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MYANMAR'S NUG NEEDS INTERNATIONAL STAMP OF APPROVAL

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) needs help to get full recognition on the international stage.

Two years after its founding, the NUG needs the stamp of approval from the United Nations and individual supportive governments as it battles Min Aung Hlaing's illegal junta.

The horrific Pasigyí massacre last week, in which over 170 civilians were killed by junta fighter aircraft, is yet one more example of the barbaric nature of Min Aung Hlaing's military regime, arguably a modern-day version of Cambodia's 1970s Pol Pot government.

As Min Aung Hlaing ramps up his hate of Myanmar citizens, playing games with a promise of a national election to try to place a fig-leaf of democracy over his brutal junta, it is becoming increasingly clear that Western powers need to go the extra mile to recognize and hold dialogue with the Spring Revolution body, the NUG.

The NUG is in essence an attempt to reinstate the duly elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy that won the 2020 election in a clear message from the Myanmar people. The NUG does not represent all opposition voices but it is clearly the main player in the fight. Although The Lady may be behind bars, facing a life sentence, the NUG is the candle of freedom to be nurtured and protected as the people move once and for all to drive the military out of politics.

Ever since General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, Myanmar has been under the jackboots of the generals, who've played games to remain in power – the 2010-2020 interim period now

clearly viewed as offering false hope of freedom under the military-written 2008 constitution.

The NUG and the Spring Revolution players are grateful for the support from such countries as the USA, UK and other European countries in the actions taken in the halls of the United Nations and with the sanctions and other diplomatic moves made against the Myanmar junta over the coup and the horrific massacres and brutality.

But, unlike the rush by Western governments to support and fund Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelensky in the wake of the Russian invasion, the Myanmar opposition is receiving little or no support in terms of weapons and funding. This willingness to only go so far to help means the Myanmar crisis could drag on for years, even decades, despite the "feel-good" statements of the NUG saying 2023 should be the last year for the Spring Revolution to roll out before victory.

When US President Barack Obama came to Myanmar to hug The Lady sending a message of hope for democracy in the Golden Land, it conveyed an important message that helped to further open up the country. But those hugs mean nothing today as Aung San Suu Kyi remains in solitary confinement – members of her government jailed, murdered, in hiding, or in exile.

The West needs to step up to the plate to offer real support to the NUG to help expedite the Myanmar people's wish to be free once and for all from the jackboots of their oppressor.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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

Subscriptions and sales in Myanmar
Mizzima Weekly is currently available as a PDF.

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Cover photo of a Spring Revolution protest by AFP





DAMP SQUIB CELEBRATIONS

A uniformed official stands guard at a poorly attended event intended to celebrate the Thingyan Water Festival in Yangon last week.

Photo: AFP



FUEL PRICES ROSE ON EVE OF THINGYAN, DIESEL SHORTAGE FOR GENERATORS

The fuel prices rose 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.

MYANMAR JUNTA USED FORCED LABOUR TO SET UP THINGYAN CELEBRATIONS

The junta forced people to construct its pandals (stages) and to work as security guards for the pandals at the Thingyan water festival in Yangon Region's Kawhmu Township.

The local junta-appointed administration has been collecting funds to build the pandals from local business owners since 5 April.

A local from a village in Kawhmu Township said: "The junta regime is trying to get people to

come and have fun at the Thingyan festival. Owners of fish ponds have to pay 10,000 kyats for each of their ponds. My friend had to contribute 80,000 kyats in total for his eight ponds."

Local officials have also told each village to supply the Township administration with two people who will either work constructing the pandals before Thingyan or as security guards at the pandals during Thingyan.

Defence forces and the National Unity Government (NUG) have encouraged people not to attend any junta-organised Thingyan celebrations, warning that they risk being attacked.

Kawhmu Township was previously just an anonymous big village, until Aung San Suu Kyi stood as the area's member of parliament in the 2012 by-election and the 2015 and 2020 general elections, each time easily winning the seat.

BLAZE AT YANGON POWER STATION

There was a serious fire at a power station in Yangon City's Ahlone Township at 6:40 p.m. on 8 April.

The Myanmar Fire Services Department in Yangon categorised the fire as a level-three fire.

"The blaze burned strongly for nearly an hour and seriously damaged the [power] station. The incident has caused blackouts in nearby areas", said a resident of Alone Township.

Since the February 2021 coup there have been power outages across the country and electricity shortages have got worse this year with Yangon residents often only receiving electricity from the national grid for a few hours a day.

MYANMAR'S NUG EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER HANDOVER OF PDF FIGHTERS TO JUNTA

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) has expressed concern over the Thai authorities handing over three members of the People's Defence Forces (PDF) to the Myanmar junta authorities.

As they note in a press release: "On March 31, 2023, three members of the Resistance Forces from Myanmar were arrested by Thai authorities and handed over to the terrorist Myanmar military group, in violation of the international police procedures.

"This action threatens the life and safety of Myanmar citizens

who have been displaced and sought a refuge in Thailand due to various reasons, including oppressive and atrocious acts of the terrorist Military Council.

The National Unity Government, as the people's government and with its inherent responsibility to protect the citizens, is paying a very close attention to these incidents and similar incidents, and is continuously communicating and coordinating with the relevant organizations to reach to a solution."

Three PDF members seeking medical treatment were

arrested in the Thai border town of Mae Sot and handed back to the Myanmar junta's Border Guard Force (BGF).

It is believed that they are currently being interrogated at the Thingan Nyi Naung Myanmar junta military camp in Myawaddy.

Thiha (38), Htet Nay Win (31), and Saw Phyo Lay (26) were arrested by Thai Immigration at a checkpoint on the road to Bangkok on 1 April.

They had been trying to go to a medical clinic in Mae Sot to receive treatment, but got lost and took a wrong turn.

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

The 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.



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NUG MILESTONE

**National Unity Government fights on the ground and
in the international space**

Mike Garner



Demonstrators show their support for the National Unity Government at a protest in Yangon early in the post-coup crisis. Photo: AFP

When it comes to major military conflicts over the last century, China had Mao Zedong, East Timor had Xanana Gusmao, Afghanistan had Ahmad Shah Massoud and today Ukraine has Volodymyr Zelensky.

But when it comes to Myanmar's Spring Revolution, outside observers struggle to identify a leader, apart from the jailed democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, now sadly out of sight and largely out of mind.

Duwa Lashi La, the acting president of Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) may make online speeches and venture into the field to work with People's Defence Force (PDF) fighters, but in terms of public perception he does not stand out as the Spring Revolution leader, and is reportedly hesitant to try to outshine Aung San Suu Kyi, given the depth of support she has amongst the Myanmar people.

'NO PUBLIC FACE'

Analysts point out that this matters as Myanmar's Spring Revolution hits a crucial juncture as clashes with junta forces intensify.

As one ASEAN politician told *The Diplomat*

Magazine recently, "The NUG and PDF have no public face. There is no leader that people can rally around, there's no central point."

As members of the NUG celebrate the second anniversary of their founding on 16 April 2021, the Spring Revolution faces a conundrum, not easy to solve, and other deep-seated concerns as they put up a tough fight against the illegal Myanmar junta.

Few would question Duwa Lashi La's deep commitment to the cause. Nor would they question the grueling efforts of the thousands of PDF fighters caught up in a life-and-death struggle against the junta around Myanmar. But two years in, it is becoming increasingly clear that the lack of a prominent leader and the plethora of local PDF and Ethnic Revolutionary Organization (ERO) groups – some publicly allied to the NUG and some not - are viewed by analysts as a weakness.

MYANMAR NEEDS ATTENTION

Myanmar people grumble that the Ukraine war gets world attention, with people swapping their Facebook profile pictures for the Ukrainian flag and posting *Vogue* magazine fashion photos of leader Zelensky and his wife, but not Myanmar.



There are a myriad groups of People's Defence Forces and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations operating in the field. Photo: Mizzima

The Myanmar Spring Revolution has no obvious go-to figurehead, bar the images of the revered Aung San Suu Kyi carried by demonstrators at anti-junta protests.

In the age of social media and personality politics, the NUG is at a critical stage as thousands of PDF fighters battle the Myanmar junta with limited weaponry and vulnerability to air attack – what is essentially the latest step on a grueling road to democracy and freedom in the country. In this heated environment, image matters.

Myanmar needs attention, given the appalling brutality of the Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing who appears intent on mimicking the 1970s Killing Fields of Cambodia's Pol Pot.

Only last week, Min Aung Hlaing's air force massacred over 170 villagers – men, women and children in Pazigy Village in strife-torn Sagaing Region, helicopters buzzing the dusty torn up area afterwards seeking to deny rescue teams the ability to collect and bury the bodies.

Luckily, news of the horror spread quickly on the internet, so there is international outreach.

NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La was quick to issue a call in the wake of the massacre to ASEAN and other international players to crack down on the illegal Myanmar junta wreaking mayhem, yet again stressing the Myanmar military generals need to be hauled up in front of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity.

WORLD DISTRACTED

Myanmar citizens and interested international observers are seeing the horror play out, day by day, week by week in Myanmar. But the world is largely distracted by the war in Ukraine and fears of World War III, bubbling tension over China's threat to invade Taiwan, and a world economy staggering under debt, with many banks failing.

There is little doubt that the Spring Revolution was a shock to the generals in Naypyidaw. Close observers of Myanmar recognize that Min Aung Hlaing misjudged the Myanmar people and that the situation could have been different. The senior general expected the people to protest against the coup and then go back to their normal lives. Min Aung Hlaing did not expect the aggressiveness of the Spring Revolution.

It can be argued that two years in, the NUG and the related National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) – the organized face of the resistance - have done a passable job of building up an alternative government including a defence arm to challenge the illegal junta.

NUG President's Office spokesperson Kyaw Zaw told Mizzima: "Overall, the NUG's performance in the past two years has been largely successful due to the support of the people, despite numerous challenges. As our Acting President has stated, the inability to fully protect the people from the Military Council's abuses is a significant challenge, but we are doing our best to overcome it. We are also working with international organizations to provide direct humanitarian assistance to the people. I urge the people to continue to cooperate and not lose momentum."

That said, the NUG does not represent all the Spring Revolution players, and a number of PDFs and EROs operate independently, albeit with a common goal, to oust the junta.

The NUG, as the primary leadership body for the Spring Revolution, is working to coordinate and strengthen military operations against the Myanmar military, deliver humanitarian aid, build an alternative government infrastructure and strengthen its representation on the international stage.



FIGHTING POWER

What is clear, as seen in a recent assessment, is the NUG is arguably trying to do too much to build an alternative government and is thinly stretched, with the core challenge being to support PDF groups and the manpower fighting the war.

According to a report by the Nyan Lin Thit Analytica group entitled “Two Year Activities of the CRPH, NUCC and NUG” covering developments since the 1 February 2021 military coup up until January 2023, the PDFs were first established on 5 May 2021 by the NUG.

What appears to have happened is the NUG embraced the independent efforts of groups of young men, and some women, in forming resistance groups, some directly controlled by the NUG, but the majority pledging loyalty to the NUG but largely operating independently.

Although the people had been resisting the Military Council oppression for seven months in a largely peaceful way since the coup, when the time came to resist with a defensive war, NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La announced the “Right to Defense” starting from 7 September 2021.

From that time forward, armed revolutionary groups emerged all throughout the country and some are fighting in alliance with eight EROs to overthrow the Military Council. Moreover, in 2022, Burma People Liberation Army (BPLA) and Magway based People’s Revolution Army PRA-Magway met with NUG-Ministry of Defense and are said to be working in alliance in military matters.

According to the report, NUG leaders and NUG-Minister of Defense visited the frontline posts and revolutionary forces’ graduation ceremonies personally and took care of their living conditions. The NUG Ministry of Defense has also allied with the people to provide some levels of food supply, weapons and ammunition.

LIMITED WEAPONS SUPPLY

Weaponizing the resistance has been a serious problem. Although there was recently spurious talk about PDFs acquiring anti-aircraft weapons, the reality is many PDF groups are not fully armed and many operate with hand-made weapons and ammunition. Many of the PDFs rely on hit-and-run tactics using improvised explosive devices (IED) and make-shift commercial-quality drones.

Spokesman Kyaw Zaw notes there are difficulties even though Min Aung Hlaing admits that his regime has lost control of half of the country, and ana-

lysts claim the junta only commands 17 per cent of the territory.

The NUG spokesman admits they face challenges in acquiring weapons, while emphasizing the importance of a central command system to achieve greater success in the armed resistance movement.

“The demand for weapons is very high, and the cost of purchasing them has doubled, and in some cases tripled. Despite the challenges, the strength and resistance of the people remain strong.

Currently, our focus is on developing the central command system, which has been successful to some extent. To achieve greater success, we need a central command system to fight unitedly and strategically. With that approach, great success will be achieved,” said Kyaw Zaw.

FUNDING DILEMMA

A core element for the NUG is funding and the ability to provide money to support the administration infrastructure and salaries, humanitarian aid for the needy, and the war effort.

The NUG is caught between two stools. On the one hand it is struggling to get international funding – funding that could help it bring more PDFs and EROs under a central command structure umbrella.

On the other hand, the international community raises questions about how much control the NUG has over anti-junta resistance fighters.

The NUG needs funding. Yet Western governments, while lambasting the Myanmar junta for their atrocities, appear reluctant to provide the body with the recognition and the money to back this up.

DIPLOMATIC POSITIVITY

All that said, there has been progress on the international diplomatic front to raise the issue of Myanmar at the UN and with a number of governments around the world.

As the Nyan Lin Thit Analytica group report points out, the NUG saw a win with the US government administration. On 10 May 2021, the BURMA Act (Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021 or the BURMA Act of 2021) was submitted to the US Congress to impose sanctions on all those related to the Military Council and those who violate human rights against the people of Myanmar, whether it is an individual or the organization as a whole. On 23 December, 2022, US President Joe Biden signed the National Defense Authorization Act-NDAA which included the Burma Act and therefore started non-lethal aid towards Myanmar.

This aid will be received from 2023 to 2027 and therefore, America is initiating its support to help the CRPH, NUCC, NUG, including the EROs.

On 21 December 2022, the United Nations Security Council called for an immediate end to all violence across Myanmar, and issued an order to the Myanmar Military Council to release all political prisoners, including President Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi. In addition, they called for dialogue and the implementation of the ASEAN Five-point Consensus.

The NUG, particularly through the office of the NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung, have been reaching out to engage with the relevant UN offices and officials in attempts to put the Myanmar crisis on the UN agenda.

UN Special Envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer has been questioned over her interactions with the Myanmar opposition and the NUG. Ms Heyzer claimed in March 2023 that she has held unofficial meetings with representatives of the NUG, when queried by the media on this, and said she was planning to meet NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung, though it is unclear whether this meeting has taken place so far.

COMMON VISION?

One element of the Spring Revolution has been a call for the NUG to nail down what type of future they and other political players want for Myanmar.

Some analysts are calling on the NUG to hold talks with the various PDF and ERO players to help pull people together under the Spring Revolution umbrella to combat the junta but also formulate a template of a democratic federal union.

Nobody would expect this to be easy, particularly given all the years of effort spent on peace talks in Myanmar that have come to nothing.

As the NUG marks its second anniversary, many hope the international community will come to accept that it is not perfect. It may lack an obvious charismatic figurehead. But it is the best vehicle to work with if the world would like to see peace in the Golden Land.

Originally published by Mizzima online as: Myanmar's National Unity Government fights on the ground and in the international space

Mike Garner is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Myanmar and world affairs.



Democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.
Photo: AFP

INSIDE MYANMAR'S NUG AND THE SPRING REVOLUTION

As the National Unity Government (NUG) marks the second anniversary of its founding, the Nyan Lin Thit Analytica group has published a report entitled “Two Year Activities of the CRPH, NUCC and NUG” covering developments since the 1 February 2021 military coup up until January 2023.

The report was released in April 2023. In addition, the group has released a report on the Myanmar junta during this same period. The publications come out as the NUG marks its second anniversary of its founding on 16 April 2023.

The main report is written using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches with the data retrieved from the ministries of CRPH, NUCC, NUG, social media news and websites, noting that there may be some gaps in reporting.

The following is an assessment of the report and also editorial commentary provided in an attempt to put the developments into context.

LEADING THE REVOLUTION

After the military took power in the coup in 2021, Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and National Unity Government (NUG) have been in part leading the revolution and within the two years of the revolution, they have been striving mainly towards ending the military dictatorship and building a federal union, the report says.

In the wake of the Myanmar coup and the arrest of Aung

San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other members of the government elected in 2020, the CRPH, NUCC and NUG were established in 2021 to implement the people's purpose of ending the dictatorship and building a federal democratic union.

The CRPH and NUCC were formed first before the NUG, viewed by many Spring Revolution supporters as representing the

Myanmar people – labelled in the media as the shadow government or opposition, but in effect standing as the civilian government of Myanmar.

Initially, after many meetings and consultations, the NUCC laid out a road map to return power to the people.

The CRPH, NUCC and NUG operate under the banner of



the Spring Revolution and have their roles, though they do not represent all People's Defence Forces (PDF) or Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO) who are fighting in the field.

NEW APPROACH

What became clear in the early months of the Spring Revolution was the remnants of the National League for Democracy-led government under the CRPH, NUCC and NUG needed to adjust their approach to a number of challenges the previous government ad-

ministration, under Aung San Suu Kyi, had faced in terms of dealings with the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) and the Rakhine and Rohingya situation.

In order to form a new national government, discussions were made within NUCC and with the confirmation by the CRPH, which led to the formation of the NUG on 16 April 2021. The NUG is responsible for the implementation of the political roadmap and for the administrative mechanism.

The NUG stated that Re-

gional and State governments have also formed and that they are working towards all-inclusiveness.

One of the first steps was the CRPH offered an olive branch to the EAOs. They announced all EAOs are no longer rebels and terrorists on March 17, 2021, the aim being to co-opt them in order to eradicate the military dictatorship and set up a federal union. Within these two years, CRPH and NUG have been meeting and discussing with EROs, revolutionaries and stakeholders.



Photo: Kachin Waves - AFP

ROHINGYA U-TURN?

Regarding Rohingya matters, the NUG announced on 3 June, 2021 that it would work towards the good of all residents in Rakhine by meeting with all Rohingya organizations, representatives from IDP camps, and stakeholders from Rakhine. Additionally, the NUG announced that it would change or adjust the contentious 1982 Citizenship Law and that it would include all perspectives from the citizens including those residing in Rakhine.

Moreover, in February 2022, NUG withdrew all genocide-related objections raised by the NLD government to the International Court of Justice's charges against Myanmar, charges brought in the wake of the Myanmar military offensive in 2017 that drove over 700,000 Rohingya in Rakhine State to flee to Bangladesh.

Kyaw Zaw, the spokesperson of the NUG presidential office and NUG Women, Youth and Children Affairs Minister Naw Susanna Hla Soe, apologized publicly through their respective social networks for not standing up for ethnic peoples and Rohingya whose human rights were violated under the NLD government that held office for five years after the won the 2015 elections.

COMMON ENEMY

These moves were important both for the Rohingya community but also in terms of international diplomacy. The NUG outreach to the Rohingya and related NGOs recognized that they now had a common enemy – the military junta.

On 20 June, 2021, NUG and the Rohingya representa-

tives from the Muslim of Myanmar Multi-Ethnic Consultative Committee met for the first time and discussed Rohingya matters.

In 2022, NUG held three meetings with Rohingya organizations, education leaders and the people, regarding the resettlement of Rohingya, protecting them according to the laws, and for the regaining of long-lost educational opportunities.

BUILDING A GOVERNMENT

What is clear from the developments over the last couple of years is that the NUG, CRPH and NUCC are working to form a government for Myanmar to run operations in-country and to deal with the international community, including efforts to be recognized at the United Nations and in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) forum – and to stymie incidents of the Myanmar junta or Military Council being invited to international events, as has happened on a number of occasions.

The NUG is made up of 17 Ministries and under these respective Ministries, the following Union Ministers and Vice Ministers are operating.

After developing the NUG, the first NUG government meeting was held on 17 April 2021 and up to 7 February 2023, there have been five Government Meetings, according to the report. In those meetings, political, administrative, international recognition related matters were discussed and in the two years anniversary of the revolution meeting, it was specifically stated that they need to speed up their drive in order to avoid them having to mark their three year an-

niversary of the revolution and that “now is the best time to build trust with the people which deteriorated due to the dictatorship and chauvinism.”

The NUCC held its first press and media conference on 16 November, 2021 and discussed the building of a federal union. The first People's Assembly was led by the NUCC on 27 January 2022 and the Federal Democracy Charter was approved.

The NUG has built up infrastructure to support labour, education, health and other elements of a government administration. This includes support for people who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) made up of people who resigned their jobs or official positions in government-related organizations. This includes soldiers and police officials who defected.

Since the coup, there has been no official contact between the NUG, NUCC and CRPH – the Spring Revolution players - and the Military Council.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

Dr. Sasa and the UN Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun led the efforts to get recognition of CRPH, NUCC and NUG as official government organizations from the time of the coup until today and lately it can be seen that Minister of International Relations Zin Mar Aung has been taking the lead in international matters.

When Zin Mar Aung went to RFA Head office for exclusive interview, the US government provided her full security throughout the whole trip. Zin Mar Aung also held meetings with parliament representatives from European coun-

tries such as Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Britain and Australia. Moreover, Daw Zin Mar Aung had unofficial meetings with ambassadors from South Korea and Japan and also met with the Malaysian Foreign Minister.

But international outreach has not been plain sailing.

Although the NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung was invited to deliver a video speech at the UN's Global Town Hall 2022 on 5 November 2022 under the title "Sustaining Peace and Development in a Divided World", one UN official restricted her from delivering her speech. Moreover, Deputy Foreign Minister Moe Zaw Oo was also sent to the "breakout room" of Zoom when it was his turn to speak.

Regarding this situation, although the UN does not support the Military Council, it also does not want to publicly show support towards the CRPH and the NUG and therefore, restricted the participation of NUG representatives, the report says.

The report noted that the UN needs to take more effective action regarding Myanmar's situation.

UN ACTION

There have been some hopeful signs. On 21 December 2022, the United Nations Security Council called for an immediate end to all violence across Myanmar, and issued an order to the Myanmar Military Council to release all political prisoners, including President Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi. In addition, they called for dialogue and the implementation of the ASEAN Five-

point Consensus.

The NUG, particularly through the office of the NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung, have been reaching out to engage with the relevant UN offices and officials in attempts to put the Myanmar crisis on the UN agenda.

Questions have been raised over the UN Special Envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer and her interactions with the Myanmar opposition and the NUG. Ms Heyzer claimed in March 2023 that she has held unofficial meetings with representatives of the NUG, when queried by the media on this, and said she was planning to meet NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung, though it is unclear whether this meeting has taken place so far.

BURMA ACT

The NUG saw a win with the US government administration. On 10 May 2021, the BURMA Act (Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021 or the BURMA Act of 2021) was submitted to the US Congress to impose sanctions on all those related to the Military Council and those who violate human rights against the people of Myanmar, whether it is an individual or the organization as a whole. On 23 December, 2022, US President Joe Biden signed the National Defense Authorization Act-NDAA which included the Burma Act and therefore started non-lethal aid towards Myanmar. This aid will be received from 2023 to 2027 and therefore, America is initiating its support to help the CRPH, NUCC, NUG, including the EROs.

ASEAN FAILURE

Closer to home it is clear

that two years of debating the Myanmar crisis by ASEAN has resulted in failure to date.

As the report notes, the Military Council did not follow the Five-point Consensus of ASEAN, and ASEAN rejected the Military Council in the ASEAN meetings and showed its disapproval for the Military Council. However, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Singapore and Vietnam are still having political and economic relationships with the Military Council and have not yet recognized the NUG as the official representative of Myanmar.

On the other hand, the Malaysian Foreign Minister met with representatives of the NUG before the UN General Assembly meeting in 2022. Malaysia is the first country to have this kind of official relationship with the NUG among ASEAN members. Before that meeting, the Malaysian Foreign Minister also met unofficially with the NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung in May 2022. Malaysia is a country that opposed the military coup and its meetings with NUG ministers can be seen as a way of showing solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

The NUG also requested ASEAN not to allow the Military Council to attend ASEAN meetings. On 9 November 2022, the NUCC sent a letter to ASEAN which called on the forum not to recognize the elections planned by the Myanmar Military Council, and to liaise with the CRPH, NUCC and NUG as legitimate representatives of the Myanmar people.

Indonesia, ASEAN chair for 2023, announced in January 2023 that it will open a special office to handle Myanmar affairs.

This step can be seen as an improvement in the ASEAN sector by imposing more pressure on the Military Council. Therefore, there is hope that Indonesia will have more success to mediate compared with the failed efforts of Brunei and Cambodia as ASEAN Chairs in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

On the other hand, there is hope that NUG representatives may be able to officially attend ASEAN meetings, the report says.

CHINA CARD

The Chinese government has proved an important supporter of the Myanmar Military Council in terms of diplomatic support and in pursuit of Beijing's development and investment projects in Myanmar, including the strategic China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), mining projects, and the stalled Myitsone Dam project.

The report says that on 7 June 2021, the NUG sent an open letter to China's Foreign Minister Mr. Wang Yi. However, China has yet to publicly respond to the NUG regarding the Myanmar issue, and is stronger in its cooperation with the Military Council. Whether or not China has privately engaged with the NUG is unclear.

JAPAN CONUNDRUM

In relation with Japan, there were meetings with the NUG Union Ministers and Japan Parliament representatives with the aim to recognize the NUG as legitimate and to stop Japan's development aid from going to the military junta. However, Japan has not yet taken any action.

Mr. Sasakawa, Japan's Special Representative for Peace in Myanmar, visited Myanmar in

November 2021 for a five-day visit. He tried to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the NLD, but was not allowed, so he only met with the members of the Military Council and some political parties.

Moreover, he mediated between the Military Council and the Arakan Army (AA) for a ceasefire agreement.

Critics have voiced concern over Japan's humanitarian aid delivery, similar to worries expressed about the UN and other international organizations, the fear being noted over the danger of funneling aid through the Military Council.

Among the demands of the NUG and CRPH are that there should be sanctions on businesses related to the military community, the withdrawal of the Military Council from the international community

and the provision of humanitarian aid directly to the people in need in Myanmar.

FIGHTING FRONT

In the wake of the 1 February 2021 coup, the militant fight back by the Spring Revolution players appears to have sprung up spontaneously after weeks of protests on the streets.

According to the report, the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) were first established on 5 May 2021 by the NUG.

What appears to have happened is the NUG embraced the independent efforts of groups of young men, and some women, in forming resistance groups, some directly controlled by the NUG, but the majority pledging loyalty to the NUG but largely operating independently.

According to the report, PDFs are the armed forces which emerged after the military coup and are made up of three parts. They are the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), Local Defence Forces (LDFs) and Local Defence Teams (LDTs).

PDFs are armed forces functioning in region and states while LDFs and PDTs are local and village security revolutionary armed groups. PDFs function under NUG and ERO under Centralized Military Command Structure (C3C) and Joint Command and Coordination (J2C). However, Chinland Defence Forces (CDF), Karenni Nationalities Defence Forces (KNDF) and Kachin People's Defence Forces (KPDF) are functioning under C3C but are not under the control of NUG. They are armed forces that already have their own administrative mechanisms and chain of commands.

Although the people have been resisting the Military Council oppression for seven months in a peaceful way, when the time came to resist with a defensive war, NUG Interim President Duwa Lashi la announced the Right to Defense starting from 7 September 2021.

From that time forward, armed revolutionary groups emerged all throughout the country and some are fighting in alliance with eight EROs to overthrow the Military Council. Moreover, in 2022, Burma People Liberation Army (BPLA) and Magway based People's Revolution Army PRA-Magway met with NUG-Ministry of Defense and are said to be working in alliance in military matters.

According to the report, NUG leaders and NUG-Minister of

Defense visited the frontline posts and revolutionary forces' graduation ceremonies personally and took care of their living conditions. The NUG Ministry of Defense has also allied with the people to provide some levels of food supply and weapons and ammunition.

In terms of weapons distribution, the NUG Minister of Information and Technology Htin Lin Aung stated that they now have anti-aircraft weapons which can take down Military Council aircraft. This has yet to be confirmed.

Over the last two years, weapons and ammunition supply has proved a dire challenge for many PDF groups, many forced to make their own guns, mortars and makeshift missile launchers. Suitable weaponry and ammunition remain a challenge. There are little or no weapons being delivered from outside Myanmar.

The NUG Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration has enacted the People's Police law and formed township police forces in PDF controlled areas to take action over crimes and to provide security for the citizens.

Respective NUG departments have collaborated with PDFs, LDFs, LDTs, LAFs and helped to provide humanitarian aid and financing on the ground. NUG-Ministry of Defence has also formed alliances with the PDFs and EROs as they carry out what is termed a "defensive war" against the Military Council.

In addition, the CRPH, NUCC, NUG claim to have had some success through lobbying to cut off oil companies, which are the main sources of the Military Council's income, as well as increasing efforts to prosecute the

war crimes committed by the Military Council and to increase the interim administration programmes on the ground in the country.

After one year of the defensive war, the NUG announced at the end of 2022 that "2023 will be the year to end the revolution" and that they already have control in 50 percent of the country. This claim of control has yet to be verified.

NUG ADMINISTRATION

The report says that more than a year after the coup, the PDFs led by the NUG in Sagaing and Magway, and the allied EROs began to take control and interim public administration groups were formed in 29 townships in Sagaing and seven townships in Magway with administrative staff who left their former jobs.

Local Administrative Forces (LAFs) are unarmed groups who are taking care of administrative mechanisms in areas where NUG's interim administration mechanisms are in action. When UN organizations came to supply humanitarian aid, local defense forces and local administration forces are guaranteed to provide security protection. People's Defense Teams (PDTs) are armed groups responsible for local security in areas where interim people's administration mechanisms are operating. PDTs are protecting and defending against oppression of civilians by the Military Council members, such as rape, robbery and burglary.

In some ethnic areas, they already have their own administration mechanism long before the CRPH, NUCC or NUG existed. Disputes have occurred. On 26 April 2022, Karenni State

Government, Ministry of Home Affairs announced that it objected to the Demoso Local Administration Forces' formation of interim village and township administration departments and the NUG's reformation of the CDM administration committee into a local administration department.

According to the report, concerns have been voiced by ethnic administrations about some attempts by the NUG and its related bodies to impose local administrations, with the concern this may represent a Burmanization or imposition of Bamar hegemony that has been a challenge in Burma for decades.

WAY FORWARD

From the day of the coup to this day, the NUG, NUCC and CRPH are working together to remove the illegal military junta and install a legitimate government, according to the report.

Over the least two years, international relations and cooperation stands as the most progressive sector. CRPH, NUCC, NUG has received support and recognitions from the USA, Europe, South Korea and Japan but Russia, China and India have shown no sign of a willingness to recognize the NUG as legitimate.

On the ground, the NUG needs to reach out to all Spring Revolution players to engage meaningfully in dialogue over a joint vision of a democratic federal union and what this would look like in the flesh.

NUG SPOKESMAN CLAIMS PROGRESS FOR SPRING REVOLUTION BUT NOTES HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES REMAIN



Photo: Mizzima

Two years after its formation, the National Unity Government (NUG) can claim it has surprised Min Aung Hlaing's military junta by the resistance pushback that even the top general admits means they have lost control of half of the country.

NUG marked the second anniversary of their founding on 16 April and can claim majority support from the people.

The NUG was established approximately two and a half months after the military coup that overthrew the elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 February 2021.

Over the past two years, the NUG government has achieved significant successes

despite facing several challenges.

Officials NUG told Mizzima that their government has achieved success in the two years since its formation, particularly in terms of diplomacy and territorial control. However, there are still many challenges to be addressed, including supplying humanitarian aid that was disrupted by the military junta's deliberate terrorist attacks.

NUG President's Office spokesperson Kyaw Zaw cited the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) to explain that the People's Defense Forces (PDF) of the NUG has been successful due to the military junta's inability to govern almost half of the country, with only 17 percent

of the territory said to be under their stable control, with them facing PDF resistance on a number of fronts.

"Our biggest success was when the military staged the coup, they believed that they could take control of the entire country within a matter of months. But, currently, the Military Council only has control over small areas in the entire country, and Min Aung Hlaing has even admitted that they are unable to govern almost half of the country," said Kyaw Zaw. "Independent observers have analyzed the situation and found that the Military Council can effectively govern only 17 per cent of Myanmar. More than half of the country is under the control of revolution-

ary forces. The remaining areas are being contested by both the Military Council and our forces in an attempt to gain control of those territories, according to the analysis.”

Kyaw Zaw also discusses the challenges faced in acquiring weapons, while emphasizing the importance of a central command system to achieve greater success in the armed resistance movement.

“The demand for weapons is very high, and the cost of purchasing them has doubled, and in some cases tripled. Despite the challenges, the strength and resistance of the people remain strong. Currently, our focus is on developing the central command system, which has been successful to some extent. To achieve greater success, we need a central command system to fight unitedly and strategically. With that approach, great success will be achieved,” said Kyaw Zaw.

Kyaw Zaw added that, despite the challenges, the NUG has connected with Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) for the armed revolution, and the NUG’s Ministry of Defense has organized more than 300 People’s Defense Force (PDF) battalions.

On the other hand, a citizen expresses some dissatisfaction with the NUG’s performance, citing the need for a clear plan, concerns about junta’s airstrikes, and a call for better results and support given the increasing number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

“NUG is almost two years old now. What the people want to hear is a clear and precise plan. The claims that it [the NUG] already has anti-aircraft weapons only hurt the people more because of the Military Council’s airstrikes. Most people support the NUG. I want better results along

with support. Now there are more IDPs. Even if the increasing number of IDPs cannot be reduced, it remains crucial to strive towards preventing further increases. The NUG must prioritize meeting the needs of IDPs. Almost two years since the establishment of NUG, in some cases, I am not satisfied with the performance of the interim government [NUG] supported by the people.”

NUG President’s Office spokesperson Kyaw Zaw highlights the urgent need for international assistance in addressing the worst humanitarian crisis in Myanmar’s history, caused by the Military Council’s atrocities and economic mismanagement.

“The main challenge we face is that due to the Military Council’s terrorist atrocities, the need for humanitarian assistance in all parts of Myanmar is reaching the worst situation in Myanmar’s history. In order to fulfil the humanitarian needs, we are connected with the international community. Although we are doing our best to help, we also have limited resources, so there are many difficulties in helping all the people who need help. For example, there are more than 60,000 houses that have been burned by the Military Council.”

He notes that the NUG can only work in a limited way in the areas they control to resettle the people.

“So we are trying to connect internationally. Now, the UN has officially pointed out that there are 1.8 million IDPs in Myanmar. More than a third of Myanmar’s population is in need of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the economic management of the Military Council is poor and it does not seem to have the will to do it. The country’s economy has already been bankrupted since it started working only to oppress

the people. For example, there are severe power outages in many parts of Myanmar. During the tenure of the civilian government, the whole country got enough electricity.

Because of the Military Council’s incompetence, for example, the LNG vessel owned by Hong Kong [which was helping produce electricity] has left Myanmar. Investors are leaving. Electricity projects were stopped,” said Kyaw Zaw.

Kyaw Zaw accuses the Military Council of violating international laws through their obstruction of international aid and lack of cooperation in addressing the country’s problems.

“The problems that people have to face are not small. We have international connections to help the people. However, the Military Council’s obstruction and their lack of cooperation means that it does not reach the public as much as it should have. I also want to tell you that they are violating international laws,” he said.

“Overall, the NUG’s performance in the past two years has been largely successful due to the support of the people, despite numerous challenges. As our Acting President has stated, the inability to fully protect the people from the Military Council’s abuses is a significant challenge, but we are doing our best to overcome it. We are also working with international organizations to provide direct humanitarian assistance to the people. I urge the people to continue to cooperate and not lose momentum,” said Kyaw Zaw.

As of 28 February this year, 60,459 homes of civilians were destroyed by arson attacks by the military junta, according to an independent research organization, Data for Myanmar.

MYANMAR NUG'S TWO-YEAR JOURNEY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

The National Unity Government (NUG) celebrated its second anniversary on 16 April, but it still has to try to gain international recognition as the official government of Myanmar. Despite facing difficulties in obtaining strong legitimacy, the NUG is acknowledged in some international circles as the people's government and is actively engaged in meetings and coordination efforts.

Aung Myo Min, the Minister for Human Rights of the NUG, told Mizzima that the NUG strives to be acknowledged as a legitimate government.

"We are still working towards getting the NUG recognized as a government. I want to be clear in stating that while the NUG has not yet been recognized as a legitimate government, it [NUG] is similar to an elected government and is being led based on the consensus of the people. Although we have to continue to try to be recognized as a government, we are actively engaged in meetings, coordination, and cooperation, much like a functioning government,"

said Aung Myo Min. "At this stage, certain countries have officially announced their meetings with the NUG, while others are engaging in a form of silent cooperation known as silent diplomacy."

NUG President's Office spokesperson Kyaw Zaw said that the Military Council in Myanmar is facing increasing international sanctions and condemnation, with the UN adopting its first-ever resolution on the situation.

"We are witnessing an increase in international sanctions against the Military Council, which is becoming increasingly isolated on the global stage. A few days ago, the United Nations Human Rights Council unanimously condemned the Military Council's human rights violations and demanded necessary action. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution on the situation in Myanmar, demanding an immediate end to the junta's violence and immediate releases of all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders. This is the first resolution related to Myanmar

in the history of the United Nations Security Council," he said.

He also highlights the NUG's successful diplomatic efforts, including the opening of representative offices in key countries.

"In terms of diplomacy on the international stage, our NUG Foreign Minister is engaging in official discussions with ministers from around the world, with some meetings being publicly announced and others remaining undisclosed. Remarkably, in February [this year], the opening of the representative office of the NUG Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Washington DC, was officially attended by the US Deputy Secretary of State, which is a great success for us from a diplomatic point of view. Also, we could open representative offices in other important countries. It is because of everyone's support, so we are able to open the offices despite the challenges," said Kyaw Zaw.

Aung Myo Min, the NUG's Minister of Human Rights, stressed that although there is widespread

awareness of the human rights violations and war crimes committed by Myanmar's Military Council, the differing political interests and positions of various nations hinder the achievement of effective change, and that awareness must continue to prompt effective actions against the Myanmar junta.

"It is not that the world does not know about Myanmar's human rights violations. They are already aware of the extreme violence and brutality carried out by the Military Council. The world already knows that not only human rights violations are being committed, but the Military Council is also committing war crimes. But on the other hand, knowing that much is not enough. We need to continue raising awareness to prompt action. Due to the international nature of the issue, the varying political positions and interests of different countries can create obstacles to achieving effective change. While some countries prioritize justice, some prefer to remain silent on Myanmar's internal affairs. It is not a matter of them being unaware of the human rights violations taking place. Therefore, we must persist in our efforts to take appropriate actions against the Military Council," said Aung Myo Min

He also emphasized the

importance of ASEAN's role in addressing Myanmar's issues and the need for continued cooperation with other countries, including the Friends of Myanmar group, to promote human rights and global justice.

"ASEAN said that their efforts regarding the Myanmar issue have not yet been successful. However, the stance and actions of the rotating ASEAN chair country are crucial in implementing policies and promoting cooperation. Indonesia, as the current chairman, has expressed interest in the issue and their discussions are still ongoing to find a way to address the situation in line with ASEAN principles. It's worth considering how to address Myanmar affairs when another country becomes the rotating chairman after Indonesia, who has shown interest in the issue and can provide democratic leadership in ASEAN, and this is something that must always be considered every year. We still are not satisfied with ASEAN's performance. More needs to be done. In addition, the Myanmar issue is not just an ASEAN issue, but it is something that threatens human rights, global security, and justice in the world, so it is very important to cooperate with ASEAN and other countries that are interested

in Myanmar issues, such as the Friends of Myanmar group of governments, rather than just ASEAN alone," said Aung Myo Min.

Meanwhile, the international community, including the United Nations, is urging the Myanmar military to stop their war crimes. Western nations are imposing sanctions on the Myanmar military junta.

While the NUG marked its second anniversary on Sunday, it still lacks effective recognition as the official government on the international stage. However, the NUG is recognized as a people's government and it is committed to establishing itself as a legitimate government and bringing positive change to Myanmar.

Mizzima

MYANMAR JUNTA'S PAZIGYI VILLAGE MASSACRE 'WORST ATROCITY' IN OVER TWO YEARS OF WAR



Collecting bodies from the Pazigy massacre site.
Photo: AFP

The Myanmar junta's aerial attack on Pazigy Village in Kantbalu Township of Sagaing Region this week is the worst atrocity committed in over two years since the Myanmar generals seized power in an illegal coup on 1 February 2021.

The attack has prompted international outcry with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres speaking of his shock over the loss of life. At this stage, at least 100 people including men, women and children lost their lives

in the matter, with concerns that number may rise.

Speaking to the media after the event, Human Rights Watch Asia Division Deputy Director Phil Robertson said the Myanmar military's airstrike on the village is likely to have a chilling effect across Myanmar's society.

"I think in the future, communities will be reluctant to hold a... mass gathering of any sort, recognising that they could be bombed, they could be attacked,"

he said.

The Pazigy Village massacre has arguably broken the boundaries of brutality played out by the illegal junta that is waging war on its own people.

WAR CRIME IN PAZIGYI VILLAGE

On the morning of 11 April, the junta army conducted an airstrike on Pazigy Village that has gone down in the annals as the most deadly incident carried out by the Myanmar military since the

coup.

As of the time of writing, at least 100 people are confirmed to have lost their lives in the attack.

Pazigyi is a village in Male Area of Kantbalu Township in Sagaing Region. On the morning of 11 April, about 150 people gathered at the opening ceremony of a new public administration office. The local people including children were enjoying a feast there. At about 8:00 am, a junta fighter jet dropped bombs on the building, killing many people including children having their meal at 17 tables.

According to the witnesses, many of the victims were blown apart by the attack, and a little later, an Mi-35 helicopter gunship opened fire on those who were running away.

Later in the day at about 5:30 pm, the junta jets carried out further bombing aimed at those attempting to collect the dead bodies.

Thousands of civilians from Pazigyi and near-by villages in this region of Sagaing have run away from their homes due to fear of attack.

NUG SPEAKS OUT

The National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement claiming that the military junta no longer distinguished between civilians and armed groups in their attacks, and the incident was another piece of evidence that the junta army has repeated a war crime. On the day before the massacre in Pazigyi Village, the junta army had conducted an airstrike on Waibula Village near Falam in Chin State, killing nine people.

In response, the military junta claimed the aerial attack was not aimed at hurting civilians, and claimed falsely that the heavy ex-

plosions were due to the ignition of arms and ammunition shown at the opening ceremony of the building.

INCREASE IN AERIAL ATTACKS

The military junta has reportedly been suffering serious losses in their conflicts with the resistance and have therefore increased their air strikes since early 2022, a year after the coup.

Many of these attacks have taken place in states and regions such as Sagaing, Magwe, Kachin, Kayah, Kayah, Chin and Shan, with many of the offensives targeting civilians rather than the anti-junta forces.

In October 2022, the junta army launched an airstrike on a music concert celebrated in A Nan Pa Village of Hpakant Township in Kachin State on the anniversary of the founding of Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). In that attack, over 60 people lost their lives. In August and September 2022, they did the same to Letyartgone Village and Yinbaungdine Village in Sagaing Region, killing nearly 30 people. On 10 April 2023, they carried out an aerial attack causing the death of 9 people in Waibula Village near Falam in Chin State.

In a report by the UN Special Envoy of Human Rights to Myanmar in February, the envoy called out the attacks by the junta against civilians and their property using the air force and heavy artillery.

JUNTA AIRSTRIKE STATISTICS

According to the Monitoring Myanmar's Peace Programme by the Burmese News International, the statistics they have collected from 2021 to January 2023

shows that the junta armed forces have carried out air attacks for 258 days between 1 February 2021 and 25 January 2023. Reportedly, they have made at least three to five attacks per day. Since the record is only for the days with attacks in townships, the number for the whole country.

The military junta appear to have largely used aerial bombing to target the villages of civilians, schools and IDP camps. In the operation areas of the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and the battlefields, the junta armed forces have conducted aerial attacks for 53 days in total. When it comes to similar attacks on ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), they have launched their raids on the Karen National Union (KNU) for 52 days, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) for 32 days, and the Arakan Army (AA) for 13 days respectively. In terms of the areas, they have made air attacks in nine states and regions - Kayah State for 73 days, Sagaing Region for 70 days, Kachin State for 34 days, Rakhine State for 16 days, Chin State for 14 days, and Kayah State for 13 days.

DECLARATION OF A WAR CRIME

As the NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La has declared, the Pazigyi attack is a war crime, adding to the many other war crimes committed by the junta over the last two years. The NUG is calling for international action against the junta including sanctions and a blockade on aviation fuel, all with the aim to dissuade the Myanmar military from continuing to carry out attacks against civilians and the terrible loss of life as seen in the Pazigyi massacre.

ASEAN 'STRONGLY CONDEMNS' MYANMAR AIR STRIKE ON PAZIGYI VILLAGE: CHAIR STATEMENT



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) “strongly condemns” recent air strikes in Myanmar in which dozens of people were reported killed, said a statement issued Thursday by Indonesia, the current ASEAN chair.

“All forms of violence must end immediately, particularly the use of force against civilians”, said the statement.

A statement from the ASEAN chair does not necessarily indicate the agreement of all member states.

The official death toll from Tuesday morning's strike on Pazigy Village in the remote Kanbalu township in Myanmar's central Sagaing region remains unclear, though at least 100 fatalities have been reported by Mizzima, The Irrawaddy and Radio Free Asia.

The junta claimed Wednesday it had “launched limited air strikes” after receiving a tip-off from locals about an event marking the opening of a local defence force office connected to the military government's opponents.

The attack drew swift condemnation from the United Nations and Western powers, with UN rights chief Volker Turk saying he was “horrified” by the deadly strike.

One villager told AFP on Wednesday that it was difficult to identify the dead.

“We can not identify anymore who is who among the dead because they all became pieces,” he said.

Indonesia - Southeast Asia's biggest economy - is serving as 2023 chair of ASEAN and will host the 10-member bloc's annual leaders' meetings in May and September.

Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said last week that Jakarta had been working hard to implement the “five-point consensus” agreed upon with the Myanmar junta in April 2021, which calls for an end to violence and dialogue between the military and rebels.

But the plan has been largely ignored by the junta, and mediation attempts by ASEAN countries to solve the crisis have so far failed.

Jakarta's chairmanship of the bloc had raised hopes ASEAN could push for a peaceful solution in Myanmar, using Indonesia's weight as a regional economic power and its diplomatic experience.

Indonesia earlier this year announced plans to set up a special envoy's office under the foreign ministry to establish low-level dialogue with the junta, though little information has emerged about the status of any talks.

The junta remains an ASEAN member but has been barred from top-level summits over its failure to implement the peace plan.

Following the coup that toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in 2021, a military crackdown on dissent and armed groups opposed to their rule has left more than 3,200 people dead, according to a local monitoring group.

AFP.

NUG ISSUES SECOND SITUATION REPORT ON MYANMAR JUNTA'S PAZIGYI VILLAGE MASSACRE



The National Unity Government (NUG) has issued a second report on the Myanmar junta's aerial attack on Pazigy village in Sagaing Region, saying the death toll, as of 13 April, stands at 168 people including children.

According to the NUG's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management efforts are being made to treat the injured and also collect the dead bodies at the site of the 11 April airstrike.

According to the second report:

Military aircraft was deployed for scouting around the site at 14:30 pm on 12th April 2023 following the two-time airstrikes in Pazigy Village

According to the statistics at 12:00 pm on 13th April 2023, there are 168 fatalities with 121 male and 47 female

The death toll includes 21 primary school students

About 300 villagers being evacuated to the nearby areas

Limitations exist for the treatment of severely wounded patients

Urgent action is taking place to clear the incident site as there are concerns about hygiene and health due to the pieces of dead bodies lying at the site and in the surrounding areas.

NGOS SAY UN MOVE TRASHES MYANMAR JUNTA'S CLAIM OF LEGITIMACY AND LEGALITY



Helicopter gunship flies over a combat zone.
Photo: AFP

The Progressive Voice and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) say that the adoption of the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Myanmar by consensus once again demonstrates that the Myanmar military is running out of allies and deals a huge yet another blow to the junta's campaign for international recognition and legitimacy.

The resolution, adopted without a vote at the end of the 52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council on 4 April 2023, follows consensus adoption of the resolution on Myanmar at the UN General Assembly as well as the first ever resolution on Myanmar at the UN Security Council in December 2022.

The Human Rights Council resolution unequivocally condemns the junta's continuing violence against civilians and the democratic resistance and in no uncertain terms holds the junta alone responsible for the worsening human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

However, despite this strong signal from the Human Rights Council, it falls short in several key areas.

While the resolution rightly recognizes the serious human rights and humanitarian implications of "sale, diversion and illicit or unregulated transfer

of arms" to Myanmar, as well as calls by the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar that were echoed by several Member States and civil society, the resolution failed to explicitly call for a comprehensive arms embargo to stop the military's atrocities.

Similarly, the resolution fails to call for sanctions on the sale of aviation fuel to the Myanmar military although the resolution condemns the junta's ongoing airstrikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure facilitated by the junta's access to aviation fuel.

It is noteworthy that, albeit in much watered-down language as a result of concessions to achieve consensus, the resolution expresses deep concern at the sale and diversion of arms and calls for cessation of "illicit transfers and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment" as well as on states to "refrain...from the export, sale or transfer of surveillance goods and technologies and less-lethal weapons" to the Myanmar military.

This, however, falls far short of recognizing the need to stop all forms of arms sale and transfers – regardless of whether they are legal or illegal under existing standards and norms – to the Myanmar military that has been committing a nationwide campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar for over two

years. UN reports have detailed known arms transfers from UN Member States, namely China, Russia and India, to Myanmar since 2018 following the Rohingya genocide, and in particular since the attempted coup, that could be used in the commission of atrocity crimes.

In June 2021, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) called on UN Member States to prevent the flow of arms to Myanmar. The Human Rights Council must take a stronger stance and recognize the need for a comprehensive arms embargo to end the military's atrocity crimes. All UN Member States must immediately stop selling arms to the Myanmar military or risk complicity in its atrocity crimes.

The UN resolution also underscores the need to address root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State and to create conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees, stressing the importance of their continued protection. We reiterate calls made by over 200 civil society organizations for the UN Secretary-General to urgently investigate the involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the pilot repatriation project that could send Rohingya back to Myanmar in the absence of a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return.

The UN have failed to address the grave issues specific to Myanmar that were identified in the "Rosenthal Report", which found systemic and institutional failures on the part of the UN in Myanmar leading up to and during the genocide in 2017. The Secretary-General must develop a further action plan that meaningfully and urgently implements the recommendations of the report.

For the first time, the resolution on Myanmar at the Human Rights Council referred to the National Unity Government (NUG), welcoming its pronouncement articulated in the "Policy position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State" that recognizes Rohingya's rights to citizenship. The Council must take a further step in recognizing the NUG's Declaration under Article 12(3) of the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute, accepting the Court's jurisdiction over the State of Myanmar. The NUG must also take further concrete actions to implement their policy and to guarantee the rights and dignity of Rohingya with meaningful participation of Rohingya themselves.

On 28 March, the junta dissolved 40 political parties, including the National League for Democracy led by imprisoned State Councillor, Daw Aung San

Suu Kyi, despite having no legal basis to dissolve political parties as an illegal military junta. This is yet another ploy by the military that is conspiring to illegally hold sham national elections. The military lacks the legitimacy and effective control of Myanmar's territory and does not have a constitutional basis to hold such an election, which was made clear by a January 2023 report by the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. Myanmar people have vocally rejected the junta's plans for sham elections. The international community must join them and unequivocally denounce any such plans, and clearly reject potential voting results as illegitimate.

This latest action by the military junta also clearly demonstrates that the junta has no intention of pursuing an inclusive process to resolve the crisis in Myanmar in accordance with the will of the people of Myanmar expressed in November 2020 election. While we are disappointed with the Council's continued support for ASEAN's failed Five Point Consensus, the resolution expresses support for the "ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the implementation of the Five Point Consensus", which was adopted at the ASEAN Summit in November 2022. This, by extension, recognizes the need for a time-bound action plan for the implementation of the Five Point Consensus.

Ahead of its Summit in May, ASEAN must review and reframe the Five Point Consensus to better reflect the ground realities and the will of the Myanmar people to achieve federal democracy, justice and accountability. In this respect, ASEAN must take steps to formally and meaningfully engage and consult with key stakeholders from Myanmar, including the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations. It must initiate an ASEAN-Plus approach to impose arms embargoes and provide humanitarian aid directly to those who are working in the frontlines with the communities most deeply affected by the military's ongoing atrocity crimes, including through provision of border based humanitarian aid.

Over two years since the military's attempted coup, the will of the people of Myanmar to resist the military for the establishment of a federal democratic Myanmar remains strong. The Council must mobilize member states to reflect the repeated calls made by the people of Myanmar to further restrict military's access to arms and actualize justice and accountability through all possible routes.

ANGER AS TIME MAGAZINE FEATURES MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER AS AN 'INFLUENTIAL' PERSON OF 2023

Myanmar people and international critics are challenging Time Magazine for choosing Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing as one of the most influential people of 2023.

Min Aung Hlaing joined the roster of 100 celebrities, leaders, and innovators in the 13 April line-up with the following text:

“During a parade to mark Myanmar’s Armed Forces Day on March 27, General Min Aung Hlaing, military tunic festooned with medals, inspected thousands of soldiers from an open-top jeep. The display of pomp was a signal of the 66-year-old’s viselike grip over the nation of 54 million since his February 2021 coup d’état.

“From his podium, he warned that the pro-democracy rebels he is embroiled in a blood-soaked campaign against would be “tackled for good and all.” Since the putsch, villages have been terrorized by artillery and air raids, leaving tens of thousands killed and more than a million displaced. Even before he seized power, the U.N. accused him of massacring Rohingya Muslims with “genocidal intent.”

“Min Aung Hlaing has returned Myanmar to a pariah state and made it the world’s second most authoritarian regime, per the Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2022 Democracy Index. Only Taliban-ruled Afghanistan ranked worse.”

No doubt Time Magazine couldn’t find the name and photo of the leader of the Taliban so went with the Economist’s second ranker.

The magazine on occasions makes a faux pas, like when they put Myanmar Buddhist monk Wirathu on the cover under the headline, “Buddhist bin Laden” to describe the controversial figure, setting off a firestorm.

On this occasion, posts on social media exploded as Myanmar people and concerned observers questioned why the magazine had featured a man in charge of a military that only this week murdered over 170 civilians in an air attack in Pazigy village in Sagaing Region.

Democracy activist Igor Blazevic wrote a letter to the Time Magazine Editorial Board, published on DVB, questioning the decision:

“By your decision to put Myanmar’s butcher Min Aung Hlaing – one of the most brutal murderers in the world – on your list of 100 most influential people, you have just encouraged him and his kleptocratic gang to massacre more innocent civilians. If you have doubts about that, just follow in next few days how his military propaganda machine will use the fact that you have bestowed upon him the title of one of the world’s ‘most influential leaders.’”

Blazevic went on to say: “You have just inflated the notion of him as a strong leader rather than what he really is – a little, greedy man with a Napoleonic complex who is increasingly desperate because he is losing control over the country to the determined nationwide resistance. His desperation manifests itself in large scale massacres.”



BANGKOK REVELS IN FIRST POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC SONGKRAN FESTIVAL

Water pistols, hose pipes and smiles were in abundance on the streets of Bangkok last week, as the city celebrated the Thai new year festival Songkran after a three-year COVID-19-pandemic-related hiatus.

While the three-day celebrations include paying respect to elders and sprinkling water over Buddha statues, the festival is also a chance for younger Thais and foreigners to indulge in a little booze-fuelled revelry.

Thailand has opened its borders and COVID-19 has largely slipped off the radar, though a significant number of Thais continue to wear masks, long after the government advised they were no longer necessary – though could be worn if people so desire.

The ever-chaotic megalopolis of Bangkok saw a huge water fight take place at close to 200 official sites, with smaller bouts of liquid-based clashes breaking out in neighbourhoods across the city, as residents welcomed a return to normality after years of tough COVID-19 lockdowns and other measures.

Thai reveller Phoranee Sukjee, 29, said she was hopeful the revival of the festival would boost the country's economy, which was battered by the pandemic.

"Though some places in Bangkok are still quiet, things would definitely get better," she said.

City governor Chadchart Sittipunt urged citizens to wear colourful shirts and respect traditional Songkran activities in an alcohol-free family-friendly environment.

By midday, however, the floral shirts on backpacker hotspot Khao San Road were already drenched, the beers cracked, and the music blasting as Thais and foreigners soaked each other with brightly coloured water guns.

"It's already blown out our expectations, it's so much fun," said drenched Californian Parker Core, 24, who booked a last-minute trip from Malaysia.

"We have nothing like it in America," he said.





Further along the road - lined with tubs offering refills - Julia Grinina laughed as her nine and eight year old children tore through the crowds, each armed with water guns.

"We came here to get sprayed, we knew what we were coming for," said the 34-year-old from Kazakhstan, who now lives in Pattaya.

At either end of the street stalls selling water pistols, protective plastic phone covers, and 20-baht (60 US cents) water refills were doing a brisk trade, with the vendors and their children soaking merry customers.

"I'm glad because the authorities have allowed us to splash water like we used to," said orange vendor Wattana Kunpang.

"They allowed us to splash water, drink, eat, and they also relaxed the regulations so I think foreign tourists would enjoy this," the 46-year-old added.

DANGEROUS ROADS

Many Thais use the long holiday weekend to travel home to see friends and family, with road acci-

dents peaking during the period.

At least 63 people were killed and hundreds injured in crashes on Wednesday, local media reported, with authorities urging people to drive safely during the holiday and promising to levy harsh penalties on those driving while intoxicated.

Across the border in neighbouring Myanmar -- where the Buddhist festival is known as Thingyan -- the formerly boisterous celebrations were muted, with a few hundred celebrating in parks in the commercial capital Yangon.

Since the 2021 coup, many have chosen not to celebrate the festival, with last year's Thingyan marked by a heavy security presence on the streets.

This year's festival was also overshadowed by a junta air strike on a village in Myanmar's central Sagaing region earlier in the week, which reportedly killed more than 100 people, including young children.

AFP

XI SAYS CHINA MUST STRENGTHEN TRAINING FOR 'ACTUAL COMBAT' AS POSSIBLE TAIWAN INVASION LOOMS



Chinese President Xi Jinping with visiting French President Emmanuel Macron. Photo: AFP

China's President Xi Jinping called on the country's armed forces to "strengthen military training oriented towards actual combat", state media reported Wednesday last week, after Beijing conducted military drills intended to intimidate Taiwan.

Xi's comments, made on a naval inspection trip on Tuesday, come amid heightened tension in the region after the show of force by Beijing, which sees self-ruled Taiwan as its territory.

China on Monday concluded three days of military drills launched in response to a visit last week by Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen to the United States, where she met a bipartisan group of lawmakers and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

Xi on Tuesday told the People's Liberation Army's Southern Theatre Command Navy that the military must "resolutely defend China's territorial sovereignty and maritime interests, and strive to protect overall peripheral stability", state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Beijing has also criticised a plan for US forces to use a growing number of bases in the Philippines, including one near Taiwan.

The United States and the Philippines are holding their largest-ever joint military drills this week, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken committing to "standing with the Philippines against any intimidation or coercion, including in the South China Sea".

Xi added Tuesday that China must be "innovative in its concepts and methods of combat".

Some analysts question whether Beijing is poised to invade Taiwan.

Disputed waters

China and Taiwan split following a civil war in 1949.

Beijing views the democratic island as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day, stepping up its rhetoric and military activity around the island in recent years.

The PLA simulated targeted strikes and a blockade of Taiwan during its recent three-day "Joint Sword" exercise.

Taiwan's defence ministry said it continued to detect Chinese warships and aircraft around the island even after drills officially concluded.

Beijing warned this week that Taiwanese independence and cross-strait peace were "mutually exclusive", blaming Taipei and unnamed "foreign forces" supporting it for the tensions.

Washington has been deliberately ambiguous on whether it would defend Taiwan militarily.

It has, however, sold weapons to Taipei for decades to help ensure its self-defence, and offered political support.

China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea - a strategic waterway through which trillions of dollars in trade pass annually - despite an international court ruling that the assertion has no legal basis.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei all have overlapping claims in the sea, while the United States sends naval vessels through it to assert freedom of navigation rights in international waters.

AFP.

CHINA WOULD GAIN SWIFT AIR SUPERIORITY OVER TAIWAN, US LEAKS SHOW



Chinese fighter jet. Photo: AFP

China would probably gain air superiority very quickly in any attack on Taiwan, something Russia crucially failed to do in its invasion of Ukraine last year, leaked US intelligence documents show, according to media reports Saturday.

The classified documents, allegedly leaked by a US national guardsman in the worst US security breach in a decade, reveal that Taiwan's military leaders doubt their air defenses can "accurately detect missile launches," while only about half of their aircraft are capable of effectively engaging the enemy.

China views democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory to be retaken one day, by force if necessary. The island lives under the constant fear of a Chinese invasion, and Beijing has stepped up its rhetoric and military activity around it in recent years.

The intelligence reports said that Taiwan fears it could take up to a week to move its aircraft to shelters, leaving them vulnerable to Chinese missile strikes.

In addition, China's use of civilian shipping, including passenger ferries, for military purposes has hampered the US intelligence community's ability to predict when an invasion might be pending, the Washington Post reported.

The Pentagon criticized Taiwan's missile drills as too highly scripted, which could leave their armed forces and leadership unprepared for a "real-world event," the Post said.

President Xi Jinping has undertaken a huge

overhaul of China's army to expand and modernize it.

The People's Liberation Army is estimated to be 14 times the size of Taiwan's own armed forces.

Taiwan's defense ministry told the Post that its response to recent Chinese shows of force in the vicinity demonstrate that its military is "absolutely capable, determined and confident" it can defend the island.

Last week, Taiwan staged large-scale emergency response drills enacting a wide array of scenarios, including attacks by missiles and chemical weapons.

The drills came just days after China held its latest military exercise around the island, just 100 miles (160 kilometers) off the coast of the Chinese mainland.

Chinese jets and warships continued circling Taiwan even after the conclusion of the massive drills.

Taiwan's defense ministry detected seven Chinese naval vessels and 26 aircraft between Wednesday and Thursday morning.

It said 14 aircraft had crossed the unofficial median line that separates the island from mainland China.

On a visit to Beijing Friday, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned that "a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait... would be a horror scenario for the entire world."

AFP.

MYANMAR: UN CONDEMNS DEADLY MILITARY AIRSTRIKE ON CROWD OF CIVILIANS

The United Nations has denounced deadly airstrikes carried out by the Myanmar Armed Forces which reportedly killed at least 100 people in an opposition stronghold in the northwest on Tuesday.

Military aircraft dropped bombs and fired on a crowd of people in Kanbulu Township, located in Sagaing Region, who had gathered that morning for the opening of a new town hall, according to media reports.

GUTERRES CONDEMNS ATTACK

UN Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the attack and called for those responsible to be held accountable, his Spokesperson said in a statement.

Mr. Guterres offered his deepest condolences to the families of the victims. He also called for the injured to be allowed urgent medical treatment and access to assistance.

“The Secretary-General condemns all forms of violence and reaffirms the primacy of protection of civilians, in accordance with international humanitari-

an law,” the statement said.

END THE VIOLENCE

Myanmar’s military seized power in February 2021 following disputed elections the previous November, detaining democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and other top officials.

Thousands of people have been killed since the coup, and the UN continues to speak out against the ensuing repression, human rights violations and abuses.

The Secretary-General reiterated his appeal for the military to “end the campaign of violence against the Myanmar population throughout the country”, in line with a Security Council resolution adopted in December.

Resolution 2669 demands an immediate end to all forms of violence in Myanmar. It further calls for restraint, de-escalation of tensions and the release of all prisoners.

RIGHTS CHIEF ‘HORRIFIED’

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, also issued a statement, saying



● Photo: UN News

he was “horrified” by reports of the airstrikes.

“It appears schoolchildren performing dances, as well as other civilians, attending an opening ceremony at the hall in Pazi Gyi village, Kanbalu Township were among the victims. A helicopter gunship then reportedly fired on those fleeing the hall,” he said.

The UN rights chief noted that despite clear legal obligations for the military to protect civilians in the conduct of hostilities, “there has been blatant disregard for the related rules of international law.”

HOPE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

He called on all parties to take “all feasible precautions” to protect civilians from the effects of attacks, including by avoiding locating military objec-

tives within or near densely populated areas.

“As I have previously noted, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the military and its affiliated militias are responsible for an extremely broad range of human rights violations and abuses since 1 February 2021, some of which may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes,” Mr. Turk said.

“I firmly believe the international justice processes now underway will one day hold the military leadership accountable for such crimes,” he added.

Courtesy of UN News



KAREN STATE

10,000 flee from Shwe Kokko fighting to Thailand

Over 10,000 residents of the Shwe Kokko area of Myawaddy Township in Kayin State have fled from their villages to Thailand because of an increase in fighting in the area.

Fighting escalated after the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied defence forces raided two camps of the Border Guard Force (BGF) junta-aligned militias.

The displaced people are sheltering just across the border in Thailand. The Thai authorities have provided 15 emergency tents, but large numbers of the displaced still need food, water, toilet facilities and other basic items, according to Phoe Thingyan, a spokesperson of the Overseas Irrawaddy Association (OIA).

“They urgently need food, mosquito nets, clothes and bed sheets, while they have to take shelter in small tents”, he said.

Most of the displaced are elderly people and children.

There has been intense fighting between people’s defence force (PDF) and KNLA fighters against BGF and junta army soldiers in the area of the Myawaddy-Kawkaik Asia Highway in Kayin State. As a result, 10 resistance groups have signed a joint

statement telling people not to use the highway for 15 days from 7 to 15 April.

MON STATE

1Bilin Township BGF camp attacked

Resistance forces attacked Maelan Border Guard Force (BGF) camp and killed two BGF officers in the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade (1) area in Bilin Township, Mon State on 9 April.

The camp, which was manned by BGF and Myanmar junta army troops, came under a drone attack that killed two BGF officers and injured many others at about 10:50 a.m. on 9 April, according to a spokesperson of the Kyaikto Revolution force (KRF), one of the defence forces involved in the attack. They added that the resistance force fighters all managed to retreat without suffering any casualties.

According to the spokesperson the defence forces included in the attack included the KNU’s armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Kyaikto Revolution Force (KRF) and the Pa’O People’s Defence Force-Kham Dom (PPDF-KD).

There has been frequent fighting between the KNLA and joint defence forces in KNU Brigade (1) areas since the February 2021 coup.

Junta’s Thingyan stage bombed in Mon State’s Thanbyuzayat Township

An urban guerrilla group bombed a pandal (stage) being built for the junta-organised Thingyan



Photo: AFP

New Year water festival in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, on the afternoon of 9 April.

The Revolutionary Force For Justice (TRFFJ) claimed responsibility for the attack on the pandal, which took place near the Township Administration Office.

TRFFJ also said that no innocent passers-by were injured by the explosion.

A representative of the group said: “More mine attacks will be carried out if military supporters celebrate the water festival at the pandal and we will not be responsible if anyone there is injured. This was a warning attack.”

Defence forces from various districts have warned people not to attend junta-organised Thingyan water festivities.

In recent days defence forces have attacked the pandal in the People’s Square in Yangon and main pandal in Bago City.

Resistance forces also warned the public that the junta might carry out false flag attacks on pandals by bombing them and blaming the explosions on defence forces to discredit them.

A youth from Mon State’s Ye Township said: “The junta knows that the Burmese people want to have fun, so they are organising events for youths. As for me, I will not be participating at all in any of their events.”

CHIN STATE

Six killed in junta airstrike in Chin State’s Falam Township

Six people including a school principal and his wife, were killed in a junta fighter jet airstrike on Waibula Village in Chin State’s Falam Township on the morning of 10 April.

Salai Cung Ngai, a Chin Nation Defense Force (CNDF) spokesperson said to Mizzima: “They dropped six bombs in three airstrikes. Two hit Waibula village.”

He added that other people had been injured and there might be further deaths amongst the injured.

He also said that the CNDF believe the airstrike was in retaliation for an earlier attack, at 5:00 a.m. the same day, on the Vhar Village junta army camp, also in Falam Township, by the CNDF and other defence forces

Salai Cung Ngai said: “We attacked the military camp in a raid and controlled it after a one-and-a-half-hour fight. One person from our side died and at least 16 junta soldiers were killed. We also captured [junta] soldiers with their weapons and ammunition and the camp was burned down. At least 10 junta soldiers were captured alive.”

The military camp in Vhar Village is an outpost of Infantry Battalion 268 based in Falam Township.

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BOMBING NEAR STATE GUEST HOUSE CAUSES POWER OUTAGE IN NAY PYI TAW

Sittaung Urban Guerrilla Force claimed responsibility for detonating a bomb at a substation near the State Guest House in Dakkhina Thiri Township in Nay Pyi Taw on 14 April, a Water Festival holiday, according to local news outlets.

As a result of the attack, some transformers in the substation were damaged and electricity was also cut off in the compound of the State Guest House, according to a member of the guerrilla force, who added that the substation was still unable to transmit electricity until the middle of 15 April.

Following the military coup in Myanmar, numerous regions of the country have been facing severe power outages. However, as Nay Pyi Taw is the city where the junta is based, it has not been affected as severely by power cuts.

A member of the group said that the electricity transmitted from the substation is mainly given to hotels owned by cronies. The motive behind the bomb attack, as claimed by the group, was to retaliate and make those who support the junta experience the same consequences they have inflicted on the rest of the population.

MYANMAR TRADE WITH BANGLADESH DECLINES DUE TO US DOLLAR SHORTAGE

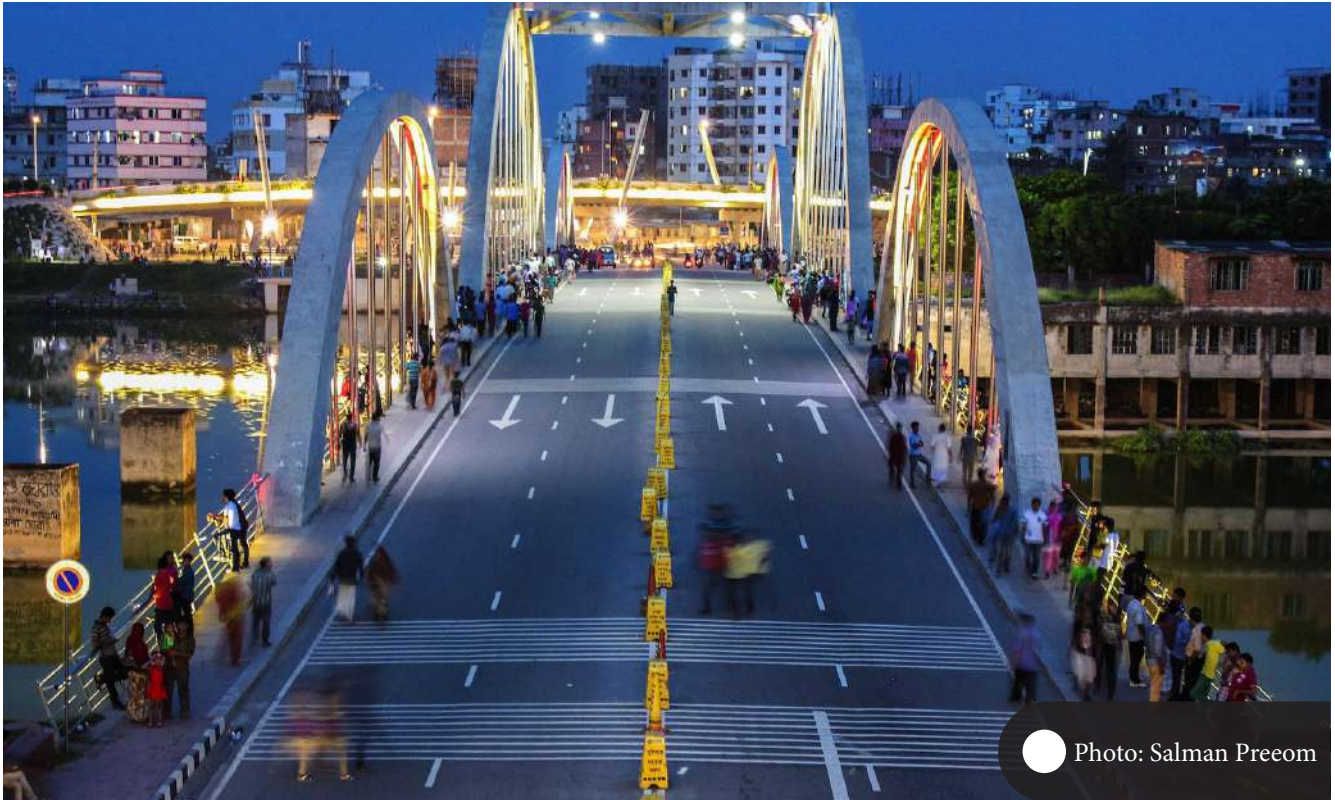


Photo: Salman Preeom

Traders in Rakhine State claims that the border trade with Bangladesh has declined due to US dollar shortage there as the banks could not sell the required dollars to the traders.

Bangladesh pays in US dollars for imports from Myanmar in border trade.

Currently the two banks including Sonali Bank in Bangladesh are not selling dollars to the traders in the border trade, claiming various excuses, leading to a suspension in trading and problems with exports from Myanmar.

Under the new export policy by Myanmar, 65% of export earnings from border trade must be mandatorily exchanged at the rate controlled by the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM). This has reportedly led to lower trader profits.

The traders said that some of them had to suspend their businesses as they could not sell their goods if they hiked the prices of their goods.

Myanmar exported over 1,000 tons of Rohu fish to Bangladesh in January from Maungdaw border trade post and earned US\$2.5 million. In March, Myanmar was able to export only around 200 tons of Rohu to Bangladesh, the trade statistics compiled by Maungdaw border trade post says.

The traders said that they could not say how long this dollar shortage will last in Bangladesh and it would affect the border trade with Bangladesh in Rakhine State if it lasted longer.

A responsible official from the Rakhine State Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the control and restriction on dollars would cause distrust and then it would drive this official border trade to unofficial trade through illegal channels.

ADB FORECASTS MYANMAR GDP GROWTH RATE OF 2.5% FOR 2023



Photo: Anjani Kumar

The Asia Development Bank (ADB) forecasts the GDP growth rate for Myanmar in 2023 at 2.5%, a slight rise on 2% in 2022.

And the ADB forecasts the inflation rate in Myanmar for 2023 at 10.5%, a decline from 16% in 2022.

ADB said that the inflation rate in developing economies in Asia was 4.4% in 2022 and it forecast that this rate would fall to 4.2% this year and further to 3.3% in next year.

ADB forecast that the growth in Asia would be higher than expected this year.

Asian Development Outlook, the latest report issued by ADB, says that the implications of the global banking crisis would have an impact on the prospects of developing economies in Asia.

The growth rate of developing economies in Asia was 4.2% in 2022 so that it will see a higher growth rate in 2023.

The economic recovery in China would be

stronger than expected and it could lead to brighter prospects for developing economies of Asia.

ADB previously forecast the growth rate of China at 4.3% and it revised this figure to 5% in this report.

Reopening of the economy in China including border trade with neighbouring countries will facilitate the firmest support to growth in the region.

Apart from China, the rest of Asia will likely see a growth rate of 4.6%, a slight decline on last year's 5.4%.

The South Asia region will see the highest growth rate in Asia with 5.5%. India looks set for a growth rate of 6.4%.

ADB warned that the Asia region would still have challenges such as rising commodity prices though it was experiencing growth in part because of the fallout from the Ukraine war and global banking crisis.

CHINA EXPORTS RISE FOR FIRST TIME IN 6 MONTHS: CUSTOMS DATA



Photo: Li Yang

China's exports rose in March for the first time in six months, customs data showed Thursday last week, as the world's second-largest economy continued its recovery following the end of onerous coronavirus curbs late last year.

The 14.8 percent surge in overseas shipments marked the first since September, according to the General Administration of Customs, and will provide a boost to hopes for a lasting rebound.

Beijing long maintained some of the world's strictest Covid curbs, persisting with snap lockdowns and lengthy quarantines despite their increasingly dire economic consequences.

The government abruptly ditched the restrictions in December, and a wave of cases afflicted the operations of many businesses for several weeks.

Thursday's customs figures contrasted with a poll of analysts conducted by Bloomberg News, who predicted that exports would decline 7.1 percent.

The sharp uptick was a "positive surprise", said Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

However, he added that the sharp rebound "may be partly due to a low base effect", noting that Covid outbreaks in March last year forced many Chinese factories to shut down and restricted operations at the country's ports.

"The other factor behind the strong export growth may be the inventory and order cycles for exporters," Zhang said in emailed comments to AFP.

While the torrent of Covid cases in December and January "likely depleted factories' inventories", they are now running at full capacity and have "caught up the cumulated orders from the past", he added.

Imports in March contracted 1.4 percent, a more moderate pace than in January and February.

China's economy grew just three percent in 2022 -- one of its slowest rates in decades -- and the country has set a modest target of "around five percent" for this year.

There is optimism that goal can be reached, with the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday maintaining its annual growth forecast for China at 5.2 percent.

China's year-on-year trade with the United States fell 17.4 percent, and dropped 10 percent with the European Union, Thursday's figures showed.

But there was a sharp 25.9 percent increase in trade with Russia as Moscow focuses on business with its giant neighbour after being hit with sanctions following its invasion of Ukraine.

"As Covid-19 waves subsided in January of this year, mobility normalised, and high-frequency economic indicators -- such as retail sales and travel bookings -- started picking up," the IMF wrote in its World Economic Outlook report.

"The reopening and growth of (China's) economy will likely generate positive spillovers, with even greater spillovers for countries with stronger trade links and reliance on Chinese tourism," it added.

Top Chinese leaders have also signalled a focus on recovery, with new Premier Li Qiang last month telling a major economic forum that the country was showing "strong momentum".

AFP

TELENOR'S MYANMAR DEPARTURE NEGATIVELY IMPACTS ITS ASIAN ASSET

Norwegian majority state-owned multinational telecommunications company Telenor's Asian assets have been negatively affected by its challenging departure from Myanmar after the military coup in the South-east Asian country, the Financial Times reported citing the CEO of Telenor, the Norwegian telecoms company

According to an interview with the Financial Times the CEO Sigve Brekke revealed that the company has created a separate unit for its Asian assets, which includes Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, and Malaysia. This move is intended to provide flexibility for pursuing strategic options, such as mergers.

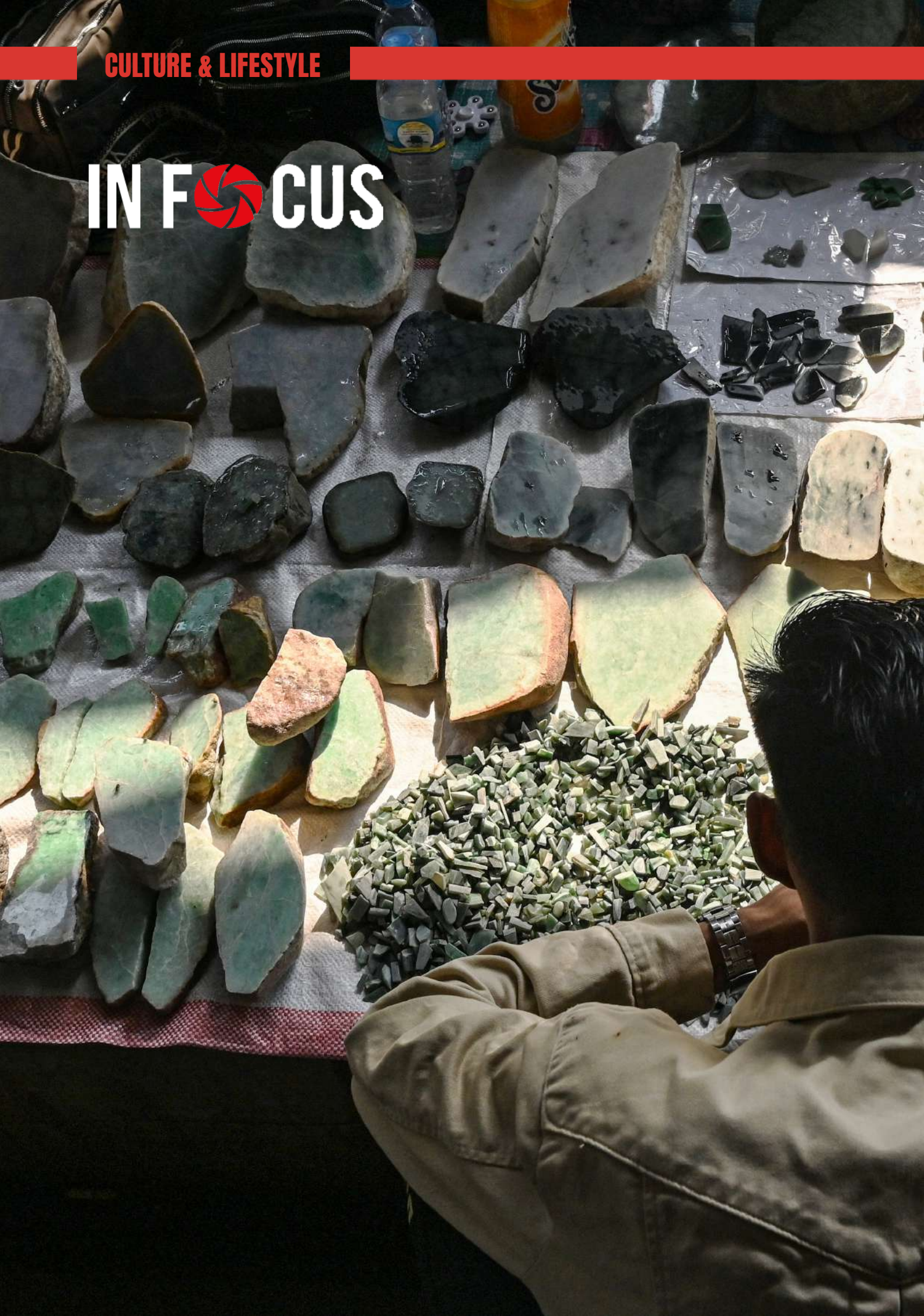
"Myanmar was quite a significant part of the value in Telenor's market capitalisation. It affected investors' views on our Asian assets. This is another reason why we are setting ourselves up differently in Asia. We are better able to handle risks going forward," he told the Financial Times.

When asked about Telenor's presence in Asia in the next five years Sigve Brekke declined to offer any speculation. However, he did mention that the company may continue to operate in Asia through joint ventures with local partners.

In March of last year, Telenor divested its Myanmar business, citing the challenges of doing business under the country's military junta that committed severe human rights violations and war crimes.

Penrose Thitsa

IN FOCUS





BUSINESS AS USUAL

A gem trader waiting for customers in a Mandalay market.

Photo: AFP

INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITY PREVENTION DISCUSSES GENOCIDE AND MYANMAR



Since 2017, Frontiers of Prevention, I-GMAP's annual international forum, has brought academic researchers and prevention practitioners from governments, international organizations, and civil society to Binghamton's Downtown Campus in New York, USA, for two days of conversation, sharing notes and experiences, and forming new professional connections and networks.

This year it was held on 14-15 April and included a range of concerns worldwide including the crisis in Myanmar

Unlike more familiar academic conferences, Frontiers of Prevention had a workshop format. Over the meeting's two days, several extended thematic sessions, without formal presentations, allowed participants and audience members to explore topics in



the world. Filipino-American journalist Maria Ressa is the co-founder and CEO of the digital media company Rappler. As part of the award ceremony, she delivered a keynote address for I-GMAP's 2023 Frontiers of Prevention meeting, an international gathering of atrocity prevention scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers.

depth, to make connections among different thematic panels, and to pursue collaborations and test new ideas.

During the event, I-GMAP awarded the inaugural Nadia Rubaii Memorial Prize to 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Winner Maria Ressa. The award honors Ressa's work in promoting atrocity prevention through defending free media in the Philippines and around



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