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MURDERING ITS OWN CITIZENS

The Myanmar junta will eventually lose in the end because they have committed the cardinal sin – going to war with their own people.

James Rodehaver, head of the UN rights office's Myanmar team, speaking on the occasion of a release last week of yet another report on the Myanmar crisis, said that "what they're doing now is they are treating Myanmar's people as their opponent and adversary."

"You have a military making war against its own people," he told the media, noting: "They have really created a crisis."

The UN is growing blunter with their language. Two years on from the February 1, 2021, coup that toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian National League for Democracy-led government, the situation is a "festering catastrophe", said UN human rights chief Volker Turk, adding that the military was operating with "complete impunity". In the report examining the first two years since the takeover, the UN Human Rights Office said that at least 2,940 people had been verified as killed, of which nearly 30 percent had died in detention.

However, the true death toll is likely to be much higher.

It is hard to clearly assess public feelings in Myanmar today. There may be a relatively small percentage of the population who back the military junta, or continue to remain members of pro-military parties, primarily the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). But the vast majority of the Myanmar population – Bamar and non-Bamar – are truly shocked at how the country's

protectors, the military, have turned upon their people.

There had long been an undercurrent of opposition against a succession of military juntas, since General Ne Win had the audacity to grab power on behalf of the men in green in 1962. Resistance came to a head in the late 1980s and 1990, when a foray into democracy went badly wrong. But the 2021 military coup that pulled the rug from under Aung San Suu Kyi's popularly elected civilian government prompted a dramatic response largely from Generation Z, who had grown up with the hope of a free and more open society.

The Myanmar junta attempts to fob off the Spring Revolution fighters, claiming they are terrorists. But in essence, these revolutionaries represent the voice of the people, who are in a no-holds-barred fight for the soul of Myanmar.

Whatever junta coup-maker Min Aung Hlaing thought when he executed the coup is unclear. Maybe he hoped for an outcome similar to the post-1990 democracy protests, when opponents either fled the country or buckled down to reluctantly accept military rule. Chances are Min Aung Hlaing thought there would be protest and then it would die down, enabling him to push forward with the military's template of "disciplined democracy". But, if so, he guessed wrong.

The Myanmar junta shows no qualms about murdering its own citizens. And, hence, there is no other option for the Spring Revolution fighters but to pursue a marathon fight to oust the military from power.

EDITORIAL

mizzima WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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INFORMATION

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

Subscriptions and sales in Myanmar

Mizzima Weekly is currently available as a PDF.

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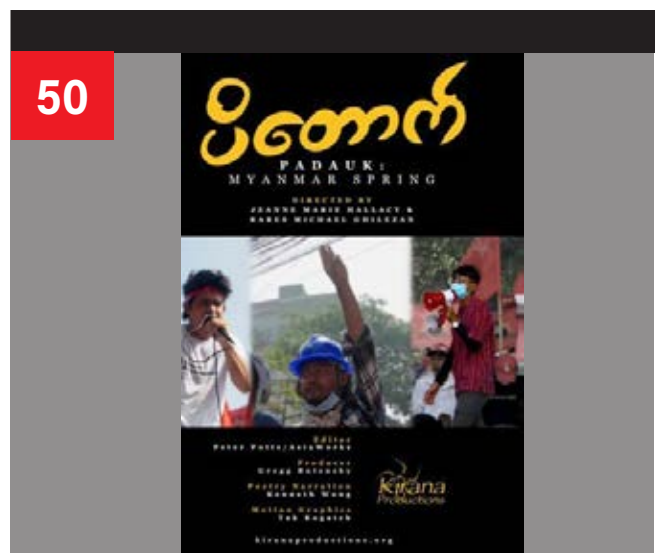
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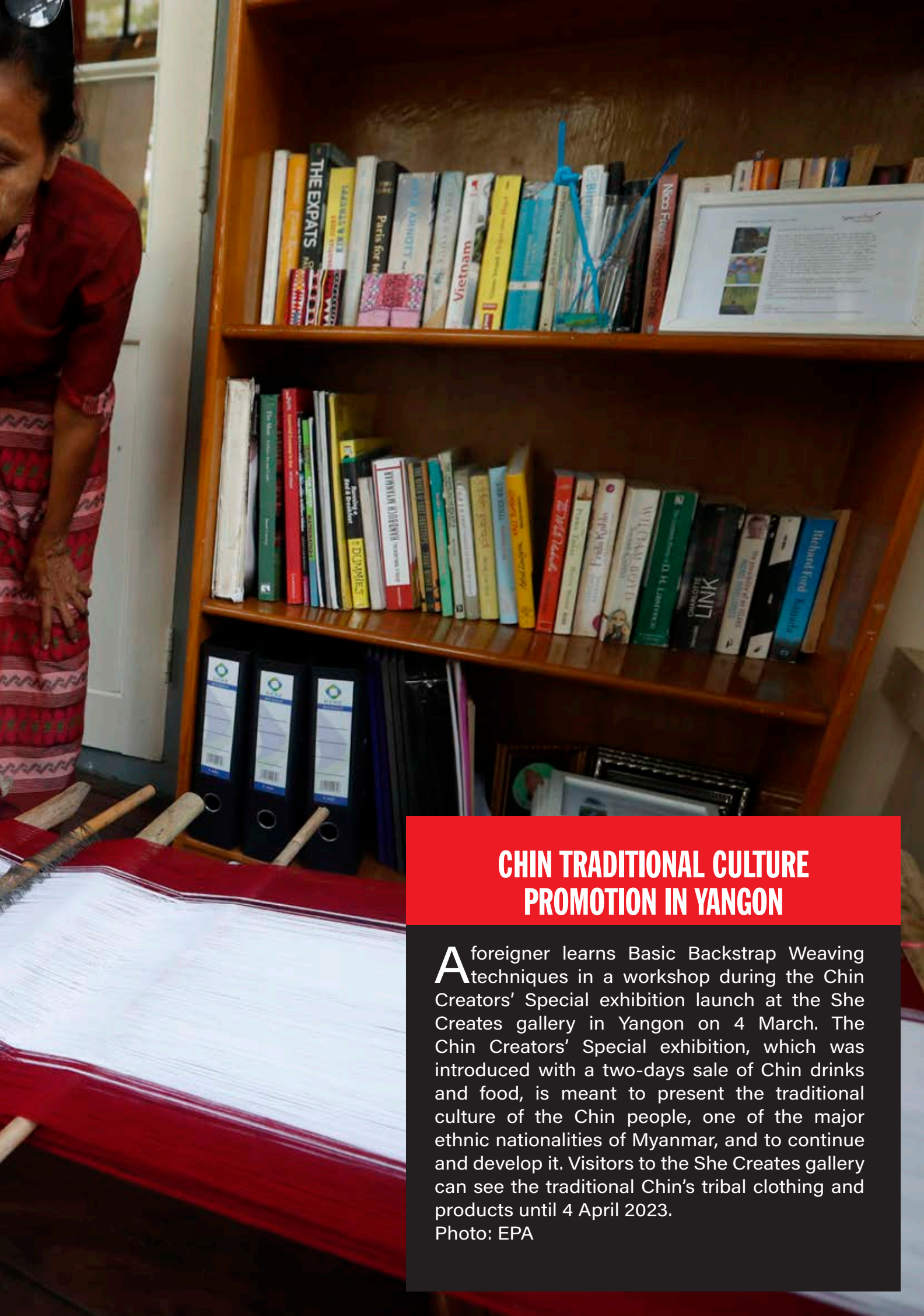
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IN FOCUS





CHIN TRADITIONAL CULTURE PROMOTION IN YANGON

A foreigner learns Basic Backstrap Weaving techniques in a workshop during the Chin Creators' Special exhibition launch at the She Creates gallery in Yangon on 4 March. The Chin Creators' Special exhibition, which was introduced with a two-days sale of Chin drinks and food, is meant to present the traditional culture of the Chin people, one of the major ethnic nationalities of Myanmar, and to continue and develop it. Visitors to the She Creates gallery can see the traditional Chin's tribal clothing and products until 4 April 2023.

Photo: EPA

NUG REPORTS SHOCKING MASSACRE OF OVER A DOZEN CIVILIANS IN A SAGAING VILLAGE



The National Unity Government (NUG) has reported the shocking massacre of 17 civilians and one People's

Defence Fighter in Tataing village in Sagaing Region by the 33rd Division of the Myanmar junta.

On 1-2 March, the junta troops, who were stationed in Htisonng Village raided nearby Tataing Village, capturing PDF leader Michael Ko Kyaw Zaw who went out scouting during the raid. According to the NUG, the PDF leader was tortured, disemboweled and decapitated. The bodies of four other males were found near Nyaung Yan village in Myinmu Township.

The troops then went on to capture 15 civilians to use as human shields as they retreated.

A total of 14 men and three women were found murdered, many of the bodies having been cut up and disfigured.

In addition, the troops burnt down 60 out of a total of 72 houses in Tataing.

The NUG said photos of the bodies have been sent to international organizations, though they said they published only one photo because many of the photos were too gruesome to show publicly.

RAILWAY POLICE DEPUTY CHIEF SHOT DEAD IN MANDALAY

The Deputy Chief of Mandalay's Myitnge Railway Police Force was shot and killed at a friend's house in Mandalay at 6:35 pm on 25 February 2023.

He was shot whilst visiting a friend, who works as an estate agent, at the corner of 44th Street and 136th street, ward in Mandalay City's (K), Pyigyidagun Township.

"The police officer often visited his friend's house. Just before dusk last night I heard three or four gunshots in a row. Later I found out that the police officer who often visited the house had been killed and died on the spot", said a local resident.

The police officer was later identified as Deputy Chief of Police Win Min Thant, a company commander from No. (6) Railway Police Force (Myitnge).

It is not yet known which organisation carried out the killing. According to junta propaganda apparently, eight unknown people armed with a shotgun and knives broke into the house to rob it.

According to the reports Deputy Chief Win Min Thant was shot three times and died on the spot. There were two bullet entry wounds in his head and one entry wound on the left side of his waist. The gunmen also seized a pistol with 18 rounds of ammunition and a police walkie-talkie.

SANCTIONS TO TACKLE WEAPONS AND JET FUEL SUPPLIES WELCOMED

Justice For Myanmar welcomes sanctions imposed by the EU on members of the terrorist Myanmar military junta, its arms brokers and jet fuel suppliers, more than two years after the military's illegal coup attempt.

Arms brokers targeted in the latest round of sanctions include Aung Hlaing Oo, Sit Taing Aung and Kyaw Min Oo, along with the companies Dynasty International, International Gateways Group and Sky Aviator Company Limited.

Aung Hlaing Oo and Dynasty International have both had business with EU companies, and future activities will be prevented through these sanctions.

Aung Hlaing Oo has been a longstanding business partner of the Finnish energy corporation, Wärtsilä, and won two junta power plant tenders in 2022 in a consortium with Dongfeng Electric International Corporation. Wärtsilä have told Justice For Myanmar they ended business with MCM after US sanctions, but refused to disclose details.

Dynasty International brokered the supply and maintenance of G120TP aircraft from the German corporation, Grob Aircraft SE. In response to recent questions in parliament from Die Linke, the German government stated they are not aware of the sale of Grob G120TP aircraft to the Myanmar Air Force.

The EU has also importantly designated Asia Sun Group, which brokers the supply of jet fuel to the junta and stands complicit in its international crimes. This will help disrupt the supply of jet fuel to the junta, which it needs for its continued indiscriminate airstrikes.

The new designations fill major gaps in the EU's sanctions regime, targeting key arms brokers and military institutions.

These include the Myanmar military's Office of the Quarter Master General, Directorate of Procurement and Directorate of Defence Industries, which were sanctioned by the US, UK and Canada in December 2021 and January 2022.

The new EU sanctions come as the people of Myanmar continue to courageously resist the junta in the face of its nationwide campaign of terror, ensuring its attempted coup fails.

The junta's response to mass resistance has been the continued commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity, murdering over 3,000 people, arbitrarily arresting over 19,000 more, displacing 1.1 million people and carrying out indiscriminate attacks across Myanmar, enabled by the supply of funds, arms and jet fuel.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "We welcome the latest round of sanctions from the EU, targeting junta members and agencies, along with their arms brokers and jet fuel suppliers, which are complicit in ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"The people of Myanmar have sustained mass resistance to the military's brutal and illegal coup attempt and its campaign of terror, ensuring that the coup and the junta's sham so-called 'elections' will not succeed.

"While these latest sanctions are a positive step in cutting the junta's access to resources, far more needs to be done to coordinate sanctions that systematically target the junta's sources of revenue, arms and jet fuel.

"In particular, we call on the US to follow the EU, UK and Canada in targeting the military's jet fuel supply chain, and we call on the US, UK and Canada to follow the EU and swiftly sanction Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, which is the junta's biggest source of foreign revenue.

"The EU needs to urgently expand its sanctions to target more individuals and businesses that enable the junta's access to funds and arms, in coordination with its allies.

"Democracies in the region, including Japan, South Korea and India, must also step up, end business with the junta, and impose targeted sanctions on the junta and its conglomerates."



Andrew Landen

PROTEST IN USA

Call to end Myanmar
air strikes, impose
No-Fly-Zone





Burmese people and supporters hold a protest in Washington. Photos: Facebook



People of several ethnicities from Myanmar demonstrated in front of the White House in Washington DC on 25 February.

The demonstrators were calling for an end to deadly airstrikes by the Myanmar junta, the imposition of a No-Fly-Zone and for the junta's upcoming illegitimate elections not to be internationally recognised.

The demonstrators gathered at the US State Office building before marching to the White House, despite bad weather conditions.

At the White House, the demonstrators put on a play about the way the junta was bombing the population and killing innocent people.

Bamar, Kachin, Karen, Chin and Arakan people attended the demonstration. They were joined by Mrs. Joan Friesen from the American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis.

Following the demonstration, there was a meeting between the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile's Communications, Information and Technology Minister Htin Lin Aung and ethnic leaders from various Myanmar states, at the NUG office in Washington DC.

Apparently, they discussed how they could better cooperate to make the revolution more effective, according to demonstrators who were there.



MYANMAR AIR FORCE TARGET CIVILIANS, CLINICS AND SCHOOLS

On the 61st anniversary of Myanmar's first military coup led by the late General Ne Win on 2 March 1962, the Canadian not-for-profit organization, Associates to Develop Democratic Burma Inc., released its Special Report on unprecedented air strikes and bombings by the Myanmar Air Force against civilians and civilian physical infrastructures such as schools, clinics, places of worships of all faiths, residential homes and villages.

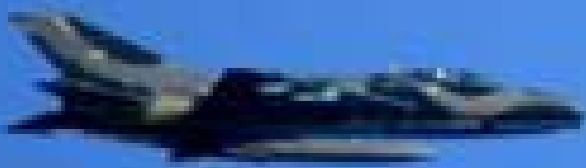
The 44-page report is drawn from the research and documentation by different organizations, such as the Karen National Union, Chin National Front, Kachin Independence Army, Karenni National Progressive Party, the Salween Institute for Public Policy, as well as Karenni human rights organizations, and the Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian NGO. Additionally, the ADDB report draws on the Myanmar military's leaked document of the 23 December 2022 meeting of military security chiefs.

The report offers the first-ever comprehensive documentation and insight into how the embattled Myanmar regime under Min Aung Hlaing has made an unprecedented break with the Myanmar Air Force's decades-old philosophy of using air strikes specifically against military targets as part of a counter-insurgency operation. The

Min Aung Hlaing junta now portrays any civilian, politician or activist who supports the nationwide resistance as "terrorists".

Since the coup two years ago, the Myanmar military leadership has, with alarming frequency, deployed fighter jets, helicopter gunships and artillery to strike civilian targets including Christian churches, Buddhist monasteries, schools, clinics and hospitals.

Media Monitor Collective (of Myanmar or MMC-M) notes that 88.4% of the country's townships have experienced violent armed conflict. Since the coup, 24,065 civilians have been arrested or detained,



2,750 citizens killed as the direct result of armed conflicts, including air strikes and mortar shelling. The leaked military document also reports 12 out of 14 administrative States/Regions under siege.

Since 1 February 2021, over 11,000 incidents or cases of organized violence against and by the regime were documented. Of these, nearly 760 were air strikes against villages, refugee or IDP areas and armed conflict regions. The heavy troop losses the Myanmar army has suffered is definitely a factor in the coup regime ramping up its use of air strikes to nearly 400% in the second year of the unsuccessful coup whose legitimacy has been universally rejected by virtually all international governments and organizations including the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In his closing remarks delivered on the 21-February 2023 during a YouTube LIVE public discussion with the leaders of Myanmar's democratic resistance organisations, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs from Malaysia (2018-22), Dato 'Sri Saifuddin bin Abdullah, characterized Myanmar air strikes against civilians, soft targets, as "an act of state terrorism".

The ADDB Special Report echoes Saifuddin's view and urges the leaders of the regional bloc to

consider concrete accountability measures including the prevention of ASEAN-based companies from supplying the Myanmar military with lethal assistance and related support, such as the sale of aviation fuel.

The Associates to Develop Democratic Burma, Inc. (ADDB), better known as the Euro-Burma Office, is a not-for-profit organization established in 1990, incorporated in Canada in 1994 and led by long-time democrats drawn from Myanmar's diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Harn Yawngkhwe, the founding executive director of ADDB Inc. whose late father President Sao Shwe Thike was a co-founder of the independent Republic of the Union of Myanmar alongside the martyred General Aung San, made a broad appeal for the immediate cessation of violence: "my older 17-year old brother was the very first casualty of the military coup 61 years ago. The troops that raided our family home in Yangon and shot dead my unarmed brother, shouted for my mother, a member of parliament, to come out as if she were "an armed rebel". Sixty-years later, the same Myanmar Armed Forces falsely frames all anti-coup democrats and citizens as 'terrorists' while their fighter jets, helicopter gunships and artillery are killing civilians. Violence against civilians must stop."



Photo: AFP

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS JUNTA AIRSTRIKES, ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS AND ASEAN INACTION

Myanmar's military has continued to carry out air strikes that have targeted civilians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), villages, and civilian infrastructure including schools, according to a special report released by the Associates to Develop Democratic Burma [ADDB] Inc on March 2, 2023, the 61st anniversary of the first Myanmar coup led by General Ne Win in 1962.

The 44-page special report is based on research and documentation conducted by various organisations, including the Karen National Union, Chin National Front, Kachin Independence Army, Karenni National Progressive Party, the Salween Institute for Public Policy, as well as Karenni human rights organisations and the Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian NGO.

The report 'Myanmar Military Air Strikes Target Civilians: An ASEAN Member State's Air Force Bombing IDPs, Villages, and Civilian Infrastructures' highlights that the junta's military has continued to carry out these unethical airstrikes despite agreeing to the Five Point Consensus (5PCs) at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in April 2021.

It also explains how



A village set on fire by junta troops in Sagaing.
Photo: Facebook

the junta forces have faced heavy losses in rural and ethnic regions leading to an increase in the use of air power against various regions and populations. “The heavy losses which the Myanmar Forces have suffered in the vast rural and ethnic regions in the face of nationwide armed resistance and effective sabotage, is a factor behind the increasingly frequent and widespread deployment of air power against multiple regions and populations,” said the report.

“Notably, only the capital Nay Pyi Taw, the Ayeyarwady Delta region, the commercial and former capital Yangon,

and the narrow coastal region of Tanintharyi of Southern Myanmar have not been attacked by the Myanmar Air Force,” said the report.

The special report also mentioned leaked documents—marked ‘Secret ’and dated 23 December 2022 “which contain the detailed minutes of the 7-hour meeting of regional and national level heads of security agencies held at the Police Headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw.” That meeting was presided over by Lieutenant-General Soe Htut, one of the key members of Min Aung Hlaing’s military council.

Participants of the above-mentioned meeting reported to the junta’s Home Affairs Minister that 12 out of the 14 regions are zones of violent conflicts. Some participants talked of the need for more bullet-proof vests, more air strikes and fortification of police and security stations across the country.

The Myanmar Armed Forces have historically used coordinated air and ground operations against ethnic armed organisations, targeting their military bases and headquarters, said the report. However, since the coup two years ago, there has been a sharp break from this pattern, with civilians being targeted in air strikes, including violence-fleeing IDPs, schools, hospitals, residential quarters, and places of worship.

The special report also discusses the shift in the Myanmar military’s objectives from counter-insurgency to a new, warped counter-terrorism paradigm that targets civilians and pro-democracy individuals

and organisations as “terrorists.” The military aims to break the morale of local communities that support the popular armed resistance against the junta, create a humanitarian burden for the local resistance groups, slow down the advances of resistance organisations, and eliminate all anti-coup individuals by any means necessary.

The report discusses the junta’s use of air strikes against civilian populations, which poses a great challenge to ASEAN. It calls for concrete steps as measures of accountability, including suspending security cooperation with the Myanmar military, ensuring no ASEAN member state is involved in supplying Myanmar’s military forces with lethal assistance, and adopting stringent measures to prevent ASEAN-based commercial and financial institutions from financing Myanmar security ministries and their commercial affiliates.

The report notes that ASEAN’s failure to intervene in the past in Cambodia and Myanmar’s genocide against Rohingya Muslims puts its international reputation and credibility at grave risk. It also highlights the importance of viewing the Myanmar military’s actions as state-directed terrorism and urges the ASEAN and the United Nations to take action.

The ADDDB, better known as the Euro-Burma Office, is a not-for-profit organization established in 1990, incorporated in Canada in 1994 and led by long-time democrats drawn from Myanmar’s diverse ethnic and religious communities.



MYANMAR STILL RECEIVING SHIPMENTS OF AVIATION FUEL FROM INDIA AND THAILAND



Aviation fuel shipments to Myanmar have continued despite the military's ongoing war crimes, according to Amnesty International and Global Witness, who have identified more companies involved in the supply chain.

"We have traced new shipments of aviation fuel that have likely ended up in the hands of Myanmar's military, which has consistently conducted unlawful air strikes. These attacks regularly kill civilians, including children, yet planes can only take off if they have fuel," said Montse Ferrer, Amnesty International's Researcher and Advisor on Business and Human Rights.

On 3 November 2022, Amnesty International published *Deadly Cargo*, a report on the country's aviation fuel supply chain that links national, regional and global companies

to the Myanmar military.

Since the report's publication, Amnesty International, Global Witness and Burma Campaign UK have identified other companies involved in aviation fuel transactions, which are likely to have reached the military in recent months.

One shipment involved the oil tanker *Prime V*, which sailed from Sikka in India on 28 November 2022. On or about 10 December, *Prime V* offloaded Jet A-1 grade aviation fuel at the former Puma Energy Aviation Sun Co. Ltd. (PEAS) terminal in the port of Thilawa in Myanmar.

One of the companies involved in this transaction is Reliance Industries Ltd of India, which owns the terminal from which *Prime V* departed. Sea Trade Marine, a Greek company, is the beneficial owner of *Prime V*, while Japan's P&I Club provided the protection

and indemnity (P&I) insurance. Amnesty International contacted the companies, yet only Japan P&I Club responded, saying that it complied with applicable sanctions at the time, and that its insurance cover may be terminated if a vessel is involved in illegal activity. There is no suggestion that the *Prime V* broke applicable laws in this delivery.

Details of an October shipment have also been obtained recently, showing that the tanker *Big Sea 104* left the Bangchak Oil Refinery in Bangkok Port in Thailand on or about 8 October 2022. It arrived at Thilawa about a week later and offloaded 12,592 tonnes of Jet A-1, according to data from Kpler, a commodities information company, at the former PEAS terminal.

The refinery from which the ship departed is owned by publicly listed Thai company Bangchak Corporation Plc. Prima Marine Plc, another Thai company, is the beneficial owner of *Big Sea 104*, while Luxembourg-based The Shipowners' P&I Club provided the insurance. None of these companies responded to Amnesty International's letters.

"Each of these companies played a role in ensuring the Myanmar military continues to have access to aviation fuel to conduct unlawful air strikes. This has to end. All companies should stop their involvement in the aviation fuel supply chain to Myanmar," said Montse Ferrer.

At the time these two shipments arrived, the port terminal was controlled by the Myanmar subsidiary of the Swiss and Singapore-based Puma Energy. In October 2022, Puma Energy said it was withdrawing from Myanmar after selling its assets to what it called a “locally owned private company” from which it claimed to have obtained undertakings that it would comply with “Human Rights laws” and not use those assets to commit human rights violations.

Amnesty International has established that this buyer was Shoon Energy, formerly called Asia Sun Aviation, and that the sale was completed in December 2022.

Shoon Energy is part of a Myanmar business conglomerate, called Asia Sun, which imported aviation fuel on behalf of the military and distributed it to air bases. Following Puma Energy’s departure, this conglomerate now manages the main aviation fuel terminal in Thilawa port, Yangon, and, jointly with military-controlled Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise, the import and distribution of aviation fuel across the country.

Montse Ferrer said: “It is troubling that the Swiss-registered multinational fuel company Puma Energy, which committed to withdraw from Myanmar in October 2022, decided to sell its aviation fuel assets to a Myanmar business group which has imported fuel for the military.”

Last month the UK and EU imposed sanctions on individuals and companies behind

the Asia Sun group for their ties to the provision of aviation fuel to the Myanmar air force. Ahead of these sanctions, however, the Asia Sun conglomerate changed several of its companies’ names to Shoon Energy.

Montse Ferrer said: “Puma Energy has stated that the buyer of its Myanmar assets has undertaken to ‘comply with Human Rights law’. However, given the close relationship between Shoon Energy and the Myanmar military we are concerned this assurance is essentially meaningless.”

Since companies continue to export aviation fuel to Myanmar, even while knowing the role that it plays in enabling war crimes being committed by the military, the international community must act.

Amnesty International and Global Witness have previously laid out a path forward: countries should suspend the export and transport of aviation fuel to Myanmar. Importantly, they should also suspend the provision of third-party services such as insurance, shipping or financial services to vessels involved in the shipment of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

Hanna Hindstrom, Senior Investigator at Global Witness said: “The international community has the tools in place to enact these restrictions. We should do what is in our power to reduce the Myanmar military’s capacity for terrorizing civilians.”

According to the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security, the military conducted 104 air strikes in 2021,

and 243 in 2022.

“Since the military’s coup in 2021, it has brutally suppressed its critics and attacked civilians from the ground and the air. Supplies of aviation fuel reaching the military enable these war crimes. These shipments must stop now”, said Montse Ferrer.

On 1 February 2023, the second anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, Canada and the UK announced measures to prevent aviation fuel from reaching the military, including targeted sanctions on Myanmar companies and individuals. On 20 February 2023, the EU sanctioned Asia Sun group and associated entities Asia Sun Trading and Asia Sun Energy.

In response to Amnesty International’s investigations for Deadly Cargo, the global shipping company Wilhelmsen said it would cease providing shipping services to any vessel transporting aviation fuel to Myanmar.

Korean Pan Ocean has also stated it would no longer allow its vessels to transport aviation fuel to Myanmar, and Thai Oil said it would put on hold any shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

“We urge anyone involved in this trade to put people before profits and to cease supplying the fuel that facilitates these atrocities. We call on more states to enact or reinforce controls to prevent these supplies”, said Hanna Hindstrom.

NEW SHIPMENTS OF AVIATION FUEL TO MYANMAR REVEALED DESPITE THE MILITARY'S WAR CRIMES: AMNESTY

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Sale of Puma Energy assets

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International community must act

Since companies continue to export aviation fuel to Myanmar, even while knowing the role

that it plays in enabling war crimes being committed by the military, the international community must act.

Amnesty International and Global Witness have previously laid out a path forward: countries should suspend the export and transport of aviation fuel to Myanmar. Importantly, they should also suspend the provision of third-party services such as insurance, shipping or financial services to vessels involved in the shipment of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

Hanna Hindstrom said: “The international community has the tools in place to enact these restrictions. We should do what is in our power to reduce the Myanmar military’s capacity for terrorizing civilians.”

Background

According to the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security, the military conducted 104 air strikes in 2021, and 243 in 2022.

On 1 February 2023, the second anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, Canada and the UK announced measures to prevent aviation fuel from reaching the military, including targeted sanctions on Myanmar companies and individuals. On 20 February 2023 the EU sanctioned Asia Sun group and associated entities Asia Sun Trading and Asia Sun Energy.

In response to Amnesty International’s investigations for Deadly Cargo, the global shipping company Wilhelmsen said it would cease providing shipping services to any vessel transporting aviation fuel to Myanmar.

Korean Pan Ocean has also stated it would no longer allow its vessels to transport aviation fuel to Myanmar, and Thai Oil said it would put on hold any shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

160 MYANMAR CSOS SEND OPEN LETTER TO UNHCR

A total of 160 Myanmar regional and international civil society organizations (CSOs) sent an open letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) last week.

It asks the UNHCR to take action to increase accountability for junta crimes, protect the rights of the Myanmar people and support their wishes for federal democracy.

Below is the full text of the letter:

We, the undersigned 160 Myanmar, regional and international civil society organizations (CSOs), call for the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to take concrete actions to advance accountability through all possible avenues, protect human rights of the Myanmar people, and strongly support their will for federal democracy.

We welcome the UNHRC resolution of 1 April 2022 which acknowledged the human rights situation in Myanmar as one of the Council's important agenda. We however recognize that the resolution failed to adequately reflect or address the severity of the human rights and humanitarian crisis

in Myanmar. The resolution also fell short in advancing justice and ending rampant impunity enjoyed by the Myanmar military for decades. During the 52nd Regular Session of the UNHRC, we call for the adoption of a meaningful and robust resolution which reflects the Myanmar people's desire for federal democracy, pursues all available mechanisms and avenues for justice and accountability, and bolsters effective locally-led frontline humanitarian assistance.

While monitoring and reporting mandates on Myanmar by the UNHRC remain strong and robust, there is an urgent need for the Council to strengthen its efforts for justice and accountability. The creation of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) to collect evidence of the most serious international crimes in Myanmar and prepare files for criminal prosecution — following the findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar — was a substantial step in the right direction. However, the IIMM is not mandated to initiate prosecution, rendering justice elusive for victims of the most serious international crimes committed in Myanmar prior to its establishment in 2018, including the Rohingya genocide. Currently, there is no international court that has an investigation into all crimes committed in Myanmar.

We further express disappointment at the insubstantial UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Myanmar, adopted in December 2022, which failed to either uphold the Council's responsibilities under Chapter VII of the UN Charter or refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The UNHRC must move the UN beyond solely gathering evidence to making justice a reality in Myanmar, by calling on the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNSC to refer the situation in Myanmar to the ICC or establish a tribunal of its own. At the same time, we urge the Council to welcome the declaration lodged by the National Unity Government (NUG) under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute to accept the ICC's jurisdiction over international crimes committed in Myanmar territory since 1 July 2002, a significant step towards justice taken by Myanmar's legitimate government. Finally, we urge the UNHRC to further recommend the UN member states, agencies and mechanisms supply financial, political and technical support for ongoing universal jurisdiction efforts in Argentina, Germany, Indonesia and Turkey.

Achieving accountability in Myanmar means justice for victims of the world's most heinous crimes. Equally, securing justice will "[restore] any semblance of democratic rule, security and stability to the country," as the High Commissioner



UNHCR

The UN Refugee Agency

himself stated, and by extension to the Southeast Asian region.

We are alarmed by the UN's apathy towards the Myanmar military's total disregard and undermining of the Five-Point Consensus (5'PC'), devised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in the past 22 months. ASEAN itself has explicitly requested UN support in implementing the 5PC, while the UNSC resolution called for the implementation of it. The UN can no longer hide behind ASEAN. The UNHRC must strongly recommend the bloc to move beyond its failed plan based on extensive consultation with the NUG, ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs) and civil society. It must further call on the UNSC to use all instruments at its disposal, including enforcing punitive measures, should the junta fail to comply with the resolution.

For the past two years,

the military junta has deliberately carried out extrajudicial killings, massacres, sexual and gender-based violence, mass arbitrary arrests, torture in detention and other horrendous violations against civilians in Myanmar in a widespread and systematic manner. Since the failed coup, the junta has slain over 3,000 people and sentenced 144 people to death. In July 2022, it abhorrently executed four democracy activists, an act which the IIMM stated "could constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes." We welcomed statements by the UN Secretary-General and the UNSC to condemn the execution, and urge the UNHRC to strongly follow suit.

Most notably, the junta has consistently launched airstrikes on civilians, including at schools, medical facilities, and religious sites. In September 2022, it murdered 11 children at a school in Let Yet Kone village,

Sagaing Region, and a month later killed over 60 innocent civilians celebrating the founding of the Kachin Independence Organisation. On 14 and 16 February 2023, the junta's jet fighters dropped bombs in Mutraw District in Karen State, destroying two rice warehouses and seven schools, including New Generation School which has offered higher education to Karen students for over ten years. The UNHRC must accurately recognize the gravity of the crisis in Myanmar as constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes. It must further condemn the junta's rampant airstrikes targeting civilians, strongly call for a global arms embargo which covers all weapons, munitions and other equipment, as well as the provision of military assistance, and recommend member states to suspend direct and indirect supply and brokering of arms and aviation fuel to Myanmar.

The UN further has an obligation to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. As the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, stated in his conference room paper, "the junta's violent assaults on children ... are part of its ongoing widespread and systematic attack on the people of Myanmar and likely constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes."

As of 2 February 2023, over 1.2 million people have been internally displaced across Myanmar, while over 72,000 people have sought safety in India and Thailand. The junta's primary role in creating and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis must be condemned by the UNHRC. The extension and widening of the unlawful state of emergency and martial law to cover additional 37 townships in strong resistance areas indicates that the junta only intensify its brutal attacks.

The UN must further reverse decades of systemic failures as its agencies continue to fall far short of executing any "complementary and mutually reinforcing work" to address the root causes of and improve the humanitarian and human rights tragedy in Myanmar. Most urgently, we call on the UN to stop allowing the junta to weaponize aid and ensure aid and relief reach those in direst need. To this end, it must direct its agencies and advocate for other aid providers including member states to partner with local frontline humanitarian actors, including ethnic and border-based civil society and community-based organizations, and the NUG and EROs,

who have been providing assistance and services to affected communities.

The junta's ongoing atrocities also present a tremendous obstacle to the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya languishing in camps or harrowing conditions. The UNHRC must recognize this reality and welcome the International Court of Justice's decision to reject Myanmar's preliminary objections in the case lodged by The Gambia against Myanmar on the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Moreover, the UN should ensure member states, in particular Myanmar's neighboring countries, act in line with the principle of non-refoulement, not only in regard to Rohingya refugees but all Myanmar refugees.

With the current crisis unfolding, it is paramount for the Myanmar people to have their voices represented at the UN. We welcome the High Commissioner's accurate recognition of the Myanmar military's action on 1 February 2021 as the attempted coup in the oral update to the 50th Session of the UNHRC and the statement on 27 January 2023. The UNHRC's decision to reject the junta's representative at its sessions since the 47th Regular Session of the UNHRC, in response to a collective call of Myanmar civil society, was further welcomed. However, the UNHRC must recognize the Myanmar people's democratic will, as expressed in the November 2020 general elections, and legitimate government the NUG. The UNGA's deferral of a credentials

decision on Myanmar, an explicit rejection of the junta's attempt to claim Myanmar's seat at the UN, allows the NUG to continue to represent the people of Myanmar through Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun at the UNGA. This should extend to the UNHRC and other UN Offices in Geneva. To exclude the representative of Myanmar to the UNGA from the 52nd Regular Session of the UNHRC is contradictory and, in effect, denying the people of Myanmar their legitimate representation.

As the junta conspires to illegally hold sham national elections, despite lacking legitimacy, a constitutional basis, and effective control of Myanmar's territory as also made clear by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, the UNHRC must unequivocally denounce any such plans, and reject potential voting results as illegitimate. The results of the 2020 elections already reflect the true will of the Myanmar people and provided the basis for the formation of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the NUG, and the National Unity Consultative Council.

The UNHRC must fully support the democratic will of the people of Myanmar, bring about justice and accountability, and strengthen locally-led humanitarian aid. To this effect, it must mobilize member states to utilize all tools at their disposal to actualize justice through all possible routes.

MIN AUNG HLAING VISITS TROOPS IN RAKHINE STATE

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited a Western Military Command Sittwe army base in Rakhine State on the afternoon of 26 February.

He and his wife met officers, soldiers and their families who live on the base and presented them with food parcels before visiting the Tatmadaw Hospital in Sittwe where he gave out more food parcels, according to junta-aligned Myawady Daily Newspaper.

Whilst at the army base, Min Aung Hlaing also made a speech.

In the speech, he told Myanmar army officers and soldiers to take a role in national politics in response to recent political developments.

He also emphasised that soldiers should always be obedient, disciplined, and follow orders, possibly in response to recent cases where officers in Karen State refused to follow orders to launch an attack because they considered such attacks to be suicide missions.

He also instructed the listening soldiers to have self-control so that they lead a healthy and balanced lifestyle and stay fit. He also told officers that they need to lead their troops in a balanced way and be good commanders.

According to the junta-aligned Mirror Daily News, he also said that many ethnic people want multi-party democracy, but lessons need to be learned from the 2020 multiparty democratic election. He highlighted that there is a need to ensure voter lists are accurate by carrying out the currently underway national census.

The upcoming junta elections and the census have been criticised for being illegitimate and many anti-junta groups have called on people to not take part in the elections or cooperate with the census.

According to reports Min Aung Hlaing also met with Rakhine businessmen at Sittwe's U Ottama Hall on 27 February.



Min Aung Hlaing, centre, with officials in Sittwe. Photo: Supplied

REMEMBERING ANGEL

In a remembrance dedicated to Angel (Kyal Sin) last week on 3 March by Thinzar Shunlei Yi, Sisters 2 Sisters at ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, had the following to say:

Let us remember Angel today and tomorrow and every day, together with all other women whose breath was taken away as revenge for their resistance.

On the anniversary of the fallen hero, Angel (Kyal Sin) of Myanmar, I am honored to pay tribute to her. I am honored to pay tribute to all my sisters in the revolution.

Let me speak to her directly.

My Dear Sister Angel,

You left us a year ago, and we remember you in our hearts. Every day, we think of you and sisters like you who were murdered by soldiers for standing up and resisting this offensive coup.

Angel, I want you to know that the plans the generals tried to carry out have not yet succeeded. This is because of sisters like you who defended democracy on the frontline since the very beginning. You risked and sacrificed everything to protect us and those without access to institutions, and those who struggle to make it on their own.

But it hurts to tell you, Angel, that more than 107 women and 683 young people like yourself have been murdered since the coup. Among those 107 murdered women, most of them were between eighteen and twenty-nine years old. Recently, a young woman—age 23, one of a very few Student-Union Presidents, and a courageous revolutionary sister—was reportedly raped while in detention, sustaining several injuries. She was denied access to health care and was held in isolation for many months. Thinking of the pain and



Photo: Facebook

the rage she must have felt, I am angry. I know that you would be angry too.

These soldiers assume that young women like us are easy targets. It has been this way for far too long—not just in our country, but all over the world. This misogynistic military coup is only the most recent manifestation of a hateful history of marginalization and suppression. If we cannot be silenced and ignored, we will be the targets of their frustration and brutality.

Angel, today a year ago, you refused to be silenced and ignored. Though it should never have come to this, now you are one of our heroes. You are important. You are visible. Your sisters all over the country continue to carry you & yr spirits in the revolution.

But we continue to lose them, as we lost you. And I wonder—are we, collectively, yet open and just enough to shine the same light of recognition and visibility on our fallen sisters in other ethnic and marginalized communities? On November 19, 2016, environmentalist and women’s human rights defender, Naw Chit Pan Daing was murdered in Dawei. And on January 19 and 20 of 2015, two Kachin Volunteer Teachers, Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, were brutally raped and killed by the Burmese Army in Northern Shan state. We demanded Justice, and we will continue to demand Justice for each of us at least for the rest of my life to the best of my ability. The righteousness of our fight hinges on this. And most importantly as an older sister, I will keep questioning whether our leaders in the revolution are hoarding recognition and representation, or whether they are helping to distribute it to all who are entitled to it.

These weeks, the world is overwhelmed with the news from Ukraine and Russia. We are seeing and hearing about people losing their lives, families splitting, and young people picking up guns to defend their freedom. I also see young Ukrainian women joining the armed forces, confronting aggression head-on. Angel, you were murdered for civil disobedience. They killed you because you were at the protest on the frontline. The tyrants of this world are unrelenting. They are in the business of crushing our hopes. If not revolution, I wonder what there is for us. If not for Justice and Accountability, why would we waste our time and energy attending meetings and zoom-conferences?

Angel, after your death, people saw the real face of the military in Myanmar. The military had a chance to deceive all of us, to pretend that they are the true guardians of democracy and they are the only institution that can bring Myanmar into

a democratic transition. Now, people confidently say that the military has turned into a fascist institution with fascist ideologies, and that it is fascist at its very root. Now, the military has promised an election, and many diplomats still dream that this could be an entry point to democracy. We are adamant that there can never be a free and fair election under a military-drafted constitution that fails to respect the principles of federal democracy—one of the goals we held most dearly for a time after our independence. Myanmar’s nation-building process must not lose sight of this noble endeavor, and in this regard, the 2008 constitution diverted us onto a dangerous detour. Bereft of legitimacy, competence, or public support, Myanmar’s military has disgraced itself as a serious political body, let alone one capable of organizing an election.

Angel, the shirt you wore said, “Everything will be OK.” Was this a sign of the naiveté of optimism? The tragedy of hope? Not necessarily. You were defending democracy with your real body and soul. You could say, “Everything will be ok,” because you knew that all things change. This is the wisdom of a young person. We know that we will change, and we are determined to have a political system that allows us to breathe and thrive. When we hear a young person say, “Everything will be ok,” let us listen to them, let us hear their voice, and let us help them gain the representation that is their birthright. When a young woman says, “Everything will be ok,” we can trust her, but only insofar as we are able to support and match her courage and vision.

Angel, on March 3 of 2021, I saw the bright eyes and heavy heart you had. You may have passed away, but your spirit, and your clarity of purpose, fuel us in our march to our goal. Your blood and vital breath course through this revolution.

My sister, you were not alone. You are not alone now. You will never be forgotten.

Sisters 2 Sisters Campaign

ARAKAN ARMY MONITORS MIN AUNG HLAING'S VISIT TO RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) is carefully monitoring the junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Rakhine State, according to AA spokesperson, Khaing Thukha.

He made the comments at an AA/United League of Arakan (ULA, the political wing of the AA) press conference on 27 February.

He said: "If he [Min Aung Hlaing] is here to solve the current crisis and free our people from prohibitions and restrictions, this visit is welcome. However, if he is here to create an optimistic political view [of what is happening in Rakhine State] to the international community or to show off that Rakhine State is completely calm and peaceful... we will take action"

He also said that they would also listen and take action if Min Aung Hlaing made promises that he could, or would, not keep. But, if he just did things that benefit the people of Rakhine State the AA would welcome his visit.

"We know that the junta is visiting Rakhine State. So, if the military junta Chairman's visit benefits the people of Rakhine State, especially if he eases the current prohibitions and restrictions or restores Rakhine people's living conditions by supporting business, developmental progress, and other things, we will not have anything in particular to say", he added.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited a Western Military Command Sittwe army base in Rakhine State on the afternoon of 26 February.

He met officers soldiers and their families and made a speech before visiting the Tatmadaw Hospital in Sittwe.

NO ELECTIONS IN RAKHINE STATE IF CEASEFIRE BREAKS DOWN, SAYS AA

The Arakan Army (AA)/United League of Arakan, (ULA) said that the current ceasefire in Rakhine State could break down at any time, and if it does and there is fighting there will be no elections.

The comment was made by the AA/ULA spokesperson Khaing Thukha at a AA/ULU press conference on 28 February, in response to junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's trip to Rakhine State on 26 and 27 February 2023.

On that trip, when speaking to a group of businessmen at Ottama Hall in Rakhine State's Sittwe, Min Aung Hlaing said that he wants to see elections carried out in Rakhine State and that the junta would make a real effort to ensure elections are carried out throughout Rakhine State.

In the 2020 elections, voting was cancelled in most townships in Rakhine State, meaning that about three-quarters of the eligible voters in the state did not get to cast a vote. The cancellation of votes denied the ANP from an absolute majority in the Rakhine State Parliament and gave the NLD a larger majority in the national parliament.

In response, four days after the 2020 election, both the AA and Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) released coordinated statements calling for the cancelled elections in Rakhine State to be held.

But cooperation between the AA and the Tatmadaw stopped after the February 2021 coup and there were frequent clashes between them

until they signed a temporary ceasefire on 26 November 2022.

According to the Rakhine politician, Pe Than, ever since the ceasefire between the junta and the AA in Rakhine State, the junta has been talking about holding state-wide elections in Rakhine.

He said: "There is currently a ceasefire between the Arakan Army-ULA/AA and the Myanmar Army in Rakhine State. At the press conference, the ULA/AA spokesperson Khaing Thukha said that although the situation is currently stable, the ceasefire could be broken at any time. If the fighting returns, there will be no reason to hold an election in the state. Also, Rakhine people are not interested in elections."

Khaing Thukha also said at the press conference that elections cannot help the Rakhine people or change their lives. He also said that if fighting continues to be intense in Rakhine State and if people continue to be arrested the election will not be happening.

The junta is expected to hold elections in August. In February the junta extended the State of Emergency until August because it claimed that the situation in the country was too volatile. Elections can only be held when there is no longer a State of Emergency, but Pe Than warned that the junta could easily just extend the State of Emergency, which would further delay any elections.



Photo: AA

CHINA SAYS WUHAN ‘LAB LEAK’ CLAIMS HURT US CREDIBILITY

Beijing accused Washington on Wednesday last week of harming its own credibility after a top US intelligence official said his agency believed the pandemic “most likely” caused by a laboratory incident in Wuhan, China.

FBI Director Christopher Wray told Fox News on Tuesday that the Bureau has now assessed the source of Covid-19 was “most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan.”

Chinese officials have angrily denied the

claim, calling it a smear campaign against Beijing.

“The United States once again stirs up the laboratory leak theory, which will not discredit China, which will further lower its own credibility,” foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing on Wednesday.

Wray’s comments come after a report earlier this week said the US Department of Energy had determined that a leak from a Chinese lab was the most likely cause of the Covid-19 outbreak.



Photo: AFP

The department's findings are significant because it works with a network of national laboratories, including some that do advanced biological research.

But other agencies within the US intelligence community believe the virus emerged naturally in the world.

In Tuesday's interview, Wray also accused the Chinese government of trying to stall US efforts to investigate the causes of the pandemic.

"The Chinese government... has been doing its best to try to thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we're doing, the work that our US government and close foreign partners are doing," Wray said.

"And that's unfortunate for everybody."

At Wednesday's press briefing, Mao reiterated a longstanding and unsubstantiated Chinese claim that the virus could have escaped from the US military research lab at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

"The US should respect science and facts, cooperate with the World Health Organization as soon as possible, invite international experts to conduct traceability research in its country, and share research results with the international community," she said.

The scientific community sees it as crucial to determine the origins of the pandemic in order to better fight or even prevent the next one.

AFP

US SAYS CHINA ARMING RUSSIA IS STILL 'ON THE TABLE'



Chinese leader Xi Jinping.
Photo: AFP

The United States has “no indication” that China has decided to supply arms to Russia, but the possibility remains “on the table,” a White House spokesman said Thursday last week.

“This is not a move that would be in the best interest of the Chinese and their standing in the international community, which we know they highly prize,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told journalists.

“We’ve communicated to the Chinese our concerns about this,” Kirby added.

US officials have launched a broad diplomatic offensive over the past week to warn China against providing lethal assistance -- which experts say could have a profound impact on the war in Ukraine as it enters its second year.

Beijing so far has forcefully denied the allegations that it is considering such a move.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who will be hosted on Friday by US President Joe Biden, called on Beijing not to arm “the aggressor Russia,” while France urged China to be cautious.

AFP

FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN CHINA RESTRICTED AND TRACKED IN 2022: PRESS GROUP



Foreign media in China endured strict Covid controls, widespread harassment and constant surveillance in 2022, a press group said Wednesday.

Nearly half of foreign journalists in the country were ordered to leave a place or denied access on health and safety grounds last year despite presenting “no health risk by China’s own standards”, the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC) said in its annual report.

A similar proportion said problems with smartphone “health codes” rendered them unable to travel at some point last year.

Almost 40 percent said at least one of their sources had been harassed, detained, questioned or suffered other negative consequences from speaking to foreign media, while 45 percent reported similar official pressure on Chinese colleagues.

China maintained some of the world’s tightest Covid restrictions for most of last year, curbing travel into and around the country while imposing lengthy quarantines and mass testing regimes.

Beijing abruptly dismantled the policy in December.

“A bevy of state restrictions, ongoing digital surveillance, and the continued harassment of Chinese colleagues and sources means existing challenges to true freedom of the press in China remain”, the report said.

The findings were based on a survey of 102 of the FCCC’s 166 members, representing news organisations from 30 countries and regions.

Local regulations mean that independent Chinese media is practically non-existent, while state-backed outlets are heavily censored.

China ranked 175th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ 2022 Media Freedom Index.

AFP

MODI CALLS FOR UNITY AT G20 DOMINATED BY UKRAINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Thursday last week for the G20 to bridge differences over Ukraine, telling the opening of a meeting in New Delhi that global governance has “failed”.

India had wanted its G20 presidency this year to focus on issues such as alleviating poverty and climate finance, but the Ukraine war has so far crowded

out other agenda items.

The gathering will see US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the same room for the first time since July, but the two men are unlikely to hold talks.

“The experience of the last few years - financial crisis, climate change, pandemic, terrorism and wars - clearly shows that global

governance has failed,” Modi said in a recorded statement opening the meeting of G20 foreign ministers.

“We are meeting at a time of deep global divisions... We all have our positions and our perspectives on how these tensions (can) be resolved. However, as the leading economies of the world, we also have a responsibility for



Indian PM Narendra Modi, right, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the meeting. Photo: AFP

those who are not in this room,” Modi said.

Western delegates fear China is considering supplying arms to its Russian ally and they will use the foreign ministers’ summit to discourage Beijing from intervening in the conflict.

India’s longstanding security ties with Russia have put the host of Thursday’s meeting in an awkward diplomatic position after refusing to condemn the invasion over the past year.

But EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he was confident

India would use the meeting to “make Russia understand that this war has to finish”.

“Certainly the success of the meeting today will be measured in respect to what we will be able to do on that,” he told reporters Wednesday.

Borrell will meet on the sidelines of the New Delhi summit with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, where he will seek assurances that Beijing will not lend support to Russia’s war effort.

“Until now, the answer has been clearly stated by China, ‘it hasn’t happened and it won’t happen,’ but we have to remain vigilant,” said a senior EU official with knowledge of the matter.

Chinese state news agency Xinhua last week quoted top diplomat Wang Yi as saying Beijing was willing to “strengthen strategic coordination” with Russia after meeting Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

‘Zero evidence’

Blinken said he had no plans to meet with either the Russian or Chinese foreign ministers at the G20 summit.

The last time Blinken and Lavrov were in the same room, at a G20 meeting in Bali last July, the latter stormed out according to Western officials.

“If Russia -- President Putin -- were genuinely prepared to engage in meaningful diplomacy necessary to end the aggression, of course we’d be the first to work to engage, but there’s zero evidence of that,” Blinken said.

Blinken had a fiery encounter with Wang last month in Germany after the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon over its east coast on February 4.

Lavrov intends to use his G20 attendance to lambast Western countries over the conflict, according to a Russian foreign ministry statement.

“The destructive policy of the US and its allies has already put the world on the brink of a disaster,” the ministry said Tuesday.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna called on the G20 to “respond clearly” to the war as it had during its Bali meeting last year.

The conflict was a “dirty war, waged in violation of all the laws of war and of simple humanity”, she said in her address to the meeting.

Hosting the G20 puts India in a tricky position, because while it shares Western concerns about China, it is also a major buyer of Russian arms and has ramped up Russian oil imports.

A meeting of G20 finance ministers in Bengaluru last week failed to agree on a common statement after Russia and China sought to water down language on the war.

While India has not condemned the Ukraine invasion, Modi told Putin last year this was “not a time for war” in comments seen as a rebuke to Moscow.

AFP



CAMBODIA OPPOSITION LEADER JAILED 27 YEARS FOR TREASON: COURT



Kem Sokha arrives at the court. Photo: AFP

A Cambodian court on Friday last week sentenced top opposition leader Kem Sokha to 27 years in jail for treason, in a case rights groups say is politically motivated.

“Kem Sokha... is sentenced to 27 years in prison on the charge of collusion with foreigners committed in Cambodia and other places,” Judge Koy Sao said at the court in Phnom Penh.

The 69-year-old was the joint founder of the now-dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party and has long been a foe of Hun Sen -- Asia’s longest-serving leader.

After the verdict, Kem Sokha was immediately taken from the courtroom to his home, where he will be placed under house arrest and banned from meeting anyone apart from family members.

The court also stripped him of his right to vote and barred him from running for political office.

Arrested in 2017 in a midnight swoop involving hundreds of security forces, Kem Sokha was accused of hatching a “secret plan” in collusion with foreign entities to topple the government of long-time ruler Hun Sen.

He has repeatedly denied the charges against him.

Critics say Hun Sen has wound back democratic freedoms and used the courts to stifle opponents, jailing scores of opposition activists and human rights defenders.

AFP

SRI LANKA WORKERS DEFY STRIKE BAN TO PROTEST RESCUE PLAN

Sri Lankan workers went on strike Wednesday last week in defiance of a government ban to protest a rescue plan for the bankrupt island nation, forcing the closure of hospitals, banks and ports.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe is facing a public backlash over steep tax hikes and spending cuts imposed to secure a sorely needed International Monetary Fund bailout.

Around 40 trade unions, including government hospital staff and bank employees, called work stoppages.

Doctors at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka in Colombo said only emergency cases were being treated, while appointments were cancelled at private clinics and hospitals.

Electricity workers and bank tellers were also on strike while dock workers staged lunch-time protests at the capital's port.

Wickremesinghe used his executive powers on Tuesday to effectively outlaw strikes by compelling "essential services" to remain at work, and government workers defying the order risk losing their jobs.

Union leaders said they were told by Wickremesinghe on Saturday that he cannot reduce income taxes as it was a condition of the

IMF to release a bailout package.

Haritha Aluthge of the Government Medical Officers' Association told reporters in Colombo that his union planned to continue its industrial action.

"A token one-day protest is not going to sway the authorities," he said. "We will have to take stronger action."

Sri Lanka sought IMF help after defaulting on its \$46 billion foreign government debt last April but is waiting for financial assurances from China, its largest single bilateral creditor, that it is willing to take a haircut on loans to the South Asian nation.

Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic crisis since late 2021 has caused severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines and led to months of protests that toppled president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July.

Wickremesinghe, who was elected by parliament to replace Rajapaksa, says the economy contracted by 11 percent last year and the island will remain bankrupt until at least 2026.

He has also announced that the country did not have money to finance a local government election which was scheduled for March 9, prompting accusations that he was using the economic crisis to stifle democracy.

AFP



Protestors in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Photo: AFP

RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT CAN SAVE WORLD FROM 'DESTRUCTIVE SPIRAL': TÜRK

UN rights chief Volker Türk has issued an urgent appeal to all countries to support people's right to development, as a way out of the world's current "destructive spiral".

Adding her voice to the High Commissioner's call for action, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed

warned in a video message that the right to development has "yet to be realized by billions of people" who were "hurting (while) the planet is burning. The world cannot wait."

Marking the 35th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development at the Human Rights Council this week in Geneva, Mr. Türk emphasized

that the value of this landmark accord comes from the equal importance it gives to people's economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

"We are seeing inequalities are escalating to perilous proportions. Climate change and biodiversity loss are far outpacing our corrective efforts," Mr.



Millions around the world live in poverty.
Photo: UN News

Türk told the Geneva forum on Tuesday.

“I am convinced that progress in realising the full spectrum of human rights can reverse this destructive spiral and can re-establish the basis for dialogue and sustainable development between, and within, Member States.”

One right should not be prioritized over another, the High Commissioner continued. Political freedoms were “not more vital than social or cultural rights”, just as civic freedoms

were no less important than achieving economic rights.

Perilous inequality

All countries should acknowledge their “inescapable interdependence” and work together, the UN rights chief continued, as he warned that key Sustainable Development Goals – agreed by all UN Member States in 2015 – have been “knocked badly off track”, largely by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global problems that can only be fixed by a common multilateral approach include climate change and biodiversity loss, Mr. Türk continued, as he pointed to a “severe pushback” in gender equality and the rights of women and girls, the invasion of Ukraine and other simmering geopolitical tensions.

Developing solutions

With an equally sobering message of his own, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, Achim Steiner, noted that “for the first time ever, the latest Human Development Index – which measures a nation’s health, education, and standard of living – has declined globally for two years in a row”.

As people are “taking to the streets...in frustration over a lack of climate and environmental action”, and as climate activists “are threatened, harassed and killed”, Mr. Steiner explained that in partnership with UNDP and others, national human rights institutions have been encouraged to play a pivotal role in addressing inequalities linked to climate change and environmental

degradation.

At an individual level, the UNDP chief also noted that tens of thousands of people have been helped to participate in their country’s development through the agency’s Climate Promise Initiative and via consultations on Nationally Determined Contributions.

G20 partnership call

Further progress in securing the right to development could also be achieved if new sources of finance can be found to promote the right to development in line with the UN Secretary-General’s new SDG Stimulus Plan, Mr. Steiner added.

This calls for the G20 group of industrialized nations to provide a \$500 billion annual stimulus for sustainable development, as well as new debt relief measures for developing countries.

“As part of these efforts, countries need to recommit to the target of dedicating 0.7 per cent of their Gross National Income to Official Development Assistance”, the UNDP chief said.

Courtesy of UN News





Photo: Matan Levanon

CHIN STATE

Myanmar junta bombs CNA and CDF camps in Thantlang. The camps of the Chin National Army (CNA) and Chinland Defense Force (CDF) were bombed by the Military Council in Thantlang Town, Chin State. Junta's fighter jets attacked CNA and CDF camps in Thantlang Town at 12:30 pm on 22 February. Following the incident, jets attacked CNA's Bwarpee camp at 12 am on 23 February. According to a CNA spokesperson, the Military Council are using fighter jets as final tools in the battle to attack the resistance forces. The primary military threats from the regime forces in Chin State are artillery bombardment and air raids by helicopters or jets, "They (Junta soldiers) dropped bombs on the camps in Thantlang using two fighter jets. Some dormitories were damaged during the incident, but there were no fatalities in any of the camps," Salai Htet Ni, a CNA spokesperson said. He also stated that helicopters have landed at the Military Council base in Thantlang, transporting wounded soldiers and replenishing weapons and ammunition and so there are likely to be more battles. Battles have frequently broken out between local resistance forces and the Military Council since the coup. Currently, local resistance forces now control over 70 per cent of the territory in Chin state, according to the CNA spokesperson. During the second week of February, fighters from the CNA and CDF raided the Thantlang Police Station and General Administration Office, seizing over 40 weapons and ammunition, as well as arresting six Junta soldiers with weapons stationed at CB Bank in Thantlang. It is known that after the junta lost ground battles with resistance forces, only one tactical hill occupied by the Military Council army remains in Thantlang, and thus they are employing air strikes against the resistance forces. More than 50,000 people are currently internally displaced in Chin State's nine townships, with at least 40,000 crossing the border to become refugees in India's Mizoram Sta.

SHAN STATE

Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) registers to contest junta elections. The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), also known as the White Tiger Party or Kya Phyu Party, registered with the Union Election Commission on 27 February 2023, to stand in the junta-organised Myanmar national elections. Party Chairman Sai Ai Pao confirmed the registration to Mizzima News and said that if the junta holds elections the SNDP will compete in the elections at the national (Union) level, rather than just in the Shan State elections. According to the junta's election regulations, all political parties that want to compete in the Union level elections must deposit funds of 100 million kyats and have 100,000 party members within 90 days of their registration, which for the SNDP will be by 28 May 2023. Any political party that wants to compete in the Union elections must also open offices in 150 townships, half of the country's total, within 180 days of registration (26 August 2023 for the SNDP) and run candidates in at least 600 constituencies nationwide. Sai Ai Pao said that complying with the junta's election regulations was a challenge for the SNDP, when he spoke to Mizzima in early February. He said: "There is no problem with 100,000 party members. Financially, it's expensive, 100 million Kyats and 165 offices are really challenging, so it's difficult." In the 2015 elections, the SNDP put up candidates in Shan, Kayah and Kachin states and in Sagaing Region. In the 2020 elections, it put up candidates in Shan and Kachin States. In both the 2015 and 2020 elections the SNDP won just one seat. The junta has decided that it is going to hold elections. On 26 January 2023, it passed a new Political Party Registration Law. This has made it very hard for many political parties to compete in the elections because the new law has many onerous regulations that most political parties will be unable to comply with. The new law also gives all parties who want to contest the elections until 27 March to register or re-register their party. So far, 13 political parties have registered to contest the elections. The National Unity Government (NUG) in exile has rejected the elections as illegitimate and unfair and has called on people to boycott them and not cooperate with election officials.



PRISONER KILLED AND SIX OTHERS AT LARGE AFTER POLICE VAN ESCAPE IN NAY PYI TAW

A prisoner was shot dead and six others remain at large after escaping from a prison van in Nay Pyi Taw, reported Radio Free Asia [RFA] citing a source close to the prison.

The incident occurred as the van was transporting 19 men and two women, including political prisoners, back to Yamethin Prison from Pyinmana District Court in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area.

Some of the prisoners attacked the guards and took a gun, prompting police to open fire. The escaped prisoners are notorious criminals, including those imprisoned for murder, rape, and robbery, and have been imprisoned for 50 years. Although political prisoners did not take part in the escape, they could still be penalised, according to RFA.

The remaining inmates were taken to Pyinmana Police Station for temporary custody, and a policeman who was injured during the escape is being treated in a local hospital, reported RFA.

Prison breaks are not uncommon in Myanmar, where brutal conditions have led to at least seven riots by prisoners protesting violations of their rights, including beatings and torture by prison guards.

Since the military coup in February 2021, nearly 20,000 people have been arrested for their views and pro-democracy activities, with almost 16,000 political prisoners still being held, according to figures compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

Myanmar's prisons have been the site of human rights abuses, and the military junta has been accused of using illegal logging and environmental crimes to finance their operations.

OVER 2,000 WORKERS UNEMPLOYED AFTER TWO YANGON GARMENT FACTORIES CLOSE



Yangon factory. Photo: EPA

Solidarity of Trade Union Myanmar (STUM) issued a press release which says that over 2,000 workers were unemployed after two garment factories in Watayar industrial zone, Shwepyithar Township, Yangon Region were closed.

These two factories are GTIG and Gysan owned by Chinese nationals running with over 1,000 workers each in Watayar industrial zone in Shwepyithar Township. These two factories were manufacturing apparel for the UK-based Primark brand.

A spokesperson for STUM explained that the workers were informed in mid-February about the imminent closure of the factories as Primark Company would leave Myanmar and then the workers were paid compensations on 28 February for ceasing their employment and then they closed their businesses.

Moreover, trade unions negotiated with these two factories for giving priority to the former workers for employment if these two factories were not permanently closed but temporarily and then Gysan agreed and signed on the agreement but GTIG had not yet agreed to it, this STUM official added.

Primark is a well-known UK-based brand and it announced in 2022 that they would stop their business in Myanmar. Primark gave manufacturing orders to these two garment factories owned by the Chinese nationals on a CMP basis.

According to the data released by the Ministry of Labour, currently 505 garment factories, 48 shoe making factories, eight wig factories and other factories totaling 177 are running their businesses in Myanmar.

It is learned from the labour activists that some factories were getting fewer orders so that they would likely close their businesses soon.

The investments in CMP factories reportedly came from China, Thailand, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

EU ASSISTS SMES IN MYANMAR



Photo: Alexandre Lallemand

The European Union (EU) in Myanmar announced that they are giving assistance to SMEs in Myanmar.

The EU's 'ARISE Plus Programme' gave some assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the agricultural sector and to over 6,000 farmers to support their income and livelihood.

The EU programme reportedly gave job opportunities to domestic SMEs and technology for a sustainable economy.

Moreover 'ARISE Plus Programme' also includes opportunities for foreign trade in agricultural products.

Myanmar gets trade opportunities in exporting agricultural products, coffee, pulses and beans, and fruits to EU countries and also these EU countries reportedly like and have interest in Arabica Coffee grown in Myanmar hilly regions.

CHINA TO UNVEIL LOWEST GROWTH GOAL IN YEARS: ANALYSTS

China will likely set one of the country's lowest growth goals in decades at the annual National People's Congress next week, experts told AFP, hit by long-running property woes, a sluggish global economy and geopolitical tensions.

Thousands of party delegates from across China will converge on Beijing for a rubber stamp conclave set to confirm key personnel appointments and make policy for the coming year.

Among the first declarations is expected to be a target for gross domestic product growth over the coming 12 months, announced by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang at Sunday's opening ceremony.

Last year, the economy expanded just three percent, one of its weakest in decades on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and a real estate crisis.

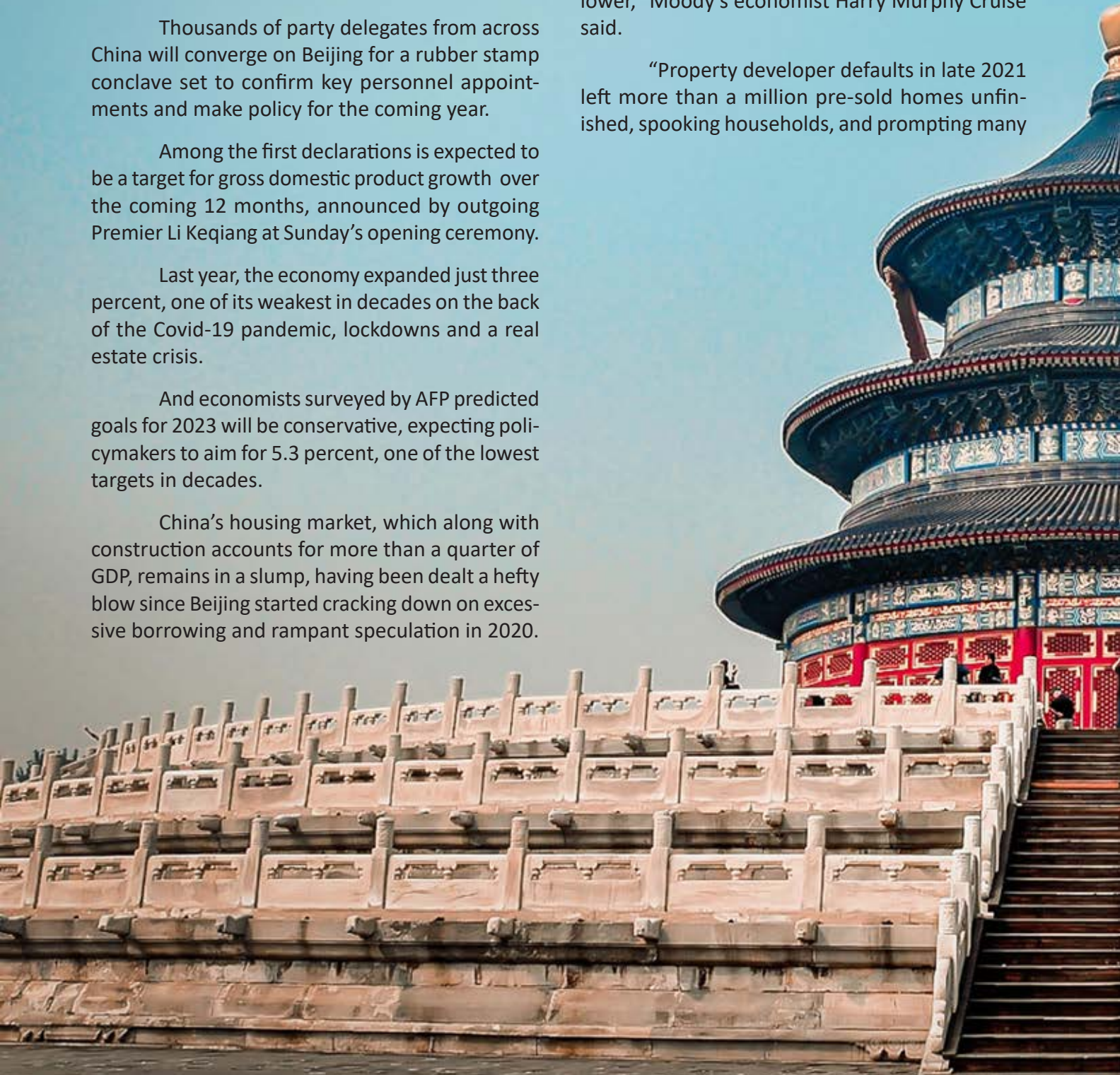
And economists surveyed by AFP predicted goals for 2023 will be conservative, expecting policymakers to aim for 5.3 percent, one of the lowest targets in decades.

China's housing market, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of GDP, remains in a slump, having been dealt a hefty blow since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020.

Real estate sales have since fallen in multiple cities and several developers are struggling to survive, while many homebuyers last year refused to pay mortgages on incomplete properties.

"Sales, commencements and prices are all lower," Moody's economist Harry Murphy Cruise said.

"Property developer defaults in late 2021 left more than a million pre-sold homes unfinished, spooking households, and prompting many



to turn their back on the market.”

An ailing international outlook was also likely to drag on growth, with economists warning of a slump in the world economy as countries battle soaring costs and central banks simultaneously hike interest rates to cool demand.

“We see empty containers piling high at Chinese ports,” Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance, told AFP.

“Export demand is rapidly disappearing due to weaker global growth and supply-chain migration.”

Meanwhile, commentators warned that geopolitical tensions posed a threat to China’s

economic prospects -- particularly if Beijing chooses to further involve itself in Russia’s war in Ukraine.

“One big risk (if not the biggest) would be China actively supporting Russia with weapons and ammunition,” Teeuwe Mevissen, China economist at Rabobank, told AFP.

“This would almost certainly lead to Western sanctions.”

What growth does come will be driven by a surge in consumption demand, economists said, as the country emerges from almost three years of Covid restrictions.

“With signs of a recovery in consumer confidence, pent-up demand amid normalisation, and stronger economic activity supporting the labour market, we think services consumption stands to benefit the most,” Jing Liu, Greater China Chief Economist, HSBC Global Research, wrote in a recent report.

The Institute of International Finance’s Ma, agreed, telling AFP his group expected a surge in household consumption, from a 0.2 percent contraction last year to nine percent growth in 2023.

“Considering household consumption is about 40 percent of GDP, household consumption alone can push GDP higher by 3.5 points,” he said.

AFP

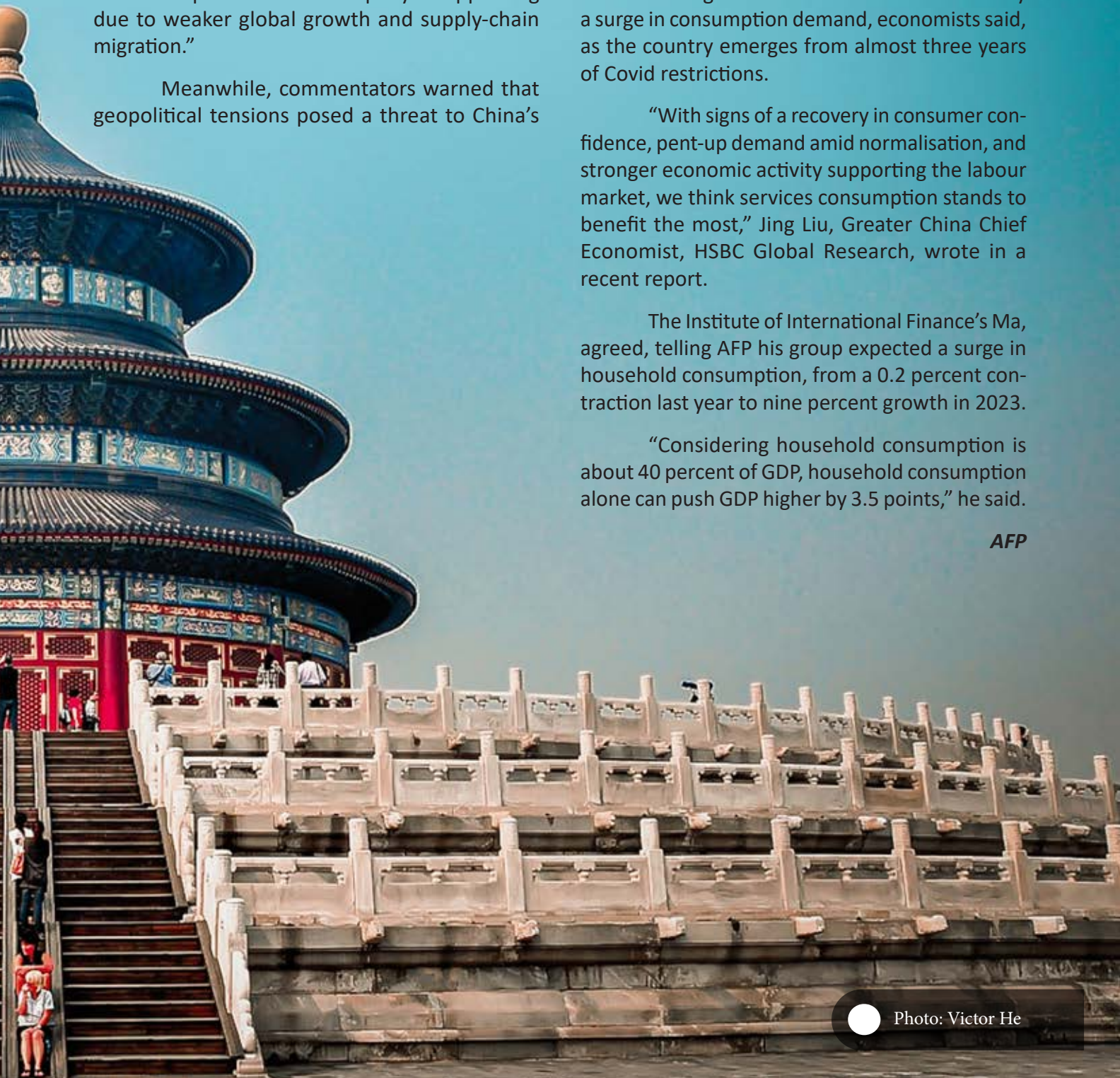


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US LUMBER COMPANY BUYS TEAK FROM MYANMAR COMPANY LINKED TO JUNTA

US Maryland-based J. Gibson Mcllvain Co., a 220-year-old high-end dealer of wood, has reportedly purchased about \$100,000 worth of teak boards from a Myanmar-based subsidiary of a timber-processing firm with links to the military junta. This purchase was made during the summer of 2021 when the junta was executing a brutal campaign against pro-democracy supporters, reported The New Zealand Herald.

According to leaked records from Myanmar's tax agency, the purchase was one of at least two shipments made by J. Gibson Mcllvain Co. in 2021 and 2022, after the United States and the European Union had imposed sanctions on Myanmar's monopoly teak producer in response to the military coup in Myanmar.

Win Enterprise Ltd., the company from which J. Gibson Mcllvain Co. bought the teak, was not under sanctions at the time, but it was listed on the state monopoly's website as a unit of the Forest Products Joint Venture Corp. Ltd. (FPJV), a timber firm majority-owned by the state monopoly and a state agency. Win Enterprise claimed that the listing was a mistake.

J. Gibson Mcllvain Co. claims to have "total quality control throughout the entire supply chain from the forest anywhere in the world" and prominently displays a green "responsible forestry" logo issued by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which verifies the chain of custody of forest products through third-party auditing firms. However, the purchase of teak from a company linked to Myanmar's junta raises questions about the effectiveness of certifications and the need for stricter regulation of supply chains.

Myanmar teak is a valuable resource for luxury yacht and high-end furniture makers worldwide due to its density and weather resistance, but it is also a crucial source of revenue for Myanmar's military junta.

Reports suggest that the military has seized illegally logged timber and sold it to fund its operations, including human rights violations and environmental crimes.

The revelation of a US-based lumber company purchasing teak from a firm linked to Myanmar's military junta highlights the challenges faced by companies seeking to maintain responsible supply chains in conflict zones in Myanmar. It also underscores the need for stronger regulatory frameworks to prevent companies from inadvertently contributing to human rights abuses and environmental destruction.

Full Moon Day of Tabaung

Buddhist Abbot Ashin Abaya Linkarya arrives to deliver a sermon at a monastery on the eve of the Full Moon Day of Tabaung celebrations, in Yangon on 4 March. Full Moon Day of Tabaung, which in 2023 falls on 05 March, marks the last month of Myanmar's lunar calendar. People traditionally make donations to monks and build stupas or pagodas with sand along the beach.

Photo: EPA



ပိတောက်

PADAUK:
MYANMAR SPRING

DIRECTED BY
JEANNE MARIE HALLACY &
RARES MICHAEL GHILEZAN



Editor
Peter Potts/AsiaWorks

Producer
Gregg Butensky

Poetry Narration
Kenneth Wong

Motion Graphics
Tak Kogateh

Kirana
Productions

kiranaproductions.org

PADAUK: MYANMAR SPRING DOCUMENTARY WINS AWARD

Video Librarian has awarded a documentary about the Myanmar crisis for their annual 2022 collection.

Directors Jeanne Hallacy and Rares Michael Ghilezain take viewers to the embattled country of Myanmar for their film “Padauk: Myanmar Spring”. It is a riveting tale of conflict, hope, and activism.

In “Padauk: Myanmar Spring” (2021, USA, 56 min), director Jeanne Hallacy and Rares Michael Ghilezain take the viewer to the streets of Myanmar during the heady days following the February 2021 military coup.

Through Nant, a young, first-time protester, we meet three human rights activists whose lives have been turned upside down by the coup. As

the protests continue, Nant comes to understand the truth of a brutal regime that has continued to wage war against its own people for decades. Against a foreboding backdrop, Nant’s political awakening regarding the plight of others in her ethnically diverse country gives hope for the future.

Nant, now residing in the USA, helps offer insight into the youth-led protests that erupted in Myanmar following the 1 February military coup.

In many ways the film offers a look into the coming of age for many young people who had grown up with a sense of hope over the last

decade as the country began to open up and some form of democracy began to flourish in the wake of the 2015 victory for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

With members of the elected civilian leaders arrested, the people of Yangon, Mandalay and many other cities and towns took it upon themselves to protest and fight back.

Nant was caught up in the protests, an action that for many like her proved a coming of age and a wake-up call. As the weeks went by through February and March, she recognized how the Myanmar people had been misled over the decades through government media and propaganda.

She came to realize that what was happening on the streets of central Myanmar was reminiscent of the military's repression of such groups as the Rohingya and ethnic groups in the country and that people must apologize for the harm caused. She said the country was being torn apart and that people were changing.

"I didn't use to believe what I heard through media outlets such as DVB, VOA, Mizzima and Irrawaddy," she said, but in time as society came under pressure due to the crackdown by the security forces, a truer picture began to emerge.

"The junta is ruining lives, the junta is ruining our future," she said, yet "people keep rising."

One of the main characters in the documentary is Zaw, a teacher-turned-activist, who said as Generation Z or Gen Z, they were the last generation to fight against the military – the last chance to crush the horror of military rule.

Zaw said put the fight into perspective. Our grandparents failed against General Ne Win, our parents failed against General Than Shwe, he said, and now it is Gen Z that is fighting against General Min Aung Hlaing.

Beautifully augmented by poetry and art, "Padauk: Myanmar Spring" shows the resilience and determination of the people of Myanmar, and the sacrifices they've made.

As director Hallacy told Mizzima: "It's actually a story about political awakening - told through Nant- as one of the millions of youth who were previously not engaged in political or social issues - but realized through the coup that they had been blinded by the military propaganda and lacked compassion for the Rohingya and ethnics."

The documentary offers "a seed of hope amongst the horror," says Hallacy.

The film won a place in the Video Librarian Best Documentaries 2022.



● Zaw protests on the street in Yangon. Photo: Supplied



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