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ARRESTS FOR THE LADY

**Flower Strike
prompts junta
arrests as
Myanmar honours
Aung San Suu Kyi's
birthday**



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BANGKOK THROWS SPANNER INTO ASEAN MYANMAR RESPONSE

Controversy has swirled over the recent invitation made by the Thai caretaker government to the Myanmar junta to attend informal ASEAN talks in Bangkok. A number of Myanmar-linked NGOs condemned the secretive meeting which included the illegal Myanmar military junta organized by the outgoing Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai of the caretaker Thai Government on Sunday 18 June.

As Progressive Voice said: “We are outraged that the Foreign Minister Don stated in his invitation to ASEAN Member States that ASEAN should ‘fully re-engage Myanmar at the leaders’ level’. This decision was never agreed upon by ASEAN Member States, nor did the Indonesian Government, the incumbent Chair of ASEAN, initiate this meeting. In organizing this meeting, the caretaker Government of Thailand is acting without the mandate and any consultation with the ASEAN Chair.”

The NGO said that as a member state of ASEAN, Thailand must not deviate from the bloc’s agreement – the Five-Point Consensus, and called for a halt to the meeting. The meeting went ahead.

On a diplomatic level, the Thai invitation to Myanmar foreign minister Than Shwe threw a spanner in the works of a troubled process by ASEAN to encourage the Myanmar junta to adhere to the agreed Five-Point Consensus in an effort to bring peace to the troubled country. While this agreed consensus has effectively gone nowhere since it was inked two years ago, it does lay out some form of framework that is supposed to put pressure on the Myanmar junta to put down their guns and come to the negotiating table.

The recent Bangkok meeting effectively scuppers any chance of this and throws a carrot to the junta.

The 2021 Myanmar military coup and aftermath have damaged the status and unity of ASEAN – and have proved a re-

minder that the condition of many ASEAN bloc members leave a lot to be desired in terms of democracy, rights, and governance. Few of the 10-nation bloc can claim clean credentials at this point in time. The Myanmar crisis – and ASEAN’s failure to deal with it – only serves to further muddy ASEAN affairs at a time when world geopolitical affairs are in significant flux.

The timing of the Bangkok meeting left a lot to be desired, given the Bangkok administration is currently acting in a “caretaker capacity” following the recent election that saw the Move Forward Party (MFP) grab the majority of the votes, with the party lining up a coalition to take power – subject to the normal process and constraints. In the wake of the Bangkok meeting, MFP party leader Pita Limjaroenrat called for the setting up of what he termed a “Myanmar Inter-Agency Task Force” under the purview of the Thai Prime Minister’s Office in order to take more strident steps to deal with the Myanmar crisis.

Responding to the criticism on the day, Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said the talks were needed as Thailand suffers more than others because it shares more than 3,000 kilometres of land and sea border with Myanmar. “We need to talk, otherwise people will be affected. Today is just a meeting, we did not agree on anything,” he said.

But the spat has once again reminded ASEAN that their approach to the “bully boy” in their ranks needs revision. MFP party leader Pita stepped into the fray with an outline of how his “government-in-waiting” would approach the Myanmar crisis – a crisis that clearly has serious implications for Thailand – despite the fact Pita is currently on the sidelines waiting.

What this spat indicates is ASEAN needs to revisit their approach to the Myanmar crisis with a plan that could make progress. Nobody is holding their breath.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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Cover photo by AFP





MARKING WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Rohingya children playing on the street in a refugee camp in New Delhi on 20 June.

Photo: AFP

MRS. & MR. AMIRUL GHANI
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PDF SUSPENDS YANGON MISSIONS

The Dark Side Revolution Burma (DSRB) Force has postponed urban missions in Yangon because it does not have the necessary infrastructure in place to ensure their success.

A DSRB Force representative said: “What we mean by infrastructure are safe houses for resistance fighters, warehouses for storing the ammunition and [money to cover] the costs of transportation, replenishing equipment, shipping and emergency expenses.”

Recently many resistance fighters have been arrested in Yangon due to a lack of safe houses.

“In order to be able to fight the enemy effectively in urban areas, we all need to stand strong. The budget is necessary for our our military targets and missions”, said the DSRB Force representative.

To get more funding the DSRB, the Myohtit

Dagon People Defense Force (MDPDF), and the Justice Urban Guerilla Force (JUGF) launched a joint fundraising campaign called “Urban Guerrilla 45 Days” on 26 May.

The plan was to sell 400 raffle tickets at 20,000 kyats each to win a prize of a gold chain valued at 6,000 Thai baht (approximately 525,000 kyats).

Unfortunately, 20 days after the campaign was launched only 21 tickets had been sold.

Anyone who wants to buy raffle tickets can get them from the DSRB Facebook page.

DSRB was formed as an eastern province special people’s defence force (PDF) after the February 2021 coup and since then it has carried out at least 20 missions in Yangon’s South Okkalapa and North Dagon townships.

BURMESE WOMAN’S UNION RELEASES SEXUAL VIOLENCE REPORT

The Burmese Women’s Union (BWU) released a report documenting sexual violence-related incidents in the BWU’s five target areas of Karenni State and Sagaing, Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwady regions since the 2021 coup.

In the report, released on 17 June, BWU documented 59 cases that took place between the February 2021 coup and April 2023. There were 36 cases of sexual violence and 23 cases of domestic violence, including adultery.

Ma Thwe Zin Toe, a Burmese Women’s Union spokesperson said: “We wanted to point out sexual violence cases as well as to reduce [the number of] those who commit sexual violence. We also like to highlight the ineffectiveness of dealing with these violations.”

The cases in the report have been divided into three sections, those committed by the military junta, those committed by other armed organisations and those committed by civilians.

BWU recorded nine cases of sexual violence and sexual harassment committed by military soldiers. These included cases where military involvement was suspected, but not proved, because the bodies of the victims were found near military bases.

BWU recorded four cases of sexual violence and harassment committed against seven women by

other armed organisations.

Of these, one was a sexual harassment case committed by a people’s defence force (PDF) member in Magway Region and one was a gang-rape and murder of three women by resistance forces in Sagaing Region while they were being interrogated on suspicion of being military informants.

The report also detailed 23 cases of sexual violence, and 23 cases of domestic violence and adultery committed by civilians. Amongst these were four cases in which minors were raped, including one where the victim was a three-year-old girl.

Of the cases detailed in the report Ma Thwe Zin Toe said: “These cases have not been handled adequately, there are situations in which women who have been assaulted are placated by verbal apologies with no effective punishments being taken against the perpetrator.”

A human rights activist who did not wish to be identified said: “The revolution will be impacted if we don’t carefully handle this situation. It is essential to completely oppose and punish revolutionary groups who commit sexual assault on women.”

The report was released to coincide with International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict on 19 June.

20 VILLAGERS KILLED, 40 INJURED IN FIGHTING IN BAGO REGION'S NATTHANKWIN VILLAGE

Approximately 20 residents of Natthankwin Village, in Bago Region's Kyaukkyi Township were killed and about 40 more were injured as a result of fighting between the junta and defence forces.

A resident of Natthankwin Village said: "Most of the residents' injuries were caused by the military junta's heavy artillery bombardment and mines, even after the fighting ended. A few locals were also injured in a local defence [anti-junta] force attack. We don't know the exact number of casualties because we do not compile lists, but as far as we have counted there were about 40 injuries and 20 fatalities."

They added that most of the injured and dead were from Natthankwin Village, where the fighting occurred, though some were also from other nearby villages.

Mizzima has yet to confirm casualty and death numbers.

According to reports, Junta troops frequently fire 40mm, 60mm and 120mm mortar shells in the

vicinity of Natthankwin Village. They have also planted landmines along the village entrance roads which pose additional dangers to the villagers.

As a result of the junta's actions, many villagers have fled from Natthankwin Village and the nearby Kyaukkyi Township villages of Daungmo, Tawkyaukpauk, Ohnpinsu, Okshikone, Yetwinkonegyi and Yetwinkoneywa.

Previously, on 6 June, the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] and people's defence force (PDF) fighters destroyed a bridge over the Sittaung River, close to Natthankwin Village, for strategic reasons.

The junta are currently trying to rebuild the bridge as quickly as they can.

A Natthankwin villager who had fled the fighting said: "Those who are familiar with military matters understand why the bridge was destroyed. However, some people are criticising those who destroyed the bridge because the damage has inconvenienced them."

YANGON AIRPORT SECURITY CHIEF ASSASSINATED

The chief of security at Yangon International Airport, Former Major Ye Khaing, was shot dead at about 7:00 p.m. on 19 June by the Urban Owls Yangon Guerrilla Force.

The Urban Owls said that they shot Ye Khaing nine times whilst he was in his car outside his house in Mingalardon Township in Yangon.

The guerrilla force claimed that Ye Khaing was a confidante of Tun Myint Naing, the owner of Asia World Company, a business that helps the junta and backs the junta's Senior General Soe Win.

An Urban Owls representative explained that Ye Khaing prevented CDM participants, artists who support the revolution and people involved in the revolution from travelling from the airport and had them arrested.

He also prevented well-known people from travelling and threatened innocent travellers, extorting money from them.

Urban Owls said: "Airport officials in Yangon have been unjustly arresting and oppressing revolutionaries, Civil Defence Movement (CDM) participants and tourists. We also have information about airport

security officers, military officers, and airline officers who bully, bribe, and oppress passengers at the airport."

The names of the airport officials who threaten people were included in a list handed over to the Urban Owls.

The Urban Owls warned Yangon residents that they must prepare themselves for an escalation in revolutionary activities in Yangon and asked them to support the revolution and revolutionary fighters in any way that they can.

"The most important period of the revolution will come soon. We are going to launch more targeted attacks now that we have a Yangon-based people's defence force (PDF)", said the Urban Owls representative.

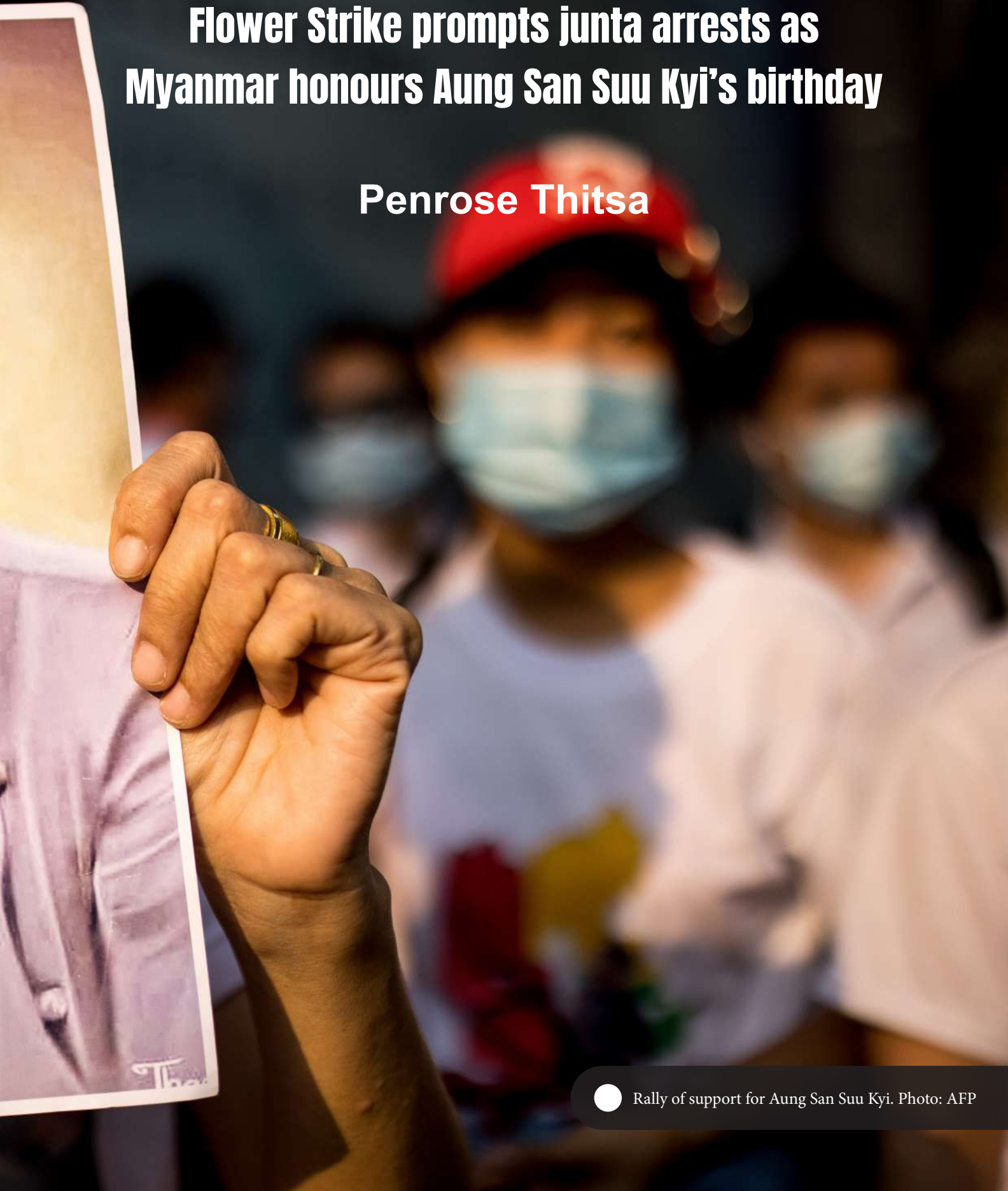
Following the shooting, junta soldiers blocked off all of Khayay Avenue, checked the overnight guest lists, and are currently reviewing CCTV footage from the area. None of the shooters have, so far, been identified or caught.



ARRESTS FOR THE LADY

Flower Strike prompts junta arrests as Myanmar honours Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday

Penrose Thitsa



Rally of support for Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

Flowers were used as a weapon last week as Myanmar citizens – mostly women – used them to remind Myanmar and the world of the birthday of the country’s democracy icon, The Lady with flowers in her hair.

Many people in Myanmar took part in the “Flower Strike” on 19 June to commemorate the 78th birthday of detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi and posted birthday wishes on Facebook, prompting the junta to scour the streets and arrest dozens of participants or alleged participants.

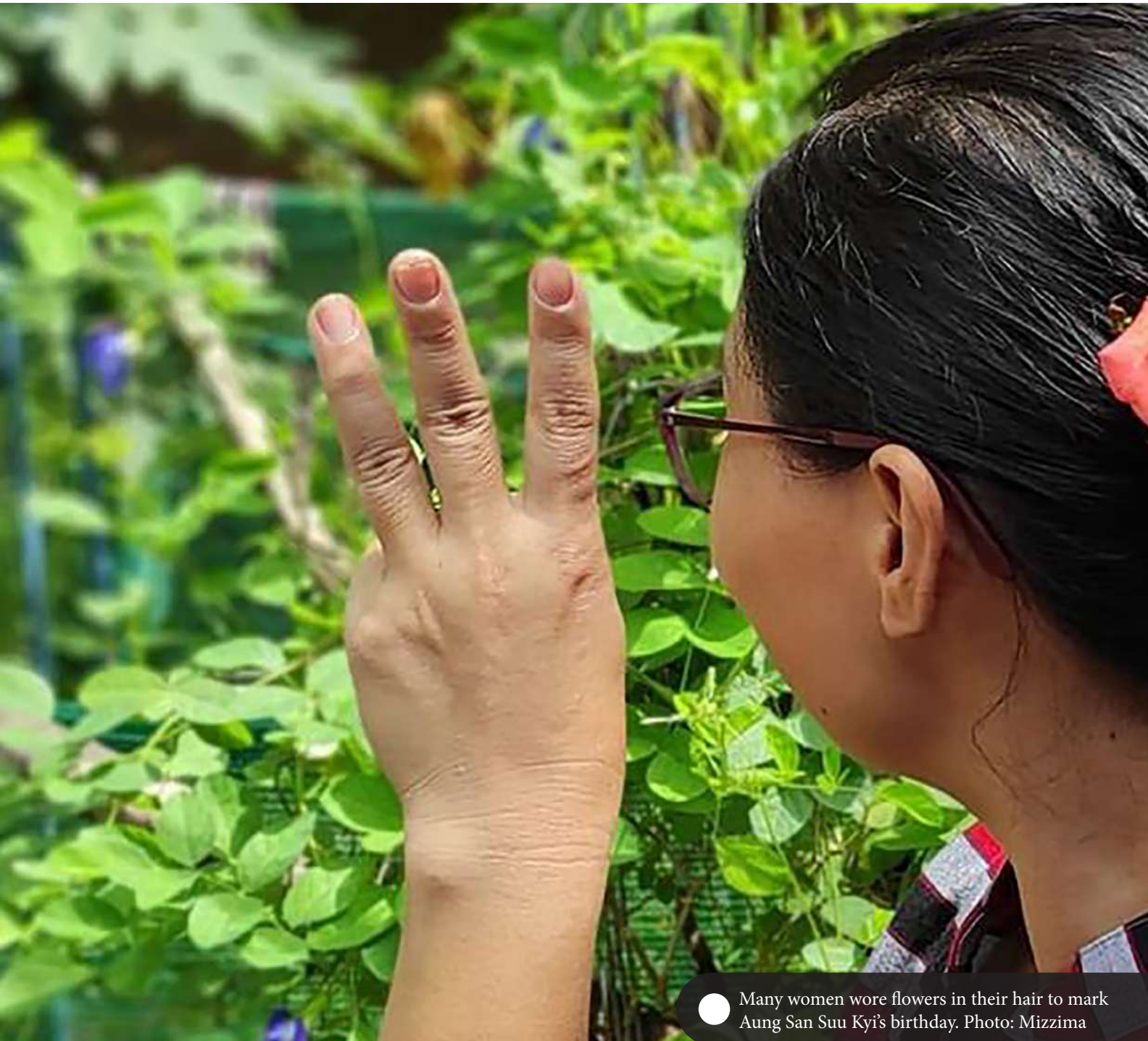
Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi’s youngest son

attempted to deliver a birthday card for his mother without success at the Myanmar Embassy.

JUDICIAL APPEALS

The Flower Strike took place at a time when The Lady, with the help of her embattled lawyers, is attempting to appeal against a number of cases that have led to her jailing for up to 33 years – effectively a life and death sentence given her age.

This appeal process appears to be kept by the junta authorities to a slow pace – and painful in that the hearings look set to be held separately, probably with a significant period of time elapsing between each



Many women wore flowers in their hair to mark Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday. Photo: Mizzima

case being heard. Critics believe the cases are political and trumped up, but The Lady's lawyers have to treat each one with the seriousness and care vital for them to have any chance of having them struck down.

CALL FOR FLOWER STRIKE

Aung San Suu Kyi is out of sight but not out of mind. Jailed in a building in a prison compound in Naypyidaw – and not allowed to mingle with other prisoners - her image of resolve is an inspiration, particularly for women in Myanmar.

And so it was not surprising that the call by Spring Revolutionaries to hold a Flower Strike would

resonate. Yangon, Mandalay and other areas of the country witnessed the gentle defiance, despite the tension.

Sources in Yangon said that more than 30 people, predominantly women, who wore flowers and carried flowers were arrested in Yangon on 19 June. From the morning of Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, junta soldiers and police in Yangon started inspections and arrests targeting participants of the Flower Strike.

About 30 women from Pabaedan, Kamayut and Tarmway townships in Yangon were arrested for their involvement in the flower strike, a women rights activist told Mizzima.

Among the 30 or so women, 13 were employees of the Thamadi Gold Shop located in Pabaedan Township in Yangon.

On the other hand, some female participants in Yangon who were examined by the junta police or soldiers managed to evade arrest. A female participant from Sanchaung Township in Yangon who was examined by the junta's troops told Mizzima: "They inquired about the meaning of the roses I was holding. As I was near my shop at the time, I gestured towards it and explained that the flowers were intended for offering to the Buddha image in my shop." A narrow escape.

Social media "warriors" also faced danger. Sources in Yangon said that among those arrested for their involvement in Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday activities in Yangon were individuals who expressed birthday wishes for Aung San Suu Kyi on Facebook, including a man.

According to residents in Mawlamyine, Mon State, three individuals residing in a house near Shwe Myaing Thiri Market were arrested by the police in the city, as they were distributing flower seedlings to passers-by on 19 June.

Mawlamyine residents said that the house where the arrests took place is an orchid seedlings shop. On the morning of 19 June, they were seen distributing the seedlings to pedestrians and shoppers, with the scene being live streamed on Facebook.

On social media, there are reports that three actresses - Poe Kyar Phyu Khin, Khin Wint Wa, and Moe Pyae Pyae Maung - have been arrested due to their Facebook posts commemorating Aung San Suu



Kyi's birthday. Radio Free Asia (RFA) Burmese edition stated that sources within the Myanmar entertainment industry informed them [RFA] about Poe Kyar Phyu Khin's arrest, but they were unable to verify the arrests of the other actresses.

Several of the arrested individuals across Myanmar have been released shortly after signing a pledge, while others face charges; however, the precise number of arrests as yet is unknown.

Concerning the pledges, individuals are required to sign an agreement stating their commitment to refrain from engaging in any future political activities.

SON SPEAKS OUT

Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi's youngest son, Kim Aris, has broken his silence and publicly called on the junta to release his mother.

"I can't let my mother languish in prison," Mr

Aris told BBC Burmese in an exclusive interview in London, urging the world to do more to help her.

Mr Aris, a British national, says the Myanmar military has not given him any information about his mother or the condition of her health. He says he has tried contacting the Burmese embassy, the British Foreign Office and the International Red Cross but none of them have helped.

"Before this, I didn't want to speak to the media or get involved too much," Mr Aris told the BBC, in his first-ever interview with international media. He hadn't spoken out when his mother was detained for nearly 15 years between 1989 and 2010.

LOW PROFILE

"It was better that I stayed out of politics. My mother never wanted me to be involved. But now that she has been sentenced, and the military are clearly not being reasonable, I think I can say what I want," he



Protesters at an earlier demonstration in support of Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP



FLASHBACK - Aung San Suu Kyi with Win Myint in court. Photo: AFP

told the BBC.

Mr Aris called on the world to take action over the Myanmar crisis and provide aid for the people.

Mr Aris and his brother have been mostly separated from their mother since 1988, when Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar from the UK to care for her ailing mother.

“The military will never win this war,” he told the BBC. “It’s just a matter of how much longer it goes on. The sooner they hand back power to my mother, and the democratically elected government, the sooner things can start to progress in their country.”

Mr Aris visited the Myanmar Embassy in London with a bouquet of flowers and a birthday card. He rang the bell and asked for the embassy to accept his gifts to send to his mother. The embassy receptionist refused to open the door to accept his gifts.

Speaking in a video, he appealed to the Myan-

mar junta to consider his mother’s advancing years and consider allowing her to return to her home in Yangon and to be reunited with her dog.

“Although she is used to staying alone, it is not something she should have to accept, and I certainly don’t,” Mr Aris said.

As the Myanmar crisis continues with no sign of let-up, Aung San Suu Kyi remains a beacon, somebody to protest for.

UN EXPERT CALLS FOR NEW APPROACH TO MYANMAR CRISIS



The world must rethink its approach to solving the crisis in junta-ruled Myanmar because it was not working, a United Nations expert said Wednesday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 2021 coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with more than 3,600 civilians killed in the military's crackdown on dissent, according to a monitoring group.

Efforts by the 10-member Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) bloc, which includes Myanmar, to defuse the crisis have faltered and no progress has been made on a five-point peace plan agreed on two years ago.

Tom Andrews, a UN special rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar, called for a new course of action and leadership from its fellow ASEAN members.

"I believe that the crisis in Myanmar has reached an important inflection point and that it is time the international community reassesses its approach to the crisis," he told a press conference in the Indonesian capital Jakarta.

He said the current action by the international community and regional bloc ASEAN was "simply not working" to end the crisis.

"A change of course is imperative," he said.

"This change will require vision and leadership, and I believe that Indonesia is positioned to provide that leadership."

ASEAN has become divided over the Myanmar issue, with Thailand defending talks with the junta after inviting its foreign minister Than Shwe to an informal meeting on Monday.

Indonesia and Malaysia - among the junta's harshest critics within the regional bloc - snubbed the meeting.

Myanmar's generals have been barred from high-level ASEAN meetings and Bangkok drew criticism from Singapore over Monday's talks, which warned it was premature to engage the junta at such a high level.

The United Nations says more than one million people have been displaced by violence since the coup.

Fighting between the army and rebel groups in Myanmar has periodically sent thousands of people fleeing across the border into Thailand.

ASEAN's last leaders' summit, held in May, ended without any significant progress.

AFP

THAILAND DEFENDS DIVISIVE MYANMAR JUNTA TALKS



Thailand's caretaker foreign minister Don Pramudwinai who invited the Myanmar junta delegate. Photo: AFP

Thailand on Monday last week defended hosting talks with the Myanmar junta that have split the regional bloc leading diplomatic efforts to end the chaos engulfing the country since the military seized power.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 2021 coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with more than 3,600 civilians killed in the military's crackdown on dissent, according to a monitoring group.

The generals have been barred from high-level meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional bloc, of which Myanmar is a member.

But Thailand's caretaker government, which is dominated by army-linked parties, last week invited junta foreign minister Than Shwe to the informal two-day meeting.

The move has split ASEAN and drawn criticism that it is undermining the bloc's efforts to tackle the crisis.

However, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said the talks were needed.

"We suffer more than others because we share more than 3,000 kilometres of land and sea border with Myanmar," Prayut told reporters.

"We need to talk, otherwise people will be affected. Today is just a meeting, we did not agree on anything."

Indonesia and Malaysia - among the junta's harshest critics within ASEAN - snubbed the meeting, while Singapore warned it was premature to engage the junta at such a high level.

Cambodia sent a junior foreign ministry official while China - long a key supporter of the Myanmar military - dispatched Deng Xijun, its special envoy for Asian affairs.

The split is a fresh blow to ASEAN's already faltering efforts to defuse the crisis.

No progress has been made towards implementing a five-point peace plan agreed on two years ago and the last ASEAN summit, in May, ended without any significant progress on the matter.

Fighting between the army and rebel groups in Myanmar has periodically sent thousands of people fleeing across the border into Thailand.

Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai said the kingdom was suffering the effects of the crisis more than other countries in the region.

"Thailand is the only country that wants to find a solution," he told reporters.

"None of the other ASEAN members care as much as us."

Prayut, a former army chief who himself seized power in a coup in 2014, suffered a heavy defeat at last month's Thai general election but is still in the post in a caretaker capacity.

A senior Southeast Asian official familiar with the matter told AFP at the weekend they suspected the outgoing Thai government was trying to find a way to persuade ASEAN to let Myanmar attend high-level meetings again.

AFP

US SANCTIONS MYANMAR'S DEFENSE MINISTRY AND TWO BANKS



Photo: Andy Feliciotti

The United States said Wednesday last week that it is imposing sanctions on Myanmar's Defense Ministry and two "regime-controlled" banks that enable transactions between the military regime and foreign markets to buy arms and other materials.

"Burma's military regime has leveraged state-run access to international markets to import weapons and materiel, including from sanctioned Russian entities, to continue its violence and oppression," said Treasury Under Secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence Brian Nelson.

"We will continue to support the people of Burma and deny the regime access to the means to perpetuate ongoing atrocities," he added in a statement, using Myanmar's former name.

On Wednesday, the Treasury Department designated Myanmar's Ministry of Defense, noting its command of the armed forces which "conducted decades of repressive military rule that was violently resumed following the coup in 2021."

The ministry has continued to import goods

and military material worth at least \$1 billion since the coup, including from sanctioned entities in Russia - providing revenue to Moscow, the Treasury added.

The other entities named were state-owned financial institutions Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank, and Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank.

The banks "primarily function as foreign currency exchanges" and allowed Myanmar's state-owned enterprises access to international markets using offshore accounts, helping them transact more easily with foreign entities, the statement added.

The financial institutions also allow the Defense Ministry and other sanctioned military entities to buy arms and other materials from foreign sources, said the Treasury.

As a result of the designations, all property and interests in property of those named in the United States are blocked and must be reported, among other restrictions.

AFP

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SWEDEN MUST ACT TO STOP INDIAN ARMS SALES TO MYANMAR MILITARY



Photo: Linus Mimiet

Sweden must act on recent Indian arms sales to the Myanmar military and investigate how components of Swedish arms are once again being exported from India to Myanmar, despite the EU arms embargo, says the campaign organisation Justice for Myanmar.

The NGO is calling on the Swedish government and its arms control authority, the Inspectorate of Strategic Products (ISP), to take necessary measures to ensure that Swedish arms do not end up in the hands of the illegal Myanmar military junta that is committing atrocities throughout the country with total impunity.

On 29 March 2023, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström responded to an inquiry by the Member of Parliament, Hakan Svenneling, on measures taken by the Swedish government to prevent the re-export of weapons produced under Swedish licence in India.

The inquiry follows an investigation by Justice for Myanmar that found that some of the arms and associated components sold from India to the Myanmar military were Swedish designed, including fuses for

Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles, developed and produced by Saab Group.

As an EU member state, it is prohibited for Sweden to transfer arms and dual-use items and technologies to the Myanmar military.

In responding to MP Hakan Svenneling's question, Billstrom confirmed that Swedish Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles have been manufactured in India under licence since the 1970s. He also confirmed that Sweden has transferred Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles to India and that some of these transferred arms have been diverted from India to Myanmar.

In 2012, this diversion was subject to an official investigation by the ISP.

According to Billstrom, the ISP concluded that India was respecting its commitments to not re-export weapons manufactured under Swedish licence and that the Indian government had taken sufficient measures to reduce the risk of diversion.

However, since the 2012 investigation concluded, Indian firm Sandeep Metalcraft Private Limited has supplied the Myanmar military with time mechanical fuse 447 designed for 84 mm Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles, despite the Myanmar military's genocide against the Rohingya and ongoing international crimes.

One shipment of fuse 447 was sent to Myanmar in 2019 and a second shipment likely of fuse 447 was shipped after the Myanmar military's attempted coup, directly supporting its campaign of terror. Sandeep Metalcraft still advertises Carl Gustaf fuses on its website.

The information exposed by Justice For Myanmar therefore suggests that key components for ammunition for Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles once again have been diverted from India to Myanmar. This casts doubt on the Indian government's willingness to comply with end-user commitments and take appropriate measures to reduce the risk of diversion.

Billstrom's response did not address the questions raised about the recent transfer of fuses for Carl Gustaf rifles from India to Myanmar.

In response to Justice for Myanmar's earlier investigation, Saab declined to respond to questions on whether the transferred fuses would require a Saab licence to be produced, and whether Saab's licence

production agreements with Indian companies prohibit or restrict onward exports from India to other countries. It is unclear whether Sandeep Metalcraft is in a position to manufacture the fuses in India without licensable parts and assistance from the Saab Group.

India has continued to export military hardware, including 122 mm barrels for howitzers, to the Myanmar military as late as October 2022. The manufacturer of these barrels is Yantra India Limited, a state-owned public sector undertaking associated with the Indian Ministry of Defence.

Yantra India Limited's ordnance factory in Ambajhari currently produces 84 mm mark-III FFV 551 Carl Gustaf ammunition. The FFV551 is the primary high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) round and is a rocket-assisted projectile.

Billstrom, in his response, also noted a new system, in place as of 1 March 2022, that implies supervisory controls in foreign countries that have received transfers of light weapons made in Sweden, such as Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles and ammunition for this category of weapon.

This system may include post-transfer verification visits in recipient countries to reduce risks of diversion, including the risk of re-export to other countries without prior and explicit permission from Sweden.

The new system also implies that countries that have not acted in accordance with commitments to not re-export Swedish light arms without prior consent from Sweden should not be considered eligible as recipients of new transfers of arms made in Sweden or of transfers foreseen as part of prior deals made with Sweden, as long as the commitments continue to be contravened or where a recipient country refuses to accept a post-transfer verification visit.

It is not clear whether ISP has undertaken, or intends to undertake, an official investigation into the transfer by Sandeep Metalcraft fuses for Carl Gustaf rifles to Myanmar. ISP should urgently investigate if any of the Sandeep Metalcraft shipments to Myanmar contain Swedish technology and make public any past or future investigation carried out to this end.

Justice for Myanmar supports the proposal made by members of Parliament Hakan Svenning et al on 28 April 2023, asking the Swedish government to adopt a strategy to prevent the re-export of Swedish arms to Myanmar.

Justice For Myanmar notes with concern that in September 2022, Saab announced its decision to set up a production facility in India for its Carl-Gustaf

M4 shoulder-fired weapon system. For this venture, Saab FFV India is being established as a new company to make the rocket launchers for the Indian military, as well as parts of other weapons platforms for foreign states.

This move is particularly alarming in light of India's increasing military co-operation with the Myanmar military after its campaign of genocide against the Rohingya in 2017. In July 2019, India and Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding to increase defence co-operation and has continued to support the Myanmar military after its coup attempt.

According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India was the third largest supplier of weapons to Myanmar for the years 2017-2021, accounting for 17% of Myanmar's arms imports after China (36%) and Russia (27%).

Justice for Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "We are deeply concerned about Sweden's apparent ties to the supply of weapons to the Myanmar military, which is intensifying its indiscriminate attacks against the people.

"The ISP must fully investigate how components of Swedish light arms and their ammunition are still being exported from India to Myanmar, including from Sandeep Metalcraft, and ensure that Sweden abides by the EU arms embargo, which prohibits Sweden from transferring arms and dual-use goods to the Myanmar military.

"The Swedish government needs to take urgent action to prevent further diversion, including a suspension of export and production agreements with Indian arms manufacturers in light of India's blatant disregard for the norms of conduct contained in the Wassenaar Arrangement and in international humanitarian law, as seen in the continued business Indian arms manufacturers have with the illegal Myanmar military junta.

"We demand that the ISP evaluation leading to a decision to grant Saab the right to establish an M4 manufacturing plant in India be made public in light of India's well-known track record of exporting conventional arms, ammunition, parts and components to Myanmar, including from Swedish designed weapons."

INDIAN STATE-OWNED ARMS COMPANY EXPORTING TO MYANMAR JUNTA



A state-owned Indian arms company exported over \$5 million in equipment to the Myanmar junta in the six months to April 2023, according to a Justice for Myanmar investigation.

Justice for Myanmar is calling on India's Quad partners and other allies to use their leverage to pressure India to stop the supply of arms and dual-use goods and technology to the Myanmar military junta.

Its investigation of Indian export records has revealed over US\$5 million in new exports to the Myanmar military and its arms brokers from Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) in the six months from November 2022 to April 2023.

The shipments consisted of military end-use goods, technology and technical documents to be used by the Myanmar military.

Items included metallic sonar domes, transducers and gaskets for the domes to be used on frigates, warships or submarines; directing gear systems;

various items for radio transmission or radar equipment; and manpack radios for battlefield communications.

BEL, which maintains a branch office in Myanmar, transferred the equipment knowing that the Myanmar military is the end user and that it is committing ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity with total impunity.

Through its campaign of terror against the people, the Myanmar military junta has so far murdered over 3,600, arbitrarily arrested 23,300 more, committed indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, torture, sexual violence and displaced at least 1.5 million.

The shipments may aid and abet the junta's international crimes and are a continuation of India's flagrant disregard for its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and its commitments under the Wassenaar Arrangement, according to Justice for Myanmar.

India and the Myanmar military have long-standing ties. In his speech on 25 December 2022, junta head Min Aung Hlaing stated a need for large warships with high combat capabilities and the training of navy officers to operate them, noting that naval officers had been sent to other countries, including India, to enhance their individual capabilities.

Justice for Myanmar believes that the USA and France, which are honouring Prime Minister Narendra Modi in state visits this year, have a particular responsibility to address India's support for the junta, and to push for India to impose an arms embargo on Myanmar.

BEL's exports to Myanmar during the six-month period were spread across seven shipments, with three being sent to the Myanmar military directly, three sent to the arms brokers Mega Hill General Trading, and one sent to Alliance Engineering Services.

Alliance Engineering Services is connected to the family of the junta's former air force chief Maung Maung Kyaw.

Mega Hill General Trading is a private Myanmar military contractor that has a history of procuring technology and providing services to the army's Directorate of Procurement, including a remote-controlled weapon station supplied by BEL in 2021 and exposed by Justice For Myanmar.

Justice For Myanmar also exposed BEL's supply of a coastal surveillance system to the Myanmar military before and after its illegal coup attempt.

Justice For Myanmar calls for urgent targeted sanctions against Mega Hill General Trading, Alliance Engineering Services, their associated business, directors and shareholders.

BEL is 51.14% owned by the Indian government and is publicly listed. Other shareholders include Nippon Life India Asset Management, Goldman Sachs, Vanguard, BlackRock, Fidelity, Canada Pension Plan, California Public Employees' Retirement System, California State Teachers Retirement System, Caisse de Depot et Placement du Quebec and the Swedish pension funds, AP-fonden (AP1), Andra AP-fonden (AP2) and Sjunde AP-fonden (AP7).

BEL's institutional shareholders should divest

from the company because of its continued supply of dual use goods and technology to the Myanmar military, in line with their international human rights responsibilities.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung said: "The Indian government and its state-owned arms companies are continuing business as usual in Myanmar, equipping and profiting from the junta as it commits acts of terror against the people.

"These new and significant exports to Myanmar from Bharat Electronics Limited make India further complicit in the junta's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"By selling arms and equipment to the junta, India is choosing to ignore the voices of the Myanmar people, the legitimate National Unity Government, civil society, UN resolutions and its responsibilities under international law.

"It is crucial that India's Quad partners and other allies step up and start using their leverage to stop India's abhorrent support for the junta.

"The Biden administration is this week honouring Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a state visit to the White House.

"We urge President Biden and his government to push Prime Minister Modi to immediately stop all shipments of arms and dual use goods and technology to the Myanmar junta.

"The US should impose conditions on military aid to India to help end Indian support for the junta.

"President Macron should raise India's complicity in the junta's international crimes when Modi makes a state visit to Paris in July, and push India to impose an arms embargo on Myanmar."

NUG'S ACTING PRESIDENT ATTENDS CLOSING CEREMONY OF PDF OFFICER TRAINING COURSE



Acting President of the NUG Duwa Lashi La visits the troops. Photo: Facebook

Acting President of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) Duwa Lashi La delivered a speech at the closing ceremony of People's Defence Forces (PDF) officer training course on 20 June.

The event was held in a liberated area of the country.

The training course was attended by PDF members from different commands of the country.

There are about 300 battalions and columns of PDFs throughout the country under the NUG's Ministry of Defence, and the PDF military headquarters is working in conjunction with allied ethnic revolutionary organizations (ERO) for military operations led by experienced commanders from the ERO.

As the junta is a significantly more advanced enemy, with all-round military powers, the PDF are engaging in 'asymmetrical warfare', with networking, cooperation, and knowledge and experience exchange with diplomats, military attachés from various countries, international organizations and academic institu-

tions.

The MoD said that the PDFs and allied ethnic revolutionary groups have eliminated at least 29,650 enemy forces and the injury of 11,230 others, adding that over 13,000 members of the army and police have defected to the PDFs.

The United States Institute of Peace issued a report in November last year that, based on interviews, claimed there are around 65,000 PDF members, 20 percent of them equipped with military-grade weapons and another 40 percent use homemade weapons.

The PDFs are carrying out military operations under the command of the Central Command and Coordination Committee (C3C) and Joint Command and Coordination (J2C), which were established by the NUG and its EAO allies.

NUG'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTRY OFFERS URGENT ADVICE TO MYANMAR REFUGEES IN INDIA



Myanmar refugees in a camp in Manipur. Photo: AFP

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the National Unity Government (NUG) has released a list of dos and don'ts for Myanmar refugees who are taking shelter in India for security reasons.

The request of the NUG was made as community tension between Kukis and Meiteis has increased in India's Manipur border state. The former in this state share ethnic lineage with Myanmar's Chin community and the latter fear they will be outnumbered by the arrival of the refugees.

The statement issued on 15 June said that Myanmar citizens and their social organizations are to avoid disturbing the host country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, not to associate with the host country's political and administrative matters, not to get involved in the illegal wildlife and drug trades, to live harmoniously with the respective local communities and to abide by social and religious disciplines and, if needed, to immediately contact with the nearest Myanmar's Hluttaw representatives, social organizations and ministry of foreign affairs should there be

any problems.

The ministry also advised Myanmar's Hluttaw representatives and social organizations to convey this message to their nearby IDPs and communities.

Since the Myanmar military coup in February 2021, over 50,000 civilians have fled from Myanmar's Chin State and Sagaing Region into India's northeast, according to a report of the United States Institute of Peace, on 15 June.

The Indian government has allowed Myanmar refugees into their country. As Myanmar's coup consequences have worsened India is expected to rethink its position before the fallout seriously threatens its national interests.

The Indian communities of Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland have ethnic and kinship ties extending into Myanmar's Chin State and the Sagaing Region.

MYANMAR JUNTA'S OBSTRUCTION OF CYCLONE MOCHA AID PUTS THOUSANDS AT RISK: HRW



People queue for water in Sittwe. Photo: AFP

The Myanmar junta's increasing obstruction of humanitarian aid in the month since Cyclone Mocha has put thousands of lives at immediate risk and endangered millions of people, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said 20 June.

Since the cyclone made landfall on May 14, 2023, junta authorities have refused to authorize travel and visas for aid workers, release urgent supplies from customs and warehouses, or relax onerous and unnecessary restrictions on lifesaving assistance, HRW noted in a press release.

The persistence of Cyclone Mocha's damage and resulting illness and deaths reflect the junta's new as well as existing restrictions on aid. Donors, regional bodies, and the United Nations should press the junta to lift all restrictions on aid delivery without relenting on the need to hold junta officials responsible for past and ongoing human rights abuses.

"The junta's moves to block aid have turned an extreme weather event into a man-made catastrophe," said Shayna Bauchner, Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Donors should press the junta to drop their politically motivated obstruction and allow desperately needed aid to reach all cyclone survivors."

Cyclone Mocha was one of the strongest cyclones to ever hit the region, with maximum sustained

winds of 250 kilometers per hour leaving a trail of destruction. The UN estimates that 7.9 million people were affected, with 1.6 million in need of urgent aid across 5 Myanmar states and regions, Rakhine, Chin, Sagaing, Magway, and Kachin. Hundreds were killed and hundreds of thousands of buildings damaged.

Telecommunication outages have delayed outreach and needs assessments, further isolating communities.

Human Rights Watch interviewed aid workers and people in affected communities who described how the junta's failed relief response has been deliberate. Humanitarian aid staff, who asked that their names not be used for fear of junta retribution, told Human Rights Watch that since the cyclone, the junta's access restrictions have hindered their agencies' ability to conduct needs assessments, distribute relief supplies, and provide emergency medical care. Many aid workers, local activists, and villagers expressed the view that the junta was seeking to use the cyclone response to legitimize and bolster its control.

On June 8, after weeks of appeals by humanitarian organizations for unrestricted access, the junta formalized its obstruction by issuing a blanket suspension of travel authorizations for aid groups in Rakhine State, reversing initial approvals granted in early June.

The ban followed a letter requiring the UN and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) to hand over all domestic distribution of relief supplies to junta authorities. Meanwhile, villagers have continued to report massive levels of unaddressed needs, including destroyed shelters, injuries and waterborne illnesses, malnourishment, and lack of access to food and clean water.

“It is unfathomable that humanitarians are being denied access to support people in need,” the acting UN resident and humanitarian coordinator, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, said following the suspension. “Just when vulnerable communities need our help the most, we have been forced to stop distributions of food, drinking water, and shelter supplies. This denial of access unnecessarily prolongs the suffering of those without food to eat or a roof over their head.”

The junta named 18 generals to oversee “rehabilitation processes” in disaster-affected townships, led by the junta’s deputy prime minister, Adm. Tin Aung San, and its minister of border affairs, Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, both of whom are sanctioned by the United States, European Union, and Canada. The generals assigned to townships in Rakhine State include Brig. Gen. Sunny Ohn, who served as deputy commander in Rakhine State during the military’s 2017 campaign of crimes against humanity and acts of genocide against the Rohingya, and Lt. Gen. Aye Win, who led two investigations in 2017 that covered up military atrocities.

The junta’s actions have been felt by those in need. “The junta isn’t doing anything on its own and won’t let international organizations help,” a Rohingya man from Thae Chaung camp in Rakhine State told Human Rights Watch. “Why they’re doing that, I don’t understand. Children are suffering.

We need shelter, we need food, we need medical support. The monsoon season is just starting. We fear more rain.”

The junta’s interference in relief operations disregards multiple international calls regarding humanitarian aid, most notably the five-point consensus from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the December 2022 UN Security Council resolution, which urged “full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.” The junta’s grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have only increased since the December resolution. The Security Council should urgently pass a follow-up resolution instituting a global arms embargo, referring the situation to the International Criminal Court, and imposing sanctions on the junta leadership and mili-

tary-owned businesses.

The global humanitarian response has received only 15 percent of the US\$887 million needed for the year, \$333 million of which is earmarked for the cyclone response. Donors should increase funding while seeking ways to channel aid through local civil society groups, rather than through junta authorities, given the military’s track record of corruption and misuse of disaster assistance funding and material. Effective aid delivery hinges on engaging local partners that have the networks and experience to navigate a difficult environment, Human Rights Watch said.

“Governments seeking to help the people of Myanmar facing this or future humanitarian crises need to recognize that the military junta will only be a dangerous obstacle to reaching that goal,”

Bauchner said. “The lives of countless thousands of people across the country are at risk because of generals who are determined to maintain their tight grip on power at any cost.”

HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

Since the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar’s junta has carried out a nationwide campaign of crimes against humanity and war crimes, deliberately blocking aid from reaching millions at risk, as a form of collective punishment. The blockages sustain the military’s longstanding “four cuts” strategy, in which the armed forces maintain control of an area by isolating and terrorizing the civilian population.

One week before Cyclone Mocha, the UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, reported that “humanitarian access continues to deteriorate because of bureaucracy, multiple checkpoints, movement restrictions, conflicts and roadblocks.” The number of people needing assistance in the country has grown from 1 million before the coup to 17.6 million, according to the UN, with almost half the population now living below the national poverty line. About 1.2 million people displaced by conflict and insecurity were living in areas affected by the storm.

Since the coup, the junta has arrested hundreds of local aid and healthcare workers. In October 2022, it imposed a new Organization Registration Law requiring domestic and international organizations to register with the junta and submit quarterly updates on their activities, with criminal penalties of up to five years in prison for failing to comply. The law prohibits organizations from direct or indirect contact with any opposition groups, and requires organizations seeking to deliver emergency disaster relief to obtain approval

from local junta administrators by submitting information on funding, materials, and proposed projects.

The junta's obstruction of aid violates international human rights law obligations regarding the rights to life, health, and shelter. All parties to an armed conflict are obligated to facilitate rapid and unimpeded impartial humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need, and are forbidden from withholding consent for relief operations on arbitrary grounds.

Expert guidance commissioned by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that in exceptional situations, such as when a country is unlawfully impeding lifesaving assistance, international organizations may, without the country's consent, "conduct temporary humanitarian relief operations to bring life-saving supplies to a people in extreme need, when no alternatives exist," and when they would not "seriously impair the territorial integrity of the state."

INADEQUATE WARNING

Authorities were effectively detaining about 600,000 Rohingya in camps and villages when the storm hit Rakhine State, having long denied them freedom of movement and other basic rights, amounting to a system of apartheid. Rohingya told Human Rights Watch that while local junta authorities made evacuation announcements a few days before the cyclone, they provided little support to find shelter or transportation, and did not adequately communicate the storm's risks. Some Rohingya said they tried to take shelter at Sittwe University and in other concrete buildings but returned home because the sites were full.

"Authorities made an announcement about an incoming cyclone but they didn't tell us how devastating it could be," a Rohingya man living in Rakhine's Dar Paing camp said. "They just told people to leave their homes, but didn't say where to go. No one from the junta or NGOs came to help move people. So people stayed in their shelters and were injured or died. We thought it would be like the other storms we face every year. We never realized it would be so catastrophic."

From Rakhine State, the cyclone moved inland to the country's northwest, where the civilian population has faced military attacks, displacement, movement restrictions, and internet shutdowns for over two years. Villagers from Matupi, Kanpetlet, and Mindat townships in Chin State, all under martial law, reported that the junta closed major roads after the cyclone hit. In Sagaing and Magway Regions, where almost a million people have been displaced by airstrikes and fighting since the coup, flooding has destroyed large swathes of farmland, while shifting landmines and un-

exploded ordnance increased the risk to villagers.

POST-CYCLONE BLOCKING OF AID

The junta's restrictions on access, movement, banking, and the import and transport of critical nutrition, housing, and medical supplies have hindered every aspect of the cyclone response.

In early May, in preparation for the cyclone, international agencies submitted travel authorization requests for pre-approval, a highly bureaucratic and arbitrary process. For weeks, the junta delayed issuing new travel authorizations and visas for emergency relief staff and experts, leaving many groups reliant on local partners and existing field staff who themselves were affected by the cyclone.

Following negotiations, some travel authorizations were issued in early June, only to be revoked in the June 8 order blocking all existing access for aid groups in Rakhine State.

"The humanitarian access situation in cyclone-hit Rakhine State has deteriorated," OCHA reported on June 9. "The suspension of access in Rakhine brings a stop to activities that have been reaching hundreds of thousands of people."

Humanitarian staff reported that some access requests were briefly approved by state-level junta authorities before being overturned by the junta in the capital, Naypyidaw. OCHA, which is coordinating the emergency response, submitted a detailed two-week plan for the transport and distribution of supplies in Rakhine and Chin States to junta authorities in Naypyidaw the week of May 22. After weeks with no response, OCHA reported on June 9 that "initial approval for humanitarian distribution and transport plans across 11 townships have also been rescinded." On June 7, the junta issued a letter to the UN asserting that beyond Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, all domestic distribution of relief supplies would be managed by the relevant state-level junta authorities.

The junta has claimed that it is overseeing an extensive, effective disaster response. Junta spokesman Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told the BBC that the junta "has allowed local and international organizations helping recovery efforts in line with rules and regulations." A junta diplomat in Thailand claimed baselessly in an opinion article that the junta's early warning system and relief efforts have demonstrated its "management capability, efficient action, and ability to plan long-term."

Residents from coastal Rakhine State said there was no support for search-and-rescue operations after the storm. "How many are still missing, no

one knows,” the man from Thae Chaung camp said.

“I saw many bodies afterward. I attended ten funerals including two of my relatives. The junta could have evacuated us to buildings in town, but they did not. If the diaspora hadn’t sent some assistance after the cyclone, many more Rohingya would have died.”

Local aid workers told Human Rights Watch about new roadblocks and increased scrutiny at military checkpoints, amplifying the risk of arbitrary detention, harassment, and confiscation of supplies.

Junta officials have blocked staff from transporting food, housing materials, and medical goods between townships, at times demanding they turn the supplies over to the junta. The authorities have also exacted bribes at Sittwe airport from staff bringing in cash and supplies. The junta’s General Administration Department has denied local activists’ requests to collect aid for storm victims.

“The INGOs and NGOs are unable to provide assistance to us,” a man from Sittwe said. “The junta authorities told them that if any humanitarian wants to help us, they have to work with the junta. It makes it difficult for them to help us independently. So we are suffering. We do not have shelters now, or any aid.”

On May 23, junta officials detained and interrogated five ethnic Rakhine aid workers transporting relief supplies from Sittwe to Ponnagyun township for alleged connections with “illegal” media outlets. They released the aid workers the following day. On June 2, officials arrested eight aid workers at a junta checkpoint in Mrauk-U while they were trying to distribute supplies.

The Arakan Army, an ethnic armed group, along with its political wing, the United League of Arakan, has requested international support for its relief efforts, having strengthened its control across central and northern Rakhine State since the coup. Local activists expressed concerns that the junta was using the cyclone response to regain a foothold in the state, by both enforcing restrictions to undermine the Arakan Army’s efforts as well as reinforcing junta troops through its own minimal outreach.

On May 19, the junta threatened to take legal action against media reporting “false news” about the cyclone, including reports with higher death tolls. The statement claimed that 97 people died, and only because they had refused to be evacuated by the junta. The opposition National Unity Government tallied more than 450 deaths.

SHELTERS DESTROYED

Humanitarian agencies said that in camps

and villages in low-lying central and northern Rakhine State, nearly all shelters were damaged or destroyed, along with latrines, wells, and other infrastructure. “All of Sittwe is damaged,” a Rohingya man said of the Rakhine State capital. “It looks like a graveyard.”

About 140,000 Rohingya have been confined to camps in central Rakhine State since 2012, sheltered in bamboo longhouses designed to last just two years. For more than 10 years, the authorities denied aid agencies’ requests for adequate land and resources to improve safety in the flood-prone former paddy fields and low-lying coastal areas where the camps sit. Fewer than half of all camp shelters had received any repair over the past two years.

The resulting damage has been massive, with most Rohingya interviewed by Human Rights Watch saying that shelter is their greatest need. Many people who lost their houses have been living in tents made of debris along roads, in paddy fields, or in other overcrowded and ad hoc displacement sites. Markets have begun to reopen but prices for building materials and food have skyrocketed.

“So many Rohingya in the camps are living under an open sky,” the man from Dar Paing camp said.

“My shelter was fully destroyed but we survived. People are using htamein [skirts] as temporary roofs. No one is coming to help us.”

In the northwest, roadblocks and ongoing fighting are preventing people from reaching towns to buy building materials, while local aid workers have been blocked at checkpoints from moving supplies and cash.

FOOD AID WITHHELD

A humanitarian agency reported that “80 per cent of households surveyed in Rakhine stated their communities and neighbors are struggling to access food.”

Residents of some camps and villages in Rakhine State said they had received small rations of rice, beans, and oil from junta officials following the cyclone. “But it was finished after two days,” a man said. Some villagers reported being charged for rice and roofing sheets delivered by local junta officials to cover “transportation costs.” Others have relied on community donations to avoid starvation.

Aid workers said that the supplies distributed by junta officials – extremely limited in scope, without consideration of communities’ needs – appear to be little more than a propaganda opportunity, with photos splashed across state media. Local media reported that a military ceremony allegedly providing supplies

to survivors in Matupi township was nothing more than a photo op, with junta officials leaving with the aid that they were photographed distributing.

The World Food Programme had been distributing food assistance but, even prior to the June 8 suspension, the organization was facing dwindling supplies, transport restrictions, and difficulty reaching northern Rakhine and the northwest due to lack of travel authorizations. “Wider access for distributions is urgently needed, along with permission to transport humanitarian supplies from in-country warehouses and into Myanmar from other countries,” OCHA reported.

Cyclone flooding has caused massive destruction to paddy fields, seed storage, livestock, and other means of agricultural and fishing livelihoods, exacerbating the vulnerability of populations already facing losses due to conflict and the country’s economic freefall. The coup triggered widespread infrastructure collapse and a severe devaluation of the Myanmar currency, leading to increasingly dire banking and supply chain crises and shortages of food, medicine, and other essentials.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that about 327,000 hectares of agricultural land were affected by flooding, and at least half of all fishing equipment in Sittwe was damaged or destroyed.

DISEASE, DAMAGED HEALTH FACILITIES

Communities have been reporting outbreaks of diarrhea and skin infections, particularly among children, while health workers warn of heightened risks of waterborne and communicable diseases in the weeks ahead. “We’re facing a shortage of drinking water,” the man from Dar Paing camp said.

“During the cyclone, the sea water entered our ponds. We are still tasting water like salt.”

The cyclone caused significant damage to hospitals and clinics, compounded by the junta’s severe restrictions on health care. Rohingya in Sittwe and Pauktaw camps reported little to no access to mobile health services. “So many injured Rohingya still need medical attention,” a man from Sittwe said. “Some kind doctors came from Yangon to help us, but it’s not enough.”

“Health partners continue to face persistent challenges in accessing the most severely affected areas,” OCHA reported on June 9. “Wider access is crucial to effectively extend health services, allocate resources, and carry out early warning and outbreak investigations.”

Following the suspension of its travel authorizations, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders or MSF) Myanmar tweeted: “This will desperately hurt communities as we will be unable to open primary healthcare clinics, facilitate emergency referrals or provide much needed emergency relief items. People impacted by the cyclone ... will continue to suffer enormously if this decision is not reversed.”

The UN reported that “the impact of Cyclone Mocha will deprive more children and pregnant and lactating women of access to timely and lifesaving nutrition treatment and support, contributing to increased morbidity and mortality.” Humanitarian agencies reported that the junta is denying access to even assess nutrition needs and disseminate guidance on feeding infants in emergencies.

Rates of severe acute malnutrition have spiked this year, yet only nine percent of children in need received lifesaving nutrition treatment in the first quarter of 2023, with assistance “severely hampered by access constraints, restrictive humanitarian space, displacement, and uncertainty around the importation of nutrition therapeutic products.” For 2 years, junta authorities refused to provide customs clearance for 77 cases of medicine, healthcare equipment, and nutrition supplements.

URGENT NEED FOR PROTECTION

“Increasing protection risks require urgent attention,” OCHA reported, “including threats to safety and security, unexploded ordnance (UXOs), sexual and gender-based violence, loss of civil documentation, looting, extortion, and robbery. New negative coping mechanisms observed include borrowing money at high interest, and children begging for food due to the lack of job opportunities, which might lead to child labor, exploitation, and abuse.” OCHA also reported cases of suicide attempts, “primarily among women and girls who were affected by the cyclone and are experiencing psychological distress after the storm.”

Landmines and improvised explosive devices that may have been dislodged by landslides and flooding pose an ongoing risk, especially as people clear debris in previously safe areas. Myanmar was one of only a handful of states to use antipersonnel landmines in 2022, with casualties spiking since the coup. Over 60 percent of landmine incidents in the first quarter of 2023 took place in areas affected by Cyclone Mocha, and landmine contamination has been reported in almost 300 villages since the storm. On May 24, one person was killed and five were injured by a landmine in Hakha, Chin State, where post-cyclone landslides had been reported.

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DISPLACEMENT UNDER MYANMAR JUNTA WORSENING



Displaced people in Karenni State. Photo: Mizzima

Relentless attacks by the military junta throughout Myanmar in the past few weeks have caused the already dire displacement and humanitarian situation further devastation inside the country, according to the humanitarian organisation, Progressive Voice.

The root cause of the displacement has been the Myanmar military and its decades-long oppression in ethnic minorities areas, which have expanded to Bamar-majority areas in central Myanmar following the attempted coup. Its ongoing atrocity crimes are only deepening the humanitarian crisis.

Progressive Voice says that without immediate and concrete actions by the international community to hold the military junta accountable for its atrocities, it will only be emboldened to continue heinous crimes with blanket impunity.

In southeastern Myanmar, fighting between the junta and democratic resistance forces in Thayatchang Township of Tanintharyi Region has dis-

placed more than 5,000 villagers since 8 June 2023. Junta soldiers not only launched targeted attacks against the resistance forces, but also indiscriminately used at least 30 villagers as human shields, including children and elderly people.

A little further north, on 7 June 2023, the junta's deliberate artillery shelling on villages in Kyaukgyi Township, Bago Region, has displaced over 10,000 people. Due to their protracted displacement, in an area of 4,000 acres people cannot grow their crops, thus risking shortages of food supplies for conflict-affected populations. With the monsoon season already starting, the situation of displaced people who already have acute needs for shelter, food, medicines and other essentials are made even more drastic. They urgently need emergency support.

Similarly, in central Myanmar, which has become a stronghold of the people's revolutionary forces, the military junta's intensifying attacks have spiked the number of displaced populations.

On 9 June 2023, junta troops launched both aerial and ground attacks in Salingyi Township of Sagaing Region displacing, an estimated 5,000 people from ten villages. Hundreds of houses were destroyed due to the junta troops' torching of people's homes following the attacks.

On 9 June, the junta troops entered a village in Khin-U Township, also torched villagers' houses and took their properties and livestock, including 50 sheep and six cows. These incidents are examples from just the past few weeks of the junta's nationwide terror campaign against the people of Myanmar.

Such destruction of property, food storage and looting of livestock, on top of the junta's use of artillery shelling and airstrikes in parallel with arson attacks to intentionally target civilian areas have been a pattern, as the resistance movement has continued to gain momentum on the ground.

Local communities and vulnerable populations have faced fresh and protracted displacement over the past two years, with at least 1.5 million displaced since the attempted coup. This is in addition to the existing number of displaced populations in ethnic regions and refugees in neighboring countries like Thailand and Bangladesh prior to the military's attempted coup. Such acts of the military junta are not stopping any time soon.

While the escalation of atrocity crimes against civilians continues, the junta has started processing the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, starting with its "pilot project". Meanwhile, in Rakhine State where Rohingya refugees are supposed to return, the junta blatantly continues to block the life-saving humanitarian assistance from reaching populations devastated by Cyclone Mocha in areas under its control. The situation and conditions are clearly not ready for the Rohingya's safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return.

Given the current humanitarian crisis – caused by Cyclone Mocha and the junta's ongoing atrocity crimes against the people – the "pilot project" reeks of the junta's routine manipulation tactic to falsely claim legitimacy and the classic weaponization of aid, according to Progressive Voice.

Recently, the Special Rapporteur on the hu-

man rights situation in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has called on Bangladesh to urgently stop the repatriation project. He stated, "Conditions in Myanmar are anything but conducive for the safe, dignified, sustainable, and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees."

Despite this, Bangladesh and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) are allowing the junta to move forward with its plan. Furthermore, according to the news agency, RFA, the UNHCR has cut food rations for the 23 Rohingya refugees who registered for repatriation although their return has not yet taken place yet. This action is clearly a proof of UNHCR's complicity in the pilot project, and the repatriation will not be voluntary.

The worsening displacement and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar will endure if the international community continues to fail to respond and hold the military junta accountable for its heinous crimes. The catastrophe in Myanmar needs to be immediately addressed in an effective and concrete manner by respecting and supporting the voices of the people on the ground. The Spring Revolution, the democratic resistance movement and the people's determination for federal democracy will continue despite the junta's ongoing brutal attempt for power grab.

It is time for the international community to support the Myanmar people in the realization of their will for a federal democratic country. The international community must take all actions possible to bring about the end of the military junta by dismantling this criminal institution and holding the junta leaders to account by international law. Meanwhile, the international community must support and partner with local responders and ethnic humanitarian organizations to deliver the desperately-needed humanitarian assistance, without channeling it through or partnering with the junta, to ensure humanitarian support reaches the displaced populations in time to save lives.

HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR EFFECTIVE AID DISTRIBUTION IN MYANMAR



To mark World Refugee Day on 20 June, 11 humanitarian organisations issued a letter calling on the United Nations (UN), ASEAN and the international community to support local responders helping displaced people (IDPs) in Myanmar.

Below is the text of the letter:

On the occasion of the World Refugee Day, we call on the United Nations, ASEAN and the international community to urgently address the root cause of the multifaceted crisis in Myanmar and fully recognize and support local leadership for effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. We call for UN agencies, humanitarian organizations and aid donors to prioritize channeling humanitarian aid in partnership with and supporting local civil society, frontline responders, and ethnic service providers, including cross-border, to best support affected populations.

Civil society further recommend countries neighboring Myanmar to provide protection and assistance to refugees fleeing from the junta's atrocities. The international community must formulate a comprehensive response centered on protection of human rights, humanitarian and 'do no harm' principles in tackling Myanmar's mass displacement and refugee catastrophe.

The egregious crimes of the Myanmar military junta since the illegal coup attempt of 1 February 2021 have brought about new waves of mass displacement and suffering across the country and beyond its borders into neighboring Thailand and India. Over 1.5 million have been displaced en masse in multiple regions after the attempted coup — particularly in Chin, Karen and Karenni States and Sagaing, Magwe and Tanintharyi Regions. This mass displacement and calamity only reflect the lasting — in some cases lifelong — experiences of ethnic communities where the same military has forced hundreds of thousands into protracted displacement by its full-scale attacks for decades both

inside and across the borders.

Most recently, the gravity of the mass displacement within and outside Myanmar has been worsened by the disastrous Cyclone Mocha, with around 1.6 million people affected according to the UN. The exact numbers could be much higher. The double catastrophe of natural disaster and man-made ongoing atrocities by the junta in Chin and Rakhine States, and parts of Sagaing and Magwe Regions and Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Shan States, has displaced tens of thousands more. Internet shutdowns and restrictions, and the extension of martial law in 37 townships further aggravated the impacts of the Cyclone on local communities. Several townships in Rakhine State saw more than 400 Rohingya killed in displacement camps which could have been prevented, while around one million Rohingya refugees have also faced significant wreckages in the already precarious settlements along the Bangladesh border.

Vulnerable populations displaced inside and outside Myanmar by the military junta's atrocious crimes or the Cyclone are desperately in need of emergency humanitarian aid, particularly water, food, shelter, medical supplies, clothing, vehicles, and full information access both online and offline. The military junta has deliberately refused access to UN and humanitarian agencies, despite repeated requests to deliver life-saving aid distributions to communities affected by the Cyclone.

During the past two years when humanitarian needs have been acute, the military junta has routinely blocked, confiscated, destroyed and manipulated the distribution of aid for their political advantages. It has frequently targeted aid workers and medical professionals, and ruthlessly launched airstrikes on and looted healthcare facilities.

Meanwhile, the military junta has weaponized the vulnerable situation of Rohingya in refugee camps

in Bangladesh in its repatriation “pilot project”. The current extreme restrictions imposed on Rohingya inside Myanmar by the military junta, compounded with its ongoing terror campaign against the whole nation and the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, there exists no conditions conducive for the safe, dignified, sustainable, and voluntary return of the Rohingya. The planned repatriation will only add more suffering to genocide survivors.

Such practice only proves that the Myanmar military continues its long-standing practice of exploitation and weaponization of humanitarian aid during crisis times — in flagrant breach of international humanitarian law. Its actions which “willfully [impede] relief supplies” as a tactic of starvation is considered a method of warfare and amounts to a war crime. Despite this fact, international humanitarian agencies, including the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre), continue to partner with the military junta to gain access to displaced communities, who are housed in areas out of the junta’s control.

Channeling humanitarian aid through or in partnership with the illegal military junta, the root cause and architect of the crisis, will only further violate international humanitarian and human rights principles, particularly the principles of ‘do no harm’ and humanity. At the same time, aid agencies’ continuing refusal to part ways with the junta only lends legitimacy to the military junta who the Myanmar people have categorically rejected. Such acts further embolden the junta to continue to carry out its terror acts, exacerbating conflict and human suffering.

Prior to the attempted coup, Myanmar military’s offensives and gross human rights violations in ethnic Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine and Shan States have already caused mass displacement and influxes of refugees into neighboring countries. Since donors have drastically shifted its funding to inside Myanmar following the military’s façade transition in 2011, refugee populations along the Myanmar’s borders have faced restrictions on humanitarian aid access. Along the Myanmar-Thailand borders, refugees have experienced ration cuts to less than USD 10 a month per person. Funding has been cut for healthcare and children’s education, while their parents struggle to afford school fees and materials due to the lack of income and prohibition of work. While in Kachin State, Myanmar military’s ongoing attacks since 2011 have led to protracted displacement of Kachin population in IDP camps.

On this World Refugee Day, we are reminded once again that the repeated cycles of mass displacement and humanitarian crisis within Myanmar and the spillover affects beyond its borders in Southeast Asia have all along been triggered, exacerbated and sustained by the Myanmar military. The military has committed genocide against the Rohingya and war crimes and crimes against humanity against ethnic communities for decades, and throughout Myanmar since its attempted coup. They must be held to account. Unless

and until the Myanmar military answers to justice and remedies are provided to victims and survivors of its atrocity crimes, Myanmar cannot promise safety for refugees and IDPs to return home.

Local humanitarian and civil society groups, ethnic service providers, diaspora communities, local administration forces of the revolution, members of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) and the National Unity Government (NUG) have been at the forefront to effectively provide emergency aid to affected communities from both the Cyclone and from military’s attacks, and have been the primary source sustaining the livelihoods of vulnerable IDP and refugee populations over the past two years.

The voices of refugees and IDPs must be heard and strengthened, their agency and role recognized. Local hosts, humanitarian responders, and ethnic service providers have the expertise in supporting their own communities — often at great personal risk. They must be recognized, celebrated and supported at all costs.

On this World Refugee Day, we call on the UN, ASEAN and the international community to:

- Recognize that the military junta is the root cause of the devastating multi-faceted crisis in Myanmar, and take all necessary actions to prevent its commission of further atrocities and hold the perpetrators to account;

- Stop legitimizing the military junta by partnering with the junta in the delivery of aid or channeling humanitarian aid through the junta;

- Provide shelter and protection to those seeking temporary refuge in their respective areas;

- Recognize and support the role of frontline local humanitarian responders and ethnic and community-based organizations to address the humanitarian crisis, and form equal partnership with them and provide funding and political support to their efforts in immediate response to the multifaceted crises and effective provision of aid, including through cross-border aid; and

- Consult and collaborate with the NUG and the EROs in the provision of aid. Signed by:

1. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
2. Chin Human Rights Organization
3. Human Rights Foundation of Monland
4. Kachin Women’s Association Thailand
5. Karen Human Rights Group
6. Karen Peace Support Network
7. Karen Women’s Organization
8. Karenni Civil Society Network
9. Karenni National Women Organization
10. Progressive Voice
11. RW Welfare Society

ASEAN MOVES JOINT DRILLS FROM DISPUTED SOUTH CHINA SEA AREA



Photo: Facebook

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has moved its first-ever joint drills, Indonesia's military said Tuesday last week, edging them away from waters disputed by China.

The bloc's joint exercises were initially slated for the North Natuna Sea, which Indonesia claims as its exclusive economic zone but where Beijing's ships occasionally patrol.

When confronted by Jakarta, China has invoked the so-called nine-dash line, which demarcates an area it claims to have historic rights over but is contested by its neighbours.

China claims most of the South China Sea despite protests from Southeast Asian nations, including Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

The ASEAN's drills will now take place in the South Natuna Sea between September 18 and 25, Indonesia's military said in a statement, avoiding the contested waters.

ASEAN's members have held naval drills with

the United States and China before but they have never staged military exercises as a bloc.

The decision came at a planning conference between rotating ASEAN chair Indonesia and "several ASEAN counterparts", the military said, without disclosing which countries attended or abstained.

China's leading regional ally Cambodia refused to confirm its attendance at the drills after they were initially announced.

The Indonesian military statement on Tuesday said the drills will be attended by military leaders from all 10 ASEAN countries.

Military chief Yudo Margono told reporters earlier this month that the drills would focus on maritime security and rescue, and would not involve combat operations.

AFP

INDONESIA ARRESTS NEARLY 500 HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUSPECTS IN CRACKDOWN

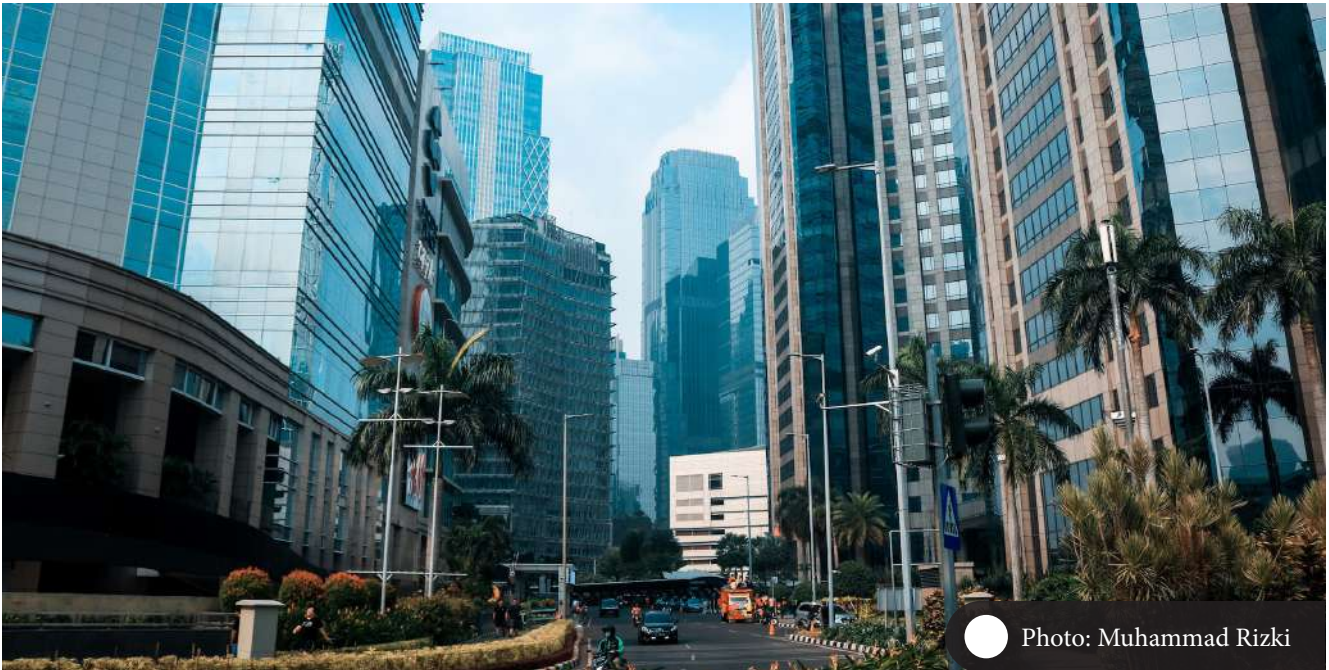


Photo: Muhammad Rizki

Indonesian police have this month arrested nearly 500 suspects involved in the trafficking of more than 1,500 victims, officials said Tuesday last week, as Jakarta cracks down on human smuggling.

Indonesia is one of the largest migrant worker-exporting nations in Southeast Asia, with hundreds of thousands from the poorest parts of the archipelago nation leaving the country every year through unofficial routes in search of higher-paying work.

Several shocking cases have highlighted the issue of human trafficking in the country in recent years and police created a human trafficking task force this month to ramp up efforts to stem the exploitation of Indonesians.

National police spokesman Ahmad Ramadhan told AFP authorities had rescued 1,553 victims in the last two weeks before they were trafficked out of the country.

“Within a short period of time, we managed to rescue this many people, but there are more people who have already left Indonesia,” he said.

Between June 5 and 18, police arrested 494 suspects and five major traffickers were still “being hunted down”, he said.

Many of the victims were rescued from illegal shelters on course to be trafficked as maids, boat crew or prostitutes, with several cases of child exploitation

also included.

The United Nations says between 100,000 and one million people are sold into sex work or forced into labour every year in Indonesia.

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.

Jakarta has moved to increase probes, prosecutions and convictions for human trafficking, and has made efforts to repatriate victims trafficked to other Southeast Asian nations.

In the past year, Indonesia has rescued more than a thousand of its nationals working in online scams in Myanmar and Cambodia as the country tries to get a grip on the widespread problem.

Human trafficking is also a domestic problem across Southeast Asia’s biggest economy, a sprawling nation of more than 17,000 islands.

In one of the worst cases in recent years, at least 57 people were found caged on a palm oil plantation in North Sumatra last year.

They were lured to an alleged drug rehab facility and then put to work on the plantation.

AFP

BIDEN AND MODI VOICE CONCERN ABOUT MYANMAR SITUATION



Visiting Indian PM Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden. Photo: AFP

US President Joe Biden and visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi voiced “deep concern about the deteriorating situation in Myanmar,” last week during Modi’s state visit to Washington.

The comment was made in a statement issued in a joint statement by the US and India on 22 June after talks between Biden and Modi.

The US and India called for “the release of all those arbitrarily detained, the establishment of constructive dialogue and the transition of Myanmar toward an inclusive federal democratic system.”

The United States has imposed a slew of sanctions on Myanmar’s junta but New Delhi has maintained a comparatively cordial relationship, mindful that the country borders unstable parts of north-eastern India.

The statement released by the White House referred to the country as Myanmar and not the former name of Burma, which the United States uses.

In the statement Biden and Modi also called for action against extremist groups based in Pakistan such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

The statement said that the US and India “strongly condemned cross-border terrorism, the use of terrorist proxies and called on Pakistan to take immediate action to ensure that no territory under its control is used for launching terrorist attacks.”

They called on Pakistan to punish perpetrators of attacks including the bloody 2008 siege of Mumbai.

India under Modi has taken an increasingly hard line on Pakistan, announcing an airstrike in 2019 in response to an attack.

The United States historically has been a close partner of Pakistan but its patience wore thin over ties between Afghanistan’s Taliban and Islamabad’s powerful military and intelligence apparatus.

The Biden administration has kept Pakistan at arm’s length since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, in contrast to warming relations with India.

AFP, Mizzima

INDIA'S MODI PLUGS YOGA AT RECORD-LARGE UN SESSION



Yoga in the park in New York. Photo: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi celebrated the International Day of Yoga Wednesday last week as he took part in a multi-country session of the ancient discipline at UN headquarters in New York.

“Yoga means to unite. So your coming together is an expression of another form of yoga,” Modi, dressed all in white, said on the first day of a visit to the United States.

It was Modi who engineered the creation in 2014 of the International Day of Yoga every June 21 through a UN General Assembly resolution.

On yellow mats at a grassy area of the UN complex by the East River, people from 135 countries stretched and meditated at Wednesday’s group session. This set a record for nationalities in one go at yoga, the Guinness organization said.

“Today, it is wonderful to see the entire world come together again. For yoga,” Modi said in a speech before the session.

“Let us use the power of yoga. Not only to be healthy, happy, but also to be kind to ourselves and to each other. Let’s use the power of yoga to build bridges of friendship, a peaceful world and a cleaner and

sustainable future,” he said, after pausing at a bust of Mahatma Gandhi.

Since coming to power in 2014 Modi has used yoga as a way to promote India on the international stage.

Yoga - the traditional Indian discipline of physical and spiritual practices - is now followed around the world, and UNESCO declared it to be an intangible world cultural asset in 2016.

Another record was set on this edition of the International Day of Yoga: some 153,000 people took part in a mass session in the city of Surat in the state of Gujarat, local authorities said.

After his visit to New York Modi met with President Joe Biden and made a speech to Congress.

The Indian government is billing this visit to enhance ties with the US as historic.

It comes as Modi, a Hindu nationalist, comes in for criticism from NGOs and the United Nations over his record on human rights.

AFP

CHINA SLAMS BIDEN FOR EQUATING XI TO ‘DICTATORS’

China’s foreign ministry on Wednesday last week slammed comments by US President Joe Biden equating Chinese leader Xi Jinping with “dictators” as an “open political provocation”.

Speaking at a fundraiser in California on Tuesday, Biden said Xi had been angered over an incident in February when a Chinese balloon - which Washington says was used for spying - flew over the United States before being shot down by American military jets.

His comments come just days after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded a visit to Beijing aimed at re-establishing lines of communication in order to avoid conflict between the two global powers.

“The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two

box cars full of spy equipment is he didn’t know it was there,” Biden said.

“I’m serious. That was the great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn’t know what happened.”

Beijing’s foreign ministry termed Biden’s comments as “ridiculous”.

“The relevant remarks by the US side are extremely ridiculous and irresponsible, they seriously violate basic facts, diplomatic protocol and China’s political dignity,” foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a Wednesday briefing.

“China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to this,” she added.

The White House tried to ease tensions later



Chinese President Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

on Wednesday, saying Blinken “made some progress” during his trip to China and that Washington still had “every expectation of building on that progress.”

“Diplomacy, including that undertaken by Secretary Blinken, is the responsible way to manage tensions,” a senior administration official said, adding “it should come as no surprise that the president speaks candidly about China and the differences that we have.”

‘DISTORTION OF FACTS’

The multi-faceted rivalry between China and the United States turned into a full-blown diplomatic crisis with February’s balloon incident.

Beijing on Wednesday reiterated its protest against Washington’s decision to shoot it down.

“The United States should have dealt with it calmly, rationally and professionally, but its distortion of facts, abuse of force, and escalation of hype have

fully exposed its hegemonic and bullying nature,” Mao said.

Russia also criticised Biden’s comments, with the Kremlin on Wednesday saying the comment reflected Washington’s “unpredictable” foreign policy.

“This is a very contradictory manifestation of US foreign policy, which points to a significant element of unpredictability,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

‘GOING TO TAKE TIME’

Biden, who at 80 is running for re-election, on Tuesday told donors that “we’re in a situation now where (Xi) wants to have a relationship again.”

Blinken “did a good job” on his Beijing trip, but “it’s going to take time,” Biden added.

The US president also brought up another prickly point regarding China: a recent summit in which leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States - known as the Quad group - sought to boost peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific maritime region.

The four countries are “working hand in glove in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean,” Biden said.

“What he (Xi) was really upset about was that I insisted that we unite the... so-called Quad,” Biden said.

Tuesday was not the first time Biden has made significant, even provocative, statements at fund-raising receptions - usually small-scale events at which cameras and recordings are forbidden but where journalists may listen to and transcribe the president’s opening remarks.

At one such event last October Biden spoke of the threat of nuclear “Armageddon” from Russia.

AFP



HIMALAYAN GLACIERS MELTING 65 PERCENT FASTER THAN PREVIOUS DECADE: STUDY

Himalayan glaciers providing critical water to nearly two billion people are melting faster than ever before due to climate change, exposing communities to unpredictable and costly disasters, scientists warned last week.

The glaciers disappeared 65 percent faster from 2011 to 2020 compared with the previous decade, according to a report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

“As it gets warmer, ice will melt, that was expected, but what is unexpected and very worrying is the speed,” lead author Philippus Wester told AFP.

“This is going much faster than we thought.”

Glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region are a crucial water source for around 240 million people in the mountainous regions, as well as for another 1.65 billion people in the river valleys below, the report said.

Based on current emissions trajectories, the glaciers could lose up to 80 percent of their current volume by the end of the century, said the Nepal-based ICIMOD, an inter-governmental organisation that also includes member countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar and Pakistan.



Photo: Raimond Klavins

The glaciers feed 10 of the world's most important river systems, including the Ganges, Indus, Yellow, Mekong and Irrawaddy, and directly or indirectly supply billions of people with food, energy, clean air and income.

"With two billion people in Asia reliant on the water that glaciers and snow here hold, the consequences of losing this cryosphere (a frozen zone) are too vast to contemplate," said ICIMOD's deputy chief Izabella Koziell.

'TOO VAST TO CONTEMPLATE'

Even if global warming is limited to the 1.5 to 2.0 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels agreed to in the Paris climate treaty, the glaciers are expected to lose a third to a half of their volume by 2100, the peer-reviewed report said.

"It underscores the need for urgent climate action," Wester said. "Every small increment will have huge impacts and we really, really need to work on climate mitigation... that is our plea."

Wester said improving technologies and previously classified high-resolution satellite imagery meant predictions could be made with a good degree of accuracy.

The world has warmed an average of nearly 1.2 C since the mid-1800s, unleashing a cascade of extreme weather, including more intense heatwaves, more severe droughts and storms made more ferocious by rising seas.

Hardest hit are the most vulnerable people and the world's poorest countries, which have done little to contribute to the fossil fuel emissions that drive up temperatures. Amina Maharjan, a livelihoods and migration specialist at ICIMOD, said communities do not have the support they need.

"Most of the adaptation is communities and households reacting (to climate events). It is inadequate to meet the challenges posed by climate change," Maharjan said.

"What is going to be very critical moving forward is anticipating change," she said.

AFP



UN CHIEF CALLS FOR NEW ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRITY IN BID TO STEM MISINFORMATION



Photo: UN News

Countries must address the “grave global harm” caused by the proliferation of hate and lies online, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on Monday, launching a key report designed to shore up information integrity on digital platforms.

Alarm over the potential threat posed by the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) must not obscure the damage already being done by digital technologies that enable the spread of online hate speech, as well as mis- and disinformation, he said.

The policy brief argues that they should be integral players in upholding the accuracy, consistency and reliability of information shared by users.

“My hope is that it will provide a gold standard for guiding action to strengthen information integrity,” he wrote in the introduction.

CONNECTING AND DIVIDING

Digital platforms – which include social media channels, search engines and messaging apps – are connecting billions of people across the planet, with some three billion users of Facebook alone.

They have brought many benefits, from supporting communities in times of crisis and struggle, to helping to mobilize global movements for racial justice and gender equality. They are also used by the UN to

engage people worldwide in pursuit of peace, dignity and human rights on a healthy planet.

Yet these same digital platforms are being misused to subvert science and spread disinformation and hate, fuelling conflict, threatening democracy and human rights, and undermining public health and climate action.

“Some of our own UN peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid operations have been targeted, making their work even more dangerous,” he said.

DECEITFUL, DANGEROUS AND DEADLY

Although misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are related and overlap, they are distinct phenomena.

Hate speech refers to abusive or threatening language against a group or person, simply because of their race, colour, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or similar grounds.

The difference between mis- and disinformation is intent, though the distinction can be difficult to determine. In general, misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of inaccurate information, while disinformation is not only inaccurate but intended to deceive.

Regardless, they have all proved to be dan-

gerous and even deadly.

“While traditional media remain an important source of news for most people in conflict areas, hatred spread on digital platforms has also sparked and fuelled violence,” the report said. “Some digital platforms have faced criticism of their role in conflicts, including the ongoing war in Ukraine.”

SAFER DIGITAL SPACE

Given the threat, the Secretary-General has called for coordinated international action to make the digital space safer and more inclusive while also protecting human rights.

Constructive responses have largely been lacking. Some tech companies have done far too little to prevent their platforms from contributing to the spread of violence and hatred, while Governments have sometimes resorted to drastic measures – including internet shutdowns and bans – that lack any legal basis and infringe on human rights.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The report puts forward the framework for global action through a Code of Conduct for information integrity on digital platforms, that outlines potential guardrails while safeguarding the rights to freedom of expression and information.

It will build on principles that include respect for human rights, support for independent media, increased transparency, user empowerment and strengthened research and data access.

The Secretary-General also provided recommendations that could inform the Code of Conduct.

They include a call for Governments, tech companies and other stakeholders to refrain from using, supporting, or amplifying disinformation and hate speech for any purpose.

Governments should also guarantee a free, viable, independent, and plural media landscape, with strong protections for journalists.

Meanwhile, digital platforms should ensure safety and privacy by design in all products, alongside consistent application of policies and resources across countries and languages.

All stakeholders should take urgent and immediate measures to ensure that all AI applications are safe, secure, responsible and ethical, and comply with human rights obligations, he added.

Advertisers and digital platforms should ensure that ads are not placed next to online mis- or dis-

information or hate speech, and that ads containing disinformation are not promoted.

OUR COMMON FUTURE

The policy brief is the latest in a series of 11 reports based on proposals contained in Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General’s 2021 report that outlines a vision for future global cooperation and multilateral action.

They are intended to inform discussions ahead of the SDG Summit in September, marking the midpoint towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and the related Summit of the Future next year.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Alex Gruber

KAREN STATE

Junta missile attack kills elderly woman in Than Daung Gyi Township, Karen State

Myanmar junta soldiers killed an elderly woman and injured two men when they fired long-range rockets into Chaung Hnitkwa Village in Karen State's Than Daung Gyi Township on 17 June.

The missile attack followed a two-hour battle, from 8:00 a.m to 10:00 a.m. on 17 June near to Chaung Hnitkwa Village, between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and junta forces.

The missiles were fired from the 16-Mile military camp in Than Daung Gyi Township, also near to Chaung Hnitkwa Village.

"In total three people were hit. An elderly woman died on the spot and the two injured people were taken to Taungoo Hospital with serious injuries", a KNLA Brigade 2 source said to Mizzima.

There are frequent clashes between the junta and revolutionary forces in Than Daung Gyi Township and the junta soldiers frequently fire artillery into villages in the township, killing and injuring locals.

According to Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, an independent, non-partisan nongovernmental organisation, in the week from 7 to 13 June 2023, there were 79 civilian casualties in Myanmar. Of those, 50 died and 29 were injured. They were as a result air strikes, heavy weapons, land mines, shootings and oppression.

Thandaunggyi Education Office set on fire

The Myanmar junta's Thandaunggyi Township Education Office in Ward 2 of Thandaunggyi Township in Karen State was set on fire about 1:00 a.m. on 20 June.

The fire burned for about an hour, until 2:00 a.m. when residents managed to extinguish the fire.

"It was a big fire and it spread out from the Education Office. We don't know what caused the fire, but I believe it was an arson attack. The fire was extinguished at around 2:00 am," said a Thandaunggyi resident, to Mizzima.

Almost all of the two-storey Education Office building was completely destroyed by the fire which also destroyed documents and educational equipment, according to Thandaunggyi residents.

According to a local source, people's defence force (PDF) joint forces had set fire to the Education Office as part of a campaign to cause the collapse of the junta's education system.

"The Township Education Office is the main pillar of the education system, so local PDF members set fire to the office building. Military Council soldiers were also stationed at the Township Education Office. The Thandaunggyi Township Education Office building was completely destroyed. The number of junta fatalities is still being verified", said the source.

MON STATE

Junta informer shot dead in Mon State's Ye Township

A junta informer was shot dead by the Yebilu Force defence force in Michaung Village, in Mon State's Ye Township at 9:00 am on 20 June.

U Ye Win Ning, aged 59, a military veteran and informer, secretly reported resistance fighters and people taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in Ye to the junta army.

He was killed when a member of the Yebilu Force fired 15 rounds of 9mm ammunition at him.

The Yebilu Force commander said: "He was also a veteran. Because of villagers' complaints, we had been monitoring his whereabouts for seven to eight months so that we could be sure of killing him. We carried out this attack after monitoring his activities as a military informant. We didn't seize a gun from him."



STATE PEACE TALKS TEAM AND PEACE PROCESS STEERING TEAM HOLD OFFICIAL MEETING AMIDST STRAINED PEACE PROCESS

The junta's State Peace Talks Team (SPTT) and five members of the Peace Process Steering Team [PPST] held an official meeting from 26 June to 28 June at National Solidarity and Peacemaking Centre in Nay Pyi Taw, according to the junta-controlled media.

The five member groups are the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC) [KNU/KNLA-PC], Lahu Democratic Union [LDU], and Pa-O National Liberation Army [PNLO].

During the meeting, the participants engaged in cordial discussions on various important topics including matters of mutual agreement among the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatory EAOs, the principles of federalism, humanitarian assistance, and the stances of NCA-S EAOs regarding meetings and discussions with political parties, such as United Wa State Party, National Democratic Alliance Army [NDAA], and Shan State Progress Party (SSPP).

The details of the three-day meeting are still unknown.

In Myanmar, the momentum of the peace process has significantly diminished since the military coup on 1 February 2021. The PPST, which consists of ethnic armed organizations, was established in 2016 to negotiate with the now-ousted National League for Democracy government.

MYANMAR'S NUG WILL OPEN A DIGITAL BANK



Photo: AFP

The National Unity Government (NUG) will reportedly open a new digital bank, making the move around the same time the US imposed economic sanctions on two state-owned banks of Myanmar namely Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB).

It is learned that this new digital bank would be opened in the name of Spring Development Bank (SDB) and the NUG intends to run this bank as other state-owned banks providing regular services in the post-spring revolution period.

SDB will reportedly provide services in four currencies namely Myanmar Kyat, Thai Baht, Singapore dollar and US dollar in the initial stage.

NUG Minister of Planning and Finance Tin Tun Naing shared this SDB news on his Facebook page but he did not elaborate in detail.

In early May this year, NUG issued an ordinance which says that it confers power to its Ministry of Planning and Finance to work as an “Interim Central

Bank” for overseeing banking business in Myanmar and prohibiting using the public reserve fund in committing terrorist acts in the country.

The Acting President of the NUG, Duwa Lashi La, issued this ordinance and conferred power to implement the work of this central bank like other international central banks.

The NUG appointed an Australian economist Sean Turnell as the special adviser of the Interim Central Bank of the NUG. Turnell provided economic advice to the previous National League for Democracy-led government under Aung San Suu Kyi. He was arrested shortly after the February 2021 coup and sentenced for breaking the Official Secrets Act. He was released in an amnesty earlier this year.

FAO SAYS MYANMAR RICE REACHES RECORD-HIGH PRICE



Photo: Wolfgang Hasselmann

A recent report from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says that the price of Emata rice has been rising since January 2022 and it reached a record-high level in May 2022 as it was in high demand by domestic and international buyers.

The high prices reflect the strict accessibility of food by the people and the hindrances related with the conflict which have caused the below average production in 2022, the report says.

The high prices for farm inputs costs and high costs in transportation have an impact on the prices of food so that in overview the rice price rose over two-fold in May 2023 in comparison with the corresponding period last year.

The FAO report says that the paddy production is expected to reach 24.7 million tonnes in 2022 and it will be 8% lower than the average annual production in the last five years.

The export of rice is expected at 2.4 million tonnes in 2023 calendar year and it will be 150,000 tonnes more than the estimated target of 2022, the

FAO report says.

Similarly the export of corn is 1.7 million tonnes which is 10% more than the average annual export as there is high demand for this crop from neighbouring countries including China and Thailand.

The announcement made by the Myanmar Federation of Rice (MRF) says that the number of Myanmar companies who submitted export proposals to China GACC in 2023 for rice and broken rice rose over two-fold in comparison with last year.

Myanmar could export nearly 200,000 tonnes of rice in the first two months of FY 2023-24 (April and May) and it was half of the corresponding period in last financial year.

The Military Council tried to control the soaring rice price after the coup by imposing restrictions on export, stock and storage of rice in the country but the rice price is still at the high level.

WITH RECORD UNEMPLOYMENT, CHINA'S YOUTH CONFRONT BLEAK JOB MARKET



Crowded job fair in China. Photo: AFP

Rather than celebrating finishing university, this summer Chinese graduates shared photos of themselves theatrically throwing their degrees into bins, underscoring the bleak outlook as youth unemployment sits at a record high.

The jobless rate could rise even further this summer, analysts warned, providing another headache for the government as it tries to jumpstart the country's sluggish post-Covid economy.

With well-paid jobs few and far between, young people told AFP they were opting to remain in university, while others are scrambling for limited government jobs as opportunities in the private sector dry up.

Sampson Li, who graduated this month with a master's degree in software engineering, was looking for work but has given up to apply for a doctorate instead.

The 24-year-old told AFP he passed three rounds of interviews at a major tech company in Shenzhen, dubbed China's Silicon Valley, before the employer said it had frozen recruitments.

"Three other companies asked me to take a lower pay than the market rate," he said. "I can't survive with that salary in this city."

Data released last Thursday by the National Bureau of Statistics showed May's unemployment rate for people aged 16-24 hit 20.8 percent, an increase on the previous record of 20.4 percent hit in April.

Larry Hu, Macquarie Group's chief China economist, warned that the figure could increase further in July when 11.6 million more college graduates start looking for work.

"Corporates are reluctant to hire because of soft consumer demand, while consumers are reluctant to spend because of the weak labour market," he told AFP.

"As a result, policy is the only game changer at this stage."

STATE CRACKDOWN

At a State Council meeting in April, Premier Li Qiang pledged to ensure stable employment opportunities for young people.

"We have to take measures to stabilise the scale of employment in manufacturing and foreign trade enterprises, optimise university curriculums, and improve the quality of vocational education and skills training based on the market demand," Li said.

However, a hoped-for raft of stimulus mea-

asures for the economy, including help to boost the jobs market, fell flat, as did an interest rate cut Tuesday, which was less than expected.

One of the reasons China's once-freewheeling private sector is seeing much slower growth is because of a sweeping government crackdown on property companies, tech giants and private tutoring firms.

"While Beijing runs a state-led economy, private companies provide up to 80 percent of China's urban jobs," Yu Jie, a senior China research fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House, wrote.

These sectors relied on "young people willing to work long hours for lower salaries", she said.

Liu Qian, armed with a degree in fintech, has been job hunting for the past six months.

"There were dozens of fintech start-ups when I entered university, but many have disappeared over the past two years after the government tightened rules governing the sector," she said.

"My parents now want me to study for the civil services exam, to see if I can get a job in a state-owned company."

The odds are tough, though.

More than 7.7 million applicants took the civil service exam this year, to qualify for about 200,000 government jobs at national and provincial levels, state media reported.

Frustration over the fierce competition for any well-remunerated work has fuelled the online memes of throwing away degrees, with graduates also posting photos of themselves sprawled on the ground or in various poses of despair.

The pictures are a reference to the now-prevalent counterculture of "lying flat" -- young people rejecting the rat race of urban living for a simpler, less professionally ambitious life.

SKILLS MISMATCH

There is generally a mismatch in skills possessed by young job seekers and the demands of the labour market, Chatham House's Yu said.

The services sector, for example, remains a rare bright spot with millions travelling and dining out after three years of pandemic restrictions were lifted last December.

But the lack of opportunities for vocational training means young people are ill-equipped to work in it, Yu said.

Many of the jobs that are available are poorly paid and arduous.

Tan Yong, 17, moved to Shenzhen from neighbouring Meizhou last year after dropping out of high school.

He first found work at an assembly line making air conditioners, but was forced to leave after six months when the production line moved to Vietnam.

Now Tan works as a rider for a food delivery company.

"The work is difficult, and we make less than five yuan on most deliveries," he said.

"But many young people don't want to work in factories where you need to stand for nearly seven hours."

AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ARRESTS 51 INDIVIDUALS FOR SURGE IN GOLD AND DOLLAR PRICES

The Myanmar junta reportedly arrested 51 individuals on allegations of exploiting the unexpected surge in gold and U.S. dollar prices, reported Radio Free Asia (RFA). This information was disclosed by the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), which is currently under the control of the military junta.

On 23 June, the CBM issued a statement saying that individuals involved in foreign exchange speculation, foreign currency trading, money transfers, and employees from three specific companies have faced legal action and prosecution in Yangon and Mandalay.

Due to the junta's rigorous surveillance of cash flow within Myanmar, a significant number of individuals have turned to the unregulated hundi system. This informal method of money transfer is extensively utilized by local Myanmar citizens and offshore migrant workers for domestic and international remittances. The system gained prominence as a result of strict banking regulations, limited access to foreign exchange services, and the absence of well-established domestic and internationally connected financial institutions.

Since the U.S. Treasury Department declared its decision to include the Myanma Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB) on a sanctions blacklist, due to the Myanmar military's procurement of arms from foreign sources, including Russian entities, both the dollar and gold prices in the unofficial black market have experienced a significant surge.

This escalation commenced following the announcement, with the exchange rate standing at 2,890 Myanmar kyat to the dollar prior to the declaration. Subsequently, within a day, the rate climbed by 7.3 percent to reach 3,100 kyat.

According to the junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun has alleged that the recent action taken by the United States is intended to deliberately provoke a political and economic crisis in Myanmar.

BUDDHIST RETREAT

Thein Inn Monastery, Inle Lake, Shan State.

Photo: JP Desvigne



IN FOCUS



REMEMBERING BURMESE WRITER NYI PU LAY WHO DIED AGE 71

MYINT ZAN



Nyi Pu Lay. Photo: Facebook

Writer Myint Zan pens a tribute to Burmese writer Nyi Pu Lay who died last week.

Just an hour or two before I learned the sad passing of Burmese writer Nyi Pu Lay (AKA Nyein Chan and Bo Nyo) (5 February 1962 - 21 June 2023) I was fleetingly thinking of him. Then on social media I read the shocking news of his demise. As I write, several hours after his passing, social media is awash with many tributes to him. This is a personalised reminiscence of a friend whom I had known since childhood. I will not elaborate his literary achievements. Briefly though it could be mentioned that he won the national literary prize for the year 2016 for his biographical novel which reads in translation *The Sweet Honey Drop on the Sharp Scalpel Blade* (as stated in the book translated by Dr Zaw Tun, retired Professor of English, University of Mandalay).

Nyi Pu Lay (childhood name Bo Nyo) was born in Mandalay on 5 February 1952, the youngest child of veteran writers Ludu ('The People's') U Hla

(19 January 1910-7 August 1982) and Ludu Daw Amar (29 November 1915-7 April 1988). Dilettante that I am, only after he passed away, I became aware why Ko (brother, elder brother) Nyein Chan (the formal name given by his parents, in Burmese Nyein Chan means 'peace') took the pseudonym Nyi Pu Lay which translates as 'short little young(est) brother'. Nyein Chan adopted the pseudonym because he was the youngest among his siblings and the youngest of his two older brothers one of whom survives him. With respect to all his siblings, among them, he has had the most literary laurels.

Nyi Pu Lay, a geology major graduate of Mandalay Arts and Science University in the late 1970s had a variety of interests and achievements. He was a footballer, and even in post-University days past his mid-twenties he was in the Mandalay divisional team of footballers. He did long distance cycling.

He painted. He was a photographer with the pseudonym Nyeinchanseinlann on his social media page. And starting in the mid-1980s he wrote (initially) short stories, then travelogues, essays and novels. I have had the chance to read some of his short stories, the very first one is titled *Yet Hsar Ta Doe* ('a taste of a Burmese digestive condiment') and it was published in 1985. But his literary career stopped for about nine years starting in 1990. In December 1989, Nyi Pu Lay was arrested, charged and convicted by the then Burmese regime. He spent around nine years in various Burmese jails before being released in 1998. During his incarceration his family including his late mother Ludu Daw Amar was able to visit only occasionally as he was held in far-off places from Mandalay.

Both his parents and one of his elder brothers had spent time in detention under various Burmese governments. His late father Ludu U Hla spent time in Rangoon jail (now the jail is taken down) from about 1953 to 1957. During his detention Ludu U Hla was able to write books and sent regular letters to his family where he mentioned his youngest son 'Bo Nyo' in his letters. After his release U Hla could publish his letters to his spouse, sons and daughters in book form. He wrote at least four books during his detention. They

were published after U Hla's release. In the 1950s, the then Burmese government was not so harsh or oppressive as the regime which incarcerated Nyi Pu Lay continuously for about nine years. Nyi Pu Lay's late father U Hla, in the 1950s, was able to interview prison inmates, wrote about them even while he was in prison and published them after his release, Alas, that was not the case with the regime which imprisoned Nyi Pu Lay. Prisoners and especially political prisoners were generally not provided with books to read far less papers and pens to write.

Still, using various means Nyi Pu Lay was able to write a short story while still in jail. He managed to smuggle the short story and his contacts arranged to publish it under another pseudonym while Nyi Pu Lay was still in jail. Only after his release, and when the literary scene was less restricted, was the short story republished under the name 'Nyi Pu Lay'.

After his release from prison his literary career resumed. He gave literary talks throughout the country and abroad including in the United States, which he visited in 2019. He also arranged for two literary talks by me in Mandalay in 2004 and 2005. In his introduction in one of the talks he stated that while he was in prison when his mother or elder sisters visited him, they took one of my articles in Burmese published in a magazine and showed it to him through the prison railings. He stated that he was very happy to see my article albeit one supposes that his family were unable to leave the magazine with him due to strict prison rules.

As stated above, Nyi Pu Lay was awarded the national literary prize for his book published in 2016.

The prize ceremony was held in 2017. The significance of this prize is that it was probably the first time where a book written entirely in the colloquial Burmese style was awarded a national literary prize. His mother Ludu Daw Amar won the national literary prize for the year 1964 for her book (which reads in translation) *Artistes Loved by the People*. It was written at that time in formal, Burmese prose. (The formal written style in Burmese prose is significantly different from the colloquial, spoken style and is more direct and more easily accessible for the reading public.) Later, Ludu Daw Amar wrote many books among which would include *Anyeint* ('Street theatre'), *Aung Ba La*, *Pho Sein*, *Sein Gadoan* (biographies of three Burmese artistes, dancers) and other books which made significant contributions to Burmese culture. She wrote in clear, direct colloquial style in all her books and articles

she published after 1966. Due to the inflexible attitude if not cussedness of the then national literary prize selection committees that only Burmese prose written in formal style is 'pure' Burmese literature Daw Amar never received any literary prize after 1964 even though the books she wrote were significant narrations about and contributions to Burmese literature and Burmese cultural history.

Perhaps almost as a compensatory mechanism the selection committee for the year 2016 of books published in Burma had at least for that year relaxed the rigid rule that automatically 'disqualified' any books written in colloquial style for the various genres of the national literary prizes. Nyi Pu Lay's *The Sweet Honey Drop on the Sharp Scalpel Blade* was a living biography of Burmese medical doctor Naga Thein Hlaing who passed away in 2021. Nyi Pu Lay interviewed the medical doctor about his pioneering medical and surgical achievements especially in the Naga hills of northern Burma (hence the name Naga Thein Hlaing for the medical doctor) and recorded hours of them on cassette tapes.

When he transcribed and embellished them for his biographical novel it is best narrated in the spoken, colloquial style. I belatedly thank the then national literary prize selection committee for at least the year 2016 in 'overcoming' the conceit that only Burmese prose written in formal style is 'pure Burmese literature'.

On social media two persons had independently posted and reproduced their last 'chats' on 'messenger' with Nyi Pu Lay. Apparently, the chats took place, perhaps, hours before Bo Nyo's demise. One could take solace in that he was active even in his last hours. In his introduction at one of my literary talks in Mandalay in the year 2005 he mentioned the Burmese saying '[A person can die] before the stretched arm is relaxed and the relaxed arm is stretched'.

He graciously stated that when his time comes, he would like to 'go' in the hands of doctors like my late father Dr San Baw (29 June 1922 - 7 December 1984) and my later mother Professor Dr Myint Myint Khin (15 December 1923 - 19 June 2014). Bo Nyo apparently died peacefully hours after he had social media conversations with two of his contacts. Death came to him, metaphorically, after the 'stretched arm is relaxed': within hours of his social interactions. One is grieved by his passing but one can take solace in that in his last hours, as was the case during most of his life, he had been socially productive. Rest in peace, my friend.



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