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# TIME OF THE ESSENCE AS CYCLONE MOCHA SURVIVORS FEAR RAINY SEASON ARRIVAL

The intersection of natural disasters and political unrest unveils a distressing scenario, epitomized by Myanmar's military junta's perplexing and disruptive efforts to delay and obstruct critical humanitarian aid following Cyclone Mocha.

Such a stance serves nobody, including the junta itself.

The people, already grappling with the aftermath of the devastating cyclone, now face compounded suffering due to the junta's inexplicable actions. It is imperative for the international community to denounce these obstructive measures and demand immediate, unrestricted access to provide essential aid to those in desperate need.

This is a humanitarian issue and should not be politicized.

The intentional delay tactics employed by Myanmar's military junta in granting access to international humanitarian organizations and relief efforts defy logic and reason. The crucial time frame for prompt assistance is rapidly closing, leaving survivors vulnerable to further harm, including injuries, diseases, and even potential loss of life as the monsoon season rapidly approaches.

The unfortunate part is the junta's bureaucratic red tape has transformed into a weapon aimed at suffocating relief efforts, thereby intensifying the suffering of the affected populations. This bewildering strategy serves only to consolidate the junta's power at the expense of the most vulnerable – including the disadvantaged living in internally displaced people's camps, both Rakhine and Rohingya.

Beyond impeding international aid, the Myanmar junta actively suppresses local initiatives striving to provide relief to Cyclone Mocha victims, or at least casts fear when its minions arrest aid workers, as happened briefly last week in Rakhine State with a philanthropist and his team. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements encounter hostility and arbitrary restrictions,

preventing them from reaching communities in dire need. By undermining these invaluable local efforts, the junta further isolates the population, denying them the opportunity to rebuild and recover.

The denial of humanitarian aid gives rise to a perplexing crisis that amplifies the impact of Cyclone Mocha and perpetuates an unending cycle of suffering. The absence of access to clean water, shelter, food, and medical supplies heightens the risk of disease outbreaks, deepening the already dire situation. Particularly vulnerable are children, women, and the elderly, whose lives hang precariously in the balance due to the junta's obstructive measures.

Confronting the junta's relentless obstruction requires the international community to stand united and intensify pressure on the military regime. Imposing sanctions and diplomatic measures become indispensable in demonstrating that such abhorrent actions will not be tolerated. ASEAN, regional powers, and international organizations must collaborate cohesively to ensure immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Myanmar.

By attempting to bolster local initiatives and fortifying the resilience of affected communities, the international community can contribute to the long-term recovery of the nation if they are allowed to contribute to the storm clean up.

Myanmar's military junta's inexplicable delays and obstructive tactics regarding humanitarian aid in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha unveil a shocking disregard for human life and the fundamental principles of compassion. This is one more nail in the coffin of the junta's sense of responsibility.

People's suffering should never be exploited as a political tool. The international community must act swiftly and decisively to do what it can ensure aid reaches those in desperate need.

As the dark clouds of the monsoon gather, time is running out.

EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

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**MIZZIMA MAGAZINE**

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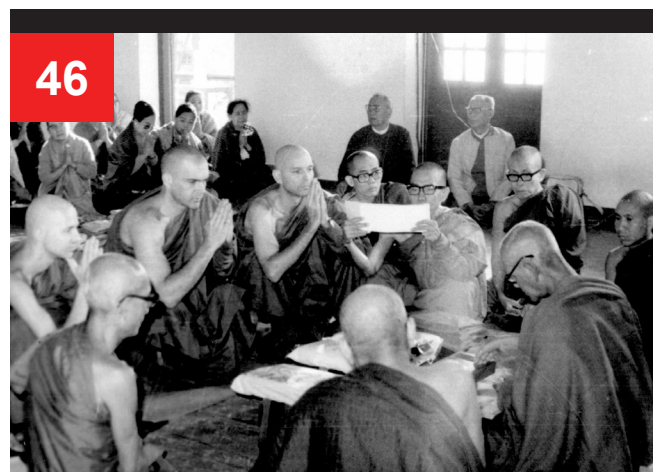
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## RAISING CYCLONE AID MONEY

**P**uppeteers perform during the puppet show at the Burma Blender Bike smoothies and juice bar, in Yangon, Myanmar, 27 May. Myanmar traditional puppet show, fundraising event for people affected by Cyclone Mocha is organized by Htwe Oo Myanmar Puppetry Home and Burma Blender Bike.

Photo: EPA

## JUNTA KILLS OWN SOLDIER DURING INTERROGATION AFTER PRISONERS ESCAPE

On 29 May, the Myanmar junta killed one of its own sergeants whilst interrogating him about a prisoner breakout that happened under his watch at Taungoo Prison in Bago Region.

On 18 May 2023, Sergeant Kyaw Htwe, Police Sub-Inspector Aye Thaw and Sergeant Maung Myo were escorting 10 political prisoners to court when they mounted an escape attempt. They killed Sergeant Maung Myo and nine of the prisoners escaped taking four guns with them. The other prisoner received a gunshot wound and was recaptured.

After the escape, Police Sub-Inspector Aye Thaw and Sergeant Kyaw Htwe were arrested and questioned at an interrogation centre by the junta.

According to a source, Sergeant Kyaw Htwe died whilst being interrogated on 29 May.

“Kyaw Htwe died yesterday [29 May]. And he was buried yesterday. We have no information about Police Sub-Inspector Aye Thaw”, said a source with links to Taungoo Prison.

## PYU SAW HTEE MEMBER KILLED IN MANDALAY’S THABEIKKYIN TOWNSHIP

A 22-year-old member of the junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militia and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was shot and killed in Mandalay Region’s Thabeikkyin Township on 29 May.

Hein Win Zaw, who was also the son-in-law of Soe Tint, a ward administrator and USDP member was shot whilst working on a farm at about 2:00 p.m. on 29 May.

“He was a supporter of USDP and a Pyu Saw Htee Militia member. His family has good relations with the military junta soldiers. He was shot dead four to five times and killed whilst he was working at the farm”, said a local resident.

According to locals after Hein Win Zaw completed his Pyu Saw Htee militia training he was in con-

tact with junta military columns and had conflicts with other local residents.

At 2:00 p.m. six unknown gunmen arrived at the farm and started firing. Hein Win Zaw was hit four times, twice in the back, once in his right arm and once in his pubic bone. He died on the spot according to the police.

It is not yet known which organisation carried out the killing but a military supporting Telegram Channel said that it was carried out by local people’s defence forces (PDFs).

According to USDP press releases nearly 2,400 members have been killed across the country since the February 2021 coup.

## IMMIGRATION OFFICE IN SAGAING’S CHAUNG-U TOWNSHIP ATTACKED

Myanmar junta forces guarding the Immigration Office at Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region were attacked by the Farmers Revolution Force at about 6:45 a.m. on 4 June.

“Because we struck quickly, they barely had time to fire back. However, they began firing once we left the immigration office,” said a representative of the Farmers Revolution Force.

Four junta soldiers were killed in the 10-minute attack and the defence force fighters seized four G3 guns and 49 rounds of ammunition before escaping by car.

Junta soldiers tried to chase them in another

car, but the defence forces managed to escape unharmed.

About 10 junta soldiers were stationed at the Immigration Office. They arbitrarily inspected and detained pedestrians, accused them of being people’s defence force (PDF) members and demanded money from them, according to the Farmers Revolution Force.

Following the attack, two military vehicles from the Monywa-based Northwestern Military Command arrived to provide reinforcements at the immigration office.



# TENS OF THOUSANDS FLEE ADVANCING JUNTA SOLDIERS IN SAGAING'S SALINGYI TOWNSHIP

Tens of thousands of people have fled a column of 150 junta soldiers after they entered Salingyi Township, in Sagaing Region on 4 June.

People fled to safer locations and nearby towns from 20 villages in Salingyi Township, including the villages of Nyaungpingyi, Ohma, Htandaw, Ywashay, Theindaw, Hnintaw, and Shwe Inle, according to Captain Thu Rain, the leader of the Salingyi-based Hero Fighter Force.

They fled after junta troops reportedly crossed the Chindwin River in three boats from Monywa Town on the east bank to Salingyi Township on the west bank, on the morning of 4 June. Their arrival caused locals who feared there would be fighting in their areas between the junta and defence forces to flee.

Currently, the junta troops are stationed at Nyaungpingyi Monastery, having ejected internally displaced people (IDPs) who were sheltering there, according to a Salingyi PDF official.

The official said: "Army soldiers have been stationed at the Nyaungpingyi Monastery, which has

caused the IDPs there to be displaced. The soldiers are patrolling and guarding the entrance and exit gates of Nyaungpingyi Village. We are continuing to keep an eye on their movements."

Apparently, two local people were arrested when the junta troops moved into the area. Mizzima is still looking into the incident.

Captain Thu Rain said: "The identities of the two hostages are still unknown. We don't know if they were IDPs staying in the monastery or Nyaungpingyi villagers. People don't dare to stay in the village because army soldiers are there right now, so the villagers have left. In the villages close to Nyaungpingyi, tens of thousands of locals have fled out of fear that army soldiers will invade, burn down their homes, and massacre the villagers. We are also scouting the junta's movements."

According to the Salingyi Hero Fighter Force, as of 2:30 p.m. on 4 June, the junta troops remain stationed at the Nyaungpingyi Monastery and have not yet entered any of the surrounding villages.

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## MYANMAR'S NUG CALLS ON ITS FINANCE MINISTRY TO SET UP INTERIM CENTRAL BANK

The National Unity Government (NUG) has called to its Ministry of Planning, Finance and Investment (MPFI) to set up an interim central bank, through the issuing of an ordinance on 1 June.

The union minister of the MPFI will become the chairman of the Board of Directors and the governor of central bank that will conduct international and domestic operations as befitting a central banking authority of Myanmar, and to exercise oversight and issue licences to companies and institutions applying to operate as banks and financial institutions, the NUG says in a press release.

"The interim central bank is also intended to alleviate the losses of the people, to regulate and rectify the banking sector, and to forestall and safeguard the foreign exchange reserves belonging to the people from misuse in the terrorist endeavours of the military," according to the ordinance.

The NUG stepped up its movement in this sector as the central banking mechanism under the military junta has disregarded their obligations to safeguard the interests of depositors, and its functions are being operated under the dictates of the military re-

gime, leading to severe and intolerable losses of the people.

The shadow government said that formation of an interim central bank could forestall and safeguard the foreign exchange reserves belonging to the people from misuse in terrorist endeavours of the military in procurement and production of weaponry and jet fuels used in violent attacks on civilians.

At this stage, it is not clear how the NUG and the MPFI intends to do this on a practical level.

The military junta delivered over US\$1.43 billion worth of natural gas from Rakhine State to China last year, according to the report of Burma News International, adding that successive Myanmar governments earned billions of US dollars from Rakhine's natural resources export to China every year, while Rakhine is the second poorest state in Myanmar.

In its 2022 report, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) quoted official figure of military junta that Myanmar earned more than \$106 million from exports of timber products in less than a year.



ဝေဒနာရှိသူများ  
အန္တရာယ်ရှိသည်။  
**DANGER!  
NOSWIMMING**

Two men look out to sea in Rakhine's Sittwe as Cyclone Mocha approaches. Photo: AFP



# **COMPOUNDING THE PAIN**

**Humanitarian aid donors push for  
access as Myanmar junta plays with  
people's lives**

**Andrew Landen**

**A**s the dark clouds of the monsoon loom, many citizens in the west of Myanmar - recently bludgeoned by Cyclone Mocha - are living in dire straits.

As both international and local humanitarian aid organizations seek to deliver aid to those whose houses and possessions were destroyed by the recent cyclone, the generals in Naypyitaw are using aid as a tool to consolidate their tenuous grip on the country.

Millions of people are now pawns in the hands of Myanmar's military junta.

Caught in the middle are the "angels of mercy" – big players like the UN, World Food Programme and EU – who are trying to deliver aid to people across a swathe of the country from Rakhine, Sagaing, Magway, Chin and Kachin who to various degrees were hammered by Cyclone Mocha last month.

While the total death toll stands at around 150 – a far cry from the 2008 Cyclone Nargis toll of 138,000 – many battered by the cyclone face the challenge of

erecting shelter and finding food and water.

Now as we enter June, the stakes have ratcheted up as another storm appears to be barreling towards Myanmar and the heavy rains and winds of the monsoon loom.

Cyclone Mocha was a catastrophe for millions.

Now is Myanmar about to see another catastrophe as the monsoon sweeps in and only limited aid is handed out?

## **GAMES GENERALS PLAY**

The Myanmar generals are desperate as their February 2021 power grab is not going to plan over two years in. Back in 2021, the generals hoped for a repeat of the "uprisings" of 1988 and 1990. They expected an initial outcry, then a petering out of outrage. What they did not expect was that the peaceful demonstrations would morph into outright armed resistance - under the banner of the Spring Revolution – an angry movement that continues to grow, with well over half of the country effectively out of their control.



Ms. Danielle Parry, acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yangon and Acting Head of the UNOCHA met recently and discussed how to provide assistance to people affected by Cyclone Mocha with Ko Ko Hlaing, the Myanmar junta's minister of international cooperation. Photo: Facebook

While the junta struggles militarily to keep a grip, the generals have a trick up their sleeve – namely playing local communities and the international community in a chess game where aid is a useful pawn.

For the junta, Cyclone Mocha, and the coming storms and heavy monsoon rains, are in fact a god-send.

Safely ensconced in “fortress Naypyidaw”, the brutal generals are using a carrot-and-stick strategy to push their hegemony – particularly over areas that are out of their control or torn between the resistance forces and their embattled forces.

So, how did we get here?

### **REPEATING 2008?**

Questions hang in the air as to whether the military junta is repeating its response to 2008 Cyclone Nargis, a seemingly dire response to a national crisis in what was then, relatively-speaking, “peacetime”.

During Cyclone Nargis, the military junta was accused of initially delaying and restricting international assistance, which hindered the delivery of aid to the affected areas. The regime’s response to the disaster was widely criticized for its lack of transparency, coordination, and willingness to accept external assistance promptly. These actions by what was viewed as a xenophobic regime were seen as exacerbating the human suffering caused by the cyclone.

Are we now witnessing a replay of the Cyclone Nargis debacle under the banner of “Cyclone Mocha”?

Or might the stance of the regime actually be worse?

To some extent, the failures of 2008 are being repeated in the wake of Cyclone Mocha. But this time round, the generals are deliberately using aid as a “weapon of war” – claiming to help, and shaking hands with donors, but seemingly restricting and controlling the aid to make sure it goes to communities that demonstrate allegiance to the “men in green”.

### **CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE**

The United Nations estimates that more than 5 million people were negatively affected and 1.6 million seriously affected by Cyclone Mocha, and with the monsoon and possible storms looming in June, the cry for action to deliver aid is growing shrill – at least in

the “diplomatic speak” of international donors, the UN, World Food Programme, EU and others who have to tread carefully with their words to maintain access to the South East Asian basket case that is Myanmar.

UNOCHA has called on the international community to contribute towards an emergency fund of US\$333 million to help the 1.6 million people directly affected by the storm in northwestern part of Myanmar, some parts of Kachin State and Rakhine State.

The angels of mercy are making the right noises. But they are faced with a dilemma.

UNOCHA and the others feel they are obligated to liaise with the Myanmar junta. In fact, they would appear to have no other option if they hope to deliver aid into the arms of the needy.

That process is underway. Ms. Danielle Parry, acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yangon and Acting Head of the UNOCHA met recently and discussed how to provide assistance to people affected by Cyclone Mocha with Ko Ko Hlaing, the junta’s minister of international cooperation. At a meeting in Naypyidaw on 31 May, UN organizations reportedly discussed coordination and cooperation in order to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to people affected by the cyclone.

It is unclear whether access approval has been given for large-scale relief distributions, but humanitarian organizations are already providing shelter, water, cleaning aid, basic health care and emergency food in accessible areas, according to UNOCHA. These players include a range of local CSOs and the World Food Programme.

Aid is being given to some communities but international aid organizations are clearly caught in the middle when attempting to provide humanitarian aid, given that they have to deal with the military junta, yet over half the country is not in junta hands. Sizeable areas of the country are under the control of the National Unity Government (NUG), the Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO), and other ethnic groups, the latter with a full spectrum of standing in dealing with the junta.

### **WEAPONIZED AID**

Given this, international aid practices come under the spotlight. Igor Blazevic, a European democracy

activist closely following developments in the Myanmar crisis, recently expressed anger over the “weaponization of aid and unpleasant truths about protecting future markets” – the “future markets” referring to the desire of international agencies to remain rooted in host countries whoever is in charge.

Blazevic does not mince words. In a post on Facebook, he said: “It is outrageous how UNOCHA and other UN agencies are constantly in their communication misinterpreting [the] reality of what they do and how they do aid in Myanmar. At the same time, they are helping [the] junta create [a] humanitarian incentive [to] pull the population of the country away from [the] resistance.

Critics such as Blazevic express concern that international aid agencies are inadvertently supporting the junta that is clearly pursuing “carrot-and-stick” policies against the Myanmar population – despite their egalitarian public rhetoric.

Bomb and burn the resisters, hand bread crumbs to the desperate. That is the junta approach.

“So, on one side there is a stick heavily hitting the population. On the other side is a carrot of aid.

Offer to population and to every single actor in Myanmar is constantly on the table - come to our side of the line and you will be able to deliver aid (if you are either local CSO, international NGO, UN agency or ethnic armed organization), or you will receive aid (if you are IDP whose house and livelihood has been destroyed by junta),” says Blazevic.

And where is the money coming from?

“This carrot is not funded by money junta gets from selling gas to Thailand or from cash they get from transporting Russian oil to China through Myanmar pipelines. That money is used to buy weapons from Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran. This carrot is funded by the EU, USAID, Japan and other major donor countries which are main contributors to the UN agencies and humanitarian INGOs. Gas and oil money is paying [the] junta’s stick and money from democratic [countries] is paying [for the] junta’s carrot,” says Blazevic.

The irony of the situation is not lost on Blazevic who highlighted the ludicrous situation of three Myanmar military generals visiting Chin State last month

to provide a humanitarian aid response – while at the same time, their soldiers and air force are attacking citizens and destroying their homes in the state.

## **DILEMMA FOR DONORS**

On the face of it, international donors are caught in a dilemma – deal with the junta or have your aid blocked.

The donors tend to adhere to diplomatic norms and make decisions based on long-term goals.

A cornerstone of the long-term donor goal is to maintain a presence in Myanmar, the argument being it is better to keep the door open to dialogue with the junta than having it slammed shut.

That is the reality today as the UN and other donors seek to support Cyclone Mocha victims and other people living in poverty, including internally displaced people (IDPs).

Blazevic says he has no problem with “UNOCHA meeting the junta and trying to negotiate the access to as many victims of Cyclone Mocha as possible, IF AT THE SAME TIME, there will be some other high ranking UN representative PUBLICLY MEETING representatives of NUG, ERO and civil society organizations which are providing as much aid as possible with extremely meagre resources, mainly fundraised from diaspora and through self-help of local communities.” (Blazevic’s capitalization)

## **HUMANITARIAN AID CONUNDRUM**

Whether it is due to the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha or the dire situation in impoverished sectors of Myanmar, there is a “humanitarian aid conundrum”.

What Blazevic argues is that international donors should use the NUG and other resistance-related actors to deliver aid to those in need.

“With substantial funding coming from major aid donors, these actors will be able to deliver huge amounts of aid which are out of reach of agencies based in Yangon and it will be at least 10 times more ‘cost effective’,” he claims.

All this, however, may be easier said than done. And the Myanmar junta knows it.

The reality is that the bulk of the aid that is allowed through to those in need will be used by the



Humanitarian aid being delivered to people in need in Teknaf, Bangladesh, also hit by Cyclone Mocha. Photo: AFP

junta in a PR push to bolster the junta's standing in certain areas, whereas resistance-held or influenced areas will – as Blazevic notes – “receive peanuts”.

The Myanmar generals know what they are doing and they have been doing it for decades, so there should be no surprise.

As the UN notes: The military employs its so-called four-cuts approach - including through indiscriminate airstrikes and artillery shelling, razing villages to displace civilian populations, and denial of humanitarian access - to cut off non-State organized armed groups and other anti-military armed elements from access to food, finances, intelligence and recruits.

Students of Myanmar's troubled history know the score.

Therefore, given the reality on the ground, the humanitarian aid conundrum really needs to be addressed. This ought to involve concerted efforts to complement the aid being delivered through the front

door via the Myanmar junta with aid delivered through the back door, cross-border through the NUG, EROs, and NGOs.

This puts the UN and other international donors in a quandary. This challenge will not be new to them as they have dealt with countries caught in conflict. But nobody will say this will be easy.

*Andrew Landen is the pseudonym for a writer who covers Asian affairs.*

# SAFE SHELTER A KEY PRIORITY FOR CYCLONE MOCHA VICTIMS: UN OCHA

**T**wo weeks after Cyclone Mocha hit western Myanmar safe shelter remains a key priority for cyclone-affected people who have been left without a roof over their head as the monsoon approaches, says the UN OCHA in their latest press release.

In addition, OCHA expresses concern that while the humanitarian aid effort is picking up pace, more supplies and increased access are needed.

Cyclone Mocha has exposed significant safety and security challenges for cyclone affected communities. To date, shelter and other relief items have been distributed to more than 63,000 people, OCHA

reports.

More than 230,000 people have received food assistance but household food reserves are dwindling, and communities are having difficulty buying food due to price rises and crop damage.

Loss of agricultural inputs and livestock is a growing problem.

The cyclone has created an education emergency with approximately 80 per cent of schools and educational infrastructure reportedly sustaining damage ahead of the start of the new school term.

Work is underway to reinstate Temporary Learning Spaces (TLSs), disseminate learning kits to



Survivors of Cyclone Mocha living in their wrecked home in an IDP camp in Sittwe. Photo: AFP



children, and restore schools and learning centers to operation.

While humanitarians continue to ramp up support where they have authorizations and supplies, so far it has only been possible to reach a fraction of the 1.6 million people identified for assistance in the \$333 million Flash Appeal launched last week.

Wider access for distributions is urgently needed, along with permission to transport humanitarian supplies from in-country warehouses and into Myanmar from other countries. Detailed plans for the transport and distribution of supplies have been shared and are pending approval.

Pledges of additional funding from generous donors have started arriving, but much more is needed to adequately support vulnerable people and ensure prompt distributions of critical supplies.

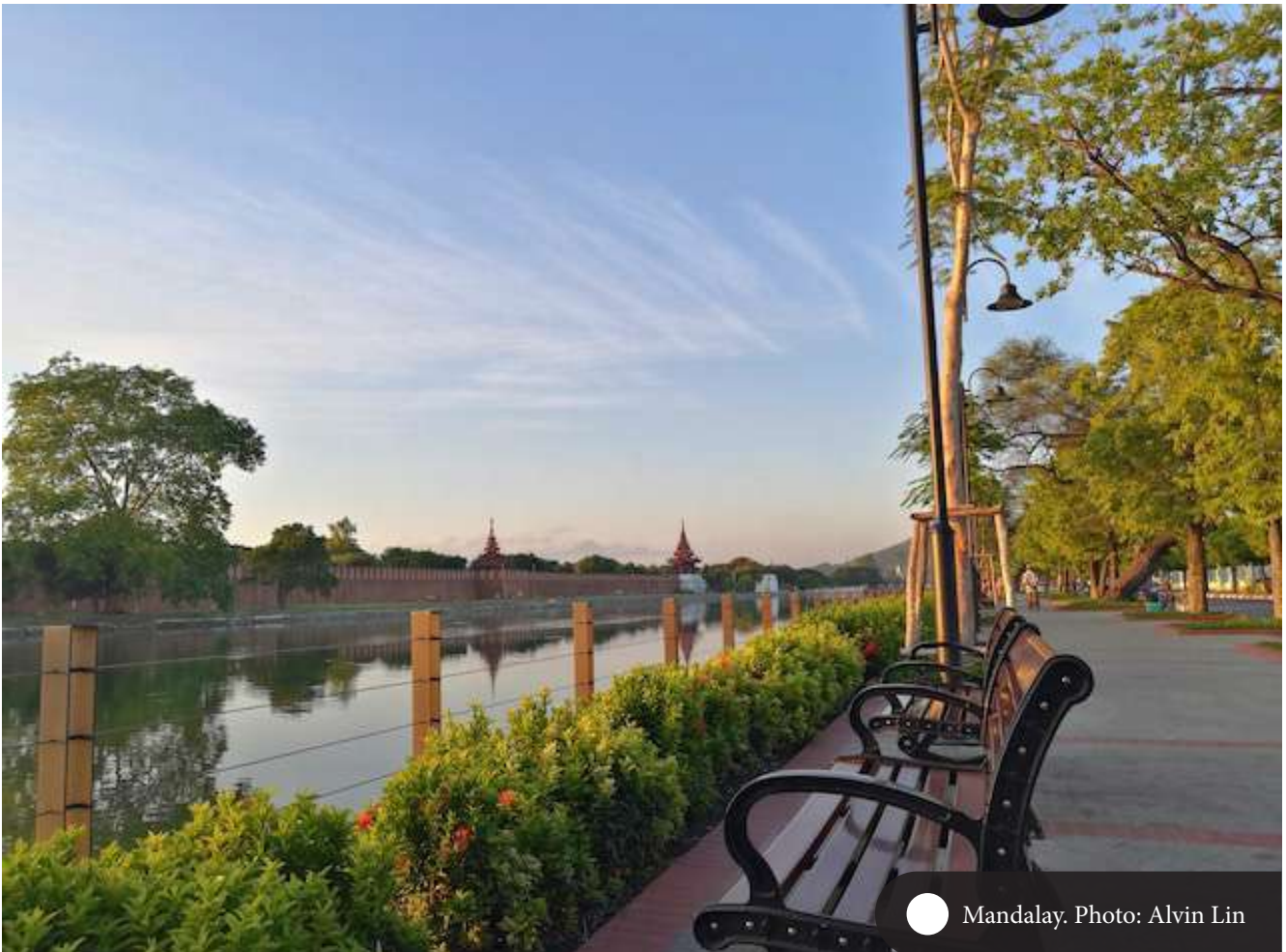
Two weeks have passed since Cyclone Mocha struck Myanmar the humanitarian response is gathering pace but aid agencies still require more supplies, expanded access and additional funds to distribute assistance at-scale. Needs are enormous across all communities. The consequences of the cyclone reach far beyond the physical destruction of houses and public infrastructure, with a range of safety risks now also threatening the well-being of the affected population. These risks include the movement of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in flooded areas, instances of sexual and gender-based violence, loss of civil documentation, looting, extortion, and robbery. Such risks pose a direct threat to affected communities, potentially exacerbating negative coping mechanisms such as high interest borrowing and children begging due to the lack of job opportunities of their parents. This situation increases the likelihood of child labor, exploitation, and abuse.

The cyclone's impact has eroded community support systems among affected populations. Reports from partners on the ground indicate that parents are struggling to adequately care for their children while they are rebuilding their damaged homes or are seeking employment to sustain their families. Of particular concern is the situation faced by displaced communities, that are currently enduring overcrowded living conditions that lack privacy, sanitation, and proper lighting in many areas. These conditions pose the risk of sexual abuse and harassment, particularly targeting women and adolescent girls. Adding to the gravity of the situation is the destruction or damage to most of the Women and Girls' Centers in the affected areas.

Despite ongoing access challenges, humanitarian partners are ensuring that field observations continue in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cyclone's impact, especially among vulnerable groups. Simultaneously, those who have access are intensifying their response efforts, delivering critical and lifesaving assistance to affected communities in the Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing, and Kachin.



# MYANMAR NLD MINISTER DR SET AUNG RELEASED FROM YAMETHIN PRISON



Mandalay. Photo: Alvin Lin

**D**r Set Aung, former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry under Myanmar's ousted National League for Democracy-led government, was released from Yamethin Prison, Mandalay Region, on 2 June, according to sources close to the prison.

"He was released this morning. He is healthy. He was released after completing his entire prison sentence," said a source close to the prison.

After the military coup, he, along with the Nobel Peace Laureate and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, her economic advisor Dr. Sean Turnell, an Australian professor, Minister of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry Soe Win, and former Minister Kyaw Win, were charged under Article 3(1) (c) of the Official Secrets Act.

All five of them were sentenced to three years in prison each for the aforementioned charge by the special court located in Naypyidaw Prison.

Presently, all individuals involved in that case, except Aung San Suu Kyi, have been released.

The now-released Dr Set Aung also served as Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar until July 2017, and was an economic policy advisor to President Thein Sein from April 2011 to June 2012.

Dr. Sean Turnell was released and deported in late 2022.

# UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MYANMAR TO STEP DOWN: UN CHIEF SPOKESMAN



UN Special Envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer. Photo: Facebook

The United Nations special envoy for Myanmar will step down in June, a spokesman for the UN chief told AFP last week, after an 18-month tenure in which she was criticised by the junta and its opponents.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in February 2021, ending a brief democratic experiment and sparking clashes with ethnic rebel groups and anti-coup fighters.

Diplomatic efforts led by the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc to resolve the crisis have so far failed to stem the bloodshed unleashed by the coup.

Noeleen Heyzer, who was named envoy by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October 2021, “will conclude her assignment on 12 June” when her contract ends, Stephane Dujarric said.

Guterres “is thankful to Ms. Heyzer for her tireless efforts on behalf of peace and the people of Myanmar,” the spokesman said, adding a new envoy would be appointed.

Heyzer, a Singaporean sociologist, was tasked with urging the Myanmar junta to engage in political dialogue with its opponents and end a bloody crackdown it launched after toppling the government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

She visited the Southeast Asian nation last August and met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and other top military officials in a move criticised by rights groups as lending legitimacy to the generals.

But she was denied a meeting with detained democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi and later irked junta officials who accused her of issuing a “one-sided statement” of what had been discussed.

She later vowed not to visit the country again unless she was allowed to meet Suu Kyi, who has since been jailed for a total of 33 years by a closed-door junta court.

## REBUFFED

Backed by major allies and arms suppliers Russia and China, the generals have rebuffed several attempts to kickstart dialogue with opponents of its putsch.

Former UN special envoy, Swiss diplomat Christine Schraner Burgener, was blocked by the junta from visiting the country and was the target of regular broadsides in Myanmar’s state-backed media.

Cambodian Foreign Minister and ASEAN envoy for Myanmar Prak Sokhonn visited Myanmar twice but both times the military denied him visits with Suu Kyi.

More than 3,500 people have been killed in the military’s crackdown since the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

More than one million people have been displaced by the violence, according to the United Nations.

AFP

# UN SPECIAL ENVOY HEYZER CALLS FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN MYANMAR BEFORE POLLS



Zin Mar Aung, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the National Unity Government (NUG), left, during her meeting with UN Special Envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer, right.  
Photo: Facebook

Organising elections without an “inclusive political dialogue” risks worsening violence in Myanmar, said a UN envoy on Saturday, a day after meeting a leading opposition figure in Geneva.

The outgoing UN special envoy for Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer, who steps down on June 12, said she met with Zin Mar Aung, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the National Unity Government (NUG).

In the Friday meeting, the UN envoy “warned against ongoing attempts by the Myanmar military to undermine democratic institutions and processes, such as the dissolution of opposition parties”, a statement said.

Heyzer warned “the military’s proposed elections risk exacerbating the violence in the absence of inclusive political dialogue and conditions that permit citizens to freely exercise their rights”.

Heyzer said that any dialogue should focus on people in conflict-affected areas - including women and youth.

Myanmar has faced turmoil since the military seized power in February 2021, ending the rule of ci-

vilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s elected government over unsubstantiated allegations of fraud in elections the previous year.

The military has since tasked the junta-dominated Union Election Commission with holding fresh polls, which opponents say cannot possibly be free or fair.

The commission dissolved Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy Party, for failing to comply with new election rules drawn up by the military.

During her 18-month tenure, Heyzer has been criticised by the junta and its opponents.

She visited the Southeast Asian nation last August and met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and other top military officials in a move criticised by rights groups as lending legitimacy to the generals.

But she was denied a meeting with detained democracy figurehead Suu Kyi and later irked junta officials who accused her of issuing a “one-sided statement” of what had been discussed.

AFP

# TOP CHINESE INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL VISITS MYANMAR FOR 'COOPERATION' TALKS



Photo: Victor He

**A** top Chinese intelligence official has visited Myanmar to discuss military “cooperation” with the junta, Myanmar state media reported Wednesday last week, the latest high-profile delegation sent by Beijing to its internationally isolated ally.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and the formation of dozens of “People’s Defence Forces” now battling the junta.

It is the first publicly reported visit by a military official from China, a major ally and arms supplier of the junta, since the coup.

Major-General Yang Yang, acting director-general of the Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department of China’s Central Military Commission, met the junta’s number two official, Soe Win, for talks on “cooperation between the two armies”, state media said.

The two also discussed “cooperation in peace, tranquillity and development programmes for border areas” at the Tuesday meeting, according to state-run

newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar.

China’s defence attache was also present at the meeting, the report said.

The junta has been shunned by many in the international community over its bloody crackdown on dissent, but China has maintained ties with the regime.

Myanmar’s military has imported \$267 million in arms and equipment from China since it seized power, including from state-owned entities, the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews said earlier this month.

Several projects in Beijing’s sprawling Belt and Road infrastructure initiative are slated to run through northern Myanmar, linking China’s landlocked Yunnan province with the Indian Ocean.

Beijing also backs and arms several ethnic rebel groups along its border with Myanmar, analysts say.

Some of these groups have clashed repeatedly with the

Myanmar military in the aftermath of the coup, and an alliance of China-backed rebels in March called for Beijing’s help to defuse the crisis.

Earlier this month, China’s foreign minister travelled to Myanmar to meet junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, becoming the highest-ranking Chinese official to meet the top general since the coup.

At the meeting, Qin Gang called on the international community to “respect Myanmar’s sovereignty”, according to a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry.

Beijing’s diplomats are also mediating between Myanmar and Bangladesh on a pilot programme to repatriate Rohingya refugees who fled a 2017 military crackdown that is currently the subject of a UN genocide investigation.

More than 3,500 people have been killed in the Myanmar military’s crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

AFP

# JAPAN WITHDRAWS ODA FOR RAILWAY PROJECT IN MYANMAR



Photo: Sam Lee

Japan is withdrawing its Official Development Assistance (ODA) for upgrading the Yangon-Mandalay railway, according to a report of the Asahi Shimbun on 31 May.

Japan declared it was resuming ODA in Myanmar after the country began opening up in 2011.

The project was aimed to upgrade aging rails and bridges that are prone to delays and derailments on 620 kilometers of track between the two major cities.

The Japanese newspaper said that the ODA withdrawal decision is marked as a protest over the 2021 military coup against the democratically elected government, and it will impact financial assistance for upgrades to the railway system in Myanmar.

The report also included the remarks of some observers

that Japan is expected to review other major ODA projects for the country to protest continued oppressive military rule in Myanmar.

Upgrading for railway network between Yangon and Mandalay was started with a feasibility study in 2013, and the project got going in 2018, with repairing or renewing rails, railway bridges and signal systems.

Japan made an agreement on this project with the National League for Democracy-led government provide yen loans of up to 142.2 billion yen (\$1 billion) for the project by 2020, and agreed to provide additional funding as needs arose until around 2024 when the project is scheduled for completion.

During the term of the civilian government, Japan provided a wide range of loans and grants

for infrastructural, healthcare, education and rural development programmes.

Just before the military coup in Myanmar on November 2020, the two countries signed a low-interest loan deal worth a total of 42.78 billion yens (\$414 million) for building road infrastructure and financing small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Moreover, the Japanese Foreign Ministry announced a total of 27.78 billion yen will be earmarked for a project to build a bridge on a road in the East-West Economic Corridor that crosses Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

However, Japan suspended new yen loans for Myanmar since the coup.

# NORWAY-BASED RESEARCH INSTITUTE PROPOSES RECOGNITION OF NUG FOR LEGITIMACY AT HOME AND ABROAD



The Norway-based Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) recommends three forms of priority support from the international community, including recognition of the National Unity Government (NUG) and strengthening its legitimacy at home and internationally, to eventually ensure stability in Myanmar.

In its analytical report entitled, “Myanmar’s Interrupted Transition: The Democratic Instinct Survives”, the PRIO also warns of possible scenarios if there is a failure to develop democracy in the country.

One scenario is the possibility that the “military remains in power”. Under these circumstances, the opposition would not control large areas of the country and/or deliver basic public services, then Myanmar could become “Balkanized” and ungovernable, leading to a human development catastrophe within the country and regional instability.

Another scenario is that the “military is pushed from power”, but no viable political alternative to guide the transition to a new political framework emerges. This situation is similar to the “Arab Spring” in Egypt. After this movement emerged, an authoritarian regime was dislodged but the opposition lacks the institution-

al capacity and governing vision to consolidate power, allowing for another return to authoritarian rule, or a situation of fragmentation and instability.

However, the PRIO made some recommendations to avoid such unfavourable scenarios, calling for the three forms of priority support from the international community, while the opposition consolidate as a credible governing alternative, able to guide opposition actors to a new political accord on Myanmar’s future.

The report highlighted three ways the international can provide support.

First and foremost, they suggest the recognition of the NUG, to strengthen its legitimacy, at home and internationally, while depriving the military of such legitimacy.

Secondly, to increase the support to the NUG and ensure that such support strengthens communities, reinforces unity and avoids fomenting divisions.

Thirdly, they suggest the international community take further actions that starve the military of financial resources and weapons, including enforcing sanctions against the regime and crony companies.

The report was co-written

by Andra Mong Mao, who is a political analyst, specializing in Myanmar’s ethnic and sectarian armed conflicts, civil-military relations, and China’s growing role in Myanmar, along with Marte Nilsen, who is a senior researcher at PRIO.

In their analytical report, the authors said that after the 2021 coup, the military has faced a credible challenge to its dominance from a new multi-ethnic political and military alliance, and the military’s ability to control the political and economic affairs of the country appeared to be declining. Meanwhile, unity within the opposition is fragile, and it still lacks the strength needed to overcome the military’s advantages in controlling state institutions and resources.

The report mentioned that the military does not have effective control over territory or population, and its position is not sustainable, while taking increased casualties, defections and desertions in recent years, and has failed to recruit sufficient numbers of troops to replace those losses.

The report says that the anti-military opposition groups have strong confidence to end the dictatorship as they pursue their Spring Revolution – sparked by the military’s illegal takeover of the government in the February 2021 coup.

# SPIKE IN BOATS SMUGGLING METH OUT OF MYANMAR: UN

Asian drug trafficking networks are increasingly using sea routes to smuggle methamphetamines out of Myanmar and ramping up ketamine production as they seek to expand their business, the UN said Friday.

Meth from coup-hit Myanmar's northeastern Shan state - the regional epicentre for the drug's production - is being smuggled by boats to avoid tighter patrols on land routes through China and Thailand, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in an

annual report.

The border region between Myanmar, Laos and Thailand has long been a hotbed of illegal drug production and trafficking, particularly of meth and opium.

Increased drug patrols in China's southwestern Yunnan province and along Thailand's border with Myanmar led to a drop in meth seizures by Chinese and Thai authorities in 2022 as drug traffickers turned to alternative maritime routes.





“Traffickers have continued to ship large volumes through Laos and northern Thailand, but at the same time they have pushed significant supply through central Myanmar to the Andaman Sea where it seems few were looking,” UNODC regional representative Jeremy Douglas said.

The report flagged high volumes of Myanmar-made meth heading into Bangladesh and India.

Health experts say use of the drug can lead to paranoia, hallucinations and violent behaviour and those withdrawing can experience psychosis.

Police across East and South East Asia seized nearly 151 tonnes of methamphetamines in

2022, down from the record of 172 tonnes set in 2021.

Wholesale and street prices for meth across the region fell or remained at record lows in 2022.

“The most powerful regional trafficking networks are able to operate with a high degree of certainty they can and will not be stopped,” the UN report said.

Researchers also pointed to evidence that drug smuggling networks are looking to diversify what they sell.

In 2022, authorities across the region seized a record 27.4 tonnes of ketamine, an anaesthetic misused as a recreational party drug - up 167 percent on 2021.

Nearly half was netted in Cambodia, which has emerged as a key production centre for ketamine, with 13 “highly sophisticated” laboratories found last year.

“The discovery of a series of industrial-scale clandestine ketamine laboratories, processing warehouses, and storage facilities across the country has set off alarm bells in the region,” the report said.

The report also noted a massive rise in seizures of the chemicals needed to make ketamine.

Large mixed shipments of meth and ketamine indicate organised crime groups are trying to push the two drugs as a package to increase demand for the anaesthetic, according to the report.

AFP



Meth seizure. Photo: AFP

# **SURGE IN MINING OPERATIONS IN MYANMAR’S ETHNIC AREAS SPARKS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: NGO**

**M**yanmar Mining Watch Network has expressed concerns about the surge in mining operations for natural resources in Myanmar ethnic areas following the military coup.

In a press conference held last week, the environmental organization emphasized the detrimental impact of these activities on the environment and social interests.

With decades of lack of transparency, the natural resource extraction industry in Myanmar has surged under a centralized system with a noticeable absence of law enforcement. This has resulted in a surge of mining activities in ethnic areas like Kachin State, Shan State, Karenni State, and Karen State,

where gold, jade, rare earth metal, amber, tin, tungsten and white gold mining activities have witnessed a significant increase.

During the press conference, Mr. Paul (a pseudonym), the Network Coordinator of the Myanmar Mining Watch Network, emphasized that the escalated mining activities have placed the livelihoods of millions of people, animals, and entire ecosystems at stake.

“Since the coup d’état, we have witnessed a surge in gold mining at the confluence (Myitsone) of the Maykha and MaliKha rivers. We did research around Myitsone in Kachin. We focused on about six villages. In eastern Shan, we issued a report about



rare earth mining,” said Paul.

“Irrawaddy River is the lifeblood of Myanmar. Millions of people and animals depend on it. All ecosystems have been destroyed.”

As per accounts from Kachin residents, there are credible reports of Military Council troops and businessmen actively involved in gold mining operations within Kachin State. The presence of these groups has resulted in adverse effects on education and health, with a particular emphasis on compromised women’s safety and a rise in incidents of sexual harassment associated with gold mining.

Additionally, the alarming prevalence of drug use, including among children, poses significant risks and hazards to the local population.

Kachin’s Myitstone resident Naw Naw highlighted the detrimental consequences of mining activities, including health consequences.

“There are many consequences. The rivers had significantly changed their courses, leading to the absence of trees near the rivers. [Drinking] water shortage arises. The previously clear water has turned yellow and is no longer suitable for consumption. The people have to depend on the rivers to drink.

People have health problems because they have to drink only this water,” said Naw Naw.

“The most common issues caused by gold mining include rampant drug problems, with even children getting involved. When the weather is too cold, some people use drugs to be able to work. Additionally, women living near gold mining areas face extensive sexual harassment. These problems are expected to worsen. When issues arise, the villagers do not know to whom they can ask for help. Despite residents not agreeing with the mining business, they find themselves without the right to voice their complaints.”

According to the press conference, there are more than 200 small-scale gold mining companies in Hkambu Village alone in Kachin State.

Furthermore, the rare earth mining activities in eastern Shan State have had a profound impact on nine villages. The mining operations have resulted in the destruction of tea plantations and local vegetable farms, land confiscations, water scarcity, and a surge in health issues, according to the Myanmar Mining Watch Network.

The group said that some ethnic armed organizations are also deeply involved in the mining operations.

The group has called upon the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) of the National Unity Government [NUG] to prioritize the establishment of a federal system for managing natural resources, ensuring the rights of ethnic communities are respected. They have further urged the NUCC to blacklist groups that provide financial support for mining activities benefiting the junta’s exploitation of natural resources.

Myanmar Mining Watch Network (MMWN) is a network which was established in 2016 in Myitkyina, Kachin State. It was formed by 11 organizations with the purpose advocacy.



● Mining in Kachin State. Photo: AFP

## HONG KONG ARTISTS MARK TIANANMEN QUIETLY OR OVERSEAS

**A**vant garde street performance, politically charged theatre, pro-democracy music and poetry - powerful works of art dealing with China's bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown that were once commonplace in Hong Kong have all but disappeared in recent years.

For decades, tens of thousands of people gathered annually in Hong Kong's Victoria Park for a candlelight vigil marking June 4, 1989, when Chinese troops moved into Beijing's Tiananmen Square to quell peaceful protests calling for reforms.

Hundreds, by some estimates more than 1,000, were killed in the crackdown.

Any mention of the day -- let alone commemoration -- has long been forbidden in mainland China, but the massive turnout every year in Victoria Park

stood as an enduring symbol of the special freedoms Hong Kong enjoyed, even after its return to Chinese rule.

But since Beijing imposed a national security law on the city in 2020 to quash dissent, authorities have suppressed public events mourning the Tiananmen crackdown, and artistic output commemorating the pivotal day has shrivelled.

Hong Kong artist Luk Ming remembers how more than a dozen people took part in interpretive performances in the bustling district of Causeway Bay on the anniversary's eve in 2009.

"The performers were not artists, but the everyman -- there was a taxi driver, a teacher, and so on," Luk told AFP, using a pseudonym due to fear of repercussions.



Remembering the victims. Quiet protest in the USA. Photo: AFP

As part of the “Our Generation’s June 4” art project, some performers had covered their bodies with yellow paint - a colour associated with the city’s pro-democracy camp - as a representation of “freedom and hope”, Luk said.

“People were proactive then... with many trying to tell others about the crackdown lest we forget.”

Though a few hardcore artists might try to sustain the tradition, he added, “will they continue to put it out there under so much uncertainty?”

Just last year, on the day before the anniversary, artist Chan Mei-tung was bundled into a police van mid-performance for “misconduct in public places” and detained overnight.

The offending piece had seen her whittle a potato into the shape of a candle - once distributed by the thousands at the annual Tiananmen vigil - and hold a lighter to it.

### **‘SAFEGUARD A MEMORY’**

In 2019, Hong Kong was rocked by massive, and at times violent, protests over an unpopular bill that morphed into a months-long movement calling for broader democratic change.

The ensuing crackdown saw more than 10,000 people arrested, though more than 6,000 have yet to be formally charged.

Meanwhile, three organisers of the annual Tiananmen vigil have been charged with “incitement to subversion” under the national security law - an offence punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

There has also been what amounts to an erasure of Hong Kong’s public memorials to Tiananmen: a museum run by the vigil’s organisers was shuttered, monuments were removed from universities and dozens of books about the 1989 crackdown were pulled from libraries.

For the fourth year running, June 4 is expected to be a neutered affair.

City leader John Lee has issued vague warnings that “any act that is in breach of the law” will see police enforcement.

Given the climate in Hong Kong, some artists have transplanted their works to more receptive soil.

For the past three years, Lenny Kwok, a Hong Kong musician who has organised commemorative concerts since 1990, has hosted an operetta marking the anniversary in Taiwan.

A mixture of music, poetry and storytelling, the show will open this year in a Taipei park with the reading of a poem by Nobel laureate Nelly Sachs, who fled Nazi rule during World War II.

“All the nations are ready to rise up from the map,” the poem begins.

Kwok said he believes the desire for freedom and democracy in both Hong Kong and Taiwan is closely connected to the Tiananmen incident.

“We are here to safeguard a memory that is being gradually erased, rewritten and re-interpreted,” he said.

### **‘CONNECT WITH ART’**

Taiwan will also see a performance of “35th of May”, a stage drama by Hong Kong playwright Candace Chong, on the anniversary weekend.

The play -- its name a coded reference to June 4, mentions of which are censored on the mainland -- follows an elderly couple’s decision to openly mourn their son who died in Tiananmen Square after decades of grieving silently.

It debuted in Hong Kong in 2019, but the troupe that originally produced it, Stage 64, disbanded two years later.

Stage 64’s founder Lit Ming-wai translated the script from Cantonese - Hong Kong’s native tongue - into Mandarin and English for Taiwanese audiences.

She told AFP she still felt the “boundaryless power” of Hong Kong’s security law, even when publishing the script in Taiwan.

For example, the play’s original tagline - “Unveil the memories once displaced; confront the abnormal red line” - was changed due to legal concerns from the publishing house.

It is now “On the 35th of May, let’s meet in the open”.

The six showings have been booked out by more than 1,000 people.

Taiwanese director Chung Po-yuan said he hoped the play would push the audience to reflect on the island’s authoritarian past, while thinking about their future in the face of China’s claim over the self-ruled democracy.

“If we lose our guard, it may recur in the future,” Chung said.

AFP

# CHINA WARNS ‘NATO-LIKE’ ALLIANCES COULD LEAD TO CONFLICT IN ASIA-PACIFIC

China’s defence minister warned Sunday against establishing NATO-like military alliances in the Asia-Pacific, saying they would plunge the region into a “whirlpool” of conflict.

Li Shangfu’s comments came a day after US and Chinese military vessels sailed close to each other in the flashpoint Taiwan Strait, an incident that provoked anger from both sides.

“Attempts to push for NATO-like (alliances) in the Asia-Pacific is a way of kidnapping regional countries and exaggerating conflicts and confrontations,” Li told a security conference in Singapore also attended by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Li warned that these alliances would “plunge the Asia-Pacific into a whirlpool of disputes and con-

flicts”.

Li’s comments echoed long-held Chinese criticism of the United States’ efforts to shore up alliances in the region and counter China’s rise.

The United States is a member of AUKUS, which groups it with Australia and Britain.

Washington is also a member of the QUAD group, which includes Australia, India and Japan.

“Today’s Asia-Pacific needs open and inclusive cooperation, not buddying up into small cliques,” Li said at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit.

Li sought to paint the United States as the trigger of regional instability, and China as seeking to ease tensions.



Chinese fighter jet. Photo: AFP

“It cannot be denied that if a fierce conflict or confrontation occurs between China and the United States, it would bring unbearable pain for the world,” he said.

## **MISCALCULATIONS**

On Saturday, Austin called for top-level defence talks with Beijing to prevent miscalculations.

“The more that we talk, the more that we can avoid the misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to crisis or conflict,” Austin said.

Also on Saturday, the United States deployed a destroyer from its 7th Fleet along with a Canadian naval vessel through the Taiwan Strait.

China responded by sending one of its naval ships close to the US destroyer, the USS Chung-Hoon, according to the Pentagon.

The strait is one of the world’s most tense potential military flashpoints.

China claims Taiwan as its territory - vowing to take it one day, by force if necessary - and has in recent years ramped up military and political pressure on the island.

Austin on Sunday described the incident as “extremely dangerous”, saying the Chinese vessel crossed “probably 150 feet (46 metres)” in front of the Chung-Hoon.

“I call upon the (Chinese) leadership to really do the right things to rein in that kind of conduct, because I think accidents can happen that could cause things to spiral out of control,” Austin told reporters in Singapore.

Saturday’s Taiwan Strait encounter followed what the US military said was an “unnecessarily aggressive maneuver” by one of Beijing’s fighter’s near a US surveillance plane in the South China Sea last week.

Li told the Singapore audience on Sunday that the onus was on the United States to pull its military presence away from areas near China.

“Our Chinese military aircraft and warships won’t ever go near the airspace and territorial waters of other countries to engage in so-called navigational hegemony,” Li said.

“The best thing would be if all countries, and especially their warplanes and warships, refrained from wandering through other country’s territorial airspace and waters. What are you hanging around here for?”

Austin and Li shook hands and spoke briefly at the Singapore event’s opening dinner on Friday, but there was no substantive exchange.

The United States had invited Li to meet with Austin on the sidelines of the conference, but China declined.

A senior US defense official told journalists Sunday that the US had also offered lower level meetings but that China didn’t respond.

A member of China’s delegation told AFP that the removal of US sanctions on Li was a precondition for talks.

However, there have been some signs of improved dialogue between the two nations.

CIA Director William Burns made a secret trip to China last month, a US official announced on Friday.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink will also travel to China on Sunday for a rare visit.

In his speech in Singapore on Saturday, Lloyd outlined Washington’s extensive partnerships in the region.

“America’s partnerships are bringing the region closer together to help keep it free, open, and secure,” he said.

**AFP**

# MORE THAN 280 DEAD, HUNDREDS HURT IN INDIA TRIPLE TRAIN CRASH

**A**t least 288 people were killed and hundreds more injured in a three-train collision in India, officials said Saturday, the country's deadliest rail accident in more than 20 years.

Wreckage debris was piled high at the crash site near Balasore, in the eastern state of Odisha, where some carriages had been tossed far from the tracks and others flipped over entirely.

Smashed train compartments were torn open in the impact late on Friday, leaving blood-stained holes in their sides.

Survivor Arjun Das told a Bengali television

channel he heard a thundering sound, then saw people falling from upper berths.

He jumped out of the train. "People were screaming, shouting for help," he said.

"There were injured lying everywhere inside coaches and along the tracks. I want to forget the scenes."

The disaster began when an express train running north from India's tech hub Bengaluru to Kolkata derailed, falling onto the adjacent southbound track.

Minutes later, the Coromandal Express head-





ing from Kolkata to Chennai smashed into the wreckage, some of its coaches also colliding with a goods train parked nearby.

Researcher Anubhav Das was in the last carriage of the second train when he heard “screeching, horrifying sounds coming from a distance”.

His coach stayed upright and he jumped out unhurt after it ground to a halt.

“I saw bloodied scenes, mangled bodies and one man with a severed arm being desperately helped by his injured son,” the 27-year-old told AFP.

“I lost count of the bodies before leaving the site. Now I now feel almost guilty.”

Rescue workers searched for survivors trapped in the mangled wreckage Saturday, with scores of bodies laid out under white sheets beside the tracks.



Rescue team at work. Photo: AFP

Sudhanshu Sarangi, director general of Odisha Fire Services, said the death toll stood at 288 but was expected to go higher, potentially approaching 380.

“Many people who have been rushed to hospitals are succumbing there and we are still taking out the dead bodies,” he told AFP from the accident site.

“The rescue work is still ongoing here as there are some bodies under the bogies and teams are trying to lift them to get them out.”

### **‘HOUR OF GRIEF’**

India has one of the world’s largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst of them in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar and plunged into the river below, killing between 800 and 1,000 people.

Friday’s crash ranks as its third worst, and the deadliest since 1995, when two express trains collided in Firozabad, near Agra, killing more than 300 people.

Odisha state’s chief secretary Pradeep Jena confirmed that about 900 injured people had been hospitalised.

Rescue teams including from the National Disaster Response Force and air force were deployed, while the railways ministry announced an investigation.

Authorities said every hospital between the crash site and the state capital Bhubaneswar around 200 kilometres (125 miles) away was receiving victims, with 200 ambulances -- and even buses -- deployed to transport them.

At Bhadrak District Hospital, bloodied and shocked survivors were receiving treatment in crowded wards.

The disaster comes despite new investments and upgrades in technology that have significantly improved railway safety in recent years.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi - who officials said would visit the crash site and hospitals later Saturday - said he was “distressed by the train accident”.

“In this hour of grief, my thoughts are with the bereaved families. May the injured recover soon,” he tweeted.

AFP

# BRICS MINISTERS OPEN TO ENLARGEMENT AS PUTIN LOOMS LARGE

**T**op diplomats from BRICS countries said the group was open to welcome new members, during talks in South Africa on Thursday last week, as the bloc seeks a larger voice in the international arena.

Foreign ministers from the five-nation grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa called for a “rebalancing” of the global order, as they met in Cape Town for a two-day conference overshadowed by the fallout from the war in Ukraine.

“Our gathering must send out a strong message that the world is multipolar, that it is rebalanc-

ing and that old ways cannot address new situations,” India’s Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said during opening remarks.

“We are a symbol of change and must act accordingly.”

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has largely isolated Moscow on the international stage, pushing it to seek closer ties with China and others.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said “more than a dozen” countries, reportedly including Saudi Arabia, have expressed interest in joining BRICS and the group was currently shaping its ap-



The BRICS foreign ministers at the meeting. Photo: AFP

proach.

The issue was discussed with Saudi Arabia's top diplomat, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, who was in Cape Town, Lavrov said.

China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu sounded a more conciliatory note saying Beijing welcomed prospective applicants.

"We expect more countries to join our big family," Ma told a press conference.

The talks came ahead of a heads of state summit in August, which is proving problematic for host South Africa, due to the possible attendance of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin is the target of an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant over accusations that Russia unlawfully deported Ukrainian children.

A member of the ICC, Pretoria, which has close diplomatic ties with Moscow, would be expected to arrest Putin if he sets foot in the country.

On Thursday, South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor reiterated that Putin, like all other leaders, has been invited, adding the government was looking at its "legal options".

### **'SLEEPLESS NIGHTS'**

Pandor stressed the summit would be held in Johannesburg, after media reports suggested the government was considering moving it elsewhere to get around the issue.

As questions about Putin's potential visit kept coming, Pandor quipped with her Brazilian counterpart Mauro Vieira, asking "Do you spend sleepless nights thinking about it?".

Meanwhile, outside the hotel where the meeting was held, about a dozen protesters with Ukrainian flags and traditional clothes chanted "Stop Putin! Stop the war!"

Some held signs depicting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, with the words "child murderer" in blood-red letters.

"It is difficult to see that South Africa, which has such a strong stand on children's rights, is shaking the hand of a person who is part of these systemic war

crimes against Ukrainian children," Dzvinka Kachur, 41, a member of the Ukrainian association of South Africa, told AFP.

Yet, Pandor said Putin was not discussed by the foreign ministers, with talks instead focusing on the potential use of alternative currencies to the US dollar for international trade and on strengthening the New Development Bank, also known as the BRICS bank.

Ways to "ensure that we do not become victim to sanctions that have secondary effects on countries that have no involvement in issues that have led to those unilateral sanctions," were also talked about, she said in an apparent reference to western measures against Russia.

Pretoria, which says it wants to stay neutral over the Ukraine war but is accused by critics of tilting towards the Kremlin, has long advocated for BRICS to act as a counterbalance to a western dominated international order.

Fifteen foreign ministries from Africa and the global south have been invited for the second day of talks on Friday.

AFP

# UN AGENCIES WARN OF RISING HUNGER RISK IN 18 'HOTSPOTS'

**H**unger is set to worsen in 18 “hotspots” worldwide including Sudan, where fighting is putting people at risk of starvation, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) warned in a report published on Monday.

Sudan, Burkina Faso, Haiti and Mali have been elevated to the highest alert level, joining Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

Additionally, a likely El Niño – a naturally occurring climatic phenomenon that has a warming effect on ocean surface temperatures in the central and east Pacific - is also raising fears of climate extremes in vulnerable nations.

## **AGAINST 'BUSINESS-AS-USUAL'**

The report calls for urgent humanitarian action to save lives and livelihoods, and to prevent starvation and death.

“Business-as-usual pathways are no longer an option in today’s risk landscape if we want to achieve global food security for all, ensuring that no one is left behind,” said Dongyu Qu, the FAO Director- General.

He underlined the need for immediate interventions in the agricultural sector “to pull people from the brink of hunger, help them rebuild their lives, and provide long-term solutions to address the root causes of food insecurity.”

## **WORSE THAN EVER**

Acute food insecurity is set to potentially increase in 18 hunger “hotspots”, comprising a total of 22 countries, according to the report.

“Not only are more people in more places around the world going hungry, but the severity of the hunger they face is worse than ever,” said Cindy Mc-

Cain, WFP Executive Director.

The Sudan conflict is already driving mass displacement and hunger. More than one million citizens and refugees are expected to flee the country, while an additional 2.5 million inside its borders are set to face acute hunger in the coming months.

The report warned that a possible spillover of the crisis raises the risk of negative impacts in neighbouring countries. If the conflict continues, it could spark further displacement and disruptions to trade and humanitarian aid flows.

## **ECONOMIC SHOCKS CONTINUE**

Meanwhile, economic shocks and stressors continue to drive acute hunger in almost all the hotspots, carrying over trends seen globally in 2022, largely due to fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen remain at the highest alert level for acute hunger.

Alongside Sudan, three other countries - Haiti, Burkina Faso and Mali – also have been elevated to this level because of movement restrictions affecting people and goods.

“All hotspots at the highest level have communities facing or projected to face starvation, or are at risk of sliding towards catastrophic conditions, given they have already emergency levels of food insecurity and are facing severe aggravating factors. These hotspots require the most urgent attention,” the UN agencies said.

The report listed the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan and Syria as hotspots with very high

concern, along with Myanmar.

All of these countries have a large number of people facing critical acute food insecurity, coupled with worsening drivers that are expected to further intensify life-threatening conditions in the coming months.

The other hotspots are Lebanon, Malawi, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

## **SUDAN FOOD DISTRIBUTIONS**

Meanwhile in Sudan, WFP began distributing food assistance on Saturday to thousands of people trapped in the capital, Khartoum, since fighting broke out six weeks ago.

The distributions came in the last days of the seven-day ceasefire agreed by the army, which was set to expire on Monday evening, local time.

“This is a major breakthrough. We have finally been able to help families who are stuck in Khartoum and struggling to make it through each day as food and basic supplies dwindle,” said Eddie Rowe, WFP Country Director.

Staff have been working round the clock to reach people in the city since the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and rival military group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), erupted in mid-April.

“A window opened late last week which allowed us to start food distributions,” Mr. Rowe said, adding that “WFP must do more, but that depends on the parties to the conflict and the security and access they realistically guarantee on the ground.”

## **STEPPING UP SUPPORT**

WFP is rapidly expanding distribution of emergency food assistance across Sudan.

Latest updates including distributions to some 12,445 people in locations controlled by both sides in Omdurman, part of the Khartoum metropolitan area.

More food assistance has been prepositioned to continue distributions in the capital for as long as the security situation allows, with the goal of reaching at least 500,000 people.

Food and nutrition distributions also began over the weekend in Wadi Halfa in Northern State to around 8,000 Sudanese who have fled Khartoum and are making the long journey to Egypt. Last week WFP also began distributions to 4,000 newly displaced people in Port Sudan, a city on the Red Sea Coast.

The UN agency has rapidly scaled up support to reach 675,000 people so far with emergency food and nutrition assistance in 13 of Sudan’s 18 states since resuming operations earlier this month.

Activities were halted after three staff were killed in North Darfur on 15 April, the first day of the conflict.

As hunger rises, WFP is expanding to support 5.9 million people across the country and requires \$731 million to reach them.

**Courtesy of UN News**



Photo: Back Forward

## MON STATE

### ***Defence forces drone kills two civilians in Bilin Township, Mon State***

Two civilians were killed when a resistance forces drone accidentally dropped a bomb on a farm in Daung Village, in Mon State's Bilin Township, on 27 May.

According to local news sources the bomb landed on U Saw Ba Khat Farm whilst the Karen National Union (KNU), Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) were using drones to bomb junta soldiers stationed in Duang Village.

A friend of the deceased told Mizzima that 16-year-old Saw Moe Htet and his friend Saw Maw Khar were playing under a mango tree on the farm when the bomb killed them.

He said: "They were sitting and playing under the mango tree in the farm. The resistance forces were dropping bombs from drones onto the Military Council soldiers stationed in Duang Village. One bomb accidentally dropped on the farm. The house has also been completely destroyed."

KNU officials from Thaton District expressed their sorrow and regret for the deaths of the two youths and pledged that they would assist ground teams as much as possible to prevent similar incidents in the future, according to a 28 May report in the Salween Times.

A Daung villager explained: "The village is next to the Mawlamyine highway. Soldiers are stationed in the village. The farm is quite close to the village."

Mizzima contacted Aye Min Tun, the Thaton District PDF officer, for an explanation of what hap-

pened, but he has yet to reply.

KNU and KNLA joint forces often use drones and grenade launchers to attack junta facilities, gates and convoys in Bilin Township.

## KAREN STATE

### ***Civilian killed by junta artillery in Kawka-reik Township***

Myanmar artillery units based in Kyondoe Town, in Kawka-reik Township, Karen State have been randomly firing at civilians in the area, killing one and injuring three since 28 May.

Light Infantry Battalions 546 and 547 are based in Kyondoe. They terrorise innocent civilians by randomly firing artillery into the surrounding area at all times of day and night.

On 30 May Light Infantry Battalion 545 started randomly firing artillery into nearby areas at 10:00 a.m. A villager from Thayettaw Village in Kyondoe Town was killed by one of the shells.

"The artillery shell fell near Two Pagodas outside Thayettaw Village. The victim was driving a sidecar motorcycle on the road after having taken a patient to the hospital," a Kyondoe resident said to Mizzima.

Previously on 28 May at 8:00 p.m. Infantry Battalion 546 fired 120mm and 105mm mortar rounds into Kwakareik Village. Three villagers were injured and six houses were destroyed, according to the Karen National Union. (KNU).

The three injured were named as Daw Thein Shwe (age, 52), Saw Htein Lin Aung (age, 15), and Naw Aye Mhan Htet (age, 21). None were seriously injured.

Kawka-reik Township, is in Dooplaya District and is part of KNU Brigade 6 controlled area.



## MYANMAR JUNTA'S DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MEETS SRI LANKAN AMBASSADOR TO DISCUSS HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND REPATRIATION EFFORTS

The Myanmar junta's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Soe Htut received the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Myanmar Janaka Bandara at the Ministry of Home Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw on 5 June, reported Sri Lanka's leading news and entertainment website Colombo Gazette.

During the meeting, Ambassador Janaka Bandara conveyed his appreciation to Myanmar and the Deputy Prime Minister for their intervention and support in the successful repatriation of numerous Sri Lankan individuals who had fallen victim to human trafficking and were stranded in Myanmar.

Furthermore, the Sri Lankan Ambassador expressed the need for ongoing support and close cooperation between the authorities of Myanmar and Sri Lanka to effectively address the challenges posed by illegal migration and human trafficking.

In a recent development, the Myanmar authorities successfully rescued six Sri Lankan individuals who had fallen victim to human trafficking and were stranded in Myanmar. These individuals were promptly handed over to the Sri Lanka Embassy in Yangon for their repatriation to Sri Lanka. After being identified as victims of an organised trafficking network operating in Southeast Asian countries, they were safely repatriated to Colombo via Bangkok, thanks to a Sri Lankan Airlines flight on 25 May of this year.

The repatriation process was facilitated and supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Eden Myanmar Foundation.

The Sri Lankan Ambassador Janaka Bandara engaged in a comprehensive discussion with the Myanmar junta's Deputy Prime Minister, addressing various pressing matters related to human trafficking, money laundering, and cyber-crimes. The discussion also explored opportunities to strengthen cooperation between the two nations in combating these critical issues.

In a similar incident, Indonesian officials reported in early May of this year that they had successfully rescued 20 Indonesian nationals who were trafficked to Myanmar as part of a cyber scam, amidst a rise in human trafficking cases in Southeast Asia.

According to a statement from Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Ministry, their embassy in Yangon, with the assistance of local networks, effectively liberated the victims from Myawaddy township and safely transported them to the Thai border. They closely collaborated with Thai authorities to facilitate the repatriation of the victims back to Indonesia.

# MYANMAR BORDER TRADE FALLS AMID TIGHTER RESTRICTIONS



Muse border gate. Photo: AFP

**M**yanmar border trade merchants say that trade fell in the first two months of this FY 2023-24 because of tighter restrictions on border trade.

After the new policy of mandatory exchange of earnings from export in border trade to the prescribed limit to Myanmar Kyats was imposed by the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), the export of rice and broken rice to China at the Muse border trade post has been stopped for nearly three months since March this year.

Previously daily trade value at this Muse border trade post was nearly US\$15 million and it was between US\$5 to 6 million during the COVID-19 pandemic but now it has fallen to just over US\$3 million a day.

In this new fiscal year from 1 April to 19 May, the total trade value from sea trade and border trade is over US\$1,590 million and it was over US\$2,030 million in the corresponding period of last fiscal year.

In the import sector in this fiscal year until 19 May, the trade value is over US\$2,440 million and it was over US\$2,040 million in the last fiscal in corresponding period so that it was over US\$400 million more than the same fiscal period last year.

Business persons commented that the increase in imports suggested more imports of electric vehicles and accessories for these EVs.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, fishery products, livestock and livestock products, metal and minerals, finished products of the manufacturing sector and CMP garment products. It imports EVs and accessories, general merchandise, pharmaceutical products, cement, fertilizers and capital goods.



# MYANMAR RICE PRICES RISING IN DOMESTIC MARKET



Photo: Caelen Cockrun

**P**rices of rice in Myanmar are continuing to rise in the wake of Cyclone Mocha as people are hoarding supplies and the export of rice is still permitted.

The price of rice is still at a high level with 120,000 Kyat per bag (50 Kg) for Shwebo Pawsan, 100,000 Kyat per bag for other high-quality rice, and 85,000 Kyat per bag for low quality rice.

Rice merchants say these prices are 30% higher than at the beginning of May.

Moreover, some rice mills reduced their milling capacity because of frequent power outages so that the supply of rice in the market was also reduced, the rice millers said.

The Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) said that the current prices of rice rose by 30% to 90% compared with prices last year depending on the variety.

Some rice merchants said that the rice price was soaring and chaotic in the market because some merchants were hoarding hundreds of thousands of rice bags and they were being sold at the high prices in the market.

The MRF said a rice storage and warehouse registration system will be implemented within a few

months to control hoarding and speculation in the market.

MRF will implement this system in which the rice mills, rice merchants and rice retailers must register with MRF if they store more than 50 tonnes of rice or over 5,000 baskets (46 lbs) of paddy in their warehouses.

The neighbouring countries including Thailand use this “National Storage Capacity” system in which the accurate data of rice storage is recorded.

The Military Council exported 2.26 million tonnes of rice in the last fiscal year 2022-23 and earned US\$856 million from the rice export.

The Military Council plans to export 2.5 million tonnes of rice this fiscal year and expects the export revenue to bring in US\$1 billion.

Rice acreage and cultivation drastically fell this year as the junta launched their military operations in major rice growing areas and they destroyed many paddy fields and cultivation. Some rice merchants said that the price of rice was soaring in the domestic market as the junta was planning to export more rice though the rice acreage and production drastically fell.

# SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY REMAINS CHALLENGING: IMF



Protest in Sri Lanka. Photo: AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's economy showed "tentative signs of improvement" but recovery remains challenging and Colombo must pursue painful reforms, the IMF said Friday last week.

The International Monetary Fund's Deputy Managing Director Kenji Okamura said the country was emerging from its unprecedented crisis thanks to reforms including the doubling of taxes, spending cuts and the scrapping of subsidies.

A currency crisis since late 2021 led to severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines and triggered months of protests that led to the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July.

"The current economic crisis has its genesis in policy missteps aggravated by external shocks," Okamura said in a statement Friday, after meeting President Ranil Wickremesinghe and other leaders on Wednesday.

"We discussed the importance of fiscal measures, in particular revenue measures, for a return to macroeconomic stability."

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April last year, and is still negotiating with its bilateral and private creditors on repayments.

"The economic recovery remains challenging," Okamura added.

"Now, more than ever, it is essential to contin-

ue the reform momentum under strong ownership by both the authorities and the Sri Lankan people".

Wickremesinghe, speaking to the nation on Thursday night, vowed to press ahead with restructuring loss-making state enterprises despite resistance from trade unions.

"Rebuilding a bankrupt nation cannot be achieved by using traditional methods," Wickremesinghe said. "We must adopt a fresh approach and embark on a new journey of transformation."

He said the state oil company, the electricity utility and national carrier Sri Lankan Airlines made losses of more than \$1.32 billion in 2021, adding a huge burden on the island's 22 million population.

Wickremesinghe's new government secured a \$2.9 billion bailout from the IMF in March under a 48-month programme that commits Colombo to painful reforms.

Foreign debt restructuring was held up as the country's main bilateral creditor, China, was initially reluctant to take a haircut and instead offered more loans to pay off old debts.

Just over \$14 billion of the total foreign credit is bilateral debt to foreign governments, 52 percent of which is owed to China.

AFP

# ADANI PORTS' PROFITS IMPACTED BY MYANMAR PORT SALE, BUT REVENUE SURGE OFFERS RESILIENCE

Indian port operator and logistics company Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd, a subsidiary of the Adani Group, announced on 30 May that its fourth-quarter profit was affected by losses resulting from the sale of a port project in Myanmar, reported Indian Express.

India's private port operator reported a 5.1 percent increase in net profit at 11.59 billion rupees (US\$140 million) from a year ago, while its revenue from operations surged nearly 40 percent.

However, the profit was affected by losses resulting from the sale of a port project in Myanmar.

Earlier this month, Adani Ports disclosed that it had sold its Myanmar port, which had faced sanctions, for \$30 million, hugely lower than its investment in the project.

The company announced that the sale consideration was adjusted from US\$260 million, leading to huge losses.



## HINDU FESTIVAL

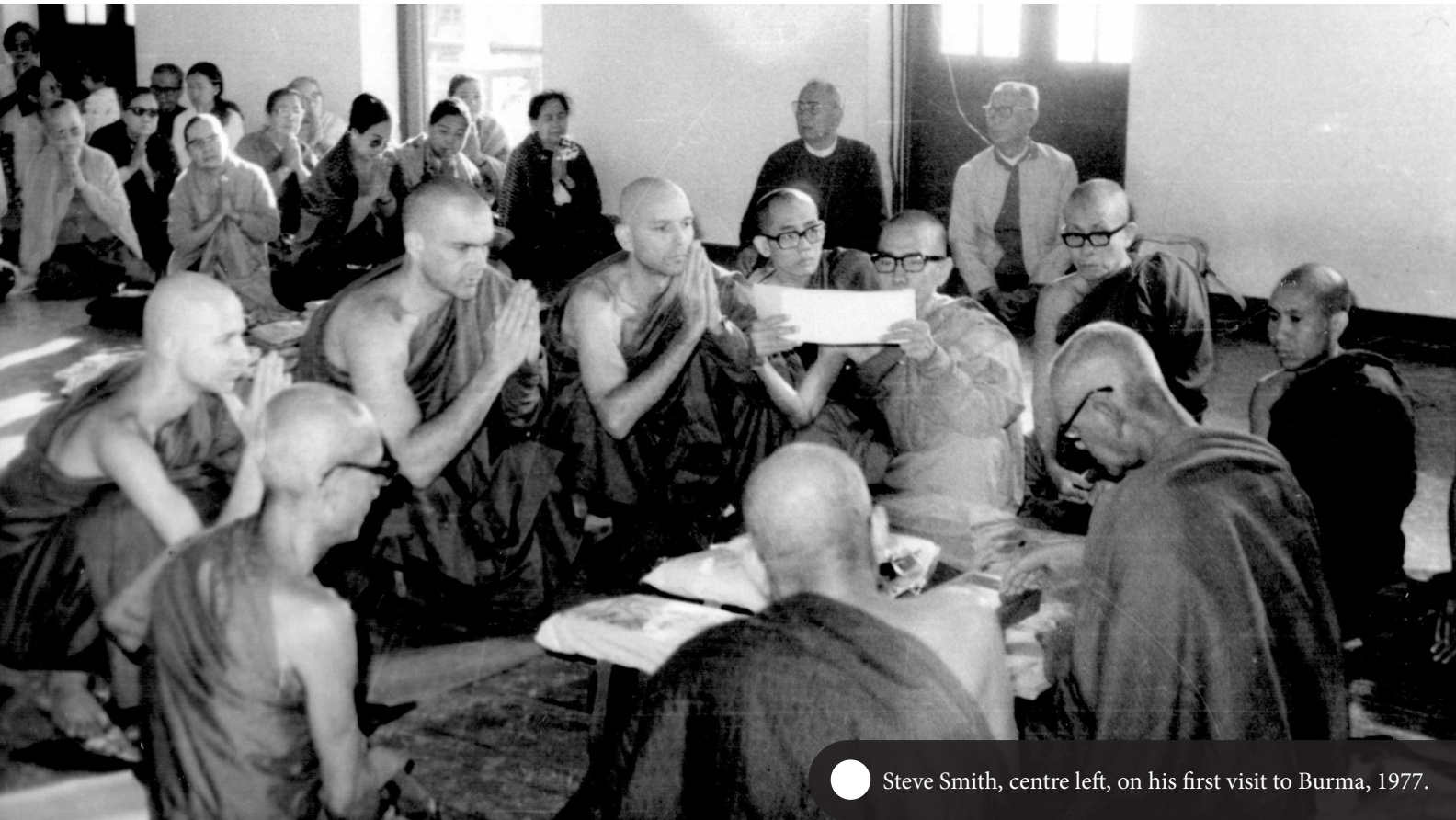
**H**indu devotees with their pierced cheeks arrive to walk on burning coal during the firewalk festival in Yangon on May 28.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



# 'BURMA'S GREATEST GIFT TO THE WORLD HAS BEEN THE DHAMMA'



Steve Smith, centre left, on his first visit to Burma, 1977.

*Insight Myanmar talks to American Steve Smith on a lifetime quest*

**B**urma is caught between two stools. On the one hand, the country has been trampled under the boots of the generals for decades. Yet, on the other hand, the Buddhist Dhamma has offered the Burmese and a few lucky foreigners a path to salvation.

One foreigner who entrusted himself to the Buddhist path is American Steve Smith.

Steve's first meditation teacher was Mahasi Sayadaw. He visited the Sayadaw's rural Seikkhun monastery back in 1977. Steve was moved by how the great teacher embodied centuries of monastic wisdom and discipline, while at the same time making great strides to spread the teachings beyond the monastic order—an unprecedented act at that time.

"The feeling around him was vastness and void. This radiating presence and emptiness at the

same time. It was indescribable, but very powerful, kind of a goosebump energy."

Several years later, the country started allowing longer stays for foreign meditators, and Steve went to Bodghaya to undertake lower ordination under the renowned teacher, Taungpulu Sayadaw, before becoming a full bhikkhu under Mahasi Sayadaw.

"He was just as I remembered him, this incredible presence, sense of vastness and yet transparent personality, like no sense of self-centeredness or self-importance or anything but this pure transmission of these liberating teachings." After a brief trip home, Steve returned to ordain under Sayadaw U Pandita, whom he had been drawn to from their first meeting. Although U Pandita didn't teach many foreigners at that time, he dedicated himself to Steve's training, and the results were profound.

“I felt like there was nothing he couldn’t see about me.... I trusted this person quite quickly, more than I had ever trusted anyone in my life.” Beyond U Pandita’s powerful meditation guidance, Steve also gained inspiration by observing the Sayadaw’s interactions in society. Steve relates such an example, when U Pandita turned his back to Khin Nyunt, the dreaded chief of military intelligence, when the latter was trying to offer him requisites.

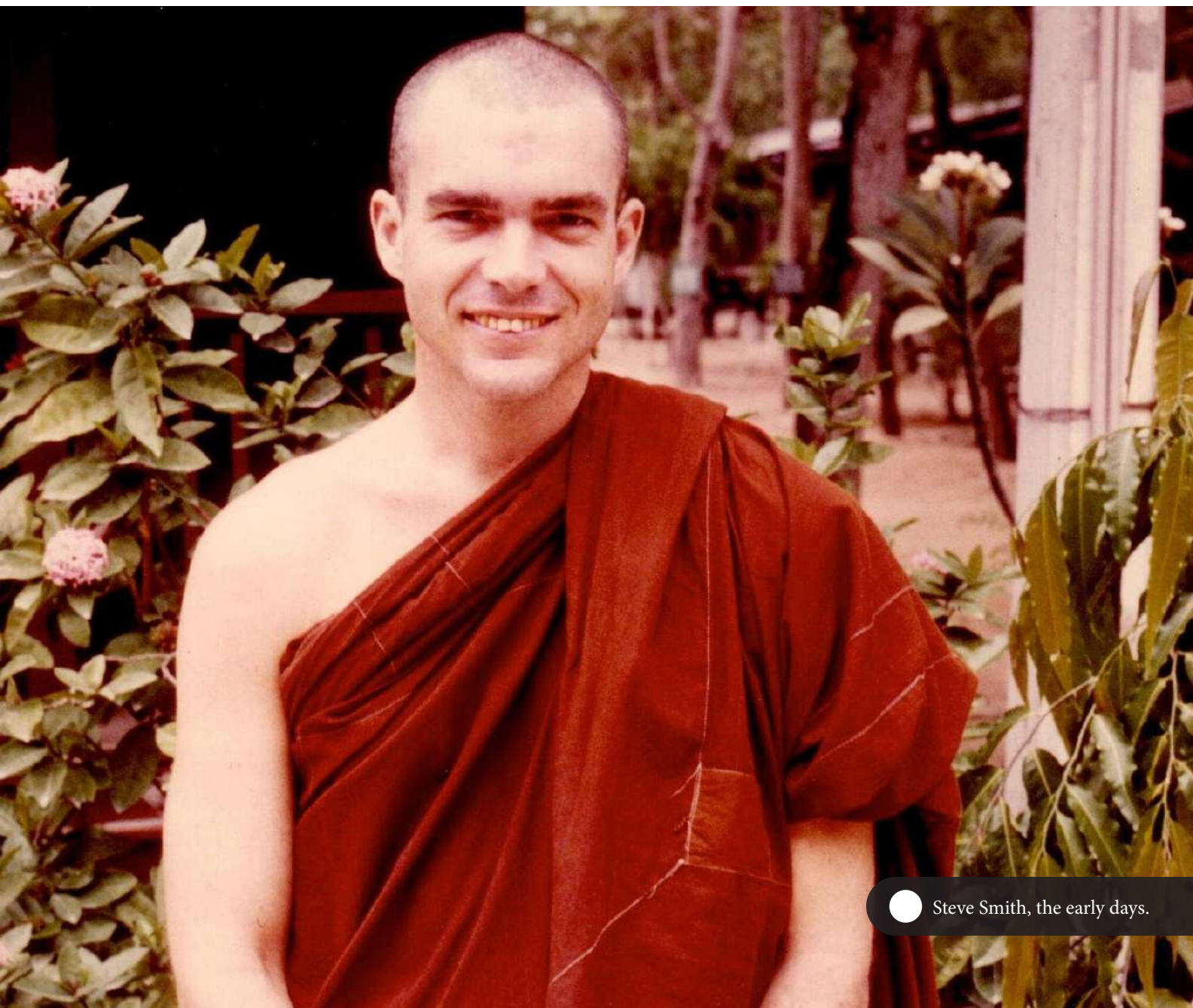
U Pandita was also Aung San Suu Kyi’s primary meditation guide. Since they shared the same teacher, Steve developed a close friendship with her and her family. But because of this friendship, the military had blacklisted Steve from returning to the country for many years. However, when Sayadaw U Pandita passed away in 2016, Steve was allowed to

join a small handful of foreign disciples who traveled to Yangon for the ceremony.

The gifts of Myanmar have filled Steve’s life in ways he never would have anticipated. “I think Burma’s great gift to the world has been the Dhamma, either directly through these ordained monastics, or in the way it’s influenced nearby Southeast Asian countries. It’s inspired this Western surge of interest in Dhamma practice and training.”

In the first of a series of interviews, Steve Smith talks to Insight Myanmar about his spiritual journey and the gift of Dhamma that Burma has for the world:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/5/19/steve-smith-part-1>



Steve Smith, the early days.



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