

Myanmar's arrested environmental activism

Myanmar notes record high in rice exports

mizzima | WEEKLY

myanmar news & insight

NO END IN SIGHT

The civil war in Myanmar

Mulling the future of Myanmar on
the anniversary of an unfulfilled promise

mizzima

WEEKLY
myanmar news & insight

OUT EVERY
THURSDAY

PRINT VERSION

PDF ONLINE VERSION

For more contents to read
Follow us on:

Our Websites:

www.mizzima.com

www.mizzimaburmese.com

www.mizzima.tv

SUBSCRIBE HERE

KEEP UP ON WHAT MATTERS



Available at...

- Every City Mart in Yangon
- Innwa Book Store, Pansodan Road
- Yangon Bakehouse, Pearl Condominium, Block C
- Popular Bookstore in Mayangone Township
- Pansodan Gallery (1st Floor, 286 Pansodan Road - Upper)
- Book Worm Books, Pearl Condominium, Block C
- And in Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw

Contact Us!

➤ Subscription
(95) 9 421010101



IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Mizzima Weekly is pleased to run two important commentaries in this issue focused on Myanmar's civil war.

The lead story entitled, No end in sight: The civil war in Myanmar, by Yun Sun raises important questions over why the Myanmar conflict will not end soon, as both sides are hell-bent on winning – the junta fighting for survival and the Spring Revolution fighters seeking to finally oust military rule from the Golden Land.

The commentary entitled, Mulling the future of Myanmar on the anniversary of an unfulfilled promise, by Igor Blazevic highlights a recent anniversary, the 75th Karen National Day to stress how this one ethnic group – and by extension many others – have life-long business to settle, having never really been at peace since Burma's independence in 1948.

But both commentaries highlight an issue that cannot be emphasized enough – the need for the Spring Revolution forces to unite, work together, and plan the future of Myanmar together.

Mizzima and Mizzima Weekly have covered this call before but there are still fears amongst observers, activists and players that the Spring Revolution players are in many ways fixed in their ways and

views – effectively slaves of the past, encumbered by political, ethnic, religious and racial views that block the path to effective unity.

As Yun Sun writes: The military government's existence as a shared target and common threat is uniting the NUG, PDF, and EAOs under the same objectives, though not in terms of operations or future post-conflict objectives. Myanmar's resistance forces still have a long way to go in terms of political negotiation and reconciliation among themselves. However, for the time being, fighting the Burmese military remains the highest priority for all players.

As Blazevic puts it: In order for the victory of Myanmar's David over its Goliath to happen, what is needed is a credible and active political alliance of the National Unity Government (NUG) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) behind the new visionary idea of a Federal Democratic Myanmar. But, as the writer notes, this vision has yet to be hammered out, many of the key players caught up in the views of the past and seemingly reluctant to give too much ground.

Unity and a hammering out of the new vision of a Federal Democratic Myanmar are crucial to the future of a free country.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

Editor In-Chief and Managing Director

Soe Myint

Contributors

Sai Wansai,
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

Neither this publication nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission from Mizzima Media Co. Ltd.

Photos are by Mizzima

Unless otherwise credited.
© 2015 MIZZIMA All rights reserved

INFORMATION

Mizzima is owned by Mizzima Media Group in Yangon, Myanmar.

Subscriptions and sales in Myanmar

Mizzima Weekly is currently available as a PDF.

Contact: Mizzima Media Group

Email: sm@mizzima.com

Phone: +95-9421010100

CONTENTS

**mizzima** WEEKLY

NEWS & INSIGHT

3 EDITORIAL

6 IN FOCUS

8 NEWS ROUNDUP

10 **NO END IN SIGHT** – The civil war in Myanmar

14 Myanmar junta makes plans for elections

16 Mulling the future of Myanmar on the anniversary of an unfulfilled promise
– Igor Blazevic

18 International community must support Myanmar's independent media



20 Are we now seeing the fruits of Myanmar's Spring Revolution?

21 NUG will take action against Myanmar junta for desecration of historic sites

22 Myanmar air strikes against civilians are acts of terrorism, says FORSEA

10





24

- 24** HRW: Myanmar Political Parties Law designed to “crush all political opposition”
- 26** Myanmar’s arrested environmental activism
- 28** Rohingya refugees land on Indonesia’s west coast
- 29** Rohingya refugees despair over looming food aid cuts

COVID-19 UPDATE

- 30** Hundreds protest in China over health insurance reforms

CHINA FOCUS

- 32** China’s Xi hails Iran ‘solidarity’ during ‘complex’ world situation
- 34** Taiwan finds remains of suspected Chinese balloon, tightens military security
- 35** Vietnam jails South Koreans for people smuggling during pandemic

COVER PHOTO OF KAREN FEMALE FIGHTER IN KAREN STATE BY AFP

COMMENTARY

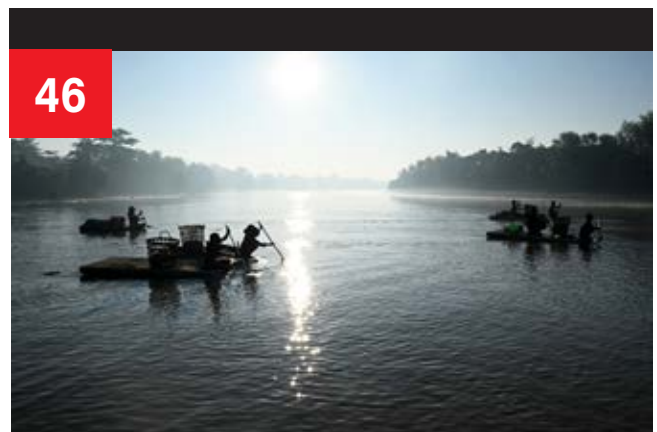
- 36** UN experts warn of ‘catastrophic consequences’ if Rohingya refugee rations are cut
- 38** ETHNIC NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 39** LAST WEEK IN NAYPYITAW

BUSINESS

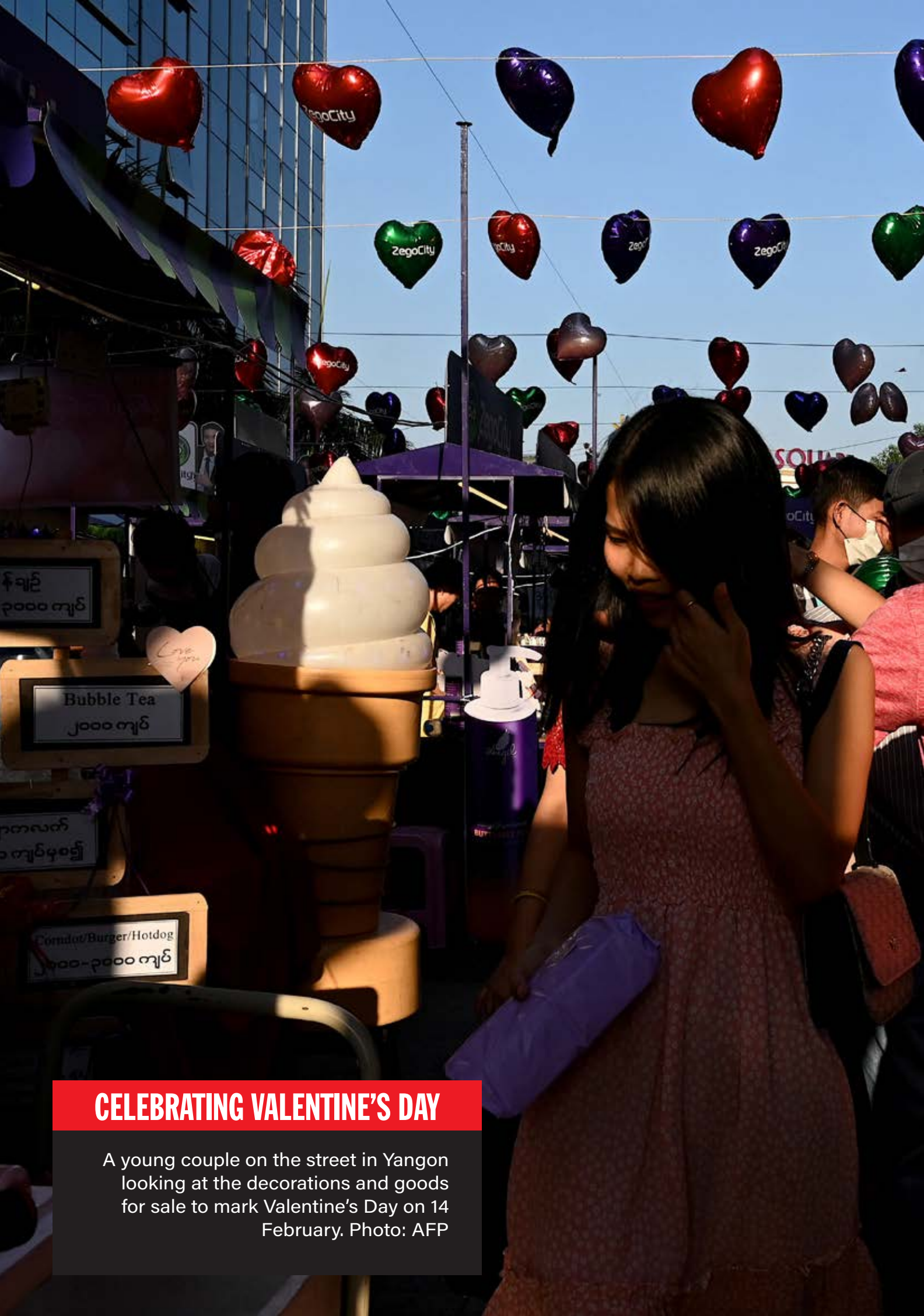
- 40** Myanmar notes record high in rice exports primarily to China
- 41** Philippines eyed as attractive export market for Myanmar onions
- 42** Serious fuel shortage in Kachin State’s Hpakant, all filling stations closed
- 43** BUSINESS ALERTS

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

- 44** IN FOCUS
- 46** Austrian Shan princess, the last Queen Consort of Hsipaw, dies



46



CELEBRATING VALENTINE'S DAY

A young couple on the street in Yangon looking at the decorations and goods for sale to mark Valentine's Day on 14 February. Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



NUG WILL TAKE ACTION AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA FOR DESECRATION OF HISTORIC SITES

The NUG announced that it will take action against the junta for destroying and deploying troops at historical structures and culturally important landmarks.

The statement was made by the NUG's Interim Board for Heritage Administration on 12 February.

It gave, as examples of this behaviour: the junta's deployment of troops in the ancient historical city of Mrauk-U; attacking and destroying ancient temples in Chin State; damaging the World Heritage site near Shwebo in Sagaing Region's Hanlin, one of five Pyu City States that existed in central Myanmar from the 2nd century BCE to the 11th century; and burning down Christian religious structures and villages in Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region.

The organisations and individuals who committed these and similar acts will be prosecuted under the relevant laws, including the Preservation and Protection of Ancient Buildings Law, the Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage Region law, and the Anti-Terrorism Law, according to the Interim Board for Heritage Administration.

Three Myanmar junta soldiers stationed in Magway school injured in attack Three junta soldiers were injured when defence forces attacked the school where they were stationed in Pantaingchon Village, in Magway Region's Pakokku Township on 13 February.

About 20 junta soldiers from Army Division 101 stationed at Pantaingchon School were attacked by local defence forces at about 2:00 p.m.

A representative of Pakokku Rangers People's Defence Force (PDF) said: "The school is located between the Technological University and the fabric factory. The initial plan was to take control of it, but we were forced to retreat due to the arrival of a massive military force and as a result, we were unable to seize it."

Three junta soldiers and a civilian were injured and several defence force members suffered minor injuries in a 15-minute exchange of fire.

The attack was jointly carried out by PDFs from Pakokku Township, including the Pakokku Rangers, the Pakokku People's Defence Force (PPDF), the Earthquake People's Defence Force, Young Force (UG) and Thu Rein (TR).

FORMER STUDENT LEADER KO LIN HTET NAING SENTENCED TO FIVE MORE YEARS IN PRISON

Ko Lin Htet Naing (aka James), a former leader of All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and political activist was sentenced by the Myanmar junta to five more years in prison under section 52 (b) of the counter-terrorism law on 13 February, according to his wife Phyo Phyo Aung.

His wife Phyo Phyo Aung said: "He had already been sentenced to three years in prison under other charges and after spending another two months in prison he was sentenced to another five years under section 52 (b) of the counter terrorism law", she said.

He was first sentenced by Insein Prison Court on 7 December 2022 to three years imprisonment without hard labour for incitement under Section 505 (a) before receiving his most recent sentence of five years.

The sentences are consecutive, meaning that Ko Lin Htet Naing will have to serve eight years

in prison.

He was initially arrested at a restaurant in Botahtaung Township on 18 June 2022 and first charged at Insein Prison Court on 3 November 2022.

Ko Lin Htet Naing's mother Daw Gye Myint, (aka Daw May May Kyi) was killed in a bomb blast at the parcel gate of Yangon's notorious Insein Prison on 19 October as she was preparing to visit her son in the prison.

Ko Lin Htet Naing asked to attend his mother's funeral on 21 October 2022, but the authorities refused to give him permission to attend.

He also served as Vice President of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and was actively involved in promoting democracy. He has already served prison sentences for his participation in the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

JUNTA AMBUSH KILLS SEVEN DEFENCE FORCE FIGHTERS IN IN SALINGYI TOWNSHIP

Seven defence force fighters were killed when they were ambushed by junta troops near Kyartak Village, in Sagaing Region's Salingyi Township at noon on 12 February.

About 70 junta troops attacked 35 defence forces fighters just outside Kyartak Village as they were clearing mines. Seven defence force fighters were killed and a vehicle and motorcycle were torched before the defence force fighters could retreat, according to a person from the Pale People's Administration.

"We had gone close to the village to remove mines because we believed that the [military] column was in the village. Then, they suddenly started firing at us. The battle lasted about half an

hour", said a representative of one of the defence forces involved in the incident.

"The Military Council's 70 members were constantly firing at us and shot dead seven of our revolutionary soldiers. The rest [of our soldiers] had to retreat for their own safety", he added.

Of the seven killed defence force fighters, one was from Pale PDF, five were from the Yesagyo Revolutionary Force and one was from Pakokku Township PDF.

Other defence forces also involved in the incident included Yinmarbin District Battalion (8), Salingyi Revolutionary Force and the M7 Force.

21 ILLEGAL MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS ARRESTED IN RANONG, THAILAND

21 Myanmar migrant workers who illegally entered Thailand by boat were arrested in Ranong, Thailand, on 12 February, and are being prosecuted by the Thai authorities.

The 21 migrant workers were discovered and detained by the Ranong-based 25th Infantry Battalion, early on the morning of 12 February, at the Surat Thani Island checkpoint.

The workers had each paid 18,000 baht (1,200,000 MMK) to a broker who was going to find them illegal work on construction sites in Thailand, according to the Ranong Provincial Public Relations Office.

It said that currently the migrants are being held at the immigration office in Ranong and are being prosecuted in accordance with the law.

The political instability, lack of job opportunities, and economic crisis in Myanmar since the February 2021 coup has led to an increase in the number of Myanmar workers illegally crossing the border into Thailand and other neighbouring countries to look for work.

There are also legal Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand who have arrived using the official Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries.

BLAZE AT SIX-STOREY YANGON BUILDING

Six people suffered respiratory problems following a fire in a six-storey building in Yangon's Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township on 15 February.

The fire, on 122nd Street in Yaytwinkone Ward, started at about 2:50 p.m. and the flames rapidly spread throughout the building as people tried to escape by going onto a veranda roof.

A Myanmar Fire Services Department report said that firefighters from Tamwe and Mingalar Taung Nyut townships used fire engines

and water trucks to extinguish the fire by 3:28 p.m.

Of the six people who suffered respiratory problems three were taken to Yangon General Hospital, whilst the other three were treated at the scene by volunteers from the Mingalar Taung Nyunt Youth's Social Association, according to the association's social media channel.

The Myanmar Fire Services Department is still investigating the cause of the blaze.

NO END IN SIGHT

The civil war in Myanmar

Yun Sun

The second anniversary of the February 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar has just passed, and the abysmal state of armed conflict, insurgency, chaos, and anarchy has only been deteriorating. Despite the repeated calls by regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and by the United Nations to stop the violence, protect human rights, and respect the democratic process, the Burmese military junta has demonstrated no appetite for political concessions or negotiation with the resistance movement. With the uncertainty associated with the postponed general elections this year — which most speculate will be neither free nor fair nor legitimate — the civil war inside Myanmar is likely to only escalate in 2023. There is no end in sight.





BACKGROUND

Strictly speaking, the civil war in Myanmar has been ongoing since 1948. The fighting between the central government dominated by the Bamar majority and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in seven ethnic states has never completely ceased since the country's independence decades before the 2021 coup. The country is no stranger to military coups either. The 1962 coup led by General Ne Win replaced the country's representative democracy with 26 years of military rule. And the landslide victory by Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 elections was also denied by the military, which held onto power for another 25 years until the NLD won again in the 2015 general elections.

However, the modality of Burmese politics after the 2021 coup has been entirely different. Before the coup, the Burmese people had tasted democracy and freedom and had been exposed to the outside world and the free flow of ideas, information, people, and economic opportunities under a democratic government. They simply refuse to return to more decades of military rule, no matter that the Burmese military sees military rule as

its natural prerogative and a normal state for the country. The opposition to the coup and the rejection of military rule have been the most powerful factors uniting the rest of the country and, crucially, driving divergent resistance forces together.

NO END IN SIGHT FOR THE CIVIL WAR

It is these conditions that have allowed the National Unity Government (NUG) — the shadow civilian government formed by members of the parliament elected during the 2020 general elections — and its armed wing, the People's Defense Force (PDF), to thrive throughout the country. By 2022, the PDF was estimated to have expanded to more than 250 units with more than 65,000 troops. Even though different militias and units under the PDF framework do not share the same commander or commanding structure, they share the common aspiration of driving the military out of power. At the local level, especially in rural areas where the military junta's control is weak, the PDF enjoys substantial control of the territory and has been launching attacks against military barracks, police stations, and government administrative offices.

Although the resistance is still fragmented, it somewhat improved in 2022. A sizeable portion of the PDF is either recognized by or under the command of the NUG. Many of the PDF units cooperate or coordinate their positions with the EAOs. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the leading ethnic armed organization in the



Kachin state, and local PDFs have launched joint attacks against the military in Kachin State and Sagaing Region. The military government's existence as a shared target and common threat is uniting the NUG, PDF, and EAOs under the same objectives, though not in terms of operations or future post-conflict objectives. Myanmar's

resistance forces still have a long way to go in terms of political negotiation and reconciliation among themselves. However, for the time being, fighting the Burmese military remains the highest priority for all players.

Despite the joint purpose among the resistance forces, it is unfortunate that

the Burmese civil war is at a stalemate and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. The power gap between the Burmese military and the resistance (the PDF and EAOs combined) remains significant, in terms of not only size but also weaponry and firepower. The resistance's lack of income — which is funded by donations



The Spring Revolution has morphed from street protests to guerrilla warfare. Photo: AFP

— is particularly striking in comparison to the military's control over the state and its resources. After all, the Burmese military has the luxury of collecting tax and purchasing weapons from China and Russia, while the PDF and EAOs must rely on underground channels to acquire arms. In terms of territory, some estimate that the PDF and EAOs control 40 to 50% of the country's territory. Accurate assessment of the control of territory is extremely difficult given the highly volatile battlefield situation and the constant contest for territory between the military and the resistance. And most observers would agree that the territories under PDF control are in less-populated rural and jungle regions, while the Burmese military still firmly holds the population centers, including cities and urban areas. With the continuation of bloody violence during the civil war, the PDF and EAOs are gaining ground in the peripheries of the country, and it is unlikely that the Burmese military can eradicate these groups despite their repeated campaigns against the insurgency. Similarly, despite operations by the PDF and EAOs, a decisive victory to defeat the Burmese military is also improbable in the foreseeable future.

ILLEGITIMATE AND DESTABILIZING ELECTIONS IN 2023?

As stipulated by the 2008 constitution, Myanmar's state of emergency, which the military declared following the 2021 coup, can only be extended twice. This means that it would end by January 31, 2023, and the country's general election must be held within six months afterward, i.e., by August 1, 2023. Many people had expected that the military junta would have run out of extensions for the state of emergency, which it believes allowed it to form the State Administrative Council to govern the country. However, by the beginning of February, the military government extended the state of emergency for another six months, citing the "unusual circumstances." The military's prior political and legal preparations had indicated that it was planning to hold the election sometime in 2023, but this announcement delays the election by another six months. The military cannot indefinitely postpone it.

Regardless of when the election will be held, it will be highly controversial and destabilizing. As the resistance mobilizes to reject the election, speculation of attacks against polling stations and of efforts

to deter people from voting has run rampant. The military junta may see a manipulated election as its ticket to some type of legitimacy. However, the contest for power will only manifest itself through more bloodshed.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO THE ARMED RESISTANCE?

The other potential game changer is international assistance. The 2023 U.S. National Defense Authorization Act has enabled direct engagement with the resistance movement, including providing non-lethal assistance. Although it falls short of the military assistance that the resistance forces have been requesting, calls from the resistance for such assistance have been growing in volume in Washington. The international community's attitude toward the resistance also holds great sway over the political situation on the ground. China's position, for example, could decisively influence the country's internal dynamics and trajectory. At a minimum, growing international concern, as demonstrated by the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2669 in December 2022, puts greater pressure on the behavior of the Burmese military and the calculus of its foreign enablers, including China and Russia. More Western sanctions are unlikely to change



Symbols of resistance - the three-finger sign and Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

the Burmese military's stance, but the tightening of positions by its foreign supporters will. If Beijing is significantly burdened and troubled by the deepening chaos and instability in Myanmar, it could more forcefully press the Burmese military toward negotiations and settlements. China has not done so in the past two years because COVID-19 had hindered mobility across the border and Chinese involvement. But that has changed now, as attested by the new Chinese special envoy's visit to Myanmar in late December 2022.

There is no quick solution to Myanmar's seven-and-half-decade-long civil war.

The power imbalance between the Burmese military and the resistance dictates that the struggle will be prolonged and is unlikely to render the result the West would like to see. In fact, many Burmese observers have privately assessed that the country has only "returned to the pre-2010 path after a decade-long deviation." Thus, more internal instability and chaos, a bigger illicit economy, and deepening dependence on China and Russia are likely in Myanmar's future. There is no end to the country's troubles in sight.

Yun Sun is a Nonresident Fellow at the Global Economy and Development, Africa

Growth Initiative

This article was first published by the Brookings Institute as part of a series titled "Nonstate armed actors and illicit economies in 2023" from Brookings's Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors.

MULLING THE FUTURE OF MYANMAR ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF AN UNFULFILLED PROMISE

Igor Blazevic

In this reflection, activist and friend of Myanmar Igor Blazevic uses an important anniversary to stress the need for a strong alliance to take on the Myanmar military junta and free the country from dictatorship.

Nant Helen is Karen, Chairperson of the Karen Swedish Community and Co-Chairperson of the European Karen Network. We got to know each other after the coup, and in the meantime we became good friends. What united us is our tireless solidarity and efforts to help friends in Burma.

On the 75th Karen National Day, Nant Helen posted the following: "On 11 February 1948, more than 400,000 Karen people from across Burma took to the streets of Rangoon and other main cities, marching peacefully with 4 demands; self-determination, equality, national unity and peace. It is still the biggest Karen protest in the history of Burma.

It was a day when Karen people came together from different regions, different religions, and different backgrounds. On this day, the Karen united, from the mountains of Kawthoolei to the plains of the delta, from the university educated to the illiterate farmers or hunters. They





A female Karen fighter stands on parade in Karen State. Photo: AFP

came together with one voice, demanding their rights. A mass movement was born that continues to this day.

They demanded their political rights as a nation.

1. Give us Karen Country, at once! (We want Freedom and Self-determination)
2. Show Karen one Kyat, Burman one Kyat, at once! (We want equality and fairness)
3. We don't want ethnic conflict! (We want communal harmony)
4. We don't want civil war! (We want peace).

These demands were rejected by the central government, and instead, the Karen people were met with more repression, and, later that year, with bullets. The Karen were faced with a choice of continued repression and attacks, or taking up arms to defend ourselves and fight for the survival of our race.

75 years on, we stick with our demands, and we will continue until our people are free.

I hope today brings us new hope, spirit and energy to continue our struggle until we are free."

I am reposting Nant Helen's post on the anniversary of the Panglong Agreement (12 February 1947). The demands which representatives of the Shan, Kachin, and Chin peoples had and what Aung San pledged to them in Panglong on behalf of the Burmese government are not different from what the Karen people were demanding and have been striving and struggling for.

NEW HOPE

Similar to Nant Helen, I also believe that the people of Myanmar - and all of us who are, for various reasons, close to their struggle - do have

new hope, spirit and energy to become free from the brutality and oppression of murderous and predatory gangs in uniforms.

Victory over an army that has degenerated into a murderous terrorist organization will not come to the people of Myanmar from outside. It will come neither from the ASEAN's 5 Point Plan nor from the US Congress Burma Bill nor from any of Myanmar's neighbours.

None of the international players believe that David, the people, can prevail over Goliath, a brutish military. That is why they want to appease and persuade Goliath to stop torturing, raping, plundering, destroying, burning, and murdering. They also want to persuade the people of Myanmar to accept that they must continue to live in the shadow of Goliath and let him enjoy a luxurious life, just as long as he promises that he will behave better.

People of Myanmar, Bama as well as ethnic nationalities, have had enough of Goliath's rogue behaviour, and they do not want to take it any more. They know that this time they must and they can liberate themselves. It is the truth that Davids in the real world do not often prevail over Goliaths, but history teaches us that sometimes they do.

NEED FOR POLITICAL ALLIANCE

In order for the victory of Myanmar's David over its Goliath to happen, what is needed is a credible and active political alliance of the National Unity Government (NUG) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) behind the new visionary idea of a Federal Democratic Myanmar.

After two years of failed

attempts of the military junta to fully grab and consolidate power, it seems to me that we are at a critical crossroads. The junta and the military are significantly weakened. Resistance is getting stronger week by week, already numerous enough, gradually gaining small weapons for effective guerilla struggle and becoming more and more capable of tactical cooperation between the EROs and People's Defence Forces or PDFs.

What is now needed is to take this struggle to a new level of strategic and initiative-taking cooperation between the NUG and EROs. For that to happen, a committed political alliance is needed.

It seems to me that two things are needed for such an alliance to be forged.

One is that the National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership needs to find political courage in this critical historic moment to promise ethnic stakeholders federalism and self-determination on behalf of the Bama majority. The NLD team consisting of someone senior enough from the NLD ministers in the NUG, someone senior from the CRPH and someone from the NLD's Central Executive Committee should meet ethnic stakeholders and make a credible promise that the four above-mentioned demands will be fulfilled in the future Myanmar that is liberated from military dictatorship – the four demands of self-determination, equality, national unity, and peace. Make it as in-person meeting. Make it as a written symbolic pledge. Make a public speech to the nation. Symbolism in politics and history matters.

Speeches to the nation matter.

CRUCIAL STEP

I am aware that among

some senior and not-so-senior NLD members, there is still lingering fear about federalization and about “balkanization”. My response on that will be that if the legitimate political representatives of the Bama majority do not do what is needed from their side to forge a full political alliance between the NUG and EROs, both the NUG and EROs, as well as the NLD, will lose the current revolution and struggle. The junta and the military will reconsolidate power and use natural resources to strengthen themselves again so that Myanmar will have neither democracy nor federalism.

Because we are in a critical historic moment, the current NLD personnel that are not in the junta’s jails need to take over historic responsibility for transformative, visionary leadership and must do what Aung San has done in Panglong – it should promise to ethnic stakeholders the federalism and self-determination they have been demanding and struggling to achieve for decades. This is how they can create a winning alliance.

COMMON PROJECT

A second thing is needed as well. Ethnic stakeholders also need to leave their comfort zone and boldly bet on a “common project” with Bama democrats. I say “bet” because, yes, there is a big uncertainty and risk. We do not know whether the alliance between Bama democratic forces and ethnic federalist forces will be strong enough to prevail over the military and whether nowadays aligned players will be able, later on, to make a full compromise over the future institutional buildup of the country. But if a critical mass of ethnic stakeholders bet on victory and on a common project, there is a “high probability” they will prevail over a significantly weakened military.

And once we achieve a common victory, there is a “realistic chance” that compromise can be achieved as well.

For a compromise over the institutional buildup of a Federal Democratic Myanmar to be achieved, we need moderate and gradual approaches in talks about the future of the country. The underlying challenge is that even when (and if) military dictatorship is removed, the country will be full of numerous armed groups with no common understanding of how the country should be institutionally constructed. We know that we have maximalist and conflicting demands regarding who is “entitled” to control which territory. Probably the hardest part of the country to find compromise is Shan State. We also have an underlying challenge how to balance significant demographic disproportionality between the Bama majority and ethnic nationalities.

Wisdom, moderation, and non-dogmatic, visionary approaches will be needed to find the right compromise and balance between multiple conflicting demands in an extremely diverse and divided society.

But still, a political alliance between Myanmar’s political and armed stakeholders is the key to winning in the current struggle. Young Spring Revolution activists and CDM-ers have already shown “transformative visionary leadership”. They have already put their lives on the frontline of the struggle for a new Myanmar that can be a fair and secure home for everybody.

Others need to follow their example. The NLD needs to find its own internal visionary leadership comparable to Aung San and make a new state-founding deal with ethnic stakeholders along the lines of

what EROs have been demanding for already 75 years.

Ethnic leaders also need to show the same boldness to commit themselves to a common project of a Federal Democratic Myanmar.

DON’T WAIT

Another possibility is that the NLD will be reluctant to make a visionary decision and will continue to wait for “what will the Lady say” and will remain reluctant to offer to ethnics what they ask. Or ethnic stakeholders will not be ready to invest in a common project and will just tactically and patiently work on strengthening their own autonomy and de facto control over their “own territory”, waiting for who will prevail in the centre to extort as many concessions as possible because whoever will prevail, the centre will be extremely weak.

In that case, everybody will lose in this struggle, and the military will win. The NLD and Bama democracy movement will lose, and the kleptocratic regime of ex-generals will consolidate their grip over the country and its economic assets. Ethnic stakeholders will not get freedom and equality for their people either. The maximum that they can get if the junta reconsolidates power and control over the population, territory and natural resources, will be a Wa or RCSS type of “autonomy for illegal and legal businesses”.

This would be a dire prospect.

For David to slay Goliath, a fully-functioning alliance is the need of the hour.

Igor Blazevic, Senior Adviser at the Prague Civil Society Centre and lecturer at the Educational Initiatives Myanmar

ARE WE NOW SEEING THE FRUITS OF MYANMAR'S SPRING REVOLUTION?

Ma Lone Gyi Tin



Photo: AFP

As Myanmar's Spring Revolution enters its third year, the Acting President of the National Unity Government [NUG], Duwa Lashi La, said at a recent meeting of the NUG that everyone will have to make efforts to achieve victory.

The Acting President said that at present, all opposition groups have the will and zeal for federalism.

He added that this clearly shows that everyone is united in the common political consensus and common political goal of the Spring Revolution.

It is obvious that the people of Myanmar as a whole have a strong desire to overthrow the junta and establish a free and fair federal union.

On the other hand, the junta is facing a series of defeats and is trying to win against the people by torturing them. But one must also know that the military junta can no longer gain legitimacy as a government on the international front.

The general public

needs to know that the junta must pay for the war crimes it committed as soon as the NUG receives international recognition as the official government of Myanmar. We can already see that the time for this is not far away.

The people of Myanmar, ethnic alliances, People's Defense Forces (PDFs), and the NUG must make more efforts than before. Of course, we have already seen that they are making great efforts.

It is common knowledge that the junta's army is losing heavily in ground battles with the revolutionary forces, which are increasingly united and systematic, so the junta's army attacks unarmed civilians. Moreover, more and more junta soldiers have defected from the military since the coup.

Even some of those who cannot defect from the military for various reasons are sending information to the revolutionary forces in various ways, so the junta often leaks secret information. It can be seen that the junta leader has often warned military officers not to leak information. The junta,

defeated in many battles, has become politically and diplomatically inferior. At a time when the international community and the United Nations are engaging more with the NUG, the junta's diplomatic situation is not good even with ASEAN nations.

On 13 February, it was reported that the U.S. State Department Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, Uzra Zeya attended the opening of the Foreign Affairs Office of the NUG in Washington and, alongside NUG Foreign Affairs Minister Zin Mar Aung, she cut the ribbon for the inauguration ceremony.

In the event, she said the US stands with the people of Myanmar in their aspirations for democracy, the rule of law, justice, and respect for human rights, and the US will remain a strong partner in these efforts.

On 6 February, British Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs, James Cleverly, met with NUG Foreign Affairs Minister Zin Mar Aung in London to discuss bilateral cooperation regarding the Myanmar issue. They discussed the issue of minorities and other issues, including how to stop the terror acts of the junta.

This shows that two world powers recognize the government in exile, the NUG.

The possible result of the Spring Revolution is already visible. Sufferers have already felt pain. When the people of Myanmar as a whole are on the winning side, as the father of independence General Aung San said, it is necessary not to get carried away when the likely outcome is seen, but all need to be alert and work harder until the goal is reached.

NUG WILL TAKE ACTION AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA FOR DESECRATION OF HISTORIC SITES



Photo: Sven Schuerermeier

The NUG announced that it will take action against the junta for destroying and deploying troops at historical structures and culturally important landmarks.

The statement was made by the NUG's Interim Board for Heritage Administration on 12 February.

It gave, as examples of this behaviour: the junta's deployment of troops in the ancient historical city of Mrauk-U; attacking and destroying ancient temples in Chin State; damaging the World Heritage site near Shwebo in Sagaing Region's Hanlin, one of five Pyu City Staes that existed in central Myanmar from the 2nd century BCE to the 11th century; and burning down Christian religious structures and villages in Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region.

The organisations and individuals who committed these and similar acts will be prosecuted under the relevant laws, including the Preservation and Protection of Ancient Buildings Law, the Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage Region law, and the Anti-Terrorism Law, according to the Interim Board for Heritage Administration.

MYANMAR AIR STRIKES AGAINST CIVILIANS ARE ACTS OF TERRORISM, SAYS FORSEA

The Myanmar coup leader Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing's use of violent attacks from the air perfectly fits the definition of "domestic terrorism" developed by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), says FORSEA (Forces of Renewal South East Asia).

Domestic terrorism: Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature, according to the FBI.

The State Administrative Council, or Myanmar's coup regime, established on 1 February 2021, has been deploying Myanmar Air Force fighter jets and gunship helicopters to deliberately strike "soft targets" in the conflict regions of Myanmar. The air force jets have launched missiles and dropped



Myanmar Air Force fighter jets. Photo: AFP

bombs with increasing frequency and with progressively greater precision against civilian populations and their physical infrastructures.

Myanmar Armed Forces Russian, Chinese and Pakistani-supplied fighters and bombers have struck civilian gatherings in Kachin State, war refugee camps in Chin State on the border with India's Mizoram State, the mountainous state of Karenni people, Karen villages across

the borders from Thailand and villages in the Burmese Buddhist heartland of the Dry Zone.

Most recently, at 11:30 pm on 15 February – 3 days after the coup regime held the annual ceremony in its fortified capital Naypyidaw, commemorating the establishment of Myanmar as a Union of multi-ethnic nations – its fighter jets bombed a sizeable village school built by Naw May Oo, a former Karen refugee from USA with volunteer teachers and donations from Karen diaspora and other individual philanthropists.

The school buildings were clearly marked “New Generation School” (NGS). The school catered to the educational needs of Karen and other war-fleeing Myanmar Internally displaced persons (or IDPs), who have sought refuge and protection under the Karen National Union and its military wing Karen National Liberation Army.

She wrote on her Facebook page the morning after the mid-night bombing of her refugee school:

“To all friends and supporters of the New Generation School, Mutraw District (Karen State), I’m sad to inform you that years of hard works and dedication of all of you, together with the determination of our very own people in Mutraw district, was attacked once again, by air-strikes last night.”

In a private dinner conversation in Washington two decades ago Edward Luttwak, the famed author of *Coup d’Etat: A Practical Handbook*, described what he considered a

terrorist organization, “an organization that deploys violence against civilians, but does not have an air force”, to Dr Maung Zarni of FORSEA. Myanmar coup regime has turned Luttwak’s crude definition on its head.

The 45-page document classified SECRET – which contains detailed minutes of the 7-hour long “counter-terrorism” meeting held at Myanmar Police Headquarters in Naypyidaw on 23 December 2022 – states specifically the need for increasing air strikes (across resistance-strong and ethnic minority regions). Several dozen security officials were reporting orally to the regime’s Home Affairs Minister Lt-General Soe Htut who presided over the internal Security meeting. And the document recorded that out of a total of 14 regions that make up Myanmar (called “states and divisions”) resistance networks are very active in 12. Importantly, they openly admitted both significant human intelligence failures and poor electronic surveillance over resistance networks, particularly in the ethnic minority-controlled conflict regions, which is more than 50% of the country’s territories. The report also noted that the SAC regime troops are finding the rugged physical terrains extremely difficult for effective military campaigns, hence frequent call-ins for air strikes.

First published by FORSEA:

<https://forsea.co/myanmar-air-strikes-against-civilians-as-acts-of-terrorism/>



MYANMAR POLITICAL PARTIES LAW DESIGNED TO “CRUSH ALL POLITICAL OPPOSITION” SAYS HRW

Myanmar's new political parties law will prevent key members of the political opposition from running in upcoming elections, according to Human Rights Watch.

The rights organisation says that the law announced on 26 January 2023 adds to concerns that the vote now slated for August will lack all credibility and be used merely to try to legitimise further military control.

The Political Party Registration Law, which repeals 2010 legislation, prohibits

anyone previously convicted of a crime or serving a prison term from joining a political party.

This disqualifies many senior members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), including the party leader, Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, both serving lengthy sentences on fabricated charges. The military overthrew the newly elected NLD-led government on 1 February 2021.

“Myanmar's junta adopted the Political Party Registration Law not only to rig the planned elections but to try to obtain legitimacy for

a military-controlled state,” said Manny Maung, Myanmar researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The junta is creating a system to crush all political opposition and derail any possible return to democratic civilian rule.”

The new law states that existing political parties must reregister within 60 days of the law's enactment or risk being dissolved, and disqualifies any political group declared as an “unlawful association or terrorist organisation under any existing law.”

The junta has already



Photo: AFP

declared the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and its parliamentary body, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the Union Parliament) as "terrorist organizations" for alleged attacks against the military since the coup.

The law requires political groups seeking to put forward electoral candidates to have at least 100,000 members within three months of registering, a huge increase from 1,000 in the previous law, and a prohibitive bar for most parties.

It also requires national political parties to have funds of at least 100 million kyat (US\$47,000) to qualify for registration, far more than most of the smaller parties can afford. For regional or state parties, the minimum amount required in the party coffers is 10 million kyat (\$4,700). These requirements will make it nearly impossible for smaller ethnic and minority parties to take part in elections, Human Rights Watch said.

The NLD responded that it "steadfastly" objected to any election under the military junta, and that it refused to register. Other smaller parties, such as the Kayah State Democracy and the Kayan National Party, also said they will not register and therefore face dissolution. Some ethnic minority parties such as the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and the United Democracy Party have indicated they plan to register.

The People's Defense Forces, which are anti-junta militias, have indicated that they aim to disrupt preparations for the elections and have attacked some junta personnel

conducting a population survey that could be used to assemble voter rolls. This raises concerns that members of political parties that register under the new law could also be targeted.

On 1 February 2023, the junta extended the state of emergency in the country for six more months. On 2 February the junta imposed new martial law orders in 37 additional townships in Chin, Karen, Karenni, Magway and Mon States, and Bago, Sagaing, and Tanintharyi Regions. The orders impose curfews and curbs freedom of association and movement, restricting political parties from organising.

The military-drafted 2008 Constitution, although designed to perpetuate military control, requires the state to enact laws to allow political parties to organise for the "flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system."

Under the new law and additional martial law orders, any election would be dominated by junta-backed political parties and the military itself, which already holds 25 percent of seats in the national and local legislatures under the 2008 Constitution.

The Political Parties Registration Law fails to meet international standards in respecting the rights of political parties to organize and stand for election. Under international law, voters should have the right to freely choose their candidates, and any conditions placed on political party and candidate registration should be reasonable and non-discriminatory.

Establishing a credible, pluralistic, and rights-respecting

electoral system is essential to holding genuine democratic elections in which voters freely choose their representatives. Despite the limitations imposed by the 2008 Constitution, in November 2020, voters exercised their right to choose their government, a right that the military denied by staging a coup.

Human Rights Watch says concerned governments, including regional partners such as member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, and India, should condemn the political parties law and ensure that they do not lend credibility to the junta's attempt to legitimise military control through sham elections.

The United Kingdom, the United States, and European Union member states should coordinate with other like-minded governments to strengthen and enforce targeted sanctions against senior junta officials and military entities in Myanmar.

"The 2021 military coup strangled the hopes of the Myanmar people who had voted in credible elections in 2020," said Maung, from Human Rights Watch. "Concerned governments need to put concerted pressure on the junta to return to a democratically elected civilian government."

MYANMAR'S ARRESTED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

Adam Simpson, Thomas Kean and Susan Park



Jade mining environmental damage in Hpakant, Kachin State. Photo: EPA

In the two years since the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar's natural environment has deteriorated as the embryonic legal and regulatory regime that was emerging during the decade of political and economic reforms has unravelled

Gold mining has significantly increased, particularly in Kachin and Shan States, causing extensive social and environmental problems. The military has issued new mining permits while informal or illegal mining has also proliferated, causing deforestation, erosion and flooding while also damaging fisheries by polluting waterways with toxic sediment.

Kachin State is also emerging as a key site for highly polluting rare earths mining. While the illicit export of rare

earth elements across the border to China has been occurring for years, export activity has boomed since the coup. Attempts by previous governments to regulate these polluted areas have failed since the coup due to a lack of effective oversight. Some of the revenue may be helping the military crush dissent.

But just when Myanmar's environment needs its defenders the most, environmental activists find themselves facing a plethora of new pressures and security concerns.

Myanmar's environmental activists, and civil society more broadly, are no strangers to political restrictions. During half a century of earlier authoritarian military rule, activism was largely confined to ethnic 'liberated areas' or border zones

beyond the reach of the military. This situation began to change during Myanmar's decade of political and economic reforms starting in 2011, when environmental activists could openly challenge infrastructure projects, mines and government decisions for the first time.

Since the 2021 military coup, the increasingly complex situation in Myanmar has severely impacted environmental movements. The safety of activists has become much more perilous under the new and highly restrictive Organisation Registration Law enacted in October 2022. The coup has resulted in three key impacts on Myanmar's environmental movements — fracturing, fragmentation and transformation.

A process of fracturing has occurred since the collapse of many environmental NGOs, civil society organisations and community-based organisations as a result of the coup and the subsequent societal conflict. Some activists have simply abandoned activism due to security concerns, cutting all communication with networks of former colleagues to avoid scrutiny from the security services.

A similar fracturing process occurred after the 2014

Thai coup, which resulted in a dramatic reduction in environmental activism in Thailand. But the impacts of the coup in Myanmar on environmental activism have been significantly larger in proportion to the level of extreme disruption and repression across the entire society.

Environmental movements have also experienced fragmentation since many activists have been forced to relocate for safety reasons. Activists have gravitated towards more liberal spaces beyond the reach of the military regime by fleeing to 'liberated' areas run by sympathetic ethnic armed groups or seeking refuge abroad, usually in Thailand, from where they can continue environmental activities through other means. Fragmentation has also occurred due to the additional difficulties in communication and transport since the coup. Internet shutdowns in various areas have made it difficult for networks to remain in contact and many activists have changed their phone numbers for security reasons, making it hard to reconnect. Even where the internet and mobile connections operate, new restrictions on major social media platforms have disrupted networks. Travel across Myanmar is also much more difficult due to higher costs, limited connections and regular checkpoints.

Environmental activists and groups now often work on their own, or network in very limited ways.

Environmental movements have been transformed in a variety of ways since the coup. Activists have adopted new strategies to continue their work inside nominally state-controlled areas of Myanmar. In regions where the military remains largely in control, activists have shifted their work to rural areas where the military's reach is weaker.

Some environmental activists have changed their role completely by shifting to the provision of humanitarian aid, while other activists have transitioned from working non-violently to joining the military struggle for democracy under the People's Defence Forces, part of the armed resistance that emerged after the coup, or pre-existing ethnic armed groups.

The ability of activists to openly challenge environmentally destructive activities has virtually evaporated. Activists can appeal to international actors for support, but the influence of international organisations is much reduced. During the decade of reform, civil society organisations could complain to the International Secretariat of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative if the government

failed to consider their concerns. After the coup, Myanmar was suspended from the initiative due to political instability. These types of international actors simply no longer have any leverage over Myanmar.

Two years after the military coup, with the international community's attention focused on Ukraine, Myanmar's environment is experiencing serious degradation and the communities that rely on it for their existence are facing threats to their safety and livelihoods. Meanwhile, Myanmar's environmental activists who once shined light on these issues now face constant repression and threats to their own security. There is no easy solution, but if even a sliver of the world's attention and resources that have been expended on Ukraine were directed towards Myanmar instead, then a way out of the present quagmire would seem more likely.

First published on East Asia Forum

Adam Simpson is Senior Lecturer in International Studies at the University of South Australia.

Thomas Kean is Senior Consultant at the International Crisis Group, and Director and Editor-at-Large of Frontier Myanmar.

Susan Park is Professor of Global Governance at the University of Sydney.

ROHINGYA REFUGEES LAND ON INDONESIA'S WEST COAST

At least 69 Rohingya refugees, many of them women and children, landed on Indonesia's west coast Thursday in a wooden boat, an official with the United Nations refugee agency said.

The vessel came ashore at a beach in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh, according to UNHCR official Oktina Hafanti, with one passenger saying some on board died during the voyage.

It was the sixth Rohingya boat to land in Indonesia since November.

Around a million Rohingya are estimated to be living in refugee camps in Bangladesh after they fled persecution in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017.

Thousands risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys -- often in poor-quality boats -- attempting to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

"We currently count 69 of them, including men, women and children," Hafanti said.

The refugees were being transported to a temporary shelter nearby, the official added.

Hafanti said authorities would double-check the headcount after they arrived at the refuge.

According to a passenger who gave his name as Shorifuddin, the boat departed Bangladesh two weeks ago.

Several people died due to a lack of food and the captain abandoned the passengers in the middle of the journey, he said.

"We have been suffering in the ocean for 15 days and all this time, we didn't have enough food," the 15-year-old told AFP.

He said he fled Bangladesh with seven family members including his parents hoping for a better life in Indonesia.

"We were strongly persecuted in Bangladesh by the local people. We also didn't have the opportunity to study and achieve higher education," he said.

Five other vessels carrying Rohingya refugees landed in Indonesia in November and December last year, carrying a total of nearly 700 passengers.

More than 2,000 are believed to have attempted the risky journey in 2022, according to the UNHCR, a number similar to that in 2020.

The agency estimated nearly 200 Rohingya died or went missing last year attempting hazardous sea crossings.

AFP



Rohingya migrants come ashore on the beach in Aceh, Indonesia. Photo: AFP

ROHINGYA REFUGEES DESPAIR OVER LOOMING FOOD AID CUTS

Looming cuts to food aid will have a “devastating” effect on the estimated million Rohingya living in sprawling Bangladeshi refugee camps, community leaders from the stateless minority said Saturday.

The UN World Food Programme announced Friday it would cut back its assistance for the first time since a 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar that drove huge numbers of Rohingya out of their homes and across the border.

Monthly food vouchers would be cut from \$12 to \$10 per person from March to make up for a \$125 million donor shortfall, the agency said, adding that further ration cuts were also “imminent” without an immediate funding boost.

“We understand that the world’s attention towards the Rohingya is decreasing,” Sayedullah, a Rohingya community leader living in the camps, told AFP.

“But the latest decision by WFP will pave the way for a humanitarian crisis in the camps.”

Salimullah, another civil society leader, said the ration cut would exacerbate crime in the camps, with women and children suffering the most.

“This will be a devastating blow,” he told AFP. “There will be a rise in terrorism, drug and human trafficking.”

The 2017 crackdown in Myanmar -- now the subject of a UN genocide investigation



● A Rohingya boy. Photo: AFP

-- sent around 750,000 Rohingya fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh with harrowing stories of murder, rape and arson.

Bangladesh has struggled to support its immense refugee population and the prospects of a wholesale return to Myanmar or resettlement elsewhere are remote.

Rohingya living in the camps around Cox’s Bazar are not allowed to seek employment and are almost entirely dependent on limited humanitarian aid to survive.

WFP said nearly one in eight Rohingya children were already acutely malnourished, while 40 percent of pregnant and breastfeeding women were anaemic.

Large numbers of refugees have attempted hazardous sea crossings in an effort to find a better life away from the camps, including more than 2,000 people last year,

according to the UN refugee agency.

It estimated nearly 200 Rohingya had died or went missing last year during such voyages.

“Rohingya children and their families are at breaking point and need more support, not less,” Onno Van Manen of Save the Children said in a statement.

“We are hearing reports of increasing hunger and malnutrition, as well as child marriage and child labour... and families are increasingly risking their lives at sea to seek a life beyond their refugee camp.”

AFP

HUNDREDS PROTEST IN CHINA OVER HEALTH INSURANCE REFORMS

Hundreds of retirees staged protests in the Chinese cities of Wuhan and Dalian on Wednesday against reforms to the public health insurance system, according to witnesses and images on social media.

Protests are rare in China, where authorities strictly enforce public order laws and opposition is quickly snuffed out.

But expressions of public anger do sometimes emerge, including widespread protests last year against strict Covid-19 rules, which have since been rescinded. COVID-19 infections, and the chaos that have accompanied them, appear to have died down, and internationally countries appear to have grown more relaxed about accepting visitors from China.

The latest outpouring of frustration has



Photo: AFP

been sparked by reforms to China's vast public health insurance system that have reduced allowances paid monthly to retirees.

On Wednesday a crowd of demonstrators rallied in front of a park in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in the second such gathering in a week.

Video posted on social media showed security guards by the entrance to popular scenic spot Zhongshan Park forming a human chain to prevent more demonstrators from entering.

Four witnesses confirmed the rally took place and AFP was able to geolocate footage online to areas around the park.



In the northeastern city of Dalian, a witness confirmed to AFP that hundreds also took to the streets against the health insurance reforms.

Elderly demonstrators began gathering around 9 am on Wednesday, the witness said, but were gone by the afternoon.

"Give me back my medical insurance money," they can be heard chanting in one video, which AFP geolocated to the city's Renmin Square, where a number of local government buildings are situated.

In another video, a large column of police are seen guarding the city government.

Changes to the health insurance system prompted a separate rally by hundreds of retirees in front of Wuhan's city hall last Wednesday.

Pictures shared on social media appeared to show local officials meeting with some of those demonstrators for negotiations.

'Compromise'

The insurance reforms, gradually introduced since 2021, come as local government finances are strained following years of strict and costly zero-Covid policies.

The protests in Wuhan - a city of 11 million people where the coronavirus first emerged in late 2019 - have been exacerbated by the fact that officials are largely unaffected by the reforms, analysts have said.

"Civil servants and public institution staff are still entitled to subsidised medical assistance insurance on top of the employee health insurance scheme," political risk consultancy SinoInsider said in a note.

"Senior and retired CCP (Chinese Communist Party) cadres have long had access to generous medical treatments at public expense and without having to pay for basic healthcare insurance."

Local governments could "compromise and meet protester demands early" rather than engage in a drawn-out dispute, the firm added.

AFP

CHINA'S XI HAILS IRAN 'SOLIDARITY' DURING 'COMPLEX' WORLD SITUATION



Chinese leader Xi Jinping.
Photo: AFP

Chinese President Xi Jinping hailed Beijing's "solidarity" with Iran on Tuesday last week as he hosted the Islamic republic's President Ebrahim Raisi at the start of a three-day trip.

For the first state visit by an Iranian president to China in more than 20 years, Raisi has brought a large trade and finance delegation to Beijing and was earlier greeted by Xi on a red carpet.

"In the face of the current complex changes in the world, times, and history, China and Iran have supported each other (and) worked together in solidarity and cooperation," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Both countries face pressure from Western

nations over their positions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while Iran is already under strict US sanctions due to its nuclear programme.

Iran has emerged as one of Russia's few remaining allies as Moscow has been pushed deeper into international isolation over the invasion.

Western countries have accused Tehran of supplying armed drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, a charge it denies.

In December, Washington outlined what it said was an extensive relationship between Iran and Russia involving equipment such as helicopters, fighter jets and drones.

Moscow's offensive in Ukraine is a sensitive issue for Beijing, which has sought to position itself as neutral while offering diplomatic backing to its strategic ally Russia.

China "supports Iran in safeguarding national sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national dignity... and in resisting unilateralism and hegemonism", CCTV reported Xi as saying.

Beijing also "opposes external forces interfering in Iran's internal affairs and undermining Iran's security and stability", and will continue to "promote the early and proper resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue", the Chinese leader said.

"No matter how the international and regional situation changes, China will unswervingly develop friendly cooperation with Iran", Xi added.

According to CCTV, the two sides signed a number of bilateral cooperation documents in the fields of agriculture, trade, tourism, environmental protection, health, disaster relief, culture and sport.

'Traditional friendship'

Raisi and Xi met for the first time last September at a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Uzbekistan, where the Iranian president called for expanded ties.

According to Iranian state news agency IRNA, Raisi will take part in meetings with Chinese businessmen and Iranians living in the country.

China is Iran's largest trading partner, IRNA said, citing the 10-month statistics of Iranian customs authorities. Tehran's exports to Beijing stood at \$12.6 billion, while it imported \$12.7 billion worth of goods from China.

Raisi is being accompanied by the country's foreign minister and the ministers for the economy, roads and transportation, and oil. Also attending is the minister for industry, mining and trade, as well as the minister for agriculture, according to Iranian state television.

His delegation also includes Ali Bagheri, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs and its chief nuclear negotiator.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Raisi would meet with Premier Li Keqiang and top Chinese legislator Li Zhanshu.

Raisi's first visit to China comes days after he declared victory over the nationwide protest movement triggered by the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, following her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's dress code for women.

Authorities say hundreds of people, including dozens of security personnel, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests, which they generally label as "riots".

The judiciary has sentenced 18 people to death in connection with the protests, according to an AFP tally based on official announcements. Four people have been executed, triggering international outrage.

AFP

TAIWAN FINDS REMAINS OF SUSPECTED CHINESE BALLOON, TIGHTENS MILITARY SECURITY

Taiwan said it found the remains of a suspected Chinese meteorological balloon on Thursday last week and would increase patrols at military facilities as Beijing intensifies threats toward the self-ruled island.

The incident comes after US President Joe Biden ordered the shooting down of a Chinese balloon after it crossed US territory, including over areas with sensitive military sites.

US officials said it was a surveillance balloon and part of a fleet of such craft allegedly floating around the globe.

Beijing insists it was a meteorological craft that had blown off course and has accused Washington of sending similar devices into its airspace, charges the US has denied.

Taiwan's army said "unidentified objects" were spotted falling from the sky on Thursday over the Matsu islands, some 280 kilometres from capital Taipei.

There they found the remains of a balloon that was one meter in diameter and a device inscribed with simplified Chinese characters commonly used in China that read "Taiyuan Radio No. 1 Factory Co., Ltd." and "meteorology instrument," the army said in a statement.

"Our initial analysis is that the remains belong to a meteorological detection device which have been stored by relevant units to be further analysed," the army said.

"All units are required to enhance camp patrols and continue to... monitor relevant situation."

Beijing has ramped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure in recent years on Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory and has vowed to seize one day, by force if necessary.

Taiwan's defence ministry said at a press conference on Tuesday that Chinese meteorological balloons had previously been spotted without providing details on the number and frequency.

The ministry said it would shoot down devices that pose a "high level of threat" but it has not yet encountered such a craft.

AFP

VIETNAM JAILS SOUTH KOREANS FOR PEOPLE SMUGGLING DURING PANDEMIC

Vietnam has jailed four South Korean men for smuggling people into the country during the Covid-19 pandemic, police said Thursday.

Lee Kwan Yuong, 55, and Seo Yuong Jin, 50, were sentenced to 10 years in prison for “organising illegal entry into Vietnam”, police in the central city of Danang said on their website.

Song Hong Sup and Kim Chang Gi were jailed for nine years and four-and-a-half years respectively by the court in Danang.

Vietnam largely closed its doors to the world in early 2020 to curb the spread of the coronavirus, with a very small number of foreign experts and skilled workers from authorised companies given permission to enter. It reopened in March last year.

State media said the men had used their companies to illegally bring in nearly 200 South Koreans.

Lee, former deputy chairman of the Association of South Korean People in central

Vietnam, earned more than \$42,000 while Seo pocketed \$3,600 from their services between December 2020 and March 2021, when they were arrested.

Fifteen Vietnamese men and women were jailed and five others, including one South Korean were given suspended sentences for the same charge.

Vietnam’s authorities are examining several cases of wrongdoing during the pandemic period.

At least 100 officials and businesspeople were arrested in connection with a scandal involving the distribution of Covid-19 testing kits.

Thirty-seven people - many of them senior diplomats and police - have also been arrested in an investigation into the repatriation of Vietnamese nationals during the pandemic.

South Korea is the top foreign investor in Vietnam, with total registered capital of more than 81 billion dollars.

AFP



The scene in the courtroom.
Photo: AFP

UN EXPERTS WARN OF 'CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES' IF ROHINGYA REFUGEE RATIONS ARE CUT

UN independent experts on Thursday last week warned of catastrophic consequences for Myanmar Rohingya refugee families living in camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, if life-saving food aid is slashed.

The Human Rights Council-appointed experts called for donors worldwide to give generously to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) Rohingya Refugee Response fund.

"The planned rations reductions are the devastating consequence of the international community's failure to provide funding for initiatives that address the fundamental needs of Rohingya

refugees", the two Special Rapporteurs said in a statement. "Rations will be slashed for Rohingya refugees starting in a few weeks, just before Ramadan. This is unconscionable".

Rations reduced next month

WFP has announced that it will reduce rations for Rohingya refugees by 17 per cent in March and warned that if no new funding commitments were made by April, a new round of deeper cuts will have to be made. It is appealing for \$125 million in funding.

"If these cuts are made, they will be imposed on vulnerable people who are already food insecure.



Photo: UN News

Acute malnutrition levels remain high, and chronic malnutrition is pervasive among the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh, with more than a third of children stunted and underweight,” the UN experts said.

“The repercussions of these cuts will be immediate and long-lasting, as refugees remain almost entirely dependent on this assistance for their nutritional needs,” Tom Andrews and Michael Fakhri added.

‘Particularly exposed’

“The most vulnerable, including children under five, adolescent girls, and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers, will be particularly exposed,” they said.

More than 700,000 mainly-Muslim Rohingya were forced to flee their homes in Myanmar in 2017 to escape a brutal military crackdown, which many – including the then UN human rights chief – characterized as a genocide.



Around one million members of the ethnic minority are living in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh, the largest concentration in the world.

“The Rohingya, survivors of genocidal attacks by the Myanmar military, are now further victimised by the failure of the international community to ensure their basic right to food”, the independent experts declared.

Concern over infighting

“Reductions in vital food assistance can make refugees more desperate, which could fuel further violence and unrest in the camps. This could also lead to a myriad of human rights concerns, such as a heightened risk of human trafficking, particularly of children and girls, and more refugees embarking on perilous boat journeys.”

Noting that many countries have repeatedly called for justice and accountability for the Rohingya, “those in the camps need more than words and statements of solidarity.

“Rohingya refugees need immediate action from the international community to ensure that these cuts – and their generation-spanning consequences – are avoided. The stakes could not be higher,” they said.

Independent rights experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to monitor and report on thematic issues or specific country situations.

They operate in their individual capacities and are independent from any government or organization. They are not UN staff and do not receive payment for their work.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Danny Postma

KACHIN STATE

KBC's Reverend Samson faces a further charge. The former chair of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), Baptist Reverend, Dr. Hkalam Samson is facing a further charge under Section 52 (a) of the Terrorism Act, according to the KBC. Reverend Samson was already facing two charges under section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act and section 505 (a) of the Penal Code for incitement bought against him by Major Thu Aung Zaw of the junta's Northern Regional Military Command. On 14 February the extra charge under Section 52 (a) of the Terrorism Act was added to Reverend Samson's charge sheet. One of his acquaintances said: "At a 14 February trial in Myitkyina Prison charges under Section 52(a) of the Terrorism Act was added [to the charges] against Dr. Hkalam Samson. He is facing three trials." Reverend Samson was detained by the junta at Mandalay Tada-U International Airport as he was traveling to Bangkok in Thailand for a medical check-up. He was taken from the airport to the junta's Northern Regional Military Command (RMC) headquarters in Myitkyina. Apparently, they charged him under Section 17 (1) for meeting with the Kachin Independence Organisation/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) chairman General N'Ban La and KIA General Sumlut Gun Maw in January 2022. They also charged him under Section 505 (A) for defaming the state because he said: "Let's establish a kingdom of Christ", during a talk at a youth conference in Asia. Whilst those two cases were being investigated he had a meeting with the Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile, Duwa Lashi La; the NUG Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Dr. Tu Hkawng; and the NUG Deputy Minister of Education, Daw Ja Htoi Pan. The meeting resulted in Dr Samson receiving the third charge under Section 52 (a). A lawyer working on the case said: "The charge under the Terrorism Act was added for meeting and praying with the NUG President; the [NUG] Natural Resources Minister Dr. Tu Hkawng; and the Education Minister, Teacher Ja Htoi Pan." Reverend Samson is a highly respected member of the Kachin community.



MYANMAR'S JUNTA SUPPORTERS FLOOD HOME AFFAIRS MINISTRY WITH GUN OWNERSHIP APPLICATIONS

Hundreds of applications came to the junta's Home Affairs Ministry in Nay Pyi Taw within days after the junta issued a new weapons policy allowing its supporters to legally own guns, according to local news reports.

Once the junta's order to allow its supporters to legally own guns was signed by the ministry in mid-February, hundreds of applications came immediately, according to a police officer.

After the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, protests against the coup broke out across the country, and the junta brutally suppressed them with weapons. After that, there was an armed struggle against the military junta, and some of the junta's administrative officials, its supporters and pro-junta informants were assassinated by some armed resistance groups.

Political analysts said that the junta has released the new weapons policy as an attempt to resolve the issue in which its supporters have been assassinated.

Applicants for the right to legally own guns must have the approval of the junta-appointed administrators and a relevant police station, said the new rule.

The types of guns that could be owned in accordance with the new rule will include rifles and machine guns, and such weapons will only be allowed to be legally owned by pro-junta organizations established for law enforcement purposes.

Since 2022, in areas where the armed revolution is strong, the military junta has already armed their supporters, and these groups are known as Pyu Saw Htee.

MYANMAR NOTES RECORD HIGH IN RICE EXPORTS PRIMARILY TO CHINA



Photo: Venicius Benidit

According to a report from the Myanmar Rice Federation, the export of rice and broken rice in January reached the record high during ten months starting from April 2022, its major export market being China.

Trade volume of rice and broken rice in January 2023 was 268,835 metric tons and it rose by 40,390 metric tons in comparison with December figures. In November and December 2022, Bangladesh was the major export market with the highest trade volume but in January 2023 China became the largest export market for Myanmar rice and broken rice.

The number of rice and broken rice exporting companies rose by seven more companies than in December 2022. In January, rice export was 171,811 metric tons and broken rice export was 97,024 metric tons of which 222,414 metric tons were exported by sea and 46,421 metric tons by border trade.

Myanmar earned a total US\$107 million from these exports and this is the highest in the last ten months.

Total Myanmar rice importing countries are 27 and China is the largest with 56,674 metric tons. Total Myanmar broken rice importing countries are 14 and also China is the largest market with 68,789 metric tons. All of the other four largest Myanmar broken rice importing countries are from Europe.

Currently the price of rice in the domestic market is rising. According to the Agriculture Marketing and Information Association (AMIA), reporting in mid-February, the amount of rice exports look set to rise.

PHILIPPINES EYED AS ATTRACTIVE EXPORT MARKET FOR MYANMAR ONIONS



Photo: Paul Magdas

It is learned from the Military Council's Ministry of Economy and Commerce that they were arranging to export onions to the Philippines where the price is high.

The ministry met with the Federation of Producers and Exporters of Onion, Garlic and Kitchen Vegetables and they discussed exporting onions and price stability in the domestic market.

Officials from the Federation called on the government help them export onions to potential markets including the Philippines.

The price of onions rose to US\$20 per viss (approx. 1.5 Kg) recently in the Philippines and this is one of the highest onion prices in the world.

The Philippines government said that they would import over 20,000 tons of onion to help the consumers in the country.

After the rise of onion prices in the country only the well-to-do families could buy onion and even the airhostesses brought onions by air into the country for the black market, it is learned.

A recent cyclone hit the production of onions in the Philippines and the onion price has reached its highest level in the last 14 years and also the onion price rose to three times the price of chicken by weight.

The price of onions in Myanmar is falling and the annual production is reportedly over 1 million tons, The acreage of onion is 170,000.

Most of the onions brought to Yangon and Bago markets are from Meiktila city and in January last week alone, 3,000 viss of onions were brought daily to the Yangon markets by 12-wheel trucks.

SERIOUS FUEL SHORTAGE IN KACHIN STATE'S HPAKANT, ALL FILLING STATIONS CLOSED



Photo: AFP

Nearly all filling stations in Hpakant, Kachin State are reportedly closed and there is a severe fuel shortage in the town.

The local residents from Hpakant said that some filling stations had to be closed as the fuel transportation to the town was banned by the authorities, and the price of fuel and basic commodities were rising in the town.

The army of the Military Council has banned fuel transportation to the jade city Hpakant since early this month and then the town faced fuel shortage and the price of petrol rose to over 20,000 kyats per gallon and some had to buy the petrol at the rate of 28,000 kyats per gallon, some local residents said.

A local resident said that the military had banned all fuel transport to Hpakant at Nantyar checkpoint and also they had banned such vehicles on the Waikhar road connecting Hpakant and Indawgyi since 1 February this year.

The filling stations in Lonekhin village in Hpakant and in other nearby places had closed their businesses a week ago. A local resident from Lonekhin village said that almost all filling stations in the village had closed at present and there was severe fuel shortage in the area.

Along with the rising fuel prices, the prices of some commodities were also rising with the price of low quality rice over 80,000 kyats per bag (110lbs) and high quality Pawsan at around 150,000 kyats per bag.

The local residents from Hpakant said that the situation in the town was unstable though there were no skirmishes and engagements in the area recently.

Renewed fighting erupted in Kachin State after the 2021 military coup and the most fighting took place in Hpakant Township. The Military Council troops and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) troops are fighting in this area to control this jade mining area.

There are only two main routes which can be used for transporting fuel, passengers and other commodities to Hpakant. They are Mohnyi-Indawgyi-Hpakant Road and Mokaung-Nantyar-Hpakant. The Military Council closed Mohnyi-Indawgyi-Hpakant road indefinitely.

Penrose Thitsa

MYANMAR'S SEABORNE TRADE SURGES BY 19.42% TO \$22.24 BILLION IN FIRST TEN MONTHS OF 2022-23 FISCAL YEAR

Myanmar's seaborne trade surged by 19.42 percent year-on-year to approximately \$22.24 billion over the first 10 months of the 2022-23 fiscal year (from April 2022 to January 2023), Business Standard reported citing the official data of junta's Commerce Ministry.

The country's maritime exports increased by 10.21 percent to more than \$9.22 billion compared to the same period last year, while maritime imports rose by 26.94 percent to more than \$13.01 billion.

During this period, Myanmar's total foreign trade value was more than \$29.33 billion, which includes border trade valued at more than \$7.09 billion. The majority of the Southeast Asian countrys foreign trade is conducted through sea routes due to its lengthy coastline, while it conducts border trade with China, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India.

Myanmar's exports include agricultural products, animal products, fisheries, minerals and forest products. The country imports capital goods, intermediate goods, and consumer goods.





SERVING TOURISTS

A woman carrying swim tubes for rent to people visiting during the Mann Shwe Sat Thaw Pagoda festival at Min Bu township in Magway Region. Devotees are returning in greater numbers to a central Myanmar temple, built around the gold-lined footprints of Buddha, after the Covid pandemic and a military coup curbed the annual pilgrimage.
Photo: AFP

ON THE WATER WITH YANGON'S 'RIVER CLEANERS'



Ma Yu launches her makeshift polystyrene boat into a Yangon creek for another day of trawling the filthy waters for plastic and tin cans with her team of “river cleaners”.

Around 10 others join her in the dawn light, driven to work the foetid grey-brown murk of Pazundaung creek by the economic crisis that has gripped Myanmar since the 2021 military coup.

They gather recyclable materials to sell to traders, their only source of income since losing their jobs after the putsch that upended the economy and sparked widespread unrest.

“There was no job for me on the land and I’m responsible for my children and my husband’s healthcare,” the 36-year-old Ma Yu told AFP, her cheeks and forehead daubed with the sandalwood “thanakha” paste popularly used in Myanmar to ward off the blazing sun.

“So I rented some polystyrene sheets and I went onto the creek with my neighbour. On the first day we managed to collect some plastic and cans to sell. We were happy,” she said.

Myanmar’s economy has been battered by the fallout of the coup, with more than a million people losing their jobs, according to the International Labour Organization.

Ma Ngal, 41, came to the river after losing her job selling vegetables and fish at a Yangon stall, with her carpenter husband also unable to find regular work.

“I didn’t tell my parents and family members that we are doing this work,” said Ma Ngal.

“But they found out, and I had to explain to them that I’m doing this for my family.”



Photo: AFP

Dead bodies

On a good day a picker can find trash worth 30,000 kyat (\$10), but more often the take-home pay is around \$3.

“Before we started working there was lots of plastic, cans and bottles on the creek,” says Kyu Kyu Khine, 39, who used to collect trash from Yangon’s streets.

The pickers try to time their working days with the tides -- floating downstream in search of more trash when it ebbs and riding it back upstream at the end of a shift.

But the tidal surges can be treacherous, says Ma Yu, who was knocked off her boat on one of her early forays onto the water.

“Sometimes I think that if something happens to me, I’m all alone here and I can’t do

anything,” she said.

The waters also carry regular reminders of the breakdown of order in Yangon, where residents say crime is surging in the aftermath of the coup.

The pickers regularly see dead bodies floating on the water, said Ma Yu.

“It’s not an easy job but... the important thing for me is that my children don’t starve,” she said.

Her fellow picker Ma Ngal says there are some lighter moments.

“Some people joke with us when they see us working. They say ‘here come the municipal team, they know how to clean up the river.’”

AFP



Mizzima TV

Be Different

FREE TO AIR DIGITAL TV CHANNEL

Proudly broadcast by Mizzima Media Group



/MizzimaDaily



www.mizzimaburmese.com



www.mizzima.com



www.mizzima.tv



Mizzima English Weekly Magazine