

— CYCLONE MOCHA WREAKS HAVOC —

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LESSONS FROM DEADLY CYCLONE NARGIS AS CYCLONE MOCHA MOP-UP GETS UNDERWAY

As the Myanmar authorities and local and international humanitarian groups reach out to the vulnerable in a large swathe of northwestern Myanmar in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, it is gradually becoming clear that some of the painful lessons of the 2008 Cyclone Nargis have been learnt.

Consider the stark statistics. Cyclone Nargis killed over 130,000 people. Cyclone Mocha killed several hundred, although the full death tally has yet to come in.

Both cyclones were said to be Category 4 storms, packing similar strength winds, though Nargis appears to have covered a larger swathe of the country and at least anecdotally was more severe in its physical destruction.

All this raises the question as to whether the Myanmar authorities, NGOs and humanitarian groups took the right steps this time round? After all, Cyclone Nargis – and its mismanagement – was a horrifying wake-up call 15 years ago.

The answer to the question is both yes and no, at least in the immediate aftermath as people begin to clean up.

The obvious positive this time round was the action taken to evacuate people and baton down, with most people aware that the storm was coming due to the actions of the authorities and NGO groups – and the widespread ownership of mobile phones and social media that helped inform the citizenry, except though in areas such as Sagaing and Chin where the junta has blocked access to the internet for two years now.

Tens of thousands of people in vulnerable areas were evacuated or took it upon themselves to move voluntarily to safety, indicating that people thought it was better to be safe than sorry as Cyclone Mocha barreled towards them. Sensible move.

At this point in time, the total death toll from Cyclone Mocha is not in. From a death toll of five, to 39, to 81, to hundreds, the toll appears substantially different compared with the carnage that was Cyclone Nargis. While we will have to wait a few more days to get the final death tally, a few hundred dead from Mocha can be considered to be far better than 130,000 toll from Nargis.

Now the big challenge is to provide enough food, medicine and shelter for those negatively affected.

Even the United Nations has expressed concern that their humanitarian coffers are only partially funded. And NGOs are concerned that internally displaced people (IDPs) – particularly in active war zones – will be at particular risk.

Key elements are at play that indicate the Myanmar junta has been using

Cyclone Mocha and its aftermath as a tool in their war against their people. This is clear from their actions – or their failure to act. For example, in Sagaing region, just as the rains and winds were coming in on 14 May, junta soldiers were shelling villages, as they continued their battle against the Spring Revolution resistance. And the junta failed to evacuate Rohingya IDPs from low-lying camps in Rakhine, resulting in a death toll possibly in the hundreds – mostly women and children – who were swept away in the floods.

Of course, the majority of the people including in large parts of Rakhine State – the worst hit – did not expect the military regime to help them based on their past experience and took care of themselves with whatever came from the regime but also from their own local authorities, such as Arakan Army in Rakhine State and the National Unity Government (NUG) and PDFs in conflict areas such as Sagaing and Chin.

What is clear is that the State Administration Council (SAC) and its ministries did little or nothing to set up temporary shelters and there are questions over the humanitarian funding they publicized.

The SAC said it raised more than MMK 100,000 lakhs and donated MMK 70,000 lakhs to their own Rakhine government but do we know who contributed this money and there are questions over transparency and who will benefit. Given the tradition of discrimination and militarization, it can be expected that the money will be used for their own political and military purposes in Rakhine and elsewhere.

Then there is the question of aid from INGOs and NGOs based in Myanmar. Will they step out of their comfort zone to go against the wishes of the SAC and provide aid to such areas in need as Sagaing and the Chin and Kachin states? Will this mean support only for Rakhine and to the areas the SAC prescribe?

Given these concerns, have lessons really been learnt from Cyclone Nargis? Yes, for the majority. But for a vast swathe of people living in areas of resistance, or the Rohingya living in camps, yet again a natural disaster is being politicized by the Naypyidaw hierarchy in their ivory tower to decide who lives and who dies and who they deign worthy to receive humanitarian handouts.

As the clean-up and humanitarian aid delivery moves ahead, chances are the junta will block or hinder help being given to those in the heart of the conflict zones, and to certain IDP camps where the inhabitants do not fit the junta's guidelines for citizenship.

Watch carefully in the coming days and weeks as this hateful division plays out.

EDITORIAL

mizzima WEEKLY

Editor In-Chief and Managing Director
Soe Myint

Contributors
Sai Wansai,
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

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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.

Contact: Mizzima Media Group
Email: sm@mizzima.com
Phone: +95-9421010100

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IN FOCUS





BEFORE THE STORM

A fisherman relaxes and speaks on the phone on his boat on the riverside in Yangon ahead of Cyclone Mocha that brought heavy rains and wind to Yangon, in addition to the onslaught in north-western Myanmar.

Photo: EPA

GRENADE ATTACK ON AYEYARWADY REGION POLICE STATION

Resistance forces from the Ayeyarwaddy Region Sub-Military Regional Command fired 40mm grenades from M79 grenade launchers at Bogale Police Station in Ayeyarwady Region at about 6:30 p.m. on 6 May.

When the grenades landed loud explosions were heard. They were followed by about 20 gunshots fired in retaliation from the police station. Casualties at the police station are currently unknown.

“We started by launching two 40 mm grenades. The police returned fire with their own weapons, but we managed to flee unharmed. We are still looking into the damage inside the police station”, said an Ayeyarwady Region Sub-Military Regional Command representative.

He explained that the Bogale Police Station Chief and his officers have been oppressing the local populace in various ways, including detaining people on suspicion of being People’s Defence Force (PDF) members, demanding money, threatening the local

community and sexually assaulting unjustly detained prisoners.

Ayeyarwady Region Sub-Military Regional Command was formed by local and township people’s defence forces (PDFs), urban guerrilla groups and special task forces from Ayeyarwady Region in July 2022. It was formed under guidance from the National Unity Government (NUG) shadow government’s Ministry of Defence, with a mission to resist the junta in Ayeyarwady Region.

The groups from Ayeyarwady Region Sub-Military Regional Command involved in the attack on the police station were Ayeyarwaddy Dolphin Defence Force (Mawgyun), the Bogale Dolphin Defence Force, and the Mawlamyine Kyun Township People’s Defence Force.

Junta soldiers and police officers are currently carrying out searches and arresting people on suspicion of carrying out the attack, according to local residents.

4,000 FLEE IMPENDING CYCLONE IN AYEYARWADY

4,000 people have moved from low-lying villages to Labutta Town in Ayeyarwady Region as a precaution against an impending cyclone, according to residents in Labutta Town.

Residents from coastal villages in Labutta Township and Pyinsalu Sub-Township started arriving in Labutta Town on 7 May. They are currently sheltering in monasteries and schools, according to a volunteer assisting the evacuees.

He explained that there are cyclone shelters in the low-lying areas of Labutta Township, but not enough to protect all the residents, so people are taking shelter in Labutta Town.

He said: “Cyclone evacuees have been arriving since 7 May. Because Cyclone Nargis was such a disaster last time, they planned to avoid it [the cyclone] this time. Locals who are unable to travel to town are also seeking shelter in highland communities.”

When he was asked about the areas that were worst hit by Cyclone Nargis said that there were no longer people in the areas of Ngapudaw Township that were some of the places worst hit by Cyclone Nargis

because following the cyclone they had moved to live on higher ground.

A resident of Asinchaing Village in Ngapudaw Township said: “All the coastal villages relocated to the mountains after Cyclone Nargis. The locals in this area don’t fear the cyclone. Nobody has yet planned to avoid the cyclone because of their only concern is high tides.”

According to volunteers, the military council has yet to visit the locals who have fled to Labutta Town and only a few village and ward administrators are conducting population census polls.

According to a report released by the junta’s Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, a low-pressure region in the Bay of Bengal could become a cyclone on the morning of 10 May and may move through the Bay of Bengal’s eastern central area of the Bay of Bengal before hitting the coastlines of Bangladesh and Myanmar on 12 May.

MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES DISPLACE 7,000 PEOPLE IN SAGAING'S KHIN U TOWNSHIP

The Myanmar Junta Army raided and set fire to villages in Khin U Township, displacing about 7,000 people, on 7 and 8 May.

In the early morning of 7 May, a Military Council column of 200 soldiers marched from Thabeikkyin township in Mandalay region to the eastern part of Khin U Township in Sagaing Region. There, the column torched civilian houses in Kabwet Village around 10:00 a.m. and in the evening, they entered Kotetat Village firing small arms and artillery.

According to the Khin U Township True News Information team, there was a clash between the junta column and local defence forces, resulting in one defence force fighter being killed and another one injured.

One of the True News Information Team said to Mizzima: "As a result of the military column, approximately 3,000 residents of nearby villages, including Kabwet and Kotetat villages, have fled and are in need of assistance."

On the morning of 8 May, more than 70 military council soldiers from Ye U Township to the west and members of the junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militia

based in Ywar Thit Kone Village to the southwest raided villages in the western part of Khin U Township.

"Today [8 May], around 8:00 a.m. Myanmar army soldiers raided Mya Kan Village in the western part of Khin U Township, then they went to Aung Thayar, and are now positioned at Inn Bauk Village. Junta soldiers are firing heavy artillery from Inn Bauk", said the True News Information Team member.

The arrival of the junta forces caused more than 4,000 residents from seven villages in the western part of Khin U township to flee.

"As far as we know, the junta column deployed in the western part of Khin U Township has not yet set fire to the villages, but they have raided houses and taken civilian's belongings. But because the locals haven't been able to return to their homes, we don't yet know what they've lost", said the True News Information Team member.

According to reports, there is insufficient local aid for all the displaced villagers and local civil society organisations have asked for assistance from across the country.

MYANMAR JUNTA EXTORTING TRAVELLERS ON TANINTHARYI HIGHWAY

Myanmar junta forces are illegally taxing and extorting travellers at 37 checkpoints they have set up on the 180-mile-long Tanintharyi Highway in southern Myanmar, according to rights group the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM).

Reliable sources told HURFOM fieldworkers that they believed the extortion was happening because the junta has authorised its soldiers to raise their own funds in the face of inadequate support at both state and regional levels.

"It is as if they their daily incomes are at the lowest level; this means more and more extortions, illegal levying taxes, arbitrary arrests and demanding ransoms from civilians", said a local.

According to one of the cargo drivers HURFOM spoke with on 2 May, they are forced to pay various illegal taxes: "Sometimes the junta extorts us for money and our property. It is all unjust taxation. Imagine how little money we have left after doing our jobs to feed our families", said the 50-year-old truck driver from Ye Township, Mon State.

Even daily road users, such as farmers, rubber plantation workers, and inhabitants, suffer from the junta's actions. A 30-year-old Tavoyan rubber plantation farmer from a village in Yebyu Township told reporters:

"We have to encounter thieves and criminals in our daily life while crossing their checkpoints and security gates."

Before the coup, there were only seven tollgates for road tax on the Tanintharyi Highway. After the coup, the junta occupied all these tollgates for security reasons and installed another 30 tollgates and checkpoints along the road to the South.

"We have been in this living hell for over two years. Everything has collapsed, and we are suffering under the military's boots. On top of that, we face these kinds of robberies at gunpoint on the road almost daily. More and more road users of this expressway have given up their jobs because of these illegal charges", said a small-scale merchant from Yebyu Township, Dawei.

“NO SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS”

Indonesia's Widodo stresses unity in efforts to push Myanmar peace plan





Indonesian President Joko Widodo leads the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. Photo: AFP

Southeast Asian nations have made “no significant progress” on implementing a peace plan aimed at ending bloodshed in Myanmar, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said Thursday last week, on the final day of a summit.

Escalating violence in junta-ruled Myanmar has dominated the three-day meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the Indonesian island of Flores.

The regional bloc has spearheaded diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, though it has yet to enact a five-point plan agreed upon with Myanmar two years ago.

Since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's

government it has overseen a bloody crackdown on dissent, killing thousands of people and battling armed resistance to its rule.

As ASEAN leaders began their final day of talks in the fishing town of Labuan Bajo, Indonesian President Joko Widodo admitted they had made “no significant progress” on implementing the peace plan.

“We need the unity of ASEAN to chart our way forward,” Widodo said through a translator.

Divisions among ASEAN members at the summit appear to have hampered those efforts.

An internal report on the foreign ministers' discussions said some countries wanted to invite the junta back to ASEAN meetings because “the time for



The Myanmar crisis did not figure high on the priorities of the ASEAN Summit. Photo: AFP

isolation has served its purpose”.

“There was also an observation that ASEAN might be experiencing a ‘Myanmar fatigue’, which might distract ASEAN from larger goals of ASEAN Community-building,” said the document seen by AFP.

“Patience, flexibility and creativity are therefore required since there will be no quick fix to the crisis.”

HAMSTRUNG

Myanmar still belongs to the 10-member ASEAN bloc but has been barred from its summits due to the junta’s failure to implement the peace plan.

The junta has spurned international criticism

and refused to engage with its opponents, which include ousted lawmakers, anti-coup “People’s Defence Forces” and armed ethnic minority groups.

An air strike on a village in a rebel stronghold last month that reportedly killed about 170 people sparked global condemnation and worsened the junta’s isolation.

Jakarta’s chairing of the bloc this year had raised hopes ASEAN could push for a peaceful solution, using its economic weight as well as its diplomatic experience.

Sunday’s armed attack on a convoy carrying diplomats and officials coordinating ASEAN humanitarian relief in Myanmar had increased pressure for tougher action.

ASEAN has long been decried by critics as a toothless talking shop, but its charter principles of consensus and non-interference have hamstrung its ability to stop the violence in Myanmar.

The latest draft of the end-of-summit statement seen by AFP has left the paragraph on Myanmar open, reflecting diplomatic difficulties over the issue.

A review of the charter was “long overdue”, said Lina Alexandra of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta.

“When you see your next-door neighbour’s house is burning, what will you do? Can you just stay silent, it’s not my problem?” she said.

AFP



ASEAN CHAIR STATEMENT ON MYANMAR - 42ND ASEAN SUMMIT



Jakarta. Photo: Muhammad Ravel

The following is the Myanmar crisis-related reference in the 42nd ASEAN Summit statement, mentioned at the end:

“We discussed the development in Myanmar and reiterated our unified position that the Five-Point Consensus remains our main reference. We supported the Chair’s continued engagement with all stakeholders in Myanmar to find a peaceful and durable solution, that is Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led, to create a conducive environment for facilitating an inclusive national dialogue.

“We observed some movements on the humanitarian front, with the completion of the Joint Need Assessment (JNA) by the AHA Centre, as facilitated by the Chair and relevant stakeholders in Myanmar. We commended the partial delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Myanmar on 7 May 2023, de-

spite the challenging security situation. We strongly condemned the recent attack on the convoy of the AHA Centre and the ASEAN Monitoring Team in Shan State.

“ASEAN will continue to mobilize additional resources and take the lead in the provision of humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre. We remained deeply concerned on the escalation of the armed conflicts and violence in Myanmar. We urged for immediate cessation of all forms of violence to create a conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogues. We reiterated that the ASEAN Leaders’ Review and Decision on the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus as agreed during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits remain.”

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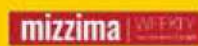
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CATEGORY 5 CYCLONE MOCHA CRASHES OVER MYANMAR, BANGLADESH

Cyclone Mocha intensified into a Category Five hurricane midday Sunday and hit land in Myanmar and Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of people evacuated from the coasts were taking shelter.

Mocha was packing winds of up to 140 knots or 259 kilometres per hour, the US Joint Typhoon Warning Center said, the equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.

Mocha “is now crossing Cox’s Bazar-North Myanmar coast. It (is) likely to move north-northeasterly direction and complete crossing Cox’s Bazar-North Myanmar coasts near Sittwe by afternoon (Sunday),” the Bangladeshi meteorological department office said in a special bulletin.

It added the maximum sustained wind speed within around 75 kilometres (45 miles) of the centre of the cyclone was

around 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour with gusts and squalls of 215 kmph.

The Zoom Earth website tracking the weather system suggested that the eye of the storm was still off the coast and heading for around Sittwe.

“The wind is getting stronger at the moment,” rescue worker Kyaw Kyaw Khaing told AFP from Pauktaw town, about 25 kilometres inland from Sittwe, and where he said around 3,000 people had



People from the villages seeking shelter from the cyclone.
Photo: AFP



Strong winds and rain from Cyclone Mocha whip across the land at Teknaf, Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

arrived to seek shelter.

“We distributed enough food for one or two meals to the people evacuated to temporary shelters. I don’t think we will be able to send any food today due to the weather.”

Thousands left Sittwe on Saturday, packing into trucks, cars and tuk-tuks and heading for higher ground inland as meteorologists warned of a storm surge of up to 3.5 metres.

“We are not OK because we didn’t bring food and other things to cook,” said Maung Win, 57, who spent the night in a shelter in Kyauktaw town. “We can only wait to get food from people’s donations.”

Bangladeshi authorities moved 190,000 people in Cox’s Bazar and nearly 100,000 in Chittagong to safety, divisional commissioner Aminur Rahman told AFP late Saturday.

The rain and wind were felt in Myanmar’s commercial hub Yangon, around 500 kilometres away, residents said Sunday.

AFP/Mizzima

WFP, UN OCHA KICK INTO GEAR TO TACKLE THE HUMANITARIAN DISASTER POSED BY CYCLONE MOCHA

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) informed Mizzima last Friday that they were gearing up to tend to humanitarian needs as Cyclone Mocha approaches the coast of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The WFP said it was

closely monitoring Cyclone Mocha, which made landfall on Sunday. Emergency preparedness was underway in areas likely to be in the cyclone's trajectory.

Working with partners, WFP was gearing up for a large-scale emergency response, putting in place contingency plans, and prepositioning food and relief supplies, vehicles, and emergency

equipment.

In Myanmar, WFP has pre-positioned enough food to cover the needs of more than 400,000 people in Rakhine State and neighboring areas for one month. Anticipating interruptions to transport and telecommunications services, WFP teams are also putting in place systems to serve the broader humanitarian community



World Food Programme food and essential supply delivery for victims of the cyclone. Photo: WFP

with their preparations and potential response to the cyclone.

Unimpeded humanitarian access to and support from communities in need will be critical in responding to any immediate impacts of the cyclone and for the longer-term recovery process.

WFP Myanmar Deputy Country Director Ms. Sheela Mathew said they were preparing for the worst, while hoping for the best. "Cyclone Mocha is heading to areas burdened by conflict, poverty, and weak community re-

silience. Many of the people most likely to be affected are already reliant on regular humanitarian assistance from WFP. They simply cannot afford another disaster."

Likewise, the UN OCHA is gearing up to provide humanitarian support. The Myanmar humanitarian Emergency Response Preparedness Plan has been activated nationwide since the start of the week.

Humanitarian organizations, especially in Rakhine, have ramped up their preparedness efforts and have been pre-positioning personnel and supplies wherever possible. Preparedness is also being stepped up in the northwest, they say.

OCHA is engaging with all relevant stakeholders to ensure timely and unimpeded access to those in need. Across Rakhine and the Northwest, there are already about six million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 1.2 million people displaced, even before the cyclone hits. An urgent injection of funds is desperately needed to facilitate a full-scale response to the Cyclone and any subsequent flooding. To date, the US\$764M Humanitarian Response Plan is only 10 per cent funded.

On 11 May, the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) issued a Red Storm Alert for Cyclone Mocha, which has formed in the Bay of Bengal and is currently forecast to cross the coast between Kyaukphyu in Myanmar and Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh on 14 May with maximum sustained wind speeds of 150-

160 kmph, gusting to 175 kmph. A significant storm surge is expected to accompany the cyclone of 2-2.7m. Evacuation advice has been issued by local authorities in Rakhine for low-lying and coastal areas in Sittwe, Pauktaw, Myebon, Maungdaw and Buthidaung with many people already starting to move ahead of the storm. Associated heavy rains and strong winds are expected to affect Rakhine and areas of high displacement further inland in northwest Myanmar.

As UN OCHA notes, this is the first cyclone to threaten Myanmar this Monsoon season and there are grave concerns about the impact especially on the already vulnerable and displaced communities with reduced coping capacity. Of particular worry is the situation facing 232,100 people who are displaced across Rakhine. Many of the IDP camps and sites in Rakhine are located in low-lying coastal areas susceptible to storm surge. The suffering of more than a million displaced people and other communities in the northwest is also expected to worsen over the coming days as the ex-cyclone moves inland bringing heavy rain. Displaced people in the northwest are already living in precarious conditions in camps, displacement sites or in forests often without proper shelter.

According to the 2023 Myanmar Humanitarian Needs Overview, there are already 6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the most likely affected areas of Rakhine (1.7M) and the northwest (4.3M – Chin, Magway and Sagaing).



TROPICAL CYCLONES AND STORM SURGES: WHY THEY ARE DEADLY

Five facts about tropical cyclones and storm after powerful Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar and Bangladesh on Sunday:

TROPICAL CYCLONES

Cyclones are low-pressure systems that form over warm tropical waters, with gale force winds near the centre. The winds can extend hundreds of kilometres

(miles) from the eye of the storm.

Sucking up vast quantities of water, they often produce torrential rains and flooding resulting in major loss of life and property damage.

They are also known as hurricanes or typhoons, depending on where they originate in the world, when they reach sustained winds of at least 119 kilometres

per hour (74 miles per hour).

Tropical cyclones (hurricanes) are the most powerful weather events on Earth, according to NASA.

STORM SURGES

Cyclones can unleash catastrophic storm surges - tsunami-like flooding - when they make landfall.



View of Hurricane Katrina that caused serious damage to the USA. Photo: AFP

They can be the deadliest part of a cyclone and are only partially affected by wind speeds.

The term "storm surge" refers to rising seas whipped up by a storm, creating a wall of water several metres higher than the normal tide level.

The large swells move faster than the cyclone and are sometimes spotted up to 1,000 kilometres ahead of a major storm.

The surge can extend for dozens of kilometres inland, overwhelming homes and making

roads impassable.

A storm surge is shaped by a number of different factors, including storm intensity, forward speed, the size of a storm and the angle of approach to the coast.

The underlying features of the land at the coast, including bays and estuaries, are also at play.

In previous storms, people failed to flee because they did not grasp the surge's deadly threat.

That was the case for 2013's Super Typhoon Haiyan, which left 7,350 dead or missing in the central Philippines, primarily due to the surge.

A storm surge of up to three metres (10 feet) is likely to inundate low-lying areas of Myanmar's Rakhine State and eastern Bangladesh, according to the Indian Meteorological Department.

LOW-LYING AREAS

Bangladesh, a low-lying delta nation, is routinely hit by bad storms between April and December that cause deaths and widespread property damage.

Bangladesh is vulnerable to cyclones due to its location at the triangular-shaped head of the Bay of Bengal, the geography of its coastal area and its high-population density, according to experts.

Hundreds of thousands of people living around the Bay of Bengal have been killed in cyclones in recent decades.

The death tolls have come down in the past few years because of faster evacuations and

the building of thousands of coastal shelters.

BAY OF BENGAL

The tropical cyclone season in the Bay of Bengal and neighbouring Arabian Sea has two peaks around May and November, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

The cyclones can form in the western Pacific Ocean and travel in a northwest direction before arriving in the Bay of Bengal.

The Bay of Bengal has conditions favourable to the development of cyclones, including high sea surface temperatures.

Some of the deadliest storms in history have formed in the Bay of Bengal, including one in 1970 that killed half a million people in what is modern-day Bangladesh.

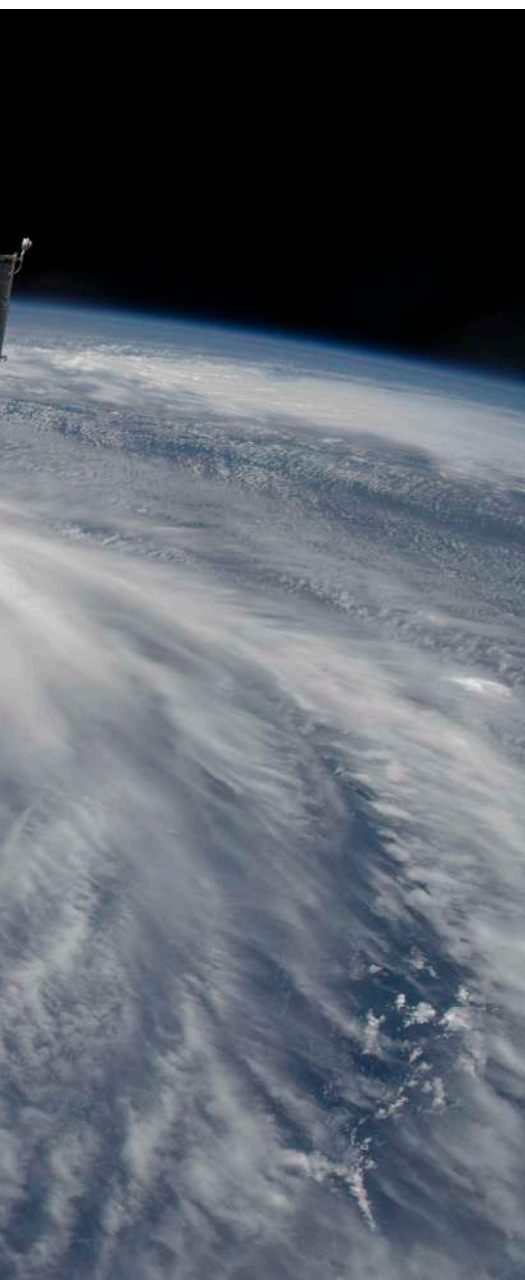
Some 138,000 died in Bangladesh in 1991 in a tidal wave caused by a cyclone.

In 1999 in India's Odisha state, 10,000 people were killed by a cyclone.

In 2007, Cyclone Sidr killed at least 4,000 in southern Bangladesh.

Then in 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which devastated Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta, killed at least 138,000 people.

AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS BURN 18 CIVILIANS TO DEATH IN NYAUNG PIN THAR VILLAGE MASSACRE



Photo: Ajay Karpur

Myanmar junta troops have been accused of massacring 18 civilians including children by burning them to death in Nyaung Pin Thar village in Htantapin Township, Bago Region.

The attack happened on 10 May.

On this day, Karen National Union (KNU) fighters and PDF forces attacked Military Council troops from two sides in Nyaung Pin Tha Village seriously injuring and killing junta troops.

“They (deceased) met with military column and were killed. Currently, the entire village ran away.

In the battle, about 20-30 military soldiers were killed,” said a spokesperson for the Htantabin Township People’s Defense Force to Mizzima.

The battle ran from 10:30 am to 3:30 pm during which military troops rounded up and burnt to death 18 people.

Five underaged children were included among the 18 innocent people and the youngest was

five years old, according to the spokesperson. Photos of smoldering bodies at the site have been posted to social media.

Fighting has intensified in the area following air attacks and artillery barrages that started on 2 May.

The military troops of Infantry Battalion 73 and Light Infantry Battalion 360 marched a column into Htantabin Township causing an intense battle with the KNU and PDF joint forces.

Since the 2021 coup, the Military Council has reportedly carried out 64 massacres killing 766 innocent civilians, according to the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (NUG) on 15 March.

Then on 11 April, the Pazigy air strike killed nearly over 160 civilians, setting the record for the highest number of casualties in a massacre of innocent people by the Military Council.

KAREN NGOS CONDEMN MYANMAR JUNTA MASSACRE OF 18 CIVILIANS IN NYAUNG PIN THAR VILLAGE

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) and the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) have issued a condemnation of the massacre of 18 civilians by junta forces in Nyaung Pin Thar village in Bago Region.

On 10 May, soldiers from State Administration Council's (SAC) Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #599 under Military Operations Command (MOC) #13, together with other SAC infantry divisions and battalions, deliberately killed at least 18 civilians, including five children, in Nyaung Pin Thar village, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, Bago Region.

Following an armed clash between SAC and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) forces, SAC soldiers killed and burned villagers at night, mainly women, children and elders, demonstrating a complete disregard for human life.

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) and the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) condemn this inhumane attack on civilians and extend our deepest condolences to the victims' families and loved ones. We stand in solidarity with all communities throughout Burma who suffer the abuses of the military regime, and will continue to work for the protection of justice and human rights in the country.

The escalation of the Burma Army's operations in Southeast Burma following the 2021 coup has led to a significant increase in human rights abuses. Civilians are regularly deliberately targeted by the SAC following armed clashes in the region, including by conducting air strikes and indiscriminate shelling towards villages, as well as shooting villagers on sight, torching villagers' houses, planting landmines near critical infrastructure, arbitrary arrest and torture. Since the 2021 coup, at least 79 civilians, including 38 children, have died in Southeast Burma as a result of SAC attacks, as reported to KHRG, and at least 500,000 civilians have been displaced.

The impunity faced by the Burma military in their continuous campaign of violence against ci-

vilians is appalling and alarming. The recent mass killing in Kler Lwee Htoo District is a perpetuation of the long history of atrocities committed by the Burma Army against villagers in Southeast Burma. The deliberate targeting of civilians constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes. The murder of civilians in a systematic and widespread manner is also a crime against humanity. Furthermore, as can be seen in the photographs widely shared on social media of the remains of the victims of this latest mass killing, the Burma military dealt with the villagers' bodies in an egregious manner, which violates customary rules applicable to armed conflicts. All those responsible must be held accountable for their actions.

The international community cannot continue to turn a blind eye while the junta perpetrates atrocity crimes throughout the country. Immediate and meaningful action must be taken to stop these attacks and bring justice for its people.

The Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) and the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) call upon international stakeholders, including foreign governments, and the civil society to unite in condemning this mass killing of civilians by the SAC and take the following actions:

Support coordinated and targeted sanctions against the military junta and its leaders, including restrictions on financial resources, trade, arms supply and aviation fuel.

Increase direct financial support for civil society and community-based organisations, and local humanitarian aid providers operating on the ground, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to deliver critical assistance to victims and survivors of attacks.

Support current investigations and international proceedings and actively pursue additional avenues to ensure the Burma military is held responsible for the wide range of crimes they have committed.

NUG DEFENSE MINISTER ANNOUNCES OPENING OF SIX MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRONTS IN FIGHT AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA



Public support for the NUG. Photo: AFP

Myanmar's National Unity Government's [NUG] Defense Minister Yee Mon said that his ministry will open six diverse fronts, namely a political front, international diplomatic front, military front, administrative front, business front and mental welfare front, in its fight against the Myanmar junta.

He made the remark in a video interview with BBC Burmese, marking the second anniversary of establishment of the People's Defense Force [PDF], the armed wing of NUG.

The PDF was formed by the NUG on 5 May 2021 in response to the military coup on 1 February 2021.

"In accordance with our one-year plan [to eradicate the junta], we will open six fronts. Political front, international front [diplomatic front], military, administrative, business and mental warfare. All six fronts are expected to gain momentum in a balanced manner and we hope to gain advantages on all fronts.

This year will turn out to be a decisive year in order to gain the upper hand," Yee Mon told BBC Burmese.

He added that Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) collaborated with PDFs in the launch of the war of resistance, bringing their military expertise and leadership to the forefront.

"As soon as the war of resistance was launched, ethnic armed groups worked together with PDFs. They have a lot of experience in the military, so ethnic groups and the leaders have actually led the implementation of the military," he said.

"Now the PDF has become an established army. On the other hand, we are able to develop the ability to cooperate with all ethnic groups, which can be said to be very extraordinary throughout history," he said.

"When the enemy's physical and mental strength is declining, we will not retreat. The revolution is only going upwards. I also

want to say that we will continue (on the path to) victory one step at a time."

According to an official statement of the NUG's Ministry of Defense, there are about 300 NUG's PDF battalions and columns spread throughout Myanmar.

"Two years ago, the People's Revolution began with the Phase of Strategic Defence, and it has now progressed to the Phase of Strategic Equilibrium. To enter the final phase, the Phase of Strategic Counter-Offensive, the ministry is working to acquire the necessary funds and strategic arms and equipment," said the statement.

"Over the past two years, our fighting forces have grown in numbers and strength, surpassing that of the enemy," said the statement.

Recently, the spokesperson of NUG's Prime Minister's Office, Nay Phone Latt said that the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), the NUG, and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), formed by nominated members of parliament and politically influential individuals after the coup, are working hard to establish a federal state and prepare for the reform of the security sector.

He said that they will make efforts to replace the military junta's army with a federal army and will reform the security sector of future Myanmar, in cooperation with ethnic groups.

NLD MANDALAY REGIONAL VICE CHAIRPERSON RELEASED FROM MANDALAY'S OBO PRISON



Win Mya Mya, vice chairperson of the Mandalay regional office of the National League for Democracy (NLD) was released last Friday morning from Mandalay's Obo Prison, according to the Mandalay political community.

She was arrested on 27 February 2021 and sentenced to three years in prison under Section 505 (a) the Penal Code for leading protests in Mandalay following the coup.

"She was released this morning. Only her family will know her current conditions after her release. But it is true that she was released. We have learned that after serving her prison term and because of the reduction, she was released," said a source in Mandalay.

Win Mya Mya, who is over 70 years old, was injured during the notorious attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's convoy in 2003. This incident occurred when a then-junta-sponsored mob attacked Suu Kyi's convoy as it traveled through the town of Depayin, Sagaing Region. Win Mya Mya was one of the passengers in the convoy. Following the incident, her entire family was imprisoned, and her homes and business were shut down by then-ruling junta.

In the 2020 General Elections, she contested for the Pyithu Hluttaw [Lower House] seat representing Sintgaing Township in the Mandalay Region and successfully won the seat. She was one of just two Muslim candidates representing the NLD party in the elections, according to local news outlets.

Due to her being Muslim, nationalist Buddhist monks signed a petition with hundreds of signatures, urging the NLD to disqualify her from the election.

Since her involvement in politics during Myanmar's nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988, she was imprisoned multiple times.

DEDICATED SERVICE: ROSALIA SCIORTINO EXPLAINS HER DECADES OF SERVICE TO DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



● Bangkok. Photo: Joe Waranont

Rosalia Sciortino has made Southeast Asia her home and as an anthropologist and development sociologist is a prime mover in improving local and international awareness about the crisis in Myanmar. The Italian-born academic has had a fascinating career and is now working to enlighten the public through her work with SEA Junction and Thailand's Chulalongkorn and Mahidol universities about political and social issues in Southeast Asia.

Dr Sciortino sat down with Mizzima this week – as ASEAN met to struggle with solutions to the Myanmar crisis – to offer her thoughts on Myanmar and her work over the last three decades.

Mizzima: Were you surprised by the Myanmar coup?

Well, as you know, there were quite a lot of gossip at the time or rumors that the coup was going to happen. Clearly the election had been in favour of the NLD (National League for Democracy). And there was concern about the reaction, the possible reaction of the military, which of course, has always been there. But since this is very common, right in Southeast Asia, to always have these rumors of a coup, it was still a surprise that it really happened - so it was expected, but kind of unexpected. Because yes, even if people talk about it, you never know whether it would happen or not. On various occasions, there have been rumors of coups that didn't materialize.

Mizzima: Obviously, the Myanmar coup had a significant ef-

fect on ASEAN and how it's handling things. How do you view ASEAN's handling of the Myanmar crisis?

I think it's very clear that they have not been able to handle the crisis. Of course, since before the coup they were always complaining about the way of working of ASEAN and the two principles of non-interference and consensus - that seem to paralyze the organization and slow it down and so there has been always complaints that ASEAN is talking but very slow in taking action, and always very careful about the way countries relate to each other.

But I think the Myanmar situation has shown that the way ASEAN is organized precludes quick action, and stifles initiative when it comes to finding a solu-

tion for a transnational problem, because at the end of the day, the situation in Myanmar impacts neighboring countries as well as the whole region. So, it is of concern for everyone. We should not forget that Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are among the largest investors in Myanmar. So, they have economic interests as well as geopolitical interests. So, it's also in their interest not to have a situation like this in their neighborhood, still, they are not able to operate as they should.

Mizzima. This week we have an ASEAN meeting, which will be I suspect, be dominated by the Myanmar crisis, in part because of the recent attack on the ASEAN convoy, which would have woken people up. What do you expect to come out of this?

Myanmar is not the only issue (that ASEAN will cover this week). I think there are a number of issues on the table that are quite concerned about economic growth, the post-COVID recovery, the South China Sea is still there, Timor Leste's accession and there are some other issues, but for sure, Myanmar is a very important issue. And there are many expectations about the role of Indonesia, which has been seen as more capable than other previous chairs of ASEAN.

I must say that I don't have a high expectation about it, yes, they are more sophisticated. Indonesia clearly has a very good Minister of Foreign Affairs. The president is also very capable of giving the impression of wanting democracy in the region in how he is trying to profile himself. This is the last year of his mandate. So, for sure, yes, the ambition of giving a good impression and maybe even aiming for some international position as other former presi-

dents have done, but whether it will move beyond the rhetoric, I am kind of pessimistic, although, of course, I hope to be wrong on this.

And during the incident that you mentioned (attack on the ASEAN convoy) and the response of President Jokowi [official name Joko Widodo], who has invited everyone to sit together and talk peace, to start with it is not very clear what has happened there, because the insinuation is the PDF (attacked the convoy), but actually, that is not an area controlled by the PDF, so it could be a try on the side of the junta to push Indonesia and other countries to what I call would be the wrong direction.

It also looks like the AHA center is operating in a non-transparent and non-neutral manner.

Interesting also the ASEAN reacts so strongly for its staff, but was not similarly outraged for the atrocities committed daily by the junta.

I think if Indonesia was serious, they could have initiated bilateral initiatives, could have consulted the NUG (National Unity Government) publicly, not "silent diplomacy", could have recognized the NUG, if ASEAN countries were serious, they should show by recognizing the NUG and inviting them to the table. And that is still far from what they are doing.

Mizzima: Right. This leads on to the fact that the Myanmar crisis has exacerbated existing conditions within Myanmar such as poverty and displacement, women's rights, those sorts of things. How do you actually view the work of the CSOs, the NGOs of the United Nations in terms of actually trying to improve the situation for people on the ground in Myanmar?

Well, the local NGOs I think they are really admirable, right? They are working hard in very difficult circumstances. Of course, we need to differentiate also in Myanmar, there are some areas that are controlled by ethnic groups, which are kind of safer territories than others, where at the moment, there is heightened conflict. Yangon is also heavily controlled by the junta. So, the degree of difficulty of operating change, according to where in the country, but they are trying their best also to provide humanitarian help and development aid from inside and from across the border.

Now, the record of international organizations I think is more mixed. There have been complaints about the UN, still wanting to work from within the country and therefore, meeting the junta and thus giving recognition to the junta and there is fear that they are normalizing a situation that should not be normalized. Therefore, there have been complaints. And also there have been declarations and open letters by NGOs, civil society groups and other allies to the UN not to play around with the military.

There is a lot of work that can be done through a local organization, there is not necessarily the need for the UN to have a local presence. Of course, the UN are saying they're there for humanitarian reasons, they're there to help the people. But many of the people say they don't want to be helped, if that implies recognition of the junta as this would help the junta stay in power for longer, with more disastrous consequences for the same people the UN is supposed to help. So, for the UN, I think in terms of working within Myanmar it remains controversial. In terms of putting pressure from outside, I think they should do much more and not using ASEAN

to wash their hands.

Mizzima: Because that seems to be the situation, the UN does seem to be using ASEAN as a tool to engage with the military.

On the surface, it seems, in a sense, a very “decolonized” approach: this is a regional issue and therefore should be resolved through a regional body, we as Western countries don’t interfere. But, this is only appearance, to avoid having to deal with a difficult situation and also because at the moment Western countries are occupied with other concerns. And ASEAN is a good way to say “you take the lead on this”, but ASEAN has shown with the five points consensus not to be serious. These points don’t talk about freeing Aung San Suu Kyi and all the other prisoners nor they talk about a number of other conditions necessary to have serious dialogue. But ASEAN has not been able even to implement those weak points. So, it is problematic to entrust ASEAN with such a role.

Mizzima: Yes. And as you mentioned, the international attention is elsewhere. That’s one of the things that Burmese people complain about. They say everybody is focused on, say, the Ukraine war. And they’re not focused on Myanmar. Do you think the Ukraine war has drawn attention away from Myanmar.

Unfortunately, this has been a problem since the very beginning. Don’t forget at the beginning of the coup that there was COVID-19 and the world was pre-occupied. I mean few months after the coup happened, we’re in the middle of the Delta (COVID-19 variant), that was very serious for Myanmar as well as for other countries. Then there was Afghanistan. Now there is Ukraine. So, there is always some other crisis

that takes the attention.

But if there is the political will there should not be a question of one crisis at the cost of the other. I think there are many factors. People are trying to understand why it is the case. Clearly the situation of the UK, which normally has been very active and engaged if we look back in the past. The US also played a very active role before, which they are not doing these days in terms of foreign policy. This is in general towards Southeast Asia is not a priority region, including Myanmar.

Some people have also mentioned that there is not a figure (or figurehead). Take Ukraine and Zelenskyy, who is not necessarily my favorite, but is seen as someone who is able to get public attention while in the case of Myanmar at the moment, we don’t have such a figure or a figure like Aung San Suu Kyi at the time. Aung San Suu Kyi remains extremely popular within Myanmar. But as you know, in terms of the international community with the issue of the Rohingya, she has lost a lot of credibility and that also influences the way the international community has responded to the crisis. So, there are a combination of factors that come together. But yes, unfortunately, it’s true that the attention for Myanmar has never really been, what it should have been.

Mizzima: Yes, in fact, on that same score, the NUG, which puts itself forward as the real government or the alternative government doesn’t really have a face. This is said to be part of the problem, there is not a person that people recognize and gravitate to. Do you think that’s a problem for the NUG?

This is what many people see as a problem. Personally,

I would like to believe that it’s not always necessary to have a figurehead for the opposition and that actually it is better when we have a very capable team of people that can act and talk on different issues together. But in this media space, we like to have superheroes and those attract public attention. The NUG is performing already in difficult circumstances with some very strong ministers but then how to combine all these voices of the different ministries and make it more together, to communicate all what they are doing in a better way than they have done so far. So, it’s not necessarily the lack of one figurehead, but how to improve the communication strategy that yes, for sure. Since this is what the global public needs. Unfortunately, this world is very PR based.

Mizzima: Moving on. Judging from your biography and the roles you’ve played, it appears you’ve had a lot of responsibilities. Can you tell us something about your work as a regional director of the Rockefeller Foundation related to Burma?

Yes, so I started my career as an anthropologist, but I have worked mostly in donor organizations, particularly American foundations, US foundations, although I am myself, European, but I have worked for the Ford Foundation since 1993 initially in Indonesia and Philippines and then I became the regional director for the Rockefeller Foundation and established the office here in Bangkok in 2000. And this office, we designed a programme which focused on the transnational impacts of regional integration. This was in the period when the socialist countries of Southeast Asia were starting to become open to the global market. So, in 1992 with the help of the Asia Development Bank 5 countries of mainland Southeast

Asia, including Myanmar and Yunnan province of China formed the Greater Mekong Sub Region to promote economic integration among them. This was done with an economic focus through all kinds of infrastructural development, but with very little attention for the social, cultural, and health aspects of development, and this was what the grant-making initiative of the Rockefeller Foundation focused on. It was called “Learning across Boundaries” and it provided funding to build the capacity of local organizations across countries in the GMS to address transnational issues, like at the time cross-border health.

That was very early on, you know, with HIV as the main concern, even before SARS, and avian flu, but then SARS and avian flu appeared so it was very relevant, and again with COVID-19 we have seen how important is to pay attention to this region as a hotspot for zoonotic diseases. Just to give an example, we supported the forming of this alliance of the Ministries of Health in the Mekong region, MBDS (Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance) cooperation, which included also the Ministry of Health of Myanmar. At the time, as a US institution we were not allowed to give funding directly to Myanmar, but we were able to operate through “intermediaries” in neighboring countries and matching funds of other organizations so to say, fund activities at the border, and include people from Myanmar into all kinds of regional activities related to transboundary issues such as migration, cross border health, ethnic minorities living in upland areas and upland agriculture and many others.

We had a strong gender and human rights focus in our program with involvement of civil society and universities. Because

of the particular situation at the time, we worked with Myanmar organizations through a regional approach.

Mizzima: Can you tell us about your past work with the IDRC as regional director?

So, the Rockefeller Foundation was from about 2000 to 2007, that was the period but then, as you know, Myanmar started to open up and gradually the embargo was up lifted. So, when I was Regional Director for East and Southeast Asia based in Singapore with IDRC which is a Canadian semi-governmental grant-making organization, I was involved in discussions about engaging or not with Myanmar at the diplomatic level in terms of going to Myanmar and talking with various stakeholders. Countries wanted to go back to have a presence in Myanmar after Aung San Suu Kyi was freed and the elections. But at the same time, there was also a little bit of fear, whether it was premature or not and whether democracy was for real. So, we did some kind of mapping as well as evaluation, whether it was a good thing to start to operate or not again in Myanmar. And as IDRC we funded mostly for development-related research and training. We did fund a number of think tanks as well as issues related to the environment and many other issues through development research.

Canada indeed, eventually opened the embassy and we were more free, compared to the times at the Rockefeller Foundation, to provide grants to civil society and other groups locally.

Mizzima: Can you tell us a little bit more in detail what your work was like as a grant maker in terms of this?

Working as a grant-maker implies providing funding strategi-

cally to attain certain institutional and program objectives based on an analysis of development challenges. In the 20 years of work in this area, I have worked at two different levels. So, one as program officer at the beginning, you really are responsible for a certain field of work, whether gender or reproductive health or migration or human rights or whatever is the field and you have a strategy of what kind of initiatives are important but then it's really responsive to an understanding of local conditions. At the time grant-making was contextualized and responsive, with greater autonomy for the program officers as experts in the field and much more open to receive proposals directly from local organizations. It was very focused on supporting local ideas and initiatives (rather than global ones), which now has changed. I actually have written about changes in philanthropy and development aid in the last two decades that have made funding much more centralized, uniform and top-down and resulted in reduced funding for local civil society organizations.

As program officer, you are very much in touch with the issues and local networks, but later in my role as director, it is more at a distance, as you have to oversee the entire office and all the programs being undertaken. So, you also have to oversee the grant making strategy not only for a field, but how all the sectors come together in a strategy for the entire region, and for particular countries. So, you are somewhat farther away from the real action. But it's quite important because you have to make strategic decisions about what kind of funding is for the benefit of the region or not and advocate for resources with the central office. And within this, like I gave the example of the

transnational issue and the time of the Rockefeller, so you kind of define what is the scope of action, and then within the scope, we can accommodate the proposal and decide whether to fund or not to fund those activities. So, it's much more at the strategic level than not at the direct level of funding of certain groups, although there is discretionary funding for the director, so still, there is some funding that can be done at the director level. Clearly, I miss this now that I have to seek funding for SEA Junction!

Mizzima: Can we move on to your work with the Thai universities, namely Chulalongkorn University and Mahidol University? What are you focused on there?

Yes, so after IDRC, I kind of concluded my grant maker and donor career and retired... kind of ...since I started to teach at Mahidol university as Associate Professor and Visiting Professor at Chulalongkorn University. And there, you can see my broad interests. So, I teach about gender, health and sexual and reproductive health rights at Mahidol. And at Chulalongkorn it is more about regional integration, the ASEAN process and how globalization plays out in Southeast Asia. But in both cases my focus is Southeast Asia. So, also when I talk about the gender issue or when I talk about the health issue, the concern is about how these issues occur in this particular region. And so, of course, then I talk also about Myanmar. When we talk about ASEAN, for instance, what we have been discussing, is the relevance of what is happening in Myanmar for the entire region in terms of ASEAN role, transboundary impacts, refugee flows and implications for democracy in the region, these are the kind of discussions I have with students. In Mahidol, to give

an example I may discuss the seriousness of maternal mortality in Myanmar, and for instance, the issue of domestic violence, as well as, for instance, rape as a tool of war. And this is an issue I have been concerned with for long time. Actually, already when with the Rockefeller Foundation, we supported women's groups to study and write about rape as a tool of war in Myanmar. So, in a sense, what I am doing now is the continuation of past concerns only that was with financing and now it's more in terms of building knowledge on development issues from a theoretical as well as a practical perspective. So, it's not only what are the development problems, but what can you do about that? How can you find a strategic entrée point to intervene? How to avoid repeating the same mistakes? And what are the gaps? So, these are the ways I approach a multitude of development issues related to Myanmar, as well as other countries and processes in Southeast Asia.

Mizzima: With regards to the Foundation for South East Asian Studies, and SEA Junction, what are you focused on at this particular point with regards to both?

So again, you see it is like I have passion for Southeast Asia in different ways. So, when I was working with Ford, Rockefeller, etc, we supported a lot of development research as well as a lot of interventions and you see that there is a gap between knowledge production and then how to communicate to the general public to advocate issues and build social movements. If you see most of the think tanks are based in a university or cater to a more academic public, but there is very little in terms of venues that are in public places. So, the SEA Junction idea

was to be based at the Bangkok Arts and Culture Center, which is a public venue, a very public venue in the middle of Bangkok and we bring issues that normally are not brought to the general public, bring it directly to the public. We do so by having discussions, but even more important by having exhibitions, photo exhibition as well as art exhibitions. We have been very consistent with our concern for development issues in Myanmar. Actually, the very first event of SEA Junction was about the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines planned to link Myanmar's deep-water port of Kyaukphyu (Sittwe) in the Bay of Bengal with Kunming in Yunnan province of China was done by one of my former students, who is an independent researcher in Myanmar, and now outside of Myanmar, and that was six years ago, so we have a long tradition of focusing on Myanmar.

Later on, we have given a lot of attention to the Rohingya situation with photo exhibitions in Thailand and Indonesia by Bangladeshi photographers about the exodus of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh and their lives in the camps, such as with a recent exhibition of quilts of Rohingya women in the camps with their concerns and hopes. Since the very beginning about the coup, we have given attention to what's happening in Myanmar with a regular update first with Aung Zaw from The Irrawaddy, and then later on with Debbie Stothard, and Khin Omar. Initially, we had the Updates every two weeks and now every month, because, as we said, the attention of the public is less, but we want to continue to do it because it's a way of documenting the evolution of the Myanmar crisis. So now we have done 30 episodes of one hour in which the resource

person highlights the key points of what has been happening. But we also have done exhibitions using the BACC space, like for instance, on the women's role in the Spring Revolution, then on the anniversary of the coup, these are very big exhibitions, which reach "normal" people who just come to BACC, Thai and tourists and a lot of young people and a lot of other Thai people. And so it's often people who are not necessarily aware of social or political issues in the region.

Now when we do a panel discussion, of course, those come because they know and they are interested, but particularly for the exhibition, they just come to BACC. And they see the photos and art works and ask questions. So, you have hundreds of thousands of people seeing things that they don't expect. So, this is the point of SEA Junction, inform and advocate with the general public. The next exhibition is going to be about the drawings of Insein prison done by an artist who was a prisoner for six months in Insein Prison, and this is going to be for two weeks with the launch on 20 May. And on the 17 of May we have a panel discussion also related to Myanmar which is about cybercrime. There is a lot of talk about trafficking with victims from Indonesia and other parts of the world. And, Myanmar with Cambodia and Laos is also one of the centers of these scams. Because of the conflict is even more difficult to rescue people that have been trafficked there. We don't focus only on Myanmar, but we have focused a lot on Myanmar because I think it's very important what is happening there. We know that Southeast Asia is in general an authoritarian region, right, I mean a lot of governments are kind of authoritarian, so if the Myanmar people can be successful in changing (their country into

a democracy) that will be a very important example for the rest of the region. The vision for a pluralist New Burma, for gender equity and diversity as an integral part of democracy is very compelling. On the positive side. When? I don't know, but it will happen since the majority of people are clear they do not want another military or pseudo-democratic government.

Mizzima: On a completely different subject. We are interested in your late husband's award that you're running. Can you tell us about that?

Yes, so that is really, SEA Junction and the Award, I think, are two of my babies, so to say that are born out of grief. After 25 years of being married to my husband O'ong Maryono he died in 2013 of the rare cancer of the appendix in Singapore, now 10 years ago, and it was devastating. I stopped working and starting these two initiatives in due time was part of the grieving process. What has helped me is to do things I believe in, engage with people and activities in promoting shared values. This with the support of many friends with the same vision.

And for him, he was quite famous because he was a multiple world and SEA Games champion in Pencak Silat, which is a Malay martial art and a trainer for national teams all over the region. He was Indonesian, so we are very diverse, he was Muslim, I Catholic, originally from Italy, but it was a good match, of course with the usual ups and downs of married couples. And when I thought about how to honor him, I think it came quite natural to do something related to his field in a way I could do it according to my skill. I am not a martial arts expert. We came from very diverse backgrounds. But he had written a book about Pencak

Silat, which many people refer to it because it is quite comprehensive there are not many books on the socio-cultural aspect in Pencak Silat. That book is a reference for people and his frustration was that Indonesians and others did not pay enough attention to their tradition, including Pencak Silat and that more should be done to document that.

And so when I thought about what I could do, the idea emerged of doing a small grant program to support people who are interested in doing research and writing about Pencak Silat, whether they are Indonesians who want to write about Pencak Silat or for the translation of studies by foreigners into Indonesian so that Indonesians know about what has been written abroad.

And now we have just had the celebration of 10 years from his death, on March 20, and what I am proud to say is that there are nine books that have been funded and published including the republishing of his own book, because there is quite a demand - much more successful than my book! And also another one he had written before dying, which is more about techniques, with very beautiful drawings "Pencak Silat for Future Generations", so those are included, but the others are from other people from Indonesia mostly, with two translation from researchers from Australia and France. The idea is to continue to realize his wish to see more interest and really build respect for this martial art which is not well known. Internationally, it is always in kind of secondary to comparative other martial arts, but quite beautiful and with spiritual aspects as well as cultural aspects. So that is the O'ong Maryono Pencak Silat Award.

'HOSTILE' US POLICIES ON CHINA RISK DIVIDING WORLD: STIGLITZ

"Hostile" US policies on China risk splitting the world into two blocs, Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz told AFP on Friday, urging the West to offer investment not "lectures" to developing countries.

"It would be a good idea... for the other G7 countries to try to put pressure on the United States to say, 'what you're doing is forming the world into two blocs, and that will be hard,'" the professor

said on the sidelines of Group of Seven ministerial talks in Japan.

"We may be in some kind of strategic competition, but that doesn't mean that we have to be quite so hostile."



Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. Photo: AFP

Stiglitz warned that competition between US Democrats and Republicans to look tough on China could undermine international action on climate change and other global crises.

And he argued that recent moves by Washington, which is attempting to limit Chinese influence on critical supply chains, could not be explained simply by concerns

over Beijing's political system.

"We have many, quote, friends who are authoritarian, but what we don't like is the economic competition, and political competition," he said.

US default risk 'significant'

The West meanwhile is investing "very little" in developing economies, compared to countries like China, said the 80-year-old American, a former World Bank chief economist.

"There's a joke that we give them lectures about what to do, and they give them money," he said.

Finance ministers from India, Brazil and Indonesia have joined their G7 counterparts and central bank chiefs for a three-day meeting in the Japanese city of Niigata, which kicked off on Thursday.

Leaders from those nations and others including Vietnam and African Union chair Comoros are also invited to next weekend's G7 summit in Hiroshima.

"Some of the other countries here may help persuade the G7... that part of the problem is that the G7, particularly the US, is not present in Latin America and Africa. So while we say we're competing, we're not doing the investment," Stiglitz said.

China funds infrastructure around the world through its huge Belt and Road Initiative, though Washington and its allies point to the high repayments associated with its projects.

It is unclear if the G7 will make concrete investment announcements after talks next week, though efforts to "de-risk" key sectors like semiconductors by diversifying away from China will be on the table.

Stiglitz also weighed in on the US debt limit crisis, a day after Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said it would be "unthinkable" for Washington to default on its debt.

The economist warned that "the risk of not reaching agreement is significant", calling Republican insistence on deep spending cuts in exchange for raising the limit "fanatic".

"It would not be politically rational... But politics in America has gotten into a very strange place," he said.

AFP

TO HEAL MANIPUR'S WOUNDS, ALL GROUPS MUST AGREE TO REPLACE IDENTITY POLITICS WITH POLITICS OF PEACE

NANDITA HAKSAR



Women flee the violence. Photo: scroll.in Media

The BJP's attempt to resolve the problems in Manipur by backing the Meitei community and projecting them as Hindu will only exacerbate the situation.

It was in the early eighties when I first went to Manipur to record human rights violations being committed by the Indian armed forces. When I returned to Delhi, friends and family commented that I had become much more polite and soft spoken after being in the state.

I was deeply impressed by the culture, the gentle ways of speaking. I was attracted to Manipur by the dignity of the people and their lack of aggression in their interactions and, most of all, the culture in which people avoided embarrassing or hurting each other.

However, from my very first visit I was aware of the deep division within the communities living in Manipur: the wariness and resentments were all too

evident.

First of all, there was the universal suspicion and dislike for the outsiders or mayangs – a racist, derogatory term for Indians from the mainland. Then there was the deep division between the tribal people living in the hills and the majority Meitei people who were mostly Vaishnavites. But there were also Muslims and a small but significant community of Meiteis who did not convert to Hinduism. There was also some Nagas who had not converted to Christianity and some were included as Scheduled Castes.

From the eighties, these divisions were somewhat suppressed by the fact that the entire state was declared disturbed under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, and the anger of the people was directed at the Indian state.

However, even in 1988 when I was fighting another human rights case in Manipur, I found it very

difficult to unite all sections of Manipur behind the demand for the repeal of the Act. It was perhaps the first time that lawyers belonging to four different communities took up a human rights case together: N Kotishwar from the Meitei community, Samuel Risom of the Nagas, Songboi Serto of the Kom community and myself, the mayang.

Even the human rights movement was soon divided along communal lines, with each community focusing on specific violations rather than uniting to fight as one. In all these cases, the activists from New Delhi added to the divisions rather than bringing people together. I have written about this in the context of the 16-year fast by Irom Sharmila and how it became a Meitei nationalist issue in Manipur, while for peace activists from other parts of India she became a cause célèbre even though she was backed by the Meitei militant groups.

The most fundamental conflict in Manipur has been the resentment of the tribal people, both the Naga group of tribes and the Kuki-Mizo-Chin group of tribes, against the unequal development and disparity in infrastructure between the Hills and the Valley. Tribals are a majority in Manipur's Hills. They cannot transfer their land to non-tribals, who include the Meiteis.

In 2021, Congress MLA Alfred Kanngam Arthur presented facts and figures about the disparity in budget allocation between the Hills and the Valley. The figures showed that in the previous five years, of nearly Rs 22,000 crore in plan funds, the Hills received less than Rs 500 crore.

These figures – placed before the Assembly in which there are only 20 MLAs from the Hill areas and 40 from the Valley – did not lead to any remedies. Instead, the Manipur state government denied the problem altogether. The finance department challenged the validity of the figures. Journalists known for their integrity dismissed the figures as “unbelievable” and did not consider the allegations of large-scale corruption and diversion of funds meant for tribal welfare to the Valley.

I have not studied the figures but I have been to the Hill areas and stayed in Imphal to see for myself the discrepancy in the infrastructure and basic ame-

nities. I have seen how it is difficult to get even an ambulance or get basic blood tests or physiotherapy in Ukhrul, which is in the Hills barely three hours away from Imphal.

Apart from lack of medical facilities there is an acute water shortage. Even today, people have to walk several kilometres to Ukhrul from their villages to buy basic things. Daily life in the Hills is very tough, with growing poverty.

The Meiteis have always considered themselves the most advanced community in Manipur, with a history of being united under the Kangleipak Kingdom founded in 1110 AD. They practiced an ancient religion before they converted to Vaishnavism. With Hinduism, they were divided into castes. However, the royal family were not accepted as Kshatriyas but are categorised as members of the Other Backward Classes.

Meitei has been recognised as an Indian language and included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Meitei society is divided into Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes.

In these circumstances, the demand of the Meiteis to be recognised as a Scheduled Tribe has been looked upon with suspicion by the tribal communities who view it as an attempt by the Meiteis to dominate the Hill areas that so far have a measure of autonomy because of their Scheduled Tribe status. Article 371C of the Constitution deals with special provisions for the Hill areas of Manipur. There are also other laws to protect tribal lands from being transferred to non-tribals.

Tribal communities feel the Bharatiya Janata Party that is in power in the state is playing a dangerous communal politics by backing the Meiteis as “Hindus”, as against the tribal peoples who are predominantly Christian. Hindu nationalism has allowed the burning of churches and growing religious fundamentalism in the Valley.

The religious extremism of the majority community feeds into the minority religious fundamentalism. A dramatic example was the attack in April on a pastor who made derogatory remarks about the

pre-Hindu Sanamahai faith.

Meitei youth have organised themselves under the banner of an organisation called Arambai Tengol, taking inspiration from the past. Even though this section of Meitei want to reclaim their pre-Hindu religion, the BJP has for long appropriated the traditional religions in the North East under their banner. For example, the BJP's parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, backs the Zeliangrong Heraka Association of Manipur.

This is briefly the background in which the violence can be seen. But there are other reasons too that have added to the volatile situation becoming even more dangerous.

The coup in Myanmar in February 2021 coup sparked a civil war in that country that has forced thousands to flee their villages and take shelter in India. North East India has been directly impacted the most by the civil war in the Chin State, from where more than 40,000 people have taken shelter in Mizoram and Manipur.

The Chins are ethnically related to the Mizos of Mizoram and the Kuki-Zomi people in Manipur. Though at least 25 Kuki-Zomi extremist groups are under a ceasefire "suspension of operations" agreement in Manipur, The Hindu reported that they are said to be in touch with their Myanmar counterparts.

Similarly, the paper reported, "The Valley-Based Insurgent Groups of Manipur formed mostly by the dominant Meitei community are reportedly fighting alongside the Myanmar Army against the resistance forces in that country. Many members of these VBIGs are learnt to have been killed in the Myanmar civil war."

The Indian government has refused to recognise the Chins or other Myanmarese as refugees and has declared them as "illegal migrants". Many of these Chins have been arrested and they are in a desperate situation. The Mizoram government, in defiance of the Centre, has taken in Chin refugees and provided them with basic humanitarian assistance. But in Manipur, it is largely the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities that have taken on the burden of looking after the refugees.

In the absence of a humanitarian policy of the Centre government to provide basic amenities

to these desperate people under a brutal army rule, many have to resort to making Aadhar cards illegally. This becomes grounds for arresting them and many are detained in jails. The Centre should allow the state to issue identity cards to the refugees from Myanmar and register them; this would be a humane response instead of calling for a National Register for Citizens.

The Meiteis fear that the Chins from Myanmar will settle in their lands. They have expressed concern about the growth of illegal villages. A recent report in the Imphal Free Press states that in addition to the existing 2,803 villages in Manipur, another 966 villages are seeking recognition. Most of these villages are in the Kuki-Mizo-Chin inhabited hill areas. The burden of providing for these refugees has fallen on the Kukis.

Their situation has become even more precarious with the drive against poppy cultivation. With rising levels of poverty, many tribals, mainly Kukis, have taken to poppy cultivation. According to officials, 14,315 acres of illicit poppy, cultivated mostly in the hill districts of Manipur, were destroyed by security forces in the previous term of the present government. This means the poor tribals compelled to work in poppy cultivation are losing their only source of livelihood.

Churachandpur, which has been the site of terrible violence over the past few days, is one of the five districts of Manipur that share a border with Myanmar. Less than 10% of the 398-km Manipur-Myanmar border is fenced. As a result, it serves as the transit route for illegal drugs to North East India from the Golden Triangle, the meeting of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand borders – a centre of a thriving opium economy and narcotics. Manipur is not only a site for the trafficking of drugs but also for their production, controlled by drug lords across the border.

The situation is made even more unstable by the fact that every community in Manipur is backed by an armed group. The demands of these armed insurgents range from wanting independence of Manipur from India to calling for the reorganisation of states within India. The Nagas of Manipur led by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Muivah) want the integration of Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur with Nagaland state – as also the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Kukis and Nagas have a conflict over territory: some Kukis want to integrate the Kuki-Chin-Mizo inhabited areas to merge with Mizoram. These insurgent groups are also linked to political parties, which makes any political resolution even more difficult.

These demands for breaking up Manipur have been opposed by the Meiteis and their armed groups. In a sense, their demand for Scheduled Tribe status is in part a response to these movements for self-determination.

There have been deadly conflicts in the past and there will be more in the years to come. Merely calling for peace will only serve to stop the violence, which has spread to Shillong and even Delhi. But how can we begin a political process that will lead to a resolution to the long and complex history of conflicts in the state?

The first thing that needs to be recognised is that the people of Manipur are victims of deadly identity politics that has kept them from having conversations across the community. The insurgents, the political parties and the intelligence agencies have all contributed to this growth of identity politics.

There is no political party that has not played into this and kept the divisions alive to be exploited for narrow political gain. The BJP's attempt to resolve the problem by backing the Meitei community and projecting them as Hindu will only exacerbate the situation. Many of the Meiteis and their armed groups have rejected their Hindu connection by going back and reclaiming their pre-Hindu culture and religion.

The people have voted in the BJP after years of disenchantment with the Congress and the regional parties.

They are also critical of the insurgent groups that have no political vision for the future.

There is no mechanism in place that can address the genuine grievances of each community and there is no space for conversation or free and fair discussions.

Without having real conversations about the grievances, problems and criticisms, there is no possibility of resolution. There are people in all communities who do not approve of this violence. Even in the midst

of the brutal attacks on Kukis where government officials were lynched, Kuki women protected Meiteis and helped in their evacuation. In other instances, Meiteis ensured the safety of Kukis.

The Centre has invoked Article 355 of the Indian Constitution and taken over the law and order in the state.

In the past the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was used for the same purpose.

I do not think that the political parties can take the initiative to find a resolution because they are complicit in the identity politics that has poisoned the atmosphere of the state. It is the people of Manipur who must take the initiative. Perhaps, one way is to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Wounds cannot be healed without the balm of justice and justice begins by all parties acknowledging that identity politics must be replaced by a politics that leads to development and peace.

Nandita Haksar is a human rights lawyer and award-winning author. This story is published courtesy of Nandita Haksar and scroll.in Media.

NO JUSTICE, NO BURIAL: RELATIVES MOUNT CORPSE PROTEST IN INDIA

The stench of death hangs heavy over the morgue at an Indian hospital - and relatives are refusing to bury the rotting corpses in protest at their killings in ethnic violence.

Kamlallian Ype, 35, from the mainly Christian Kuki tribe, was killed fleeing attackers from the majority Meitei people, who are mostly Hindus, said his friend P Hentinglian.

"He was shot in the back and fell down," the 25-year-old told AFP at the mortuary in Churachandpur.

"They approached him and shot him point blank at the forehead. I saw it all."

Around 60 people have been killed on both sides in the clashes in the hilly northeastern state of Manipur and around 35,000 residents have fled their homes since last week.

The far-flung states of northeast India - sandwiched between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar - have long been a tinderbox of tensions between different ethnic groups.

Now the families of Kukis killed in the latest violence are demanding a separate entity of their own.

Ype's widow and their four sons want nothing from the Manipur state government and see him as a "martyr for the people... for the tribal community", said his elder sister Siamting, 39.

"What I really want now is the separation of tribal regions from Manipur, for the Indian government to carve out a separate state for tribals in the region," she went on.

Another father of four, daily wage labourer Lalthansang Siekzathang, lay among the bodies in the morgue.

"Real justice would be a separate state cut away from Imphal" - the regional capital - "which only promotes one community", said his widow Jelevi Hmingthangmoi, 30.

Both women insisted their families will not hold funerals for their menfolk until the government agrees to their demands.

"He died defending our land," said Siamting. "As our demands are not met he is still at the morgue."

MOB ATTACKS

The clashes in Manipur were sparked by a protest about plans to give the Meitei "Scheduled Tribe" status.

A form of affirmative action to combat structural inequality and discrimination, that classification would give them guaranteed quotas of government jobs and college admissions.

Violence erupted in Imphal and elsewhere, with protestors setting fire to vehicles and buildings.

According to villagers, Meitei mobs armed with guns and petrol cans then attacked Kuki settlements in the hills.

Hentinglian, 25, said Ype was trying to escape to the paddy fields near his village of Kangvai after it was overwhelmed by a 200-strong mob, who he alleged were accompanied by police commandos.

"The commandos were taking (the) lead holding automatic rifles and some of the Meiteis were taking pistols along with them," he said.

AFP was unable to independently confirm his account and has sought comment from police authorities in Manipur.

Police in the state have been accused of bias in favour of the majority Meitei community, with Kukis evacuated to the safety of army-run camps accusing them of not defending them, or joining the mobs.

Mary Jones, head of Research and Preservation of Zo Identities, an activist group which promotes tribal cultures, told AFP: "We have more than 15 people who have been killed. There will be no funeral until our demands are met by the Indian government."

"We want the government to give us a separate state, away from Manipur. It would be a tribal land."

AFP

MODI'S RULING BJP VOTED OUT IN KEY INDIAN STATE



Congress supporters rally. Photo: AFP

India's opposition Congress party won power in a key state Saturday, partial election results showed, defeating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling BJP a year ahead of national polls.

It ousted Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party from office in Karnataka, the only southern state controlled by the Hindu nationalist grouping.

Karnataka has a population of well over 60 million people - about the same as Britain - and its capital Bengaluru is India's tech hub.

With dozens of results still to come in, Congress had already won 114 places in the 224-seat assembly, enough for an overall majority, and was leading in another 22, which would give it a comfortable cushion, the election commission website showed.

BJP state leader B.S. Yediyurappa - a former chief minister - conceded defeat.

"Victory and defeat aren't new to BJP," he told reporters. "We will introspect about the party's setback. I respectfully accept this

verdict."

The party had mounted a major campaign in the state with Modi himself visiting to promote its muscular brand of Hindu politics.

At one of his rallies, Modi praised an incendiary new film that wildly exaggerates the number of Hindu women converting to Islam and joining the Islamic State jihadist group.

Modi - who is widely expected to stand again in the 2024 general election - also attempted to woo Hindu voters by chanting an ode to the monkey god Hanuman.

Congress campaigned hard on secularism, giveaways of electricity and rice for the poor, and accusations of BJP corruption.

"The marketplace of hatred has been shut down," its leader Rahul Gandhi told reporters at party headquarters in Delhi.

But analysts say the Karnataka result has limited implications for next year's poll, at which the BJP is widely expected to secure a third consecutive victory.

"This election has exposed the limits of Modi's popularity," said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, political commentator and author of the book "Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times".

"It shows the BJP's attempts to polarise the voters somehow or the other has not worked and that there are limits to the politics of Hindutva," he told AFP.

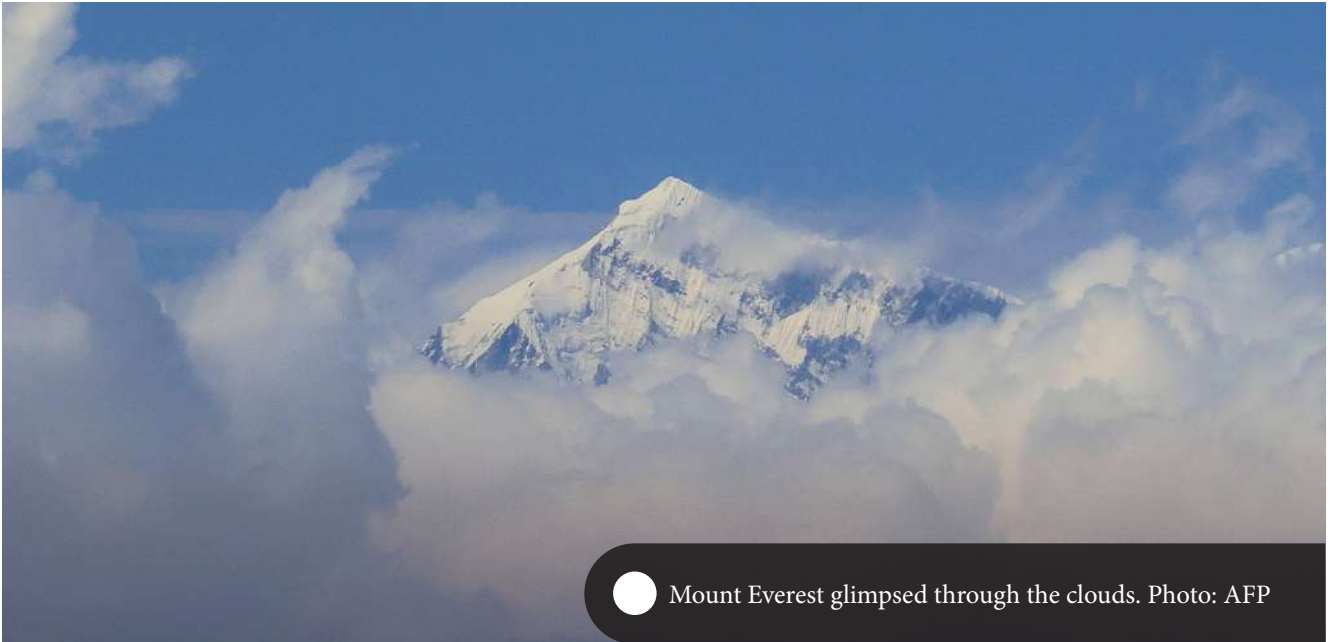
The win would "enhance Congress party's position within the gamut of opposition parties", he said, but would not affect the overall result in 2024.

Congress, the party of India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, dominated the country's politics for decades but has been in decline for years, and the victory in Karnataka will raise the number of states it controls to just four.

The BJP fell short of a majority in the last state election in Karnataka in 2018, but it assumed power a year later allegedly by persuading members of the ruling coalition to defect.

AFP

NEPALI CLIMBERS KICK OFF EVEREST SUMMITS



Mount Everest glimpsed through the clouds. Photo: AFP

Nine Nepalis reached the summit of Mount Everest on Saturday, opening the route for hundreds of climbers expected to scale the world's highest mountain in the coming weeks as this month Nepal will mark the 70th anniversary of the first ascent.

Weather cleared up for the nine to fix ropes to the top of the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) mountain, which will be used by Everest hopefuls.

Every year, the first summit of Everest is by a team from one of Nepal's expedition organising companies, who prepare the way for hundreds of paying customers to follow.

"The team safely reached the summit of Everest today," coordinator Mingma Gyalje Sherpa of Imagine Nepal Trek and Expeditions told AFP.

The team was led by mountain guide Dawa Gyalje Sherpa, who already had 12 Everest summits to his name.

Early Friday, a trail of headlights snaked up Everest's Khumbu icefall as hundreds followed the footsteps of the rope-fixing team to try to reach the summit in the coming days.

"Climbers are going up as the weather is expected to be favourable for a summit for a few days," Tashi Sherpa of expedition organiser Seven Summit Treks said from base camp.

Nepal has issued at least 466 permits to foreign climbers this year, the \$11,000 fee part of total costs for a summit ranging from \$45,000 to \$200,000.

Since most will need a guide, more than 900 people -- a record -- will try to summit this season, which runs until early June.

This could result in heavy traffic and bottlenecks en route to the summit, especially if there is a shorter climbing window because of unfavourable weather.

Already three Nepali climbers died on the mountain last

month when a block of glacial ice fell and swept them into a deep crevasse as they were crossing the treacherous Khumbu icefall as part of a supply mission.

Fatalities climbed to four when a 69-year-old US mountaineer died this month during his acclimatisation rotation at around 6,400 metres.

The heavy traffic has led to fatalities and criticism that some climbers are not experienced enough to be climbing at such a height and level of technicality.

Nepal is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks and welcomes hundreds of adventurers each spring, when temperatures are warm and winds are typically calm.

The 1953 British Mount Everest expedition saw Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary achieve the first confirmed successful ascent on 29 May 1953.

AFP

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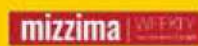
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MORE THAN 71 MILLION PEOPLE INTERNALLY DISPLACED WORLDWIDE IN 2022

A “perfect storm” of overlapping crises forced tens of millions to flee within their own country last year, sending the number of internally displaced people to a record high, monitors said on Thursday last week.

An unprecedented 71.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) were registered in 2022 -- up 20 percent from a year earlier -- amid mass displacement for Rus-

sia’s war in Ukraine, as well as by the monsoon floods that drenched Pakistan.

A full 60.9 million new internal displacements were meanwhile reported in 2022, with some people forced to flee multiple times during the year, according to a joint report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

That marks an all-time high for new internal displacements, and an increase of 60 percent compared to the some 38 million fresh displacements seen in 2021.

That number is “extremely high”, IDMC chief Alexandra Bilak told AFP.

“Much of the increase is caused, of course, by the war in Ukraine, but also by floods in Pa-



kistan, by new and ongoing conflicts across the world, and by a number of sudden and slow onset disasters that we've seen from the Americas all the way to the Pacific."

'VERY VOLATILE'

Last year, new internal displacements from conflict surged to 28.3 million -- nearly doubling from a year earlier and three times higher than the annual average over the past decade.

Beyond the 17 million displacements inside Ukraine last year, eight million were forced

from their homes by Pakistan's monster floods.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw around 16.5 million displacements -- more than half of them due to conflict, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Ethiopia.

The global internal displacement figures are only expected to grow this year, driven in part by fresh conflicts like the violence ravaging Sudan forcing hundreds of thousands to flee.

More than 700,000 people have already become internally displaced by the fighting that erupted on April 15, while another 150,000 people have fled the country, according to UN numbers.

"Since the start of the... most recent conflict in April, we've already recorded the same number of displacements as we did for the whole year in 2022," Bilak said.

"Clearly, it's a very volatile situation on the ground," she said, pointing out that those being newly displaced by the fighting were joining the ranks of more than three million people already displaced across Sudan.

'FOOD SECURITY CRISIS'

While internal displacement is a global phenomenon, nearly three quarters of the world's IDPs live in just 10 countries: Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Colombia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

Many of them remain displaced due to unresolved conflicts

that have dragged on for years and continued to force people to flee their homes last year.

And even as conflict-related displacement surged, natural disasters continued to account for most new internal displacement, spurring 32.6 million such movements in 2022 -- up 40 percent from a year earlier.

NRC chief Jan Egeland described the overlapping crises spurring ever more displacement around the world as a "perfect storm".

"Conflict and disasters combined last year to aggravate people's pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, triggering displacement on a scale never seen before," he said in a statement.

"The war in Ukraine also fuelled a global food security crisis that hit the internally displaced hardest," he said.

"This perfect storm has undermined years of progress made in reducing global hunger and malnutrition."

AFP



AVOIDING DISASTER IN A DANGEROUS WORLD



Covid testing centre in China. Photo: AFP

More people globally are being affected by disasters than ever before, despite the adoption of a UN-backed international disaster reduction agreement in 2015. Experts from around the world are gathering at UN Headquarters to speed up efforts to fully implement that agreement to bring about a safer world.

For Malawians, Cyclone Freddy was an unmitigated disaster. In March this year, the storm ripped through the African country twice during its record-breaking month-long destructive rampage through southern Africa.

The unprecedented duration of the extreme weather event would have been difficult for any country to deal with, but for Malawi, one of the most vulnerable developing nations in the world, it was devastating. Hundreds were killed, more than half a million people were displaced, and thousands of hectares of crops were washed away.

As of early April, hundreds of people remained

missing, and some 1.1 million people were in need of humanitarian support. The severe storm hit during Malawi's worst cholera outbreak in two decades, adding to the pressures on a health system that was already severely stretched.

That same month, a group of independent UN rights experts called for more humanitarian aid, but also for Malawi to “develop durable solutions to avert, minimize, and address disaster displacement through climate adaptation measures, preparedness and disaster risk reduction.”

MORE SEVERE, COSTLY, AND DEADLY DISASTERS

The impact of Freddy is just one example of the growing number of complex and costly disasters affecting increasing numbers of people, that prompted 187 countries to sign up to an international disaster risk reduction agreement in 2015.

The Sendai Framework, named after the Japanese city in which it was adopted, is an international

UN agreement designed to reduce disaster losses. It targets substantially fewer deaths from disasters, a reduction in the disaster damage to infrastructure, and improved early warning systems – all by 2030.

However, eight years on, little progress has been made: according to the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), there has been an 80 per cent increase in the number of people affected by disasters since 2015. What's more, UNDRR finds that many of the lessons from past disasters seem to have been ignored.

HALF-TIME REPORT

From 18 to 19 May, a High-Level meeting at UN Headquarters in New York will provide an opportunity to lay out the many challenges that have stalled progress, and chart a course towards a safer world.

Delegates at the event will have pored over the report of the Midterm Review of the Framework's implementation, which lays bare the scale of the problem. Released in April to mark the half-way point between the launch of the Framework and the 2030 deadline, it does not make for comfortable reading.

The report emphasizes the growing impacts of climate change since 2015, and the brutally unequal consequences, which are much more severe in developing countries; a case in point is the flooding in Pakistan in 2022, which affected more than 33 million people and damaged millions of acres of agricultural land, causing widespread food insecurity.

The growing interconnectedness of the world's societies, environments, and technologies means that disasters can spread extremely quickly. The report points to the COVID-19 pandemic as a prime example, beginning as a local outbreak in China in 2019, before rapidly spreading around the world, leading to the death of some 6.5 million people by the end of 2022.

"One doesn't have to look hard to find examples of how disasters are becoming worse" says Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNDRR. "The sad fact is that many of these disasters are preventable because they are caused by human decisions. The call to action of the Midterm Review is

that countries need to reduce risk in every decision, action, and investment they make.

COUNTRIES TAKING THE LEAD

Clearly, not enough is being done: the costs of disasters continue to rise, but funding for disaster risk reduction is not going up at anywhere near the rate needed to tackle them.

Nevertheless, as the report shows, there are many examples of countries, at a national level, putting plans in place to protect their citizens from the risk of disasters.

To date, disaster preparedness plans have been enacted in 125 countries. They range from legislation in Costa Rica that allows all institutions to allocate budgets for prevention and emergency response, to Australia's Disaster Ready Fund, which will invest up to A\$200 million per year from 2023 - 2024 in disaster prevention and resilience initiatives, and Barbados's disaster clauses that allow for debt to be immediately frozen in the event of an economic impact caused by disaster.

And, whilst the number of people affected by disasters is going up, the proportion being killed has more than halved. The disaster-related mortality rate in the decade 2005-2014 was 1.77 per 100,000 global population, and in the decade 2012-2021 it had dropped to 0.84 (barring the impact of COVID-19).

The recommendations in the Mid-Term Report, and the measures being taken at a national level will form the basis of the discussions at the High-Level Meeting: they contain proof that a safer world is achievable, between now and 2030, if the necessary investments in risk reduction are made.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Dinis Batgudinov

KAREN STATE

KNU elects Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win as chairman

The 17th Karen National Union (KNU) Congress elected Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win as the 10th KNU Chairman on 2 May.

He took over from 91-year-old Saw Mutu Pho who retired.

The 17th KNU Congress started on 24 April in the KNU Administrative area. It is normally held every four years and the 17th Congress was originally due to have been held in 2022, but had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup.

"In the election, Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win won with 70 votes over Saw Sel Gay from KNU Brigade (3) with 68 votes", said an attendee to Mizzima.

Padoh Saw Kwe has a degree in economics from Yangon University and was KNU Brigade 4 chairman from 1990 to 2012.

On 3 May the Congress also elected the KNU General Secretary Joint Secretaries (1) and (2) and 45 Central Committee members.

KNU Brigades 2 and 5 did not attend the Congress or vote in the elections. There are seven KNU brigades and enough attended the Congress to make the votes binding.

KAREN STATE

Simultaneous attack on two Mon State police stations

According to defence forces, they launched

simultaneous attacks on two police stations killing at least two police officers in Bilin Township, Mon State on 6 May.

The police stations in the Bilin Township villages of Taungzun and Winka were simultaneously attacked at 2:46 p.m.

Winka Police Station was attacked with 40mm mortars and small arms and two police officers were killed according to a representative of the Kyaikhto Revolutionary Force (KRF), one of the groups who took part in the attack.

He said: "There were eight police officers stationed at Winka Police Station and we know that two of them were killed. We simultaneously launched attacks against two police stations. The police opened fire in retaliation when we attacked Winka Police Station".

At the same time four bombs were dropped from drones onto the Taungzun Police Station. Currently, defence forces are carrying out investigations to find out whether there were any casualties or damage, according to the KRF representative.

He said: "The two attacks happened at the same time. We used ground forces to attack Winka Police Station and we used a drone to attack Taungzun Police Station. Because Taungzun was a drone mission, confirming the damage and impact on the military soldiers and police officers was difficult. We're looking into the effects of each mission we carried out today."

Defence forces involved in the simultaneous attacks included: the KRF, The Kyaikhto People's Defence Force (PDF), The Pa'O People's Defense Force - Kham Dom (PPDF-KD), and Thaton PDF.



JUNTA'S INFORMATION MINISTER HOLDS TALKS WITH FCCJ DELEGATION ON MEDIA COOPERATION AMID MEDIA SUPPRESSION IN MYANMAR

The junta's Information Minister U Maung Maung Ohn, met with a delegation led by Mr Khaldon Azhari, the former president of the Foreign Correspondent Club of Japan (FCCJ), on 11 May to discuss cooperation in the media sector and the reformation and upgrading of The Global New Light of Myanmar English newspaper, according to the junta-controlled newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The meeting, which took place in Nay Pyi Taw, aimed to explore ways to enhance media development of Myanmar, according to the junta's newspaper.

The Global New Light of Myanmar, the country's English newspaper, has been under scrutiny since the military coup, as it serves as a propaganda tool for the junta.

The FCCJ, founded in 1945, is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious press clubs.

In the aftermath of the coup, the military junta has resorted to brutal measures in its relentless campaign to suppress the pro-democracy movement in the country.

The junta has honed in on the media as a primary target, employing tactics to suffocate the coverage of protests and its violent crackdown.

Journalists have borne the brunt of this assault, facing arrests, acts of violence, and pervasive threats.

In a bid to tighten their grip on information, the junta has revoked licenses of independent media outlets and frequently imposed restrictions on internet access.

RAKHINE BUSINESSPEOPLE HOPE TO TRADE DIRECTLY WITH INDIA THROUGH SITTWE PORT



Sittwe. Photo: AFP

Local merchants and business owners in Myanmar's Rakhine State expect to trade directly with India via the India-funded international Sittwe Port, which opened on 9 May, according to a report by the Development Media Group, conveyed by UNOPS.

The Rakhine State Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RSCCI) and an Indian delegation led by India's Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways met at Sittwe Hotel on Tuesday.

The meeting focused on increased production by small-scale and medium-scale businesses in Rakhine State, their access to markets, and joint ventures between Indian and local businesspeople in Rakhine State. "We discussed preferential trade and reduction of tariffs on exports from Myanmar through Sittwe Port, and conditions for regular operation of cargo ships between Sittwe and Kolkata, and the possibility for local businessmen to operate their vessels in inland water transport," a RSCCI statement said.

Officials of the Rakhine State Coastal Ship Owners Association also held talks with the Indian del-

egation. To bring the proposals to fruition, there is a need for the two countries to sign a coastal shipping line agreement, said Rakhine State businessman Khin Maung Gyi. "With that agreement, ships from India can enter Rakhine State, and vice versa. Local businessmen plan to import steel, fertiliser and cement from India," he said.

Local business owners in Rakhine State said they have yet to wait and see how overseas trade will be done through Sittwe Port. "Indian and Myanmar authorities said the trade will create business opportunities for Rakhine State as well as Chin State and Mizoram and Zorinpui in India," said Khin Maung Gyi.

Sittwe Port is part of the India-funded Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport project. Once fully operationalised, the project will provide alternate connectivity from the eastern coast of India to the northeastern states of India through Sittwe Port. The port connects to Paletwa in Myanmar through an inland waterway and from Paletwa to Zorinpui in Mizoram through a road component.

SHAN STATE'S KENG TUNG AIRPORT TO GET UPGRADE FOR DIRECT FLIGHTS WITH LAOS, CHINA AND THAILAND



Kengtung airport in Shan State will reportedly be upgraded to connect direct flights with three foreign countries including Laos.

The State Administrative Council (SAC) Chairman said that the airports in Myanmar would be upgraded for landing and taking off by heavy aircrafts being used in Myanmar.

Kengtung is blessed with a beautiful natural environment and it is a hill station with various tourist destinations.

He said that the Kengtung airport must be upgraded to make it connected with neighbouring countries by direct flights and all heavy aircrafts being used in Myanmar could land at this airport.

“Upgrading of Kengtung airport is for development of the tourism sector in Kengtung and for the development of socio-economic life of the local residents,” he added.

Kengtung is the capital city of Shan State (East).

Similarly, the SAC chairman instructed the officials in April to upgrade the Tachileik airport for landing and taking off by heavy airplanes.

Also the Thandwe airport in Rakhine State is being upgraded for landing and taking off by jets as this city has many travellers visiting the beach resort.

MYANMAR DIAMOND JEWELRY EXPORT ALLOWED

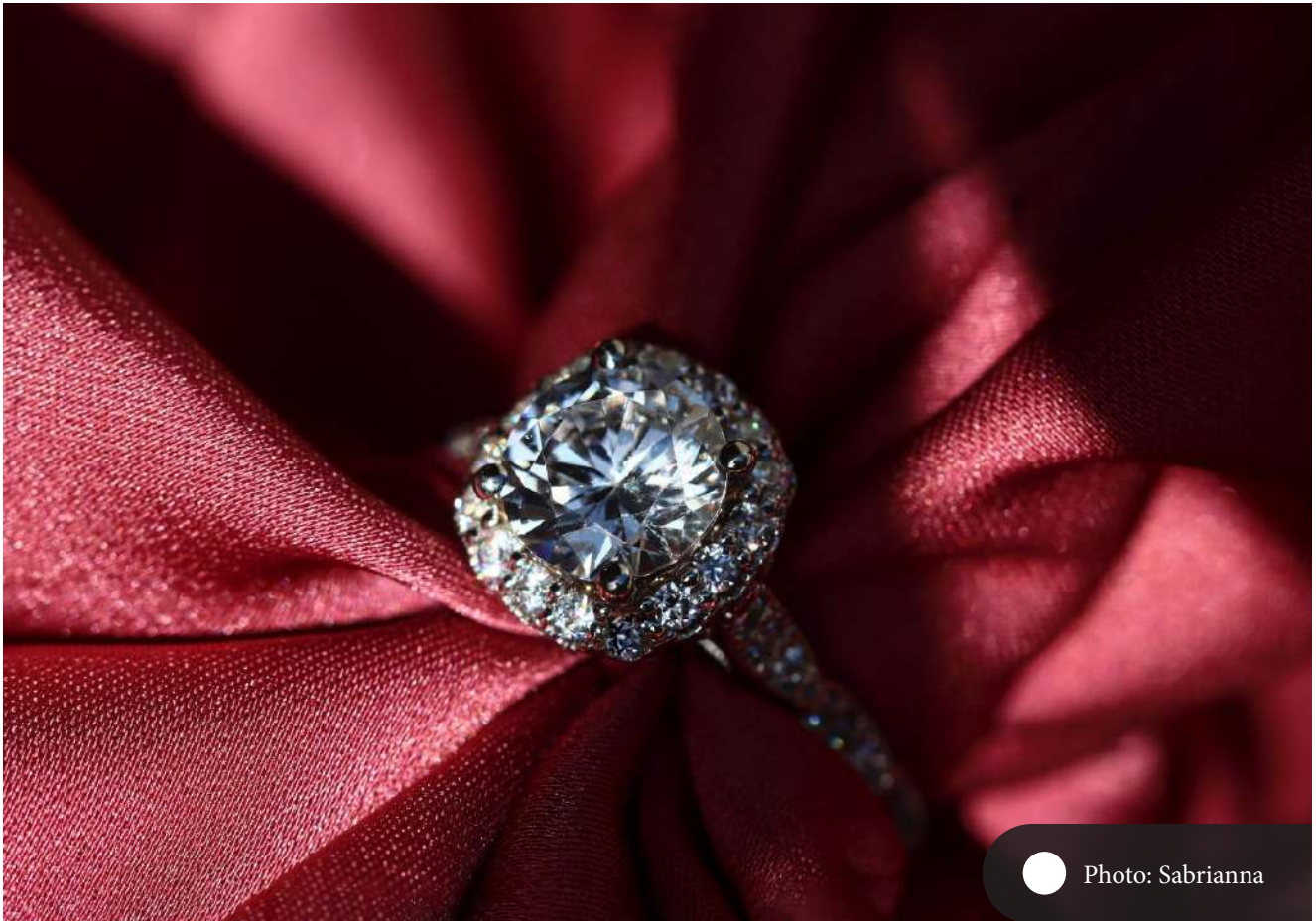


Photo: Sabrianna

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce under the Military Council issued an announcement which says that they will allow the export of diamond jewelry to foreign countries.

Previously the ministry banned the export of both polished diamonds and diamond jewelry but now they are allowing the export of diamond jewelry.

In this new announcement, the ministry banned only the export of polished diamonds. But the Yangon Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YGEA) said that this new policy would not have a serious impact on the diamond jewelry market though it allows the export of diamond jewelry.

Diamond traders said that after allowing the export of diamond jewelry to foreign countries the traders could have a bigger and wider market as they could trade diamond jewelry made with gold in both domestic and foreign markets.

A diamond and gold trader said that they would export the diamond jewelry to the countries which had friendly relations with them and currently they initially only explore opportunities.

The ministry made an announcement in 2020 which banned the export of diamonds, crude oil, ivory, elephants, horses and rare animals, weapons and ammunitions and antiques by sea, border trade and air cargo so that the diamonds could not be exported in all forms - rough, polished and in jewelry.

Now the Ministry of Economy and Commerce under the Military Council changed this ban in its new order.

In this new order, the word 'diamond' was replaced with the new wording 'rough and polished diamonds which have not been made into jewelry'.

Penrose Thitsa

NEW PORT IN SITTWE RECEIVES INAUGURAL CARGO VESSEL FROM KOLKATA

A new port in Sittwe, Myanmar, with assistance from India, has recently started operating and is now receiving container ships, reported the Nikkei Asia.

The inaugural arrival took place on 9 May, as the first cargo vessel from the Indian city of Kolkata docked at Sittwe Port in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Sittwe Port plays a crucial role in India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, connecting Kolkata in eastern India to Sittwe on Myanmar's western coast via a sea route, according to some officials. From there, the corridor traces an inland route through Myanmar via the Kaladan River and a highway, crossing into northeastern India.

Before the ceremony, Indian shipping minister Sarbananda Sonowal enthusiastically praised the port as a transformative endeavor, stating that it would open the doors of India's northeast to Southeast Asia.

The Kaladan project, valued at \$484 million, was mutually agreed upon by both nations in 2008, with New Delhi extending comprehensive support for its realization.

Although India has consistently advocated for a restoration of civilian rule in Myanmar, it has maintained a close association with the Burmese military junta since its assumption of power in 2021, choosing to keep its distance from Western sanctions.



HAVING TEA

Two women take time out on the edge of Inle Lake in Shan State to take tea.

Photo: Julien de Saluberry

IN FOCUS



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: GAY MYANMAR DOCTOR TAKES TO THE JUNGLE TO HELP WAR VICTIMS



Myanmar doctor Pyae Phyo Kyaw and his boyfriend.
Photo: Insight Myanmar

Myanmar doctor Pyae Phyo Kyaw has had to treat Karenni villagers who have lost limbs to landmines that he saw soldiers plant, and he has seen others die from treatable diseases because they simply couldn't get the proper medicine. Combined with what that Karenni population has had to so long endure, it all strengthens his commitment to help build a more equitable society in Myanmar.

Yet, Pyae Phyo Kyaw's story is not traditional.

In a Podcast by Insight Myanmar, Pyae Phyo Kyaw describes how he is simultaneously helping his people on the one hand, while taking a sledgehammer to the barriers that have long defined Burmese society on the other. A gay doctor who has traveled deep into Karenni territory with his boyfriend to set up a mobile

medical clinic in some of the hardest hit areas, Pyae Phyo Kyaw is attempting to dismantle, by word and deed, the structures of prejudice and mistrust that have long existed within his country.

This is an insight into Burmese culture and norms, as well as insight into the challenges for medical practitioners operating in an ethnic area of Myanmar where medical treatment is hard to come by and many suffer because the commonest forms of medicine are not available.

Check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast interview with Pyae Phyo Kyaw here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2022/3/4/episode-94-pride-and-prejudice>



Myanmar doctor Pyae Phyo Kyaw and his boyfriend are on a medical mission. Photo: Insight Myanmar



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