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## WEEKLY

myanmar news & insight

# MAKESHIFT WEAPONRY

Myanmar fighters risk life and limb in DIY weapons factories



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## EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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**MIZZIMA MAGAZINE**

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# OUTGUNNED BUT COMMITTED

**T**he fighters of Myanmar's Spring Revolution may be outgunned but they are committed to ousting the illegal military junta.

As we highlight in our cover story this week, many of the People's Defence Fighters or PDFs have to rely on makeshift and home-made weapons and ammunition to fight against the military might of the junta.

This is a tough situation to be in.

As outlined in our story, there are three core issues when it comes to the PDF arsenal.

Firstly, the PDF fighters have a limited number of weapons and small stocks of ammunition to fight against the Myanmar military, whose weaponry includes tanks, armoured cars, artillery, rocket-launchers and helicopters and jet fighters.

Secondly, many of the weapons that PDF fighters use are home or local factory made, and of limited quality and accuracy.

Thirdly, making weapons with limited tools and machinery is difficult and potentially deadly, as a number of weapon and ammunition makers have been injured or killed in the making and testing of weapons.

The tenacity of the weapons makers and the users should be applauded. But there are few conflicts around the world where the opposition or guerrillas are so poorly armed.

Myanmar PDF fighters have a hard time in their operations against the Myanmar junta forces. They are heavily out-gunned.

Guerrilla tactics including the use of drones and improvised explosive devices are proving testing for the junta.

But it is still hard to get away from the fact that the Spring Revolution fighters need better weapons and in larger quantities, as they point out.

The Myanmar PDF fighters are committed – but it will be a long war.



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**COVER PHOTO OF PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FIGHTERS IN KAYIN STATE BY AFP**







## ON THE STREET

**A** man walks past an ATM on a street in Yangon last week.  
Photo: EPA

## ONE PERSON BUYS 10 PLOTS OF LAND FROM NUG FOR \$2.4 MILLION USD

One person paid \$2.4 million USD to buy the last 10 remaining plots of land sold by the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile to raise funds for the revolution.

The plots of land, which are located south of Aung San Suu Kyi Street in Mandalay, were illegally seized by the military.

The land was sold by the NUG as part of the Spring Rose Real Estate Project where they 'sell' land illegally seized by the junta. The NUG then uses the money from the 'sale' of the land to help fund the Spring Revolution

in Myanmar. Once the revolution succeeds and the army is expelled from the country the newly installed NUG government will give the buyers their land.

The NUG Minister of Finance and Investment said on his social media page: "We respectfully salute and bow our heads to all the people who are involved in and serving the revolution with firm commitments and a belief in victory, as well as those who bought single plots [of land] and many plots."

The land seized by the military south of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi Street on 38th Street, between 73rd and

78th Street, was divided into 20 plots measuring 100 feet by 100 feet by the NUG Ministry of Planning, Finance and Investment. It offered each plot for sale at a price of \$240,000 USD per plot.

The land sale started on 1 October and by 4 November 10 of the plots had been bought. On 5 November, a buyer bought the remaining 10 plots for \$2.4 million USD.

The land has been illegally seized by the military, which has built a compound to house a battalion on the land, according to the Mandalay Strike Force.

## MILITARY OPERATIONS IN MYANMAR'S SAGAING COST FARMERS DEARLY

Local farmers in Yinmarbin District in Myanmar's Sagaing Region are reportedly facing difficulties in their farming as the farm input costs are rising due to military operations being launched in their area, in addition to farm damage and crop losses.

The farmers in Yinmarbin District primarily grows onion, tomato, sunflower, chicken pea and sesame for their living but now they are facing rising costs of farm inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides and weed killers in this farming season. These essentials are selling at exorbitant prices.

Moreover, the military operations

being launched in their local areas disrupted their farming and harvesting. The farmers could not harvest their crops in time because of these military offensives, which damaged their farming and crops. Local pro-junta militias have also damaged and disrupted farming activity.

A local farmer from Yinbaungtaing village in Yinmarbin said: "There were many farms damaged in last monsoon season as we could not harvest our groundnut farming during their military operations. Some of the farms in Pale Township were damaged by militia. The roads were closed during their military operations and then the

costs of these farm inputs rose."

The farmers could not grow their crops and harvest them in time - hence they lost money. Some of these farms were also damaged by heavy weapons including helicopter gunships sent by the Military Council.

These farmers mainly grow wheat, chick peas and sunflower in their farms in this season. The local farmers had to flee from their homes and farming frequently because of military operations launched by junta and clashes with local resistance forces. Farming has been severely disrupted in this dirt-poor region.

# BUS DRIVER KILLED IN YANGON BUS COLLISION

A driver was killed and more than 30 passengers were injured when two buses were involved in a head-on collision in Yangon at about 10:00 p.m. on 6 November.

The two public buses, a number 61 bus and a number 69 bus, both from the Yangon Bus Service (YBS), hit each other head-on whilst on the Aung Zaya Bridge that spans the river between Insein and Hlaing Thayar townships. The driving cab of one of

the buses was crushed and the driver was killed.

An official from the Insein Township Myanmar Red Cross Society said: "There are currently 18 passengers in Insein hospital. Two people have been transferred to North Okkalapa General Hospital for further treatment. Insein Hospital confirmed that only one of the drivers died in the accident. The health of three passengers at Insein hospital is worsening."

Only people on the buses were injured, there were no injuries amongst bystanders.

A Red cross official who attended the accident said: "The main issue was the reckless way one of the [bus] drivers was driving. The buses collided when one crossed the [centre of] the road and drove on the wrong side [of the road]."

Mizzima is still looking into the incident.

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## GANGS ROB PASSENGERS ON TWO YANGON BUSES IN ONE DAY

Passengers on two Yangon Bus Service (YBS) public buses were robbed by gangs in the Yangon townships of Hlaing and Dagon Myothit (South) on 5 November.

At around 6:30 a.m. on 5 November, a husband and wife on the YBS bus number 103 were beaten and had their belongings and jewellery stolen from them, according to residents of Dagon Myothit (South).

They said that a gang of five men got onto the bus at the Gate Huang bus stop in Dagon Myothit (South) Township, committed the robbery and left the bus at the Youtkaw Park bus stop in the same township.

Also on 5 November, at around 3:00 p.m., on the YBS bus number 22, about six people threatened some of the passengers with knives and robbed them of their belongings, including phones, wallets and jewellery, before getting off the bus at the Than Lan bus stop in Hlaing Township, according to residents of Hlaing Township.

In response to the incidents, a lawyer said: "The people of Yangon are no longer safe because of the situation in the country. So, there may be more thugs and we must prepare on our own. For our own safety, we should carry pepper spray or an electric tazer. Also, people need to work together to fight the thugs, but right now, people

are just standing around watching the robberies."

None of the robbers in the two incidents have yet been arrested, according to locals.

Since the junta took power there has been an increase in crime.

On 2 November robbers stole 20 million kyats from a construction materials shop in Pabedan Township, Yangon and on 30 October an elderly couple was found murdered in their home in Yangon City's Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township.

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## GUERRILLAS BOMB BUS SERVICE AND OTHER TARGETS IN YANGON

Anti-junta guerrillas targeted a number of junta-related sites in Yangon on 3 November.

At around 9:00 pm, an urban guerrilla force detonated a remote-controlled bomb at the Yangon Bus Service (YBS) compound on East-Horse Racing Road, Tamwe township, Yangon.

"Before the Military Council guards noticed, an explosive bomb was dropped in front of the gate of the Yangon Bus Service (YBS) compound, and then it was detonated from a

distance," said a spokesperson for Black panda from the Yangon Special Guerrilla Force. "There were security guards around, so we had to disguise ourselves to detonate it."

The Yangon Special Guerrilla Force carried out the attack, and one junta soldier was injured as a result of the explosion.

Around the same time, other guerrilla actions took place in Yangon.

Human Rights Defenders force detonated a remote-controlled mine

in the YBS car compound owned by Myanmar Economic Holdings Public Company Limited owed by the Myanmar military, at the corner of Min Ye Kyaw Swa Road and Ka Naung Minthar Gyi Road, East Dagon Township, at 8:30 pm, according to a statement released by Yangon Special Guerrilla Force.

According to local residents, there were explosions in North Dagon, South Okkalapa, and Bahan townships around 9 pm on the same night.



PDF fighter working on various ammunition  
in Pale, Myanmar. Photo: AFP



# MAKESHIFT WEAPONRY

## Myanmar fighters risk life and limb in DIY weapons factories

**U**nder an awning in a bamboo thicket in northern Myanmar, an anti-coup fighter following instructions from YouTube welds scavenged steel into crude mortar rounds and shells to be fired at junta troops. Almost two years after seizing power, the military has been unable to crush local militias that have sprung up to fight the putsch with hit-and-run tactics.

In turn, these People's Defence Forces (PDF) remain massively outgunned by the military's artillery strikes, Chinese and Russian-made jets and Israeli-patterned rifles.

Captured weapons and expensive purchases on the black market have provided patchy boosts to PDF firepower, analysts say, but many militias have turned to risky trial-and-error operations to churn out their own rockets, mines and mortars.

"We just learn how to build weapons from the internet or YouTube," said Nay Min, an anti-coup fighter from the northern Sagaing region.

"We search how to cook saltpetre (potassium nitrate), how to combine it to get gunpowder, how to build rifles. We haven't received any training," he told AFP.

Those with engineering or mechanical backgrounds, like his comrade Nay Myo Win, experiment and come up with prototypes or copies of captured weapons, he said.

Blowtorches in hand, they sweat for hours in makeshift workshops powered by generators that are frequent targets of junta raids.

Nay Myo Win mixes saltpetre to

**"We just learn how to build weapons from the internet or YouTube," said Nay Min, an anti-coup fighter from the northern Sagaing region.**

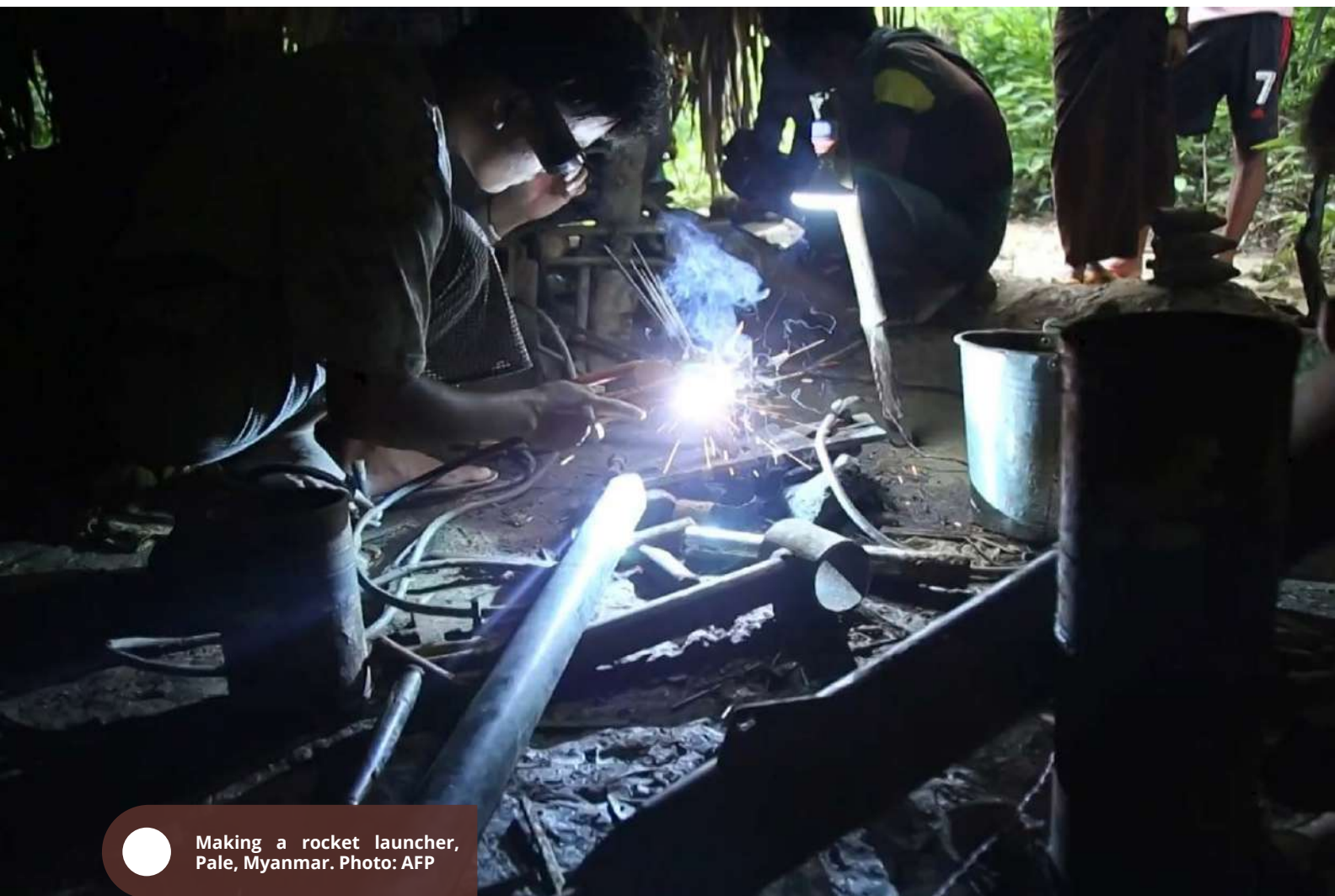
make the gunpowder needed to fire mortar shells filled with lead and scrap metal that he claims have a range of just over two kilometres (1.2 miles).

#### **Crude armaments**

Laid out on a tarpaulin ahead of a mission in October, the mortars are unimpressive -- little more than construction pipes welded to bipods.

The shells require two charges to detonate - one to fire the shell and the other to explode on impact - a method first used at the beginning of the 20th century.

But the damage is substantial, Nay Min said - "around 15 feet from the target it will hit people and they will die or be wounded".



Making a rocket launcher, Pale, Myanmar. Photo: AFP

One batch of shells was made from a telecoms tower owned by a firm close to the military, which was sabotaged by PDF fighters some months ago.

"We just wanted to destroy their business," Nay Min added.

"But, after we had started making homemade weapons ... we needed more stainless steel and we thought of the tower."

Nay Min's group is one of dozens of PDF militias in Sagaing making their own weapons in a bid to turn the tide in the fighting.

Many upload footage of successful tests of mortars, rockets or mines to social media, with joyous shouts accompanying each loud bang.

But the work can be deadly.

"It's more than dangerous," said Bo Shaung, an anti-coup fighter and rocket maker from another group operating in Sagaing.

"When we cook gunpowder, if we add too much saltpetre, it's dangerous. If we add too little, it's also dangerous."

One video obtained by AFP shows a new mortar being tested. The shell explodes in the barrel, killing the fighter who had just loaded it.

Thu Ya, another anti-coup fighter, said he lost his sight six months ago when the explosive he was handling went off too soon.

"I got injuries on my hands and feet which have recovered now but I... still have blurry vision," he said.

In the absence of machines like lathes and voltage regulators, each shell is made by hand.

And for all the risk that comes with producing them, the homemade munitions are often more bark than bite.

### 'Drain on morale'

Once a target has been selected, preparing ammunition for an attack can take up to 10 days, Nay Min said.

His group relies on information from locals to gauge troop positions.

To guide their fire they have little more than Google Maps to measure the distance from the target.

"We normally attack them in our own areas and we all know the locations and distance," he said, insisting that most attacks were accurate.

Assessing the effectiveness of these weapons is "extremely difficult" in the absence of impartial reporting from the field, said Bangkok-based security analyst Anthony Davis.

Both sides regularly inflate or play down their casualty figures, analysts say.

But Davis said the spread of locally made mortars and rockets "indicates that these systems are far from simply window-dressing".

"They inflict real casualties but perhaps as importantly are a constant drain on the morale of often isolated army units on the receiving end."

The junta has labelled all PDF groups as "terrorists". It blames anti-coup fighters for the deaths of more than 4,000 civilians.

Nay Min sees his group's fight as justified.

"We are satisfied with what we have done," he said.

But "we need everything. Especially we need weapons."

**AFP, Mizzima**



Weapons are makeshift at best. Photos: AFP

# EU EXTENDS MYANMAR SANCTIONS, TARGETS MINISTER AND JUDGE

**T**he EU on Tuesday extended its sanctions on Myanmar's junta, targeting 19 more individuals and entities including a minister and a chief justice.

The measures against Myanmar were announced by the European Council because of "the continuing escalation of violence and grave human rights violations following the military takeover two years ago".

It was the fifth package of EU sanctions on the southeast Asian country, under military rule since 2020 when the military staged a coup against a civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, now in prison on corruption charges judged spurious by Europe.

Myanmar has been in turmoil under the junta, which faces

widespread armed resistance and has responded with a brutal crackdown.

A local rights group says 2,300 people have been killed in the past two years, and the UN children's agency estimates that one million people have been displaced.

The latest sanctions target Myanmar's minister of investment and foreign economic relations, Kan Zaw, the supreme court chief justice Htun Htun Oo, and high-ranking military officials.

Also listed were election commission officials and business people representing firms linked to the junta.

In total, 84 individuals and 11 entities in Myanmar now fall under the EU sanctions, which include visa

bans and the freezing of assets in the European Union.

Previous sanctions maintained include an embargo on weapons and on equipment that can be used to spy on communications.

"The EU is deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and the evolution towards a protracted conflict which has spread across the country and has regional implications," the European Council said in a statement.

It added that it would do everything possible to bring to justice those responsible for "human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity" in the wake of the coup.

**AFP**



Photo: Alexandre Lallemand

# ASEAN ACTIVELY AIDING AND ABETTING MYANMAR JUNTA'S WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has appointed the Myanmar junta to chair the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference and allowed it to take control of the ASEAN counter-terrorism website.

The illegitimate Myanmar military junta has been appointed chair of the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference, as it intensifies the use of its air force to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It is also continuing to co-chair

the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) - Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism and will host a meeting in December. The junta is using its control of the ASEAN counter terrorism website to post disinformation and propaganda.



ASEAN chairman Prak Sakhonn. Photo: AFP

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## **Campaign organisation Justice for Myanmar believes that through these actions, ASEAN is knowingly actively aiding and abetting the junta's war crimes and crimes against humanity.**

Campaign organisation Justice for Myanmar believes that through these actions, ASEAN is knowingly actively aiding and abetting the junta's war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The organisation is calling on ASEAN to end its complicity in the junta's international crimes by immediately revoking its leadership roles in the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference and the ADMM - Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism, excluding it from all meetings and activities and recognising and supporting

Despite increasingly using its air force to commit war crimes, the illegitimate Myanmar junta was still appointed chair of the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference.

Recent junta aerial attacks include indiscriminate air strikes against a concert in Kachin State, killing more than 80 people, and against a school in Let Yet Kone village, Sagaing, killing at least 12 people.

By placing the Myanmar military's Commander-in-Chief (Air) General Tun Aung, a war criminal, in charge of the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference, ASEAN is knowingly and actively aiding and

abetting the junta to continue its war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to Justice for Myanmar.

General Tun Aung will lead the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference for the next year, which will involve a series of interactions between ASEAN air forces. The handover to the junta took place during a meeting in Laos on 4 November.

The junta's leadership of the air chiefs conference coincides with Indonesia's chair of ASEAN.

The junta is also being allowed to continue to lead the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism, alongside the Russian regime.

As the co-chair, the Myanmar junta is maintaining the group's website and recently updated it to include a section titled "Terrorist News", in which it is posting disinformation and propaganda taken from junta-controlled media.

These include posts that label Myanmar's legitimate government and democratic institutions, the National Unity Government (NUG), Committee Representing Peoples' Hluttaw (CRPH)

and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) as "terrorist", a designation that the junta uses as a pretext for its ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In its role as co-chair of the ASEAN working group, the Myanmar junta, which is a terrorist organisation under Myanmar and international law, is calling the Myanmar people's sovereign choice of government a terrorist organisation.

The NUG was formed by the CRPH, based on a popular mandate from the people of Myanmar through the 2020 general election. In contrast, the Myanmar military's coup attempt is illegal under the military-drafted 2008 constitution, and therefore the junta is an illegal entity.

One propaganda post on the ASEAN website from 3 November states, "the CRPH/NUG terrorist groups and PDF terrorists, with the intention to disrupt the State peace, tranquillity and rule of law, are committing the acts of terrorism and vandalism such as burning down and blowing up the houses, office buildings, roads and bridges by using various means. Therefore, the entire population want the international community to denounce the terrorists."

Another post from 18 September espouses the military's false claims that the National League for Democracy (NLD) committed electoral fraud in the 2020 election. It states, "the root causes leading to the current political unrests are the electoral frauds that occurred in 2020 general elections. The NLD party that cunningly cheated and frauded the votes in the election are committing the acts of terrorism applying the armed approach after forming the NUG group that comprised extremists of NLD party members".

The post goes on to state that Myanmar's representative to the UN, U Kyaw Moe Tun, is a "fugitive", and warns that countries supporting NUG "will be presumed as the terrorists in international arena". It then baselessly accuses the non-governmental organisation, Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) of spreading "fake news and disinformation".

SAC-M's members are comprised of former UN experts on Myanmar, including Yanghee Lee of South Korea, Marzuki Darusman of Indonesia and Chris Sidoti of Australia, whose governments are part of the junta-led

counter terrorism working group. SAC-M is the organisation that demonstrated that the Myanmar junta is a terrorist organisation as defined in national and international law and called for it be designated and treated as such.

The junta further uses the ASEAN website to post names and photos of so-called "terrorists" that it is seeking to detain or has detained under conditions where torture is routine, which amounts to crimes against humanity. The posts include graphic images of victims.

### **Junta to host December ASEAN meeting**

The Myanmar junta is set to host the next ASEAN counter terrorism meeting via video conference from Myanmar on 5-6 December, according to the working group website. Allowing the junta to co-chair the December meeting will deepen ASEAN's complicity in the junta's atrocity crimes and embolden the junta as it continues to wage a war of terror against the people of Myanmar.

The December meeting follows a bilateral counter terrorism meeting between the Russian military and the Myanmar military junta in Naypyidaw in September, under the ASEAN defence platform.

While a report on the September meeting has not been made public, it is likely that it included broader discussions on bilateral defence cooperation.

By allowing the junta to lead the counter terrorism working group, ASEAN is facilitating deepening ties between the junta and Russia. Russia remains one of the main arms suppliers of the Myanmar military and also provides military training and other forms of support.

The working group's last multilateral meeting was held in Moscow in July 2022. Australia, New Zealand and the USA all announced a boycott of the meeting.

### **International legal implications**

In May, Justice For Myanmar concluded that through ongoing military support, legitimacy and the impeding of international action to resolve the crisis in Myanmar, it is likely that ASEAN is aiding and abetting the junta's war crimes and crimes against humanity. ASEAN's continued military engagement with

the junta only exacerbates its liability in the junta's international crimes.

ASEAN has been warned by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar that its efforts to address the Myanmar crisis is "inadequate" and that a fundamentally new approach is needed "to deprive the junta of the funds, weapons and legitimacy it uses to continue its assault on the rights and democratic aspirations of the people of Myanmar".

ASEAN knows that it is contributing to the junta's international crimes.

By placing the junta in charge of the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference and allowing it to lead the counter-terrorism working group, ASEAN also continues to recognise the illegitimate junta as the government of Myanmar, despite the NUG's democratic mandate. This act of recognition breaches the international legal principle of non-interference in State sovereignty, including in Myanmar's right to choose its own government.

Justice for Myanmar says that ASEAN, its members and the ADMM partners Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the USA must take a clear stand against the junta's war of terror, its illegal coup attempt and its dissemination of disinformation and propaganda through ADMM-Plus.

### **Justice for Myanmar demands the following immediate steps**

1. Revoke the Myanmar junta's position as chair of the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference and co-chair of ADMM's counter-terrorism group.
2. Take control of the counter-terrorism working group website from the junta.
3. Exclude the junta from all ASEAN meetings and activities.
4. Recognise and support the National Unity Government as the legitimate government of Myanmar.
5. Take concrete action to end the Myanmar military's violence against the Myanmar people.
6. Cooperate with UN Member States to impose a global arms embargo on Myanmar

and to refer the Myanmar situation to the International Criminal Court through the UN Security Council.

ASEAN, its members, and its partners must act now to withdraw from aiding and abetting the terrorist junta.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung said: "The junta is a terrorist organisation. It is outrageous that ASEAN's response to the junta's indiscriminate air strikes is to appoint the junta's air chief, a war criminal, in charge of a regional body.

"General Tun Aung must be held accountable for his crimes under international law, not emboldened to step up his slaughter of civilians.

"ASEAN appointed General Tun Aung in charge knowing that he and the junta he represents are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. ASEAN is therefore actively aiding and abetting those international crimes.

"It is unacceptable that ASEAN and its partners see it as appropriate to allow the junta to lead regional defence bodies, providing it with legitimacy, support and platforms for its disinformation and propaganda.

"ASEAN's position is untenable and it must act now to end its complicity in the junta's crimes by immediately revoking its roles in the ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference and ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism, excluding it from all meetings and activities, censuring it for its publication of disinformation and propaganda on an ASEAN website, and recognising and supporting NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar.

"It is deplorable that democracies in the Indo-Pacific, Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the USA are maintaining multilateral defence cooperation with the junta through ASEAN. This only emboldens the junta's extreme violence against the people of Myanmar, giving it a green light to continue to commit atrocity crimes with blanket impunity.

"While we welcome boycotts of the junta's last counter-terrorism meeting, held in Moscow, ADMM-Plus members must do far more to resolve the crisis in Myanmar and end ASEAN's complicity."

# SOUTHEAST ASIA'S RUSSIAN DILEMMA AS SUMMITS LOOM

**S**outheast Asian countries including Myanmar look set to maintain ties with Russia as a trio of global summits loom, despite US-led efforts to isolate Moscow over its Ukraine invasion.

The Ukraine conflict and its repercussions -- higher fuel, energy and food costs and supply chain disruptions -- will loom over the back-to-back gatherings in Phnom Penh, Bali and Bangkok.

The diplomatic whirl begins this week with a gathering of leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has been largely muted on the invasion of Ukraine -- with the exception of Singapore, which imposed sanctions.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked to send a video message to ASEAN and has been invited to attend the G20 summit in Bali, which follows it, in person.

G20 host Indonesia has sought to carve out a peacemaker role, inviting Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as Zelensky, though neither has confirmed his presence.

At ASEAN, Ukraine will sign a "treaty of amity and cooperation", the first step towards establishing formal relations.

Despite these gestures, analysts expect ASEAN nations to continue their longstanding policy of strategic fence-sitting.

"I think what the bloc will do is continue cooperation with Russia in a very business-as-usual fashion," Joanne Lin from Singapore's Yusof Ishak Institute told AFP.

"Many member states are very good at compartmentalising issues."

Putin signalled a pivot to Asia in September in the face of a barrage of Western sanctions, hailing the "colossal new opportunities" the region offered.

Analysts say Russia hopes to curry favour with ASEAN countries struggling with soaring energy bills by offering oil and gas, while also

cementing ties with longstanding allies such as Myanmar and Vietnam.

As Europe tries to wean itself off Russian hydrocarbons, Moscow is scrambling to find new markets and offering huge discounts.

Indonesia's state oil and gas company Pertamina is in talks to buy crude oil, while Myanmar and Laos are also hoping Moscow can ease fuel shortages.

"Russia will attempt to portray itself as a neutral economic and political partner, respectful of ASEAN's agency and independence," Asia Society Australia chief executive Philipp Ivanov told AFP.

## UN abstentions

Over the past year, the Kremlin has stepped up contacts with longstanding allies in the region, particularly Vietnam and military-ruled Myanmar, a major buyer of Russian weaponry for its fight against pro-democracy militias.

Putin welcomed junta supremo Min Aung Hlaing as an honoured guest at an economic forum in Vladivostok last month.

Overtures have also been made to Thailand, with the kingdom's foreign minister visiting Moscow last month for trade-focused talks.

Thailand's crucial tourism industry, struggling to bounce back after the pandemic, is looking to Russia as sanctions make travel to Europe harder for Russians.

Last month, Russia's Aeroflot resumed direct flights to the Thai holiday island of Phuket, more than six months after they were suspended following the invasion of Ukraine.

Thailand, along with Vietnam and Laos -- another longstanding Moscow ally -- joined the likes of China and India in abstaining at a UN General Assembly vote last month to condemn Russia's annexation of parts of Ukraine.

Against Moscow's inducements, Southeast Asian countries will weigh



the risks of breaching US sanctions or stirring Washington's wrath.

Earlier this year, Malaysia was forced to issue hurried denials after its ambassador in Moscow appeared to suggest it was willing to sell semiconductors to Russia.

And the threat of US sanctions sank two major Kremlin arms deals in the region.

In July, the Philippines scrapped a \$216 million deal to buy 16 Russian Mi-17 helicopters.

Last year, Indonesia said it had backed out of an agreement for 11 Russian Su-35 jets.

### China, but not only

As Western sanctions and boycotts bite, Moscow needs to shore up supplies of raw materials, vehicle spare parts, semiconductors as well as consumer goods such as electronics and clothing.

Russia -- the biggest supplier of arms to Southeast Asia in the last 20 years -- is also desperate to buttress its under-pressure military export industry.

"Russian defence companies have been willing to accept part-payment in commodities, (and) pursue joint production," a Yusof Ishak Institute report said.

And while China has been warmer, calling for deeper ties and avoiding criticism of the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is seen as wary of becoming too dependent on Beijing.

Ivanov of the Asia Society said the pivot to Asia "is no longer a policy option, but a necessity" for Russia and diversification of ties would help it avoid "becoming a Chinese vassal state".

"Russia has a lot of work to do in Southeast Asia to lift its economic and diplomatic engagement, and we can expect to see more of Russia in the region," he told AFP.

**AFP**

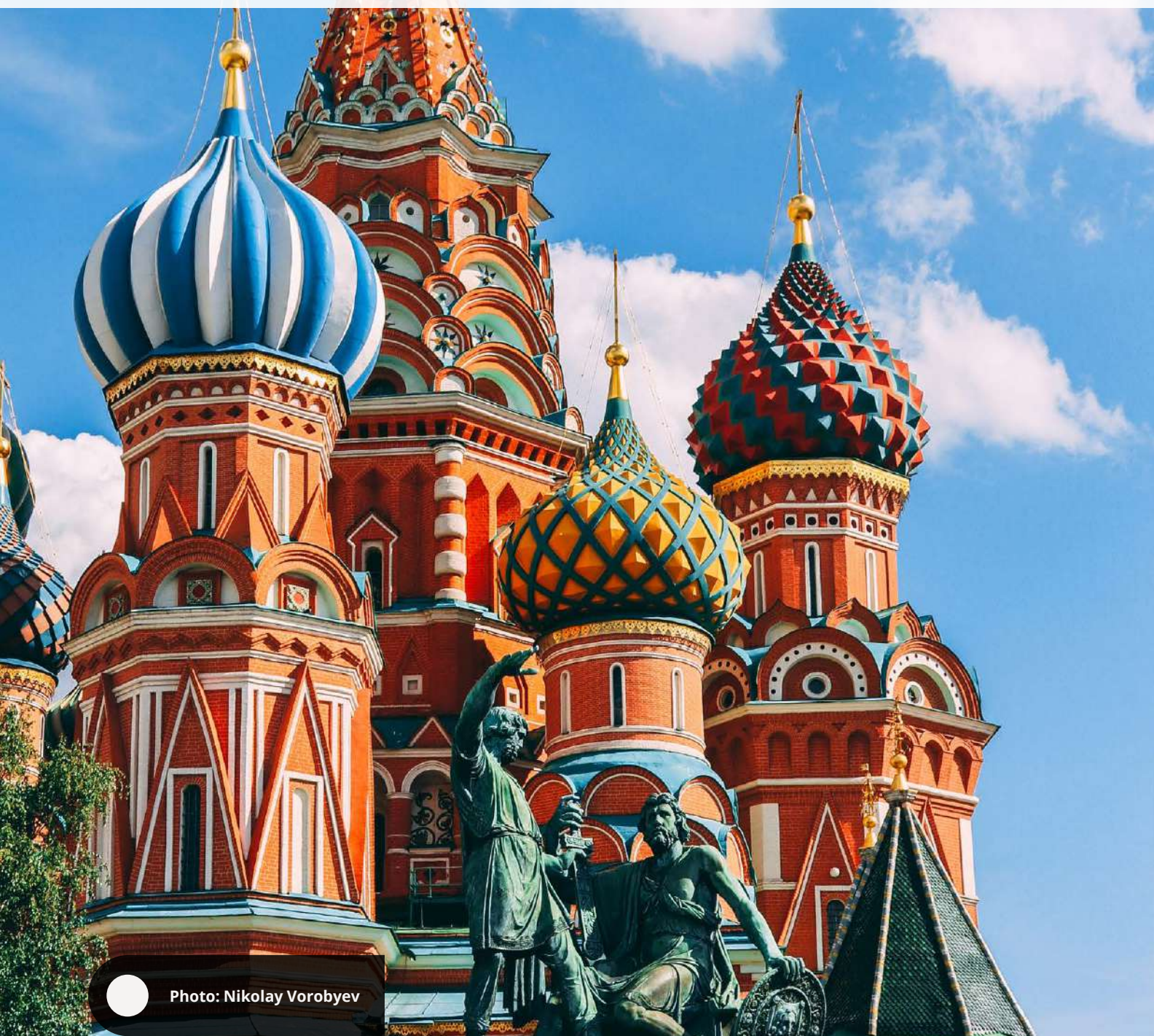


Photo: Nikolay Vorobyev

# MYANMAR JUNTA RELEASES FORMER TOP ELECTION COMMISSION OFFICIALS

Myanmar's junta said Wednesday it has released two top election commission officials jailed for fraud during the 2020 vote won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party.

Election commission chairman Hla Thein and spokesman Myint Naing were detained shortly after the military took power last year, alleging massive fraud in polls that international observers said were largely free and fair.

They were later jailed for three years each in closed-door trials for "failing to give explanations to the people over vote frauds".

The pair -- both in their 70s -- had their sentences quashed last month due to their age and health and the "benevolence of the state", the junta said in a statement.

A junta spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

The junta has cancelled the results of the 2020 elections, in which Suu

Kyi's National League for Democracy trounced its military-backed rival.

It has said it will hold fresh elections next year, plans that have been slammed by the United States but praised by close ally and arms supplier Russia.

All political parties must ask for permission if they wish to meet foreign organisations or individuals, the junta-stacked election commission said in August.

Those failing to comply would have their registration cancelled, it added.

The junta's newly-appointed head of the body previously oversaw elections in 2010 that were boycotted by the NLD and won resoundingly by a military-backed party.

The NLD has been decimated by the coup, with many senior members in hiding or in jail, including Suu Kyi who has been sentenced to 26 years by a closed junta court.

On Tuesday -- the anniversary of the 2020 election -- the NLD called for Suu Kyi's release and for the junta to allow its senior leaders to meet with her.

The Nobel Peace laureate has been detained since the coup and in June was moved from house arrest in the military-built capital Naypyidaw to solitary confinement.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the coup.

More than 2,400 civilians have been killed in a military crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

The junta blames anti-coup fighters for the death of more than 4,000 civilians.

AFP



Myint Naing. Photo: AFP

# NLD STATEMENT CRITICISES MYANMAR JUNTA ON SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF ANNULLED ELECTION

**T**he National League for Democracy (NLD) released a statement on 8 November, the second anniversary of the annulled 8 November 2020 elections that were resoundingly won by the NLD.

The statement criticised the junta's annulment of the 2020 elections and said it would reject the results of the junta's planned elections.

According to the statement 91 political parties participated in the 2020 election. Out of 1,117 constituencies nationwide the NLD won 920 of the constituencies and received 82.4 per cent of the vote.

It also pointed out that if there

had been any doubts about the integrity of the 2020 elections there were official procedures laid out in the Union Election Commission's laws and bylaws that should have been followed, which the junta did not follow when it annulled the elections and forcibly took power in February 2021, claiming that voter lists were incorrect.

It said that the NLD would not recognise any future elections organised by the junta, saying that they would be 'fake elections'.

The statement also pointed out some of the abuses committed by the junta since the February 2021 coup. These included violently breaking up peaceful protests, deaths in custody during interrogations, the burning

down of houses, the murder of innocent civilians, the arrests of NLD members and parliamentarians and the destruction of NLD offices.

Many NLD members including the NLD president, Aung San Suu Kyi have been imprisoned and the statement called for their immediate release and encouraged world leaders to do the same.

It also called on neighbouring countries including members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other countries to help find practical solutions to the problems in Myanmar saying they should meet with Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss 'practical solutions' to improve the situation in Myanmar.



Photo: EPA

# TEN PEOPLE INJURED IN MUSE HOTEL BOMBING

**A**t least 10 people, including a five-year-old child were reportedly injured in a bomb blast outside the Top One Motel in Muse, northern Shan State, on the morning of 14 November.

"The first explosion occurred at 11 am. No one was hit at that time. Five minutes later, two more explosions occurred. Ten people were injured," said a Muse resident.

No deaths were reported from the blast.

The resident said that two pro-junta militiamen who were providing security in front of the motel were also seriously injured in the blast.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast.

In Muse, explosions often occur

in areas where pro-junta militias are active, according to residents.

Muse on the China-Myanmar border is a town where the Myanmar junta's army, militias, Ta'ang National Liberation Army, Kachin Independence Army, Shan State Progress Party, Kokang armed group Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and anti-junta local People's Defence Force- People Security And Defense Army operate.



Photos: Supplied

# 300 SUSPECTED MIGRANTS FROM SRI LANKA RESCUED FROM MYANMAR REGISTERED BOAT OFF VIETNAM

**M**ore than 300 suspected migrants from Sri Lanka were rescued off the coast of Vietnam after their boat began taking on water, Vietnamese authorities said Tuesday.

The Myanmar-flagged Lady 3 fishing vessel encountered difficulties around 250 nautical miles off Vung Tau on Vietnam's southern coast, according to Vietnam's Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre which said the boat was thought to be heading to Canada, about 6,000 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean.

"There was an issue with the ship

which meant water flowed into the engine room and could not be fixed since November 5," the centre said.

After the captain called for help on Monday, Vietnamese authorities asked a Japanese-flagged ship sailing nearby to rescue the Sri Lankans.

The vessel was drifting with a lot of panicked people gathering on the deck, the rescue centre said.

All 303 people, including 20 children, were brought safely to Vung Tau.

Foreign debt-ridden Sri Lanka has for months faced severe shortages

of food, fuel and medicines -- along with rampant inflation and running blackouts -- after running out of foreign exchange to import essential goods.

Security officials have said the spiralling economic crisis may be encouraging unlawful emigration.

A surge in people-smuggling attempts to Australia by boat prompted Canberra and Colombo to set up a special monitoring centre after fitting fishing boats with GPS tracking devices to curb dangerous human trafficking journeys.

**AFP**



Vietnam rescue personnel pick up the migrants. Photo: AFP

# CHINA EASES COVID MEASURES, CUTTING QUARANTINE AND SCRAPPING FLIGHT BANS

China announced the relaxation of some of its hardline Covid-19 restrictions on Friday last week, cutting the quarantine period for inbound travellers from 10 days to eight and scrapping snap closures of flight routes.

In a further sign of easing, the National Health Commission said it

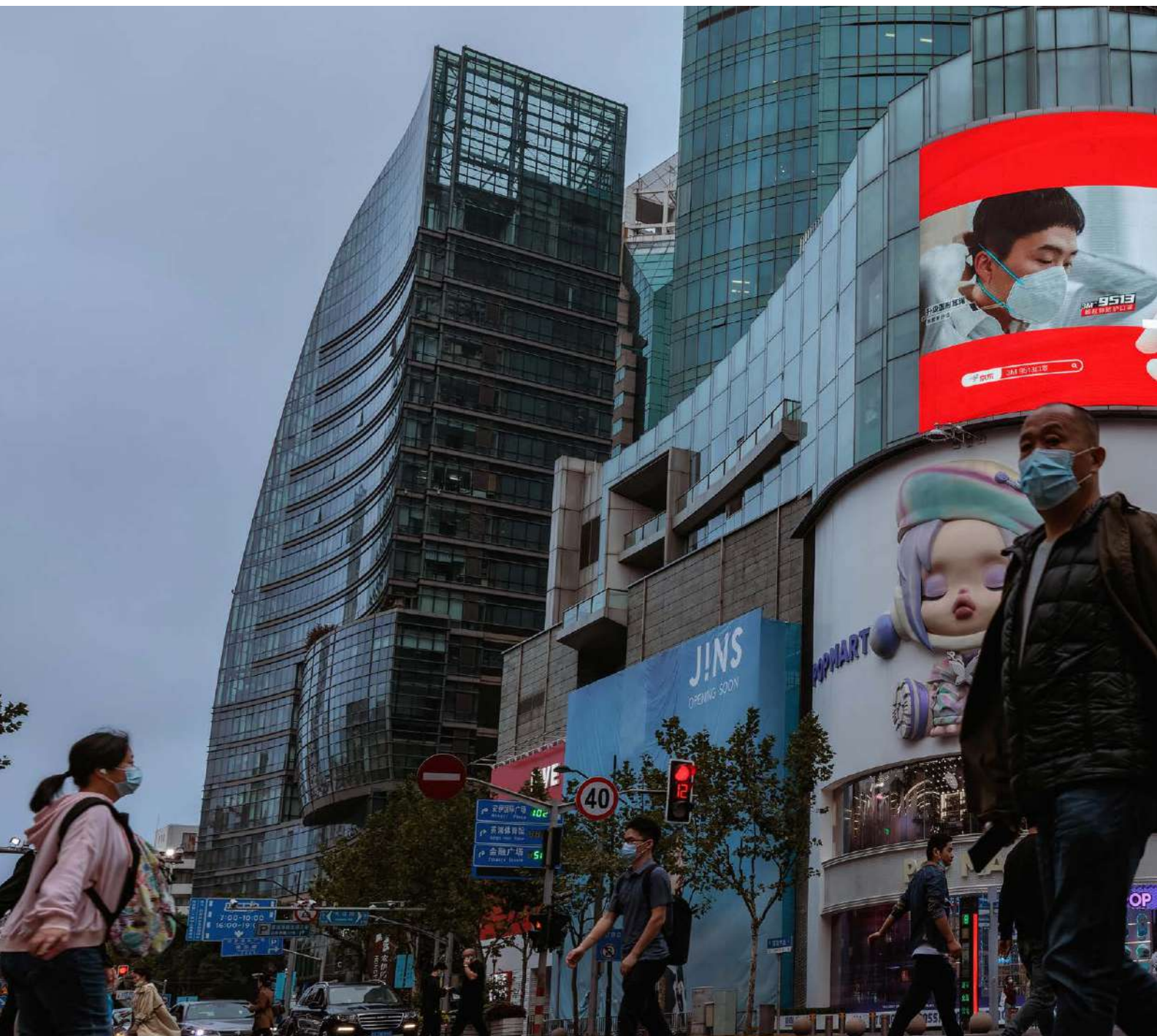
was abolishing the requirement to identify and isolate "secondary close contacts".

In a notice published on state-run CCTV, the government said the powerful seven-man Politburo Standing Committee met Thursday to rubberstamp the limited relaxations.

Inbound arrivals will still be

required to undergo six nucleic acid tests and will not be allowed to freely set foot outside during those eight days, the notice said.

It added that travellers will only be required to show one negative Covid test within 48 hours of boarding flights to China, a reduction from the current two tests.

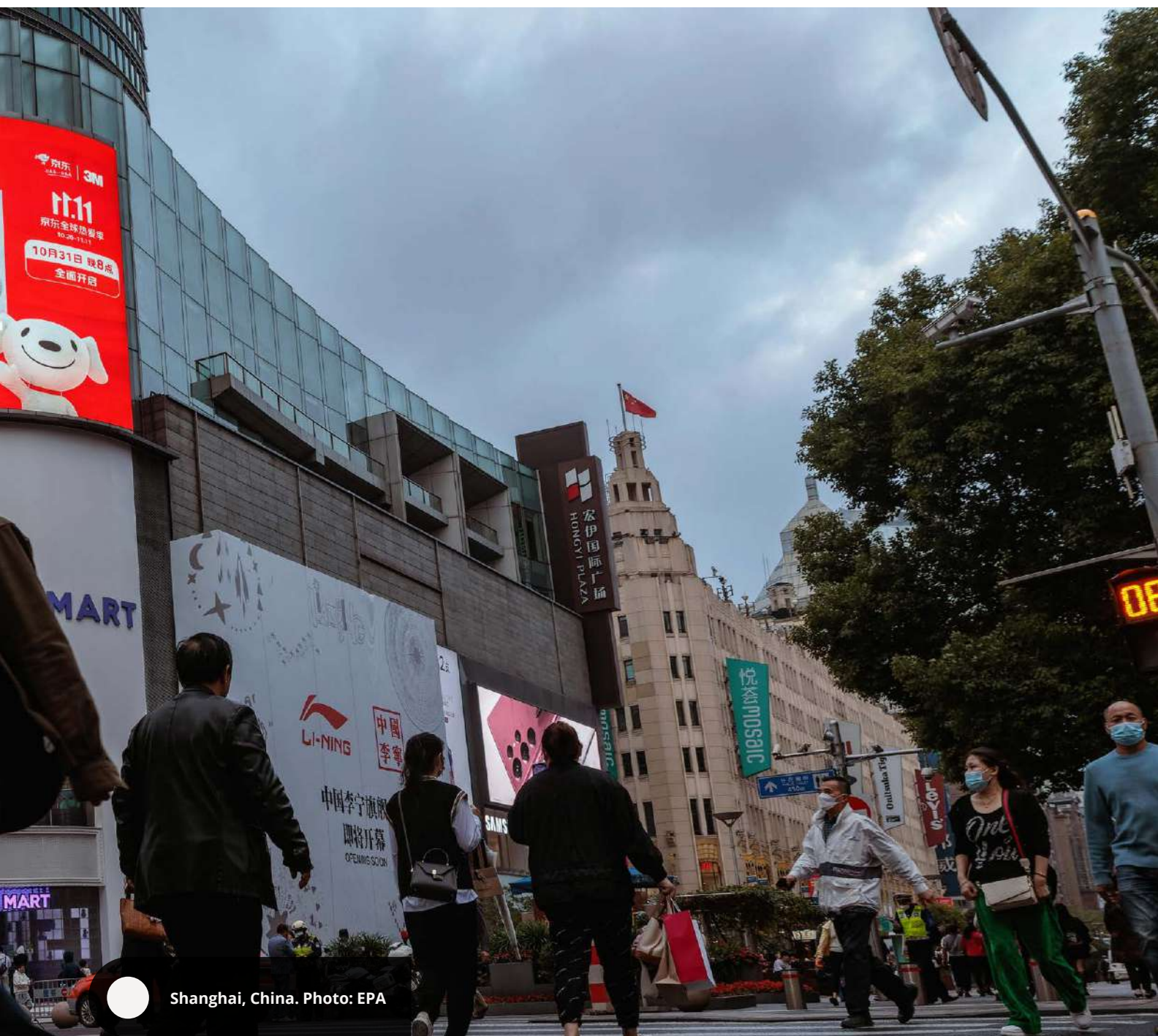


**Travellers will only be required to show one negative Covid test within 48 hours of boarding flights to China, a reduction from the current two tests.**

The new rules single out "important business personnel" and "sports groups" as examples of privileged groups permitted to skip quarantine as long as they remain in a virus-secure "closed loop" for the duration of their stays.

A so-called "circuit breaker" mechanism on inbound flights would be abolished, the notice added, bringing an end to a policy that saw the snap closures of flight routes if a certain proportion of passengers tested positive for the virus.

AFP



Shanghai, China. Photo: EPA

# CHINA SAYS COMMITTED TO CLIMATE FIGHT AT UN SUMMIT

China's top climate envoy told a UN summit Tuesday his country would not retreat from the fight against global warming, a day after Beijing and Washington were urged to boost efforts.

"Energy and food crises have hit the world one after another, and

the climate action process is facing serious challenges," Xie Zhenhua said at the gathering of some 100 world leaders at the United Nations COP27 climate summit in Egypt.

"China has been actively responding to climate change with sustained and pragmatic actions," he added.

"China's determination of actively participating in global climate governance will not retreat, let alone change."

But efforts to make progress against global warming were dealt a blow in August when China suspended climate cooperation with the United States following House leader Nancy



A coal-powered power plant in China. Photo: EPA

Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

The world's two largest polluters last year pledged to work together to accelerate climate action this decade, and vowed to meet regularly to tackle the crisis.

Xie said that "multilateralism, solidarity and cooperation are necessary to address climate change."

UN chief Antonio Guterres told the summit on Monday that China and the United States have a "particular responsibility" to join a "historic pact" to redouble efforts to speed up the transition away from fossil fuels.

**"China's  
determination  
of actively  
participating in  
global climate  
governance will  
not retreat, let  
alone change."**

Xie said China "hopes that developed countries will take the lead in effectively scaling up their emission reduction targets and achieving carbon neutrality ahead of time."

While China is the world's second biggest economy, the country has insisted that it cannot be put in the same category as developed countries, as it has had to lift tens of millions of people out of poverty.

**AFP**



# INDIA AT 75: MELTING GLACIERS, HEATWAVES AND CLIMATE CRISIS

From prime ministers and millionaires to labourers and ascetics, Hindu faithful dream of trekking at least once in their lives to Gaumukh, where the waters of India's holiest river, the Ganges, emerge from a Himalayan glacier.

But the ice at the end of the arduous journey is receding rapidly and portends an increasingly dry future for a country of 1.4 billion people facing existential challenges from climate change.

"It is quite astonishing, so quick and it is happening every day and every second," said Sheethal Vepur Ramamurthy, a researcher with Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany.

"We can even see the glacier dripping," she told AFP at the site. "So,

it is a harsh reality."

"Climate change definitely plays a role. Although people may deny it is happening in front of our eyes, we just have to witness it."

The Ganges flows for around 2,500 kilometres (1,550 miles) across India and is central to both Hindu identity - believers revere it as "mother Ganga" - and the survival of 500 million people who depend on its water for their daily farming, domestic and industrial needs.

Seventy-five years after independence, India has overtaken former coloniser Britain to become the world's fifth-largest economy.

It is also the world's third-biggest carbon emitter and second-biggest coal user.

Now, it is experiencing increasingly frequent droughts, floods and water shortages.

## 'Our identity'

"The Ganges is our culture, heritage, identity, and if it disappears, so will our life and existence," said Sanjeev Semwal, 53, a Hindu priest in Gangotri, the town below the glacier.

Anything that impacts the river "should be a cause of worry for everyone", he told AFP.

His family have served for generations at the town's temple to Ganga, the goddess who personifies the river, on the banks of the meltwater stream.

With increasing prosperity and investment in infrastructure,



Protesting to protect the environment in Mumbai, India. Photo: AFP

hundreds of thousands of devotees now visit annually -- a far cry from the few hundred in his father's time.

"The human presence and the region's weather patterns have both changed in my lifetime," he said.

The area is a microcosm of India's wider changes: Gangotri town has been transformed by construction in recent years, and is now packed with shops, tourist facilities, and traffic.

At the same time, the glacier of the same name has shrunk by 1.7 kilometres in 90 years, according to the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology.

Deadly natural disasters are becoming more frequent: at least 26 people died in an avalanche on the route to Gangotri in October.

A glacial burst in the region killed at least 72 people last year, and around 5,000 others died in 2013 when heavy rains led to flooding near another Hindu pilgrimage site.

### **Water scarcity**

India is one of the world's most water-stressed countries.

It has 17 percent of the world's population but only four percent of its water resources, and the government's NITI Aayog public policy centre says about 600 million people already face "high to extreme water stress".

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said in February that food security and agriculture-dependent economies such as India were the "most vulnerable" to the impacts of global warming.

The country's rice production could fall by 10 to 30 percent, it projected, with maize dropping 25 to 70 percent in the face of rising temperatures, increasing groundwater scarcity and extreme weather patterns.

India saw its warmest March on record this year when a heatwave made life unbearable for hundreds of millions of people, with some poor districts of even the capital New Delhi only receiving tanker deliveries twice a week.

Poverty remains widespread in India and nearly 45 percent of households do not have piped water connections.

## **Seventy-five years after independence, India has overtaken former coloniser Britain to become the world's fifth-largest economy.**

The country's outdated agricultural sector remains its biggest employer and water consumer, depleting groundwater resources through wells and pumps, and the environmental challenges have already forced farmers in some areas off their land.

The climate crisis "is not something we are going to face sometime in the future", said Manshi Asher of campaign group Himdhara.

"It is something that is already happening. The reason it is not evident is because people who bear the cost of the crisis are the most vulnerable and don't get heard in the media or by the planners."

If action was not taken, she added, "those who can - privileged people - will continue to live in their safe spaces while most others bear the brunt of water shortages and other impacts of climate crisis".

### **'Small is beautiful'**

Coal-dependent India consumed about a billion tonnes of the dirty fuel in 2021. Three-quarters of it went to electricity generation in a new all-time high for the country, according to an International Energy Agency report in July.

New Delhi also plans to increase production by more than 50 percent in the next two years and relaxed environmental compliance rules for mines in May.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India will cut its emissions to net-zero only by 2070 -- missing a key goal of last year's COP26 summit for countries to commit to doing so by 2050.

India and China were blamed for blocking a commitment to "phase out" coal at that gathering.

Modi is not attending the COP27 summit under way in Egypt, where India is demanding rich countries offer more financing to help developing nations deal with the impact of climate change and to adapt their economies.

Indian policymakers say fossil fuels power its economy that helps lift millions out of abject poverty, and that the country's per capita emissions are far lower than those of rich countries, as are its historical carbon contributions.

But environmentalists like Manoj Misra accuse policymakers of "not looking beyond the next election".

"They are not looking at the future and this shortsightedness is the problem," he said.

"Everyone wants to consume like the United States but where are the resources?" he asked. "We need to return to the Gandhian heart of small is beautiful and less is more."

**AFP**

# BIDEN URGES WORLD TO 'STEP UP' CLIMATE FIGHT AT COP27

**P**resident Joe Biden vowed at UN climate talks on Friday that the United States was on track to slash its carbon emissions, urging all nations to ramp up their own efforts to avert catastrophic global warming.

His speech came at the halfway point of a two-week COP27 conference in Egypt where rich polluters like the US are under pressure to finally

provide the funding developing countries have been promised in the battle against climate change.

Biden touted the passage of a massive, \$369 billion spending package to green the US economy as an achievement that would "shift the paradigm" for his country and the entire world.

"The climate crisis is about

human security, economic security, environmental security, national security and the very life of the planet," Biden said.

In an hours-long visit to Egypt before heading to Asia for ASEAN and G20 summits, Biden said the United States "will meet" its goal of cutting emissions 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.



US President Joe Biden and Cambodian PM Hun Sen at the ASEAN meeting. Photo: EPA

He also announced plans to step up efforts to cut methane emissions -- a major contributor to global warming -- by plugging fossil fuel leaks and requiring companies to act on leaks reported by credible third parties.

"To permanently bend the emissions curve, every nation needs to step up. At this gathering, we must renew and raise our climate ambitions," he said.

"The United States has acted, everyone has to act. It's a duty and responsibility of global leadership," said Biden, whose administration also announced plans to require federal contractors to reduce their emissions in line with the Paris Agreement.



## **Biden said the United States "will meet" its goal of cutting emissions 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.**

### **Howl of protest**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has sent energy prices soaring, has raised concerns that tackling climate change has dropped down the priority list of many countries.

"Russia's war only enhances the urgency of the need to transition the world off its dependence on fossil fuels," Biden said.

His 22-minute speech was briefly interrupted by a small group of demonstrators, who howled and attempted to unfurl a banner protesting fossil fuels before they were removed by UN security.

New research shows just how dauntingly hard it will be to meet the ambitious goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels -- requiring emissions to be slashed nearly in half by 2030.

The new study -- published on Friday in the journal Earth System Science Data -- found that CO2 emissions from fossil fuels are on track to rise one percent in 2022 to reach an all-time high.

Before his speech, Biden met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on the sidelines of COP27, where he raised human rights issues with his host amid concerns over the health of jailed dissident Alaa Abdel Fattah, who is on a months-long hunger strike.

Abdel Fattah's family later announced that they had requested a presidential pardon for him following calls for his release from a raft of Western governments, including the United States.

### **Mixed reviews**

Biden's visit to COP27 came three days after US midterm elections that

have raised questions about what the result could mean for US climate policy.

His climate speech earned mixed reviews from COP27 participants.

"President Biden is advancing the boldest climate agenda of any American president by far," said Ani Dasgupta, president of the World Resources Institute.

But he said the US was "grossly underperforming" on its commitments in a \$100-billion-a-year global climate funding programme to help developing nations transition to renewable energy and build resilience.

Biden has pledged to double the US contribution to \$11.4 billion, but Democrats may be running out of time to honour that as control of the House of Representatives appears poised to shift to the Republicans from January in the wake of this week's vote.

Others pointed out that the United States has previously blocked efforts to establish a "loss and damage" mechanism that would see rich polluters compensate poorer countries for the destruction from climate-induced natural disasters.

Biden did not address the "loss and damage" mechanism idea in his speech, though the United States has allowed it to be on the official COP27 agenda.

"Joe Biden comes to COP27 and makes new promises but his old promises have not even been fulfilled," said Mohamed Dowd, founder of the Power Shift Africa think tank.

"He is like a salesman selling goods with endless small print."

**AFP**

# NEW MILESTONE IN BATTLE AGAINST ILLEGAL, UNREGULATED FISHING

**G**lobal action to fight illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing has intensified, the Food and Agriculture Organization said on Monday last week, noting that 100 States have now signed on to an international agreement battling the scourge.

The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) is the first internationally binding instrument specifically designed to prevent, deter, and eliminate IUU fishing by denying

port access to foreign vessels that engage in or support such practices.

“Rising consumer demand and transforming agrifood systems in fisheries and aquaculture have driven global fish production to its highest levels and there is broad recognition of the need to step up the fight against IUU fishing”, said QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General.

## One in five, illegal

One in every five fish caught

around the world each year is estimated to originate from IUU fishing.

This not only triggers devastating impacts on the sustainability of fisheries and the livelihoods of those who depend on them but also on the conservation of marine ecosystems.

IUU fishing undermines national, regional, and global efforts to achieve sustainable fisheries and its elimination is key to succeeding

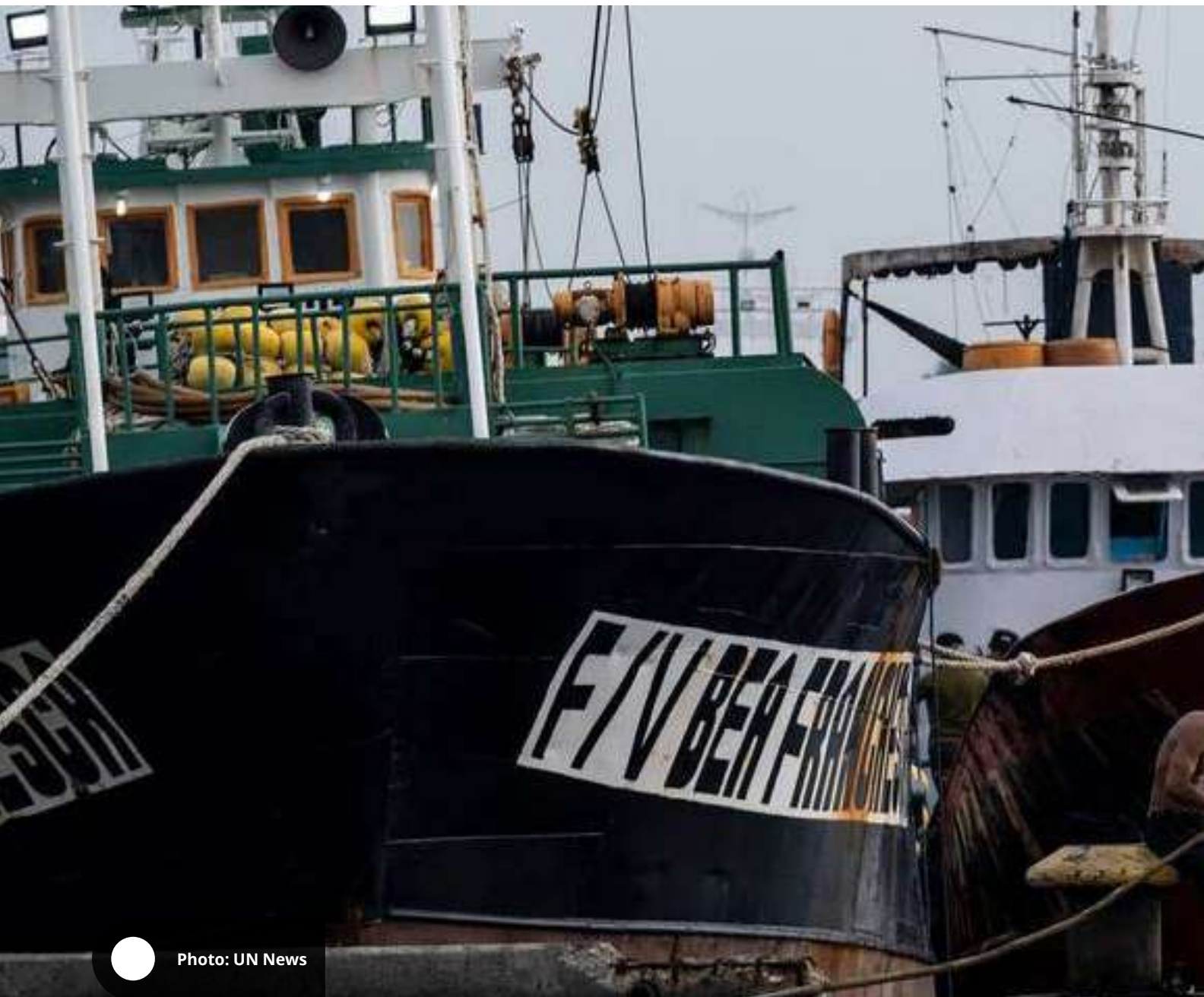


Photo: UN News

in reaching the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **The right move**

However, with Angola, Eritrea, Morocco, and Nigeria being the latest countries to back the agreement, 60 per cent of port States globally are now committed to the agreement to combat IUU fishing.

"It is encouraging to see more States support the PSMA in support of the Sustainable Development Goals", said the top FAO official.

### **'Transforming aquatic food systems'**

Manuel Barange, director of FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, upheld that "we have a responsibility

to manage and use all aquatic resources sustainably".

He maintained the need to work together to step up port controls and an adequate information exchange through implementing the PSMA.

"This will contribute to transforming aquatic food systems and maximize their role as drivers of employment, economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability."

### **Working the system**

FAO recently launched the PSMA Global Information Exchange System (GIES), which collects and shares official compliance-related information with a focus on port inspection results, actions taken and


port entry or denials.

Along with the FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels, the platform supports PSMA nations, and complementary instruments aim to combat IUU fishing.

So far, FAO has assisted more than 50 countries in reviewing their legislation; strengthening their institutional capacity; and improving their monitoring, control and surveillance systems and operations, to effectively implement the agreement, and fulfil their international responsibilities.

*Courtesy of UN News*




 Photo: Koko Htikeaung

## I RAKHINE STATE

**A** **attack on Myanmar junta vessels in Rakhine prompts deadly response:** The Arakan Army (AA) attacked two Military Council vessels in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State, on the morning of 4 November and the vessels returned fire, killing one adult and one child and injuring several others, according to locals residents. The AA attacked the vessels that were travelling along the Kelantan River, and the junta vessels fired heavy artillery at the nearby Shwe Pyi Thit village, a villager told Mizzima. "There is no battle between the two sides these days. However, at around 9 am, AA began attacking the junta's vessels. That is why junta soldiers from the vessels are launching heavy artillery into nearby Shwe Pyi Thit Village. It is now reported that a child and an adult were killed by heavy artillery," he said. The victims, including Moe Moe Yee, San Oo Kyaw, Oo Thein May, and Tun Shwe Than, are reportedly being transported to Kyauktaw Hospital by the Kyauktaw Charity Association for further treatment after heavy artillery landed in the village of Shwe Pyi Thit. According to another villager, the houses in Shwe Pyi Thit village were hit by heavy artillery as a result of such shooting, and the villagers are currently fleeing. "At the hospital, one of the victims was seriously injured and she's in bad condition. It is known that there are still more injured people. I can't say for sure at the moment. All the villagers have fled," said a resident of the village of Shwe Pyi Thit.

## I KACHIN STATE

**K** **IO-controlled Mai Ja Yang hit by artillery fire:** Junta troops fired three rounds of heavy artillery at Mai Ja Yang, a town on the Chinese border in a long-term Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) controlled area. The attack happened at around 1:00 p.m. on 6 November. A KIO news source said: They [junta troops] fired onto Mai Ja Yang three times in succession. The exact location [where the shells landed] is still being investigated." A Kachin Independence Army (KIA) frontline officer said that the artillery attack was in retaliation for a successful KIA offensive against the junta. The night before the artillery attack, 5 November, the KIA and people's defence force (PDF) fighters attacked and occupied the junta's tactically important frontline stronghold of Laukdan Hill, in Momauk Township, which was being defended by the junta's 88th Light Infantry Division. Mai Ja Yang is the KIO's educational capital and it is home to the Kachin National College, the College of Education, the Federal Law Academy, the Kachin State Comprehensive University and other vocational schools jointly established by the KIO and the National Unity Government (NUG).

## I KAREN STATE

**M** **yanmar junta air force bombs villages in KNU controlled area:** The junta air force unexpectedly dropped bombs on villages on Muttraw District in an area controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 5. The surprise airstrike destroyed many houses, a Christian Church and a primary school in the villages of Tabal and Korde in the Sawmupalaw village tract in Lutho Township, according to a KNU statement. "The military council has always suddenly bombarded the villages in KNU area. It is what they normally do, they are targeting [civilian] people", said a source close to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNU is still trying to find out exactly how many houses were destroyed in the attack.



Photo: Hong Sar for Mizzima

## Junta opens new university in NPT

The junta has set up a new university named Naypyitaw State Academy in Zabuthiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, and the junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that he was paving the way for the administrative capital Nay Pyi Taw to also become the capital of education. The junta started the Naypyitaw State Academy Project in April this year and was able to open it in November. The opening ceremony of the new university was held on 9 November and the junta chief presided over the ceremony. "Offspring of staff from government departments and organizations and local people from Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory need to learn higher education for their further studies. As such, the government established the Naypyitaw State Academy in the Zabuthiri Township of Nay Pyi Taw Council Area," reported the junta's media. Min Aung Hlaing said that the administrative capital city already has a forestry university, an agricultural university and a veterinary university and they are trying to make Nay Pyi Taw the education capital. In Myanmar, the military coup has been almost two years, and during these periods, along with the political instability, various sectors, including education, have deteriorated.

# MYANMAR CENTRAL BANK WANTS HUNDI MONEY CHANGERS TO BE LICENSED

**T**he chairperson of the junta-controlled Myanmar Central Bank, Than Than Swe, said she is putting pressure on operators of Hundi money transfers to stop making illegal transfers and get official licences for their businesses.

The comments were made in meetings she had with Hundi operators in the town of Muse on the border of China and the town of Tachileik on the border with Thailand.

The Hundi system of money exchange runs in parallel to official money exchange systems and is the preferred way for many workers abroad to send money back to Myanmar.

Someone sending money using the Hundi system gives a Hundi operator in their location their money and details of an intended recipient in a specific location, which is often in another country.

The Hundi operator will then contact an associate in the destination location and give them details of what has to be paid to whom. The Hundi operator in that location then gives

the recipient, who is often identified by a special code, the transferred amount.

No money physically changes location instead the Hundi operator sending the money incurs a debt with the Hundi operator who pays the recipient out of their own money. The debt is then settled at a future date.

Than Than Swe said Hundi operators will need to get licences from the Central Bank if they want to keep operating in border areas like Muse and Tachileik. The director of the Central Bank's Foreign Exchange Administration Department also explained the application procedure for obtaining an official money transfer license.

A Myanmar economist said that the central Bank's plan would fail and Hundi operators would continue to operate without licences because the junta wants to control all foreign exchanges and this was just a way for them to do so.

In the 22 months since the coup Myanmar's currency, the kyat has dropped in value from about 2,000

kyats to the US dollar to an informal rate of about 3,000 kyats to the US dollar on the black market, though the official Central Bank rate remains unchanged at 2,100 kyats to one US dollar.

Because of this unfair exchange rate, people sending money to Myanmar currently prefer to use unofficial channels like the Hundi system. It is another reason that Hundi operators would not want to have official licences as they would force them to use unrealistic official rates of exchange.

Than Than Swe also warned the Hundi operators that if they continued to make unofficial money exchanges they may lose their money, as the Central Bank is stepping up its measures against money laundering and the funding of terrorism.

On 21 October the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) announced that it had put Myanmar on its blacklist because it had failed to implement measures to fight against money laundering and financing terrorism.

**Mizzima**



Photo: Mizzima

# MYANMAR JUNTA CLAIMS IT CAN RUN THE ECONOMY WITHOUT FOREIGN LOANS AND GRANTS

**J**unta leader Min Aung Hlaing said: “The previous government got foreign loans and grants, but we did not get these foreign funds when we took power”, at a meeting with businessmen from Tanintharyi Region on 5 November.

But, he claimed that the economy was doing well, despite not getting any foreign loans and grants because

the junta has made great efforts to promote the economy.

He said that despite those efforts the economy is still in decline because the ongoing political conflict made it hard for the junta to improve the country's economy.

He claimed that previous governments had made his

task harder by neglecting the manufacturing sector.

He said: “The two previous democratic governments did not support the domestic manufacturing sector. They ran the economy with foreign loans, grants and foreign exchange earnings obtained from the non-trade sector.”



Taking a break on a building site in Yangon. Photo: AFP

# IMF AGREES \$4.5 BILLION SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR BANGLADESH

**T**he International Monetary Fund said Wednesday it reached a preliminary agreement to provide Bangladesh with a \$4.5 billion support package to help it cope with soaring energy and food prices.

Bangladesh in common with other Asian economies has been hit hard by the sharp rise in prices in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, prompting angry street protests.

The South Asian nation of around 170 million people approached the IMF earlier this year for support.

An IMF delegation and Dhaka representatives "reached a staff-level agreement to support Bangladesh's economic policies" with a total of \$4.5 billion under various facilities, the institution said in a statement, adding the deal was subject to IMF management approval.

Bangladesh plans to use the IMF loan to prop up its foreign exchange reserves, which have nosedived from \$46 billion to \$34 billion.

The Bangladeshi taka has depreciated some 25 percent against the greenback in recent months, while

according to official figures inflation has approached 10 percent -- but independent economists say the true figure is closer to 20 percent.

Household budgets have been hit hard and the government has pledged to cap the price of several staple foods, including rice, to quell public discontent.

"Bangladesh's robust economic recovery from the pandemic has been interrupted by Russia's war in Ukraine, leading to a sharp widening of the current account deficit, rapid decline of foreign exchange reserves,



Photo: Ibrahim Boran

**Penrose Thitsa**

## Myanmar to export 300,000 tons of rice per year to Bangladesh

**M**yanmar will export 300,000 tons of rice to Bangladesh every year (for five years) until 2027, according to the Burmese junta's Ministry of Economy and Commerce. In September this year, the two nations signed a five-year MoU on rice trade, and the rice export has begun. The price is about US\$465 per ton, according to the Myanmar Rice Federation. This is the second time that the two nations signed an MoU on rice trade. For the first time, in 2017, Myanmar's civilian government led by National League for Democracy and Bangladesh signed an MoU on rice trade for five consecutive years (from 2017 to 2022). Myanmar has planned to export a total of 4 million tons of rice annually by 2025 from around 2 million tons currently. Meanwhile, the country is facing an increasing food security crisis, with about one-fourth of the population of 55 million people affected in a moderate or severe way, according to a report published in June this year by the Food and Agriculture Organization.

rising inflation and slowing growth," said IMF team leader Rahul Anand.

"Even as Bangladesh tackles these immediate challenges, addressing long-standing structural issues remains critical, including threats to macroeconomic stability from climate change," he added.

### Power cuts

The depreciating currency and dwindling foreign exchange reserves have left Bangladesh unable to import sufficient fossil fuels.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has been forced to close diesel plants, leave some gas-fired power stations idle and impose lengthy power cuts of up to 13 hours a day to conserve existing stocks.

Last month at least 130 million people were left without power after a grid failure caused widespread blackouts.

And tens of thousands of mosques around the Muslim-majority

country have been asked to curtail the use of air conditioners to ease pressure on the electricity grid.

The blackouts have sparked widespread public anger and helped mobilise large demonstrations on the streets of Dhaka.

At least three people were killed in one demonstration and around 100 others injured in another in a police crackdown.

In August the government raised the prices of petroleum and diesel by up to 50 percent.

Bangladesh's precarious financial position was compounded this year by unprecedented floods in the northeast, inundating the homes of more than seven million people and causing nearly \$10 billion in damage, according to government estimates.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has blamed the government for the crisis, accusing it of squandering cash on multibillion-dollar vanity projects.

It has organised a series of rallies demanding Hasina's resignation and a general election under a caretaker government.

Bangladesh hopes to graduate from Least Developed Country status and become a "middle-income" nation by 2031.

Hasina's government has put together a programme, which the IMF said it supports, to achieve the goal, as well as measures to contain inflation, change its monetary policy framework, and strengthen the financial sector.

Bangladesh will also support large-scale climate investments and seek additional climate financing.

Elsewhere in the region, Sri Lanka has also sought a bailout from the IMF, its economic crisis -- which saw its president ousted by street protests -- exacerbated by the global rise in energy and food prices.

**AFP**

# IN FOCUS





## ALL CALM

**B**oats berthed on the edge of a lake in Mandalay. Photo: Kentaro Komada

# PYIN OO LWIN HOT-AIR BALLOON FESTIVAL RETURNS WITH A BANG

**T**housands of people have gathered in the hills of central Myanmar for the annual Tazaungdaing light festival that marks the end of the rainy season with a fiery nighttime display of exploding hot-air balloons.

The celebrations in the former

British hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin have not been held for two years because of the Covid pandemic and unrest following a military coup.

But on Sunday night rival teams began launching 76 aerial artistic creations that will take flight over the next five days, competing for marks in

aesthetics, teamwork, height reached and time spent in the air.

Their balloons were propelled upwards about 100 metres (320 feet) using the heat from a fire before fireworks inside exploded, obliterating months of work in a spectacular burst of lights across the inky sky.



Letting off fireworks. Photo: AFP

The festivities are a rare respite from the economic misery and violence wracking much of the country almost two years after the military's power grab.

"We are holding our festival here but we are sorry for what is happening elsewhere," said Aung Myat Thu, 37, who spent months working with friends on their balloon.

"When we were preparing for the competition, we all worked alongside our worries."

The hot-air balloons featured an array of artwork from images of Buddha to traditional motifs, with one

**"We are holding our festival here but we are sorry for what is happening elsewhere," said Aung Myat Thu, 37, who spent months working with friends on their balloon.**

made in the shape of a polar bear.

Some participants hooked dozens of red, white and yellow candles to their balloons before releasing them into the chilly night air to huge cheers.

Crowds ambled between stalls at a temporary fairground while traditional dancers performed.

While the Tazaungdaing tradition is rooted in Buddhism, the hot-air balloon contest was started by British colonialists in the late 19th century.

Previous editions have drawn tens of thousands of local and foreign visitors, attracted by the colour -- and danger -- of the gathering.

The balloons are loaded with fireworks, and any miscalculation on

when to light the rockets can result in catastrophe.

In 2014, three people were killed at Tazaungdaing celebrations in Taunggyi in neighbouring Shan state when a balloon crashed onto spectators below.

Tin Mar Lwin, 41, was beaming Sunday night after sending off her balloon, which was decorated with a huge red and gold Buddha seated on a lotus leaf.

"I want the situation to be stable like this," she told AFP of her country.

"I want peace. I'm hoping for it. I'm happy coming to this event."

**AFP**



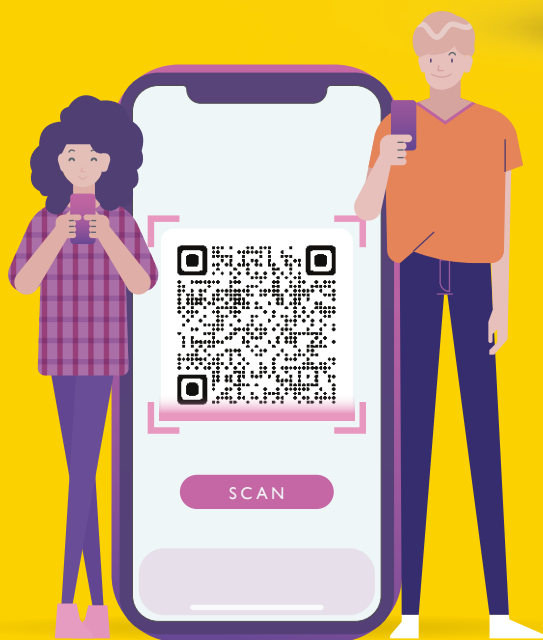
Preparing candles for a balloon. Photo: AFP

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