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Spring Revolution, asks Igor Blazevic



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SPRING REVOLUTION NEEDS POLITICAL UNITY

Mizzima Weekly's cover story this week is an interview with Igor Blazevic, a well-known European rights and democracy activist who has been keeping a close eye on Myanmar for over a decade.

In the interview, Blazevic raises important questions about the Spring Revolution, a militant movement that has surprised Myanmar analysts by its tenacity but is facing a formidable foe in the shape of the military junta.

A crucial element, worth mentioning in the interview, is the need for real unity amongst the Spring Revolution players.

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is attempting to divide-and-rule, and he is having some success with this in terms of agreements with some Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) and also with international humanitarian players.

Blazevic stresses the need for informal face-to-face dialogue between the key stakeholders in the Spring Revolution,

including the National Unity Government (NUG), people's defence forces (PDF), and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO).

And – crucially – he calls for a common goal.

Naturally, members of the EROs will have different demands compared with other players, especially given their lengthy history of stand-off against the Burma military and the outcomes of endless “peace talks” and the Panglong process.

At the end of the day, Blazevic says, the Spring Revolution is about self-determination.

Differences in the past need to be put aside in order to focus on this key goal.

And when the different players get together ideally it is not on a Zoom call but face-to-face with a shaking of hands.

The future of the people of Myanmar is at stake and the Spring Revolution players need to come together as one.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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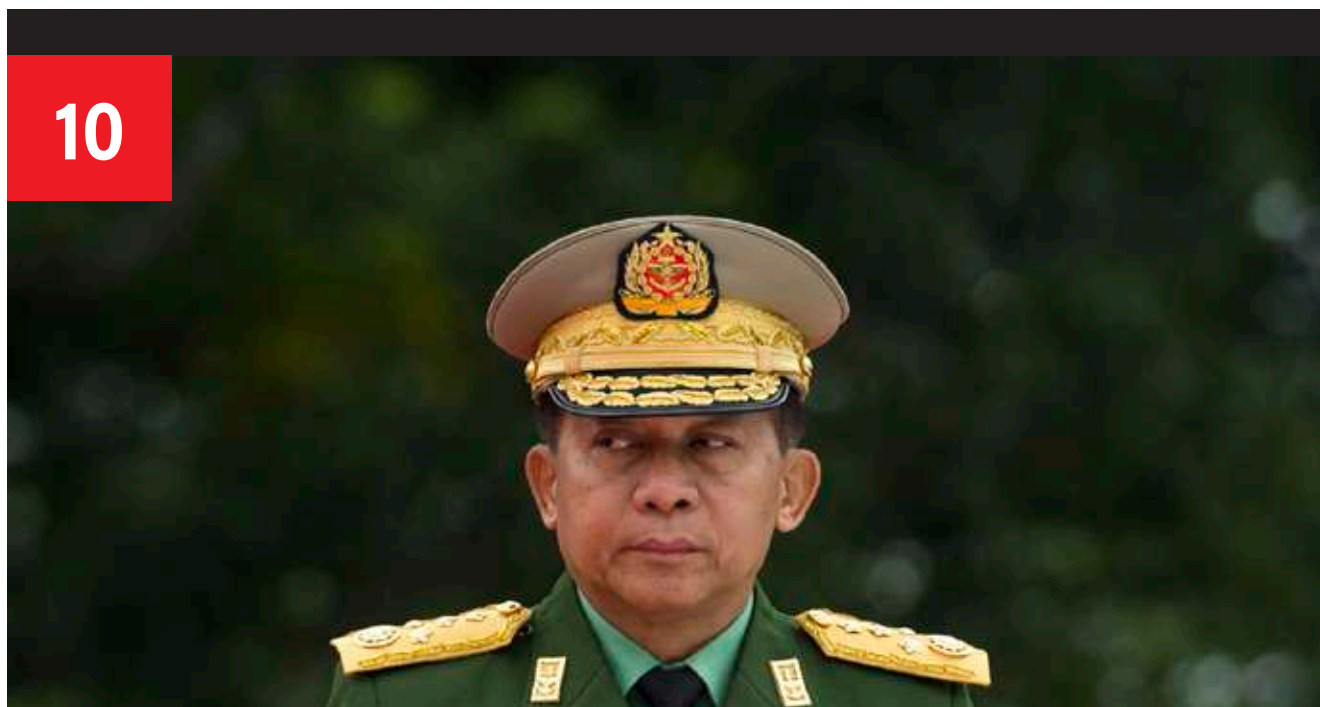
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ACCIDENT IN YANGON

A volunteer carries oxygen cylinder near the Ammonia leakage accident of an ice factory in Yangon, Myanmar, 12 January. Hundreds of people suffered from ammonia leakage from the ice factory leakage and about 18 people were sent to hospital according to the local rescue teams.

Photo: EPA

ATTACK KILLS 15 MYANMAR JUNTA SOLDIERS IN SAGAING'S MYINMU TOWNSHIP

Local defence forces allegedly killed 15 junta soldiers when they attacked a junta convoy with mines and a drone between Wunpyae and Atkatkapa Villages in Sagaing Region's Myinmu Township at about 6:45 a.m. on 8 January.

The convoy was attacked as it was travelling between Monywa Township and Sagaing Township.

Private Thonnya a spokesperson for the People's Knight Defence Force- Myinmu, one of the defence forces involved in the attack, said: "According to our

news sources 15 [junta] soldiers died at the hospital. It could even be more.

Unfortunately, junta soldiers shot at the People's Knight Defence Force- Myinmu drone which, as a result, was damaged and lost.

"We are satisfied with this mission, but we lost our drone during the mission. The cost of the mission was quite high. A landmine costs about 150,000 kyats. At least three, four or five mines are used in one operation, so the cost is quite high", explained Private Thonnya.

He added that 15 junta soldiers had died in the attack and another 10 were injured. Despite coming under fire from junta forces all members of the attacking people's defence forces were able to retreat without suffering any injuries.

The defence forces involved in the attack were the People's Knight Defence Force-Myinmu, the People's Army To Fight Dictatorship (PAFD), TAUNGTHA People Defence Force (TTAPDF), Dog Killer Defence Force Myinmu (DKPDF-MMU) and D.B.B.F-MMU.

ON THE RUN MPS AND NLD MEMBER ARRESTED BY MYANMAR JUNTA

Two National League for Democracy (NLD) members of the national parliament (MPs) and an NLD party executive who were on the run were arrested along with family members, on 8 January.

They were arrested at a house in Shartaw Village in Magway Region's Pwintphyu Township at 4:00 a.m.

The arrested national MPs were both NLD members of the Pyithu Hluttaw, the House of Representatives national lower house. They were U Tun Tun, the MP for Pwintphyu Township and U Win Win, the MP for Minbu Township in Magway Region. U Win Win's wife and three children were also arrested along with him.

The arrested local MP was U Than Thin, an NLD member of the Chauk Township Regional Hluttaw (parliament).

The other arrested NLD member was U Phoe Kyaw, the NLD executive for Chauk Township.

The owner of the house where they were all found was also arrested.

A local villager said: "Young people from the village were beaten and taken away by junta soldiers. I think around 70 phones were also taken. The owner of the house where they were staying was also arrested."

Another local said: "I'm not sure how the Junta's soldiers discovered that the MPs were hiding in the village, the Military Council was desperate to catch

them. Village youths were also tortured and arrested.

They [the junta soldiers] insulted and tortured them."

Mizzima is still looking into where the arrested MPs and their family members were taken after the incident.

Since the February 2021 coup the junta has been arresting and imprisoning NLD MPs and members for allegedly engaging in terrorist activities and supporting people's defence forces (PDFs).

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), as of 7 January, 13,272 people had been arrested by the junta.

MYANMAR JUNTA'S INDISCRIMINATE FIRING OF WEAPONS KILLS CIVILIAN

Junta soldiers killed an innocent civilian when they indiscriminately fired their weapons in Sagaing Region's Kalay Town on 9 January.

The incident happened when People's Defence Force (PDF) Kalay attacked a junta fortified bunker at the corner of Wesley Hospital Road, in Kalay Town's Tahan Ward at around 11:00 a.m.

When they came under

attack the junta soldiers fired around the area indiscriminately and a civilian in a nearby house was hit and killed by a bullet.

The victim's family members have not yet released the victim's identity, but PDF Kalay extended its deepest condolences to them.

A spokesperson for PDF Kalay said that the attack was to warn the junta to stop going from

door-to-door to record household registrations for the upcoming junta run elections.

On 10 January PDF Kalay issued a statement telling people to stay away from junta army bases, junta vehicles and the routes they regularly travel along as there could be attacks carried out against the junta in the near future.

PYU SAW HTEE MEMBER SHOT DEAD IN LAUNGLON TOWNSHIP

The Launglon People's Defense Force (LLPDF) shot dead a military veteran who was also a member of the Pyu Saw Htee junta aligned militia, at his home in Thabawtseik Village in Tanintharyi Region's Launglon Township at around 1:00 p.m. on 9 January.

The ex-serviceman, who was shot four times, was named

as U Kyaw Lwin. According to locals he had been in close contact with the junta since the coup.

A Launglon resident said: "He had been given warnings by the LLPDF since the coup, but he didn't care about the warnings and kept committing crimes in cooperation with Military Council troops. Now, because of his attitude, he

has been shot."

Elsewhere in Launglon Township on the same day, 9 January, two junta soldiers providing security for government personnel were shot near Kamyawkin Village Elementary School by local defence forces. One soldier was killed, the other was injured and the defence forces seized a rifle.

MYANMAR JUNTA TORCHES HOUSES FOR NO REASON IN TANINTHARYI'S LAUNGLON TOWNSHIP

Despite there being no fighting in the area junta troops torched Hinchotaw Village in Tanintharyi Region's Launglon Township on 11 January.

According to the National Unity Government (NUG) appointed Launglon Township People's Administration Organisation the junta troops started torching people's homes, unprovoked, at about 5:00 a.m.

A representative of the Launglon Township People's

Administration Organisation said: "They [the junta troops] came to the village and Pyu Saw Htee members were also with them. Then they torched the houses. There was no fighting with resistance forces at that time."

A local said: "Three houses, four motorcycles, and a furniture store were completely destroyed by the Junta's arson."

We put out the fire as soon as they left the village; otherwise, the entire village would have burned down.

They also took the villagers' cellphones before leaving the village. Fortunately, no one was detained."

The junta troops moved on from Hinchotaw Village and at the time of reporting were on their way to Kyauknimaw Village, also in Launglon Township.

Launglon Township People's Administration Organisation issued a statement condemning such willful arson and warning that violence in the area may continue.

JUNTA SMOKESCREEN?

Are elections a Myanmar junta ruse to split the Spring Revolution, Igor Blazevic asks

Human rights campaigner and writer Igor Blazevic sits down with Mizzima Editor Sein Win to discuss the challenges the Spring Revolution players face in ousting the military junta from power.

Mizzima: The Myanmar coup took place almost two years ago. When you look back, how do you view developments in 2022?

Igor Blazevic: When we look back, in a certain way everybody in the international community expected that sooner or later the military junta will suppress the popular uprising against the junta. And the huge impressive achievement of the people of Myanmar is that the junta has not been able to suppress the popular uprising and the resistance.

When we look at recent history there have been a lot of huge uprisings against military dictatorships by people in their country. We can look at Hong Kong, we can look at Belarus, and when you see there basically the regime in a similar way like Myanmar have used extreme brutal violence and after three or four months the regimes by using brutal violence have suppressed resistance.

In Myanmar that didn't happen. In Myanmar people have shown extraordinary resilience, extraordinary determination and we are now in a situation in which the junta is not able to beat the people, people are not able to defeat the junta, so in 2022 put us in a situation which I call the negative equilibrium - people cannot defeat the junta and the junta cannot defeat the people, so it is very destructive, very destructive because the junta is using systematic destruction of everything in order to prevail.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is called many names but he should not be underestimated. Photo: AFP

And now what is important is where the tipping point will come, we can have negative equilibrium, it can go one direction, it can go and it can go the other direction, and the next year (2023) it will be important to see which way it will go. It is very destructive but at the same time it is impressive in how the people of Myanmar are defending themselves.

Mizzima: I like the word you used, negative equilibrium, and it is devastating and also a lot of war crimes, the torture, they do everything to suppress the people's uprising. On the other hand, they are planning to go for an election in 2023, it is like an exit strategy for Min Aung Hlaing. What are the tactics that they have been using to counter the Spring Revolution?

Blazevic: I think that in this moment, the junta has a very clear strategy, which has a couple of elements. One side of this strategy is not to fight the military offence but to fight the

civilian population. Traditionally, this has always been the military tactic of the junta with the Four Cuts Policy. Now this strategy is even more clarified in the junta's minds because of the Russian assistance because this is a typical Russian military strategy. Russia does not fight the armed opponent. Russia fights the civilian population. If somebody looks at how Russia was conducting the war in Chechnya, how Russia was helping Assad (of Syria) survive, how Russia is today fighting in Ukraine, it was always systematic mass scale hitting on the civilian population. And this is now what the (Myanmar) junta is doing. By doing that the junta is intentionally creating a huge humanitarian disaster. So, this is not a secondary consequence of the war, this is the primary goal of the junta military strategy to create a huge humanitarian burden, a crisis, a real humanitarian crisis, on the other side burden for every single stakeholder in Myanmar who is

challenging the junta.

So, this is one side. On the other side of that strategy are extremely problematic figures like (Nippon Foundation Chairman) Sasakawa but also other donor and international players who are approaching ethnic stakeholders with the carrot of humanitarian aid and saying to them "Hey, if you do even a temporary ceasefire with the junta, you will be able to get the humanitarian aid". So, on one side we are seeing this heavy international stick hitting the people of Myanmar and on the other we see a very dirty misuse of humanitarian aid for political purposes in order to break the alliance of forces against the junta. And if you are a stakeholder who is opposing the junta because you don't want the junta, you don't like the junta, but at the same time you have 10,000, 20,000, 100,000, half a million desperate population then you are seriously thinking what sort of a choice should I make.





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So, on the one side we have now a very problematic convergence of the Russian military strategy which is targeting the civilian population and a very, very dirty game of the humanitarian aid that basically can lead the current situation into what I call a domino effect. If one stakeholder accepts a temporary ceasefire then the other stakeholders are looking and thinking maybe we should do the same, if the second accept it we can get a domino, in which the final purpose is to cut the Kachin from the Sagaing, Arakan (Rakhine) from the Sagaing, and achieve as many ceasefires so that the junta can use all of its military power to crush the Sagaing and Magway.

So, this is the strategy and in this strategy the elections are just a smokebomb, they have thrown the elections, they are preparing themselves systematically for elections and they might use it but they might now use it, they are having it in their cards and they are deciding when they will use their card.

But at this moment because they have thrown this smoke-bomb in front of the stage, it looks to me like a false attack. When you want to defeat your opponent, then you create this false attack, the opponent moves all its forces there, then you come from the back.

So, elections are something like a false attack, a lot of our attention, from the civil society and the population is moving in the direction of the elections but at the same time, we are becoming weak in the back from our alliance. And I say we need to prepare ourselves for elections, but at the same time, we need to see where the main threat is coming, and the main threat is coming in a breaking and trying to split the alliance that was standing, is standing, behind the Spring Revolution.

Mizzima: So, the junta basic tactic is still divide-and-conquer?

Blazevic: Still.

Mizzima: So, whenever we

have divide-and-rule disunity can happen. When we look at the National Unity Government (NUG), how do you see that? There is some concern about the disunity in the NUG, and disunity in the ethnic alliances. What do you think?

Blazevic: I think probably the most important thing is that we need informal dialogue between the key stakeholders. The Myanmar revolution was run by the many, many stakeholders, and that is giving us strength to the Spring Revolution because so many social forces are giving their contribution. But at the end of the day, the war, because we are in the middle of the war, war is decided by how much military power one side has and the other side hasn't. And when we look from that perspective, in Myanmar there are a couple of key stakeholders from that point of view. They are the NUG and its capacity to have the PDF forces, it is Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Arakan, because they are the backbone of the current resistance against the

junta military war against the people of the country. And I think these stakeholders need to have a lot of informal dialogue in order to recreate a clear common understanding.

And we need to be frank and clear what the underlying problem of this alliance is. The underlying problem is not necessarily the grievances of the ethnic stakeholders vis-à-vis the NLD (National League for Democracy), the NLD has made a lot of mistakes before. The underlying grievances, who has done what in the past is a part of the problem. But a much bigger problem is the ethnic stakeholders for 70 years have a very clear political goal, they want self-determination.

The Spring Revolution is fighting for something else. The Spring Revolution is not fighting for self-determination. The Spring Revolution is fighting for the military outside of the politics, military outside of the economy, and to bring back democracy. In the meantime, the Spring Revolution has accepted the Federal principle but has not made a clear political pledge, not only federal but also self-determination. And because we have these two basically different political goals, we need to make a compromise between them, we need the political courage of the players on all sides that we come together and you will get what you want, you have been fighting for 70 years, we will get removing the military from politics and the economy, let's talk about how we compromise these two different principles.

And it seems to me that

we are now unfortunately in a situation where we lack a little bit of leadership, and we lack a bit of critical political courage to make a hard decision. And I hope somebody will do it in order to reunite politically the forces, because if you are reunited politically, then we will be much stronger on the military field. They will also be much stronger vis-a-vis the international community because we can stand as the NUG, as a Kachin, as a Karen, as a Chin, as a Karenni, as an Arakan, say we are together, we are together and you as international players must stand with us.

But when we go there separately, unilaterally on our own, then we look like a dis-united force, which means - why should somebody try to understand the mess of Myanmar in which ten different players are asking ten different things?

Mizzima: Very recently the United States passed the National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA). Burma is a part of the NDAA. It is to support and help the Burmese people in terms of the revolution and organization such as the NUG and others. How can we expect this to be helpful to the Burmese revolution?

Blazevic: So, it is good, it is good, it is giving certain additional strengths. If we have been talking before about this balance, this a little bit giving the strength on our side. But there are two important things we should not overlook. Nothing which is happening abroad, nothing which is happening internationally, will decide how the conflict and struggle in

Myanmar will finish. This will be decided by the domestic forces. That will decide.

So, what we talked about before regarding political unity – this will be much more important than anything. On the other side, Burma is having a few positive things. It has an extra dimension – the NUG, NUCC, etc.

The key institutions that have been mentioned there, the legitimate bodies of Myanmar. And it was mentioned that the



junta was not a partner of the United States and cannot be involved in any way with any sort of aid coming with US money. It was other aspects of the assistance so all these things are adding strength to our side. This is a law, not an executive decision, this is a law which is in an executive implementing policy. We still need to a lot of advocacy with the US government because now the war is giving us good wins but in order to use these wins we need to proceed in a systematic way.

Mizzima: And also we need political unity.

Blazevic: We need political unity.

Mizzima: For that political unity we need to talk to each other behind the stage.

Blazevic: We need to talk to understand the profound demands of the key stakeholders and you need to make a credible pledge one to another, what you want is a legitimate demand and you will have it. And once

we have a new future Myanmar there will be federalism, there will be self-determination, there will be opportunity for the ethnic stakeholders to raise their children in their own language, in their own schools, to govern their own territories. At the same time there will be a very clear pledge for individual human rights accepted everywhere in the country.

We also, I believe, need to make a social economic justice pledge with people of Myanmar. People





The National League for Democracy won the 2020 election but lost when the military grabbed power in a coup in February 2021. Photo: EPA



are exploited for decades by the predatory junta for using all wealth of the country to buy the jets for huge amount of money that are then bombing people. They are taking all the wealth of the money for luxury for their families, their spoilt children, so we need to make a pledge to the people that in the future, the revenues from the oil the gas and natural resources will go into the education, go into the health care, will go into the burnt villages, it will go to recover the life of the political prisoners, we need to do this social economic promise to the people of the country that the future gives something to them.

Mizzima: That is quite a lot to do.

Blazevic: I think the junta will continue to destroy in order to defeat. So, their strategy of

victory is what Assad has done in Syria – win through total destruction. We need to create enough strong political force to be transformed into a strong enough military force which will essentially bleed the military into total weakness, which will then create the breakup of the junta and we need this political unity in order to be a strong partner of the international community in which we will be able to make clear demands. That is what we need from the political unity. This political unity will represent the will of the people. And then the international players will not be able to play their own divide and exploit game with Myanmar. We have a lot predators around Myanmar, which also play this divide and destroy game.

MYANMAR AIR STRIKE KILLS FIVE, INCLUDING MOTHER AND TODDLER IN KAREN STATE

A mother and her toddler were among five people killed in a military air strike in Myanmar's east, Karen rebels and an aid group said Saturday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government was toppled in a military coup almost two years ago, ending the southeast Asian nation's brief period of democracy.

Four junta fighter jets dropped eight bombs on villages in Hpapun district on Thursday afternoon, killing five people, the Karen National Union said in a statement.

Another four people were wounded, the ethnic rebel group said. The Karen live largely in Myanmar's east near the border with Thailand.

The Myanmar junta was contacted for comment but did not respond.

Christian aid group the Free Burma Rangers said its staff arrived at Lay Wah village in Hpapun hours after bombs destroyed two churches and a school.

"Some villagers had come back and they showed us the mangled bodies of the five who had been killed," the group said in a statement.

"A mother and her baby were instantly killed."

A Baptist pastor and a Catholic priest were among the dead, the Free Burma Rangers statement said. The toddler was almost three.

Villagers had fled into the jungle before the air strikes,

the group said, and fatalities would have been much higher had children still been in their classrooms.

"We saw shrapnel-damaged homes and roofs blown off," it said.

A Karen National Liberation Army spokesman told AFP there had been another air strike on Friday.

"We will continue to see these types of incidents because we don't have air defence systems," he said.

More than 2,700 civilians have been killed since the military grabbed power in February 2021, according to a local monitoring group.

AFP



Karen National Union



TWO WOMEN BLOW THEMSELVES UP AFTER BEING STOPPED BY JUNTA SOLDIERS IN SAGAING



Two women from the Independent Youth Scout Group resistance force killed themselves when they detonated a home-made mine they were carrying whilst being stopped and searched by junta soldiers.

The incident happened in Mintel Gyi Village, in Sagaing Region's Kawlin Township at around 9:15 a.m. on 7 January.

Junta soldiers were marching in Kawlin Township from Kyoekhone and Wayong Khone Villages to Min Chan and Tel Gyi Kone Villages. The two women, both members of the Independent Youth Scout Group resistance force, rode ahead of the soldiers on a motorcycle with the mine, planning to plant it further along the soldiers' route. But, they were stopped and searched by soldiers at the front of the column, according to local civil society organisation (CSO), the Kawlin Revolution (KR) Team.

A representative from KR Team said: "The women were only carrying the mine and a remote control to carry out a mine attack on the Military Council column. They didn't have guns to fight back with. I believe they chose to die together to avoid being arrested and tortured. I believe about two Military Council soldiers were affected."

The two women were named as Ma Su Su Ye, age 45 and Ma Hninsi Phyu, age 20.

Following the incident junta troops removed the two women's bodies and the junta seized Ma Su Su Ye's home on 8 January, according to the KR Team representative.

THAI TROOPS KILL 6 ALLEGED DRUG SMUGGLERS NEAR MYANMAR BORDER



Thai soldiers at the scene of the clash.
Photo: Royal Thai Army/Twitter

Thai soldiers killed six suspected drug smugglers in a shoot-out in a jungle in northern Thailand, officials said Tuesday last week.

The incident took place near the “Golden Triangle” - where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet - long a hub for smuggling despite repeated crackdowns.

Army officials said rangers encountered a group of 15 to 20 men in Fang district before dawn on Monday as they crossed the border from Myanmar.

The Pha Muang Task Force, which monitors six border provinces, said six alleged smugglers were killed after an exchange of gunfire.

The army said soldiers searched 19 backpacks belonging to the men and discovered 300 kilograms (660 pounds) of ketamine and three guns.

Last month, Thai soldiers killed 15 alleged drug smugglers near the Myanmar border.

Officials said they opened fire after being attacked by the group, later discovering they were carrying crystal methamphetamine, a highly addictive stimulant often produced in Myanmar and shipped through Thailand and Laos for export around Asia.

Authorities across Southeast Asia have made record meth seizures in recent years.

AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA HITS ETHNIC REBELS WITH AIR STRIKES NEAR INDIA BORDER

Myanmar's junta has carried out air strikes on an ethnic armed group's base near the border with India, the rebels and media said Wednesday last week, with one bomb landing close to the international boundary.

The military coup almost two years ago has sparked renewed fighting with long-established ethnic rebel groups, as well as with dozens of People's Defence Force groups that have sprung up to oppose the junta.

The bombing by five jets on Tuesday evening killed five fighters at the headquarters of the Chin National Front (CNF), which claims to represent the mainly Christian Chin minority in western Myanmar, spokesman Salai Htet Ni told AFP.

"They dropped seven bombs... Some of our houses were destroyed from their air strike... One bomb landed on the Indian side," he said.

Local media also reported five fighters had been killed and that one bomb landed in Champhai district, in India's Mizoram state.

But Indian police said the bomb had actually landed directly in the dry riverbed that marks

the international boundary.

"Our initial investigation has revealed that there is no damage to any (Indian) life or property," Lalrinpuia Varte, police superintendent of Champhai district, told AFP.

"Farkawn village, which is about eight to nine kilometres (five to six miles) from the international border, is the closest to where the incident happened."

The CNF's fighters have dwindled in recent years, and it signed a ceasefire with the military in 2015.

But in May last year it signed an agreement with a shadow government dominated by lawmakers from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) that is working to overturn the coup.

Coup leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by claiming electoral fraud in November 2020 elections won by Suu Kyi's NLD.

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

AFP



Bomb explosion on the Indian side of the border. Photo: Supplied

MAJOR MYANMAR-CHINA BORDER CROSSING AT MUSE PARTIALLY REOPENS

A Myanmar-China border crossing vital to trade has partially reopened, an official said Sunday, after years of a pandemic-prompted closure.

Covid-19 shuttered the Muse-Ruili checkpoint - among the Southeast Asian nation's busiest - in April 2020.

One of Muse town's border gates opened Saturday at 7:00 am (1230 GMT), according to an official in Myanmar's northern Shan state.

Six trucks made the short relay trip at the Mang Wein crossing, said U Min Thein, vice-chairman of the Muse Rice Commodity Exchange.

"China only allowed us to export food and drink at the moment," U Min Thein told AFP Sunday.

But he said they were not permitted to send over economic mainstays -- including rice, broken rice, beans and watermelons.

For those, traders had to use the Kyinsankyawt border gate outside Muse, he said.

The Kyinsankyawt checkpoint partially reopened under similar circumstances in May last year, according to state media.

On Saturday, U Min Thein said, China exported construction and industrial equipment, electrical appliances, medical devices, consumer and household goods, as well as food products.

"But China had not yet allowed people to cross the border," he said.

The Muse checkpoint's reopening has been persistently stalled by both sides, and the Chinese city of Ruili has faced multiple lockdowns to limit the spread of Covid.

China recently declared an end to its zero-Covid policy, and has since recorded a massive spike in infections.



AFP

Photo: EPA

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CHINA HALTS SHORT-TERM VISAS FOR S. KOREANS, JAPANESE OVER COVID TRAVEL CURBS

China suspended issuing short-term visas to South Koreans and Japanese on Tuesday last week, its embassies in Seoul and Tokyo said, in apparent retaliation for restrictions imposed on Chinese travellers over Covid concerns.

The measure was announced first in South Korea, which has introduced a host of new rules for visitors from China, including visa restrictions and testing requirements.

It joined more than a dozen countries that have imposed new travel rules over worries of surging Covid-19 infections in China.

“Chinese embassies and consulates in Korea will suspend the issuance of short-term visas for Korean citizens,” Beijing’s embassy in Seoul said.

It said the measures would be “adjusted again in line with South Korea’s removal of the discriminatory entry restrictions on China”.

China currently issues no tourist visas and requires a negative Covid test for all arrivals.

Beijing’s embassy in Tokyo announced in a brief statement late on Tuesday that the issuing of visas for Japanese citizens would also be halted,

giving no specific reason or indication of how long the measure would last.

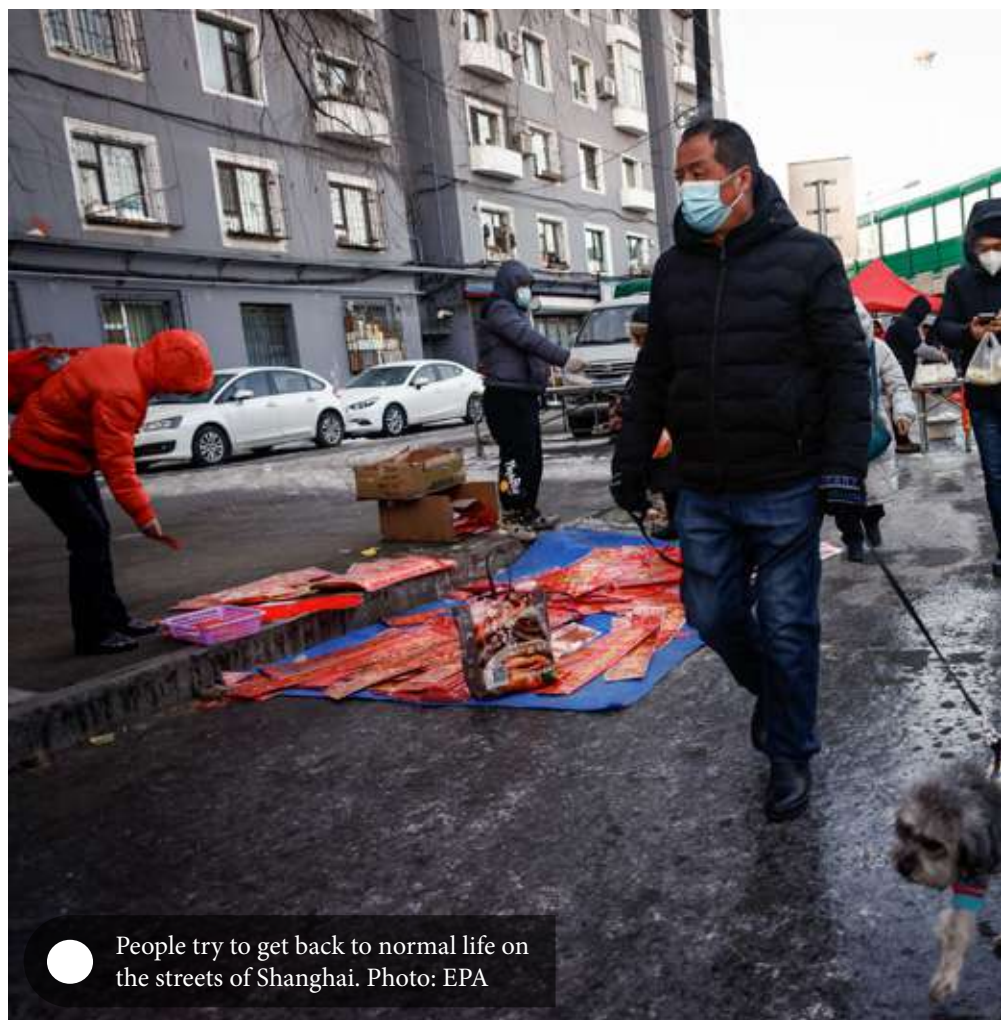
Seoul is also capping flights from China, and travellers from the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau must test negative before departure.

Seoul’s foreign minister has defended the measures as being “in accordance with scientific evidence”.

Mainland visitors are also being tested on arrival and are required to quarantine for a week if they test positive, authorities have said.

Japan will now require arrivals from mainland China and Macau to test before travel and on arrival, a measure not currently required of other travellers.

Flights from the mainland can only land at specific



People try to get back to normal life on the streets of Shanghai. Photo: EPA

airports, although Hong Kong arrivals are exempt from the new rules.

Manhunt

Headlines in South Korea have been dominated by the case of a Chinese national who tested positive on arriving in Seoul, refused to quarantine and then fled, sparking a two-day manhunt.

Police eventually found the Chinese national, who was not identified but was described as a medical tourist. The visitor will be questioned this week over the infraction, South Korean media reported.

According to official

figures, 2,224 Chinese nationals on short-term visas have landed in South Korea since 2 January, with 17.5 percent testing positive on arrival.

South Korea has limited its issuance of short-term visas for Chinese nationals to public officials, diplomats, and those with crucial humanitarian and business purposes until the end of January.

All flights from China are also now required to land at South Korea's main Incheon International Airport.

South Korea's southernmost Jeju Island, which has its own international airport and separate visa entry regime, had been a popular tourist destination for Chinese arrivals before the pandemic.

Seoul is "inevitably strengthening some anti-epidemic measures to prevent the spread of the virus in our country due to the worsening Covid-19 situation in China", Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said last month in announcing the measures.

'Scientific measures'

South Korea's foreign ministry said in a statement Seoul "communicated with China in advance" about the measures and that the information was "shared transparently with the international community".

Beijing's foreign ministry said it was "regrettable" that "a few countries still insist on

discriminatory entry restrictions against China".

The ministry's spokesman, Wang Wenbin, said China was "firmly opposed" to the restrictions, without commenting specifically on its decision to suspend issuing visas to South Koreans.

"We once again call on relevant countries to take scientific and appropriate measures based on facts," Wang said, discouraging what he characterised as "political manoeuvring and... discriminatory practices".

China's hospitals have been overwhelmed by an explosion in cases after Beijing began unwinding hardline controls that had torpedoed the economy and sparked nationwide protests.

Tourists from China accounted for the largest proportion of all foreign tourists visiting South Korea in both 2019 and 2020, making up 34.4 percent and 27.2 percent respectively, according to Seoul's official data.

But the number of Chinese tourists dropped significantly last year - from 6.02 million in 2019 to 200,000 for January to November 2022 - making up only 7.5 percent of all tourists from overseas, South Korea's culture ministry told AFP.

Chinese tourists also made up around a third of all visitors to Japan before the pandemic.



AFP

UK VOWS NO LET-UP WITH CHINA AFTER JIMMY LAI INTERVENTION

Britain will stand up to “Chinese aggression” and defend Hong Kong’s freedoms, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak vowed Wednesday last week after his government intervened in the case of jailed media tycoon Jimmy Lai.

Minister for Asia Anne-Marie Trevelyan met the pro-democracy figure’s legal team on Tuesday, prompting an angry response from the Hong Kong government.

But speaking in parliament, Sunak insisted on Britain’s right to get involved in its former colony, whose civil liberties were meant to be guaranteed for 50 years under the Sino-UK agreement that came into effect in 1985.

The UK has admitted hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers fleeing China’s crackdown, he said, and it will remain “robust in standing up to what we believe to be Chinese aggression”.

Britain would also resist the “undermining of the (50-year) settlement that we fought so hard to achieve”.

Sunak was responding to China critic Iain Duncan Smith, who along with other MPs met earlier Wednesday with Lai’s son Sebastien.

Jimmy Lai, 75, is a British citizen and founder of Hong Kong’s now-shuttered Apple Daily newspaper.

He is facing up to life in prison for “colluding with foreign forces” - a crime under the security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong to quash huge democracy protests in 2019.



His trial, scheduled for December last year, was pushed to September after Hong Kong authorities asked Beijing to step in and bar Lai from being represented by a London lawyer.

“We’ve been clear that the Hong Kong authorities must end their targeting of pro-democracy voices, including Jimmy Lai,” Sunak’s spokesman told reporters after the Trevelyan meeting.

Hong Kong’s government responded: “We will never tolerate, and strongly deplore, any form of interference by any foreign power or individual with the (territory’s) judicial proceedings and internal affairs.”

AFP



Indonesian jungle.
Photo: AFP

Security outside the courthouse during
the trial of Jimmy Lai. Photo: EPA

JAPAN RACKS UP NEW SECURITY DEALS WITH EYES ON CHINA

Space defence, US troop deployments and a “hugely significant” deal with Britain: Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is collecting more than souvenirs on his whirlwind diplomatic tour.

Defence has dominated his agenda this week in meetings with Group of Seven allies in Europe and North America, as the Japanese leader seeks to draw friends closer in the face of growing pressure from China, analysts say.

Japan wants to normalise its “role as a great power”, Amy King, associate professor at the Australian National University’s Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, told AFP.

It seeks “the kinds of strategic partnerships and defence relationships that are quite normal for other countries, but which have been largely off-limits to Japan” because of its pacifist post-war constitution.

Kishida’s conversations have also touched on everything else from trade to climate issues, showing that he is trying to broaden Tokyo’s relationships with its allies.

Japan is “insuring itself against a decline in US capacity, and working to draw other major democratic states into Asia”, King said.

The government

unveiled a major defence overhaul in December, including doubling spending to two percent of GDP by 2027 and designating China the “greatest strategic challenge ever” to Japan’s security.

Kishida’s diplomatic efforts “reflect that Japan’s national defence cannot be done by Japan alone”, said Mitsuru Fukuda, a professor at Nihon University who studies crisis management.

“In the past, Japan was able to separate economy and

politics,” doing business with countries like China and Russia while enjoying the security protections of its alliance with the United States.

But deepening friction between democratic and authoritarian countries, including over Russia’s war in Ukraine, mean “we cannot do that anymore”, he said.

Japan is hosting this year’s G7 and Kishida is visiting all bloc members except Germany on a trip capped by talks in Washington Friday with



Japanese PM Fumio Kishida shakes hands with US President Joe Biden on a visit to the USA. Photo: EPA

US President Joe Biden.

US and Japanese foreign and defence ministers have already agreed to extend the nations' mutual defence treaty to space, and announced the deployment of a more agile US Marine unit on Japanese soil.

'Belated adjustment'

In Britain, Kishida signed a deal creating a legal basis for the two sides to deploy troops on each others' territory.

Japan made a similar agreement with Australia last year and discussions are underway for one with the Philippines.

Last year, Tokyo also agreed to develop a

next-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy, and to increase intelligence-sharing and defence cooperation with Australia.

Beijing has watched the developments with some discomfort, warning Japan last year against "deviating" from bilateral relations.

But analysts say Tokyo is moving carefully to avoid directly challenging its powerful neighbour.

"Expanding its military network is definitely one effective way to counter or try to deter China," said Daisuke Kawai, a research fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs.

But since the deals stop short of full alliances with mutual defence commitments, they should remain "acceptable for now" to Beijing, Kawai said.

And while the overhaul of Japan's defence policy and spending has been interpreted by some as a break with the past, others see it as a more subtle shift.

The moves "will at least complicate Chinese calculations on how far it can push the envelope of its activities in the region", said Yee Kuang Heng, a professor of international security at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Public Policy.

But they "still do not tip the regional military balance vis-a-vis China significantly".

Japan's post-war constitution prevents it from waging

war, and the government's plan to acquire missiles that could strike enemy launch sites has stirred debate about the limits of the legal framework.

But polling suggests Japan's public largely supports the shift, even if opinion on how to pay for it is divided, and some observers consider it long overdue.

"These deterrent efforts should not be seen as destabilising or provocative," said Euan Graham, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"Rather, they represent a belated adjustment to a balance of power that has shifted significantly in favour of these authoritarian challengers to the status quo."

AFP



RARE EARTHS: VITAL ELEMENTS IN A HIGH-TECH WORLD

A Swedish mining group said last week that it had discovered Europe's largest known deposit of rare earth elements, rekindling hopes that more sources for the key metals will be found outside the powerhouse producer China.

The metals are crucial for electronics such as smartphones, computers and batteries as well as the cutting-edge technologies that could reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Are they really rare?

Not really. With names like scandium, cerium, dysprosium and thulium, rare earths are a group of 17 heavy metals that are actually abundant in the Earth's crust across the globe.

Before the Swedish find, the United States Geological Survey had estimated there are 120 million tonnes of deposits worldwide, including 44 million in China -- by far the world's largest producer currently.

A further 22 million tonnes are estimated in both Brazil and Vietnam, while Russia has 21 million and India seven million.

But mining the metals requires heavy chemical use that results in huge amounts of toxic waste and has caused several environmental disasters, making many countries wary of shouldering the heavy financial costs for production.

They are often found in minute ore concentrations, meaning large amounts of rock must be processed to produce the refined product, often in powder form.

Why are they special?

Each of the 17 rare earths are used in industry and can be found in a wide variety of both everyday and high-tech devices, from light bulbs to guided missiles.

Europium is crucial for television screens, cerium is used for polishing glass and refining oil, lanthanum makes a car's catalytic converters

operate -- the list in the modern economy is virtually endless.

And all have unique properties that are more or less irreplaceable or can be substituted only at prohibitive costs.

Neodymium and dysprosium, for example, allow the fabrication of almost permanent, super-strong magnets that require little maintenance, making viable the placement of ocean wind turbines to generate electricity far from the coastline.

Demand is set to soar even further: To meet its goal of replacing hydrocarbons and reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, the European Union will need 26 times more rare earths than currently, according to a study for the Eurometaux producers' association.

China's lead

For decades, Beijing has made the most of its reserves by investing massively in refinery





Rare earth extraction in South Africa.
Photo: EPA

operations -- often without the strict environmental oversight required in Western countries.

China has also filed a huge number of patents on rare earth production, an obstacle to companies in other countries hoping to launch large-scale processing.

As a result, many firms find it cheaper to ship their ore to China for refining, further reinforcing the world's reliance.

The European Union gets 98 percent of its supply from China, the European Commission said in 2020, while the United States imports around 80 percent of its rare earths from China.

Amid growing geopolitical tensions between the West and Beijing, officials on both sides of the Atlantic are pushing for more rare earth production as well as new recycling technologies -- though few analysts expect a significant reduction on Chinese production anytime soon.

At the height of a US-China trade dispute in 2019, Chinese state media suggested that rare earth exports to the US could be cut in retaliation for American measures, sparking fear among a range of manufacturers.

Japan saw first-hand the pain of a Chinese cut-off in 2010, when Beijing halted rare earth exports over a territorial conflict.

Since then, Tokyo has pushed hard to diversify supplies, signing deals with the Australian group Lynas for production from Malaysia, and ramping up its recycling capabilities.

AFP

TRAPPED SEDIMENT IN DAMS 'ENDANGERS' WATER SUPPLIES: UN

Thousands of the world's large dams are so clogged with sediment that they risk losing more than a quarter of their storage capacity by 2050, UN researchers said Wednesday last week, warning of the threat to water security.

A new study from the UN University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health found that, by mid-century, dams and reservoirs will lose about 1.65 trillion cubic metres of water storage capacity to sediment.

The figure is close to the combined annual water use of India, China, Indonesia, France and Canada.

That is important, the researchers say, because these big dams are a key source of hydro-electricity, flood control, irrigation and drinking water throughout the world.

"Global water storage is going to diminish -- it is diminishing now -- and that needs to be seriously taken into account," the study's co-author and Institute director Vladimir Smakhtin told AFP.

Researchers looked at nearly 50,000 large dams in 150 countries, and found that they have already lost about 16 percent of water storage capacity.

They estimated that if build-up rates continue at the same pace, that will increase to about 26 percent by mid-century.

Rivers naturally wash sediment downstream to wetlands and coasts, but dams disrupt this flow and over time the build-up of these

muddy deposits gradually reduces the space for water.

Smakhtin said this "endangers the sustainability of future water supplies for many" as well as posing risks to irrigation and power generation.

Part of a larger issue

Accumulation of sediment can also cause flooding upstream and impact wildlife habitats and coastal populations downstream.

Sedimentation is a part of a larger issue: by 2050, tens of thousands of large dams will be near or past their intended lifespan.

Most of the world's 60,000 big dams -- constructed between 1930 and 1970 -- were designed to last 50 to 100 years, after which they risk failure, affecting more than half the global population who will live downstream.

Large dams and reservoirs are defined as higher than 15 metres (49 feet), or at least five metres high while holding back no less than three million cubic metres of water.

Global warming compounds the risk in ways that have yet to be fully measured.

"Climate change extremes like floods and droughts will increase, and higher intensity showers are more erosive," Smakhtin said.

This not only increases the risk of reservoirs overflowing but also accelerates the build-up of sediment, which affects dam safety, reduces

water storage capacity and lowers energy production in hydroelectric dams.

Alternatives

To address looming challenges of ageing dams and reservoir sedimentation, the study authors list several measures.

Bypass, or sediment diversion, can divert water flow downstream through a separate river channel.

Another strategy is the removal, or “decommissioning”, of a dam to re-establish the natural flow of sediment in a river.

But addressing water storage issues is especially complex because there is no one-size-fits-all solution, Smakhtin said.

“The loss of water storage is inevitable for different reasons,” Smakhtin said. “So the question we should be asking is what are the alternatives?”

A March 22-24 UN 2023 Water Conference in New York will provide the possibility for countries to voice concerns and make commitments for the future of water management, he said.

AFP



Lower Paunglaung Dam in Myanmar.
Photo: EPA

SUPER-RESISTANT MOSQUITOES IN ASIA POSE GROWING THREAT: STUDY

Mosquitoes that transmit dengue and other viruses have evolved growing resistance to insecticides in parts of Asia, and novel ways to control them are desperately needed, new research warns.

Health authorities commonly fog mosquito-infested areas with clouds of insecticide, and resistance has long been a concern, but the scale of the problem was not well understood.

Japanese scientist Shinji Kasai and his team examined mosquitos from several countries in Asia as well as Ghana and found a series of mutations had made some virtually impervious to popular pyrethroid-based chemicals like permethrin.

"In Cambodia, more than 90 percent of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes have the combination of mutations that results in an extremely high level of resistance," Kasai told AFP.

He found some mosquito strains had 1,000-fold resistance, compared to the 100-fold seen previously.

That meant insecticide levels that would normally kill almost 100 percent of mosquitoes in a sample killed only around seven percent of the insects.

Even a dose 10 times stronger killed just 30 percent of

the super-resistant mosquitoes.

"The resistance level that we found in mosquitos in Cambodia and Vietnam is totally different," said Kasai, director of the Department of Medical Entomology at Japan's National Institute of Infectious Diseases.

Dengue can cause hemorrhagic fever and infects an estimated 100 to 400 million people a year, although over 80 percent of cases are mild or asymptomatic, according to the World Health Organization.

Several dengue vaccines have been developed, and researchers have also used a bacteria that sterilises mosquitoes to tackle the virus.

But neither option is yet close to eradicating dengue, and *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes carry other diseases, including zika and yellow fever.

New formulas needed

Resistance was also detected in another type of mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, though at lower levels -- possibly because it tends to feed outdoors, often on animals, and may be exposed to insecticides less than its human-loving *Aedes aegypti* counterparts.

The research found several genetic changes were linked with resistance, including two that occur close to the part of mosquitoes targeted by

pyrethroid and several other insecticides.

Resistance levels differed, with mosquitos from Ghana as well as parts of Indonesia and Taiwan still relatively susceptible to existing chemicals, particularly at higher doses.

But the research shows "commonly employed strategies



may no longer be effective,” said Cameron Webb, an associate professor and mosquito researcher at NSW Health Pathology and the University of Sydney.

“There is growing evidence that there may not be a place for current insecticide formulations in controlling populations of key mosquito pests,” Webb told AFP.

He said new chemicals are needed, but authorities and researchers also need to think of other ways to protect communities, including vaccines.

“We have to think about rotating insecticides... that have different target sites,” added Kasai, whose research was published last month in the journal Science Advances.

“The problem is that we don’t have so many different kinds that we can use.”

Other options include more efforts to remove breeding sites. When and where the mutations for resistance emerged is still a mystery, but Kasai is now expanding the research elsewhere in Asia and examining more recent samples

from Cambodia and Vietnam to see if anything has changed from the 2016-2019 study period.

“We are worried that the mosquitoes with the mutations that we found in this study will spread to the rest of the world in the near future,” he said.

“Before that, we have to think of a solution.”

AFP



Fumigating against mosquitoes in Mumbai, India. Photo: EPA

RULE OF LAW STANDS BETWEEN PEACE AND 'BRUTAL STRUGGLE FOR POWER' – GUTERRES



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

A role to play

Spotlighting the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Human Rights Council and its various Commissions of Inquiry, he reminded that UN entities and mechanisms promote and implement ROL.

Around the world, the UN is “mobilized against impunity and committed to holding perpetrators to account through fair, independent judicial proceedings”, said the UN chief.

“We also strengthen the rule of law by supporting victims and survivors and providing access to justice, remedy and reparation”.

Describing the ICJ as “an aspiration for accountability for the most serious crimes”, he noted the importance of accepting the Court’s “compulsory jurisdiction” and pointed to the Security Council as bearing “a special responsibility” in this.

Member States

The Secretary-General outlined how Member States can strengthen the Organization in promoting ROL by upholding the UN Charter, Declaration of Human Rights, and international law; settling disputes peacefully; advocating for equal rights for all; and committing to people’s self-determination and the “sovereign equality” of Member States.

“While the challenges are

The rule of law forms the bedrock of all international cooperation and the ability of multilateralism to operate effectively, Secretary-General António Guterres told the Security Council on Thursday, describing it as “foundational” to the whole United Nations.

“From the smallest village to the global stage, the rule of law (ROL) is all that stands between peace and stability, and a brutal struggle for power and resources”, he said, arguing that it protects the vulnerable; prevents discrimination; bolsters trust in institutions; supports inclusive economies and societies; and is the first line of defence against atrocity crimes.

‘Grave risk’ of lawlessness

The UN chief painted a grim picture of civilians around the world suffering from devastating

conflicts, rising poverty, and surging hunger, warning that “we are at grave risk of the Rule of Lawlessness”.

From illegally developing nuclear weapons to non-sanctioned use of force, “States continue to flout international law with impunity”, he continued.

Mr. Guterres cited Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; unlawful killings of both Palestinians and Israelis; “gender-based apartheid” in Afghanistan; the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s unlawful nuclear weapons programme; violence and “severe human rights violations” in Myanmar; and “a deep institutional crisis” in Haiti.

“As these examples illustrate, adherence to the rule of law is more important than ever. All Member States have a responsibility to uphold it at every turn”, stated the top UN official.

many, the primacy of the rule of law is essential to the maintenance of international peace and security and for peacebuilding efforts”, he underscored.

Negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration, are all important tools for upholding the legal framework, according to the UN chief.

At the national level, he maintained that it builds trust between people and institutions; reduces corruption; and enables societies and economies to run smoothly.

Conversely, without legal rules in place, “impunity prevails, organized crime flourishes, and there is a high risk of violent conflict”.

He said the legal framework reinforced efforts to reach the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), saying that “poverty, injustice and exclusion can only be addressed through effective, non-discriminatory, inclusive public policies”.

The UN stands ready to support Member States through its country teams around the world.

Looking ahead

The Our Common Agenda report – a blueprint for global cooperation and reinvigorated multilateralism – calls for a new common acceptance of legal rules that provides an opportunity to reset and reinforce them across the board at the UN.

It sets out the links between the rule of law, human rights and development, and calls

for a people-centred approach in which laws and justice are accessible to all.

This will also be reflected in the New Agenda for Peace.

“The rule of law is key to addressing existing and future challenges, from nuclear disarmament to the climate crisis, the collapse of biodiversity, pandemics and dangerous diseases”, said the UN chief, adding that it must adapt to the changing environment and technological advancements.

UN’s exceptional position

In closing, he observed that the UN’s “legitimacy, convening power and normative impact” puts it in a unique position to promote innovation and progress in accordance with legal rules.

The Security Council has “a critical role” in broadening the ROL too: “Together, let us commit to advancing the rule of law to create a more stable and secure world for all”.

No white flag

Focusing on the peaceful settlement of international disputes, ICJ President Joan Donoghue said that States’ behaviour “largely determines whether the rule of law is being respected”.

Once proclaiming their fidelity at the international level, the Judge explained that they may “not settle their disputes by using or threatening force and must be prepared to have the legality of their conduct evaluated by international courts and tribunals”.

Acknowledging that States

prize their autonomy and strive to safeguard whatever power they hold, she affirmed that at the international level, “the concept of the rule of law is in a constant battle with these competing tendencies” but assured that it is not time to “wave the white flag of surrender”.

Sidelining a dysfunctional Council

From Oxford University, Public International Law Professor Dapo Akande, drew attention to individual members of the Security Council whose ultimate responsibility it is, along with all States, to ensure the observance of international law.

When the Council collectively fails to fulfill its responsibilities, other organs of the UN such as the General Assembly or the Secretariat, are left having to take responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and promoting the rule of law, he said.

States should be fulfilling their duty to take “lawful steps, to bring to an end, serious violations of the most important international law obligations”.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Dinis Bazgutinoiz

SHAN STATE

Myanmar junta keeps border gates with China closed following COVID-19 surge. China opened three border gates to Myanmar on 8 January, but Myanmar refused to open the gates on its side of the border, despite announcing that it would. The Chinese Embassy in Yangon said that the three border gates on the Myanmar border in China's Ruili City in Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan Province, opposite Muse in Myanmar's Shan north, would be opened at 8:00 a.m. on 8 January, after having been closed for the last three years. But, following fears resulting from surging COVID-19 infection rates in China, the Myanmar authorities decided to suspend opening the border gates, according to sources on the Myanmar side of the gates. These three border gates, Nandaw, Sinphyu (White Elephant) and Manwein see the highest levels of border trade between China and Myanmar. Goods that go through these gates are often traded at Muse's 105-Mile Border Market. Over \$4,800 million USD was traded at the 105-Mile Border Market in the 2019 to 2020 financial year, but following the February 2021 coup and COVID-19 restrictions that trade plummeted to about \$300 million USD for the 2021 to 2022 financial year. Myanmar border traders who were planning to export rice and other cereal crops through these gates are now unable to do so and are facing financial hardships. Some people who were also waiting to cross into China have been unable to do so because the Myanmar gates are closed. According to the border traders the Myanmar junta appears to be monitoring the rate of COVID-19 infections in China. The traders did not know how long the border gates would remain closed on the Myanmar side.

CHIN STATE

Junta's Chin State airstrike on CNF/CNA Camp kills five rebels and hits India. Five Chin National Army soldiers were killed in a Myanmar junta airstrike on Victoria Camp, the Chin National Front/Chin National Army (CNF/CNA) headquarters, in Chin State's Thantlang Township, on 10 January. Victoria Camp is just on the Myanmar side of the border with India. At 4:30 p.m. two junta aircraft dropped five bombs, one of which exploded in Mizoram, India. Five CNA soldiers, two of whom were female, were killed and at least another 10 were injured. CNF/CNA spokesperson Salai Htet Ni said to Mizzima: "Three of the five bombs exploded in the camp. The CNA soldiers were killed by the explosions. The Indian government had yet to issue a statement about the bomb that landed on Indian territory. The airstrike also damaged a house, a clinic and some other buildings on the Myanmar side of the border. On the Indian side of the border the force of the explosions shattered a lorry's windscreen. The Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) also strongly condemned the attack in a statement that said now is a critical time in the history of the Chin people and it encouraged the people and revolutionary forces to unite and work together to achieve the common goal of defeating the junta. The dead CNF soldiers were named as: Salai van Robyan, Mai Ngong Lay Pao, Mai Shwe Lan Pao, Salai Douthin, and Salai Kilman. The CNF was formed on 20 March 1988 and it signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2012, but since the February 2021 coup there has been some fierce fighting in Chin State and many people have been displaced. The junta has set fire to Thantlang Town over 25 times gutting more than 1,000 houses out of a total of 1,800 houses in the town, causing the entire civilian population to flee.



MILITARY GIVES ELECTORAL TRAINING TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN NPT

Myanmar's military gave electoral training to government officials and civil servants from 11 to 14 January at No.3 Transit Camp in Pobba Thiri Township in Nay Pyi Taw, according to residents.

A resident said that the trainees who came to attend the electoral training held by the military were deputy directors and other top officials of governmental departments including the department of immigration and the department of general administration.

Among the trainers was former major general Thein Soe, chairperson of the Union Election Commission (UEC).

Since 9 January, the list of eligible voters have started to be collected in Nay Pyi Taw and some townships in Myanmar, and there were gun shootings and bomb blasts during the voter list process in some townships.

THILAWA SEZ SEES DROP IN RENT INCOME DUE TO DROP IN FOREIGN INVESTMENTS



Photo: EPA

Foreign investment in Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has fallen drastically, negatively impacting land or ground rent income by over 6 billion kyat, said the Thilawa SEZ Management Committee said.

About 113 factories from 20 countries invested in Thilawa SEZ and 93 factories and manufacturing units were still running until June 2022 but the number has increased to 102 at the end of December 2022.

Despite more factories running in the SEZ the inflow of foreign investment reportedly fell drastically so that the income from land rent in the SEZ has seen a drop.

The committee said: "Foreign investments fell after COVID-19 and then the land rent income fell from 8.628 billion kyat last year to 2.581 billion kyat this year (2022)."

Total foreign investment in Thilawa SEZ stands at US\$2.18 billion up to the end of November 2022.

MYAWADDY TO MAE SOT FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE NUMBER 1 RE-OPENS

Friendship Bridge Number 1 between Myawaddy in Myanmar and Mae Sot in Thailand opened again on 12 January after being closed for nearly three years.

The bridge was closed in February 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this was the first time the border crossing had opened since then.

For more than a year there had been rumours about the bridge re-opening that came to nothing, until now.

The Myawaddy District Administrator attended the 12 January opening ceremony from Myanmar as did the Tak Province Administrator from Thailand. They were accompanied by officials from both countries.

When the bridge officially reopened at 9:00 am there were many people waiting to cross from both sides.

Apparently both sides had been cleaning and preparing the bridge since early January in readiness for this opening.

While the bridge was closed people could not cross between the countries. Many Myanmar migrant workers who had wanted to return home had been stuck in Mae Sot because of the bridge closure.

The nearby Friendship Bridge Number 2 was open, but that only allowed trucks and cargo through, not foot passengers.

Friendship Bridge Number 1 will be open daily from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.



Myawaddy Border crossing.
Photo: EPA

THAI FIRM TO BUY CONTROLLING STAKE IN ESSO THAILAND



Photo:Facebook

Thai energy conglomerate Bangchak is to buy a controlling stake in US energy giant ExxonMobil's business in the kingdom, the two companies said Thursday last week.

The leading Thai energy firm will buy a 66 percent stake in Esso Thailand (ETL) - at a final price to be determined later - from United States ExxonMobil, they said in a statement.

Bangchak said the agreement valued ETL at 55.5 billion baht (\$1.6 billion) in total and the sale is expected to be completed in the second half of 2023.

The deal will give Bangchak control of a major refinery, increasing its capacity by 174,000 barrels per day, as well as a network of 700 Esso-branded stations.

"This investment is a step towards greater energy security, balancing our long-term strategy with energy affordability and sustainability," said Chaiwat Kovavisarach, Bangchak Group's chief executive officer and president.

Bangchak said it would seek to buy the remaining shares - currently held by a range of Thai and foreign investors - after the ExxonMobil sale is completed.

ExxonMobil will retain a presence in Thailand through its finished lubricant and chemical products business, under a yet-to-be-formed company.

President of ExxonMobil Product Solutions Karen McKee said the company was focused on meeting demand for "lower-emissions fuels and high-performance products".

ExxonMobil reported earnings of \$37.6 billion over the second and third quarters of 2022.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

ISRAEL'S COGNYTE SOFTWARE WINS TENDER TO SELL INTERCEPT SPYWARE TO MYANMAR

Israel's Cognyte Software, global leader in investigative analytics software, won a tender to sell intercept spyware to Myanmar's state-backed telecommunications firm MPT a month before the Southeast Asian nation's February 2021 military coup, reported Reuters.

The agreement was finalised despite Israel's assertion that it no longer provides defence technology to Myanmar as a result of a 2017 Israeli Supreme Court decision, according to a legal complaint recently filed with Israel's attorney general.

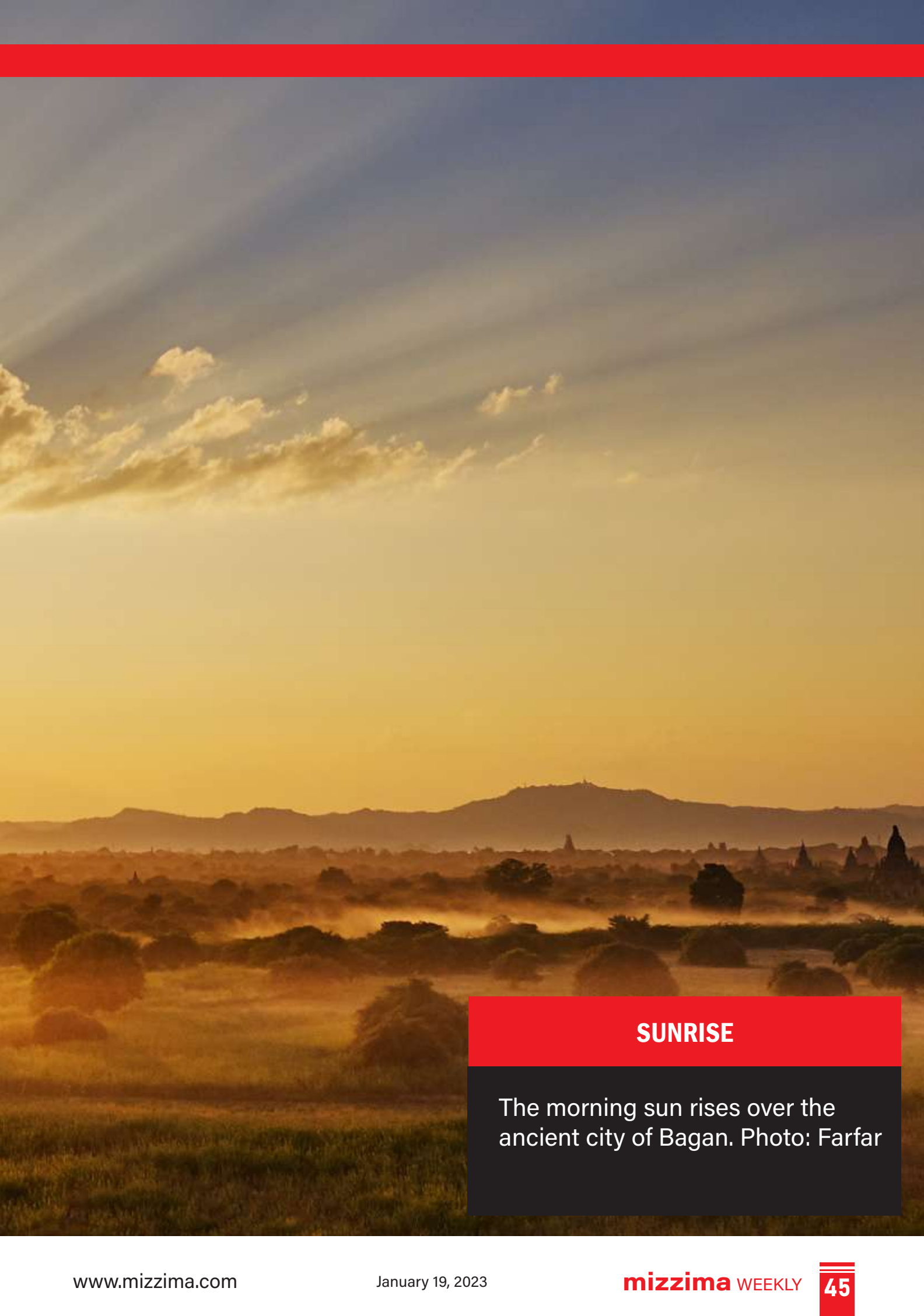
While the ruling was subject to a rare gag order at the request of the state and media cannot cite the verdict, Israel's government has occasionally declared in the media that defence supplies to Myanmar are forbidden, according to Reuters.

The authorities who buy this spyware will have the ability to listen in on calls, read messages and emails, browse other websites, and find out where users are online, according to the Wire, an Indian nonprofit news and opinion website.

Even before the military takeover in Myanmar, public concern in Israel about its defence exports to Myanmar had grown following the Burmese army's cruel crackdown on Rohingya in 2017.

The crackdown served as the impetus for Israeli human rights lawyer Eitay Mack's appeal asking the Israeli Supreme Court to impose a ban on the shipment of weapons to Myanmar.





SUNRISE

The morning sun rises over the ancient city of Bagan. Photo: Farfar

MISS MYANMAR COMPETES IN THE 71 ST MISS UNIVERSE COMPETITION IN NEW ORLEANS



● Zar Li Moe. Photo: APF



● Zar Li Moe. Photo: APF

Miss Myanmar Zar Li Moe took part on the weekend in the 71st Miss Universe competition at New Orleans Morial Convention Center in Louisiana in the USA.

People around the globe gathered to enjoy the 2023 Miss Universe live from New Orleans. The delegates introduced themselves after a triumphal entrance in which they simulated a Mardi Gras parade while a local band performed buzzing and vibrant jazz, reports Hola.com.

Over eighty candidates representing their country competed for the Miss Universe crown during the 71st annual pageant that kicked off from the Big Easy with new hosts and a new network.

Unfortunately for Myanmar supporters, Miss Myanmar did not get into the finalist line-up.

In the end, the winner was the United States, R'Bonney Gabriel. First runner up was Venezuela, Amanda Dudamel, and second runner up was Dominican Republic, Andreína Martínez.

WINNER: United States:
R'Bonney Gabriel

FIRST RUNNER-UP:
Venezuela: Amanda
Dudamel

SECOND PLACE:
Dominican Republic:
Andreína Martínez



Miss USA R-Bonny Gabriel - the winner.
Photo: AFP



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