

THINGYAN HOLIDAY SPECIAL

**mizzima** | WEEKLY  
myanmar news & insight

**NOTHING TO  
CELEBRATE**

**Myanmar crisis  
puts dampener on  
Water Festival**



# mizzima

WEEKLY  
myanmar news & insight

OUT EVERY  
THURSDAY

PRINT VERSION

PDF ONLINE VERSION

For more contents to read  
Follow us on:

Our Websites:

[www.mizzima.com](http://www.mizzima.com)

[www.mizzimaburmese.com](http://www.mizzimaburmese.com)

[www.mizzima.tv](http://www.mizzima.tv)

## SUBSCRIBE HERE

KEEP UP ON WHAT MATTERS



Available at...

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

Contact Us!



► Subscription  
(95) 9 421010101

# ARE BATTLEFIELD LOSSES WEIGHING ON MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF?

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing appears to be in a quandary. Over two years after his ill-fated military coup, the general is getting more and more desperate, resorting to increased “shock and awe” aircraft attacks and a shuffling of generals on his military chessboard, as he attempts at the same time to lay a democratic façade over his regime.

March 30 saw the Senior General remove some of the military commanders and top officers from their military positions while promoting others, according to local news outlets and sources close to the military. It has been reported that the junta removed Lieutenant General Khin Hlaing from his position as the head of the Bureau of Special Operations 4, responsible for overseeing Karen and Mon states and Tanintharyi Region, following substantial losses in fighting with the Karen National Union (KNU).

Major General Nyunt Win Swe, Commander of the Yangon Region Command, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and has replaced Lieutenant General Khin Hlaing’s position.

Behind the smokescreen of preparations for a democratic election, Min Aung Hlaing’s junta looks set to step up attacks on resistance strongholds in this hot season – essentially a two-month window before the monsoon rains bog down the potential for effective military offensives.

The junta, in a public communique late last year, admitted that they only control 72 out of Myanmar’s 330 townships. In a meeting in February of this year, Min Aung Hlaing reportedly claimed that 198 townships were peaceful, but that the military faced trouble in over 120 townships. In addition, what is clear at this stage is the junta maintains control over the key cities of Naypyitaw, Yangon and Mandalay, although the cities have seen incidents of bombings and assassinations by People’s Defence Forces (PDF).

Battlefield losses are now weighing on the general as he scrambles to try to keep the upper hand. The Myanmar junta is facing the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG) and its Spring Revolution, a plethora of PDFs and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO).

Min Aung Hlaing must recognize he misjudged the Myanmar people, particularly the young generation from all communities of the country. Analysts say they suspect that when the Senior General ordered his forces to take over the country on 1 February 2021, he expected protests but that the country would return to the status quo, a disgruntled public accepting that they were once again under military rule – as happened in the wake of the 1988 and 1990s democracy uprisings.

Yet the fighters of the Spring Revolution have surprised many inside and outside Myanmar with their do-or-die resistance.

Min Aung Hlaing is facing military setbacks and is moving around his players on the chessboard, desperately trying to crack down on resistance ahead of what he claims will be a national poll, a date for which has not been set. At the same time, he and his regime are leaning heavily on the support he receives from China and Russia, in terms of diplomacy, trade deals, or the fuel, fighter jets and attack helicopters that allow him to kill his people.

Desperate leaders take desperate measures. What is clear is the next two to three months will see stepped up aerial and ground offensives - yet more brutality as the military pursues a “scorched earth” policy burning villages and torturing and killing civilians.

Min Aung Hlaing ought to hang his head in shame. Not since the Killing Fields of Pol Pot’s Cambodia has a South East Asian country leader demonstrated such cruelty towards his own people.

EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

**Editor In-Chief and Managing Director**

Soe Myint

**Contributors**

Sai Wansai,  
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

**MIZZIMA MAGAZINE**

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

**Photos are by Mizzima**

Unless otherwise credited.  
© 2015 MIZZIMA All rights reserved

**INFORMATION**

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

**Subscriptions and sales in Myanmar**

Mizzima Weekly is currently available as a PDF.

**Contact:** Mizzima Media Group  
Email: [sm@mizzima.com](mailto:sm@mizzima.com)  
Phone: +95-9421010100



# CONTENTS



## NEWS & INSIGHT

3 EDITORIAL

6 IN FOCUS

8 NEWS ROUNDUPS

10 NOTHING TO CELEBRATE Myanmar crisis puts dampener on Water Festival

13 Political parties praised for not registering for junta elections

14 KNU holds virtual press conference to unveil report on Myanmar junta's war crimes

16 NUG welcomes UN condemnation of Myanmar junta abuses

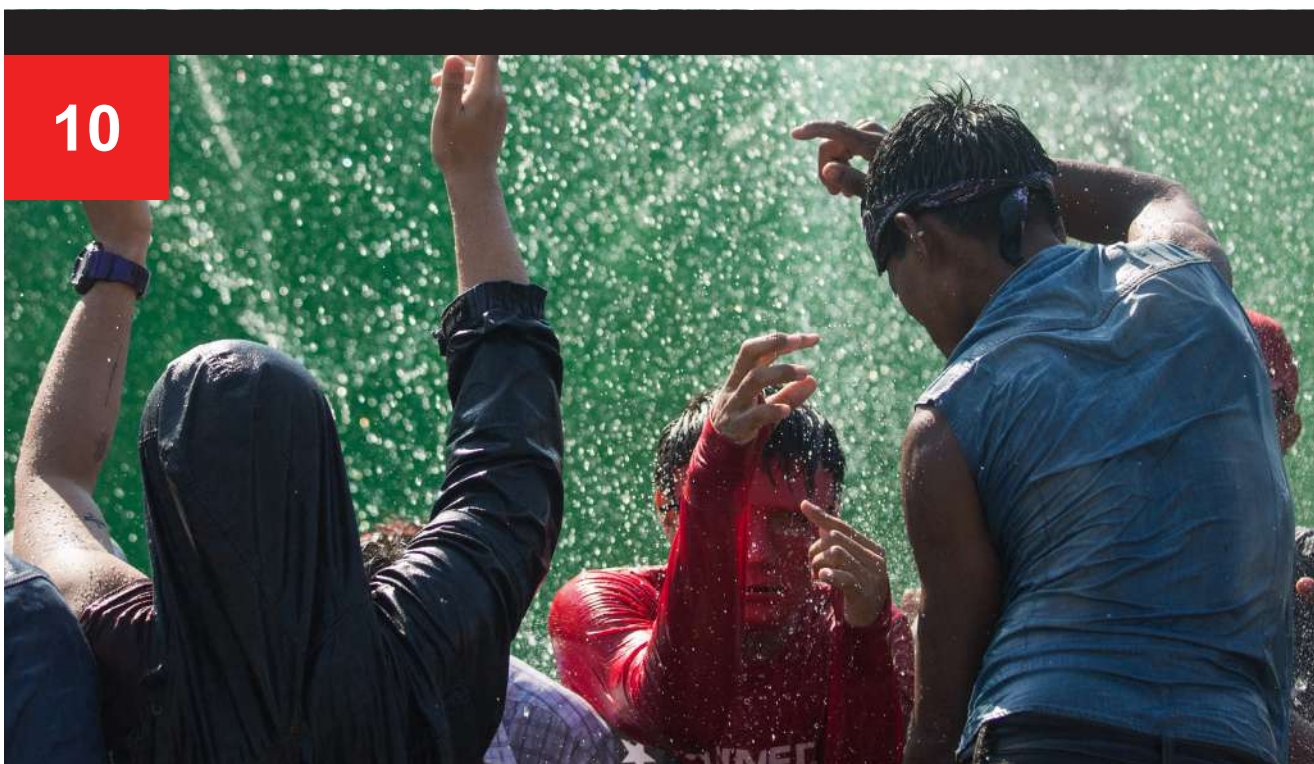


18 NUG invites junta personnel to defect

19 Reverend Dr Hkalam Samson sentenced to six years in Myanmar prison: NGO

20 700 prisoners secretly transferred from Insein to other prisons

21 Alarm as Myanmar's displaced rise to 1.8 million: UNOCHA





## COVID-19 UPDATE

- 22 'We need to know': WHO says China has more on Covid origin

## CHINA FOCUS

- 24 China holds three days of military drills in Taiwan Strait
- 26 Seven decades of China-Taiwan relations
- 28 Iran, Saudi ministers meet in China to cement reconciliation

## RUSSIA FOCUS

- 30 Russia formally charges US reporter
- 32 Possible Trump trial plunges 2024 US election race into uncharted territory

Cover photo of people celebrating Thingyan in Yangon in 2018 by AFP

## COMMENTARY

- 34 The deadly legacy of landmines
- 36 ETHNIC NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 39 LAST WEEK IN NAY PYI TAW

## BUSINESS

- 40 Fuel prices rising on eve of Thingyan, diesel shortage for generators
- 41 Sacked Myanmar migrants in Thailand to get compensation, help to return home
- 42 IMF chief calls on central banks to continue inflation fight
- 43 BUSINESS ALERTS

## CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

- 44 IN FOCUS
- 46 Thai-Lao water festival exuberance expected post-Covid





IN FOCUS

สวัสดิการคำ  
055-531587







## FLEEING INTO THAILAND

**P**eople fleeing fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic rebel groups shelter on the Thai side of the Moei river, in Mae Sot district in Tak province on April 7. Thousands of people have fled into Thailand following fierce fighting between Myanmar rebels and the military, Thai officials said on April 6.

Photo: AFP



# YANGON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT HIT BY MISSILE FIRE, SECURITY TIGHTENED



A series of explosions hit Yangon International Airport at around 9:30 pm on 6 April.

The explosions were reportedly due to the use of improvised artillery shells.

“It is certain that the Mingaladon Airport was attacked with shock missiles (improvised artillery shells). I am sure the runway was hit too. There is an intense fire at the old terminal. That’s why the fire trucks run over quickly,” said a source from Yangon.

Five explosions of the improvised artillery shells were heard loudly as well as gunshots at the airport also known as Mingaladon Airport, according to the sources.

The explosions occurred around 9:30 pm and a large number of the military soldiers and police arrived at the airport at around 10 pm. Additionally, am-

bulances as well as fire trucks from other townships arrived at the scene.

It is reported that the arrival of many junta soldiers is due to the injury of a junta military officer. However, Mizzima has not been able to independently confirm it yet.

Due to the Yangon International Airport attack, the adjacent township, North Okkalapa, is being heavily searched. Additionally, overnight guest checking is reported to be operated at Tamwe Township, Sanchaung Township, and Kamaryut Township in Yangon. Presently, the junta forces has tightened the security throughout Yangon, according to the sources.

*Gandamar*



# VILLAGERS FLEE AREAS NEAR SHWE KOKKO AS KAREN STATE FIGHTING ESCALATES

Thousands of villagers are fleeing villages near Shwe Kokko in Karen State near the Thai border as the military use assault helicopters in clashes between its affiliated border guard troops and local guerrilla forces.

The armed conflicts occurred in Hteekawhtaw and Thetkaya villages when the KNLA joint forces and PDFs carried out attacks on the pro-military Karen Border Guard Force (BGF).

“In the morning, we heard gunfire. Also, we discovered damage at BGF Gate No. (1) and other locations. The BGF and the military apparently suffered serious injuries,” said a local source on 5 April.

Around 12:30 pm, the military used Mi-35 helicopters to carry out attacks in Mekanel, and Thingan Nyi Naung areas near Shwe Kokko.

“They fired simultaneously in several areas. Junta soldiers were surrounded by resistance forces in Mekanel village. They were rescued by the helicopters,” a member of a PDF said.

Locals from the area of Shwe Kokko have had

to flee from their villages to the Thai border by crossing the Moei River.

“We fled from the battle on 5 April morning. We are currently living on a sandbank of the Moei river. The artillery shells dropped into our villages. The junta soldiers carried aerial attacks on our villages. Everyone has fled from homes. We heard that two civilians were injured. The casualties have not yet been confirmed. All the roads are closing now,” a local from Shwe Kokko said.

Armed clashes have been escalating in Myawaddy, Thingan Nyi Naung, Kawkareik, Kyondoe, Ngartaing, Kyainseikgyi, and Payathonzu areas in Karen or Kayin State since March 2023.

However, the ongoing fight is the first time in Shwe Kokko which is home to the headquarters of Kayin State Border Guard Force (BGF). It has become a hub of illegal gambling, human trafficking, extortion and cyber scam operations due to the difficult access of the Union government to the remote area.

The BGF has also allowed investment of Chinese-led development projects in Shwe Kokko.

---

## THREE CIVILIANS INCLUDING A CHILD INJURED BY MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE IN LASHIO

Three civilians, including a child, were injured in an airstrike carried out by three junta aircraft at Narmakaw Village in Lashio Township located in Northern Shan State on 7 April.

The airstrike occurred without any apparent reason, as there was no battle reported in the area at the time, injuring a little girl, a woman and a man, according to a villager.

“A man, a woman, and a girl were injured. The wounds are not serious. Some houses were damaged a little,” said the villager. “The airstrike occurred near Naungcho Town.”

This is the area controlled by the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) Brigade 4, according to the PSLF-TNLA News and Information Department.

Currently, the three injured are receiving medical treatment at Lashio General Hospital.



# NOTHING TO CELEBRATE

Myanmar crisis puts dampener on Water Festival







Young people enjoying Thingyan in Yangon in 2018 before the crisis. Photo: AFP





● Young people enjoying Thingyan in Yangon in 2018 before the crisis. Photo: AFP

**T**hingyan has turned into a tussle between the Myanmar junta and the Spring Revolution resistance forces.

The annual Water Festival that is held every year in the heat of mid-April is typically a chance for Myanmar citizens to let their hair down, throw water, dance, drink too much, and throw off the tensions that build in the hot season.

This year – over two years after the Myanmar military illegally grabbed power in a coup – the battle lines have been drawn with the junta pressuring the populace to make merry and the National Unity Government and Spring Revolutionaries calling for a boycott and warning of attacks.

The military junta wants people participation to help “rubber stamp” their rule, as they prepare to hold a national election later in the year or possibly next year.

The Myanmar crisis has put a dampener on the Water Festival that has grown from a quiet few days for Buddhists to make merit and sprinkle water on friends and family into a raucous slew of five days of mayhem, particularly in the major cities of Yangon and Mandalay.

The military junta is pulling out the stops to encourage or even force the population to attend events as “pandals” are set up for singing and dancing.

## **POST-COVID, POST-COUP**

In 2020 Thingyan was cancelled because everyone had to socially distance because of the restrictions imposed during the COVID 19 pandemic. In 2021 and 2022, many people boycotted Thingyan celebra-

tions in protest at the military junta’s coup and illegal takeover of the country.

This year the junta is trying to force the populace to celebrate Thingyan. Normally stages are sponsored by businesses, but this year companies have shown a reluctance to register to sponsor stages. The junta is building Thingyan stages in Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw. The junta is also urging hotel and bar owners to have parties during Thingyan in a desperate attempt to show to the outside world that everything is running as normal in Myanmar.

But, after the devastation the junta has wreaked on the country over the last two years there is limited public support for Thingyan celebrations, especially military-sponsored celebrations.

## **WARNINGS**

Local People’s Defence Forces (PDFs) have issued strong public warnings to the population telling them not to attend Thingyan celebrations. They are warning that there may be attacks on military-sponsored celebrations and they will not be responsible for any injuries suffered by members of the public caught up in such attacks.

Bomb attacks punctuated the celebrations over the last two years.

As most members of the public approve of the Thingyan boycott, once again the Water Festival could prove to be a damp squib of an affair in line with the somber mood of the country as it continues to suffer under draconian military rule.

# POLITICAL PARTIES PRAISED FOR NOT REGISTERING FOR JUNTA ELECTIONS

**T**he Joint Working Committee of National Unity Consultative Council and the National Unity Government (NUG) shadow government praised the decisions of political parties who decided not to register for the junta's upcoming election.

A Joint Working Committee of the National Unity Consultative Council, an advisory body to the NUG, said in a 3 April statement, that the junta is trying to use the upcoming elections to overcome the ongoing political impasse, even as it continues to kill and torture citizens.

It accused the junta's Election Commission of being no more than junta stooges and said the junta's elections are a deception designed to obscure the current true situation in Myanmar.

The junta says that it wants a "genuine and well-disciplined multiparty democracy system" and that it opposes a federal democratic system.

The committee also rejected the Election Commission's decision to dissolve 40 political parties that were legally registered prior to the coup but that had refused to re-register under the junta.

According to junta-friendly media sources 63 political parties have registered to take part in the upcoming elections.

No date has yet been fixed for the junta elections.



# KNU HOLDS VIRTUAL PRESS CONFERENCE TO UNVEIL REPORT ON MYANMAR JUNTA'S WAR CRIMES

The Karen National Union (KNU) recognizes the limitations of the United Nations and is concerned about the uptick in Myanmar junta jet fighter attacks in a report just released on the crisis in Karen State.

The KNU unveiled its report titled, "Myanmar Military's War Crimes in Kawthoolei: Loss of Lives and Livelihoods after the Coup of 2021" in a virtual press conference on 5 April.

KNU officials including KNU Vice Chairperson Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win offered a briefing on the report.

According to the report, the KNU Human Rights Committee has documented "a total of 7,587 armed clashes in Kawthoolei—the areas under the KNU's administration—between February 2021 and December 2021, leading to at least 365,187 people being displaced from their homes."

The committee has analyzed all forms of human rights violations that had occurred during these armed clashes and found that there are 19 different human rights violations - including airstrikes against civilians, arresting civilians, arbitrary shooting of civilians, heavy artillery use against civilians and torching civilian's houses - being committed in Kawthoolei.

As for the KNU, they have made it a top priority to prevent any violations of the military code of conduct, according to the report.

"The KNU has been especially vigilant about making sure

the military code of conduct is not violated during armed conflicts, and in the event that alleged cases of such violations have been reported, the KNU has made its best efforts in rigorously following its own laws by carrying out investigations and taking legal action accordingly."

According to the report, the junta has increased its use of airstrikes in response to its heavy casualties on the ground, targeting not only armed resistance groups but also civilian areas, including villages, hospitals, schools and religious buildings.

The report says that the junta's airstrikes in the southern part of Myanmar, particularly in KNU-controlled areas, have caused more damage to civilian infrastructure and livelihoods than to military targets. This indicates that the junta is trying to instill fear in the civilian population and reduce their support for the KNU, according to the report.

The report adds that the junta's procurement of new fighter jets is concerning for the safety and security of the people, as these findings indicate that the military junta is likely to continue committing crimes against humanity and violating human rights in the future.

Massive communication cuts and travel restrictions imposed by the junta have deprived the vast majority of people across Kawthoolei of access to important news and necessities, while living under constant fear and insecurity, according to the report.

Regarding the safety of women, the report says, "Even in villages that are not directly targeted by the junta, grown-up men usually avoid living for too long at a time and only women stay behind to take care of village affairs. Even though these women have to worry about potential sexual abuse and life-threatening risks on top of everything else, they try to guard their hard-earned homes and properties."

The report accuses the junta of using innocent civilians and their residential areas as defensive shields and deliberately destroying essential public facilities.



ties. It pointed out that the Geneva Conventions stipulate the obligation to protect civilians in time of war and to refrain from attacking essential public facilities such as hospitals and clinics, but the junta had failed to fulfill these obligations.

The report recommends that the UN establish a no-fly-zone and internationally guaranteed safe zones to protect civilian areas, including villages, internally displaced people camps, hospitals, clinics and schools from military attacks.

To foreign governments and international organizations, the report urges legal action against the Myanmar military junta. The report also calls for all-inclusive humanitarian dialogue and cross-border assistance agree-

ments.

In the report, KNU says it firmly believes that establishing a federal democratic union, where democratic principles are both proclaimed and practiced, is the only way to overcome chauvinism and all forms of authoritarianism, including military dictatorship, and build lasting peace in a socially and religiously diverse country like Myanmar.

The KNU selected 5 April to host the virtual press conference in commemoration of the 38th anniversary of the Karen Women's Organization.

In the Q&A session of the virtual conference, KNU's spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on the UN in the fight against the junta, as he un-

derstands that geopolitics plays a significant role in its decision-making.

"We understand that the UN is composed of governments from around the world and they all have different interests. Geopolitics plays a big deal in terms of the decisions made by the UN. So, we understand that there are limitations from the UN's side too. So, we are aware that there are things that we can rely on the UN and there are things that we cannot rely on," he said.

He stated that KNU would continue to do whatever it could and analyze what kind of support the international community could provide in achieving its goals. He added that KNU would also make its own efforts to reach pro-democracy objectives.



● Bombing damage in a village. Photo: Supplied



# NUG WELCOMES UN CONDEMNATION OF MYANMAR JUNTA ABUSES



Photo: Facebook

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) Ministry of Human Rights has welcomed a new resolution of the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Council that condemned the Myanmar junta's brutal attacks on civilians, human rights violation and abuses.

The session was held on Wednesday last week.

The following is the NUG statement issued on 5 April:

Statement on the consensus resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

The Republic of the Union

of Myanmar welcomes the Human Rights Council's adoption by consensus of the resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. Myanmar extends its appreciation to the European Union and to cosponsors.

The new resolution is stronger than last year's text and it capitalises on recent momentum, including the UN Security Council's historic 2022 resolution on Myanmar which stressed the need to uphold democratic institutions and processes in Myanmar in accordance with the will of the people. As the Human Rights Council's new resolution confirms, the

Myanmar people expressed this democratic will in the general election held on 8 November 2020.

The new resolution also condemns the illegal military junta's deliberate, widespread, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against civilians, including airstrikes, killings, torture and sexual and gender-based violence. This established pattern of intentional attacks constitutes likely crimes against humanity in addition to certain war crimes and grave human rights violations and abuses.

It is therefore unfortunate that, despite the best efforts of the



EU and likeminded States, Human Rights Council Members could not agree on stronger language to block the export, sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment including dual-use items to the criminal junta.

The junta's atrocities also demand accountability. The new resolution expresses strong support for accountability processes, including at the International Court of Justice and through the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar's (IIMM) preparation of case files. Progress must see the International Criminal Court

(ICC) recognise the National Unity Government's article 12(3) declaration issued in July 2021, which accepted the ICC's jurisdiction over international crimes committed in Myanmar since 1 July 2002.

Significantly, the new resolution welcomes the National Unity Government's pronouncement of its "Policy position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State" on 3 June 2021. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, as represented by the National Unity Government, recognises the Rohingya as Myanmar citizens and remains committed to replacing the 1982 Citizenship Law and to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in Myanmar.

On ASEAN, the resolution supports the regional group's efforts while expressing deep concern at the lack of progress in implementing the Five-Point Consensus. Accordingly, the Human Rights Council has requested the UN Secretary-General to continue to call the Security Council's attention to the situation in Myanmar. The Security Council should in turn consider all measures at its disposal, including those under Chapter VII of the UN Charter given the threat that the junta poses to peace and security.

The resolution also invites the Secretary-General to 'offer relevant recommendations to enable more effective work in the future and to strengthen the prevention capacity of the United Nations system' in follow-up to the Rosenthal report. Acting on this invitation, the Secretary-General should commission an inquiry into whether the UN Country Team in Myanmar is taking adequate steps to avoid a

repeat of past UN failures and to meet its obligations under the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights and under the UNCT's own 'programmatic engagement guidelines'. A public report with clear findings and recommendations should follow.

Myanmar, as represented by the National Unity Government, supports the Human Rights Council's extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar and accepts the call for an OHCHR country office to be opened. Myanmar will also continue to cooperate with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, the IIMM and other UN mandate-holders, human rights mechanisms and international and regional courts, tribunals and human rights bodies.



# NUG INVITES JUNTA PERSONNEL TO DEFECT



A number of Myanmar military personnel have defected to the resistance. Photo: AFP

The National Unity Government (NUG) shadow government invited junta soldiers and police officers to defect from the Myanmar junta as part of the 'People's Embrace' programme, on 2 April.

According to the NUG, the People's Revolution has been gaining momentum in all frontline areas and it advised all junta personnel who can no longer stomach the junta's terrorist behaviour to join up with the people.

According to an NUG statement, 12,327 soldiers and police officers along with thousands of their family members, had defected from the junta, under the People's Embrace programme, as of 21 February 2023. Of those who defected 3,236 were soldiers and 9,091 were policemen.

The 'People Embrace Program Implementation Committee' was formed under the People's Embrace programme to provide security, transportation, resettlement, livelihood, and social support from ethnic resistance organisations (EROs), international organisations, and donor organizations for defecting soldiers and police officers.

The NUG also warned that the People's Embrace programme will not run forever and it encouraged junta personnel to join the programme before it was too late.

# REVEREND DR HKALAM SAMSON SENTENCED TO SIX YEARS IN MYANMAR PRISON: NGO



Reverend Dr Hkalam Samson. Photo: Mizzima

**T**he former president of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), Reverend Dr Hkalam Samson, has been sentenced to six years in prison by a court in Myanmar on Friday last week, reports Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

Reverend Dr Samson was jailed on charges of unlawful association, defaming the State and terrorism.

Reverend Dr Samson, an outspoken voice for human rights for the Kachin people, was arrested at Mandalay International Airport on 5 December 2022 as he was attempting to travel to Bangkok. He has been held in Myitkyina prison since his arrest, CSW says.

A court in Myitkyina, Kachin State, sentenced Reverend Dr Samson, who serves as Chairman of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly, under Section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act, Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code and Section 52 (a) of the Terrorism Act.

He was given three years on anti-terrorism charges for meeting a senior member of the National Unity Government -- a self-declared parallel administration dominated by former lawmakers from Suu Kyi's party.

The court jailed him for another two years for unlawful association for visiting a rebel-held town near the Chinese border, and one year for breaching a law against undermining the military authorities, over a speech he gave.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a local monitoring group, says more than 20,000 people have been arrested on political charges since the coup, with more than 17,000 still in detention.

Reverend Samson has been a courageous supporter of Kachin people's rights. He served as President of the KBC from 2018-2022 and previously for two terms as General Secretary from 2010-2018. He is an internationally respected advocate for freedom of religion or belief and human rights in Myanmar. In 2019 he travelled to Washington, DC to participate in the International Religious Freedom Ministerial Conference, where he was among religious leaders from around the world who met with the United States President in the White House.

*Mizzima-AFP*



# 700 PRISONERS SECRETLY TRANSFERRED FROM INSEIN TO OTHER PRISONS



Insein Prison. Photo: AFP

**A**bout 700 prisoners, most of whom were male political prisoners, were secretly transferred from Yangon's notorious Insein Prison to other prisons throughout the country at the end of 2022 and during January 2023.

Sources close to prison authorities said that the transferred prisoners were sent to Tharrawaddy prison in Bago region and Thayet prison in Magway.

Tun Kyi, a member of the Former Political Prisoners Committee, said: "I believe that 700 political prisoners were secretly transferred in the space of two months without informing or obtaining consent from the prisoners' families. The Military Council wants both, family members and political prisoners, to suffer.

That's why they didn't tell the families. When family members arrive at the prison with parcels [for their imprisoned relatives], they are told that the prisoner has been transferred.

Amongst the relocated prisoners were the political activists Kyaw Zeya (aka Akyi Kaung), Monkey (aka Min Khant Kyaw,) and OG (aka Paing Htoo Khant). They were members of the public service youth organisation, Octups, and were sentenced to 13 years in prison by the Hlaing Township Court on various charges in March 2022.

The chairman of Octopus said: "According to Insein Prison staff they [the three prisoners] were relocated to Thayet prison in Magway Region. But when their mothers checked with Thayet prison staff we learned that they were not in the prison. Because of this, their families are still unable to send food and packages to them. We are still looking for them."

Tun Kyi said that the junta had moved prisoners in this way to encourage dissent amongst political prisoners and their families. The moves have also made it hard for prisoner's family members to visit them or deliver parcels to them.

# ALARM AS MYANMAR'S DISPLACED RISE TO 1.8 MILLION: UNOCHA



Displaced people in Karen State.  
Photo: AFP

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has expressed alarm at the rising number of people who have been displaced in Myanmar as a result of the coup and ongoing crisis.

In a press release on 6 April, UNOCHA said heavy fighting continues in many parts of the country, generating new humanitarian needs and further restricting the movement of goods and people.

Conflict and other threats to the safety of civilians have intensified, particularly in the country's Northwest which is now hosting the almost a million displaced people.

As of 27 March, almost 1.8 million people remain displaced across the country. This includes more than 1.4 million people who have been internally displaced by conflict and insecurity since February 2021.

An alarming humanitarian situation continues to unfold in Myanmar, with ongoing armed clashes in multiple states and regions, particularly in the Northwest and the Southeast, driving rising humanitarian needs.

The overall number of IDPs continues to rise. According to the latest UN figures as of 27 March, the total number of IDPs in Myanmar stands at almost 1.8 million. This includes more than 1.4 million people who remain displaced by conflict and insecurity since the military takeover, and more than 328,000 people who were already displaced from previous conflicts. Of the total IDPs since the military takeover, the Northwest is hosting the highest number - now 971,700 IDPs - followed by the Southeast - 429,800 IDPs. IDPs are living in precarious conditions in camps and informal sites, often in jungles and forests. Moves continue by the de facto authorities to close displacement camps in various parts of the country, including Kachin, Shan, Chin and Rakhine. Humanitarians remain concerned that some IDPs might have to move prematurely, while clashes are ongoing or while conditions are not safe or suitable because of explosive ordnance contamination, destruction of housing, poor access to services and lack of livelihoods.

Humanitarian partners estimate that 17.6 million people are in need in 2023. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan targets 4.5 million of those in most severe need, predominantly in conflict-affected rural areas. A quarter of the way into 2023, just 8 per cent of the required funds have been received according to FTS. A dramatic increase in funding and an expansion of access will be critical for the humanitarian community to reach those prioritized for lifesaving assistance this year.

In 2022, humanitarian organizations were able to reach at least 4.4 million people with assistance, but this support was not as deep or sustained as planned due to access constraints and severe underfunding.



## ‘WE NEED TO KNOW’: WHO SAYS CHINA HAS MORE ON COVID ORIGIN

The World Health Organization said last week it was sure China had far more data that could shed light on the origins of Covid, demanding Beijing immediately share all relevant information.

“Without full access to the information that China has... all hypotheses are on the table,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in Geneva.

“That’s why we have been asking China to be cooperative on this,” he said, insisting that if Beijing does provide the missing data “we will know what happened or how it started.”

More than three years after COVID-19 first surfaced, heated debate still rages around the origins of the pandemic.

The issue has proved divisive for the scientific community and even different US government agencies, which are split between a theory that the virus jumped naturally to humans from animals and one maintaining that the virus likely leaked from a Wuhan laboratory - a claim China has angrily denied.

Late last month, new evidence emerged that

raccoon dogs, known to be able to carry and transmit viruses similar to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid, were at a market in Wuhan when the disease was first detected in humans.

The researchers who unexpectedly stumbled over the genetic data say that it supports - but cannot definitively prove - the theory that the virus originated in animals, possibly first jumping over to humans at the market.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO’s technical lead on COVID-19, told journalists Thursday that the new information provided “clues”, but no clear answers, insisting that the data “collected in January and February 2020, more than three years ago” should have been shared long ago.

“Without information, without data to make a proper assessment, it’s very difficult for us to give a concrete answer. And in the present time, we don’t have a concrete answer of how the pandemic began,” she said.

## “NOT A GAME”

But she voiced certainty that China’s “incredible scientists” had conducted far more studies and collected much more data that could be relevant in the search.

“We know there is more information that’s out there,” she said.

“We need scientists, public health professionals and governments to share this information. This is not a game.”

In an editorial in Science Magazine published Thursday last week, Van Kerkhove said she believed China had data that it had not shared including on the wild and farmed animal trade at the Wuhan market, the testing of humans and animals in Wuhan and across China, and operations of labs in Wuhan working on coronaviruses.

“Lab audit data exist and have not been shared, for example,” she wrote, demanding that China share all data on the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid “immediately.”

Tedros stressed the vital importance of getting to the bottom of the mystery, pointing out that determining Covid origins could help avert future pandemics.

And with nearly seven million deaths officially registered in the pandemic - with the real toll believed to be several times higher - he said there was a “moral imperative.”

“We need to know the answer, beyond reasonable doubt.”

AFP.



WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.  
Photo: AFP



# CHINA HOLDS THREE DAYS OF MILITARY DRILLS IN TAIWAN STRAIT

China launched military drills around Taiwan on Saturday, in what it called a “stern warning” to the self-ruled island’s government following a meeting between its president and the US House speaker.

Dubbed “United Sharp Sword”, the three-day operation which state media said includes rehearsing an encirclement of Taiwan will run until Monday, the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command said in a statement.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen immediately denounced the drills, pledging to work with “the US and other like-minded countries” in the face of “continued authoritarian expansionism.”

China’s war games will send planes, ships and personnel into “the maritime areas and air space of the Taiwan Strait, off the northern and southern coasts of the island, and to the island’s east”, said Shi Yin, a PLA spokesman.

A later report from state broadcaster CCTV said: “The task force will simultaneously organise patrols and advances around Taiwan island, shaping an all-round encirclement and deterrence posture.”

The report went on to detail the type of weaponry China was putting through its paces, including “long-range rocket artillery, naval destroyers, missile boats, air force fighters, bombers, jammers

and refuellers.”

Taiwan’s defence ministry released a video showing soldiers loading anti-aircraft missile launchers, fighter jets taking off, and other military preparedness exercises.

The footage included surveillance of China’s Shandong aircraft carrier, which sailed through waters south of Taiwan earlier this week.

The 75-second clip, which included English subtitles, ended with a caption saying: “We seek neither escalation nor conflict, but we remain steadfast, rational, and serious to react and defend our territory and sovereignty.”



Taiwan military helicopter flies over as citizens watch. Photo: AFP

## Live-fire

Exercises on Monday will include live-fire drills off the coast of China's Fujian province, which faces Taiwan, the local maritime authority said.

The manoeuvres come after a meeting between Tsai and US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

China views democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it one day, by force if necessary.

"These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking 'Taiwan independence' and external forces and against their provocative activities," the PLA's Shi said.

"The operations are necessary for safeguarding China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Taiwan's defence ministry said eight Chinese warships and 42 fighter jets were detected around the island on Saturday.

The ministry expressed "solemn condemnation of such irrational actions", adding the detections included 29 jets that crossed into Taiwan's southwestern air defence identification zone (ADIZ), the highest number in a single day this year, according to data collected by AFP.

China was using Tsai's US visit as an "excuse to conduct military exercises, which has seriously undermined peace, stability and security in the region", the Taiwanese ministry said.

The drills also follow the departure from Beijing of French President Emmanuel Macron and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen,

who were in China to urge Xi Jinping to help bring an end to the war in Ukraine.

## 'We will never yield'

China deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets around Taiwan last August in its largest show of force in years, following a trip to the island by McCarthy's predecessor, Nancy Pelosi.

McCarthy, who is second in line to the US presidency, had originally planned to go to Taiwan himself.

The decision to meet in California instead was viewed as a compromise that would underscore support for Taiwan but avoid inflaming tensions with Beijing.

There were no immediate signs on Saturday of heightened military activity on Pingtan, a southeastern Chinese island that is the closest point on the mainland to Taiwan.

A handful of cargo ships cruised through the waters near the coastline, while tourists in sunglasses and baseball caps snapped selfies on viewing platforms.

But Fujian's provincial maritime authority has warned vessels not to enter waters near the live-fire drills on Monday.

Tsai returned to Taiwan on Friday after visiting her island's dwindling band of official diplomatic allies in Latin America, with two US stopovers that included meetings with McCarthy and other lawmakers.

Hours before Tsai met McCarthy on Wednesday, China sent its Shandong aircraft carrier through Taiwan's southeastern waters on its way to the western

Pacific.

Beijing said Friday that "Taiwan is an inseparable part of China", after repeatedly warning against the Tsai-McCarthy meeting.

"China's sovereignty and territorial integrity will never be divided," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news briefing.

"The future of Taiwan lies in reunification with the motherland."

Chinese military commentator Song Zhongping said the exercises were intended to demonstrate that the Chinese army will be ready if "provocation intensifies" to "solve the Taiwan issue once and for all."

AFP.



# SEVEN DECADES OF CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS



**A**s China launches three days of military drills around Taiwan, AFP looks at the history of relations between the self-ruled island and Beijing:

## **1949: separation**

Mao Zedong's communists take power in Beijing in October 1949 after defeating Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) nationalists in a civil war.

The KMT flee to the island of Taiwan and form their own government in Taipei in December, cutting off contacts with mainland China.

In 1950, Taiwan becomes an ally of the United States, which is at war with communist China in Korea. The United States deploys a fleet in the Taiwan Strait to protect its ally from possible attack.

## **1971: Beijing gets UN, US nods**

In October 1971, Beijing takes over China's seat at the United Nations, previously held by Taipei.

In 1979, the United States cuts formal ties with Taiwan and establishes diplomatic relations with Beijing instead.

Washington goes on to develop a nuanced Taiwan policy where it "acknowledges" China's claim to the island, which is not the same as accepting Beijing's claim of sovereignty.

The United States also maintains trade and military ties with Taipei. It opposes both Taiwanese independence and any attempt by China to forcibly take the island.

## **1987-2004: relations improve**

In late 1987, Taiwan residents are permitted to visit mainland China for the first time, allowing families to reunite.

Taiwan lifts emergency rule in 1991, unilaterally ending a state of war with China. The first direct talks between the two sides are held in Singapore two years later.

But in 1995, Beijing suspends talks in protest at a visit by Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui to the United States.

China tests missiles off Taiwan in 1996 to deter voters in the island's first democratic presidential election.

In 2000 elections, the KMT loses power in Taiwan for the first time. Trade links between the two sides improve over the next few years.

### **2005-2015: threats and talks**

Beijing adopts a law in March 2005 authorising the use of force if Taiwan declares independence. In April, KMT chairman Lien Chan makes a landmark visit to Beijing for talks with Chinese leader Hu Jintao.

In 2008, Taiwan and China resume high-level talks after the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou is elected president on a Beijing-friendly platform.

They sign a sweeping Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement in 2010 and in 2014 hold the first government-to-government talks since separation.

### **2016: honeymoon over**

Tsai Ing-wen, from the traditionally pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, wins presidential elections in January 2016.

In June, China suspends all communications with Taiwan after the new government fails to acknowledge the "One China" policy.

In December, US president-elect Donald Trump breaks with decades of US diplomatic policy by speaking directly with Tsai by telephone.

Chinese President Xi Jinping says in January 2019 that the unification of China and Taiwan is "inevitable".

### **2021: US-China tensions**

In 2021, Chinese military jets make hundreds of incursions into Taiwan's defence zone.

In October, President Joe Biden says the United States will defend Taiwan if China attacks it,

in comments later partly walked back by the White House.

Tsai confirms that a small number of US troops are present in Taiwan to help train its forces.

### **2022: Pelosi visit sparks fury**

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi lands in Taiwan on August 2 during a tour of Asia after days of speculation and stern warnings from Beijing of unspecified "consequences".

The highest-profile elected US official to visit the island in 25 years says her visit demonstrates her country's "unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan's vibrant democracy".

A furious China vows "punishment" and launches its largest-ever military exercises in the area, encircling Taiwan on August 4 and conducting war drills that last for around a week.

The exercises include the deployment of fighter jets and warships, and the firing of ballistic missiles.

Taipei responds with drills of its own and in the following weeks the United States sends warships through the Taiwan Strait and announces new military aid packages for the island.

China slaps sanctions on Pelosi but her visit rallies other US and European delegations to land in Taiwan.

### **2023: Tsai meets McCarthy**

Tsai makes two stops in the United States on her way to and from Latin America, meeting House Speaker Kevin McCarthy on the return leg in California on April 5.

Beijing warns against the meeting and issues several rebukes after, insisting Taiwan is part of its territory and that "China's sovereignty and territorial integrity will never be divided".

On April 8, the day after Tsai returns to Taipei, Beijing launches three days of military drills rehearsing an "encirclement" of Taiwan.

**AFP**



# IRAN, SAUDI MINISTERS MEET IN CHINA TO CEMENT RECONCILIATION



This handout picture released by the Saudi Press Agency shows Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (L) walking alongside Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan (R) and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang (C) during a meeting in Beijing on April 6, 2023. Photo: HO STR / SAUDI PRESS AGENCY / AFP

**T**he foreign ministers of Middle East rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia met in Beijing on Thursday last week, paving the way for normalised ties under a surprise China-brokered deal.

Tehran and Riyadh announced an agreement last month to restore relations that had been severed seven years ago when protesters in Iran attacked Saudi diplomatic missions.

The shock rapprochement between mainly-Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and Shiite-majority Iran, strongly at odds with Western governments over its nuclear activities, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterised by turbulence for decades.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan "negotiated and exchanged opinions with the emphasis on the official resumption of bilateral relations and the executive steps towards the reopening

of the embassies and consulates of the two countries", Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Saudi state TV channel Al Ekhbariya reported that the two ministers held a meeting in Beijing to "discuss implementing the agreement", airing footage of the pair shaking hands in front of Saudi and Iranian flags and then talking and smiling.

In a readout from state broadcaster CCTV, Beijing hailed "the first official meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries in more than seven years" and Beijing's "active mediation" in the diplomacy.

During phone conversations in March, the ministers had vowed to meet during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which ends later in April.

Saudi officials had said the ministerial meeting was the next step in restoring ties, and an Iranian statement last week spoke of "the constructive path of relations between the two countries."

Under last month's agreement, the two countries are to reopen their embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago.

Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran in January 2016, after protesters attacked its embassy in Tehran and consulate in the Iranian city of Mashhad over Riyadh's execution of the Saudi opposition Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

Talks between the foreign ministers are expected to be followed by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Riyadh.

Raisi accepted an invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber said on Monday.

## **Challenge to US**

Iran and Saudi Arabia support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen, where the Huthi rebels are backed by Tehran and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government.

The two sides also vie for influence in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

Riyadh's traditional ally Washington welcomed the detente agreement, but said it remains to be seen whether the Iranians will "honour their side of the deal".

China's success in bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia together has challenged the United States' long standing role as the main outside power broker in the Middle East.

One expert told AFP that Beijing's role would likely increase confidence that any deal would stick.

"Because China is a strong backer of Iran, Saudi should have more confidence in Iran's ability to comply with the agreement, an issue that has always been in doubt," said Joel Rubin, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs.

Thursday's talks "suggests that the process hasn't gone off track since the Beijing announcement last month", said Ali Vaez, Director of the International Crisis Group's Iran Project.

"But it's still early days to judge whether this is just a tactical detente or a way-station towards strategic rapprochement."

## **Warming ties**

Officials from Iran and Saudi Arabia held several rounds of dialogue in Baghdad and Oman before they reached the agreement in Beijing.

"Clearing misunderstandings and looking to the future in Tehran-Riyadh relations will definitely lead to the development of regional stability and security," Iran's Supreme National Security Council head Ali Shamkhani, who negotiated the deal for his country, said after the deal was struck.

He added that the agreement can "increase cooperation between the countries of the Persian Gulf and the Islamic world to manage the existing challenges."

In 2016 a number of Gulf countries followed Riyadh's action in scaling back ties with Tehran, but they have led the way in restoring diplomatic relations.

Iran welcomed an Emirati ambassador last September, after a six-year absence, and on Wednesday named its own ambassador to the UAE, following a nearly eight-year hiatus.

Last year Iran said Kuwait had sent its first ambassador to Tehran since 2016.

Iran has also welcomed a potential rapprochement with Bahrain, a close Saudi ally, which in the past accused Iran of backing a Shiite-led uprising in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, an accusation Tehran denies.

"This positive development can happen in relation to other countries in the region, including Bahrain," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said last month.

**AFP**



# RUSSIA FORMALLY CHARGES US REPORTER



US journalist Evan Gershkovich. Photo: AFP

**M**oscow has formally charged US journalist Evan Gershkovich with espionage, Russian news agencies reported Friday last week, accusations rejected both by the reporter and his employer.

The charges against Wall Street Journal correspondent Evan Gershkovich are the first of their kind in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, prompting an outcry from media outlets, rights groups and foreign governments.

Investigators from the FSB, the state security service that succeeded the KGB, “charged Gershkovich with espionage in the interests of his country,” state-run agency TASS said, citing a law enforcement source.

“He categorically denied all accusations and stated that he was engaged in journalistic activities in Russia,” TASS said.

The Wall Street Journal, one of the leading US newspapers, said it heard of the charges through the media reports and rejected them.

“As we’ve said from the beginning, these charges are categorically false and unjustified, and we continue to demand Evan’s immediate release,” the newspaper said in a statement.

It has previously called Gershkovich a “trusted and dedicated reporter”.

The case has been classified as secret, limiting the amount of information available.

His arrest comes as Moscow's relationship with Washington has seriously deteriorated because of the Ukraine offensive.

Washington has long accused Moscow of arbitrarily arresting Americans in order to secure the release of detained Russians.

US President Joe Biden has called for Gershkovich's release. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre earlier described the allegation of espionage as "ridiculous."

The arrest led the State Department to summon the Russian ambassador and Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed the case in a telephone call to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, only their third one-on-one interaction since the Ukraine offensive began in February 2022.

## ***Appeals in Washington***

The case has drawn bipartisan alarm in politically divided Washington, where the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate issued a rare joint statement Friday to seek Gershkovich's freedom.

"We strongly condemn the wrongful detention of US citizen and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, and demand the immediate release of this internationally known and respected independent journalist," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican leader Mitch McConnell said.

"Let there be no mistake: journalism is not a crime," the Senate leaders wrote. "We demand the baseless, fabricated charges against Mr. Gershkovich be dropped and he be immediately released."

Schumer and McConnell also reiterated their "condemnation of the Russian government's continued attempts to intimidate, repress and punish independent journalists and civil society voices."

The State Department has not yet formally determined that Gershkovich is "wrongfully detained," a designation that would open up a more robust US response including efforts by the US envoy on hostage affairs.

"I'll let that process play out. In my own mind, there's no doubt that he's being wrongfully detained by Russia, which is exactly what I said to Foreign Minister Lavrov," Blinken told reporters Wednesday on a

trip to Brussels.

"There is no higher priority than the safety and security of American citizens around the world and that includes those who may be wrongfully detained," Blinken said.

Russian officials insist Gershkovich was "caught red-handed" when he was detained in Yekaterinburg, some 1,800 kilometres (1,100 miles) east of Moscow.

"Hype around this case, which is being fanned in the United States, with the aim of pressuring Russian authorities and the court... is pointless and meaningless," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told US Ambassador Lynne Tracy on Thursday, according to a statement.

Gershkovich worked for AFP in Russia before taking a job with the Journal.

**AFP**



# POSSIBLE TRUMP TRIAL PLUNGES 2024 US ELECTION RACE INTO UNCHARTED TERRITORY

US voters on Wednesday last week surveyed a uniquely volatile 2024 presidential election landscape, where the leading Republican candidate, Donald Trump, now faces trial and the incumbent, Joe Biden, has not even confirmed he's running.

Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to 34 felony charges linked to alleged attempts to silence damaging personal information during his triumphant 2016 race for the White House.

The man who went from 1980s playboy real estate magnate, to TV reality show star in the 2000s, then right-wing populist president, made history as the first serving or former commander in chief to face a criminal trial.

But while he had to go through the humiliating

process of arrest in a New York courtroom, polls show Trump remains by far the strongest Republican candidate.

In fact, his numbers have only improved as his legal scandals grow, making it hard for his closest rival, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to gain traction.

Far from cowed, Trump is doubling down on extreme rhetoric, painting himself in a speech after his release Tuesday as the victim of a "Trump-hating judge" and "massive election interference."

On Wednesday, he called on his Truth Social app for Republicans in Congress to "DEFUND THE DOJ AND FBI" in response to what he claimed is the "ABUSE OF POWER" by the Department of Justice and chief federal law enforcement body.



Donald Trump speaking to supporters after his visit to a New York courtroom. Photo: AFP

Trump attorney Todd Blanche said his client is “upset.”

But “I’ll tell you what: he’s motivated and it’s not going to stop him and it’s not going to slow him down.”

### ***Troubles pile up***

For all the bravado, 76-year-old Trump is in serious trouble.

During his decades in the public eye, he has shown astonishing ability to escape legal peril, whether during his many business disputes or even as president when Republicans acquitted him in an unprecedented two impeachment trials.

But Trump is now in the hands of the New York state court system, where Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is mounting an aggressive prosecution.

He also risks the wrath of Judge Juan Merchan, who is overseeing his case in New York and cautioned against “comments that have potential to incite violence.”

Even if some analysts have questioned the strength of the New York case, Trump’s real problems may lie elsewhere.

Reports indicate that a high-level probe into his hoarding of top secret White House documents at his private Florida Mar-a-Lago residence is gathering pace. Another criminal probe is underway in Georgia over his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden but refused to concede.

Next year, the legal calendars will likely collide with the political calendar, sparking new levels of unpredictability.

The Manhattan court is set to reconvene on 4 December, with a trial expected sometime early in 2024. Trump, meanwhile, would in theory be campaigning hard for Republican presidential nomination with the first contests scheduled February 5 and 13 in Iowa and New Hampshire.

### ***“Not a focus”***

At the White House, Biden appears content to sit back and watch the fall of a man he has branded a “toxic presence.”

Asked Wednesday about the president’s view of the spectacle, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre reemphasized that Biden is “not focused on this indictment.”

“Our focus is on what the president was elected to do, which is make sure we deliver... to talk about the issues that matter,” she added.

Biden and his party got another piece of good news overnight Tuesday with victory for the Democratic candidate in an especially fierce battle for a vacant Wisconsin Supreme Court seat. This creates a liberal majority on the court, which will play a key role refereeing electoral disputes in 2024 in one of the tightest swing states in the country.

But Biden is also injecting uncertainty into 2024.

His age is a constant source of concern, even to allies. Now 80, he would be 86 by the time he left office after a second term.

And he has yet to confirm he is running, despite strongly hinting on several occasions that he will.

After repeated delays to the expected announcement, Axios has reported that it may now only land in July or even later.

**AFP**



# THE DEADLY LEGACY OF LANDMINES



Landmine detection and removal is a dangerous and tedious task.  
Photo: UN News

**M**ore than two decades since the adoption of the landmark Mine Ban Treaty and the creation of the UN Mine Action Service, millions of landmines have been destroyed, but land in nearly 70 countries globally is still contaminated and innocent people continue to be killed or maimed.

Marked annually on 4 April the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action draws awareness to why landmines are one of the most insidious and indiscriminate weapons of war.

## ***Born into peace but maimed by war***

Two deminers work to decontaminate the land in Bunia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

UN Photo/Martine Perret Two deminers work to decontaminate the land in Bunia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“Minga had never owned a toy. In her village, in Angola, children often made do with sticks or broken wheels – but this was something different. It was green, metal and shaped like a small tin.

She wanted to show her brothers and sisters, so she picked it up to take home.”

Documentary photographer, landmine survivor and UN Global Advocate for persons with disabilities in conflict and peacebuilding situations, Giles Duley, has many heartbreaking stories to tell, mostly about children maimed by landmines on their way to school, home or at play.

Six-year-old Minga lost her sight and her left arm in 2009, seven years after the end of the war in Angola. She was one of the many children who was born into peace but harmed by a war that she never knew.

## ***Daily danger of death***

The latest estimates show that in 2021, more than 5,500 people were killed or maimed by landmines, most of them were civilians, half of whom were children. More than two decades after the adoption of the Mine Ban Treaty, about sixty million people in nearly 70 countries and territories still live with the risk

of landmines on a daily basis.

The UN Mine Action Service, launched the campaign “Mine Action Cannot Wait” to mark the International Day, as countries like Angola, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, continue to suffer from decades of landmine contamination.

Landmines can lie dormant for years or even decades until they are triggered.

“Even after the fighting stops, conflicts often leave behind a terrifying legacy: landmines and explosive ordnance that litter communities,” says UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his message for the International Day.

“Peace brings no assurance of safety when roads and fields are mined, when unexploded ordnance threatens the return of displaced populations, and when children find and play with shiny objects that explode.”

Landmines, which can be produced for as little as \$1, do not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Their use violates international human rights and humanitarian laws.

They not only cost lives and limbs, but also prevent communities from accessing land that could be used for farming or building hospitals and schools as well as essential services such as food, water, health care and humanitarian aid.

### **Landmines in Ukraine**

Despite international efforts to prevent the use of landmines they continue to be laid in conflict situations including in Ukraine following Russia’s invasion in February 2022. UNICEF and the State Emergency Service of Ukraine recently warned that around 30 per cent of the country may potentially be mined as a result of the hostilities.

In Myanmar, the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, a UN-supported civil society group which reports on landmine use has observed “new and greatly expanded” use of mines by government forces. Militia groups in countries like the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo also use landmines to attack and frighten people, keeping them off their lands and away from their homes.

### **Butterfly wings which attract curious children**

There are more than 600 different types of landmines grouped into two broad categories - anti-personnel (AP) and anti-tank landmines. AP mines come in different shapes and can be found buried or above ground. A common type, known as the “butterfly” mine - comes in bright colours, making it attractive to curious children.

Landmines are also a major problem in many countries that rely on agriculture. In Viet Nam’s Binh Dinh province, where many people live off rice farming, 40 per cent of the land remained contaminated by landmines more than four decades after the war ended.

In Afghanistan, where landmines have maimed or killed more people than anywhere else, more than 18 million landmines have been cleared since 1989, freeing over 3,011 km<sup>2</sup> of land that has benefited more than 3,000 mostly rural communities across the country.

### **Promise of a mine-free world**

UNMAS and its partners have made progress on various aspects of achieving a mine-free world, including clearance, educating people, especially children, about the risks of mines, victim assistance advocacy and the destruction of stockpiles.

Since the late 90s, more than 55 million landmines have been destroyed, over 30 countries have become mine-free, casualties have been dramatically reduced and mechanisms, including the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, have been established to support victims and communities in need.

Today, 164 countries are parties to the Mine Ban Treaty which is considered one of the most ratified disarmament conventions to date. However, despite the progress, broader global efforts are needed to safeguard people from landmines, according to the UN Secretary-General.

“Let’s take action to end the threat of these devices of death, support communities as they heal, and help people return and rebuild their lives in safety and security.”

*Courtesy of UN News.*





## KAREN STATE

### ***Junta convoy attacked four times in KNU controlled area***

It is believed that 19 soldiers were killed in attacks carried out on a junta convoy in Tuangoo District in Karen State on 31 March and 1 April.

The four attacks, which happened in the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 2 controlled area of Thandaunggyi Township were carried out by the KNU's armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and local people's defence force (PDFs).

A PDF member involved in the attacks said to Mizzima: "We ambushed the junta troops at least four times

on their route. They suffered heavy casualties."

According to a local news source, according to witnesses and ground reports, at least 19 junta soldiers were killed in the attacks.

The first attack happened at a hot spring in Than Moe Taung Village in Thandaunggyi Township at 5:00 p.m. on 31 March, when defence forces attacked

a military column of three vehicles and soldiers that had just left Leiktho town, also in Thandaunggyi Township.

One vehicle was destroyed and seven junta soldiers were killed in that attack, according to the defence forces.

Later that evening, at 8:00 p.m., in an apparent retaliation to the attack, junta soldiers burned down eight houses in Than Moe Taung Village.

A villager said to Mizzima: "After they [the junta army] suffered heavy casualties they set fire to the village.

The locals in conflict-affected areas are in great danger."

The next day, 1 April, between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. there were three further attacks on the convoy in the villages of Moke U, Seik Kone, and Mon Kone.

According to a source close to the KNLA, at least 12 junta soldiers died in those attacks, whereas the defence forces suffered no casualties.

According to a local source, the junta started firing mortars into Than Moe Taung Village on the morning of 2 April.



● Photo: Hakan Nural

### **Fighting in KNU Brigade 2 area**

Increased fighting since 1 April in the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 2 controlled areas has forced villagers to flee their homes.

On the morning of 1 April about 150 junta soldiers from the Light Infantry Division 44 and Training Depot

No.5 attacked Baudhikone Village in Karen State's Leiktho Township.

That afternoon they were attacked by a local guerrilla group, the Northern Thandaung Defence Force (NTDF) between the villages of Thazi and Malaukchaung and killed five junta soldiers, including an officer.

An NTDF fighter was also injured in the fighting.

According to locals, people have been fleeing from the villages the junta army is entering.

Following the 1 April attack, there was fighting in six villages in nearby Yedashe Township in Bago Region that was still ongoing on 5 April, the time of reporting. The junta also launched three airstrikes against the villages.

People's defence forces (PDFs) involved in the fighting said they could give no further details for security reasons.

### **Local Myanmar resistance forces call for closure of Kawka-reik-Myawaddy highway for 15 days**

Ten local guerrilla leaders issued a joint notification on 7 April, prohibiting the use of Kawka-reik-Myawaddy road which is part of the Asia Highway in Kayin or Karen State near the Thai border for 15 days from 7 to 21 April.

Clashes between resistance groups and junta forces have intensified since March along the Asia Highway in Kawka-reik and Myawaddy townships.

As the military has suffered losses in the battles, they are using civilian vehicles to transport troops, ammunition and food to reinforce their positions in Karen State.

The joint notification was signed by the platoon leaders of Cobra Column, White Dragon Battalion, Lion Battalion Commando, Dawna Battalion, Galon Battalion and White Tiger Battalion, the commander of KNU/KNLA (PC), the Tactical Operation Commander of KNU/KNLA(PC), the deputy platoon leader of Black Leopard PDF, and the deputy regional commander of Southern Military Command.



Proudly Presented by Mizzima Media Group

# MIZZIMA TV APP

Mizzima TV delivers the best Video experience anywhere, anytime.

## NOW WATCH LIVE!



You can instantly watch Live TV, subscribe to watch your favorite TV episodes, VOD of different genre & more on your mobile device.

### Get the app free!



NEWS

CJ NEWS

LIVE TV

MOVIES

SERIES

MAGAZINE

PODCASTS

SCAN QR WITH PHONE CAMERA OR SCANNER APP FOR DOWNLOAD



MizzimaTV Mizzima+

mizzima WEEKLY



Mizzimaburmese.com

Mizzima.com

Mizzima TV app

Mizzima Free to Air Satellite Channels

Mizzima English Weekly Magazine

Mizzima Facebook Pages

Mizzima Radio

Mizzima 108FM Radio



## MYANMAR TO SEND OVER 400 ATHLETES TO 32ND SEA GAMES

**M**yanmar junta's Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw is set to send more than 400 athletes to compete in the 32nd South-East Asian Games in Cambodia, reported state-media.

More than 460 coaches and athletes across 19 sports will participate in the event.

In Vietnam's previous edition of the games held from 12 to 23 May 2022, Myanmar competed in 18 sports and won a total of 62 medals including nine gold, 18 silver, and 35 bronze. The Burmese sports audience did not support Myanmar athletes at the Vietnamese SEA Games as a form of protest against the Burmese junta.



## FUEL PRICES RISING ON EVE OF THINGYAN, DIESEL SHORTAGE FOR GENERATORS



Photo: Engin Akyurt

**T**he fuel prices are rising in the lead up to the Thingyan Water Festival and the price of 92 Octane number petrol is 2,250 Kyat per litre as of 7 April.

The fuel prices announced by the Fuel Import Storage and Distribution Supervision Committee on 7 April are Petrol 92 Octane is 2,250 Kyat per litre, Petrol 95 Octane is 2,305 Kyat per litre, Premium Diesel is 2,210 Kyat per litre and ordinary Diesel is 2,130 Kyat per litre.

The prices of fuel are rising by over 100 Kyat per litre on average within a week.

The fuel prices are rising as the Thingyan Water Festival draws closer.

Business people say that the fuel prices at the filling stations in Yangon are rising by at least 100 Kyat per litre per week and also diesel used in generators at the manufacturing plants was in short supply and difficult to obtain.

The Ministry of Electricity Energy under the Military Council have announced load shedding schedules but have been unable to stick to the schedule mean power cuts tend to run longer.

As a result, business people and manufacturers have to run their machinery and equipment using their own generators. Even so they are facing more difficulties in finding the required diesel fuel as there is a shortage.

# SACKED MYANMAR MIGRANTS IN THAILAND TO GET COMPENSATION, HELP TO RETURN HOME



**T**he employer of over 1,000 Myanmar migrant workers who were sacked from an electronics factory in Thailand are in the process of being paid compensation and then these workers will be sent back to Myanmar, via the Myawaddy town border crossing.

The 1,057 migrant workers were sacked from the factory in Samut Sakhon Province and then they were paid compensation ranging from 19,415 Baht minimum to 96,369 Baht maximum as per the law.

The Labour Attache Office of the Myanmar embassy in Thailand said that the employer would give travel expenses to the workers who wished to go back home and they would arrange the transportation to the border town Mae Sot, and the travel expenses would be calculated based on the distances to their home towns.

These migrant workers worked in Cal-Comp Electronics factory in Phet Buri and Samut Sakhon Provinces in three shifts. They staged protest demonstrations to their employers as they would like to work in two shifts only and after that this the Labour Attache Office in Bangkok Myanmar embassy mediated between them.

Then the factory informed these workers that they must reduce the workers for one shift if the workers wanted to work only in two shifts in the mediation with employees and embassy.

After that the workers in Phet Buri factory agreed with the factory in mediation but 85% of the workers in Samut Sakhon reiterated their demand for working in two shifts only. Finally, these 1,057 Myanmar workers were sacked from their jobs.

Currently, Thai and Myanmar labour agencies are reportedly collecting the lists of those who wish to work in other factories in Thailand, those who wish to return home, those who wish to get a job transfer letter (seeking new jobs and other wishes).

The Office of Labour Attache of the Myanmar embassy issued an announcement, which says that the office would coordinate and mediate after getting these lists so that the workers need to contact Thai-Myanmar labour agencies as they wish to be listed in these lists.

The Labour Rights activists and volunteers said that under the MOU, the foreign jobs placement agencies must find work for the workers sacked from their previous jobs and the new jobs must be acceptable and satisfactory to the sacked workers.

Foreign jobs placement agencies indicate that the number of migrant workers going to Thailand officially with an MOU was on average over 10,000 every month.



# IMF CHIEF CALLS ON CENTRAL BANKS TO CONTINUE INFLATION FIGHT

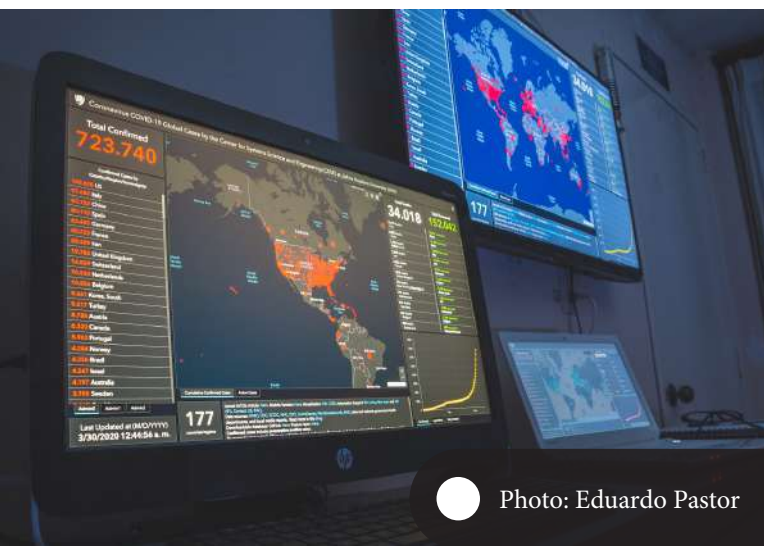


Photo: Eduardo Pastor

Central banks around the world should keep battling inflation by hiking interest rates despite ongoing concerns about financial stability, the head of the International Monetary Fund told AFP on Thursday last week.

Since last year, central banks have been raising their benchmark lending rates to tackle inflation, which rose to levels not seen for decades in many countries including the United States.

But their fight has been complicated by the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank after taking on too much interest-rate risk, setting off a period of turbulence in the banking sector on both sides of the Atlantic.

"We don't envisage, at this point, central banks stepping back from fighting inflation," IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said in an interview ahead of the fund's spring meeting next week.

"They have to stay the course in a much more difficult, more complex environment," she said.

The biggest casualty so far has been Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse, which was pushed by regulators to merge with regional rival UBS on concerns about its long-term financial health.

But Georgieva said: "Central banks still have to prioritize fighting inflation and then supporting, through different instruments, financial stability."

## US-China tensions weigh on growth

Georgieva added that US-China trade tensions - part of a broader realignment of the global economy was also having a detrimental impact on

world growth.

While there has been a long period in which decisions on production were guided by costs, "this is no more," she said.

"Today, the US, but also other countries, are saying I want to have security of supplies and I want to protect national security," she added.

"The question is how far they should go," she asked, adding that it was possible to guard both aspects "without completely undermining the foundation for growth."

Left unchecked, the long-term cost of trade fragmentation could be as high as seven percent of global economic output, she said in a speech earlier on Thursday to ambassadors and officials in Washington.

## "Elusive" recovery

In the same speech, she warned that a continued slowdown in almost all the world's advanced economies is expected to drag global growth below three percent this year.

"With rising geopolitical tensions, with inflation still running high, a robust recovery remains elusive," she said. "That harms the prospects of everyone, especially for the most vulnerable people and most vulnerable countries."

Global growth almost halved last year to 3.4 percent as the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine rippled through the world economy, abruptly halting the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

While Asia's emerging markets are expected to see substantial increases in economic output with India and China predicted to account for half of all growth this year - the good news will be outweighed by a slowdown expected for 90 percent of the world's advanced economies.

"Growth remains historically weak - now and in the medium term," said Georgieva.

She added that global growth will likely remain at roughly three percent for the next half-decade, the lowest medium-term forecast since the 1990s.

Low-income countries are expected to suffer a double shock from high borrowing costs and a decline in demand for their exports, which Georgieva said could cause poverty and hunger to increase.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

## MYANMAR'S SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES SUFFERING FINANCIAL LOSSES DUE TO SEVERE POWER OUTAGES

Since the start of summer in Myanmar, there have been an increased number of power outages, and as a result, small and medium-sized businesses are facing difficulties including financial losses, according to business owners.

Even in big cities like Yangon and Mandalay, people are only receiving about less than 6 hours of electricity per day.

An owner of a beauty salon in Mandalay told Mizzima that due to the severe power outages, her business's income and expenses are unbalanced, and she fears that her business will soon have to close down. In Myanmar, the fees charged by the government for electricity are lower than the expenses incurred for purchasing generator fuel.

"Nowadays, we receive just one or two hours of electricity per day. So, we cannot run our businesses. Because my business is a beauty salon, I have to operate my own electric generator. But the fuel is expensive, so I cannot gain profits from my business. There is an imbalance between the revenue and costs of my salon," said the beauty salon owner. "Due to the need for generator fuel, I have had to increase the prices of my services to cover the additional costs. Unfortunately, this price hike has made our services unaffordable for many of our customers."

"I will end up losing my invested capital, not to mention the additional expenses incurred for staffing. At this rate, I fear that I will have to shut down my salon," expressed the salon owner.

According to junta-controlled media on 6 April, Junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing highlighted that one of the greatest challenges faced by Myanmar presently is the need for electricity. He urged the public to comprehend that the distribution of electricity is being done on a rotating basis and to use it judiciously.

An owner of a small business that delivers goods abroad said, "I need electricity to maintain some goods. If the goods delivered to a foreign country are damaged, we lose customers. Since my business is a newly started one, it is not cost-effective to use a generator. I have a lot of problems because of power cuts."

The junta's Ministry of Electric Power announced that on the night of 4 April, an electrical worker was killed and two others were injured due to PDF's drone bomb attack on Thayagone electric substation in Bago Region. As per the junta-controlled newspaper, power plants, power lines, and electric substations have been targeted and destroyed 229 times since 2021.

The state-owned Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation has stated that the main reasons for the current severe power outages are the reduction in hydropower production capacity during the summer season, along with the destruction of electricity towers and the time required to repair those damages.

However, a citizen claims that the junta's accusations are biased, and their management is ineffective, making the junta solely responsible for the power outages.

## CHINA INVESTS MORE THAN \$113 MILLION IN MYANMAR SINCE COUP DESPITE ESCALATING VIOLENCE

China has invested over US\$113 million in Myanmar since the military coup in February 2021, despite escalating violence and destruction in the country, Radio Free Asia reported citing the junta's Investment and Companies Directorate.

While other countries condemn the military regime and refrain from trading, China adheres to its strategy of non-interference in the sovereignty of the nations it trades with.

However, the Burmese people and opposition see China's engagement as solely focused on its own benefit.

China is the second-largest foreign investor in Myanmar, following Singapore.



# IN FOCUS







## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CONTEST

**M**yanmar's San Thaw Thaw shoots during their match against Iran in the Asian qualifiers round of the Women's Olympic Football Tournament 2024 at Thuwanna Football Stadium in Yangon on April 5, 2023.

Photo: AFP



## THAI-LAO WATER FESTIVAL EXUBERANCE EXPECTED POST-COVID



**T**hailand and Laos look set to throw off their cares and enjoy the Water Festival set to start around 13 April.

The last three years have seen little or no celebration of the Songkran Festival due to the restrictions and the fears due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year the fears over the COVID-19 pandemic have dissipated to a large extent, though many

people continue to use masks even when driving alone in their cars or on their motorcycles. The two countries' borders are once again open, and many foreign tourists are flocking in to the countries, though not yet at the level seen before the pandemic.

Thailand looks set to receive about 10 million foreign visitors this year, compared to around 40 million before the pandemic.



Photo: Arisa Chattasa

Songkran is a watery, four-day feast of uninhibited fun – now spread out to close to 10 days - but a serious aspect is merit making and religious reflection, which take place from the first day through New Year's Day. On New Year's Day people flock to temples to offer alms and do merit ceremonies with monks, to pay homage to elders and bathe Buddha images in water. At home, young people pay respect by washing their

parents' hair and feet, cutting their nails and offering them gifts. The day is also celebrated sedately with people releasing captive birds and fish into streams and lakes to earn merit.

The Water Festival is called Songkran in Thailand, Phimai in Laos, Chaul Chnam Thme in Cambodia and Ching Ming in China and comes a week after the Christian festival of Easter.

Over the last few decades, the festival has changed strikingly from its sedate, religious roots to a more TV-influenced spectacle. But at heart it remains the same. It's a time of year when everyone from the poorest to the richest can mix and mingle and blow off steam in a centuries-old tradition.

Everyone participates, poor, rich, uneducated, educated – young and old. It's a rare time of universal goodwill, innocent indulgence and joy and laughter. Everyone is doused without discrimination and retaliated likewise, mostly in good cheer. Even the shyest little girl is not spared and she responds with good humour. The only people off-limits are monks and pregnant women.





# Mizzima TV

Be Different

FREE TO AIR **DIGITAL TV CHANNEL**

Proudly broadcast by Mizzima Media Group



www.mizzimaburmese.com



www.mizzima.com



www.mizzima.tv



Mizzima English Weekly Magazine