

HOW MYANMAR WATER FESTIVAL REBUFF SHOWS LOSS OF JUNTA SUPPORT BASE

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**JAILED  
BUT NOT  
FORGOTTEN**

**Calls increase for the  
release of Aung San  
Suu Kyi as Supreme  
Court readies for  
appeal**

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# FREE AUNG SAN SUU KYI

There is a pressing need for the Myanmar people and the international community to build up pressure on the Myanmar military junta to do the right thing and free Aung San Suu Kyi.

The current scenario surrounding Myanmar's democracy icon echoes the injustice that surrounded another jailed world leader a few decades ago – the incarceration of South African leader Nelson Mandela. Such was the chorus of international dismay over apartheid and Mandela's confinement that many leading figures including pop stars called for his release. Songs were sung to Free Nelson Mandela. On 11 February 1990 Nelson Mandela, hand-in-hand with his wife, walked free from the South African prison. And, as they say, the rest is history.

As the Myanmar Supreme Court gears up to handle an appeal made by Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyers, pressure should be brought to bear to free Myanmar's democracy icon whose only crime was to stand in a legitimate democratic election in 2020 with the goal to put in place the stepping stones to lift the country out of the nightmare it has been suffering for decades. Few, if any, take seriously the various charges she was sentenced for that total 33 years, a witch-hunt if ever there was one.

The Myanmar junta have it in their power to do the right thing and free Aung San Suu Kyi. Periodically, the junta frees prisoners

in amnesties, including hardened criminals, and so the fact that The Lady continues to languish in a building in a Naypyidaw prison all alone out of sight is clearly a travesty of justice.

It is a fact of history that every so often ordinary people are called to public service. Many would argue that The Lady is not ordinary, given she is the daughter of the Burmese independence hero Aung San. But she has had the opportunity on more than one occasion to step back and pursue a quiet life, even when her husband was dying of cancer and she was torn between love, on the one hand, and duty towards her country, on the other.

Myanmar's military generals should give this careful thought. Is it really true that they are cowards intimidated by a woman, who while not perfect, reflects the face of freedom for Myanmar, the inevitable outcome for a country that has suffered so much over the decades due to the trampling of soldiers' boots?

How long are Min Aung Hlaing and the generals going to deny the inevitable? Freedom will come to Myanmar eventually.

Why not show courage and let The Lady go? Deep down they know this is the right thing to do.

## EDITORIAL

# mizzima

WEEKLY

**Editor In-Chief and Managing Director**  
Soe Myint

### Contributors

Sai Wansai,  
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

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

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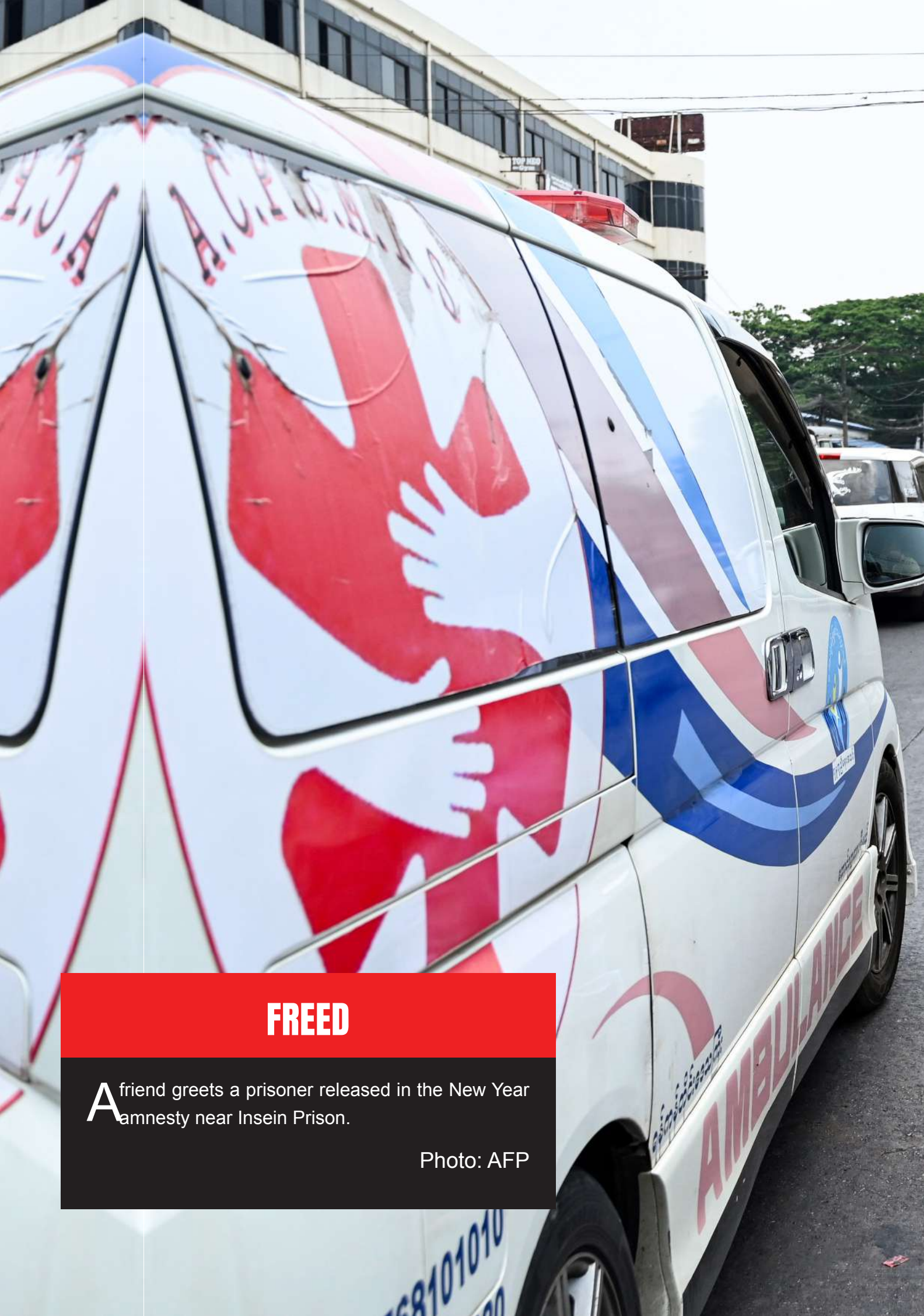
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Cover photo of Aung San Suu Kyi  
by AFP







## FREED

A friend greets a prisoner released in the New Year amnesty near Insein Prison.

Photo: AFP



# IN FOCUS





## NIGHT STRIKE COMMEMORATING PAZIGYI VILLAGE MASSACRE HELD IN KANNI TOWNSHIP VILLAGE

A night strike to pay respect to those who died in the 11 April junta airstrike on Pazigy Village was held in a Kanni Township village in Sagaing Region, on the evening of 15 April.

One of the strike's leaders, Pyae Aung Naing, told Mizzima that the protesters sang anti-military songs, shouted slogans, prayed for the victims, lit candles for them and released hot air balloons to help give the dead a better existence in their next lives. Protest leaders also gave anti-junta speeches.

The name of the village has been withheld for security reasons. According to a National Unity Government (NUG) 16 April press release, 168 villagers, including children, were killed in a junta airstrike on Pazigy Village in Sagaing Region's Kantabalu Township on 11 April. Since that statement estimates of the number of dead have risen to 170 or 171 people.

## JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLED MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY CHILDREN AS PDF MEMBERS

Only 18 of the 168 people massacred in the Myanmar junta airstrike on Pazigy Village on 11 April were members of people's defence forces (PDFs) or worked for an anti-junta administration.

The figures come from a 16 April National Unity Government (NUG) shadow government report on the airstrike on Pazigy Village in Sagaing Region's Kantabalu Township that took place at 8:00 a.m. on 11 April as villagers were preparing to celebrate the opening of an NUG administration office in the area.

According to the NUG report 168 people were killed in the attack. 40 of the dead, or 23.8 per cent were children. Six were under five years old, 19 were between the ages of five and 14 years and five were

aged between 14 and 18 years. The ages of the other 10 children have not yet been determined.

128 of the dead, or about 76 per cent, were adults. Of those only 19, or just over 10 per cent were PDF members or worked for the NUG administration. The NUG estimates that the rest of the dead were civilians.

The junta has claimed responsibility for the airstrikes claiming that it was targeting PDF members and that there had been many PDF members attending the celebrations.

Since the NUG report was issued unofficial estimates of the number killed in the Pazigy Village massacre have risen to 170 or 171 people.

## SAGAING ARTILLERY ATTACK KILLS 12 MYANMAR JUNTA SOLDIERS

Local people's defence forces (PDFs) carried out an artillery attack on a military post in Hteesauung Village in Sagaing Region's Myinmu Township, on 15 April.

The Zero Guerrilla Force claimed responsibility for the attack and said that the Myinchan District 7th Battalion and the Kyaukse District 1st Battalion also took part in the attack, which killed 12 junta soldiers. This number was also confirmed by local news sources.

Ko Thetgyi from Zero Guerrilla Force told Mizzima that junta soldiers from the camp took money from travellers and that they were drunkenly dancing outside their camp when the defence forces attacked.

"We used GPS guided 80mm and 40mm mortars in the attack. They hit the target", he said.

According to Ko Thetgyi, the soldiers at the camp randomly returned fire with heavy weapons. Some shells fell in residential areas, but there were no casualties.



# 300 FLEE TO THAILAND FROM KAWTHAUNG IN TANINTHARYI REGION

About 300 villagers from Seikhpu Village in Khamaukgyi Town, in Tanintharyi Region's Kawthaung District fled into Thailand on the evening of 16 April because they heard gunfire near to their village.

They crossed the Kra Buri River on boats into Kra Buri District in Thailand's Ranong Province.

"There was an armed clash in the village, so everyone was scared and ran away to Thailand. Now some have returned home," said a resident of Seikhpu Village.

Apparently, the gunfire was the sound of local people's defence forces (PDFs) shooting dead two pro-junta militia leaders. Currently, Mizzima has no further information about the incident.

Local authorities in Thailand provided humanitarian assistance to nearly 300 people who had fled fighting in Myanmar on 16 April. They were repatriated on 17 April when the situation in Myanmar appeared to be more stable, according to the social media page of the Thai Army's 25th Regiment Special Task Force.

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## PDF KILLS TWO MYANMAR JUNTA MAJORS IN SAGAING REGION CAMP RAID

Local defence forces raided a military camp on Tarwataing Hill near to the Yargyi to Kalewa motorway in Sagaing Region's Kani Township at about 7:40 a.m. on 17 April, according to Yinmarbin District People's Defence Force (PDF).

"We planned to seize the camp within 20 minutes. About 20 military soldiers, including two majors, were killed and five were injured. We lost one PDF member and 16 were injured including two who are in a critical condition. We set fire to the military camp", said a Yinmarbin District PDF commander.

The PDF also seized three MA-2, five MA-3,

one MA-4, and eight MA magazines, 9,380 rounds of 5.56mm ammunition, one 60-mm mortar round, 50 60mm mortar rounds, 57 40mm mortar rounds, 56 grenades, 10 Claymore mines, 29 landmines, 37 grenade detonators, 45 mine detonators, two sets of body armour, and 110 million kyats, from the camp.

It is an important part of the junta's Northwestern Military Command communication network.

After the raid, the junta used an Mi-17 helicopter to bring in 50 more soldiers to reinforce the base and to take back the bodies of the killed soldiers to the Northwestern Military Command base.

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## ABOUT 9,000 FLEE MYANMAR JUNTA FROM SEVEN SAGAING REGION VILLAGES

Nearly 9,000 locals fled in fear for their lives from seven villages in Sagaing Region's Khin U Township after Myanmar junta troops entered their villages, on 19 April.

The villages are: Inpat, Myindaung, Inn Taing Lay, Thetyatpinzu, Magyioak, Mayaninn, and Konetha.

A Khin U resident said: "The junta soldiers are indiscriminately killing adults and children so when they enter the village we have to flee for our lives."

To make matters worse for the villagers the

area is suffering a heatwave that is negatively affecting people's health and people have been passing out because of the heat.

The heat also killed 81-year-old Daw Pusein from Inpat Village at 3:00 p.m. on 19 April. She suffered heatstroke, became dizzy and lost consciousness before dying according to an Inpat villager.

Previously, in Kya Pin Tai Village also in Khin U Township, the same junta soldiers destroyed some houses and a school building at about 4:00 p.m. on 19 April.





# **JAILED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

**Calls to release  
Aung San Suu Kyi increase as  
Myanmar Supreme Court looks  
set to hear appeal**



Photo: AFP

April 27, 2023

**mizzima** WEEKLY

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**M**yanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi is locked in solitary confinement in a building in the grounds of a Naypyidaw prison, out of sight but not out of mind. In the lead up to her last prison conviction she was allowed servants and her dog. Now the building is quiet, The Lady reportedly spending time meditating, locked in a life sentence, as her country burns.

Moves, however, are afoot to challenge the status quo. Myanmar's Supreme Court will hear an appeal by the deposed leader against her convictions for corruption and violating election and state secrets laws, according Reuters.

The 77-year-old Nobel laureate is serving 33 years in prison after convictions in more than a dozen cases that Aung San Suu Kyi has called absurd and

her allies say were orchestrated by the junta to destroy her political career.

Calls to free the democracy icon continue to come in as many countries around the world – notably the USA and UK – lose patience with the military junta that grabbed power in a coup on 1 February 2021, arresting Aung San Suu Kyi, former president Win Myint, and others in National League for Democracy-led government that won the 2020 poll in a landslide.

The junta has sought to pile on criminal cases in an attempt to effectively bury The Lady and throw away the key, all while the military steps up attacks on its people.

The last case that was decided in December 2022 increased her number of years of incarceration





to 33, essentially a life sentence for Myanmar's former leader.

According to a source, the Supreme Court will hear the appeal but no date has been set yet, Reuters reports. The appeal will also be on behalf of Win Myint.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been charged with several crimes, ranging from corruption to illegally possessing walkie-talkies and flouting Covid restrictions.

She was jailed in December 2022 for seven years on five counts of corruption related to the hiring, maintaining and purchase of a helicopter for a government minister, a case in which she allegedly caused "a loss to the state".

Most people don't buy it. The corruption charges were "ridiculous", said Htwe Htwe Thein, an

associate professor at Curtin University in Australia, speaking in the wake of the last conviction.

"Nothing in Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership, governance, or lifestyle indicates the smallest hint of corruption," she said.

It is important to note that the charges against Aung San Suu Kyi have been widely criticized by human rights groups and international organizations as politically motivated and baseless. Many have called for her release and for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar, part of the bigger Spring Revolution aimed at ousting the illegal military junta.

"These trials were carried forward with no respect for due legal procedure or necessary judicial guarantees and are a clear attempt to exclude democratically elected leaders from political life," an EU spokesman in Brussels said in the wake of the last case.

In December 2022, the United Nations Security Council called on the junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi in its first resolution on Myanmar since the coup.

For now, it is a waiting game as supporters impatiently stand on the sidelines as the Supreme Court prepares for the most important case it has ever heard.



Photo: AFP

# 'PROFIT FROM THE COUP': MYANMAR ETHNIC REBELS WELCOME PRO-DEMOCRACY FIGHTERS

**A**t dusk in northern Myanmar, fighters from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army patrol their frontlines and mark the positions of junta troops, their decades-long conflict with the military fraught with new risks since the coup.

The TNLA is one of around a dozen ethnic rebel groups in Myanmar's borderlands that have long battled the military over autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

For decades, their fight for autonomy - and allegations of massive human rights abuses by the armed forces - passed largely out of sight of Myanmar's Bamar ethnic majority.

Following the military's 2021 coup and brutal crackdown on dissent, however, groups like the TNLA have become vital to Myanmar's battle for democracy, providing shelter and training for new Bamar-dominated People's Defence Forces formed to fight the junta.

"We got sympathy, understanding and support from other people in Myanmar after the coup," TNLA Brigadier General Tar Bhon Kyaw said from the group's territory in northern Shan state.

"People now understand why we were fighting... This is the profit from the coup."

Days after the coup the TNLA - which says it is fighting for autonomy for the Ta'ang ethnic group - suspended a truce with the military and has since clashed regularly with junta troops.

It now claims to have more than 7,000 fighters under its

command in its territory in northern Shan State, along the vital road to China.

## 'Another way to fight'

At a camp at a hidden location, trainees scrambled over an obstacle course and waded single file through a river, AK-47 and M-22 rifles at the ready, listening for the sounds of an imaginary enemy.

Mai Naing Aung Kyar, 24, joined the TNLA after the coup to "revolt" against the junta.

"We can't protest in the

cities but I thought that joining TNLA is another way to fight," he told AFP during a break from leopard-crawling through the dust and snapping to attention on parade.

As well as local Ta'ang youths, the TNLA had given "military training" to PDFs from outside its territory, said Tar Bhon Kyaw, and had also provided "connections" to facilitate them buying weapons.

He did not give further details, citing security reasons.

Analysts say ethnic reb-





el groups along the borders with China, Thailand and India have trained and armed thousands of PDF fighters and seconded officers to lead inexperienced fighters in battles with junta troops.

PDF groups have surprised the military with their effectiveness, analysts say, and have dragged the military into a bloody quagmire.

In February, the junta admitted it did not “fully control” more than a third of the country’s townships.

### **School bunkers**

Re-igniting conflict with the military - and training its newest enemies, which the junta has designated “terrorists” - brings

huge risks.

At a village in TNLA territory, headman Aik Oo showed AFP where a school had stood until junta troops torched it during a raid.

Workers were building a new school and had dug holes into the side of a nearby earthen bank, makeshift shelters against possible airstrikes by the military’s Russian- and Chinese-made jets.

Faced with setbacks on the ground the junta has called in devastating airstrikes to target its opponents, which rights groups say may constitute war crimes.

Earlier this month, an airstrike on a village in a resistance hotspot killed more than 170 peo-

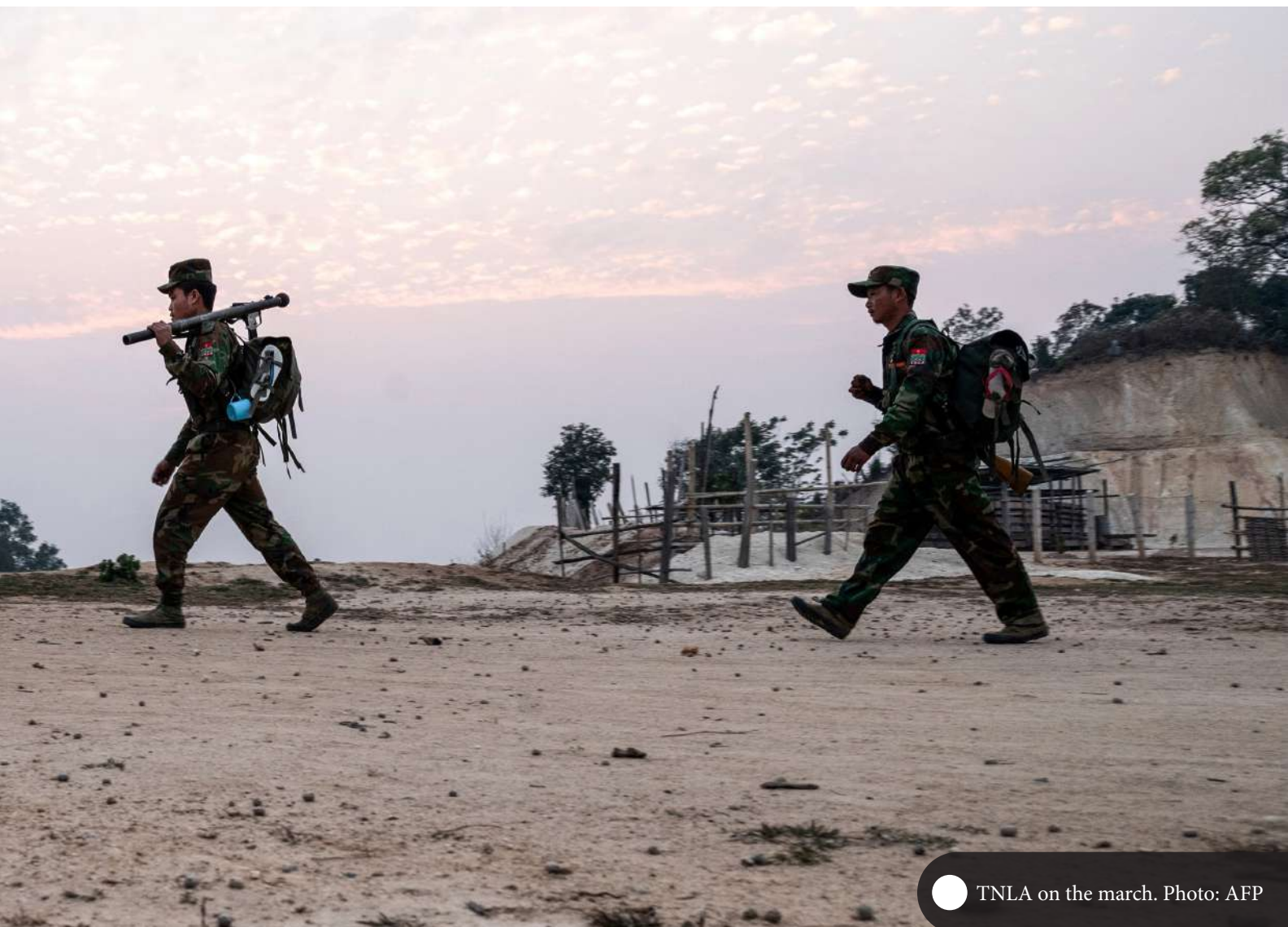
ple, including young schoolchildren, according to media reports and locals.

While the school in the TNLA-controlled village is being rebuilt, Khin Lay Yu, 52, teaches around two dozen children in a structure made of wooden beams and tarpaulins.

On her wish list for the next academic year - which starts in June - are “bunkers for the students”, she said.

“Our school has around 500 students and we have to work hard to build enough,” she told AFP.

**AFP**



TNLA on the march. Photo: AFP

# HOW MYANMAR WATER FESTIVAL REBUFF SHOWS LOSS OF JUNTA SUPPORT BASE

MAUNG ZARNI



Photo: AFP

The society-wide refusal to celebrate the popular Myanmar Water Festival is like the electorate voting with their cultural deeds against the six-decades-old mass-murderous military.

The Myanmar public are not simply opposing the coup regime led by Min Aung Hlaing. They no longer view and accept what the Association of Southeast Asian Nations claims is the largest military force in Myanmar.

“No Regime Change, No New Year (Celebrations),” is the single clearest message I picked up from surveying social media during this year’s festive season. There are still photographs of eerily empty streets of my old Mandalay, angry curses against any Myanmar person who would celebrate the water throwing festival, public pledges and calls not to celebrate Myanmar New Year.

In an unequivocal manner, several million residents of Man-

dalay deliberately stayed home and turned their city ghostly and desolate on the eve of the Water Festival.

Buddhist temples and pagodas are typically places where the pious among the public would go for merit-making. The public abandoned a popular temple in the ancient city called Taungoo, a half-way between Yangon and Mandalay.

I also glanced at the deserted scenes of a famous pagoda compound in the ancient city of Taungoo while listening to a popular theme song from one of the most memorable New Year films of all time called Thin Gyan Moe (or New Year Rain) made in the dying years of the first military dictatorship of General Ne Win in the 1980s.

Mandalay is known as the country’s most exciting centre of the New Year celebrations. Typically, throngs of merrymakers

of all ages, faiths and sexes who would fill the city’s broad streets along the moat that surrounds the old, fortified palace ruins are nowhere to be seen.

That is except in one or two coup regime organized festival pavilions. Apparently, the scorching heat in the typically very hot summer months - March and April are summer in Myanmar - played a role in getting some households of the regime-organized festival venues in order to get wet in the absence of air conditioning at home (or frequent power outages across the country, including the commercial city of Yangon). In the mountainous regions where non-Bama ethnic groups reside virtually all military regime Water Festival venues were deserted by the locals. The weather is a lot cooler in the mountains.

The coup-regime organized venues for the New Year celebrations were shunned completely by the overwhelming ma-



jority of Mandalay residents, 16 April 2023.

A cultural backgrounder may be in order.

We call the Burmese New Year Thin Gyan Festival (or the Festival of Change). Thin Gyan is the Burmese term derived from its Sanskrit root (Sin Gan Da), meaning change. Importantly, the seat of the old Burmese culture since its founding in 1850s, Mandalay is the most popular destination for musicians, artists, celebrities and so on from other parts of the country to descend.

Like Christmas seasons in the predominantly Christian West of Europe and North America, signs of preparations for festivities are everywhere, weeks before the Thin Gyan. Everyone, still capable of excitement and joy, feels the bubbly feel of anticipation. For the approaching old year, transitioning to a new, and better year, and the fun-filled acts of water-throwing as well as dancing and singing along with live dance and musical performances throughout the city. There is also this ancient tradition of public airing of social and political criticism directed at individuals and institutions of power who are deemed at having failed to uphold the virtues of justice, fairness and compassion or Dharma.

During the Thin Gyan, people of all classes, faiths, and ages throw water at one another as an act of popular ritual. For three days, and nights, communities indulge themselves in dance and music, and intoxicants.

Then there is boisterous music from neighbourhood bands and the joy-filled, if loud, teases, as festival-participants – which was everybody except senior monks, firefighters, police and lay Buddhists who were on sabbath – occasionally shout at one another.

Thin Gyan is generally a period of public display of tolerance towards playful behaviour or words that generally are “taboos”. And equally important, criticisms directed at individuals and institu-

tions of power and influence are integral to the New Year customary practices.

Against this psychocultural backdrop, the majority of Mandalay’s people – and other communities across the country – have chosen to deny themselves a communal joy of ushering in a New Year, two years in a row since the 1 February 2021 coup.

This collective action of boycott of the New Year celebrations may not have measurable, immediate impact on the regime’s atrocious conduct and scorch-earth policies towards the population, which it deems “terrorists and terrorist supporters”.

However, significantly, the widespread boycott and the main substance of the increasingly strident satirical criticisms via Facebook Live reinforces what I have argued in my Washington Post opinion editorial “The Myanmar military is destroying its public image”. Politics won’t be the same as two years ago: there no longer exists the emotional bond between the Tatmadaw or the military and even the predominantly Burmese ethnic majority. The Dry Zone ethnic Bama heartlands supplied the institution with the largest number of recruits, officers and privates.

Now that bond is broken. The Dry Zone (or A-nya) such as Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay peoples have not only turned their back on the military but also witnessed the fiercest armed resistance and civil disobedience movement.

The coup regime is in deep trouble, despite its well-stocked arsenals. Min Aung Hlaing and the Tatmadaw has lost its most important base - the majoritarian ethnic Bama and Buddhist society.

There are certainly exceptions to this general boycott.

There were scenes of young Mandalayans who flocked to listen to pop stars’ performing live in the Kanbawza Bank-organized venue in the third and last

day of the Water Festival. The images were promoted by Eleven Media Group.

Kanbawza is a military-crony-owned business run by a long-time crony named Saya Kyaung. And Eleven Media was notorious as a racist platform popularizing and peddling fear and hatred of Rohingya and Islamophobia during the 2010’s leading up to the genocidal campaigns of 2016 and 2017.

The Eleven Media Group was one of the potent hate- and Islamophobia-peddling Myanmar language media outlets during the 2016 and 2017 genocide of Rohingya by Myanmar military.

A cursory glance at the old genocidal media outlet indicates it is trying to promote the image of Myanmar as a normal, peaceful country where people just go about their daily lives, despite the fact that the country has plunged deeper into the abyss of civil war. The 11 April New Year Eve airstrikes in Sagaing region is just one of hundreds of incidents of the military-sponsored slaughter.

These New Year satirical songs reflect accurately Myanmar’s popular sentiments of rage and deep revulsion towards the once respected national institution founded as an instrument of national liberation from foreign colonial rule.

One song even chastised Aung San Suu Kyi, now in captivity, for calling the military “my father’s army”, with “genuine affection”. Besides, the performing satirists proclaimed the death of the military as an anti-Fascist resistance people’s force as early as 1958, the year of the first undeclared coup made to look like a Constitutional transfer of power from democratically elected Prime Minister U Nu to the Commander-in-Chief General Ne Win.

We live in an age where the ideology of democracy – if not the actual practice – has triumphed over all other ideological orientations. So much so that

even the world's most repressive regimes evidently feel compelled to engage in the charade of elections while adopting the trappings of a democracy, albeit with pre-ordained electoral outcomes.

### **EXAMPLES ABOUND**

The Chinese Communist Party and its "elections" which resulted, among other things, anointing Xi Jinping as Chairman with no term limits; India's BJP government headed by PM Narendra Modi has been dubbed Hindutva or Fascist; Thailand's hybrid military-feudal complex of General Prayut and its election next month; Cambodia's regime headed by the autocratic ruler Hun Sen (in power for nearly 30 years); and Myanmar's coup regime of Min Aung Hlaing who presided over the Rohingya genocide.

In the case of Myanmar today, it is crucial to fully grasp this fact that the Myanmar public are not simply opposing the coup regime led by Min Aung Hlaing. They no longer view and accept what the Association of South East Asian Nations calls "the largest military force" in Myanmar.

Without any material support from external actors, the ethnic majoritarian Myanmar's two-years old armed resistance movement may not win the zero-sum fight against this well-armed military of

genocidal killers. Besides, the Min Aung Hlaing regime is fully backed by China and Russia. As my colleagues Sai Latt wrote in Myanmar Now, the regime is financed by international corporations.

The UN agencies are also rightly accused of collaborating with the regime and providing a semblance of normalcy, acceptance and international legitimacy.

And the situation in Myanmar may eventually end up being a protracted draw, with devastating long-term consequences for the country.

Obviously, the country's immediate neighbours such as Thailand, India, China, Laos and Bangladesh are not really concerned that the civil war – that is the term – in Myanmar will pose any serious problems for them. Beyond lip service, if at all, the neighbours do not really care that millions of Myanmar people are in a living hell on earth. The regime spokesperson Zaw Min Htun spoke about the dire economic situation since the COVID-19 pandemic days while the 45-page leaked secret document from the regime's meeting of intelligence and security chiefs noted the thousands of incidents of sabotage, violence and extrajudicial killings throughout most regions of Myanmar.

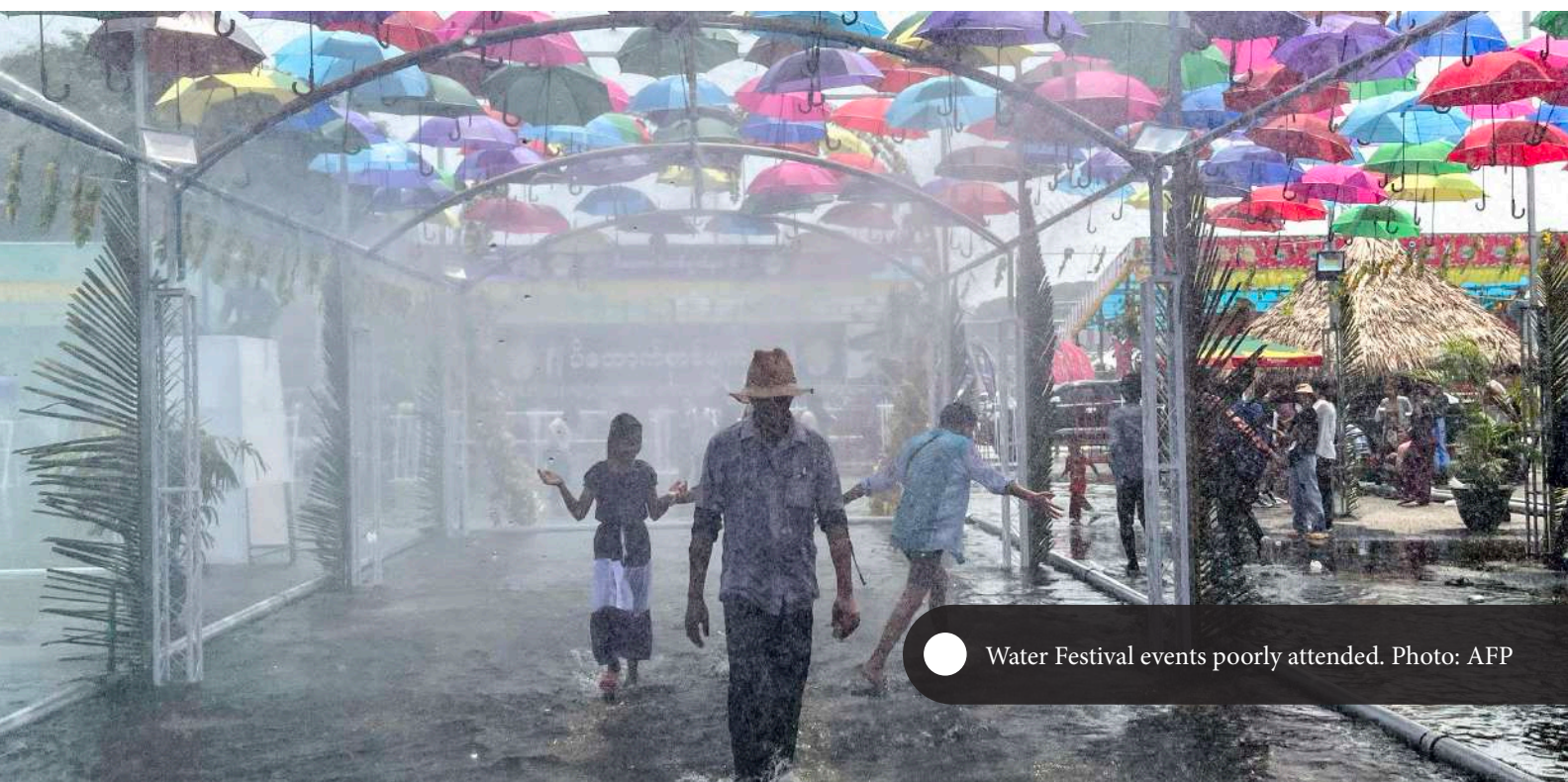
Bangladesh which has borne the brunt of Myanmar's genocide and resultant 1 million "forcibly displaced people from Myanmar", is fixated on the repatriation of Rohingyas, a pipedream without the "regime change" in Naypyidaw.

Thailand's military leadership seem to believe they can either push back the war-fleeing Myanmar refugees across the boundary rivers or just build some temporary shelters for the latter while maintaining the business-as-usual ties with the perpetrators in power. India's sole concern is to maintain its toehold in Myanmar vis-à-vis its nemesis China.

As Sai Tun Aung Lwin argues in his FORSEA op-ed, the Chinese Communist Party leadership appeared to have decided that it can protect its strategic and trade corridors as well as sovereign assets such as the twin gas-and-oil pipeline by keeping under Beijing's sway a handful of ethnic armed organizations such as the Arakan Army, the Kachin Independence Organization, the United Wa State Army, etc. and unconditionally backing the nationally reviled Myanmar military regime in Naypyidaw.

### **BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE**

The populations in Myan-



Water Festival events poorly attended. Photo: AFP



mar are no longer prepared to continue to be abused, violated and otherwise misruled over by the genocidal military. They will not reconcile with their perpetrators, without justice and freedom. As the Burmese historian Tharaphi Than argued in her 15 April-dated analysis in *The Conversation*, neither the coup regime nor the majoritarian Burmese armed resistance can and will quit.

Myanmar is now undergoing a full-blown civil war to an unprecedented degree.

On its part, Min Aung Hlaing's coup regime, sinisterly labels anyone and any community that publicly expresses pro-democratic sentiments as "terrorists". The regime has singled out even pro-democracy civilians, including children and women as "terrorists and their sympathisers and supporters", hence "legitimate targets".

In his 15 April interview on *Talk to Al Jazeera*, the regime spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Htun likened Myanmar's anti-coup resistance groups with "terrorists" in the Middle East and their local communities. As if borrowing a twisted logic which Israel routinely airs after the IDF strikes against civilians or demolished Palestinian homes in the Occupied Territories of West Bank and Gaza, Zaw Min Htun told Tony Chen, the interviewer, bombing a concert in ethnic Kachin area of Hpakhant, Northern Myanmar, or the ethnic Chin state town called Htan Ta Lan in Western Myanmar, was justified because the civilians who gathered were all "terrorist supporters", though they may be civilians.

The late dictator General Ne Win's grandson Khway Ne Win took to Tik Tok airing his victim-blaming narrative. To the outrage of Myanmar public, he justified the coup regime's airstrikes against civilian gathering in the Sagaing Division on 11 April, that is, three days before the country entered the New Year festive peri-

od. He said he holds the anti-coup resistance organizations responsible for the death of 165 civilians including a few dozen children.

In Khway Ne Win's own words, "these terrorist groups deliberately gathered civilians and provoke the national armed forces to attack them." He is a known supporter of the coup and a financier of the genocidal "Buddhist" nationalist network during the military's genocide against Rohingyas.

Myanmar people can fully understand and appreciate the depth of the seething a hatred, rage and revulsion they feel towards Myanmar's coup junta and the Tatmadaw or the armed forces. They know that their formerly national armed forces have been instrumentalized, not for national defence or protection of the population, but for terrorising the defiant populations into administrative submission, and for perpetuating the military dictatorship.

But this regime-sponsored terror campaign is clearly not working.

The resistance fighters have vowed to step up their counter-offensives while the un-armed dissidents call for making local communities absolutely "ungovernable".

Since the coup of February 2021, Min Aung Hlaing regime, by its own admission made by its spokesperson on an AJE interview, is unable to control more than half-the-country: out of a total of 330 administrative units (townships, that is), the regime is able to administer less than 190 units.

Still, the regime is bent on proceeding with its sham election. The regime spokesperson Zaw Min Htun repeated his boss Min Aung Hlaing's pledge to "restore democracy" through yet another military-sponsored election later this year. The regime is trying to soften its international image, with the coup leader presenting himself as "Prime Minister".

With the help of TIME and

other media outlets, the generals and their main spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Htun are busy reinventing themselves the custodians of democracy. They appear now in their civilian attire, swapping their green uniform with national attire, which is Indian sarong or longi and Chinese jacket, for propaganda purposes.

International diplomats, UN officials and other state functionaries may prefer "inclusive dialogue" with Naypyidaw's genocidal leaders to a people's revolution, even though the generals-cum-genocidaires keep on killing even civilians with impunity. For the genocidal leaders believe they cannot be touched, with backing from Russia and China, in an increasingly polarized world order.

Then there is little wonder that Myanmar public's sentiments against any type of dialogue have only hardened.

Yes, all wars end at the dialogue table, but only after the aggressors are overpowered to stop the killings or feel the need to seek an exit for survival.

In so far as the Myanmar public is concerned Min Aung Hlaing and the coup leaders are dead men walking. So far, Myanmar's genocidaires in green uniform are shooting their way out, from the air and on the ground.

No amount of mediation will placate the society that has come to view, with good reason, its national armed forces as a Fascist-like occupier.

Neither the regime's elections nor the Security Council's ineffectual discourse of "inclusive dialogue", has any taker among Myanmar's majoritarian Burmese resistance. Certainly, not after the regime's airstrikes cruelly slaughtered over 160 civilians, including 30 children in the Burmese Buddhist heartland of Sagaing.

Maung Zarni

# NUG DEFENCE MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR PDF UNITY AT MYANMAR NEW YEAR



A PDF fighter prepares ammunition and weaponry. Photo: AFP

**T**he defence minister of National Unity Government (NUG) sent a letter of support to the People's Defence Forces (PDF) to mark the occasion of Myanmar Traditional New Year on 17 April, stressing the importance of unity and strength among the resistance forces for the success of Myanmar's Spring Revolution.

In his letter, Minister for Defence Yee Mon said, "As our People's Revolution and PDF Tatmadaw continues to gain momentum and make progress, it is important to remain vigilant and mindful of a certain situation. The enemy is now resorting to all means to discredit our revolution, tarnish the image of our PDF, and sow disunity among us."

He also emphasized building a disciplined and strong PDF army that adheres strictly to the code of conduct in fighting against the terrorist military, and the needs of PDF to protect and safeguard the welfare of the people, while the military kills and tortures people.

He called for "one united voice and effort" in the struggle against the military as the future of Myanmar depends on unity and the competency of the PDFs.



# 'PARANOID JUNTA' ARRESTS BURMESE NEWSPAPER EDITOR: RSF



**T**he NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of a Burmese newspaper editor who was arrested after blacking out his Facebook profile photo in a discreet comment on a massacre of civilians, according to a press release 21 April.

Kyaw Min Swe, the editor of Aasan, a newspaper that was forced to close immediately after the military coup in February 2021, was arrested ten days ago at his home in Yangon although his arrest was kept secret until 21 April.

According to information reported online today and confirmed by RSF, he has been charged under Section 505 (a) of the penal code, under which the publication of content that expresses hostility towards Myanmar's armed forces is punishable by three years in prison.

Kyaw Min Swe was arrested on 11 April shortly after turning his Facebook profile photo into a black square in a comment about an air strike earlier that day on Pazigy, a village in the centre of the country, that killed at least 171 people, mainly civilians. For this "hostile" content, he is now facing up to three years in prison.

"Kyaw Min Swe's arrest is emblematic of how, in a country that submits journalists to the most abject form of terror, you can end up in prison for posting nothing more than a black square, the most basic form of journalistic comment. The desire to erase any allusion to their atrocities is one of the characteristics of war criminals. Myanmar's military junta is displaying its cruellest face, that of a desperate regime whose paranoid persecution of journalists knows no limits," said Daniel Bastard, Head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

The executive director of the Living Colour Media group and editor of its newspaper Aasan (The Voice), Kyaw Min Swe had to stop publishing Aasan after the February 2021 coup by the military, who immediately banned most independent media outlets.

After two years of military dictatorship, Myanmar has become the world's second biggest jailer of journalists, second only to China. The escalating terror deployed against independent media, which RSF recently described, explains why Myanmar is now ranked 176th out of 180 countries in RSF's World Press Freedom Index.

# SURVIVORS OF PAZIGYI MASSACRE MAKE MERIT FOR DEAD RELATIVES ON THE PHONE



Many villagers in central Myanmar are digging air raid bunkers to protect themselves from Myanmar junta air attacks. Photo: AFP

**A** merit-making ceremony between monks and the relatives of people killed in the Pazigy Village massacre on the seventh day after their deaths was held over the phone, on 17 April.

The villagers are in hiding having fled their homes after the junta's 11 April airstrike on Pazigy Village in Sagaing Region's Kantbalu Township that killed at least 170 people.

"The Pazigy villagers are not at their homes anymore and they are now living in the forest. For the merit-making ceremony on 17 April, we were unable to invite the monks into the forest. Therefore, we made merit with them on the phone", said a local volunteer.

According to a Burmese custom known as Yet Le Hsu, on the seventh day following a person's death the family of the deceased invites monks to their house, offers them a meal, host almsgiving and libation ceremonies and listen to a sermon.

"We couldn't hold Yet Le Hsu and give alms or food to monks on the seventh day after my younger brother's passing because we are currently in hiding. We are in mourning and very sad. We are also having many difficulties with our living conditions and getting basic food items", said a man whose 25-year-old younger brother was one of the airstrike victims.

Resistance forces called on people to switch off their lights and remain silent from 8:00 p.m. until 8:05 p.m. on 17 April in memory of those killed by the junta in the Pazigy Village massacre.

According to a report by the National Unity Government (NUG) report the junta's airstrikes on Pazigy Village killed 168 people, including a six-year-old child, and injured 83 people, 16 of whom, including a six-month-old baby, are in a serious condition. More recent estimates now put the number of dead at 170 or 171 people.

According to the NUG Ministry of Health, more than 300 locals, including people who lost family members in the attack, have fled the area of Pazigy Village and are in hiding. Many are also traumatised.



# MYANMAR REFUGEES ENTER INDIA BORDER VILLAGE AMID INTENSIFYING CONFLICT IN CHIN STATE



Myanmar refugee camp on the Mizoram side of the Myanmar-India border. Photo: AFP

About 820 Myanmar refugees entered Champai district of Mizoram State, India on 19 April, according to a report of Northeast Live online media.

They were settled in the East Tuipui Assembly Constituency, the report said.

Meanwhile, Young Mizo Association in nearby Wafai village said around 30 people recently entered from Chin State.

The recent influx of Myanmar civil war refugees to Mizoram was mainly from Hakha, Thantlang and nearby villages in Chin State.

Local civil society organizations in India's border state have provided Myanmar refugees with construction materials, like tarpaulins for makeshift shelters in the border area in the southern part of Champai district.

Leaders of Myanmar border villages said more refugees may flee from Chin State to India, and will take shelter in Mizoram due to the recent escalation of armed conflict in Myanmar.

Clashes between the Myanmar military and resistance forces is the main reason for the influx of refugees to India, with the junta carrying out artillery attacks on civilian.

Mizoram has reportedly hosted 31,000 refugee from Myanmar following the coup in Myanmar in February 2021.

# RUSSIAN OIL DELIVERED VIA MYANMAR PIPELINE TO CHINA



Russia, China and Myanmar benefit from the transfer. Photo: AFP

**R**ussia is using Myanmar's pipeline to deliver oil to a refinery in China's Yunnan province, according to a report in Energy Intelligence on 17 April.

As news agencies report, Russia has been seeking new and expanded markets for its crude oil since the European Union imposed an embargo on Russian crude in December in response to Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, now into its second year.

Russia has reportedly been supplying oil to Myanmar since September last year.

Myanmar has maintained friendly ties with Russia, even as both remain under sanctions from Western countries.

This latest report from Energy Intelligence says Myanmar's Kyaukphyu port data shows shipment of Russian oil to China since February 2023, now running at 3 million barrels a month or 70,000 barrels a day.

The Myanmar-China pipeline opened in 2017 as part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) with the aim of reducing China's dependence on the Malacca Strait route.

Security of the pipeline has been an issue for the Myanmar junta that grabbed power in a coup in February 2021. But there appears to be an unwritten agreement that Myanmar resistance forces will not attack the 770-kilometer pipeline that is so important to China.

Beijing appears to have strengthened ties to the illegal Myanmar junta largely to protect its Belt and Road Infrastructure (BRI), investments, and mines in the country. It is unclear whether Beijing is maintaining back-door communication with the National Unity Government (NUG) – a opposition or resistance body partly made up of remnants of the National League for Democracy-led government under Aung San Suu Kyi who during their tenure had a robust relationship with China.



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# SWEAT SHOPS: TEXTILE INDUSTRY'S DARK SIDE



● Yangon's sweat shops provide employment but at what price? Photo: AFP

**T**he deadly consequences of fast fashion were spotlighted a decade ago after 1,138 people were killed when the nine-storey Rana Plaza garment factory collapsed in Bangladesh.

While the tragedy piled pressure on top brands churning out ever-rising mountains of clothes to ensure better standards, abuses in the textile industry continue.

From Myanmar to China to Bangladesh working conditions

can be dire for those workers in the “sweat shops”.

## **FACTORY HELLHOLES**

The collapse of Rana Plaza near the capital Dhaka was the worst in a series of disasters in textile factories in Bangladesh, the world's second-largest garment exporter after China, and other Asian countries.

A year earlier, at least 111 workers were killed in a fire at a textile factory in Dhaka that produced for US retail giant Walmart,

among others, and more than 250 workers died in a blaze in a factory in the Pakistani city of Karachi that produced jeans for German discount chain Kik.

The scale of the disaster at Rana Plaza, which produced clothes for Primark and Benetton, among others, proved a turning point.

Under intense scrutiny, top brands, retailers and trade unions agreed to work together to improve safety conditions in Ban-



gladeshi factories.

About 1,820 factories - accounting for more than 80 percent of exports - have been inspected since.

Most have been declared fully or almost fully safe.

While Bangladesh has had no major textile factory disasters since 2013, such tragedies have continued to occur elsewhere.

Several people have died in fires at illegal garment factories in the Indian capital New Delhi and in Morocco, 28 people died when heavy rain flooded an illegal basement factory in the port city of Tangiers in 2021.

In Myanmar, many workers suffer under poor conditions and from long work hours. Several garment factories have been closed due to the fallout of the Myanmar coup. While international bodies call on global brands to boycott Myanmar, company exits can mean loss of jobs in a dire employment environment.

### **FORCED LABOUR ALLEGATIONS**

China is accused of having interned more than a million Uyghurs, a Muslim minority living in the northwestern Xinjiang region, in political re-education camps and exploiting some of them for forced labour in cotton fields.

Beijing has dismissed the charges, saying it is operating vocational training centres to counter religious extremism.

Global brands including Adidas, Gap, Nike and Puma were drawn into the controversy after it emerged they were using cotton from Xinjiang, which produces a fifth of the world's supply.

In 2021, French mag-

istrates opened an inquiry into claims that four fashion groups, including Uniqlo and the owner of Zara, were complicit in crimes against humanity by profiting from forced labour in Xinjiang.

### **ROCK-BOTTOM WAGES**

The meagre salaries of textile workers in the Indian sub-continent are often flagged, but being paid a pittance to deliver fast fashion is an issue in Europe and the United States, too.

In Britain in 2020 for example, investigations by the NGO Labour Behind the Label and several media outlets found textile workers in the central English town of Leicester were sometimes earning as little as two British pounds (\$2.63) an hour.

Low wages have sparked protests around the world, notably in Asia.

After years of violent, deadly demonstrations in Cambodia, garment workers finally secured a minimum monthly wage that is higher than most other countries in the region. In 2023, it was set at \$200.

### **TOXIC DUMPING GROUNDS**

In the era of fast fashion, the average person buys 60 percent more clothing than 15 years ago, while each item is kept for only half as long, according to the UN in 2022.

A throw-away culture generates growing mountains of waste, much of which ends up in mega dumps in the southern hemisphere.

"Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is dumped in a landfill or burned", said the UN.

The Dandora landfill in Nairobi, for example, receives 4,000 tons of rubbish per day,

according to Changing Markets Foundation.

### **TOP POLLUTER**

The textile industry is also a major polluter, causing between two and eight percent of global carbon emissions, according to the UN in 2022.

It is responsible for 25 percent of the pollution of the world's waters and a third of microplastic discharges into the oceans -- a toxic substance for fish as well as humans.

**AFP.**

# CHINA'S ECONOMY REBOUNDS AFTER ZERO-COVID SCRAPPED



FLASHBACK - A protest in November 2022 in China over the restrictions of the Zero-Covid policy. Photo: AFP

China's economy grew much better than expected in the first three months of the year as the country reopened after the end of Zero-Covid measures, official data showed last week.

The figures were the first snapshot since 2019 of the world's second-largest economy unencumbered by the strict health controls that helped keep the coronavirus in check but battered busi-

nesses and supply chains.

After years of travel restrictions and quarantines, Chinese people in recent months have finally returned to restaurants and started to move around more freely, giving much-needed stimulus to services. The Zero Covid policy received serious pushback and protests from the people and was widely recognized as an impossible way to control the spread of

COVID-19, which may have come from a lab leak in Wuhan, though there is still controversy over its origin and the pandemic as a whole.

According to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the official economic growth figure for January to March was 4.5 percent -- significantly higher than the 3.8 percent predicted by analysts in an AFP poll.



A key driver of the stand-out reading was a bounce in retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, as shoppers and diners once again hit high streets and malls.

Tuesday's NBS report said in the first three months of the year China had faced a "grave and complex international environment as well as arduous tasks to advance reform, development and ensure stability at home", but that economic stability was Beijing's "top priority".

"As a result, a smooth transition in Covid-19 prevention and control to the new phase was secured in a relatively short time," the report said, adding "the production and demand registered a stable recovery, employment and prices".

Beijing's virus-containment policy -- an unstinting regime of strict curbs on the population -- strongly constrained normal economic activity before it was abruptly ditched in December.

The Chinese economy is also beset by a series of other crises, from a debt-laden property sector to flagging consumer confidence, global inflation, the threat of recession elsewhere, and geopolitical tensions with the United States.

Retail sales surged 10.6 percent on-year in March, the biggest increase since June 2021, though industrial production climbed 3.9 percent last month, an improvement from January-February but below analysts' expectations of 4.4 percent.

### **"SWEET SPOT"**

"Consumption saw a recovery during the first quarter partly because of pent-up demand but is

not yet back on pre-pandemic levels," Teeuwe Mevissen, an analyst at RaboBank, said.

"Loss in household wealth due to the real estate crisis and loss of household income during the pandemic are factors why consumers have not spent more."

Iris Pang, the chief economist for Greater China at ING, said the primary reason for the faster-than-expected growth was the much stronger growth in retail sales, which were "mainly boosted by catering".

And according to Ting Lu, Chief China Economist at Nomura, there was more growth expected in April to June as China heads into "another quarter in the sweet spot".

"Due to a sharp drop in the comparison bases as a result of the Shanghai lockdown last year amid ongoing strength in the in-person services sector, we expect year-on-year GDP growth to rebound further in the second quarter," he said.

### **MODEST GROWTH TARGET**

China's economy grew just three percent in the whole of last year, one of its weakest performances in decades.

It saw 4.8 percent expansion in the first quarter of 2022, though that slowed to just 2.9 percent in the final three months of the year.

The government has set a comparatively modest growth target of around five percent this year, a goal the country's Premier Li Qiang has warned could be hard to achieve.

An AFP poll of analysts predicted that the Chinese economy would grow by an average of

5.3 percent this year, roughly in line with the International Monetary Fund's 5.2 percent forecast.

Still, experts have warned that wider global trends could yet weigh on China's recovery.

Ken Cheung at Mizuho Bank said domestic consumption "proved to be the pillar" behind the economic improvement, but "industrial production was disappointing given the strong rebound in exports growth".

He added it will "take time for (a) business confidence recovery, which requires translating the credit expansion into money flow to support real economic activities".

**AFP.**

# INDIA POPULATION TO SURPASS CHINA MID-YEAR: UN

India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country by the end of June, UN estimates showed last week, posing huge challenges to a nation with creaking infrastructure and insufficient jobs for millions of young people.

The seismic shift will see India's population hit 1.4286 billion - almost three million more than China's 1.4257 billion - at mid-year, the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population report forecast.

China has generally been regarded as the world's most populous country since the fall of the Roman Empire but last year its population shrank for the first time since 1960, while India's has continued to rise.

The South Asian giant spreads from the Himalayas to the beaches of Kerala, with 22 official languages, and nearly half its inhabitants are under 25.

The country faces huge challenges providing

electricity, food and housing for its growing population, with many of its massive cities already struggling with water shortages, air and water pollution, and packed slums.

According to the Pew Research Centre, the number of people in India has grown by more than one billion since 1950, the year the UN began gathering population data.

China ended its strict "one-child policy", imposed in the 1980s amid overpopulation fears, in 2016 and started letting couples have three children in 2021.

Many blame its falling birth rates on the soaring cost of living, as well as the growing number of women going into the workforce and seeking higher education.

China said on Wednesday that it "implements a national strategy to actively respond to population ageing, promotes the three-child birth policy and sup-





porting measures, and actively responds to changes in population development”.

“China’s demographic dividend has not disappeared, the talent dividend is taking shape, and development momentum remains strong,” said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

## **8 BILLION**

India has no recent official population data because it has not conducted a census since 2011, with a follow-up in 2021 delayed by the Covid pandemic.

The initiative is now bogged down by logistical hurdles, making it unlikely the massive exercise will begin anytime soon. Some accuse the government of deliberately delaying the count until after national elections next year.

The census will shine a spotlight on how the Indian economy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is struggling to provide jobs for the millions of young people entering the job market every year.

The new UN report also estimated that the global population will have hit 8.045 billion by mid-

2023, by which time almost one in five people on the planet will be Indian.

Other countries, mostly in Europe and Asia, can expect a demographic slump over the coming decades, according to other UN figures published last July.

In Africa, the continent’s population is expected to rise from 1.4 to 3.9 billion inhabitants by 2100, with about 38 percent of Earth dwellers living there, compared to around 18 percent today.

The population of the entire planet, meanwhile, is only expected to decline in the 2090s, after peaking at 10.4 billion, according to the UN.

## **SLEEPING GIANT**

India is on the frontlines of the effects of climate change, but generates most of its electricity from coal and its efforts will be vital in the global fight to reduce carbon emissions.

The nuclear-armed nation has started to become more assertive on the world stage, pushing for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Many Western countries were banking on the world’s largest democracy, already a member of the US-led Quad alliance, becoming more of a geopolitical counterweight to China.

But it also co-founded the BRICS grouping with Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa to challenge the dominant US- and European-led global governance structures, and is a member of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization alongside Moscow and Beijing.

New Delhi has resisted Western pressure to freeze out Moscow, opting instead to strengthen trade ties with its long-standing ally and ramping up imports of Russian oil.

**AFP**



India’s economy is growing - and so is its population. Photo: AFP

# 'HOTTER AND HOTTER': SWATHES OF ASIA SWEAT IN HEATWAVE

**S**weltering under a blistering sun, people across South and Southeast Asia have been taking cover beneath any shelter they can find as they pray for cooling rains with record temperatures hitting the region.

Bangladesh saw its highest temperature for almost 60 years in the past week, while in India at least 13 people died from heatstroke along with two in Thailand, according to local media.

"It's hotter and hotter every year," said Mikako Nicholls, shielding herself from the blazing rays with an umbrella near Bangkok's central Lumpini Park on Wednesday.

Scientists say global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, with a recent report from the UN's

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning that "every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards".

Nicholls said Bangkok's warmer spell was the hottest she had experienced in five years in the capital, and she was trying to stay indoors or in the shade.

Thailand's Meteorological Department said Wednesday that temperatures hit a record-equalling 44.6 degrees Celsius (112 Fahrenheit) in the western province of Tak on April 15, warning that the baking weather would continue into next week.

"It's possible that this year's heat might have been exacerbated due to human actions," said deputy director-general Thanasit Iamananchai.

The kingdom typically endures a spell of hot-





ter weather preceding the rainy season, but the sun has shown an extra intensity this time around.

“This year’s record heat in Thailand, China and South Asia is a clear climate trend and will cause public health challenges for years to come,” said scientist Fahad Saeed, regional lead for climate policy institute Climate Analytics.

He warned that soaring temperatures were a result of climate change -- and that the impact on vulnerable populations would be dire.

“The extreme heat that we’ve witnessed over the last few days will hit the poor the hardest,” said Saeed, based in Pakistan.

“It may even be life threatening for those without access to cooling or adequate shelter.”

A similar story played out in Myanmar where Ko Thet Aung, a taxi driver in the country’s commercial capital Yangon, said the heat was worse than in previous years.

“I can’t drive if the temperature is too hot during the day,” said the 42-year-old.

### “PRAYERS FOR RAIN”

In Bangladesh hundreds gathered in the capital Dhaka this week to pray for rain after temperatures hit 40.6 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit) - the highest recorded since the 1960s.

“They held prayers for rain. They also held prayers for easing the temperature and protection from the heatwave,” local police chief Abul Kalam Azad told AFP.

The low-lying country is being dramatically impacted by climate change, enduring devastating flooding and ever-more erratic rainfall.

Neighbouring India saw at least 13 people die from heatstroke at an awards event held outside in the west of the country on Sunday.

It came as the nation’s weather authority said parts of northern and eastern India were experiencing temperatures roughly three to four degrees above normal.

Urmila Das, a housewife in the northwestern city of Guwahati, said her family were suffering under the extreme conditions.

“We are not used to this kind of heat,” the 42-year-old said, adding that she had not sent her children to school as a precaution.

“Normally, we have rains in this part of the region from mid-March but there is no rain this year. It is very difficult.”

Contract labourer Sumu Bezbaruah, who works outside mostly delivering supplies to shops, said the heat was overwhelming.

“It has become very difficult to travel and deliver the goods,” he said.

“I do not remember seeing this kind of weather in the recent past.”

AFP



A street vendor puts up with the heat as he serves a customer in Bangkok. Photo: AFP

# AIR QUALITY PLUMMETS IN BANGLADESH, MYANMAR, NEPAL AND PARTS OF INDIA

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is deeply concerned about the deteriorating air quality in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and parts of India.

Recent data from its experts reveal hazardous levels of particulate matter (PM), posing a severe risk to human health.

In Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, PM2.5 levels exceeded 205 µg/m<sup>3</sup> on 11 April 2023, with PM10 levels reaching a staggering 430 µg/m<sup>3</sup> on 13 April 2023.

ICIMOD says that these alarming data points highlight the urgent need for action to address the issue.

Air pollution poses severe threats to human health – contributing to neonatal morbidity, stunting and learning delays in children, and with prolonged exposure linked to respiratory illnesses, heart diseases, and other health complications, especially for vulnerable populations.

“Worldwide, air pollution is responsible for more deaths annually than COVID-19 to date,” says Dr Bhupesh Adhikary, Senior Air Quality Specialist, ICIMOD. “Despite this catastrophic death toll, we aren't tackling this invisible killer with anything like the same energy. It's time we put efforts to improve air quality on a war footing. The good news is that we know what is causing air pollution in our region, and how to make rapid progress to reduce our exposure to pollutants. We urge Governments, donors and NGOs to work with us to build a coalition to really drive action

on clean air.”

The spike in air pollution in the region is due to an increase in forest fires, which are increasing in number and severity due to climate change, and residential biomass burning. As well as the impacts to human health, pollutants cause extensive damage to the region's rich biodiversity and accelerate climate impacts.

Rising temperatures are causing glaciers in the region to melt at an alarming rate: if global warming exceeds 2°C, it will result in the loss of 50% of the glaciers in the region, leading to changes in river flows which can have serious consequences for freshwater biodiversity, agriculture, drinking water, and other human needs.

Black carbon or soot emitted from forest fires and burning crop residues after harvest can accelerate the melting of high mountain glaciers, further contributing to their decline.

ICIMOD works with its partners to generate both ground-based observation data and satellite/model-based data on air quality. Such evidence is critical for policy formulation and implementation.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), is a regional knowledge development and learning centre serving the eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan – and based in Kathmandu, Nepal.





● Checking air quality in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Photo: AFP



## 'LET US LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES', UN CHIEF DECLARES

In his address marking the opening of the 2023 session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) on Monday, UN Secretary-General António Guterres drew attention to the ways that indigenous peoples are denied their human rights, and saluted them for the pioneering role they play in efforts to protect nature and preserve biodiversity.

Indigenous peoples “hold many of the solutions to the climate crisis and are guardians of the world’s biodiversity,” in places as varied as the Amazon, the Sahel, and the Himalayas, said Mr. Guterres.

### **EXPLOITATION, EVICTIONS**

The UN chief acknowledged that indigenous peoples struggle to adapt to the climate crisis, and face the exploitation of their resource-rich territories, eviction from their ancestral lands, and physical attacks.

The Secretary-General pointed to the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, which has led to broader participation of Indigenous Peoples in the work of the organization, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“The United Nations is committed to keep promoting the rights of Indigenous Peoples in policies and programming at all levels and amplifying your voices,” declared the UN chief. “Let us learn from and embrace the experiences of indigenous peoples.”

Darío Mejía Montalvo, an indigenous member of the Zenú community in the Colombian Caribbean, and president of the UNPFII, noted the arduous struggle faced by indigenous people.

### **DEBT TO RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

“Those who came before us on this path,” he said, in remarks delivered during the opening session, “were able to open up the doors of the United Nations, thanks to their strength.

“I pay tribute to the leaders of indigenous peoples and allies who have lost their lives, defending their peoples and their territories. This Forum belongs to them.”

Mr. Montalvo, describing the Forum as the greatest meeting of cultural and political diversity in the world, said that indigenous peoples are prepared to offer solutions to the climate crisis, and share their experiences.

### **INDIGENOUS MUST AT THE TABLE**

“The issues of climate change and biodiversity cannot be resolved without the real and effective participation of indigenous peoples,” he argued, adding that energy transition policies must take indigenous peoples into account from the very beginning.

“Urgent climate action involves stopping the persecution, homicide and criminalization of indigenous brothers and sisters and their actions defending human rights and the rights of nature,” declared Mr. Montalvo.





Photo: UN News

### **‘ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE, NURTURED OVER CENTURIES’**

The President of the General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi, declared that the world is still paying the price for taking such a long time to learn from indigenous peoples, about the ways in which the health of the planet and the health of people are intrinsically linked.

Mr. Kőrösi said that the UN needs to understand the factors impacting the health and well-being of indigenous peoples, and address them in a holistic and rights-based manner.

“Your peoples’ ancestral knowledge, nurtured over centuries, has paved the way for the development of many modern medicines,” argued the General Assembly President. “As guardians of 80 per cent of the world’s biodiversity, you hold traditional proficiency in how to adapt, mitigate and reduce climate risks.”

Mr. Kőrösi invited delegates to bolster the international community’s quest for solutions that promote peace, ensure the protection of human rights and foster sustainable development.

Lachezara Stoeva, the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), noted that

the theme for this year’s session – “Indigenous Peoples, human health, planetary and territorial health, and climate change: a rights-based approach” – holds particular relevance for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it emphasizes the connections between human health and the health of the planet.

“Climate action, and good health and well-being, are two core goals of the 2030 Agenda,” said Ms. Stoeva. “And, as we know, the SDGs are deeply interconnected. A lack of progress on one Goal hinders progress on all the others.”

The ECOSOC President praised the improved collaboration between the Permanent Forum and other ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, such as the UN Forum on Forests and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, and looked forward to the continued participation of Indigenous youth at the Youth Forum, together with the Indigenous Youth caucus, whose voices and proposals, she said, can transform the world into a fairer, greener and more sustainable place.

*Courtesy of UN News*



## KARENNI STATE

### *IDPs in Demoso Township facing food shortages*

Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in western Demoso Township, Karenni State, have been facing shortages of rice and other basic food supplies for the last two months, according to volunteers assisting them.

They said that about 2,200 IDPs in seven camps are in urgent need of rice and food supplies.

“They are in dire need of food supplies. When any camp receives two or three rice bags from the donors, they have to share the rice in cans for each family. We witnessed their difficulties at some camps on a one-day visit. Similar problems are likely to occur at other camps”, said one of the volunteers.

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) give money to the IDPs so that they can buy food, but unfortunately, it is insufficient for the IDPs to properly feed themselves.

To make matters worse the junta is making it hard to get supplies to the IDPs.

“The Military Council forces are conducting arrests and inspections of food and medicine transports in Karenni State, so even if you have money, it is difficult to buy food”, said a representative of an IDP charity.

The Medic Unit - Demoso, which provid-

ed health care to more than 50 IDPs on 1 April, announced that high blood pressure, diabetes and diarrhea are common among IDPs in the western part of Demoso.

The Karenni Army (KA), and Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) joint forces are fighting against the military in Demoso Township.

There has been regular fighting in the east of Demoso Township since last March and there are still columns of junta troops in the area.

“The conflict is ongoing every day. Heavy artillery is being used by the military council side”, said an official from the KNDF Central News and Information Department.

The Karenni State IDP Assistance Network reported at the end of February 2023 that there were over 21,000 IDPs in Demoso’s western region and over 200,000 IDPs in all of Karenni State.

## KAREN STATE

### *Over 400 Myanmar junta soldiers killed in KNU areas during March*

422 Myanmar junta soldiers were killed and 258 were injured in 373 armed conflicts in areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), during the month of March 2023.

The losses came in fighting against the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) and local people’s de-





Photo: Matan Levanon

fence forces (PDFs) During the same period seven soldiers from the KNLA and its allies were killed and a further 31 were injured.

The figures were released by the Central Headquarters of the KNLA.

A military source from KNU Brigade 2 said that during March there had been an increase in the number of conflicts in the area and the junta had carried out more artillery attacks and air strikes that had injured many civilians.

“Armed clashes intensified in the KNU Brigade 2 area. More heavy weapons were fired into the villages by military troops”, the source said.

He said that the junta had also fired heavy weapons at civilian targets in the KNU Brigade (3) area.

Out of the areas covered, Hpapun (Mutraw) District in the KNU Brigade 5 area saw the most fighting in March with a total of 190 armed clashes happening in the area, where the KNU re-took control of its Maekhahta camp from the junta, who had previously captured it.

## SHAN STATE

### *75 junta soldiers killed in 10 days of fighting on Mandalay-Shan border*

About 75 Myanmar junta soldiers were killed and many others were injured during 10 days of fighting in the border area between Mandalay Region and

Shan State, according to the Mandalay People's Defence Force (PDF).

The fighting took place in the border areas between Pyin Oo Lwin Township in Mandalay Region and Nawngkhio Township in northern Shan State from 5 to 14 April.

Seven local PDF fighters were killed in the fighting and a further 15 were injured, according to the Mandalay PDF.

It said that up to 900 junta troops, supported by fighters from the Nawngkhio militia group fought against the defence forces.

A Mandalay PDF member said: “The fighting has been intensifying until now. It has been ongoing from 5 to 16 April.” He added that during the fighting the junta had conducted 27 airstrikes in the area, using YAK-130 aircraft, SU-30 and Mi-35 helicopters.

At the beginning of the fighting, in Thanbo Village in Nawngkhio Township, two children were killed and three other villagers were injured when the junta fired heavy weapons at the village on 5 April.

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## MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF, THAI DEPUTY PM DISCUSS COMBATING ILLEGAL ARMS TRADE

According to Myanmar's state-controlled media, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the country's junta chief, recently met with Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Don Pramudwinai, in Nay Pyi Taw to discuss ways to combat illegal arms trade.

However, no specific details were provided by Myanmar's state-controlled media on the junta's plans to tackle this issue.

Observers of Myanmar's political climate suggest that the junta is taking an aggressive stance against PDFs (People's Defense Forces) and aiming to block the primary route of arms and ammunition.

The junta believes that the weapons used by armed resistance groups enter the country through the Thai-Myanmar border. This assumption is partly supported by the intense clash between the junta's troops and the combined forces of PDF and ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs) in early April along the Thai-Myanmar border.

# HEINEKEN, CARLSBERG AND THAIBEV TAX PAYMENTS BANKROLLING MYANMAR JUNTA

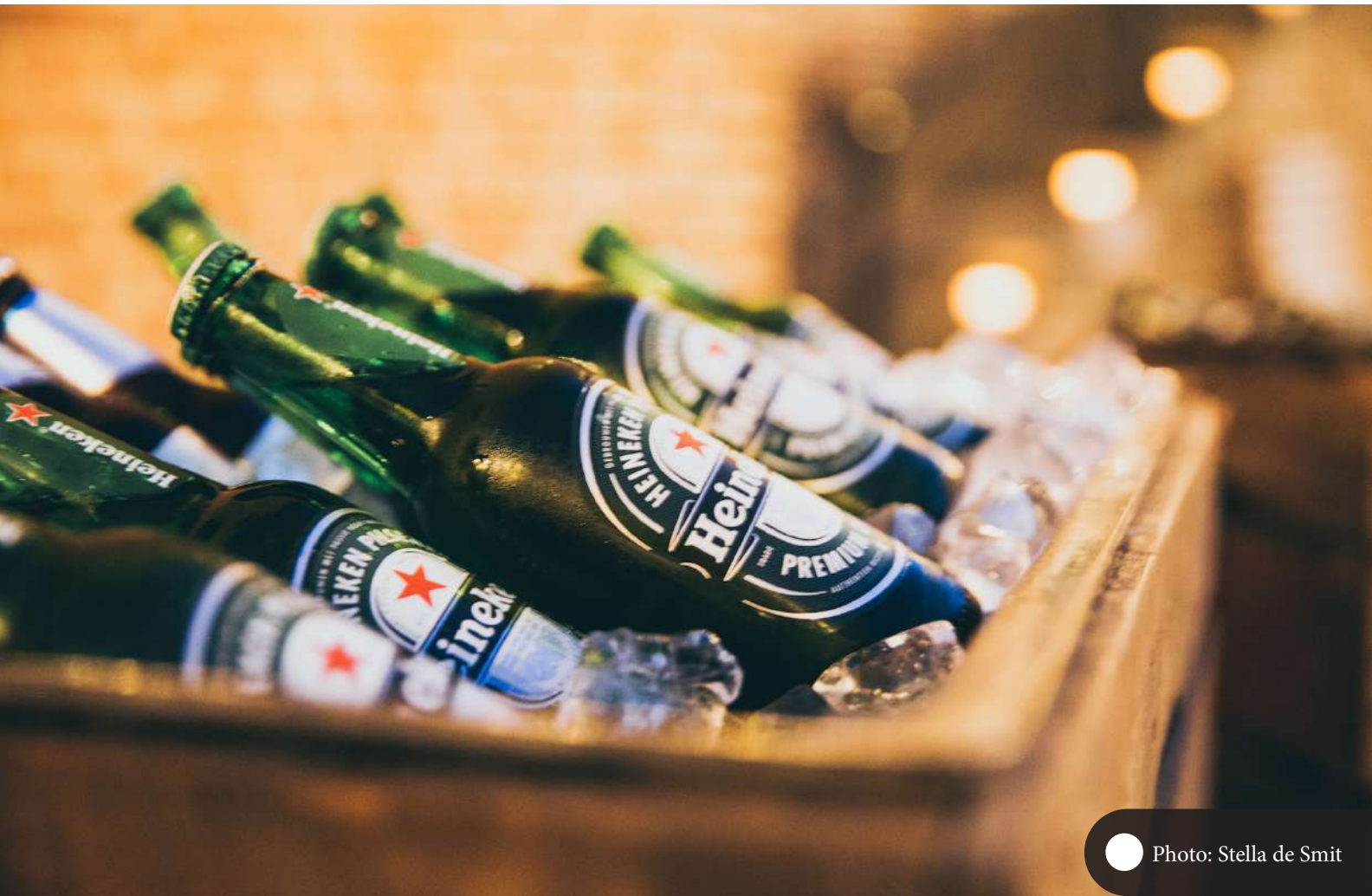


Photo: Stella de Smit

**B**usinesses owned by the family of deceased crony Thein Tun and their foreign partners Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev are paying huge sums in tax to the Myanmar junta from their drink businesses, according to an investigation of tax filings released by Distributed Denial of Secrets.

Campaign group Justice For Myanmar has called on the businesses to follow the guidance of the National Unity Government and their international human rights responsibilities, and end payments to the military junta.

An investigation of the tax filings released by Distributed Denial of Secrets by Justice For Myanmar has revealed that drinks giants Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev are paying tens of millions of dollars in

tax to the Myanmar military junta.

The foreign companies are partnered with the family of the deceased crony Thein Tun, who controlled Myanma Golden Star Group with his son, Thant Zin Tun.

Myanma Golden Star Group produces beer with Carlsberg and soft drinks with a subsidiary of LOTTE Corporation.

Thein Tun's daughter, Mar Mar Tun and son-in-law, Aung Moe Kyaw, are the local partners of Heineken and Thai Beverage (ThaiBev). ThaiBev controls Grand Royal Group.

An analysis of available tax filings from October to December 2021 show that Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev subsidiaries paid 49.9 billion kyats



in Specific Goods Tax (SGT) alone to the military junta, equivalent to US\$27.6 million based on average exchange rates from the Central Bank of Myanmar, which is illegally under junta control.

SGT is a tax on the production and import of alcohol and other products that is applied to beer at a rate of 60% and a sliding scale for spirits, depending on the price level.

Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev also paid commercial tax and income tax to the junta, which totalled 12.6 billion kyats, equivalent to US\$7 million, in the same period.

Spread across a year, ThaiBev, Heineken and Carlsberg companies in Myanmar could be paying as much as 250 billion kyat or US\$155 million in taxes to the junta, bankrolling its international crimes.

LOTTE, which is not subject to SGT, pays smaller amounts of tax and is also responsible for lease payments to the Myanmar Army as part of its hotel subsidiary's investment in a hotel development with POSCO International.

Payments from these corporations aid the junta as it wages a campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar, increasingly relying on its air force to carry out indiscriminate attacks.

On 11 April, the junta launched an indiscriminate aerial attack against people gathered at an event in Pazigy Village, Sagaing, killing at least 168 people, weeks after the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution that called on the Myanmar military to immediately cease all air strikes.

An October 2022 air strike against a concert in Kachin State killed over 80 people. Large tax payments from the drink giants help the junta buy arms, fuel and equipment and pay soldiers, supporting ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Justice For Myanmar calls on ThaiBev, Heineken, Carlsberg and LOTTE to follow the guidance of the National Unity Government and their international human rights responsibilities, and end payments to the military junta.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev are

paying the equivalent of tens of millions of dollars in taxes annually to the Myanmar military junta, which is a terrorist organisation that has been committing war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Myanmar with total impunity.

"The illegal junta desperately needs revenue to sustain its campaign of murder and destruction, and these taxes from drink giants help fund the bombs, bullets and jet fuel the junta needs to attack the people.

"Since there is a specific goods tax for beer and spirits, the junta gets a massive share of the revenues of Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev in Myanmar.

"These are funds that belong to the people of Myanmar and should be paid to the National Unity Government (NUG), which is the legitimate government. Instead, Heineken, Carlsberg, ThaiBev and LOTTE are ignoring the NUG's guidance and bankrolling the illegal junta, making themselves complicit in its international crimes and undermining democracy.

"It is also concerning that the companies are partnered with the Thein Tun family, who have deep links to the Myanmar military, evidence of Heineken, Carlsberg, ThaiBev and LOTTE's historic human rights due diligence failures in Myanmar.

"We call on Heineken, Carlsberg, ThaiBev and LOTTE to fulfil their international obligations under the OECD Guidelines and UN Guiding Principles, and end their substantial payments to the military junta, which is a terrorist organisation."

# THAI PTTEP PLANS TO RELAUNCH ZAWTIKA OFFSHORE GAS PROJECT IN MYANMAR



**T**hai PTT's subsidiary PTTEP International (PTTEPI) reportedly plans to relaunch the Zawtika offshore gas project in Mottama (Martaban) bay in Myanmar.

Thailand's PTTEP is pushing ahead with the project despite facing criticism, reports Upstream Online in a recent report.

According to junta-run media, the Military Council reported that PTTEP conducted a Aung Thinkha development plan, exploration and test drilling work in M-3 Block in offshore Mottama in February 2022.

PTTEP invested an 80% stake in the M-3 Block as an operator and it became 100% stakes holder after the MOECO Mitsui Oil Exploration Company Ltd. which owned a 20% stake, withdrew their investment.

Previously PTTEP said that they would produce an average of 324 cubic feet of gas per day from the Zawtika gas project from 2019 to 2023 and they expected to increase their production to 400 cubic feet of gas per day in 2024.

After the 2021 military coup in Myanmar two international energy giants PTT owned by Thailand and the South Korea based POSCO are still working in Myanmar. PTTEP is invested in Yadana and POSCO is invested in the Shwe gas project.

All other international energy companies which invested in the Yetagon offshore gas and oil projects in the Andaman Sea announced in April that they would leave these projects permanently.

Amid the deteriorating situation on all fronts after the military coup in Myanmar the international energy giants such as Total from France and Unocal and Chevron from US stopped their operations and left Myanmar.

Natural gas projects in Myanmar provide foreign exchange of up to over US\$1 billion every year to the Military Council. The energy sector is the main foreign exchange earning source for the Military Council.

Most of these gas export earnings come from gas pipelines connected with Thailand and China.



# MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER UPBEAT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH IF PEOPLE ‘STRIVE MORE’



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

**M**yanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing claims Myanmar’s economy would be higher than in previous years, speaking last week in a Myanmar New Year message.

“I firmly believe that if people strive for exporting greater products, this year’s economic development will be higher than the previous years,” he said, according to local media.

“Reopening border trade to some extent contributed to running industries and rising about plus 3 per cent for the State GDP in 2023 though Myanmar faced economic hardships in 2021,” he said in his New Year message.

However, Min Aung Hlaing’s stated optimism conflicts with international assessments.

The World Bank said in its latest report that the Myanmar economy would not likely to see the growth because of the government’s inconsistent rules and regulations, ongoing violence arising out of the military coup, worsening power outages and policy weaknesses.

Even though the military leader reiterated, “It is necessary to operate firm businesses as well as to encourage domestic manufacturing for booming the State economy. The government is encouraging MSME businesses.”

On the other hand, in reality, these MSME businesses are facing a lot of difficulties to continue running their businesses due to electricity shortages, rising costs of raw materials, fuel and general expenses which are soaring sharply.

During the past two years after the military coup, Myanmar economy declined sharply because of conflicts in the country and also the report issued by the World Bank on 31 March says, “GDP is projected to grow by a modest 3 percent in the year ending September 2023.”

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## CARLSBERG INVESTIGATES FORMER TIES TO MYANMAR'S MILITARY REGIME AFTER LEAKED DOCUMENTS

Carlsberg, the Danish multinational brewer, has launched an internal investigation into allegations that it had ties to the previous military regime in Myanmar, years after it announced it would no longer do business in the country, reported Investment Monitor.

Carlsberg stated that it withdrew from Myanmar in 1996 and later returned officially in 2012, after the former Myanmar military junta led by Than Shwe dissolved in 2010.

In April this year, documents leaked by the non-profit organization Distributed Denial of Secrets claimed that Carlsberg used a proxy company, Brewinvest, to form a joint venture (JV) with two military-linked companies, Myanmar Economic Corporation and Myanma Golden Star, to create Dagon Beverages, after the brewer had exited the Myanmar market.

Dagon Beverages brewed and sold Skol beer in Myanmar, a brand Carlsberg still owns today.

Carlsberg's spokesperson stated, "In relation to the questions concerning the period 1997 to 2011, we take these allegations very seriously. We have therefore launched an internal investigation to uncover all facts related to that period and the actions related to Myanmar. We will come back with the conclusions of the investigation when finalized."

## RICE PRICES SOAR IN MYANMAR AMID HIGH DEMAND AND LOW SUPPLY; JUNTA PLANS TO INCREASE EXPORTS

The prices of rice have been soaring in Myanmar in late April, according to local news outlets.

Rice traders attribute that to high demand in both export and domestic markets, coupled with lower-than-normal supply to rice commodity exchanges. The rice mills are not running at full capacity due to power shortages, resulting in low supply in the domestic rice market.

Meanwhile, the military junta has increased rice exports to earn more foreign exchange, with over US\$800 million earned from exporting 2.1 million tons of rice in the 2021-22 fiscal year. Despite the soaring prices, the junta has announced plans to export 2.2 million tons of rice and expects to earn US\$853 million in the 2022-23 fiscal year.



# IN FOCUS







## MAKING MERIT

People praying in Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon as their country goes through crisis.

Photo: AFP



## BURMA CHILDREN MEDICAL FUND SEEKS HELP



Photo: BCMF

The Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF) is seeking help as the Myanmar crisis continues.

The BCMF was established in 2006 in response to the increasing number of patients on the Thai- Burma border who required surgery that was not available at local clinics or hospitals. Before BCMF was established, people who needed surgery could only have their symptoms treated. Without the necessary surgery their lives were either severely incapacitated or they died prematurely. BCMF works to give these patients a chance to a healthy life by funding their medical treatment and providing a range of support services before, during, and after treatment.

Every Thursday, with the cooperation of the Thai authorities, a van leaves BCMF's office in Mae Sot with a group of patients and their caregivers and heads for Chiang Mai, 300 miles away. Once in Chiang Mai, the patients are admitted to Chiang Mai Hospital with costs paid by BCMF. Their caregivers stay in a 'safe house', essentially a hostel from which they can support their child. The high level of trust between

local Thai authorities and BCMF is based on scrupulous record keeping and a strong spirit of cooperation, which ensures the safe transport of patients from Mae Sot to Chiang Mai.

The recent political changes in Burma have meant very little in the lives of ordinary Burmese, particularly in relation to health care. Even with the latest round of reforms in Burma, the regime's current budget reflects the fact that, despite modest increases, health care spending remains low. In 2013, 3.9% of the country's total budget was dedicated to health care spending.

As a result, very little has changed on the ground for BCMF as we continue to see patients coming in large numbers seeking treatment due to the state of the Burmese health system. There are few Burmese hospitals that are able to provide treatment for complex cases, and at those facilities that do offer care, treatment continues to be cost-prohibitive for many patients.





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