after the military coup in February 2021 in Myanmar, power cuts have frequently broken out in the Southeast Asian nation.

On the other hand, many Chinese-based companies around the world have been criticized for violating company ethics.





HAVING FUN

A child riding in a carousel at the Tazaungdaing Lighting Festival at Pyin Oo Lwin Township in Mandalay recently in November.

Photo: AFP

WORLD STEPS INTO 2023 AFTER TURBULENT YEAR

The world's eight billion people Saturday ushered in 2023, bidding farewell to a turbulent 12 months marked by war in Europe, stinging price rises, more Myanmar junta attacks on civilians, Lionel Messi's World Cup glory and the

deaths of Queen Elizabeth, Pele and former pope Benedict.

Many were ready to set aside pinched budgets and a virus that is increasingly forgotten but not gone, and embrace a party atmosphere on New

the celebration, where children in pushchairs and partiers with champagne were equally visible.

"We're here for the ambiance, to have a good time and to be together," said 19-year-old student Ilyes Hachelef. "And it's beautiful!"

Hours earlier, Sydney became one of the first major cities to ring in 2023, restaking its claim as the "New Year's Eve capital of the world" after two years of lockdowns and coronavirus-muted festivities with a fireworks display over the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

'Year of Ukraine'

For some, 2022 was a year of Wordle, the Great Resignation, a new Taylor Swift album, an Oscar slap and billionaire meltdowns.

It also saw the deaths of Queen Elizabeth II, Brazilian football icon Pele, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jiang Zemin, and Shinzo Abe. Former pope Benedict XVI also died on New Year's Eve.

The global population surpassed the historic milestone of eight billion people in November.

But 2022 is most likely to be remembered for armed conflict returning to Europe -- a continent that was the crucible of two world wars.



In a night club in China on New Year's Eve. Photo: AFP

Year's Eve after a few pandemic-dampened years.

In Rio de Janeiro, throngs of people packed the city's Copacabana Beach - up to two million were expected - for music and fireworks, without coronavirus safety measures of the past few years.

The festivities came only hours before Brazil inaugurates new president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva Sunday, following his razor-thin win in October polls.

After the widely criticized pandemic policies of outgoing President Jair

Bolsonaro, Copacabana partygoer Ana Carolina Rodrigues - wearing the evening's traditional white - says she hopes 2023 brings a new government that "looks more at people's health."

Across the Atlantic, Parisians - and a "normal" amount of tourists, comparable to 2018 or 2019, according to officials - took the opportunity to crowd together shoulder-to-shoulder for a fireworks show along the Champs-Elysees.

Police said about a million people showed up for

"It was our year. Year of Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address Saturday, reflecting on his country's war effort throughout the year.

More than 300 days into Russia's botched invasion of Ukraine, about 7,000 civilians have been killed and 10,000 more injured, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

About 16 million Ukrainians have fled their homes.

For those who remain, an 11:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew will be in place amid periodic blackouts and Russian missile barrages.

The latest Russian strikes on Ukraine Saturday claimed at least one more life and wounded several others, said Ukrainian officials, while an explosion was heard in Kyiv just after the New Year.

"We do not know for sure what the new year 2023 will bring us," Zelensky said, promising that Ukrainians would fight on and offering a wish for "victory" in the new year.

In Kyiv, filmmaker Yaroslav Mutenko, 23, was defiant after a shell hit the four-star Hotel Alfavito near his apartment, insisting the blast would not stop him from partying.

"Our enemies, the Russians, can destroy our calm but they cannot destroy our spirit," he said.

London fireworks

There seemed to be a dulled appetite for grand celebrations in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Moscow canceled its traditional fireworks show, as Putin said in a New Year's address that "moral, historical rightness" is on Russia's side as the country faces international condemnation over the war.

London was meanwhile welcoming crowds to its official New Year's Eve fireworks display for the first time since the pandemic.

One place that wasn't joining in the pyrotechnics was the English seaside town of Scarborough, which called off its display in order not to disturb "Thor" the walrus, who recently appeared in the harbor.

Councillor Steve Siddons said the town was disappointed, "but the welfare of the walrus has to take precedence."

In New York, crowds braved a chilly rain to await the famous ball drop in Times Square, a tradition that goes back to 1907.

"We're going to be waiting for about eight hours I think," Mexican tourist Fabiola Cepeda said. "It is worth it, definitely."

Shadow of Covid

The Middle East region welcomed 2023 with a traditional fireworks show from the world's tallest building, the 830-meter (2,723-feet) Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Laser lights added

to the spectacle at the landmark, which carried messages including "Hugging again," an apparent reference to the end of Covid restrictions.

However, China begins 2023 battling a surge in Covid infections.

But New Year's Eve parties still went on as planned, even as hospitals in the world's most populous nation have been overwhelmed by an explosion of cases following the decision to lift strict "zero-Covid" rules.

In Beijing revelers flocked to clubs, music venues and bars, while downtown Shanghai saw masked youngsters celebrating in the streets near the iconic Bund waterfront, according to social media videos.

Meanwhile in Wuhan where Covid-19 first emerged, large crowds set off festive balloons in a central square as the clock struck midnight.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told the country in a televised New Year's Eve address that, despite the outbreak, "the light of hope is right in front of us".

AFP



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