

Over 500,000 IDPs in Karen State need aid

Oil, biggest single Myanmar import this financial year

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## THREAT FROM THE SKY

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# OUTGUNNED

**M**izzima Weekly focuses this week on the threat from the sky posed by the Myanmar regime's use of fighter jets and helicopters and the limitations of People's Defence Forces (PDF) to respond.

But the challenge is not just a lack of anti-aircraft missiles.

As we have reported before, the Myanmar resistance forces are generally poorly armed and have limited supplies of ammunition. Although we are now into the third year of the war, many PDF fighters still continue to operate with hand-made weapons, and improvised explosive devices or IEDs, with some PDF members not carrying weapons. Many of the engagements are hit-and-run, dependent on surprise, the hiding of explosives, and mobility. Despite the limitations, PDF groups have been reporting successes across the country, with the junta casualty count rising day by day. Incidents where PDFs capture weapons help.

What this means in simple terms is that despite the limitations, PDF groups are scoring successes in the countryside and small towns, prompting junta forces to venture out cautiously or remain bunkered down in positions.

But the PDFs remain outgunned by Myanmar's military.

All we need to do is check

out the military parades held in Naypyitaw to catch a glimpse of the firepower used by the Myanmar military against their own people. Jet fighters, helicopters, tanks, armored personnel carriers, missile launchers, the list goes on.

Given these circumstances, the National Unity Government (NUG) and PDFs are calling for weapons and ammunition to upgrade their capacity to fight back. As can be seen from our stories this week, supplies of anti-aircraft missiles are not coming, in large part due to regional powers and supporters being unwilling to further fuel the conflict.

The irony of situation on the world stage is not lost on Myanmar's Spring Revolutionaries. Ukraine is receiving billions of dollars-worth of heavy weaponry from the United States and Europe to fight the invading Russian forces – firepower that is now beginning to dwarf the massive supplies that were funneled into the Afghan war over the last two decades.

Myanmar's NUG and PDFs may receive words of support from backers around the world – but not the firepower to back it up.

Outgunned, Myanmar's Spring Revolutionaries soldier on in the face of the Myanmar military's massive arsenal.

## EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

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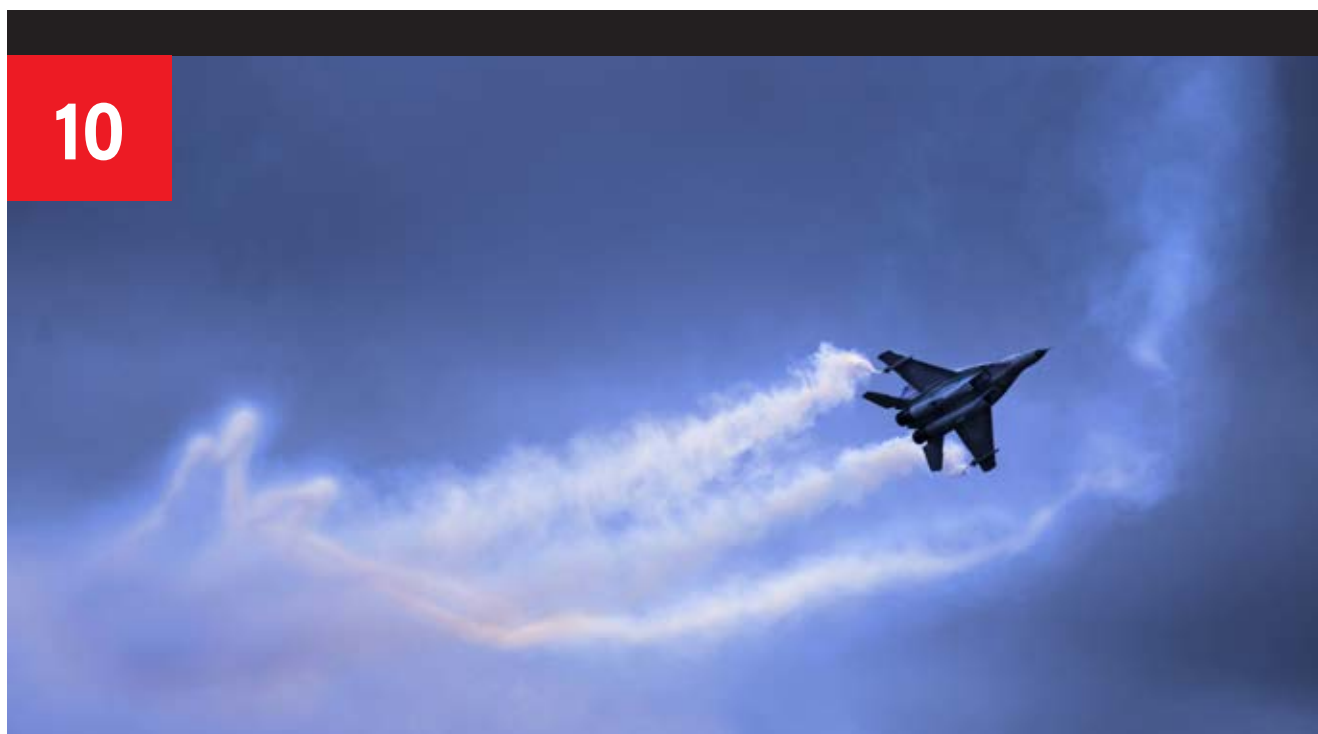


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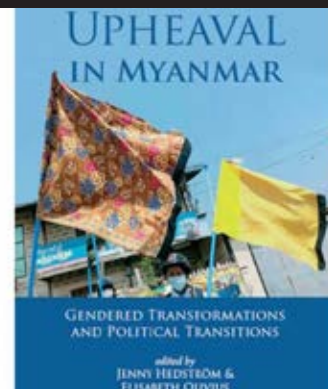
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## SYMBOL OF DEFIANCE

A Myanmar protestor holds a picture of jailed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi at a recent protest outside the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok. Photo: AFP

## FOOD CUTS IN BANGLADESH WILL HAVE “DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES” FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES: NGO

The UN's plans to alarmingly cut food aid in camps in Bangladesh shows that the international community must prioritise funding to vulnerable Rohingya refugees, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) said 18 February.

The World Food Program (WFP) this week announced it will cut food rations to Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, by 17 per cent from 1 March, to US\$10 per person. The UN agency said the decision was due to a sharp drop in international funding, and said further cuts were likely in April unless donors urgently provided a further \$125 million.

“These cuts will put close to one million Rohingya lives at risk. These refugees have survived a genocide and are almost completely dependent on aid in the camps. Cutting their food rations will have devastating consequences, not least for the most vulnerable,” said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

“International donors must not turn their backs on the Rohingya. Just because the headlines have disappeared does not mean that the needs have – refugees need the world's help more than ever.”

Close to one million Rohingya refugees live in camps in Cox's Bazar in southern Bangladesh. Some 700,000 arrived in 2017, when the Myanmar military launched a vicious operation in Rakhine State, killing thousands of men, women and children and torching hundreds of villages.

Food security has been a major issue in the camps even before the WFP's ration cuts were announced.

Many families struggle to find enough to eat, and more than one-third of children are

stunted or underweight.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are essentially barred from working and earning their own living, meaning that they are almost wholly dependent on aid from the UN and NGOs. Experts have warned that further cuts in food rations will hit the poorest and most vulnerable refugees the hardest, in particular children.

Reducing aid could also make Rohingya, especially women and girls, more vulnerable to human traffickers.

In recent years, Rohingya have increasingly tried to leave camps by boats to reach other countries in the region, such as Malaysia.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, estimates that at least 1,920 Rohingya took to boats in 2022 – a sharp increase from 287 in 2021. The sea journeys are dangerous as refugees often lack access to food, water and

medicine, and have reported being abused by traffickers. At least 119 people were reported dead or missing last year.

“Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh lead lives of utter desperation. Cutting their food rations will only make things worse, and could drive even more people to risk their lives on dangerous sea journeys,” said Tun Khin.

“The international community must do everything they can to support Rohingya refugees, including by providing enough funds to ensure that their most basic needs are met. At the same time, the world must continue to pressure Myanmar to end the ongoing genocide against the Rohingya so that the refugees can return to their homes in safety and dignity.”

## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS BURN DOWN HOUSES IN SAGAING'S PALE TOWNSHIP

The Myanmar junta set fire to houses in Sagaing Region's Pale Township on 18 and 19 February.

A junta army column departed from Pyu Saw Htee camp in Inmahtee Village in Pale Township and torched six houses and an NUG school in Mintaingpin Village at noon on 18 February.

Then, in the evening, the same column headed to Hnawyo and Tonekan villages where

they torched houses and stole valuables from them.

On the morning of 19 February, the junta column set fire to houses in the Zee Phyu Kone Village and the surrounding areas, according to Yin Mar Bin District Battalion (19) People's Defence Force (PDF).

The junta's house burning has caused more than 6,000 residents to flee Pale Township, according to a people's defence force fighter.



# TACHILEIK TO MAE SAI BORDER CROSSING REOPENED

**F**riendship Bridge No. 1, the border crossing between Tachileik in Myanmar and Mae Sai in Thailand was re-opened at 7:00 a.m. on Monday 20 February after being closed for almost three years due to COVID-19.

The bridge connects Mae Sai Town in Thailand's Chiang Rai Province with Tachileik Town in Myanmar's Shan State. It was one of the main trade routes between Myanmar and Thailand until it was closed during the COVID-19 pandemic on 24 March 2020.

A tourism business owner in Tachileik said: "We have been looking forward to the the reopening of the checkpoint for a very long time.

However, the gate was only reopened this morning [20 February]. Local residents have yet to cross the bridge because they are waiting for further instructions from the local authorities on both sides."

Initially, the bridge will only be open from 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. rather than from 6:30 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. as it was in the past, before it shut.

The junta is planning to install X-Ray machines on the Myanmar side of the border to inspect travellers and their luggage, according to travel agencies based in Tachileik.

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## FOUR JUNTA SOLDIERS, INCLUDING A CAPTAIN, KILLED IN MANDALAY REGION AMBUSH

**L**ocal People's defence forces (PDFs) ambushed junta soldiers patrolling in Mandalay Region's Nganzun Township and killed four of them, on 20 February.

The junta soldiers, who were based in Tharkyin Village, were patrolling near to Ywarlal Village in Nganzun Township, when the PDF fighters ambushed them at about 7:15 p.m.

The two sides exchanged fire for about 20 minutes, according to a representative of the TGYR - Youth Guerrilla Counter-Revolution defence force.

Four junta soldiers, including Captain, Nander Min and six others were injured. An MA 2 light machine gun and a phone were also seized

from the junta troops. The defence forces managed to retreat without suffering any casualties.

"I witnessed the deaths of four Military Council soldiers, including a captain. The rest were hurt. In addition, we opened fire four times with artillery on the Military Council stationed in Tharkyin Village. I believe there were numerous casualties, but the number has yet to be confirmed", said the representative of the TGYR - Youth Guerrilla Counter-Revolution.

The defence forces involved in the ambush were: TGYR - Youth Guerrilla Counter-Revolution, Nganzun PDF, MyitNge PDF, Mansue Kyar People's Defense Force, Zamani Guerrilla Force, LPDF-Syngtaing, Kyaukse PDF and Nganzun Battalion (6).

---

## RAILWAY POLICE DEPUTY CHIEF SHOT DEAD IN MANDALAY

**T**he 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.

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.

# THREAT FROM THE SKY

## Myanmar resistance struggles with defence against air strikes

Andrew Landen

The Myanmar junta's ratcheting up of air strikes against resistance and civilian targets has prompted calls for anti-aircraft missiles and a "no-fly-zone" to deal with the regime's threat.



Fighter jets spark fear amongst guerrilla forces and civilians in Myanmar. Photo: AFP



**T**wo years into this battle for the heart of Myanmar and it is becoming clearer that the poorly-armed Spring Revolution forces are at a substantial disadvantage when faced with the firepower of the Tatmadaw – and it is the threat from the sky that appears to pose one of the biggest challenges, both physically and psychologically.

It is logical, given the circumstances, that the People's Defence Forces or PDFs would be calling on the outside world for a supply of anti-aircraft missiles. After all, it has been argued that, given their use in other guerrilla theatres around the world, such weapons can turn the tide of conflicts – even bring down an empire.

Flashback to the guerrilla war against the Soviet and Afghan communist forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s and it can be argued that the introduction of US-made and supplied Stinger missiles helped turn the tide, leading to the 1989 Russian withdrawal, a loss of face that helped precipitate the collapse of the Soviet empire.

In a nutshell, Stinger heat-seeking missiles prompted Soviet jets and helicopters to fly high and throw out flares, making it harder to engage with the guerrilla forces, even though relatively few aircraft were shot down. This proved to be just one more nail in the coffin of Soviet occupation, another reason to head for the exit.

So are PDFs going to be handed jet fighter killers?

In an article entitled,

"Myanmar PDFs need MANPADs to have a fighting chance" published by Asia Times, security analyst and journalist Anthony Davis said that while the anti-coup resistance is being pummelled by regime's airpower that could change if more mobile missiles "somehow leaked across the border". As Davis noted, well before the junta pulled out the stops with air strikes, resistance politicians, commanders, combatants and ordinary villagers alike were grappling with a desperate lack of air defense.

Man-portable air defense systems or MANPADS might, Davis said, be seen as a "silver bullet". But the reality might be tough to swallow.

Analysts examining the worsening Myanmar quagmire recognize that while regional and Western powers are increasingly supporting Myanmar's National Unity Government or NUG, that support does not stretch to sending weapons that could change the face of the war. And on the ground, while the China-supported United Wa State Army (UWSA) might parade their ownership of MANPADS, they are not going to give or sell any to the PDFs.

ASEAN nations, for their part, do not want to see a ratcheting up of hostilities in Myanmar and are unlikely to allow the transport of sophisticated weapons to the Myanmar resistance.

Anti-aircraft missiles and a "no-fly-zone" are not coming to Myanmar, notes Davis.

As Myanmar reporter Penrose Thitsa reports in the

accompanying story in this issue: "No-fly-zone over Myanmar 'impossible' due to China's possible reaction, says security analyst", the only power that could impose a "no-fly-zone" is the United States, and that is not going to happen, he explained in the story.

Davis told a recent online video conference for



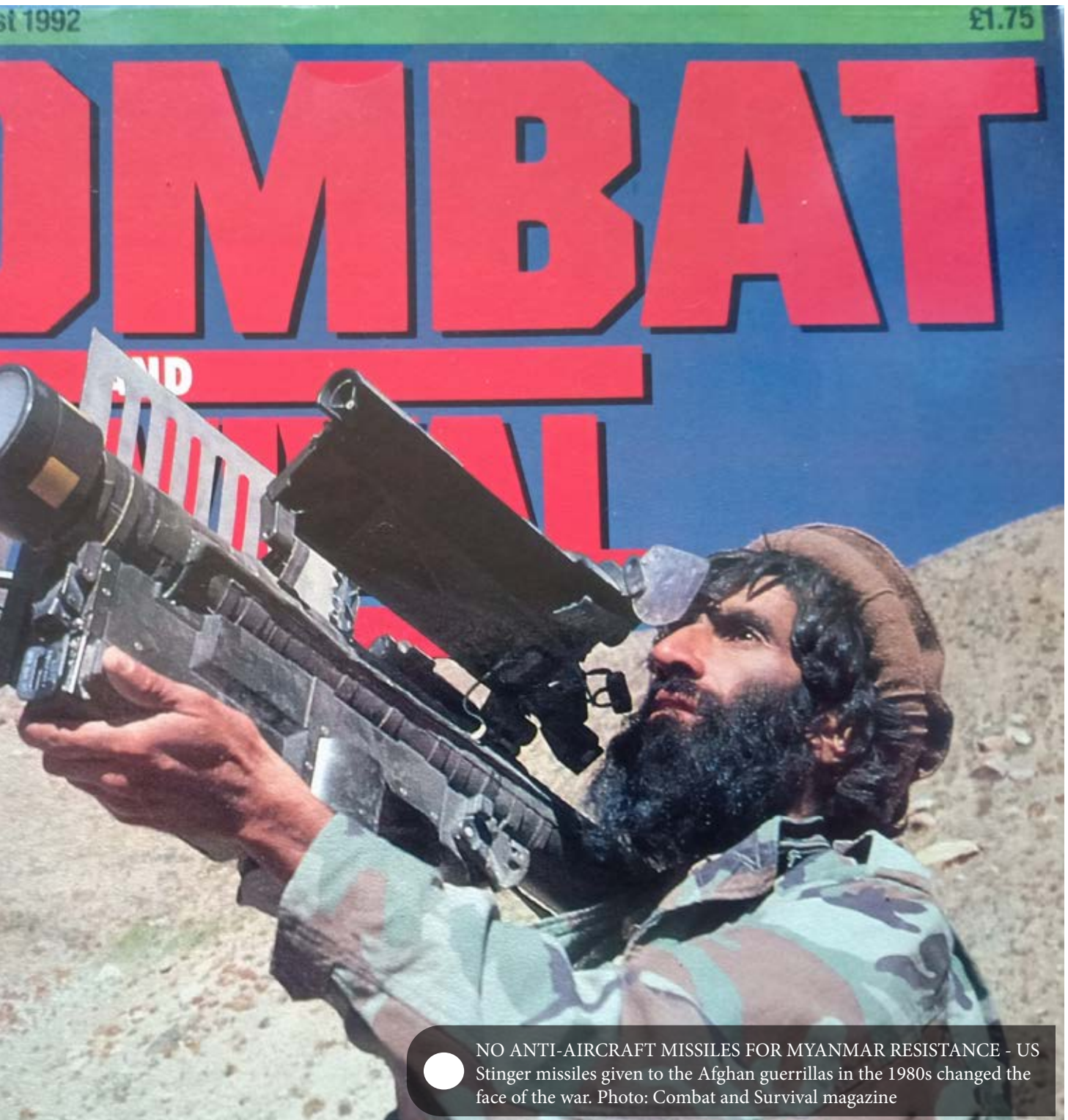
Myanmar journalists entitled, "Military Possibilities 2023 in Myanmar", both PDFs and civilians are going to have to adapt to the danger posed by junta air strikes. This adaption can be seen in a number of conflict zones around the world, where combatants – in the absence of surface-to-air missiles and heavy machine guns - have to

hide and disperse in response to aerial attacks.

As Davis noted, the experience from Afghanistan indicates that when air power is used against guerrillas, the guerrillas adapt. Similarly, "civilians are not stupid, they will disperse, so the impact becomes less and less in a

guerrilla environment." But he warns of the dangers should the resistance attempt to take and hold cities. A glance at the destruction in cities in war-torn Syria is an indicator of what could be in store.

For the Myanmar resistance and civilians taking cover from air attacks, all of this will be a hard pill to swallow.





# FORSEA FORUM DISCUSSES THREAT FROM MYANMAR AIRSTRIKES



**M**yanmar 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).

That definition reads: 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.

On 21 February evening, the NGO FORSEA hosted a dialogue live on the subject of a national armed forces resorting to targeted, precision airstrikes against civilian populations at home in Myanmar.

The discussion was entitled: How should ASEAN deal with a member state's military turning terrorist?

Speakers included: Dato'

Sri Saifuddin bin Abdullah, MP (since 2018) and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia; Padoh Saw Ta Doh Moo, General Secretary, Karen Nation Union (KNU) established in 1948 and a founding member of Myanmar National Unity Consultative Committees; Neineh Ploh, Spokesperson, Karenni National Progressive Party; Salai Van Bawi Mang, Member, Chin National Front, Technical Team; Gum San Nsang, President, Kachin Alliance, Inc., USA & Secretary of Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT); and host Maung Zarni, Co-founder of FORSEA and Fellow of the (Genocide) Documentation Center of Cambodia.

Core themes discussed involved terrorism but also the danger that an ASEAN member will once again get away with atrocities, as the Cambodian "Killing Fields" of the 1970s are still part of collective living memory.

Saw Ta Doh Moo, speaking on behalf of the KNU and Karen community, asked rhetorically why these air strikes were happening. He blamed the Tatmadaw pursuing terrorist acts against civilians.

Since the coup up until now, seven districts in central Myanmar were hit by 307 air strikes, he said. These attacks were made against the people and against churches, Buddhist monasteries and schools. This does not include attacks against our own fighters, he said.

Take one case in Muttraw district against a school, he noted. Three fighter jets dropped six large bombs on the school. Now the children are hiding in a temporary centre in the forest. This was a huge intentional attack

"This is using the state army against their own civilians. This is state terrorism," Saw Tah Doh Moo said.

This is not an issue to be



easily dismissed, he said. This is a threat to the ASEAN charter, a threat to the community. As he noted, ASEAN should intervene with India and China in attempts to prevent the delivery of aviation parts and fuel.

Salai Van Bawi Mang, speaking on behalf of the Chin community, said that since the coup, 420 Chin people had been killed, 280 of them being civilians, all due to the actions of the military. He noted that the military had lost control on the ground and had therefore reverted to using air strikes to attack their own civilians.

A key marker was July 2022, when the junta forces lost control on the ground in Chin state. They now have to use helicopters for food supplies for their troops.

Salai Van Bawi Mang said that what he had noticed was a major uptick in air strikes since January 2023 targeting infrastructure including schools, as the junta prepares for elections. All is all, he said there had been 120 air strikes since the coup. He noted the attack on 10-11 January 2023 on Camp Victoria that killed five comrades, in which the junta air force intentionally bombed a civilian hospital.

“They intentionally bombed that place, even though they knew its designation,” he said, noting air strikes had picked up from 1 February until today, totaling more than 50 air strikes in 20 days.

From his experience from visiting an attack site, people are afraid, they cannot go out to work in the fields, he said, noting that people,

particularly children, were traumatized.

Salai Van Bawi Mang called on ASEAN to tackle the issue but also focus on India, where IDPs live in large numbers.

Neinah Plo, a Karenni spokesperson, said the junta was using deadly force against civilians, causing a lot of physical damage.

He noted that the air strikes were indiscriminate but they attack anyway, a lot at night, using unguided rockets, bombs and cluster bombs that are banned internationally.

This has a lot of consequences, damaging homes, schools, clinics and religious buildings.

He noted one serious attack when the junta targeted an IDP camp in 2022 using several bombs in the middle of the night.

Neinah Plo says a leaked Myanmar military document has authorized the use of more air strikes, so the people can expect more terrorist attacks.

He called on the international community to take action to prevent these terrorist acts, targeting aviation fuel.

Gum San NSang, speaking on behalf of the Kachin community, said his community was not new to conflict, noting that there had been 50 air strikes in 2022 but that there had been an uptick in 2023, with close to 15 attacks every other day.

He reminded the audience of the massacre of 80 civilians at a concert and award ceremony in 2022.

“The junta is nothing

short of a terrorist organization, waging war on civilians,” Gum San NSang said, noting how the junta had used helicopters to gun down Rohingya in 2017.

“It is incumbent on ASEAN to take action as the regime in a member state is massacring its own people,” he said, noting that the “next killing field event is unfolding in our midst”.

He noted that the 5-Point ASEAN consensus was a veneer for inaction, noting it has to be rewritten as a “genocide regime impacts ASEAN itself”.

Saifuddin bin Abdullah, a former foreign minister of Malaysia, noted he had been trying to help ASEAN members understand what is happening in Myanmar.

“This is an important discussion on what is happening in Myanmar. It was mentioned earlier terrorism and terrorist – the air strikes and helicopter gunships, even what happens on the ground, this is the definition of terrorism, especially against civilians. It fits into the definition. State-sponsored terrorism. We know what is happening,” he said.

He noted that there would be a generation of lost children in Myanmar, given the trauma.

Saifuddin bin Abdullah mentioned the genocide in Cambodia and the killing fields in the 1970s, noting the parallels and how ASEAN had failed at that time.

“What are we doing with Myanmar?” he asked.

# NO-FLY-ZONE OVER MYANMAR 'IMPOSSIBLE' DUE TO CHINA'S POSSIBLE REACTION, SAYS SECURITY ANALYST

Penrose Thitsa

**A**nthony Davis, a veteran security analyst and journalist, said that despite the Burmese junta's airstrikes against civilians, the international community is unlikely to enforce a "no-fly-zone" over Myanmar due to the diplomatic and geo-strategic complications it would cause, particularly with China's reaction.

Davis made the remark in an online video conference on "Military Possibilities 2023

in Myanmar" and Q&A session held for about 150 Myanmar journalists, hosted by Dr Kyaw Thu and writer and activist Igor Blazevic. Davis is a British journalist with over four decades of experience covering conflicts in Asia, including Afghanistan and Burma. Davis, who is based in Bangkok, currently writes for Jane's Information Group and Asia Times.

Responding to a question from one of the Burmese

journalists, Davis said that a "no-fly-zone" as imposed over Iraq during the second Gulf War is unlikely to happen in Myanmar in the coming years or at any time, even if the Burmese junta continue conducting major airstrikes in Myanmar.

"There is only one power that can undertake, enforce a 'no-fly-zone' - that's the United States of America. That would necessitate moving a carrier battle group, an aircraft



**CALLS FOR NO-FLY-ZONES** - Protesters call for a No-Fly-Zone over Ukraine. Photo: AFP



carrier battle group into the Bay of Bengal. And that would provoke a reaction from China, let alone ASEAN. Right? So, the complications of the diplomatic geostrategic complications are such that this, frankly, will not happen,” he said

Regarding another Sino-Burmese issue, Davis said that China is super sensitive about its oil and gas pipelines in Myanmar.

“There are no ethnic resistance organizations which have any interest in messing with China’s pipelines,” he said, noting that Myanmar’s National Unity Government (NUG) effectively had a tacit agreement that means People’s Defence Forces (PDF) will leave the pipelines

alone.

“China isn’t going away. China is always going to be a crucially powerful and important neighbour and it would be counterproductive to do anything to impact their core interests.”

He also mentioned that Russia and Myanmar have a close relationship due to their mutual need for each other at this time. He said that Russia is happy to sell weapons to Myanmar as long as they are not needed in Ukraine, and that the Myanmar military is largely isolated with the exception of support from Russia. There is also talk of economic cooperation between the two nations, but it is unlikely to happen until Myanmar can reestablish security in the country, he said.

Davis also discussed the concept of an “arms pipeline,” which refers to a consistent supply of weapons to the Myanmar resistance. He states that he does not believe any external state would attempt to establish an arms pipeline in Myanmar.

Responding to a question, Davis expressed doubts about the possibility of a counter-coup in Myanmar. He believes that the Myanmar army is a well-organized and disciplined unit, and such a counter-coup is unlikely unless the army are faced with a clear defeat. However, he said that if such a moment arises, it would already be too late (to hold dialogue with the opposition).

Davis stressed that although the Myanmar military are undermanned and overstretched, in their fight against Myanmar’s resistance forces, they should not be written off.

“What I have always said from the beginning is it would be a very serious mistake to underestimate the strength of the military. They have spent several decades running the country, it is in their mentality that they believe that this is their country. This is an organisation that over time has built up a significant degree of cohesion, resources, and economic power,” he said.

Davis was addressing the Myanmar journalists at an important juncture. Myanmar has just marked the second anniversary of the 1 February 2021 military coup that ousted an elected civilian government under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. In the wake of the coup, mass protests broke out across the country, demanding the release of arrested politicians and the restoration of civilian government. But the junta has cracked down on peaceful protesters, killing and arresting thousands of people, including children. Consequently, many people of Myanmar have resorted to armed struggle against the junta because they came to believe it is the only way to protect themselves and their rights from the brutal military regime.

The people have also witnessed the junta’s use of heavy weapons against unarmed civilians, including air strikes on villages in ethnic minority areas. In response, some opposition groups have taken up arms and formed local PDFs to revolt against the junta. They see armed revolution as a necessary means to defend themselves and to fight for the restoration of democracy.





# MYANMAR LANDMINE CASUALTIES SURGE TWO YEARS AFTER COUP: UN



Myanmar civilian, right, injured by a mine and wearing a prosthetic limb. Photo: Mizzima

**L**andmines and unexploded munitions injured or killed more than one person every day in Myanmar last year, the United Nations said, pointing to a 40 percent spike in casualties compared to 2021.

The military's toppling of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021 sparked renewed fighting with ethnic rebel groups and the formation of dozens of "People's Defence Forces" in areas previously untouched by decades of conflict in Myanmar.

The Southeast Asian nation is not a signatory to the United Nations convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling or development of anti-personnel mines.

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, on Tuesday reported 390 people had been wounded or killed by landmines or unexploded

ordnances in 2022, an almost 40 percent spike compared to the previous year.

Around two-thirds of the incidents were reported in border areas where ethnic rebels have battled the army and each other for decades over autonomy and control of resources like timber, jade and the drugs trade.

And almost one-fifth of the casualties were reported in northern Sagaing region, an area that was largely peaceful before the coup but has since emerged as a hotspot of resistance to military rule.

In 2020, the year before the coup, there were 254 victims, according to UNICEF.

Myanmar's military has been repeatedly accused of atrocities and war crimes during decades of internal conflict.

Last year Amnesty International said its troops were laying landmines on a "massive scale" as they battled anti-coup fighters, including around churches and on paths to rice fields.

The UNICEF figures did not include casualties resulting from the targeting of "local administrations and security forces" by anti-junta fighters, the agency said.

More than 5,000 people were killed by anti-coup fighters and allied ethnic rebels between the coup and January this year, according to the junta.

A local monitoring group says more than 3,000 people have been killed by junta security forces, while over 19,000 arrested in the military's crackdown.

**AFP**

# NUG WELCOMES SINGAPORE'S PROHIBITION OF ARMS TRANSFERS TO MYANMAR



Photo: NUG

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) has strongly welcomed Singapore's confirmation that it is prohibiting arms transfers to the illegal military junta in Myanmar.

Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, the Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs, confirmed the existing ban in a parliamentary statement on 14 February 2023. He highlighted that it was consistent with UN General Assembly Resolution 75/287 (2021) on the situation in Myanmar, which Singapore voted for.

Dr. Balakrishnan also confirmed that Singapore would not authorise the transfer of dual-use items that are "assessed to have potential military application to Myanmar, where there is a serious risk that they may be used to inflict violence against unarmed civilians".

Putting corporations on notice, the Foreign Minister added that Singapore would take a "very firm line" against companies who contravened its laws including those on the transfer and brokering of strategic goods and technology.

According to NGO Justice for Myanmar, notorious arms brokers with branches in Singapore include Star Sapphire Group, Dynasty International, Htoo Group, and MCM Group, all of which are subject to sanctions by the US, UK, Canada and the EU. These companies are owned by cronies who aid and abet the Myanmar military's war

The NUG extended its sincere gratitude to the Government of Singapore for its principled stance, and to Foreign Minister Balakrishnan for his expressions of solidarity with the Myanmar people.



# OVER 500,000 IDPS IN KAREN STATE NEED AID

**A**id is needed for more than 500,000 people who have had to flee from their homes to Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas of Karen (Kayin) State due to junta military offensives.

The call for aid was made by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG).

According to the KHRG, from the beginning of January to 15 February, the military junta conducted at least 23 airstrikes in Karen State.

At the end of December 2022, there were about 350,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in all of Karen State, including KNU-controlled areas. This has now risen to more than 500,000 IDPs sheltering in Karen State.

Saw Nanda Hsue, a KHRG spokesperson said to Mizzima: "According to our records, there were 23 airstrikes from January to February. Especially in our [KNU] Brigade 5 and Brigade 6 [controlled] areas the number of IDPs has increased quite a bit and now there are more than 500,000 IDPs. Because of the ongoing fighting, there is a need for humanitarian aid, especially food. There are a lot of difficulties because transportation is not secure."

According to the KNU the junta destroyed many homes and schools in airstrikes on 14 and 15 February.

On 13 February three junta jets dropped bombs on Daybuno Village in the KNU Brigade 5 controlled area and hit six houses. Casualty numbers are currently unknown.

On 15 February three junta fighter jets flying out of Lu Thaw dropped six bombs onto Pedae Kae Village, also in the KNU Brigade 5 controlled area.

According to a representative of the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) shrapnel fell onto houses and a school. They added: "The airstrike did not hit the school directly, so no students were injured."

Though no students were injured this time the incident highlights the ongoing risks faced by civilians in the area.

According to the KECD there are frequent junta airstrikes in the area and they target religious and residential buildings.

FORSEA (Forces of Renewal South East Asia) has recently asserted that the Burmese junta's deployment of airstrikes falls under the definition of "domestic terrorism" developed by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The United Nations has reported that as of 30 January, 2023, there were an estimated 1,584,000 IDPs in Myanmar.



Karen IDPs. Photo: Supplied



# MYANMAR'S UN REP KYAW MOE TUN ONE OF 305 NOMINATIONS FOR NOBEL PEACE PRIZE



**M**yanmar's ambassador to the United Nations Kyaw Moe Tun is said to be one of a total of 305 nominations that have been submitted for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

The Nobel Institute provided the number of nominations this week but as is the tradition remained tight-lipped about the names on the list, so Kyaw Moe Tun's name was not publicly mentioned by the institute.

The nominations -- fewer than the record 376 registered in 2016 -- comprise 212 individuals and 93 organisations, the Oslo-based institute said on its website.

In line with Nobel statutes, the identity of the candidates is officially kept confidential for 50 years.

But those eligible to nominate -- including former laureates, lawmakers and cabinet ministers from any country in the world, and some university professors -- are free to reveal the name of the person

or organisation they have proposed, hence Kyaw Moe Tun being mentioned.

The main focus, however, is not on Myanmar. Like last year, most of the names publicly disclosed so far are involved in the nearly year-long conflict that has been raging in Ukraine, or opponents of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

They include Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg and a Ukrainian group working to establish an international war crimes tribunal.

Others known to have been nominated are jailed Putin opponents -- anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny, who was the victim of a poisoning attack, journalist and political activist Vladimir Kara-Murza and the pro-democracy youth movement Vesna.

Also believed to be on the list this year are climate activists Greta Thunberg of

Sweden and Vanessa Nakate of Uganda, Iranian women's activist Masih Alinejad and her anti-hijab movement My Stealthy Freedom, as well as the Salvation Army.

Chinese and Hong Kong pro-democracy activists are believed to have been nominated (Chow Hang-tung, Peng Lifa, the group Uyghur Tribunal) and Maggie Gobran, who helps the poor in Cairo's slums.

Myanmar's ambassador to the UN Kyaw Moe Tun -- sacked by the junta but still in his position -- and the anti-junta coalition NUCC have reportedly been nominated.

Last year, the Nobel Peace Prize was shared by Russian human rights group Memorial, Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties (CCL) and jailed Belarusian rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, a trio representing the three nations at the centre of the war in Ukraine, which all three have criticised.

**AFP, Mizzima**

# ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH WILL NEED MORE FOOD

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh should have access to adequate food aid and restrictions on Rohingya rights to work and freedom of movement must be lifted, said campaign organisation Fortify Rights.

The organisation is calling on donor governments to make sure the Rohingya refugees receive enough food and for the Bangladesh government to lift restrictions on Rohingya

refugees' rights to work and freedom of movement.

"Many Rohingya fled genocidal attacks more than five years ago and need reliable support, not cuts to the food on which they depend," said John Quinley, director at Fortify Rights.

"The cuts on food aid will be dire and could lead to significant health consequences for Rohingya refugees

in Bangladesh," he added.

In a news release published on 17 February 2023, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) announced that, beginning on 1 March 2023, it would reduce the General Food Assistance vouchers from US\$12 (about 1,224 Bangladeshi Taka) to US\$10 (about 1,070 Bangladeshi Taka) per person per month due to a \$125 million USD funding shortfall.



UN Special Envoy Noleen Heyzer, centre, on a visit to a Rohingya camp in Bangladesh. Photo: UNHCR



Fortify Rights spoke with Rohingya refugees and a WFP representative in Bangladesh about the recent announcement.

One Rohingya man, 28, who fled to Bangladesh in 2017, said: "WFP cutting food rations may affect my family and me severely as the price of the food is increasing."

Another Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh said: "If [the food aid] is suddenly cut, it will affect the whole community. Even the food we do receive is not enough."

Even before the announcement of food-aid cuts, Rohingya in Bangladesh reported experiencing food insecurity and restrictions on their livelihoods in Bangladesh.

A Rohingya refugee, 60, originally from Rathedaung Township in Myanmar, told Fortify Rights: "Here in this camp, life is so difficult . . . I have only one son. I can't earn money [through a job]. Here in the refugee camp, I can survive life eating half [of a] meal per day."

Rohingya have limited employment opportunities and largely rely on humanitarian assistance from the U.N. and other humanitarian organizations in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh denies Rohingya refugees access to formal livelihoods and work in the country.

A December 2020 participatory action research study led by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and supported by Fortify Rights found that the top two stressors experienced by Rohingya in refugee camps in Bangladesh were a lack of adequate income (94.9 percent) and insufficient

access to food (78.8 percent).

"This is a devastating blow to the Rohingya and an equally devastating blow to the humanitarian community," Domenico Scalpelli, the Country Director of WFP in Bangladesh, said in a statement. "With other critical services already dwindling, the repercussions of the ration cut – even if just two dollars – will be dire."

In a news release published on 16 February 2023, U.N. experts Michael Fakhri, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and Tom Andrews, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said the ration reductions are a consequence of "the international community's failure to provide funding for initiatives that address the fundamental needs of Rohingya refugees. Rations will be slashed for Rohingya refugees starting in a few weeks, just before Ramadan. This is unconscionable."

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes the right to food in the context of an adequate standard of living. Similarly, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provides "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living . . . including adequate food."

Bangladesh has ratified the ICESCR and signed the UDHR but continues to deny Rohingya refugees access to legal status and the right to work in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh hosts a population of approximately one

million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. In 2016 and 2017, the Myanmar Army led a genocidal campaign of massacres, mass rape, and mass arson, forcibly deporting more than 800,000 Rohingya men, women, and children to Bangladesh.

"The reduction in aid is yet another challenge confronting Rohingya people in Bangladesh and it will inevitably impair their enjoyment of other rights, including health and life," said John Quinley.

"Donors must find ways to address the funding shortfall, and Bangladesh should urgently lift arbitrary restrictions, including restrictions on the right to freedom of movement and livelihoods, to mitigate the harmful consequences of aid cuts," he concluded.



# CHINA'S ZERO-COVID STRUCTURES TAKE ON SECOND LIVES

**W**ith China's dropping of its "zero-Covid" policy, makeshift quarantine centres and testing booths are being repurposed as mini-libraries, information points or even housing.

Since Beijing suddenly abandoned its hardline virus control measures in December

after almost three years, cities across China have been left with tens of thousands of the temporary structures.

Some of the metal or plastic testing booths that were once ubiquitous symbols of the "zero-Covid" policy have found a new life as mini-pharmacies, shelters or information stations.

"Rather than leaving them empty, we're trying to use them in other ways, suiting the time and place," a city official from Suzhou, near Shanghai, told AFP.

Some booths near the train station have been transformed into information points for new arrivals, offering them



● Municipal workers remove a Covid testing booth from the street in Beijing. Photo: AFP

job opportunities or legal advice concerning work disputes.

Elsewhere in the city, booths have been repurposed by local janitorial staff to store odds and ends.

“When we came to work here this booth wasn’t here yet. So our superiors bought it for us,” Xu, a river cleaner, told AFP.

“Since we don’t do Covid testing anymore... they could bring it over,” she said.

“After work, we use it to

put our gloves and our tools in it,” she added.

“And when it rains, we come to shelter there.”

Local governments in China spent about 200 billion yuan (\$29 billion) on the testing programme needed to keep zero-Covid going, according to banking giant Goldman Sachs, as quoted by Bloomberg.

Now they are keen to put the redundant facilities to good use.

During the Covid surge in December and January, some were converted into medical consultation stations or medicine distribution points to reduce the pressure on hospitals which were inundated with patients.

Others have since been transformed into mini-libraries where residents can exchange books.

### ***‘Sustainable use’***

In Jinan, the capital of eastern Shandong province, some cabins have become “heartwarming huts” where passers-by can shelter from the cold, charge their phones or even benefit from free hot water.

Others have been converted into Red Cross service points, resting areas for delivery drivers or waste-sorting stations.

But many former testing booths remain unused - so much so that some people are trying to sell them on the internet.

On Xianyu, China’s main app for selling second-hand goods, they are up for sale from between 100 and 8,000 yuan (\$15 and \$1,200), depending on their condition.

“Ours comes from a company that no longer wanted it,” one seller told AFP.

The fate of the former quarantine centres and makeshift hospitals where Covid-positive or sick people were once sent is more complex because of their size and cost.

Some remain empty, but others have been converted into backup hospitals with additional equipment and staff, to relieve the pressure on the healthcare system.

Elsewhere in Jinan, a former makeshift quarantine centre has been converted into housing for employees of nearby companies.

A total of 650 basic rooms with a bed, closet, desk, television and air conditioning are available.

“It’s good, it allows a more sustainable use of resources,” said one Weibo user.

But others are not so convinced.

“What about wifi, thermal insulation and sound-proofing?” wrote another.

“How cost-effective is the project? Wouldn’t dismantling it have been cheaper?”

AFP





# CHINA URGES RUSSIA, UKRAINE TO HOLD TALKS, WARNS AGAINST USING NUCLEAR WEAPONS



Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, Beijing.  
Photo: AFP

China called Friday last week for urgent peace talks as it released its plan to end the war in Ukraine, but Western powers quickly rebuffed the proposals while warning against Beijing's closing ties to Moscow.

The 12-point paper calling for a "political settlement" of the crisis follows accusations from the West that China is considering arming Russia, a claim Beijing has dismissed as false.

Timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the paper calls for all parties to "support Russia and Ukraine in working in the same direction and resuming

direct dialogue as quickly as possible".

It also makes clear its opposition to not only the use of nuclear weapons, but the threat of deploying them.

But the document was immediately met by scepticism from Ukraine's allies, with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg saying Beijing "doesn't have much credibility because they have not been able to condemn the illegal invasion of Ukraine".

US President Joe Biden's national security advisor said the war "could end tomorrow if Russia stopped attacking Ukraine and withdrew its forces".



“My first reaction to (the position paper) is that it could stop at point one, which is to respect the sovereignty of all nations,” Jake Sullivan told CNN.

And German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that while “every constructive suggestion that brings us closer on the path to a just peace is highly welcome... whether global power China wants to play such a constructive role is still doubtful”.

China should “not just speak with Moscow, but also with Kyiv”, he added.

At a press conference in Beijing, Ukrainian and EU diplomats urged China to do more to press Russia to end the conflict.

Jorge Toledo, the EU ambassador to China, said Beijing has a “special responsibility” as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to uphold peace.

“Whether this is compatible with neutrality, I’m not sure, it depends on what neutrality means,” he said.

### ***Strategic allies***

China has sought to position itself as a neutral party in the conflict while maintaining close ties with strategic ally Russia.

Top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi on Wednesday met with Putin and Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Moscow.

A readout of the meeting published by Chinese state news agency Xinhua quoted Wang as saying China was willing to “deepen political trust” and “strengthen strategic coordination” with Russia.

Following Wang’s visit, Moscow said Beijing had presented its views on approaches to a “political settlement” of the conflict.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday he had not seen any Chinese peace plan and wanted to meet with Beijing over the proposal before assessing it.

Friday’s document showed Beijing “clearly views the conflict in Ukraine as a product of what it says is Cold War mentality and an outdated European security architecture”, said Manoj

Kewalramani, a China expert at the Takshashila Institution in Bengaluru, India.

“The concerns reflected in this document are around escalation and spillover effects,” he told AFP, adding that Beijing would likely prefer peace talks to focus on “a new European security architecture rather than the war itself”.

Since Russian tanks rolled over the border into Ukraine, China has offered Putin diplomatic and financial support, but refrained from overt military involvement or sending lethal arms.

Washington believes that might be about to change, voicing concerns that China could be planning to supply Russia with weapons to prop up its war effort. Beijing has denied the claims.

A virtual Group of Seven summit on Friday will call on countries to not send military aid to Russia, Japan’s prime minister said, though he did not single out any nation.

But one analyst suggested the Chinese policy paper could be laying the groundwork for further involvement by Beijing in the conflict.

“The absence of a proscription against arms transfers concerns me,” former US Department of Defense official Drew Thompson wrote on Twitter.

“It is possible Beijing is getting ready to provide Russia with lethal support.”

**AFP**

# BLINKEN TO MEET ASIA 'QUAD' AFTER CHINA FRICTION



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Photo: AFP

**U**S Secretary of State Antony Blinken will meet this week with his counterparts from India, Japan and Australia, on the heels of a flare-up in tensions with China, an official said Friday last week.

Blinken will hold the talks with the so-called Quad on March 3 on the sidelines of a Group of 20 meeting in New Delhi, said Donald Lu, the top State Department official on South Asia.

The four will hold an hour-long public discussion as part of the Raisina Dialogue, a major Indian conference on geopolitics, he said.

The Quad was a concept developed by late Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe as he sought unity among the four democracies that have each seen friction with a rising China, which has repeatedly condemned the grouping as a move to encircle it.

The latest meeting comes weeks after Blinken scrapped a trip to Beijing after an alleged Chinese spy balloon flew over the United States.

He later held a tense meeting with China's foreign policy supremo Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference.

Lu said that the Quad would emphasize its recent initiatives including disaster relief and vaccine aid, downplaying the subtext of China.

"The Quad is not a military alliance; the Quad is not in fact an organization that is against any single country or group of countries," Lu said.

"The Quad stands for trying to promote activities and values that support the Indo-Pacific -- a free and open Indo-Pacific," he said, using the US catchphrase for a region not dominated by Beijing.

India has long had tensions with China, including a

major border skirmish in 2020, and has a budding alliance with the United States.

But New Delhi has bucked Washington by preserving its Cold War relationship with Russia despite the year-old invasion of Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will attend the meeting in New Delhi. Blinken has refused to see him in person since the war, saying Russia is not serious about peace, although the two have spoken by telephone.

Blinken will head to New Delhi after stops in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have both been uneasy but guarded in public statements over Russia's attack of Ukraine.

He will also meet in Kazakhstan's capital Astana with his counterparts from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the other Central Asian former Soviet republics.

AFP

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# THAI FARMERS TAP INTO SUSTAINABLE RUBBER INDUSTRY

**B**y the light of a head torch, Wanida Hityim deftly strips bark from a rubber tree, collecting the milky latex as she explains why she's among a small number of Thai farmers trying to work more sustainably.

As the world's largest producer of natural rubber - supplying more than a third of global stocks in 2021 - Thailand's policies have stimulated massive deforestation, plummeting biodiversity and soaring soil erosion.

The vast majority of the kingdom's plantations are still worked conventionally, but a few farmers like Wanida are abandoning pesticides to try and lessen their impact on the environment.

And while money is her bottom line, Wanida also sees the small-scale benefits of turning to greener methods.

"This place even has worms in the soil," she said of her 1.5-hectare (3.7-acre) plot in the southern province of Surat Thani, home to about 500 trees.

"Plantations that use pesticides wouldn't have nature like this because the chemicals they use would just ruin the soil," the 41-year-old told AFP.

Wanida is one of a few Thai farmers to have received the international non-profit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate, which encourages the sustainable use of forests.

FSC is not without

its critics. Grant Rosoman, a senior advisor to Greenpeace International, warned it is vulnerable to industry pressure and manipulation.

"All certification schemes have problems with auditors which are paid by clients, the companies," Rosoman told AFP.

"There is a financial conflict of interest between who is paying and the auditor."

## ***'Right time, right message'***

Adopting more sustainable methods has enabled Wanida to sell her rubber at a higher price, earning her around \$650 a month instead of \$550.

Thailand exported nearly \$6 billion of rubber in 2021, the vast majority of it produced by small-scale farmers who sell to middlemen - so financial incentives are key to changing methods.

"When I talk about sustainable development for the first time, people look at me with a smile and a big question mark on their face," said Maiprae Luyen, co-founder of Agriac, a rubber intermediary set up in 2019 to promote good practices among farmers in southern Thailand.

The firm works with roughly 1,000 small farmers - 60 percent of them women - many of whom previously thought environmentally friendly methods were a "burden", said Maiprae.

But they were convinced

by both the financial returns - Agriac offers a three baht (\$0.09) bonus per FSC-approved kilogram (2.2 pounds) sold - and also the ecological benefits, she said.

Later she pointed to the cracked soil of another rubber plantation in Surat Thani, the result of unsustainable "chemical products".

"It's time that people start to understand that the value of things is not defined by price tag," she said.

"It's the right time, the right





message.”

### **China drag**

But Agriac farmers are just a few leaves in the forest of Thailand’s rubber industry: only two percent of the nation’s roughly 3.2 million hectares of plantations are worked under FSC guidelines.

In December the European Union agreed to ban the import of rubber deemed to contribute to deforestation, a move hailed as a milestone by green groups.

But the impact of this change on Thailand will be limited, said Krungsri Bank analyst Chaiwat Sowcharoensuk, because China - which accounts for almost half of the kingdom’s

market - does not prioritise sustainability.

While medium and large firms do cater to Western consumers, he said, the shift was yet to trickle down to smallholders.

“But if one day China announces a plan about sustainable rubber, then local farmers would pay attention,” he said.

“If they can’t sell their rubber, then they would take action.”

Rosoman of Greenpeace said that with question marks hanging over certification schemes such as FSC, tougher regulation like that imposed by the EU will be key to sustainability.

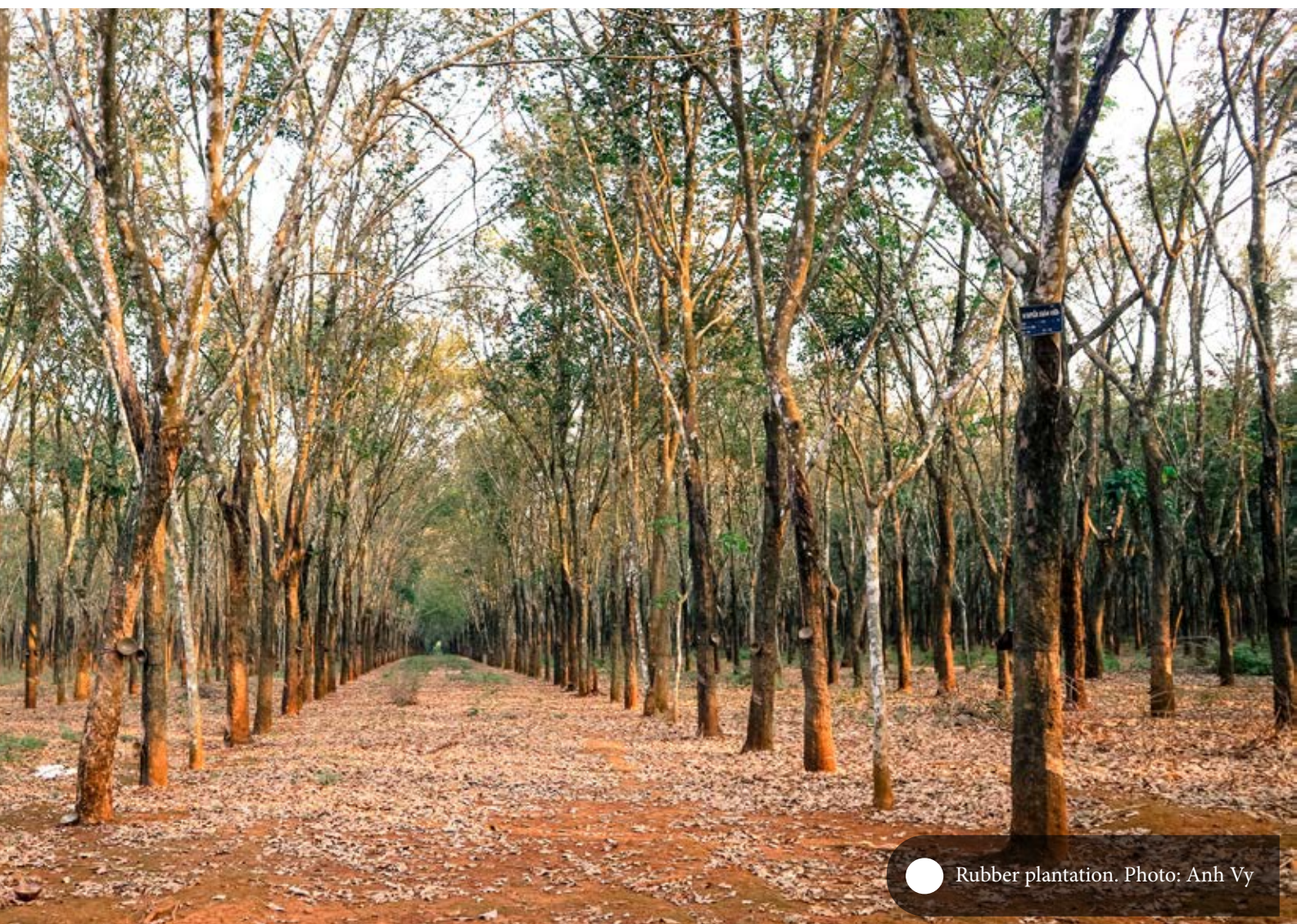
The future of natural rubber should be “very bright” he said, as the alternative - synthetic rubber produced from oil - is highly polluting.

For Wanida, out tapping her trees at 3:00 am with her faithful dogs yapping at her heels, rubber is in her blood.

Passed down from her grandfather to her father, the plantation might be taking a new direction under her care.

But, she says, “I’m still a rubber farmer through and through”.

**AFP**



Rubber plantation. Photo: Anh Vy



# UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE END TO WAR IN UKRAINE

The UN General Assembly on Thursday last week called for ending the war in Ukraine and demanded Russia's immediate withdrawal from the country, in line with the UN Charter.

At its resumed eleventh emergency special session, the world body adopted a new resolution calling for an end to the war, only hours before the conflict entered its second year on Friday.

The results were 141 Member States in favour and seven against - Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia and Syria. Among the 32 abstentions were China, India and Pakistan.

By the terms of the 11-paragraph resolution, the Assembly reiterated its demand that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally

withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine and called for a cessation of hostilities".

## *Address war's global impact*

The Assembly, through the resolution, urged Member States to cooperate in the spirit of solidarity to address the global impacts of the war on food security, energy, finance, the environment and nuclear security and safety. Underscoring that arrangements for a lasting peace should consider these factors, the Assembly also called upon all nations to support the Secretary-General in his efforts to address these impacts.

The resumed session had met on Wednesday to begin debating the resolution, with the General Assembly President, Csaba Kőrösi, saying that for a full year, the 193-member Assembly, the



Photo: UN News



Secretary-General, and the international community “have been consistent and vocal in our calls to end this war, and to adhere to the UN Charter and international law”.

## ***Justice for all victims***

The resolution reaffirmed the Assembly’s commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

The Assembly also emphasized the need to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Ukraine through independent national or international investigations and prosecutions to ensure justice for all victims and the prevention of future crimes.

## ***Rejected proposals***

The world body on Thursday rejected two amendments proposed by Belarus. The first proposal

would have altered several of the resolution’s provisions, and the second would have had the Assembly call on Member States to, among other things, refrain from sending weapons to the zone of conflict.

## ***‘New chapter of history’***

At the outset of the resumed session on Wednesday, the Assembly President said that in this “new chapter of history”, the world is facing “stark choices about who we are as an international community. These choices will either set us on a path of solidarity and collective resolve to uphold the tenets of the UN Charter,” he said, “or a path of aggression, war, normalized violations of international law and collapsed global action.”

Days after the 24 February 2022 invasion, UN Security Council members had voted to allow the General Assembly to convene the eleventh emergency special session after Russia had vetoed a resolution that would have condemned the invasion of Ukraine.

In line with resolution 377A(V), adopted in 1950, the Assembly is able to take up international peace and security matters when the Council fails to do.

*Courtesy of UN News*







Photo: Matan Levanon

## CHIN STATE

75th Chin National Day celebrated online. The Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) organised an online ceremony to celebrate the 75th annual Chin National Day on 20 February 2023. Various dignitaries and officials gave online speeches, including the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile's Acting President Duwa Lashi La. In his speech, he said: "Since ancient times, the Chin nation has been an independent nation practicing its customs and laws and governing its lands. In the past, they [the Chin] bravely defended their land against the Imperialist English with any kind of weapon and many heroes emerged. Chin National Day exists because the Chin people love federal democracy." Amongst the others who gave online speeches to mark the occasion were the event's chairperson Salai Lian Luai, NUG ministers and representatives of the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH); the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC); the Committee Representing the Chin State Hluttaw (CRCH); Chin Township administration officers and Chin leaders abroad. There were also songs from Chin artists, including the singer Thawnkham and the group Guys from Chin. Two junta soldiers surrender to CDF-Hakha. Two junta soldiers surrendered along with their weapons and ammunition to the Chinland Defence Force-Hakha (CDF - Hakha), on 20 February. The two soldiers, from junta Infantry Battalion 269 based in Chin State's Thantlang Township, surrendered with two assault rifles, 674 rounds of rifle ammunition, nine magazines, four grenades, 60 mm mortar bombs and other military equipment. "When the two soldiers showed up to join us, we sent them to a safe location. Due to security concerns, we did not let them into our camp, so we escorted them directly to the liberated area. Some Junta soldiers continue to contact us, expressing a desire to join the CDM [civil disobedience movement] and fight alongside the revolutionary soldiers. However, due to security concerns, we have yet to accept them", a representative of CDH - Hakha, said to Mizzima. The representative said that the two defecting junta soldiers were also rewarded with a payment of 3 million kyats each, before being taken to liberated areas. Already, in the first 50 days of 2023, three junta soldiers have surrendered to CDF-Hakha. Since the military coup in February 2021 about 40 junta soldiers have surrendered to CDF-Hakha.





## PDF ATTACKS JUNTA'S AIRSPACE SECURITY TASK FORCE IN NAY PYI TAW

**A** local People's Defense Forces (PDF) has claimed that they attacked the junta's No. 2031 Airspace Security Task Force, which was located on the hills between Pyinmana and Lewe townships in the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, with artillery shells, according to Radio Free Asia (Burmese Service) citing an official of the PDF.

The official said that they fired two artillery shells, one of which exploded on a building in the compound of the Airspace Security Task Force, while the other exploded on the ground between the buildings. He added that they needed to attack junta targets in Nay Pyi Taw to gain military advantages for the revolutionary forces.

After the attack, the junta's forces returned fire with heavy and small weapons, and a jet fighter hovered over the area. Security has been tightened in the area, according to local residents.



# OIL, BIGGEST SINGLE MYANMAR IMPORT THIS FINANCIAL YEAR



Photo: Arvind Vallabh

\$4.426 billion USD worth of oil products were imported into Myanmar in the first 10 months of the 2022-23 financial year.

More was spent on oil than any other imported commodity, according to figures released by the Military Council's Ministry of Economy and Commerce.

Oil products covers all oil-based fuels, including petrol, diesel, kerosene and aircraft fuel.

The price of oil products in Myanmar this financial year has been volatile. Currently, the price of fuel oil is expensive, averaging about 2,000 kyats a litre.

Russia has announced that in March it will be reducing its oil output by 5 per cent, equivalent to 500,000 barrels of oil a day. Whilst this will not directly affect the Myanmar fuel market it may raise the global price of oil, which could have an impact on the Myanmar domestic market.

Human rights organisations have called on foreign governments to sanction the sale of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) to Myanmar because the junta is using it to fuel the planes it uses in airstrikes against civilian targets.

Myanmar produces oil and gas with the help of foreign companies. But, there are no refineries in Myanmar that can produce ATF domestically, all fuel, for both military and civilian aircraft has to be imported.

The EU has imposed sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises (MOGE) and on 20 February 2023 it announced further sanctions against nine individuals and seven companies involved in supplying Myanmar with ATF and weapons.

# NEW IMPORT REGULATIONS FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES ANNOUNCED

**C**ompanies that want to import electric vehicles (EVs) to Myanmar must submit a bank guarantee saying that they have 50 million MMK of funds, according to a 22 February statement by the junta Ministry of Commerce.

The 50 million MMK of funds need to be deposited in a designated bank.

Companies that want to import electric vehicle must register with the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), whether they are solely Myanmar owned or a joint venture between Myanmar nationals and foreigners. They must also have a sales contract with an EV manufacturer and then obtain a purchase permit from the Ministry of Commerce.

All imported EV vehicles will also have to be registered with the Road Transport Administration Department.

But, EVs will be entitled to be zero-Customs tariff status, according to the Ministry of Planning and Finance.

These new regulations will be in force from 1 January to 31 December 2023.

“In the past few days, some electric cars have arrived. Currently, we are trying them out before selling them. While the Junta is establishing charging points, we are also looking for ways to sell that are convenient for customers”, an entrepreneur preparing to import electric cars to Myanmar said to Mizzima.

“Currently, in the country, there is an irregular electric supply, high fuel prices, and insufficient CNG [natural] gas. Therefore, I hope that there will be no difficulties in charging if we are going to drive electric cars”, said a taxi driver from Bahan Township.

Five charging stations are currently being built on the Yangon-Mandalay expressway as a pilot project in cooperation with the relevant ministries.

# TOURIST SCARCITY PROMPTS BAGAN HOT-AIR BALLOONISTS TO SUSPEND SERVICES



Bagan. Photo: Alexander Schimmeck

**H**ot-air balloon operators in Myanmar's former tourist Mecca of Bagan are having to adjust their operational plans due to a substantial drop in foreign tourist numbers due largely to the fall-out from the 2021 Myanmar military coup.

Four hot-air balloon companies used to provide services for panoramic birds-eye views visitors in the beginning of this tourist season but only three companies namely Balloon over Bagan (BOB), Oriental Ballooning Bagan (OBB) and Shin Than Thu (STT) are still providing their services and this looks set to change.

OBB will reportedly suspend their service in the last week of February and BOB will suspend its business on 11 April.

The passengers of these balloon services are mainly foreigners and the number of foreign tourists visiting Bagan had dropped significantly since 2019, prior to the COVID-19 restrictions and then the 2021 coup.

These companies typically charge US\$150-170 per head or 470,000 kyat in Myanmar currency. Each trip typically carries 16 passengers and each company flies 2-4 balloons daily.

In the past these balloon companies flew 180 passengers daily and each company flew up to seven balloons daily.

In this tourist season, the majority of the tourists are reportedly from Russia, China, Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Korea and Thailand.

Some speculate that Myanmar tourism business will not recover this year because of the crisis and armed conflicts.

The domestic tour operators assume that the business will take years to revive, having suffered from the Covid fallout and then the coup.

The Military Council expects about 500,000-1,800,000 tourists to visit the country in 2023 and they said last year that they would give priority for security, stability and COVID-19 prevention work.



Penrose Thitsa

## NESTLE TO CEASE OPERATIONS IN MYANMAR AMID POLITICAL TURMOIL AND ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

**N**estle, the Swiss food giant, is planning to halt all of its production in Myanmar, the Turkish broadcaster TRT World reported citing a spokesperson of the company.

It is the latest company to withdraw from the country after a military coup that occurred in February 2021, causing widespread unrest and economic downturn.

The spokesperson stated that due to the “current economic situation” in Myanmar, the company’s head office and factory in the commercial hub of Yangon would cease operations, but did not provide a specific timeframe.

Nestle markets products such as Nescafe instant coffee, Maggi noodles, and Milo chocolate malt beverage in Myanmar, but a Myanmar company will now market and distribute Nestle products from Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, the spokesperson added.

The company is committed to providing support to all those affected by this decision.

Nestle currently has 138 employees working at its Myanmar factory and head office.

Several foreign companies, including TotalEnergies, Chevron, and Telenor, have left the Myanmar market since the military coup.

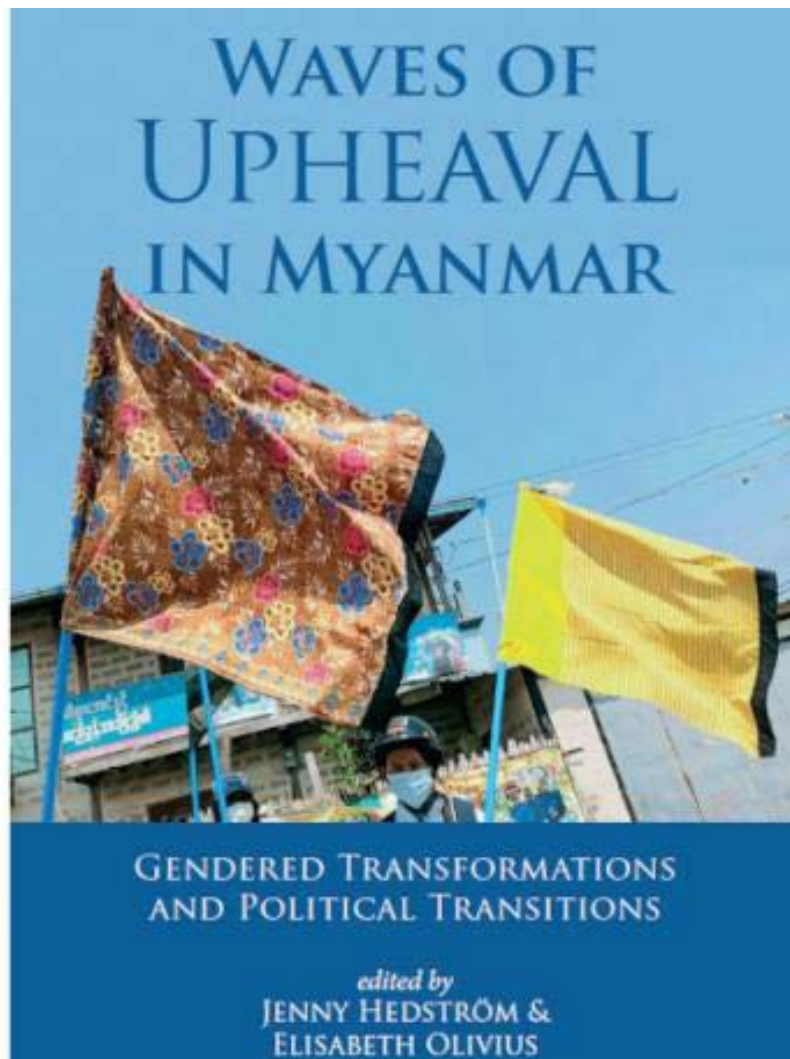
## WINTER SCENE

**W**intering shorebird whimbrel stand at Letkhomekone beach in Myanmar's Yangon region on 24 February 2023. Photo: AFP









## BOOK SHARES MYANMAR WOMEN'S VOICES

**W**omen in Myanmar have long held a pivotal role in opposition to military rule and remain crucial to the revolution's success, according to "Waves of Upheaval in Myanmar: Gendered Transformations and Political Transitions", a new book released last month by feminist scholars and human rights defenders from Myanmar and beyond.

This is the first-ever edited volume of feminist voices in Myanmar published since the coup.

"Despite Aung San Suu Kyi, the story of Myanmar has been dominated by simple, male-oriented narratives," said Jenny Hedstrom, Associate Professor at Swedish Defence University and an editor of the volume.

"We wanted to create new knowledge that could show the realities of gendered politics and everyday life in Myanmar, and how they've been interlinked before and since the deadly coup. This also helps us understand the persistence of male-dominated, militarized political power that made the coup possible and the prominence and role of women in anti-coup resistance," she explained.

The 290-page book includes 11 chapters as well as an introduction, foreword, and afterword by leading feminist scholars, junior scholars, and human rights defenders. The book was launched at The Fort—a space in central Bangkok for change-makers in Southeast Asia—with a distinguished panel of speakers, including professors, women human rights defenders, and a representative from the Swedish Embassy to Myanmar.

The book's narrative chapters – conversations with human rights defenders – give voice to the often-overlooked political work by women in Myanmar, while the theoretical chapters focus on gendered changes in formal spheres (political legislation, peace work and laws) and informal spheres (everyday life and intimate relations). The book illustrates how decades of labour by women throughout the country have sustained communities in the face of violence and upheaval and paved the way for a younger generation of activists who emerged after the 2021 coup.

"This 2021 Spring Revolution is historic," said Dr Khin Mar Mar Khin, a feminist scholar from Myanmar and author of a chapter in the book. "For the first time, we see ideological and identity-oriented revolutions in Myanmar that include gender. This is really exciting and I'm hopeful to see the dawn of real social change and turning the tables on these issues."

The editors, Jenny Hedstrom and Elisabeth Olivius, were able to convene Myanmar voices in the book in part because of the pre-coup "political transition" from 2011 to 2021, which enabled the emergence of feminist voices from a variety

of previously ignored places. However, several chapters in the book illustrate how Myanmar's so-called transition was in no way the liberal success story that international observers often held it to be.

As such, the volume not only provides important insights into the gendered experiences and effects of the last decades of change in Myanmar, but also offers readers a deeper understanding of the political situation in Myanmar and Southeast Asia and of the ways in which Myanmar's political landscape might continue to be reshaped.

"The book shows how a decade of relative freedom and openness created a young generation with new political ideals and values, and the military did not like or understand these changes," said Olivius, Associate Professor at Umeå University and an editor of the volume. "The military opted instead to take power and attack the civilian population."

The book includes conversations between human rights defenders and scholars that illustrate the lack of formal recognition of women as leaders in Myanmar despite their labour to ensure the survival of their immediate families and broader communities, and to achieving revolutionary goals.

"It is our hope that the collective knowledge gathered in this book will be of use for future students, activists and policy makers who can learn from the herstories of brave activists and Burmese scholars going before them, to create a more just and inclusive society, a society which takes the demands and lessons of women seriously, now, not later," said Hedstrom.

"Waves of Upheaval in Myanmar: Gendered Transformations and Political Transitions" is published by NIAS Press and will be distributed by Silkworm Books in Southeast Asia and Hawaii University Press in North America.





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