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Myanmar**

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MYANMAR JUNTA USES AID AS A WEAPON OF WAR

Cyclone Mocha has evaporated leaving behind devastation and a population in need in Myanmar.

What this means is the military junta can use this vacuum to their advantage.

On the one hand, the junta authorities can hand out aid to people in need, or allow third parties to do so, supporting communities they favour, such as in the city of Sittwe or the surrounding areas, building dependence on the regime to some extent.

And on the other hand, the junta can block the distribution of aid to “troublesome” areas, such as Sagaing, and the Chin and Kachin states, particularly to communities who by choice or default back the Spring Revolution resistance.

Aid, therefore, can be used as a weapon of war.

In the wake of the horrific Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the then-military regime stumbled in their humanitarian response but their action – or lack of action – was to some extent governed by xenophobia, and ethnic and religious politics. This time round, in the wake of the less damaging Cyclone Mocha, the current military junta are to some extent repeating this behaviour, using the humanitarian crisis to their advantage.

Think about it. The Myanmar generals live in luxury in their ivory tower in Naypyidaw, divorced from the wreckage of people’s lives across a swathe of their country hit by the storm. Yet, despite their bluster, they are frightened that their usurping of power since 2021 is not going to plan. It’s going badly wrong. Hence, these throne-holders will use any excuse or opportunity to attempt to twist circumstances in their favour, whether in using aid as a tool, or bragging in a pro-junta newspaper Op-Ed just published that: “Mocha practically shows who is the real government

in the country”.

For the junta, Cyclone Mocha is a perfect vehicle, a natural disaster twisted to benefit the junta agenda.

Two junta objectives stand out. Firstly, the cyclone swept across resistance strongholds in the middle of the country, damaging and flooding villages and further denigrating areas caught up in the destruction of war. So, the junta will block aid going to these areas. Secondly, the junta has not ended its war against the Muslim Rohingya. What is clear is the last remaining Rohingya in Rakhine State, numbering 600,000 and a large proportion living in IDP camps, will be last on the list when it comes to humanitarian aid.

Speaking this week at a UN Security Council meeting in New York, Women’s Peace Network advocate Wai Wai Nu highlighted the vulnerability of the Rohingya community – torn between those still residing in Rakhine and those in Bangladesh refugee camps. Here the relentless campaign against these “unrecognized” people by the Myanmar military – ongoing over the decades – continues to play out with the community now pressed post-cyclone by thirst and starvation.

The Myanmar generals will pretend to help, with “photo opportunities” as seen over the last week, and a superficial level of dialogue that will lead to some international aid being allowed in, but there will be blockage of humanitarian supplies to communities not favoured by the junta.

As Wai Wai Nu told the UN, aid should be freely distributed to communities in need, and the control should not be left to the whims of the generals, in essence the same generals, she points out, who oversaw the Cyclone Nargis aid debacle.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

Editor In-Chief and Managing Director
Soe Myint

Contributors

Sai Wansai,
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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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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Cover photo of girl walking in her cyclone-damaged village in Rakhine State by AFP

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IN FOCUS





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GETTING AID

A woman and her child collect a bag of rice, part of a humanitarian aid shipment being handed out in Sittwe, Rakhine State last week.

Photo: AFP

565 PRISONERS TRANSFERRED FROM INSEIN PRISON TO BAGO WITH NO NOTICE

5 65 prisoners were transferred from Yangon's Insein Prison to Bago's Tharyarwaddy Prison on 9 May.

The 330 male and 235 female prisoners were transferred without their families being informed according to the lawyer who told Mizzima about the transfer.

"Among the transferred prisoners, there were some prisoners charged under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances law to seven years in prison", said the lawyer.

U Tun Kyi, a member of the Steering Committee of the Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS), said that the authorities transfer prisoners, including political prisoners, in this way to cause hardships not just to the prisoners but their families too.

"Yes, they transferred some prisoners to Tharyarwaddy Prison. Political prisoners were also included in the transfer. They always do this, prisoners are treated like chickens in a cage", said U Tun Kyi.

He added that around 700 political prisoners

were transferred from Insein Prison to Tharyarwaddy Prison and Thayet Prison in Bago Region at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, but the only transferred prisoners who had no contact with their families were the political prisoners.

At that time transferred political prisoners' family members had also told Mizzima they had not been permitted to see their incarcerated family members.

On Buddha Day on 3 May 2023, the junta granted early releases for 2,153 prisoners across the country who had been convicted under Article 505 (a) of the Penal Code.

Since the coup, a total of 22,018 people have been arrested. Of those 4,232 have been released, 17,786 are currently still detained and of the detained, 5,807 have been sentenced. 154 people have been sentenced to death, but only 112 prisoners are on death row as the rest were sentenced in absentia, according to figures released by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

JUNTA TO DEMOLISH 100 HOMES IN PYIN OO LWIN TOWNSHIP

The junta ordered residents in Taung Yadanar Ward in Pyin Oo Lwin Township, Mandalay Region, many of whom are military veterans, to leave their homes by 8 May.

"We were all asked to move by today [8 May]. We are very depressed. We have filed a petition not to demolish the ward. But, since they started forcibly demolishing houses we decided to demolish our house move of our own accord, even though we didn't want to."

The area of Taung Yadanar Ward that the junta has ordered to be demolished is home to many military veterans, former police officers and former and current civil servants, as well as many other ordinary people.

According to ward residents, the junta has said it is clearing the land because it belongs to the railway station.

"We are not squatters or people who have cleared land and built houses. We are veteran military staff, policemen, and employees of government

departments. We have been living in this quarter together with the current [government department] staff members and ordinary people. They came to demolish [our house] after sending three notice letters. Actually, we received only one notice letter. It was last year [2022].

The junta ordered 1,000 households in Taung Yadanar Ward to be destroyed on 1 September 2022, claiming that the land was owned by the railway. In response, the residents filed a petition.

The residents said that their land is far from any land owned by Myanmar Railway and 2.8 miles (4.5 km) from the railway station. They also said that the 4 residents had installed and paid for sealed roads, electrical lines and fences. They also hold a Legal (10) Form saying they are entitled to live there.

Since the coup, the junta has cleared away housing in big cities such as Yangon and Mandalay claiming that they are encroaching on government land.

MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES AIRSTRIKE AGAINST SAGAING SCHOOL

The Myanmar junta launched an airstrike against a school in Htan Taw Bawdi Village in Sagaing Region's Ye-U Township on the afternoon of 9 May, according to a teacher from the village.

The attack caused a lot of damage to the school where about 300 students are taught by over 30 teachers.

A teacher who works at the community-based school said: "As we had received information about airstrikes in advance teachers and students were evacuated and there were no casualties."

But, according to the teacher, rockets from the fighter jets hit the village burning a haystack and killing

two cattle.

"We will keep fighting against the military at any cost. Our priority, however, is to ensure the safety of our students. We cannot fight with guns like the PDFs, but we will hold chalk and participate in the revolution in any way we can", said the teacher.

The junta has been continuously launching airstrikes against hospitals and schools.

On 16 September a junta airstrike hit a school and killed 11 children in Letyetkone Village just over 10km to the southwest of Ye-U Township in Sagaing Region's Tabayin Township.

14 ILLEGAL MYANMAR MIGRANTS ARRESTED IN RANONG, THAILAND

14 migrant workers from Myanmar were arrested by the Thai Army on 9 May as they were travelling to work in Malaysia and Phuket, Thailand.

They were detained at about 11:30 p.m. near to the border post in Ranong, Thailand as they were trying to enter the country illegally, according to a statement by Thai Infantry Division 25.

It said that Thai soldiers had stopped the migrant workers' boat to inspect it and had arrested the

migrants and the boat's crew when they attempted to flee.

The boat's pilot was not among the arrested, but it was discovered that the Myanmar migrant labourers had each paid a brokerage fee of 30,000 Thai baht, (about \$880 USD) to be smuggled into Thailand.

Since the February 2021 coup there has been an exodus of people from Myanmar with many of them going to Thailand.

MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES AIRSTRIKE NEAR DAWEI SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

The Myanmar junta launched an airstrike on Nabule Village, which is next to the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region.

Fighting broke out between local people's defence forces (PDFs) and a column of junta soldiers who entered Nabule on the morning of 14 May. This led to the junta launching an airstrike in support of its troops.

A member of a Yebyu-based PDF said: "Fighting broke out this morning [14 May] and the military launched airstrikes as both sides were exchanging fire."

Tanintharyi PDF reported that a junta fighter

jet from Myeik Airbase Command attacked at 8:26 a.m. before returning to the airbase.

A statement from Enemy Air Route Channel also said that a fighter plane had taken off from Myeik airbase and headed north towards Dawei at 8:10 a.m. on 14 May.

This is the first time that the junta has launched an airstrike in the area of Nabule, according to local news sources who said that the casualty numbers from the airstrike are still unknown.

"The damage has not yet been confirmed because the military situation between the two sides is tense. We are currently clearing the area", said the Yebyu PDF member.

CLEAN UP

Serious post-cyclone humanitarian challenge in Myanmar





Recovery in Sittwe, Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

As of the weekend, a week after Cyclone Mocha cut a swathe across Myanmar, the military junta noted that the death toll had reached 145, most of the dead from the Rohingya community.

Cyclone Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour) to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh over a period of about three or four days, collapsing buildings, ripping off roofs, knocking down trees and turning streets into rivers.

Although Cyclone Mocha ranked Category 5 alongside Category 5 Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in 2008, the overall damage was less severe this time round – just over a hundred killed compared with over 138,000 killed by Cyclone Nargis.

“Altogether 145 local people were killed during the cyclone,” a statement from Myanmar’s junta authorities said.

The number included four soldiers, 24 locals and 117 “Bengalis”, it added, using a pejorative term for the Rohingya.

Media reports that 400 Rohingya had died were “not true”, the junta’s statement said, adding that

action would be taken against outlets that published the figure.

Widely viewed as interlopers from Bangladesh, the Rohingya are denied citizenship and access to health care in Myanmar, and require permission to travel outside of their townships.

A Rohingya village leader previously told AFP that more than 100 people were missing from his village alone following the storm.

Another leader based near the Rakhine state capital of Sittwe told AFP that at least 105 Rohingya had died around the city, with counting still ongoing.

The cyclone had left at least 800,000 people in Myanmar in need of emergency food aid and other assistance, the United Nations World Food Programme said in Geneva on Friday last week.

“The cyclone has made a bad situation much, much worse for millions of people who are already struggling to cope in very precarious conditions,” WFP deputy director for Asia and the Pacific Anthea Webb told reporters.

That said, there appears to be a grudging admission that evacuations and care to take shelter were



People carry a coffin in a village outside Sittwe, Rakhine State. Photo: AFP



A young girl walks through her damaged village in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

a couple of the reasons why the casualty rate of Cyclone Mocha was a far cry from that of Cyclone Nargis.

'UNITED STRENGTH'

Junta-backed media reported Friday that naval ships and the air force had brought in thousands of bags of rice, while thousands of electricians, fire-fighters and rescue workers had been deployed across Rakhine.

Normal flight service had resumed at Sittwe airport on Thursday, according to newspaper the Global New Light of Myanmar.

Some international aid groups, including the WFP, were working on the ground in Sittwe this week, AFP correspondents said.

A junta spokesman did not respond to questions on whether UN agencies would be granted access to displacement camps outside Sittwe that house Rohingya.

"Offers from the international community for providing aid have been accepted," state media said Tuesday.

"But relief and rehabilitation tasks must be done through existing united strength," said the Global New Light of Myanmar.

A military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 sent hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh, with harrowing stories emerging of murder, rape and arson.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing -- who was head of the army during the crackdown -- has dismissed the term Rohingya as "imaginary".

In neighbouring Bangladesh, officials told AFP that no one had died in the cyclone, which passed close to sprawling refugee camps that now house almost one million Rohingya.

Cyclones - the equivalent of hurricanes in the North Atlantic or typhoons in the Northwest Pacific - are a regular and deadly menace on the coast of the northern Indian Ocean where tens of millions of people live.

It has yet to be seen how the junta will be judged over their handling of the humanitarian relief programme given they appear to be prevaricating over access to international aid organizations -- as was seen in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

Mizzima/AFP.

SOME 800,000 PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CYCLONE MOCHA IN MYANMAR: UN

At least 800,000 people in Myanmar need emergency food aid and other assistance after Cyclone Mocha slammed into the conflict-torn country earlier this week, the United Nations said last Friday.

Cyclone Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of up to 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh on Sunday, with Myanmar's junta saying 145 people had been killed and media reports sug-

gesting the number was far higher.

The UN's World Food Programme described "a trail of devastation" across Myanmar's Rakhine State, a region that is home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who live in displace-



● Municipal workers clear fallen trees on a road in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

ment camps following decades of ethnic conflict.

The cyclone left “houses flattened, roads cut off by uprooted trees, hospitals and schools destroyed, and telecommunications and power lines severely disrupted,” Anthea Webb, WFP’s deputy regional director for Asia and the Pacific, told reporters in Geneva via video-link from Bangkok.



“There are at least 800,000 people in urgent need of emergency food assistance,” she said, adding that “greater needs for food, shelter, water, health and other humanitarian aid are expected to be revealed as we reach more areas.”

And while Bangladesh was spared a direct hit, “nearly half a million Bangladeshis and thousands of Rohingya refugees have lost their homes and assets”, she said.

Webb said that WFP had started its response to Mocha before the storm hit, reaching 28,000 people in Bangladesh near the Myanmar border with advance cash aid to help them prepare.

And, she said, as soon as the worst of the storm passed, the agency had reached thousands of refugees with emergency food assistance, and were working “around the clock” to resume their regular food support.

In Myanmar, WFP had begun emergency food distributions to families in evacuation shelters in Rakhine state and the neighbouring Magway region.

The agency, she said, aimed to reach at least 800,000 people in the worst affected areas of Rakhine, Magway and Chin - almost half of them already displaced by conflict - for an initial three months.

“In both countries, the

needs are immense,” Webb said.

She pointed out that funding shortages had forced WFP in March to reduce the value of food vouchers for refugees living in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh to just 10 US cents per meal.

“And we will have to cut it again in June unless funding is secured,” she said, adding that WFP urgently needs \$56 million until the end of the year to help Rohingya refugees there.

In Myanmar, meanwhile, the UN agency needs \$60 million to provide emergency assistance to 2.1 million internally displaced and vulnerable people, including the 800,000 hit by Mocha, she said.

“The cyclone has made a bad situation much worse for millions of people already struggling to cope in extremely precarious conditions.”

AFP

INDIA'S OPERATION KARUNA PROVIDES HUMANITARIAN AID TO CYCLONE MOCHA VICTIMS IN MYANMAR



Indian Ambassador Shri Vinay Kumar ceremonially hands over humanitarian aid to Soe Thein Chief Minister, Yangon Region. Photo: Indian Embassy

In keeping with its tradition of Vasudaiva Kutumbakam, India as the first responder to natural disasters in the region started Operation Karuna on 18 May to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) materials for the people of Myanmar affected by Cyclone Mocha, according to a press release from the Indian Embassy 19 May.

Three ships INS Shivalik, INS Kamorta and INS Savitri brought around 40 tonnes of materials on 18 May 2023.

The fourth ship INS Gharial brought additional materials, mostly medicines and medical items on 19 May 2023.

The first lot of consignment of HADR materials were handed over by Ambassador Shri Vinay Kumar to Soe Thein Chief Minister, Yangon Region on 18 May 2023 in the presence of Bo Htay, Mayor of Yangon, Major General Zaw Hein, Yangon Regional Commander Rear Admiral Naing Min Kyaw, Commander, Naval Training Command, Commodore Kyaw Lin Zaw, Deputy Commander, Central Naval Command and Captain Thet Win Hlaing, Commander, No 1 Fleet.

The relief materials carried by the four ships have 14 pallets of essential items of use (edible and

non-edible) and 16 medical pallets. INS Gharial also contains portable medical container facility with the capacity for a 120 bedded hospital. The medical pallets contain first aid items, antibiotics, anti-histamines, analgesics, intravenous fluids for commonly spread infections and diseases.

The food items handed over are instant noodles, rice, milk powder, drinking water, ready-to-eat meals, high energy biscuits, Multi Micronutrient Food, cooking oil, sugar, canned fish, canned meat, tea, salt, spices, etc.

Among the non-food items are tarpaulin, tents, bleaching powder, disinfectant fluid, soaps, detergent powder, hygiene kits, dignity kits, crutches, wheel chairs, chain saw, divator sets, towels, shirts, blankets, sandals, fuel tanks, solar lamps, portable generators, water pumps, etc.

All HADR materials were immediately airlifted for the Rakhine State and would be distributed among the affected communities.

India stands ready to extend further support under Operation Karuna as may be required for relief and rehabilitation of the people affected by the cyclone, the statement said.

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ROHINGYA IN MYANMAR COUNT THE DEAD AFTER CYCLONE MOCHA

Rohingya families in cyclone-hit Myanmar buried loved ones outside shattered villages and searched the seashore for the missing, expecting little help from a government that denies their identity. Many live in IDP camps that have not so far received too much attention in the drive to hand out humanitarian aid.

And, to complicate matters, the claim made that 400 Rohingya – mostly women and children – died in flash floods has been rebuffed by the Myanmar junta, the authorities threatening people who make this claim.

As of the weekend, the junta claimed a total of 145 people of various ethnicities had died as a result of Cyclone Mocha.

The Category 5 cyclone snapped bridges, downed power lines and ruptured close-lying huts in displacement camps and villages across Rakhine state, leaving tens of thousands of the persecuted minority even more on the edge.

On Tuesday last week, many Rohingya were trying to pick through piles of debris that had once roofed their homes or clear fallen trees from village paths.

Others were looking for family members not seen since the cyclone made landfall. It was the most powerful storm to hit the region in over a decade.

Dozens were reported dead and more than one hundred were missing.

“We were trying to run but the water was very



● A Rohingya man burns debris in an IDP camp in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

high and dragged us down,” said Sar Hla Ma Kha, 40, from Basara village.

“The water was around our chest. My daughter and her son were lost while we were running.”

Many walked the shore searching for family members swept away by the raging waters.

Some found the bodies of their loved ones.

Aa Bul Hu Son, 66, on Tuesday buried his daughter, the latest member of his family to have been taken by the storm.

“I just found her dead body in the lake in the village and buried her right away. I can’t find any words to express my loss,” he said.

“Nine out of my 14 family members were killed,” he told AFP next to the hastily dug grave within sight of the shore.

“While we were thinking of moving, the waves came immediately and took us.”

“Only five survived. The (rest) couldn’t resist

when strong wind swathed them away.”

As the small group said Islamic prayers over Aa Bul Hu Son’s daughter and lowered her body into the soil, a plane took off from Rakhine state capital Sittwe’s airport a few kilometres behind the group.

STATELESS

Contact was slowly being re-established with Sittwe, a city of around 150,000 people, with roads being cleared and internet connections re-established.

Images broadcast by state media showed troops unloading aid at the airport, and state media reported junta chief Min Aung Hlaing had visited to view the damage.

But few Rohingya in the devastated villages along the Rakhine coast were optimistic about receiving help fast.

Widely viewed as interlopers from Bangladesh, Rohingya are denied citizenship and access to healthcare, and require permission to travel outside of their townships.

A military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 sent hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh with harrowing stories of murder, rape and arson.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing - who was head of the army during the crackdown - has dismissed the term Rohingya as “imaginary.”

Many of those remaining live in camps in Rakhine, displaced by ethnic violence that has riven the state for decades.

For those who had struggled to make a life, the storm had wiped out years of work.

“I had to work very hard for my living and to own things and rice,” Arbada said outside Basara village.

“Now all of my belongings, rice and even dishes are all gone. Now I’ve no money to rebuild my house. We are starving. I haven’t eaten for two days.”

“How many days does a person have to go hungry? I don’t know when the government will come to help.”



Mizzima/AFP.

MYANMAR DEMOCRACY ADVOCATE WAI WAI NU TELLS UN OF GROWING CRISIS IN MYANMAR

A Myanmar democracy and women's rights advocate spoke 19 May at a United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula meeting in New York on the worsening crisis in Myanmar and the problems posed by Cyclone Mocha.

Here is the transcription of her speech:

YOUR EXCELLENCIES,

I thank the United Kingdom for convening this Arria-Formula meeting. My name is Wai Wai Nu, and I am the founder and executive director of Women's Peace Network, a former political prisoner, and a member of the Rohingya community in Myanmar.

Since the Council passed

resolution 2669 last December, the junta has committed atrocities of an increasing frequency and scale. We are now witnessing the junta arbitrarily arresting and detaining many more civilians, torching and razing more villages, and burning and killing more civilians to death. These atrocities are leaving women, girls, and LGBTQ+



Wai Wai Nu, right, with Maria Ressa. Photo: Facebook

members at greater risk of the military's targeted sexual violence. Last month's Pazigy massacre resulted in Myanmar having one of the highest numbers of airstrikes in the world.

According to the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar's human rights situation, some members in this very council are supplying the weapons and aviation fuel that are facilitating the commission of such crimes. The Council must now redress its failures, and reaffirm its commitment to peace and security



in the world.

EXCELLENCIES,

Cyclone Mocha and its aftermath are now exacerbating such life-threatening risks for communities in western Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine State. The cyclone left a trail of devastation in the country with landslides and flooding, and destruction of homes and internally displaced persons camps, and injuries and deaths.

However, four days after Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar, the junta is still blocking humanitarian assistance to Rakhine State – including from UN agencies. These areas' communities have had no food or even water for days. Another day without the international community's life-saving support will starve them to death.

We know what this looks like. In 2008, over 140,000 lives were lost in Myanmar in a similar crisis – Cyclone Nargis. Following that cyclone, the military dictatorship deliberately obstructed international relief efforts to affected areas, and even held a sham constitutional referendum. The military's willful disregard of human lives magnified Nargis's devastation. This is the same, Burmese military that composes the junta today.

If history repeats itself again, it will further devastate communities in Myanmar – especially the 600,000 Rohingya remaining in the country. This is because most of the Rohingya live in the areas affected by Cyclone Mocha, and their conditions make them disproportionately vulnera-

ble to such disasters. In Rakhine State, the Rohingya have for decades been forcibly segregated in conditions of total destitution. 140,000 Rohingya have long been confined in IDP camps in areas vulnerable to natural disasters – and shelters made to last only a couple of years.

The Council must recall that the state-sponsored violence in Rakhine State, in 2012, is what resulted in such IDP camps. And it was in Rakhine State where the Burmese military systematically and brutally murdered, tortured, raped Rohingya, and burned down their homes – forcing hundreds of thousands to flee in 2017. That was the year when this very Council responded with a presidential statement urging for “the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State to be addressed.”

Meaningful steps to address the apartheid in Rakhine State – and the decades-long genocide against Rohingya – could have mitigated Cyclone Mocha's aftermath. These steps could have prevented the deaths of over 400 Rohingya, and the disappearance of hundreds more.

So, when we witness the junta sabotage the evacuation of Rohingya before Cyclone Mocha, or block aid to the IDP camps, they become further evidence of the ongoing genocide. They add to the junta's tightening restrictions on Rohingya's freedom of movement, access to education and health-care, livelihood, marriage and birth, and other basic rights. According to my organization, Women's Peace Network, the junta has

used these measures to arbitrarily arrest and detain over 3,100 Rohingya since its attempted coup.

Such are the junta's deliberate steps to exacerbate the dire conditions of life – for Rohingya – in Rakhine State.

EXCELLENCIES,

In the context of genocide, states must condemn and halt the military's pilot repatriation project – because it will not ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

The project is designed to give the junta control over every aspect of the returning Rohingya's lives in Myanmar. It will enable the junta to control the Rohingya's access to humanitarian assistance, to segregate them in internment camps, and to force them to accept the discriminatory National Verification Card scheme: the NVC.

Consequently, the project will further entrench the ongoing apartheid in Rakhine State. And worryingly, it will place more Rohingya in a position of vulnerability for continued acts of genocide.

In fact, the lack of voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation is prolonging the refugee crisis. Accordingly, it has become one of the main causes of human trafficking of the Rohingya, the boat crisis, and the rise in gang and militant violence in the refugee camps – combined with the deteriorating security and camp conditions, and the worsening food crisis.

To genuinely create the

conditions for Rohingya's repatriation, the Council thus must end the impunity that has enabled this genocide. This is the same impunity that emboldened the military to launch a coup, and even act in violation of every single point of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus – since its adoption.

YOUR EXCELLENCIES,

Time and time again, the military has shown us that it will not stop committing crimes – It can never be trusted as a stakeholder for peace and security in Myanmar.

Relying on the military to transform itself will thus further disintegrate the situation in Myanmar into a regional crisis. Despite this, ASEAN still hasn't effectively responded to the situation in Myanmar.

ASEAN's refusal to take any further actions or even reconsider its failed Five-Point Consensus is disappointing.

And based on the ASEAN Chairman's statement last week, the AHA Centre will likely continue to collaborate with the military on its sham repatriation efforts – including by implementing the genocidal NVC. This strategy from ASEAN will only prolong the crisis and bring further instability to the region.

EXCELLENCIES,

In resolution 2669, the Council decided to stay actively seized of the matter in Myanmar.

Accordingly, I urge the Council to build that resolution. The Council must urgently exercise its Chapter VII mandate and

power to end the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe, and bring peace and security to Myanmar and the region.

This includes the Council's actions to immediately end impunity in Myanmar and hold the Burmese military leaders accountable for their international crimes. It must at least fulfill the shortcomings of resolution 2669 by imposing a comprehensive arms and aviation fuel embargo, and an economic sanctions regime targeting the military. These urgent actions should also include criminal prosecution of the military by referring it to the International Criminal Court, or creating of a special or ad-hoc tribunal on Myanmar.

The Council must also ensure the delivery of aid to the areas affected by Cyclone Mocha through community-based organizations and civil society in Myanmar – not the military. Local CBOs have access to the affected areas, and are trusted by their communities.

Lastly, the Council must scrutinize, monitor, and possibly facilitate, any effort to repatriate Rohingya.

No repatriation should proceed without proper international protection, equal rights and full citizenship, as well as the restitution of land and property for Rohingya.

It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure justice and prevent the recurrence of genocide and other atrocity crimes in Myanmar.

PROTEST LEADER WAI MO NAING CONVICTED OF HIGH TREASON, RECEIVES ADDITIONAL 20-YEAR SENTENCE, TOTALING 54 YEARS



Wai Mo Naing at a protest in 2021. Photo: Facebook

Prominent peaceful protest leader, Wai Mo Naing, was convicted on Friday of high treason and received an additional prison sentence of 20 years, bringing his total prison sentence to 54 years.

Before this particular case, Wai Mo Naing had already been sentenced to 34 years in prison under eight different charges.

On Friday, the Monywa Prison court utilized Article 122 of the Penal Code to extend Wai Mo Naing's sentence by 20 years for the charge of high treason.

Furthermore, Wai Mo Naing, 26, is set to face an additional case in which he has been formally accused of inciting the murder of two police officers in the Industrial Zone Ward of Monywa, Sagaing Region in 2021.

Wai Moe Naing is the founder and inaugural president of the Monywa University Student Union. Apart from his activism, he is also a writer, having authored numerous short stories, magazine articles and online blogs.

On 15 April, 2021, in Monywa, Wai Moe Naing was among a group of protesting students riding motorcycles together. However, the situation took a grave turn as junta's troops and police intentionally rammed their cars into the protestors' motorcycles, ultimately leading to Wai Moe Naing's arrest.

Sources close to Wai Moe Naing said that the lawyers representing Wai Mo Naing have faced threats.

The Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee has issued a statement expressing strong objection to the courts under the junta for levying unjust accusations against all political figures.

MYANMAR JUNTA USING IMPORTED ARMS TO COMMIT RIGHTS VIOLATIONS: UN EXPERT



A Russia-made helicopter gunship. Photo: AFP

Myanmar’s military has imported \$1 billion in weapons since seizing power in a 2021 coup and used them “to commit atrocities,” a United Nations expert said in a report released Wednesday last week.

Fighting has ravaged Myanmar since the coup, including renewed clashes with ethnic rebel groups as well as the formation of dozens of “People’s Defence Forces” now battling the junta.

In its crackdown against dissent, the “military has killed a minimum of 3,500 civilians” and the number of political prisoners has swelled to 20,000, said the report.

It added that at least \$1 billion “worth of weapons, dual-use technology, and materials used to manufacture weapons” were brought in by the junta from the day of the coup on February 1, 2021, to December 2022, primarily from suppliers in Russia, China, Singapore, and India.

“These weapons, and the materials to manufacture more of them, have continued to flow uninterrupted to the Myanmar military

despite overwhelming evidence of its responsibility for atrocity crimes,” said Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar.

According to the report, the junta imported \$406 million in arms and equipment from Russia and \$267 million from China, including from state owned entities. Indian companies and state-owned entities accounted for \$51 million in goods.

Companies based in Singapore provided an additional \$254 million in supplies, while \$28 million in equipment came from entities based in Thailand.

“Russia and China-based entities are critical to the Myanmar military for transfers of advanced weapon systems and their spare parts,” Andrews wrote.

The imports have easily circumvented international sanctions prohibiting arms trade with Myanmar, according to Andrews.

His report singled out an attack on an opposition-controlled village that killed around 170 people, including children, describing

it as an example of a “probable” war crime.

Andrews wrote that a fighter jet dropped two bombs on Pazi Gyi village in central Sagaing region, targeting the opening ceremony of an office of the National Unity Government - a shadow administration dominated by lawmakers from ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s party.

Soon after, two attack helicopters arrived at the village and began firing on survivors and first responders, he added.

“This brutal attack is also another example of how the Myanmar junta is using internationally supplied arms and associated materials to commit atrocities,” the report said.

Special rapporteurs are mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but are unpaid, independent experts who do not speak for the United Nations.

AFP

ANNUAL US REPORT RECOMMENDS TO REDESIGNATE MYANMAR AS COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN OVER RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Photo: Alexander Schimmeck

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released an annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom – the International Religious Freedom Report – on 15 May, that also highlighted the military junta’s attacks on religious sites and killing civilians in ethnic armed group areas and local defence forces that are fighting against the regime.

The report recommended that the US government redesignate Myanmar as a country of particular concern (CPC) as the violation of religious freedom are taking place in the country since the military takeover on 1 February 2021.

It also said that the coup ended a decade of quasi-democracy and triggered an escalation of violence; conditions for ethnoreligious minorities, such as the predominantly Muslim Rohingya and Christian Chin, deteriorated alongside the breakdown of order and violations of civil and political rights. The Tatmadaw targeted houses of worship, faith leaders, and religious communities in its crackdown on opposition. The Tatmadaw arrested religious leaders, including those from the Bud-

dhist majority, for opposing the military junta.

The report pointed out that faith communities, including ethnoreligious Christian minorities, now face persecution that some have likened to what the Rohingya have faced since 2017.

The annual report stated the military’s close association with Buddhism to promote its legitimacy, violent crackdown and targeting of ethnoreligious communities such as the Rohingya and jailing many Buddhist monks who protested against the coup.

The report said the formation of National Unity Government (NUG) which attempted to unite the non- Tatmadaw-controlled area, and its coordination with various ethnic armed groups, while pledging to undo decades of abuse and disenfranchisement of the Rohingya.

The USCIRF report recommended US government to redesignate Burma as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA); to actively support international efforts to hold the

Tatmadaw, Burmese agencies, and officials accountable through the international legal system for atrocities against religious communities, including by intervening in the case of *The Gambia v.*

Myanmar at the ICJ and using coordinated sanctions against Tatmadaw leaders for particularly severe violations of religious freedom; and to increase engagement with multilateral and regional partners—in particular the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—as well as domestic actors in Burma, including the NUG, to stem ongoing religious freedom violations and promote accountability.

The commission also suggested the U.S. Congress support initiatives that prioritize the pursuit of religious freedom in Burma, such as language in the Burma Act of 2021 (H.R. 5497) and the National Defense Authorization Act (S. 1605), that require the imposition of targeted sanctions, and encourage accountability mechanisms in relation to the atrocities committed against the Rohingya.

On 27 December 2022, President Joe Biden signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for the 2022 fiscal year. The NDAA included provisions relating to Myanmar, including calling for the U.S. government to support and legitimize the NUG and deny legitimacy and resources to the Tatmadaw. The law urges the return to democracy and accountability for atrocities and human rights violations committed by the Tatmadaw.

MYANMAR BECOMES NOTORIOUS AS HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SCAM HUB



Myanmar is the base for human traffickers. Photo: AFP

Indonesian police arrested a man and a woman this month who are suspected to be behind the trafficking in persons from Indonesia to Myanmar.

Police collected information from the 20 victims who were enticed with false promises of employment in Myanmar. But they were forced to work for online scam.

In another case, six Filipinos claimed they were trafficked to Myanmar and forced to work as cryptocurrency scammers. Later they filed criminal complaints against their recruiters.

The United States Institute of Peace reported last year that over a dozen criminal zones in Myanmar are involved in “industrial-scale” human trafficking and the operation of complex online scams. Some traffickers enticed victims through social media ads promising lucrative office jobs, tricking them into illegally crossing the border to a “scam zone” in Myanmar.

Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have emerged as “countries of destination” for victims, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). International alarm is growing over

internet scams in the region that are often staffed by trafficking victims tricked or coerced into promoting bogus crypto investments.

In the past year, Indonesia has rescued more than a thousand of its nationals working in online scams in Myanmar and Cambodia.

Philippine authorities recently rescued over a thousand people from several Asian nations who were trafficked into the country and also forced to run online scams.

Victims tended to be “middle-class graduates who have limited employment opportunities” at home, said Itayi Viriri, IOM regional spokesman for Asia Pacific.

The scam centres were involved in online gambling, cryptocurrency, online money lending and romance applications, Viriri said.

After the Myanmar military coup in 2021, Myanmar has emerged as a preferred location for criminal groups to operate their trafficking and scams. Corrupt border guards are bribed to turn a blind-eye to the human trafficking.

One problematic area is Shwe Kokko Yati New City Project in Karen State that was billed from

2017 to 2020 by as part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, the National League for Democracy government could suspend the project. As a consequence, Thailand cut supplying power and telecommunications services to Shwe Kokoo, causing the project to roll to a standstill before 2021.

However, just two weeks after the Myanmar military coup in February 2021, the project immediately resumed with restoration of Thai electricity and internet.

Both China and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have voiced concern over their nationals caught up in the illegal trade.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gan visited Myanmar on 2 May and met with Myanmar Military Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing during the former’s trip to attend the SCO Foreign Minister’s meeting in India. During his visit in Naypyidaw, Qin Gang urged Myanmar to take effective measures to crack down on cross-border telecoms fraud targeting Chinese nationals, and he also called for a joint law enforcement to tackle the scams.

Various nationals are caught up in the scams. In November last year, at least 12 Filipinos were promised jobs in Thailand, but they were finally trafficked into a Chinese crime ring based in Shwe Kokko to work as crypto scammers.

During the ASEAN Summit this month in Jakarta, member nations vowed to take tougher action on human trafficking as criminals increasingly use social media and other online platforms to recruit and exploit victims.

BURMESE JOURNALIST DISCUSSES CRUCIAL ISSUE OF COMMUNICATION IN POST-COUP MYANMAR



Photo: Jonas Leupe

The issue of access to communication and information is the subject of Insight Myanmar's conversation with Toe Zaw Latt, a journalist currently with Mizzima, and who previously worked for the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB).

Before the arrival of mobile phones and internet in Myanmar, one of the few options for communication was the telephone. Until only recently, whole apartment complexes in urban areas shared a single phone line, while entire rural villages might have to make do with only one or two.

One had to have the right kind of access—and lots of money—to secure a private phone line, and even then, this privilege was usually for just senior military figures or their cronies. But the regime didn't just limit access to this main form of communication, they also controlled and actively monitored its use: every call had to go through an operator, with military intelligence listening in.

Famously, given these circumstances, the Burmese tea-shop took on an outsized role as a workaround communications

hub. This became one of the only places where one could learn the latest rumors—speaking carefully, in hushed tones, with friends and associates.

The internet arrived in Myanmar in the early 2000s. At first, it was in the form of private internet shops, although very sites were accessible. Toe Zaw Latt describes how military intelligence, as with the telephone, also carefully monitored all online activity. Then in 2012, as the transition period was just beginning, SIM cards offering mobile data hit the market—but at the whopping price of \$1,500 per card! In Toe Zaw Latt's thinking, the military wanted to make sure that like the private home line, only the very rich and connected could have this privilege. But then, suddenly, seemingly overnight, Telenor and Ooredoo won contracts; their networks went up everywhere...and the cost of a SIM card dropped to a single dollar! Quickly following this development, the Burmese online space exploded to about 30 million users. Toe Zaw Latt says that internet speeds were even faster than Europe or the US at that time. This online revolution was coupled with

the arrival of new, independent banks as well, and so now online banking became very popular. Burmese culture was irrevocably transformed in the process.

Yet despite his appreciation for these new freedoms, Toe Zaw Latt also looked on with concern because "the majority of users had no digital or information literacy." As an example, he references the infamous anti-Islam propaganda campaign that began to spread virally on Facebook, which he describes as a carefully planned psychological warfare operation launched on an unsuspecting public (mirroring what Igor Blazevic said on a recent podcast episode). However, at the same time, Toe Zaw Latt saw signs of optimism in how the younger generation became digital natives, a skill that would define Generation Z's involvement in the resistance movement after the 2021 coup.

Catch up with Toe Zaw Latt in this latest Podcast with Insight Myanmar:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/5/13/episode-165-access-denied>

FROM SUFFERING TO SOLIDARITY: LEARNING FROM THE PAST AND BUILDING AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY IN MYANMAR

HLAING AUNG

Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, there has been a significant political development with Generation Z demanding a society that is free of ethnic and religious discrimination. The Burmese youth have challenged the traditional notion and institution of Buddhism, demanding social punishment of

prominent monks. Monks such as Sitagu Sayadaw are viewed to be complicit with the Burmese military. Muslims and ethnic Chinese, most of whom are not officially recognized as Tainyintha or native groups, have also joined the revolution with the Bamar people to consolidate a collective consciousness in the hopes of creat-

ing a society that is fair and equal, rooted in the idea of civic nationalism. The Spring Revolution heavily challenged the right-wing ethno-religious-nationalist discourse endorsed by the Burmese military and its alliances after the coup.

For the Bamar people, or those who live in Bamar con-



● The Myanmar people are demanding radical change. Photo: AFP

centrated areas, the struggle is mainly based on class, particularly against the Burmese military, who have controlled the state through coercion. Since 1962, the Burmese military has monopolized all economic resources and channels for economic prosperity. Without affiliation or allegiance to the Burmese military, or if one fails to qualify for a particular social class or ethnoreligious identity (such as the Bamar Buddhist), economic opportunities and mobility are extremely limited, or virtually non-existent, for the Myanmar peoples.

Through methods of soft



and hard power, the Burmese military has prioritized the aggressive promotion of a Bamar-Buddhist, ethno-nationalist and religious agenda. This agenda has underpinned Burmese society since independence, determining one's likelihood of prosperity and access to welfare. As the primary or even sole occupier of government institutions, the Burmese military has created an exclusive society, namely through the Taingyintha classification, which prescribes a list of ethnic classifications within Burmese society.

Generational success is predicated on one's classification under Taingyintha policies. Because they hold the means to the legitimate use of violence, the Burmese military has continuously abused this prerogative, targeting various ethnic groups all over the country with violent acts.

The history and legacy of ethnic resistance by Taingyintha is predicated on the lack of inclusivity in Burmese society; those who cannot immediately ingratiate themselves into the Bamar-Buddhist classification and agenda and are heavily marginalized in Myanmar society.

Contrary to most beliefs, inter-ethnic conflict is not prevalent in Myanmar; rather, various ethnic resistance movements against the state exist due to the Burmese state's and military's negligence to accommodate for Taingyintha groups since independence. While different ethnic groups possess their respective grievances and frustrations with the Bamar-Buddhist agenda and Burmese military, it is important to note that these independent struggles create an opportunity for greater inter-ethnic consolidation through a class lens.

While the Spring Revolu-

tion aims to build a federal democratic union through coalition building among various multi-ethnic and political groups, the historical grievances of the Bamar and other ethnic minorities may vary. The ongoing debate on ethnic federalism and territorial federalism may arise from the different political identities of the Bamar and ethnic minorities.

It is important to acknowledge that there are also Rohingya and other minority groups in Myanmar who are not officially recognized as part of the national race (Taingyintha) regime. These groups have unique political interests regarding the vision of federal democracy in Myanmar. Unfortunately, many among these populations are often the most vulnerable and marginalized in the country, especially during the recent failed political transition from 2010 to 2021.

In the current ongoing political discussions among resistance actors, including creating a transitional constitution, it is essential to consider the full political spectrum of different interest groups. Personal, social, and political identities can shape these perspectives.

Although understanding history is vital for comprehending today's conflict, it shouldn't be the sole factor in determining it. Embracing the idea of pluralism can offer a solution for transforming Myanmar's long-standing conflict in a more positive direction at this critical moment in history.

Hlaing Aung is a Burmese scholar and organizer. His work focuses on identity politics and struggle studies.

XI SAYS CHINA, CENTRAL ASIA MUST 'FULLY UNLEASH' POTENTIAL

Xi Jinping called on China and Central Asia to “fully unleash” their potential in trade, economic and infrastructure cooperation Friday, as he wrapped up a landmark summit with heads of state from the strategically vital

region.

The Chinese leader is hosting the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at a summit in Xi'an in northern China this week - a meeting Beijing has said

is of “milestone” significance.

Beijing says trade with Central Asia reached \$70 billion in 2022 and expanded 22 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2023.

The region is also a cru-

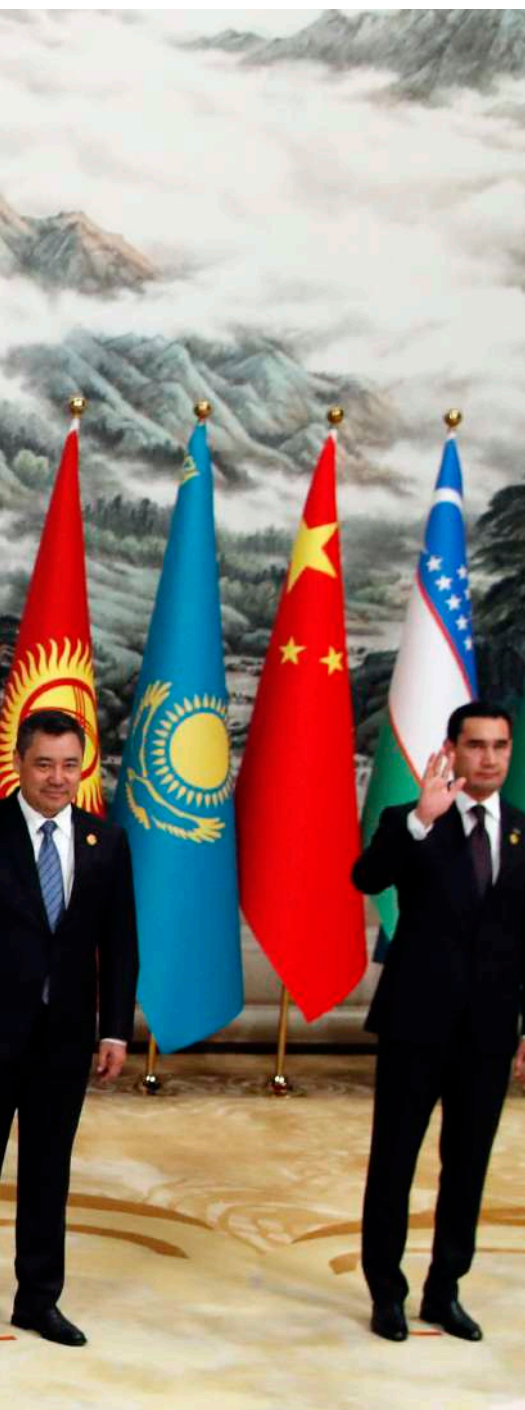


Chinese President Xi Jinping with Central Asian leaders last week. Photo: AFP

cial link in China's trillion-dollar global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative.

Speaking to regional leaders, Xi said the countries must "fully unleash the potential of traditional cooperation in economy, trade, industrial capacity, energy and transport," according to a state media readout.

He also stressed the need to develop "new growth drivers...



such as finance, agriculture, poverty reduction, low carbon, health, and digital innovation".

"China and Central Asian countries should deepen strategic mutual trust, and always offer clear and strong support for each other on issues of core interests."

Belt and Road is a defining geopolitical project for Xi, with Beijing keen to restart cooperation and fill the vacuum left in former Soviet states by Russia's war in Ukraine.

On Friday, Xi said the region and China must "take the lead" in that project and "deepen strategic mutual trust".

Beijing will aim to expand transport links with the region, he said, and work to speed up the expansion of the Central Asia-to-China gas pipeline.

Xi also pledged 26 billion yuan (\$3.7 billion) in "financing support and free assistance" to the region.

And with a goal to "uphold everlasting friendship", the Chinese leader said the leaders would aim to meet again in Kazakhstan in 2025.

"China is trying to convince Central Asian countries that there is this multipolar world that is in the making," Niva Yau, a non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, told AFP.

"And there is Central Asian unity towards strong ties to China," she said.

Xi's speech also saw him call for expanding security cooperation on what Beijing dubbed the "three evils" in the region: separatism, terrorism and extremism.

"The six countries should

resolutely oppose external interference in the internal affairs of regional countries and attempts to instigate 'color revolutions'," Xi said, a reference to unrest in former Soviet states that Moscow and others allege is backed by the West.

GROWING INFLUENCE

Moscow's invasion of Ukraine has allowed China to carve out a greater role in Central Asia, leading many in the region to question their long-standing ties with Russia and seek economic, diplomatic and strategic assurances elsewhere.

"Russia's military involvement in Ukraine has led to the imposition of sanctions by the West, which has weakened Russia's power and led to a relative decline in its influence in Central Asia," Lu Gang, director of Center for Central Asian Studies at East China Normal University, told AFP.

"This result has led Central Asian countries to place greater emphasis on economic cooperation and political support from China," Lu said.

This week's summit comes as Xi positions himself as a global statesman keen to expand China's reach far beyond its borders.

"Xi will position himself as a leader that can promote global development and peace," Zhiquan Zhu, a Professor of International Relations and Political Science at Bucknell University, told AFP.

The summit also coincides with a meeting of the G7 in Hiroshima that will likely focus on efforts to "push back China's growing influence around the world", Zhu noted.

AFP

'SIGN OF THE TIMES': THAI ELECTION A REFERENDUM ON THE ARMY



Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat, centre, with his colleagues. Photo: AFP

In a country long bedevilled by coups, Thai voters' resounding rejection of the army-backed government speaks to the deep frustration felt by many after decades of power struggles, protests, coups - and no change.

The campaign pitted opposition parties Pheu Thai and Move Forward Party (MFP) and their promises of democracy and reform against the ageing generals leading the government, among them Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha who first came to power in a 2014 coup.

Overwhelmingly, Thais cast their ballots in repudiation of eight years of military-backed rule that has seen the once-vibrant economy stagnate, inequality soar, and basic freedoms constrained.

Support for military-linked parties collapsed from 2019, when the Palang Pracharath Party, a junta vehicle, won the popular vote with 8.4 million ballots.

This time Prayut's United Thai Nation managed just 4.7 million votes, a distant third behind MFP on 14.1 million and Pheu Thai on 10.8 million.

Napon Jatusripitak, a political scientist and researcher at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, said the election was a referendum on Thailand's powerful establishment elites.

"They are tired of military generals," he said, and of a government that was "more responsive to the interests of families or oligarchies, rather than the will of the people".

MFP's shock victory as the largest party in

parliament was fuelled in part by the energy of youth-led street protests that hit Bangkok in 2020 and were eventually put down with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets.

The noisy, colourful demonstrations shook Thai politics with calls for an end to the status quo in which a powerful military-monarchist-business elite dominates politics and the economy.

‘DE-MILITARISATION’

MFP’s youthful leader Pita Limjaroenrat has called for Thailand’s “de-militarisation”, a bold statement in a kingdom long structured around the pillars of military, monarchy and religion.

The party is promising to replace conscription -- introduced more than 100 years ago and applicable to all males over 20 -- with voluntary service.

“We want to take the military out of Thai politics,” Pita told AFP in April.

But the military has a long history of political intervention in modern Thailand, with a dozen coups since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932.

The military is also still woven into the very fabric of Thai political power, Chulalongkorn University lecturer Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee told AFP.

Many senior bureaucrats in official bodies were appointed under the Prayut-led junta that ruled from 2014 to 2019, Siripan said.

“They tried to install themselves, institutionalise themselves, in the constitution to disguise their authority,” she said.

While Siripan was cautious about ascribing MFP’s success directly to their refutation of the military, she acknowledged that “it is one of the major reasons”.

The election also gave signs that dissatisfaction may be brewing even within the military.

MFP’s pledge to remove conscription was the front-facing policy to tackle systemic abuse within the army, political analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak told AFP.

“The military, the rank and file, as opposed to the officer class -- there is a big gap and Move Forward exposed and exploited that gap effectively,” he said.

In Bangkok, an area near parliament so closely identified with the military that the main road is nicknamed “Soldier Street” did the unthinkable and voted MFP.

“They would never vote for Move Forward normally but in fact they did,” he said.

“It is a sign of the times.”

CLEAR STAND

The “orange wave” that carried MFP on - named for its signature colour - also swept it past Pheu Thai, the party of billionaire tycoon and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

This remarkable victory over a political movement that has dominated Thai politics for more than 20 years came partly because of MFP’s staunch refusal to deal with coup-makers, Napon said.

Pheu Thai - which led most polls in the weeks leading up to voting day - failed to get their message straight, equivocating about whether they would go into coalition with parties from Prayut’s outgoing government.

It worked against them, Napon said, despite their front-running prime ministerial candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra’s father Thaksin and aunt Yingluck both having been the victim of military coups.

“Voters can distinguish between a party that plays games, like Pheu Thai, and a party that is intent on changing the established way of doing things in Thailand,” Napon said.

AFP.

UN MARKS 75 YEARS SINCE DISPLACEMENT OF 700,000 PALESTINIANS

The UN on Monday last week commemorated for the first time in its history, the mass displacement of Palestinians from land that was to become Israel, 75 years ago, that turned 700,000 Palestinians into refugees, almost overnight.

The mass displacement in 1948, known as the Nakba (meaning “catastrophe” in Arabic), has an importance to Palestinians across the world, said Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, addressing a high-level event at UN Headquarters in New York, marking the day.

‘THE OCCUPATION MUST END’

“The legacy of the event lives on, spurring us to continue our unflagging efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” she said, noting that the General Assembly had adopted a resolution in November 2022 for this commemorative day.

Currently, the Israeli and Palestinian road towards peace and the implementation of an agreed two-State solution follows decades pock-marked with war, flaring tensions, violence, and multiple negotiation processes.



FLASHBACK - Palestinians flee during the Nakba in 1948. Photo: UN News

Ms. DiCarlo expressed deep concerns about diminishing prospects for kickstarting the peace process on the way to forging a two-State solution, given the current landscape of expanding Israeli settlements in occupied territory, recent violence, and Israel's violation of Palestinian rights.

"Palestinians deserve a life of justice and dignity and the realization of their right to self-determination and independence," she said. "The UN position is clear: the occupation must end. A two-State solution must be achieved in line with international law. We want to see an independent State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace."

1948 'CATASTROPHE'

For Palestinians, the 1948 massive displacement meant families took what they could carry or was shipped in trucks, from their homes to areas outside



the new State of Israel.

The UN agency created to serve the displaced population (UNRWA), reports that 5.9 million Palestinian are currently registered as refugees.

The sombre anniversary spotlights the world's longest-standing protracted refugee crisis, serving as a stark reminder that Palestine refugees continue to live amidst conflict, violence, and occupation while aspiring to a just and lasting solution to their plight, said the UN Committee on the Rights of Palestine People.

'MEMORY WILL REMAIN'

The morning event brought together UN Member States and high-level speakers, including the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas.

"The Nakba memory will remain; it will continue to motivate our people to end the occupation," Mr. Abbas said. "The occupation will end. The Palestinian right will prevail sooner or later, so that peace can prevail in our region and in the world."

'Longest unresolved refugee crisis'

"The plight of Palestine refugees remains the longest unresolved refugee crisis in the world," UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, said in a video message.

"More than ever, they require our collective solidarity," he said. "There simply is no alternative to a political solution for all. Until such a day, there is no alternative to UNRWA; we have to continue to support them until a just solution is finally found to their plight."

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Guilherme Romano

KARENNI STATE

Youths launch campaign to help Karenni IDPs

The Karenni IDP Assistance Network has launched a fundraising campaign to raise 100 million kyats in one month to buy Karenni Internally displaced people (IDPs) rice and drinking water.

The campaign is running from 10 May to 10 June and the Karenni IDP Assistance Network has called on people to take part in the campaign and to donate.

“In addition to food and a place to live, medical supplies are also crucial. The aircraft’s heavy weapon [fire] causes psychological harm to the IDPs”, said a representative of the organisation.

The Karenni IDP Assistance Network was formed by politically active young people from various Karenni townships who were eager to volunteer. They are providing assistance to villages on the border between Pekon and Pinlaung townships where the junta has launched offensive operations.

Demand for rice is rising in the face of reduced supplies. In one of the villages, Salong South, junta bombing has destroyed 70 per cent of the barns used for rice storage, according to the representative of the Karenni IDP Assistance Network.

Roughly 70 per cent of the residents of Karenni State have been forced to flee their homes due to fighting and many of them are now having difficulties accessing sufficient food and drinking water where

they are staying, according to the Karenni IDP Assistance Network.

Other Karenni civil society organisations (CSOs) have said that 200,000 people in Karenni State have been displaced out of a population of 300,000 since the February 2021 coup.

KARENNI STATE

Junta launches unprovoked airstrike on Karenni village

The junta launched an unprovoked airstrike on Sawlon Village, in Karenni State’s Bawlakhe Township at about 4:00 a.m. on 17 May.

Ma Khin Shwe Win, aged 17, was killed in the airstrike and four men were also injured. Two rural health clinics, six houses, and one village monastery were also destroyed in the attack.

According to the villagers there had been no fighting in the area and the attack was unprovoked.

One said: “There was no fighting in the vicinity of the village. People were sleeping when the bombs were dropped early in the morning.”

The airstrike caused most of the villagers to flee from Sawlon Village.

Bawlakhe People’s Defence force (PDF) urged people to build bomb shelters to help protect themselves from random bombings, such as this, in civilian areas.

In April 2023 the junta conducted 108 airstrikes in Karenni State that killed one civilian and injured five others, according to Bawlakhe PDF.



UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE PRESENTS CREDENTIALS TO JUNTA'S FOREIGN MINISTER

MS Noriko Takagi, Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to Myanmar, paid a courtesy call and presented her Credentials to Than Swe, the junta's Foreign Minister on 16 May, reported the junta-controlled media.

The event took place at the junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw, and it was attended by several senior officials from the ministry.

Having established its presence in Myanmar in 1993, UNHCR has been actively working to support refugees and internally displaced persons. The organization maintains an operational presence of more than 200 staff members spread across ten different locations in the country, according to the official website of the UNHCR.

According to UNHCR estimates, Myanmar is home to more than 1.2 million persons of concern.

This number encompasses 810,000 internally displaced individuals and 600,000 stateless Rohingya, of whom 148,000 remain displaced.

PRICES OF CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS SOAR IN RAKHINE STATE AFTER CYCLONE



Cleanup on the outskirts of Sittwe.
Photo: AFP

The prices of construction materials in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, are reportedly soaring in the wake of Cyclone Mocha that hit the region as the beginning of last week.

The prices of construction materials are rising sharply two days after the storm hit the city.

Cyclone Mocha hit Rakhine State on 14 May and it devastated many buildings including residential buildings.

Rakhine people are rebuilding their damaged houses and the prices of construction materials were rising sharply, the local residents said.

The tin roof nail price rose up to 30,000 Kyat per viss (approx. 1.5 Kg) in some towns in Rakhine State and the price of tin roof (corrugated iron roof) rose up to 7,000 Kyat per foot, the local residents said.

The local residents are facing many difficulties as the prices of construction materials and foodstuffs are rising. They said that the shortage of these materi-

als and commodities worsened their situation.

The local residents are currently buying mainly the tin roofs and tarpaulins for roofing as a priority and they said that electricity was not yet available in their town as of Thursday.

Cyclone Mocha damaged and destroyed many homes and buildings in Rakhine State and it is reported that people have not yet received disaster relief and rehabilitation in some areas.

The local residents are worrying about the rising price of their staple food rice.

About 90% of Rakhine State was devastated and damaged by the storm. The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) Chairman General Twan Mrat Naing said in his address to people delivered on 16 May that the merchants should not take advantage on the natural disaster and not raise the prices of their commodities exorbitantly while the people were suffering from the devastation.

INDIA'S NRL WILL OPEN FUEL RETAIL OUTLETS IN MYANMAR IN COMING FINANCIAL YEAR

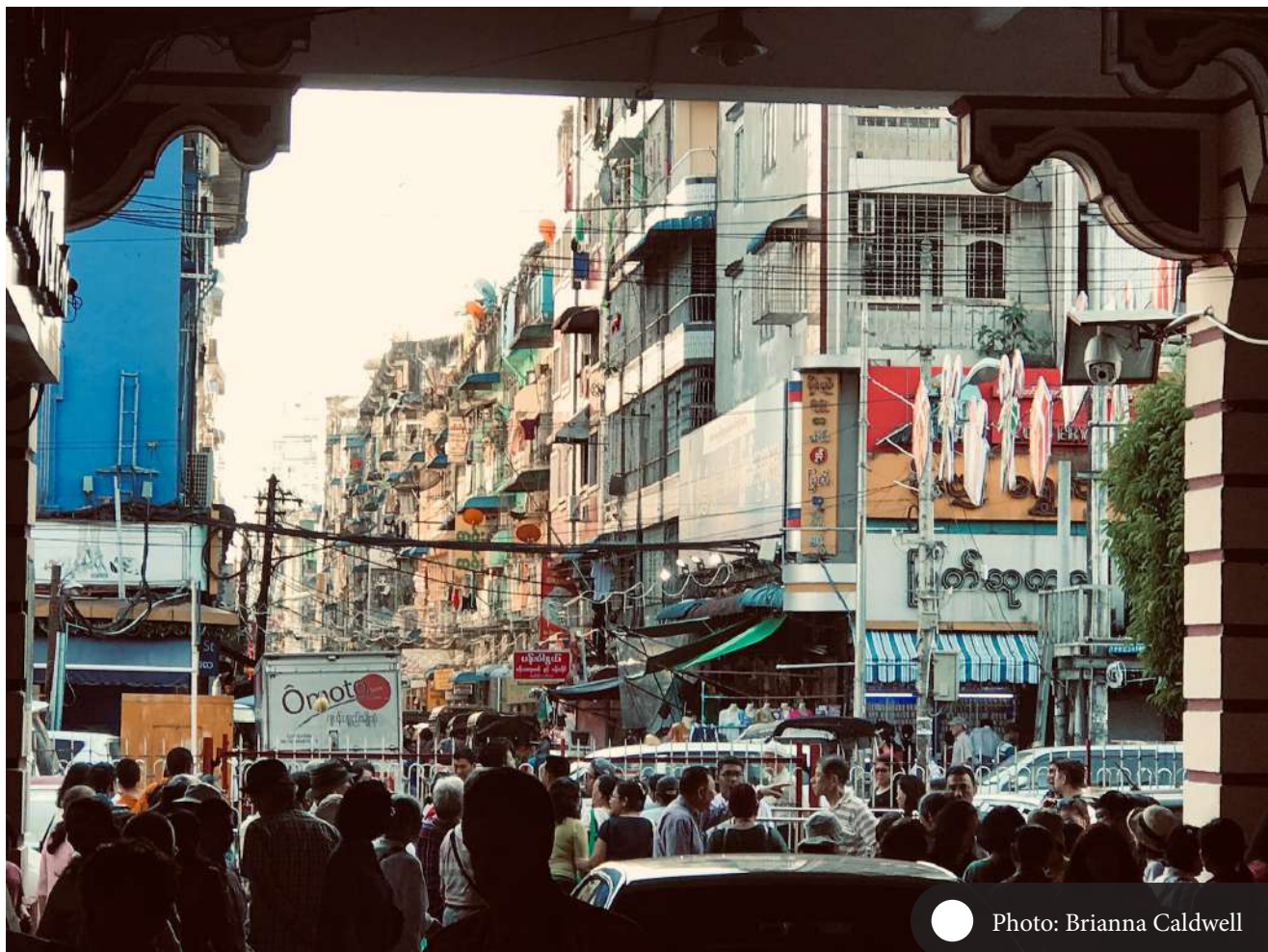


Photo: Brianna Caldwell

Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization says the state-owned Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) in Assam, India would open its filling stations in Sagaing Region in Myanmar in the coming financial year.

NRL had interest in opening filling stations in Myanmar but this plan was delayed by the coup in Myanmar. They said that it was likely they could open their fuel retail outlets in Myanmar in the coming financial year.

NRL has started its plan of exporting premium diesel to Myanmar via the border town of Moreh by the land route since 2017.

NRL has four refineries in Assam State and one of them was built in Numaligarh near Moreh and they plan to sell the fuel produced by this refinery to Sagaing Region in Myanmar.

NRL invested 28,000 crores of Rupees (approx. US\$ 3.41 billion) and it has the production capacity of 3 million metric tons per annum with an expansion project to produce 9 million metric tons per annum.

BUSINESS TOUGH IN CHINA AS NATIONAL SECURITY TRUMPS ALL

Doing business in China has become harder and potentially more perilous as the government prioritises an ever-widening definition of national security over all else, despite

insisting the country has reopened for trading.

In late March, authorities hosted global executives in Beijing, telling them they were “not foreign visitors, but a family” and

pledging to slash red tape.

But since pandemic restrictions were lifted in recent months, China has restricted overseas access to data and publicised raids on consulting firms.



Shanghai, China. Photo: Road Trip

Amendments to anti-espionage laws effective from July 1 will broaden the definition of spying and ban transferring information that relates to national security.

This has spooked foreign and domestic firms as they try to decipher authorities' intentions -- and crucially, pinpoint what is

off-limits.

"Companies are scrambling to figure out protocols to protect their staff. But the definitions are so vague," an employee of a major international auditing firm told AFP.

"No one knows whether they have crossed a line or not, or where the red line is."

US due diligence firm Mintz Group was left in no doubt it had crossed one when police closed its Beijing office and arrested five local staff members in March.

The following month, US consulting giant Bain & Company said employees at its Shanghai office had been questioned.

And in a 15-minute segment on state television last week, authorities said multi-city raids on global expert network Capvision were part of a wider campaign to overhaul China's consulting sector.

The events "send a worrying signal and heighten the uncertainty felt by foreign companies operating in China", the EU Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai told AFP.

When "companies are looking for clear signs that China's business environment is becoming more predictable and reliable, the developments are not conducive to restoring business confidence

and attracting foreign investment".

But Yale legal expert Jeremy Daum said the key was that "China believes there are legitimate threats to its national security, and will always prioritise addressing them over other interests".

"As international tensions continue to rise... the situation isn't likely to get better soon," he added.

'PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES'

With US-China relations in particular riddled with explosive issues like trade, human rights and Taiwan, Beijing has tightly consolidated its control of sensitive information.

Many experts interpreted state TV coverage of the raids as an unambiguous warning to Chinese citizens about the risks of engaging with firms like Capvision.

Several industry analysts who spoke to AFP said it appeared Capvision, Mintz and Bain had been targeted for individual cases, rather than being a sign of an arbitrary campaign to attack foreign firms.

Capvision, though it has a regional headquarters in New York, is first and foremost a Chinese company.

The CCTV report said one of its sources had leaked information about "the manufacturers and



quantities of some important military equipment”.

“I think certain firms... have always engaged in research activities that push the boundaries - and that, as has always been true for decades now, some of them will get caught,” said Bob Guterman, a former Capvision chief compliance officer who now runs news and business intelligence site The China Project.

“People are waking up -- or it’s more like the newest round of awakening to the dangers of doing business in China that have always existed.”

Crackdowns on sectors where regulations were previously often lightly enforced -- like tech and private tutoring -- have been a feature of President Xi Jinping’s time in office.

Beijing-based lawyer Lester Ross, who specialises in regulatory compliance, told AFP that state security forces had been pushing for tighter controls on data-gathering industries for some time.

China’s upper echelons of power are stacked with Xi’s allies after he secured a third term last year.

“It is the change in the balance of forces within the system, among competing bureaucracies, that has triggered the actual raids,” Ross posited.

‘CHILLING EFFECT’

The full effect of the amended anti-spying law is still unknown.

Yale’s Daum said the original definition of espionage was so broad, “it isn’t immediately clear what the impact of the expanded definition will be”.

The “open-endedness sometimes makes it difficult to fully assess the risk... (which) inevitably leads to a chilling effect”, he told AFP.

“(Companies) have to be much more cautious about the gathering of information and who they gather the information from, and that will inhibit their ability to actually do business,” said Ross.

“Even publicly available information becomes problematic because some of that is only available in China.”

Access to Chinese data sources, including Shanghai-based Wind Information and academic database CNKI, has recently been tightened for overseas researchers.

The Wall Street Journal reported the move was partly triggered by a series of US think tank reports that made use of similar tools.

The government has also instructed state-owned companies to phase out contracts with the big four accounting firms - Deloitte,

KPMG, EY and PwC - according to Bloomberg.

The dissonance between recent events and officials’ attempts to entice foreign capital into China’s Covid-battered economy has increased the sense of anxiety.

“The recent raids and the mixed messages they send have caused a lot of concern, and as that concern flows up into board rooms it is going to be even harder for many firms to approve additional investments” in China, analyst Bill Bishop wrote.

But authorities believe China is too big a market for firms to leave, journalist and author Lingling Wei said.

“They don’t see the contradiction... They still believe they can keep foreign capital from leaving, while at the same time keeping the pressure on the foreign firms.”

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

SUSPENSION OF TIN MINING IN MYANMAR'S WA REGION IMPACTS GLOBAL SUPPLIES, PRICES

The Wa region in Myanmar is set to have a significant impact on global tin supplies, as it has decided to suspend mining operations starting from this year's August, reported The Hindu Business Line.

The Wa region contributes 10 percent of the world's supplies of tin concentrate, making its decision a matter of concern. Analysts predict that this suspension will have a direct effect on tin prices, especially since the metal is extensively used as solder in circuit boards for the semiconductor industry.

The suspension of tin mining in Myanmar's Wa Region will exert pressure on global supplies, leading to a short to medium-term increase in prices, The Hindu Business Line reported citing research agency BMI, a unit of Fitch Solutions.

The International Tin Association (ITA) highlights that Wa region plays a crucial role in tin mining within Myanmar, supplying a significant portion of concentrate to China, the largest producer of refined tin worldwide.

In 2022, nearly two-thirds of China's imported tin-in-concentrate came from Myanmar, totaling 48,000 tonnes.

ING Think, the economic and financial analysis division of Dutch multinational financial services firm ING, reveals that the tin-mining area in Myanmar is under the control of the country's largest ethnic armed group 'Wa'. Myanmar possesses the world's third-largest tin reserves, trailing behind China and Indonesia. ING Think emphasizes China's dependence on tin ore from Myanmar.



EARLY PLANTING

Farm workers planting rice in a field outside Yangon.

Photo: Alejandro Rogama

IN FOCUS



FOOTBALL CHAOS BRINGS CURTAIN DOWN ON DRAMA-FILLED SEA GAMES



The Vietnam women's football team celebrate their win. Photo: AFP

Nearly two weeks of triumphs, tears and the occasional tantrum came to an end Wednesday last week as the Southeast Asian Games closed in Cambodia, with Vietnam taking home the most medals.

Women's football gold capped a glittering Games for Vietnam, who reigned over the medals table to claim regional supremacy ahead of Thailand and Indonesia.

Cambodia were fourth - the first time in four editions of the biennial Games that the hosts did not come top of the pile - but their 81 golds were a huge improvement on recent years.

The sporting action in Phnom Penh came to a

chaotic end late Tuesday when Indonesia beat Thailand in a men's football final featuring seven goals, four red cards and two mass brawls.

The Asian Football Confederation has launched an investigation into "acts of violence" between the two sides that marred the gold-medal match. The Thai football association apologised and launched its own probe.

The Games came to an official close on Wednesday evening with fanfare and fireworks at the Morodok Techo Stadium, just hours after a colossal thunderstorm hit Phnom Penh.

After the Games opened on May 5, Cambodia claimed their first-ever athletics gold, Chhun Bunthorn

winning the men's 800m and sparking moving scenes at the finish line as he toasted his late parents.

"I am very emotional," he told reporters.

"My parents passed away and I miss them greatly. If they were still here, they would have been very happy with my victory."

There was more emotion on the track when his compatriot Bou Samnang broke down in tears after crossing the finish line in the women's 5,000m -- all alone and nearly six minutes after the race winner.

Videos of her crying and soaked by rain went viral and were the defining image of the Games, her never-give-up attitude resonating with many Cambodians.

"I can say now I'm famous," the 20-year-old told AFP at the Games site, the scene of her unlikely rise to prominence, where passers-by were lining up for photos with her.

"Although I lost, they support me from the bottom of their hearts."

That support was in evidence again at the closing ceremony, where Bou Samnang was brought out in front of the capacity 60,000 crowd and applauded for showing the "true Olympic spirit".

With the Asian Games in China later this year and the Paris Olympics in 2024, Southeast Asia's world-class athletes got in some crucial competitive action.

Philippine gymnast Carlos Yulo took two golds and two silvers and compatriot Ernest John Obiena won the pole vault for the third Games running.

Controversial rules imposed by the hosts, however, limited the number of events contested by prolific gymnasts such as Yulo, who won five golds and two silvers at the last Games.

SPRINT ROYALTY REIGNS

Four of Vietnam's 136 golds were won by the star of the athletics track Thi Oanh Nguyen, who dominated the women's 1,500m, 5,000m, 10,000m and 3,000m steeplechase.

Vietnam also won the women's football with a 2-0 victory in the final over Myanmar, and topped the

gymnastics with nine golds.

They also did well in combat sports, including in the hosts' traditional martial art of kun bokator.

Thailand were best overall in athletics, notably sprint king Soraoat Dapbang, who won the men's 100m and 200m.

While the kingdom's medal hopes were hobbled by its boycott of kun Khmer -- objecting to the use of that name for a sport more widely known as Muay Thai - it did win nine golds in boxing.

The controversial use of the Cambodian name for the "art of the eight limbs" is a testament to how SEA Games rules tend to be kind to the home country.

The Philippines were fifth in the medals table but reclaimed gold in men's basketball - the sport enjoys huge popularity there and is one of the most coveted titles at the Games.

Singapore came sixth, led by their all-conquering swimmers and sprinter Shanti Pereira, who clinched women's 100m and 200m gold.

One of those swimmers, Quah Ting Wen, was jointly named athlete of the Games at the closing ceremony, along with Cambodian vovinam star Pal Chhor Raksmy.

The next SEA Games will be in Thailand in 2025.

AFP



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