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NEW UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MYANMAR FACES TOUGH TASK

A sigh of relief greeted news last week that the United Nations Special Envoy for Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, would be stepping down after an 18-month tenure. During her time as envoy for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Heyzer faced criticism from both the military junta and its opponents.

Myanmar has been in a state of turmoil since the military seized power in February 2021, leading to conflicts with anti-coup fighters and ethnic rebel groups.

Despite diplomatic efforts by the UN and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), attempts to resolve the crisis and curb the violence unleashed by the coup have been unsuccessful. Heyzer, a Singaporean sociologist, was appointed as the envoy by Guterres in October 2021. Her contract concluded on 12 June, and Guterres expressed gratitude for her tireless efforts on behalf of peace and the people of Myanmar. A spokesman for Guterres stated that a new envoy would be appointed to replace Heyzer.

Heyzer's replacement faces a tough call – assuming a replacement will be brought in. The replacement will have to deal with the schism over how to handle Myanmar crisis diplomacy.

Heyzer's main role was to encourage the Myanmar junta to engage in political dialogue with its opponents and put an end to the violent crackdown that followed the overthrow of Aung San Suu Kyi's government. In August of the previous year, Heyzer visited Myanmar and met with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and other high-ranking military officials. However, human rights groups criticized this move, claiming that it lent legitimacy to the generals, with alarm voiced over her suggestion of "power sharing". Heyzer was not granted a meeting with detained democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi, which further strained relations with the junta. Later, junta officials accused her of issuing a biased statement regarding their discussions. Heyzer subsequently declared that she would not return to Myanmar unless she was allowed to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, who has since been imprisoned for a total of 33 years by a closed-door junta court, effectively a life sentence.

The big bugbear for critics was a failure to accord status to the

opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and other related resistance organizations who effectively, in one form or another, claim to represent the people and the civilian government kicked out of power. If the UN recognizes the coup was illegal, the argument has been made that they need to accept that the NUG and other aligned actors deserve recognition diplomatically.

Last week, the irony of Heyzer publicly meeting with the NUG Foreign Minister was not lost on Myanmar analysts – essentially too little, too late as Heyzer walks off the stage.

All this said, Heyzer was faced with Mission Impossible, an envoy for the UN that has not handled the Myanmar issue well, troubled by there being two active envoys – Heyzer and Tom Andrews – the latter firing angry salvos against the junta virtually every month.

So, will a new envoy representing the UN Secretary General be brought in? Let's wait and see.

Three NGOs - Chin Human Rights Organisation, Karen Peace Support Network and Progressive Voice - have publicly called on the UN Secretary General to take responsibility himself and not to appoint another special envoy.

With a security, rights and humanitarian crisis underway in Myanmar, a new UN Special Envoy would need to be decisive and engage with all parties – particularly in the wake of Cyclone Mocha and the monsoon bearing down on the country. A number of key UN and other international aid initiatives are facing hold-ups or delays. If the UN, WFP, EU and others make efforts to work with the NUG and other related political and humanitarian organizations, there may be a better chance of delivering aid to those in need.

This, however, is a tough call. Foreign diplomats no doubt have their reservations over how they can deliver aid to both sides – through junta channels, or at least with junta permission, and on the other side, through non-governmental and opposition channels. This is easier said than done.

If a new UN Special Envoy is appointed, they need to be more inclusive and balanced in their approach.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

Editor In-Chief and Managing Director
Soe Myint

Contributors

Sai Wansai,
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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

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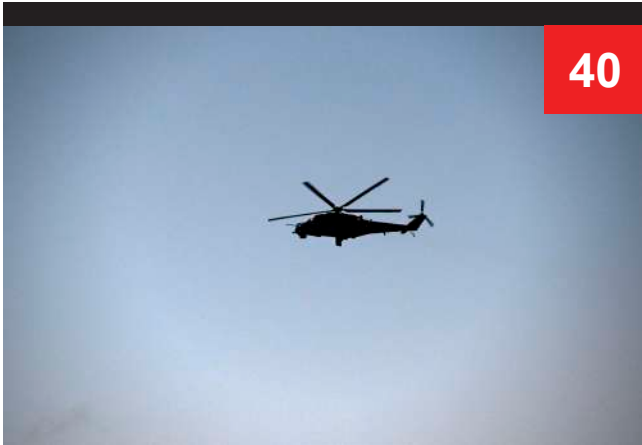
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Cover photo by Mitchell Ng Liang

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IN FOCUS





TAKING THE BALL

Myanmar's Zin Moe Pyae (L) and Nepal's Sunita Bhutan fight for the ball during the AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup 2024 football match between Myanmar and Nepal at the Thuwanna Football Stadium in Yangon on June 6.

Photo: AFP

UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHETHER A NEW CYCLONE WILL HIT MYANMAR

As low pressure builds in the Bay of Bengal, there appears to be uncertainty whether another cyclone is about to hit Myanmar as meteorologists ponder over predictions.

Independent meteorologist Win Naing told DVB that a new cyclone may hit Myanmar on 9 June.

He told DVB that a tropical depression could form in the Bay of Bengal on 6 June, and gradually strengthen into a cyclonic storm, which would move towards the western coast of Burma achieving wind speeds of 66 mph on 7 June. Win Naing predicts it will become a severe cyclonic storm on 8 June and reach wind speeds from 95 to 118 mph, making landfall between Sittwe and the Bangladesh border on 9 June.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology reports the southwest monsoon is likely to set in the Central Myanmar area during 1 to 5 June and the whole country during 6 to 10 June. A low-pressure area may form over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal and its may further intensify into a

depression. During this period, the monsoon will be moderate to strong. Weather will be partly cloudy to cloudy over the North Bay and Central Bay of Bengal.

According to the live meteorological chart on the weekend, the main depression appeared to moving towards Yangon and the southern panhandle of Myanmar – unlike the recent Cyclone Mocha that hit Rakhine State and other areas of northwest Myanmar.

According to Myanmar's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, rain or thundershowers will be above normal in Naypyitaw, Mandalay, Magway, Tanintharyi Regions and (Southern & Eastern) Shan, Chin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon States, below normal in Sagaing Region and Kachin State and about normal in Bago, Yangon, Ayeyarwady Regions and Northern Shan, Rakhine States.

Humanitarian aid donors have expressed concern to speed up aid delivery to people badly affected by Cyclone Mocha, particularly to supply material for shelters.

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.

BOMB EXPLOSION AT DOWNTOWN YANGON TAX OFFICE

The Brave Eagles Urban Guerrilla group detonated a bomb at the Internal Revenue Department's Tax Office on Pansodan Street in downtown Yangon at 12:15 p.m. on 5 June.

According to the Brave Eagles, the explosion injured the Deputy Chief officer of the Revenue Department, three employees and two people paying taxes.

"I was shocked at how loud the explosion was. There were injured people including the Deputy Chief Officer, staff and civilians. The explosion occurred on the third floor. According to what I've heard, one of them is in a critical condition. The rest are receiving care at the hospital", said a local resident.

The injured were taken to Yangon General Hospital by ambulance.

The leader of the Brave Eagles, Ko Aung Myin, said to Mizzima: "Two citizens paying tax were affected. We have been telling people not to go into

junta-affiliated areas for a long time. I feel awful for the two citizens."

The condition of the six people injured in the blast is currently unknown.

Ko Aung Myin said: "We conducted this mission because we want to prove that we dare to enter their [the junta's] places, like the Tax Revenue Office, to complete our missions. We also want to send a warning to employees not taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) who currently work for the Military Council."

The injured Deputy Chief Officer was not taking part in the CDM movement.

Following the explosion Pansodan Street was closed from Maha Bandula Road to Strand Road. Roadblocks were also set up on Merchant Road.

This was not the first attack on the tax office. On 7 January 2022, three explosions at the office killed a Chief Officer.

CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE BEING EXPORTED VIA MYANMAR PORTS

Production of methamphetamine increased in Myanmar last year and exporters of crystal methamphetamine are starting to use direct sea routes rather than going through neighbouring countries, according to a recent UNODC report.

According to the report, Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia, Latest Developments and Challenges, in 2022 seizures of methamphetamine increased in Myanmar. It says that the centre of methamphetamine production is Shan State.

According to UNODC analysis, the number of methamphetamine tablets produced by small armed groups and militias in Shan State increased by 26 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. The previous year it had already increased by 13 per cent.

The report also noted a difference in trafficking patterns in 2022, compared to previous years.

The main markets for methamphetamine pills are China, Lao PDR, and Thailand, all countries adjacent to Shan State, so extensive smuggling networks are not necessary to export the pills.

Conversely, the main market for crystal methamphetamine is abroad. Before, smugglers used routes through neighbouring countries such as Thai-

land, to export crystal methamphetamine to an international market. In previous years crystal methamphetamine coming from Myanmar was seized in western Thailand, but in 2022 seizures in western Thailand were 9.7 tons, less than half the 22.1 tons seized in 2021 and the lowest annual seizure since 2017.

UNODC says that this drop in seizures is because smugglers are now directly exporting crystal methamphetamine from Myanmar ports to international markets.

The report says that "in 2022 organized crime groups in Myanmar increasingly targeted the southern areas of Myanmar for the transportation of large quantities of crystal methamphetamine."

Despite this diversification of routes, the report warns that "organised crime groups continued to attempt to traffic large shipments of crystal methamphetamine from Shan into Thailand through various routes."



Photo: Mitchell Ng Liang

THE INDIA-MYANMAR CONUNDRUM

Why India shocks Spring Revolutionaries in cozying up to the brutal Myanmar junta

Myanmar's Spring Revolutionaries may be right in questioning the Indian government's multifaceted relationship with Myanmar's brutal military junta, given the crisis the country has been plunged into since the February 2021 coup.

India has long been a friend of the Myanmar people. Yet current relations may raise serious concerns.

In an interview that follows, entitled: "India's interests and misperceptions about Myanmar," democracy activist Igor Blazevic talks with Angshuman Choudhury, Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, in an attempt to gain insight into modern-day India-Myanmar relations and how Myanmar's Spring Revolutionaries or resistance forces should view the situation and how they should handle it.

Before we plunge into this interesting interview, it is helpful to consider an overview of the history of India-Myanmar relations.

India and Burma share a long and complex history of diplomatic, cultural and economic relations.

The two neighbouring countries have maintained a multifaceted relationship that has evolved over time, shaped by geographical proximity, historical ties, and strategic interests – both countries emerging when they became independent in 1947 and 1948 respectively.

India's relationship with Burma can be traced back to ancient times when cultural and religious exchanges took place between the two regions. The spread of Buddhism from India to Burma in the 3rd century BCE created a strong spiritual bond between the two nations that continues to this day, with many Burmese going on pilgrimage to the seat of Buddhism in Bodh Gaya in India. Additionally, the shared border has facilitated trade and people-to-people interactions, fostering a sense of cultural affinity.

In the modern era, India's relationship with Burma has been characterized by a mix of cooperation and occasional challenges. Geopolitically, both countries recognize the importance of maintaining stable and friendly ties. India has consistently supported

Burma's political and economic reforms, while also expressing concerns over issues related to democracy, human rights, and ethnic conflicts.

Economic relations play a crucial role in India-Burma ties. India has become one of Burma's key trading partners and a significant investor in various sectors, including oil and gas, power, infrastructure, and agriculture. Bilateral trade has seen steady growth, and both countries have been exploring ways to enhance economic cooperation further. Additionally, India has extended lines of credit and development assistance to support Burma's socio-economic development, aiming to strengthen ties on multiple fronts.

Security cooperation is another important aspect of India's relations with Burma. Both countries face common challenges, such as cross-border insurgency, drug trafficking, and illegal migration, a situation strained more recently when thousands of Myanmar refugees escaped into India. Thus, they have initiated joint efforts to enhance border security and intelligence sharing. Regular high-level visits and military exchanges have further contributed to building trust and cooperation in the security domain.

However, the relationship between India and Burma is not without its challenges, particularly in the wake of the 2021 Myanmar military coup. The Rohingya crisis, for instance, has strained ties due to India's differing approach from the international community regarding the treatment of Rohingya refugees. Additionally, the border areas continue to witness sporadic conflicts involving various ethnic armed groups, which can impact bilateral relations. The Myanmar conflict even occasionally spills over into India, though Delhi tries to keep its cool.

In conclusion, India's relations with Burma are multifaceted, encompassing economic, political, cultural, and security aspects. Both countries recognize the importance of maintaining a stable and friendly relationship and have made efforts to enhance cooperation. While challenges exist, the shared history, geographical proximity, and strategic interests continue to shape and strengthen the ties between India and Burma.

India's interests and misperceptions about Myanmar

What Spring Revolution civil society can do to be heard by India's policymakers

In the following interview, Igor Blazevic talks with Angshuman Choudhury, Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

Angshuman Choudhury is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. He is also a member of the Indo-Pacific Circle. Prior to this, he was a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, where he coordinated the South East Asia Research Programme. Angshuman primarily works on Myanmar, Northeast India, Southeast Asia, Indian foreign policy, and patterns of armed conflict. He has additional interests in identity, citizenship regimes, and forced displacement, with focus on Assam and Rakhine State. Angshuman is himself from Assam, and is currently based in New Delhi.

Igor: India and Russia are the countries that are most unapologetically engaging and supporting the Myanmar's junta. It is clear why Putin's Russia supports junta. It is more confusing why India, a neighbour, shows so much disregard to the suffering and will of the Myanmar people. Angshuman, can we start by outlining the main drivers of Indian policy of support to the Myanmar junta? What are the long term strategic interests and more immediate concerns?

Angshuman Choudhury: For me it is not a surprise that India is engaging and working closely with the junta after the coup. If you look at Indian policy towards Myanmar over the last 20 to 25 years, especially after early 1990s, India has always followed the philosophy of working closely with whoever is in control of Naypyidaw, be it the military or civilian government. In addition, India has a very long history of working closely with the Myanmar military. There is a path dependency of working with the military.

Interests that drive India's foreign policy in Myanmar can be summarized into three points which are border security, balancing China and economic and commercial interests.

The core driving philosophy is that, it is the Myanmar military that will be able to ensure all these three points for India. It's a Myanmar military that can ensure the security and stability of the 1,600-kilometer-long India-Myanmar border.

It's engagement with the Myanmar military that will help India balance China. It's engagement with the military that will help India advance its economic and commercial interests in Myanmar. The main thrust in Delhi is that, if we have to ensure all these three points then we have to work with the Myanmar military.

Until 1988 India was very supportive of pro-democracy forces in Myanmar. After 1988, the Myanmar military began to use the border to put pressure on India to reverse its policy. Myanmar military allowed Indian insurgents to take shelter inside Myanmar along the border regions. India started to believe that if it continues to support pro-democracy forces the Myanmar military will continue to disturb India by using Indian insurgents. So, they decided in Delhi to change policy and start working with the Myanmar military.

All this became even more pronounced because of China's rise over the last ten years. India feels threatened by rising Chinese influence in its own neighborhood. India is especially worried because of expanding Chinese influence through the Belt and Road Initiative, which includes a major north-south connectivity component in Myanmar. This has created an even stronger imperative to build a close relationship with whoever is in power in Naypyidaw in the recent past.

Igor: However, since the attempted but failed coup, India's approach you're describing looks increasingly paradoxical. We see junta having less and less control and plunging the whole country into chaos. And at the same time India is betting more and more on the junta as someone who can secure key Indian interests. How do you explain that there is a such a little understanding of the real developments in Myanmar?

Angshuman Choudhury: You are right, there is a serious paradox. I have written a lot about this in my articles that even from India's strategic point of view it doesn't make sense to work with the Myanmar military. India is doing this because the foreign policy psyche of New Delhi is stuck in the 1990s. They believe that although Myanmar military might not be in control of large swathes of territory at the moment, it will even-



India continues to look east. Photo: Big G Media

tually regain control. That's why in Delhi they believe that they need to bet on the military. There is no other more dominant force in the country. In the past, there has been resistance against the military but ultimately the military has always prevailed. The military is seen as a winning horse. The government in New Delhi fails to understand that today the situation is very different from the past.

There is also one more reason. Over the last decade the Indian establishment, particularly the (PM Narendra) Modi government, has built a very close relationship with the Myanmar military. Modi met Min Aung Hlaing on at least three occasions and that all happened during a civilian administration in Myanmar. We have also seen the Indian army chief and National Security Advisor visiting Myanmar. We have seen military exercise between the Indian and Myanmar Navies. The Indian and the Myanmar armies have conducted joint operations along the border. This is what I call path dependency. A big chunk of the Delhi's policy toward Myanmar is created not in the foreign ministry but in the defense and security establishment, by the national security advisors and the military chiefs. That explains this tilt towards the military.

Igor: In the current situation it does not look very probable that it is possible to continue with big infrastructural projects such as Kaladan Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral highway project. However, India is still ready to make a big fanfare about ongoing implementation. How is such disregard of reality possible?

Angshuman Choudhury: Believe it or not, the establishment in Delhi doesn't have enough information about what's going on inside Myanmar. Despite all its foreign intelligence and analysis capabilities it

does not have enough information, or even if it does, it tends to under read the information and to underemphasize the extent of the revolution. This is why the establishment in Delhi thinks that the military can still prevail.

Regarding Kaladan, India knows very well that the last stretch of the Kaladan project, the stretch from Paletwa to Kalewa, is out of Myanmar military's control. India knows that it's the CNF (Chin National Front) and the AA (Arakan Army) that have control over this patch of territory and India does not expect that road to be completed anytime soon. The only reason why India is still taking this project forward by inaugurating the Sittwe port is because it wants to send a message to the outside world and especially to China, that it has good relations with the Myanmar military and that it can get things going on the ground despite the coup. The target audience of photos of inaugurating the Sittwe port are not the Myanmar people, it's China.

Igor: Is Hindu nationalism playing any role in influencing Indian policy? One can imagine that there is affinity between the type of nationalism which is the core of Modi government and BJP party and the Bama Buddhist chauvinism. Is there any ideological affinity which is making the Modi government closer to the Myanmar military than to the democratic movement?

Angshuman Choudhury: Unlike many of my colleagues who study foreign policy, I do believe that ideology plays a key role in foreign policy. One cannot discount political ideology while understanding a country's foreign policy. The Hindu nationalist ideology plays a part. But it's a complex mix of both interests based foreign policy and ideological affinity. This ideological affinity is both cultural alignment between Hindu



Indian PM Narendra Modi continues to Act East. Photo: AFP



India's interests in/with Myanmar

1. Border security
2. Balancing China
3. Economic & commercial interests

nationalism and Bama nationalism, but also ideology of hyper nationalistic, militaristic nationalism. It's both cultural and political nationalism that we are seeing at play. Good example is when at a recent meeting of radical Hindu nationalist clerics in northern India, one of them framed the violence inflicted on the Rohingya in Myanmar as a positive example of what should be done to the Muslims in India. Besides this, there is a subtle but unmistakable tilt towards an autocratic style of governance within the highest levels of the Modi government in Delhi. That is also something that cannot be denied.

Igor: Is Akhand Bharat ideology influencing the BJP approach to Myanmar in any significant way?

Angshuman Choudhury: For those who don't know, Akhand Bharat literally translates to "undivided India" or "greater India". This is a ridiculous fantasy of the Hindutva nationalist movement, an irredentist fantasy much like Vladimir Putin's idea of a greater Russian motherland. It is a movement to reclaim what they believe is lost Hindu land which includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, probably Myanmar as well. However, I wouldn't say this ideology is really influencing the current government's policy towards Myanmar.

Igor: India's support for the junta become more explicit over the past year and it seems that overlaps with the arrival of the new Indian ambassador, H.E. Vinay Kumar. Did he arrive with instructions to be more active in relations with junta? Or have some other factors triggered a more active engagement of India? Or is this also a consequence of some personal ambition of ambassador Kumar?

Angshuman Choudhury: It's impossible for me to confirm whether ambassador Vinay Kumar has any personal ambitions or interests. Generally speaking, Indian foreign policy and any kind of policy making has become very, very centralized. The ambassador cannot do anything without a directive from Delhi.

And there is a belief in Delhi that now we need to up the engagement with the Myanmar military given the Chinese threat. So yes, there has been a clear shift from cautious engagement to diplomatic normalization after ambassador Vinay Kumar took charge. However, my understanding is that the directive came from the establishment in New Delhi.

If you compare the 2021 visit of the previous

foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Myanmar, it was quite different from the visit of the current foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra in November 2022. In the 2021 visit, the foreign secretary met Min Aung Hlaing, but he also met members of the civil society, many of whom are very pro-democracy. The press statement that came out from India after the visit talked about democracy, about releasing political prisoners and it was a very long press release. In 2022, it was a very short press release, and there was no mention of restoration of democracy, no call to release political prisoners, no call for cessation of violence. The only focus was on economic and strategic interests. The foreign secretary did not meet anyone from the civil society. He only met Min Aung Hlaing, Wunna Maung Lwin and other senior junta leaders.

Igor: What can Myanmar civil society and Spring Revolution activists can do to be heard by India's policymakers? Can the Modi government be influenced by either Myanmar's vox populi or by the advocacy groups and the NUG?

Angshuman Choudhury: I wouldn't be very hopeful given the sort of staunch thinking in India in terms of engagement with the junta. But that doesn't mean that we should just sit and do nothing. The key advocacy message from Myanmar civil society should be that the Indian government needs to bet on the revolution and not the Myanmar military, if India wants to secure its own strategic and economic interests in Myanmar.

That should be argued by highlighting that it's the revolutionary forces that command the popular legitimacy in Myanmar. India claims in every statement that it wants to work for the benefit of the people. So, it is necessary to convince the government in New Delhi that if they really want to work for the people than they have got to do it through the revolutionary forces, through the NUG, NUCC and the various civil society organizations and not through the Myanmar military. It should be stressed that if they continue to work through the Myanmar military, they won't be able to achieve their objectives in the short, medium or long term.

The other important thing would be to ensure that there is a regular flow of information into both the Indian government and non-government circles, including think tanks, civil society, and the academic and media communities in Delhi. Which means, organizing not just closed-door briefings but also public briefings. This would require Myanmar's civil society groups to create linkages with Indian civil society groups so that they can also take up their cause and advocate.

The think tank community in Delhi is very important, because most of the think tank community in Delhi is pro government. So, if you get through to this community, you also get through to the government in a way. The focus has to be on that.

Igor: What about the media? What would be your advice on how to work with the media?

Angshuman Choudhury: Indian media as you must have seen is not very interested in Myanmar. Despite the fact that there's a huge coup and political crisis right next door. They are only interested in Myanmar when certain big events happen or when China gets involved. For example, after the recent Chatham House report on the Great Coco Island, a lot reports about Myanmar appeared in Indian media.

Igor: Many in Myanmar intellectual political circles look into the Indian federal constitution as something that is useful inspiration for the Myanmar federalism. Can exchanges with Indian experts and learning about the Indian constitution and federal model be a venue to create links and engagement between Myanmar civil and political society with Indian counterparts?

Angshuman Choudhury: It can be one of pivots to convince the Indian government that they need to bet on the right side. We know that there has been a serious democratic backslide in India. However, the Indian government still believes in "selling" the Indian variant of federal democracy to the outside world. The Indian political establishment is very much proud of the fact that India has a federal democratic tradition. What it does at home is probably entirely different but in its outward image it likes to project India as a very proud democratic nation. So yes, that definitely is a good pitch.

Igor: What about the Mizoram state government?

Angshuman Choudhury: I'm glad you raised this question about Mizoram. The Mizoram state government has been very supportive of the revolution in Myanmar, particularly in Chin State. The Mizoram chief minister has actually strongly stood his ground in supporting the refugees from Chin State. Working with the Mizoram government would also be a good way

to affect attitude shifts in New Delhi. But the caveat is that the Mizoram government doesn't have too much political leverage in the broader federal structure. That also needs to be kept in mind.

Igor: What about Members of Parliament? Can MPs be the entry point for advocacy, either from the BJP side or from the opposition side?

Angshuman Choudhury: It's better to start with BJP Members of Parliament. The BJP is the ruling party and if you will manage to influence the BJP MPs, you would probably manage to shift the foreign policy to some extent.

Igor: What are the chances to mobilize Indian people support for the Myanmar people? Is there a possibility to wake up the interest of the ordinary public toward the Myanmar, and how to do that?

Angshuman Choudhury: This would be very difficult. The general public interest in India on Myanmar is unfortunately very low. I would recommend to focus on the three pillars mentioned before. One is media, very important. Number two, civil society organizations. Number three, the think-tank community. This needs to be three-prong strategy of public diplomacy and information campaign, using these three anchors or pivots.

Igor: When the Myanmar military bombed the Chin army base some bombs hit Indian territory as well. The Indian reaction has been pretty muted. Why did the Indian government not take the incident more seriously?

Angshuman Choudhury: Delhi doesn't believe that complaining about one specific incident is more important than destroying its relationship with the Myanmar military. In the cost benefit analysis in Delhi's mind, maintaining a good bilateral relationship



India was engaged with Myanmar during the National League for Democracy-led government's tenure. Photo: AFP

with the Myanmar military is more important than creating noise over what they see as a minor incident that can be managed easily. While that was a very serious breach of Indian sovereignty and territory, Delhi was very cautious and said that the bomb landed on the river bed which is technically no man's land. They tried to cleverly manage the incident.

Igor: The NUG has representatives in India. How do you assess the NUG approach to the Indian government and to the Indian public?

Angshuman Choudhury: The NUG needs to be more active and I say that as friendly advice. It needs to have a more aggressive public diplomacy campaign in India. It needs to be more visible. One concern amongst Indian policymakers and pro-government people is that they keep talking about the fact that there is no leader of the revolution, unlike in the previous phase where there was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The NUG needs to persuade Indian policymakers that this is a revolution which has a strong, credible and sophisticated leadership. There is a need to explain there are strong debates and constitutional framework behind the revolution and the NUG.

Igor: Do you have any more concrete knowledge about the weapons which Indian government or state-owned companies are providing to Myanmar junta? There is a lot of fog around arms sales. The Indian side is always using the argument that all those deliveries were commissioned before the coup.

Angshuman Choudhury: Yes, officially Indian government says that whatever weapons have been transferred after the coup, the deals were signed before the coup. I am not convinced about that. I believe the Indian government is not being truthful about everything. I have filed public information requests (RTI) to the Indian government to tell us when the deals are signed and what are the details.

They refused to divulge that information under the clause of national security. I don't think the Indian government has been forthcoming. I would reckon some of those deliveries were made based on more recent agreements, especially in case of the 122-mm howitzer barrels that were transferred recently.

Igor: Can we talk a bit more broadly on how India sees itself in the context of global rivalries? How does India place itself between Russia, its traditional ally, and the West and QUAD?

Angshuman Choudhury: India is trying to project itself as a third force, as a leader of countries who do not want to align with either bloc, with Russia or America. This is going back to its Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's non-alignment tradition but with new terms like "multi-alignment" and "strategic autonomy". The idea is to project India as a leading middle power or aspiring power who can guide the way for other middle powers or smaller powers, who do not wish to get trapped in this great power conflict. India is trying to achieve this through alignments with West



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Asia and the Pacific Island countries, with ASEAN, Latin American and African countries.

Yes, India is a member of QUAD, but India doesn't want the QUAD to be a security alliance. It doesn't want to provoke China to that extent. India is happy with the QUAD dealing with non-security issues. It is part of the QUAD because it helps boost India's footprint within the Indo-Pacific. Indian policymakers believe in alliance building within the Indo-Pacific to balance the Chinese influence. But they do not want QUAD to become a security alliance.

Igor: China was very alerted by the Burma Act passed by the US Congress and started to be much more active since the beginning of this year. True, in the case of China, that was maybe even more triggered by the end of their Zero-Covid policy and ensuing drive to activate economic activities at home and abroad. Did the Burma Act in any way ring an alarm in New Delhi?

Angshuman Choudhury: I don't think the Burma Act has been taken seriously in Delhi. There is a sense that it is just a symbolic step by the US policymakers which may not actually translate to any hard action. Unfortunately, there is a bit of a truth in that.

The Modi government has been careful of what the US might do in its neighbourhood. It was worried that the US might try to drive a wedge between India's own relationship with the (Myanmar) junta. So, it has not played ball on certain issues like imposing a no-fly zone and opening a humanitarian corridor between India and Myanmar.

Igor Blazevic was a lecturer at the Educational Initiatives Myanmar between 2010 and 2016 and is senior advisor at the Prague Civil Society Centre

MANIPUR VIOLENCE IS ROOTED IN EACH COMMUNITY'S NARRATIVE AND PERCEPTION OF THEIR PAST

NANDITA HAKSAR

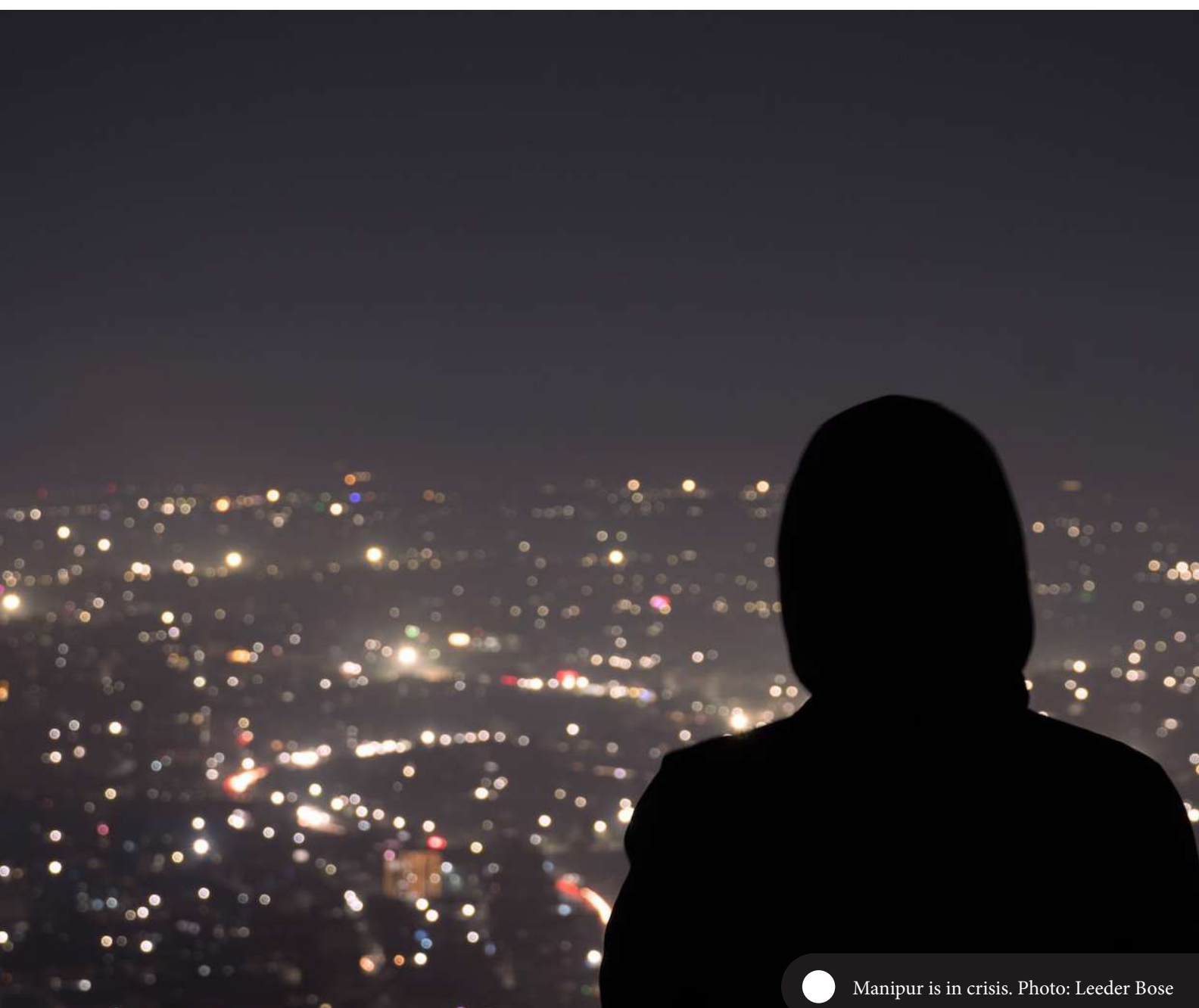
Manipur joined the Indian Union in 1949 but became a full-fledged state only in 1972; between 1949 and 1972 Manipur remained a Union Territory. It is bounded by Nagaland to the north, Mizoram in the south and Assam in the west. It has approximately a 400 km long border with two regions of Myan-

mar—Sagaing Region to the east and Chin State to the south. It is the gateway to Southeast Asia and crucial for India's Look East Policy.

Ever since Manipur joined the Indian Union it has been the site for insurgencies. The number of insurgent groups have grown and this proliferation of armed groups has added to the complex-

ity of the political problem. The events have been unfolding at a rapid pace and the conflicts have been becoming deadlier but like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *Chronicles of a Death Foretold*, everyone knows the tragedy will take place, but no one is willing to prevent it.

In a word, the cause of



Manipur is in crisis. Photo: Leeder Bose

the Manipur tragedy is identity politics. Way back in 1981, Nibedon Biswas, the youngest son of the late Nirod Kumar Biswas, the bishop of Assam, writing under the name, Nirmal Nibedon, published a book titled *Northeast India: The Ethnic Explosion* (1981). In the preface he predicted: 'It is an ethnic explosion. Make no mistake about it. Have no doubts about it. World governments, more so India and Southeast Asian countries, will have to closely study the case of the ethnic minorities, whether they are Kachins and Karens of Burma,

the Mizos or the Ahoms of India. The ethnic minorities of India, particularly those of the Mongoloid stock, will deserve more attention. For, gone are the days when small bands of proud tribesmen fought and defended themselves with poison-tipped arrows. Today, in the 1980s the ethnic minorities are wielding sophisticated weapons and engaging national armies in combat, increasingly. In brief, they are zealously guarding their ethnic identity... It is going to be a long war for all sides, frighteningly effective and cripplingly expensive for both. None may emerge victorious. Both may be losers.'

It is difficult to have 'objective' or unbiased accounts of the conflicts because each community has its own narrative rooted in its own perception of its past. As one reporter observed: "It is said that there are always two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between. But in Manipur, the truth lies not only somewhere in between, but it is unfailingly wrapped in several layers of conflicting interpretations."

These controversies over the histories led the government of Manipur to set up a 15-member committee on 16 September 2022 to verify the accuracy of books written about history, culture, tradition, and geography of Manipur, to avoid the distortion of facts. Every author writing on the history of Manipur now has to submit his or her manuscript to the Director of Higher Education and the University of Manipur for verification and approval. What are the issues which are agitating the people and communities of Manipur?

WHO IS A TRIBAL?

There is a rich debate on

the question on who is a tribal and who is not. A part of the debate is around the colonial classification of people. However, in post-Independence India, a person is a tribal if the community is recognised as a member of a Scheduled Tribe under the provisions of the Constitution and the laws.

In Manipur there are broadly two categories of communities who are designated as Scheduled Tribe—the Naga communities and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group. However, the majority community, the Meiteis are not designated as Scheduled Tribes. They are demanding to be included in the category and the tribal or hill people are opposing their demand.

Recently, this issue became so controversial and volatile that the Office of the Registrar-General of India (RGI) has declined to make public its position on whether the Meitei (Meetei) community in Manipur can be categorised as a Scheduled Tribes as per the criteria currently in use.

The office of the RGI said disclosing this information to the public would 'prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state, relation with foreign state or lead to incitement of an offence.'

Under international law the word tribal is seen as pejorative and the word indigenous is used. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favour.

In India, the Constitution has special provisions for the tribal people. In broad terms the tribal



peoples are protected from exploitation by more advanced communities and non-tribals cannot own tribal lands.

Secondly, there are provisions for a degree of autonomy in administration for the tribal people. Mizoram and Meghalaya are under the Sixth Schedule but Nagaland rejected this provision. The tribal of Manipur are protected by Article 371-C and special laws to protect their lands from being transferred to non-tribals.

There are also special welfare schemes to ameliorate the condition of tribals, including reservations in jobs and educational institutions.

CRITERION FOR ST STATUS

The Constitution of India does not spell out the criterion for declaring a community as a Scheduled Tribe. It was the Lokur Committee in 1965 which decided whether a community can be included in the ST list. These criteria include indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness.

Both the procedure and criteria for inclusion of communities had been strongly criticised by an internal government task force formed in February 2014 for being 'obsolete,' 'condescending,' 'dogmatic' and 'rigid.' The committee, led by then tribal affairs secretary Hrusikesh Panda had also said that the procedure, as it was being followed, was "cumbersome" and "defeats the Constitutional agenda for affirmative action and inclusion." The task force had concluded that these criteria and procedure were resulting in the exclusion of or delays in the inclusion of

nearly 40 communities across the country.

Based on this task force's report, the first Narendra Modi-led Cabinet had, within days of taking charge in 2014, moved a draft Cabinet note to change the procedure and the criteria. However, after being in the pipeline for nearly eight years, the proposal was put on hold.

Since then, tribal affairs minister Arjun Munda has insisted in Parliament that the criteria set out by the Lokur Committee was appropriate and that tribal societies do not change. A recent notice from the ministry of tribal affairs shows that the government is indeed trying to change the criteria for inclusion of communities in the ST category.

The government of India on 15 June 1999 (as further amended on 25 June 2002), approved modalities for deciding claims for inclusion in, exclusion from and other modifications in Orders specifying lists of Scheduled Tribes (STs). Accordingly, only those proposals which have been recommended and justified by the concerned state government/UT Administration can be processed further. Thereafter, it has to be concurred with by the RGI and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) for consideration for amendment of the legislation.

A task force under the chairmanship of the then secretary (tribal affairs) was constituted by the ministry of tribal affairs in February 2014 to examine the existing criteria and procedure. The task force in its report submitted to the ministry has made recommendations, among other things, for re-

vision of criteria and procedure for scheduling of tribes as STs. The recommendations of the task force were examined and accordingly the proposal for streamlining of procedure for scheduling of communities as STs and revision of criteria for scheduling of communities as STs was circulated to states and UTs. Views from all states/UTs have been received except one state.

CONTROVERSY IN MANIPUR

In Manipur, the Meiteis, which are the majority community, have been demanding to be included in the category of Scheduled Tribe. They are claiming the status on the basis of being an indigenous community.

In 2015, the Manipur government introduced three bills: The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh) Amendment Bill 2015 (MLRLR Bill 2015), The Protection of Manipur People's Bill, 2015 and The Manipur Shops and Establishments Act (Second) Amendment Bill 2015.

The tribal people of Manipur jointly opposed the Bills and demanded their withdrawal. They argued that if Meiteis were recognised as indigenous people it would amount to giving them ST status. The tribal people argued that this would only strengthen the Meitei economic and political dominance and control in Manipur. The hill people stated that the hills were not receiving their share of development funds and even funds for tribal welfare were diverted to the Valley.

In the course of the agitation against the Bills, nine people, including an 11-year-old boy, died. The Kukis did not bury the dead for 632 days. The Bills were

the culmination of an agitation by the non-tribal Meiteis in the Imphal valley for introducing an Inner Line Permit system to regulate and curtail the entry of 'non-Manipuris' into the state.

While the Congress government claimed that the three Bills were drawn up after a thorough consultation with all MLAs, including tribal representatives, tribal groups deny it. They allege that they were not consulted and that the Bills will lead to an encroachment of tribal areas by non-tribals, mainly the Meiteis.

Indigenous People

The Protection of Manipur People's Bill was passed in 2018 after Manipur said they would not support the Citizens Amendment Bill, 2019, unless they were protected from outsiders. The tribals opposed the Bills but the Meitei people have the political power—40 seats in the 60-seat legislative assembly. There is of course the Hill Areas Committee but because of identity politics and the lack of political vision, it has been largely ineffective in protecting the tribal people's rights.

This imbalance raises issues of representation of tribal interests in the Manipur legislature, a core issue linked to citizenship rights. There are other communities living in Manipur from even before 1951 such as the Nepalis, who have objected to the Bill because they do not have the papers to prove their residence in the state.

The controversy over the Manipur People's Bill was over two provisions: the recognition of 'indigenous' people and the cut-off date for recognition was pushed back from 1971 to 1951. In part

it is this recognition of the Meiteis as indigenous people that forms the basis of their demand to be recognised as a Scheduled Tribe, a demand strongly opposed by all tribal groups—both the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group.

The Bills were being presented by the government of Manipur as a "solution" to the long pending demand for implementation of the Inner Line Permit system by Meitei organisations to protect them from the high rate of influx of outsiders. The Inner Line Permit is a special permit required even by Indian citizens to enter certain restricted areas in the country, especially sensitive border areas. The Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) has been spearheading the movement for legislation to "protect the indigenous population from migrants."

WHO ARE OUTSIDERS?

In Manipur, as in many parts of India, there is a word which refers to the 'outsider' in derogatory terms.

The word is Mayang and it refers to Indians, but not to Mongoloid people, whether they are Mizos or Burmese.

Many communities and tribes in Manipur have been divided by the international border between Myanmar and India and despite this they continue to have ties with their families and communities across the border.

It is the demand of some insurgent groups that the borders be redrawn so as to bring the communities together. The Meiteis challenge the border and claim that the Kabaw Valley in Myanmar belongs to them; whereas the Naga insurgents demand that the Nagas of Burma should be united

with the Nagas in India.

The Kuki insurgents also have a vision of uniting all Kuki inhabited areas under one administration of a Kuki homeland. There are some 19 separate Kuki armed groups and for the most they are demanding a homeland within the Indian Union. Ten Kuki MLAs have said they cannot live in Manipur and have demanded a separate administration.

The Naga insurgents were the first to raise the demand for the unification of all Naga inhabited areas, both in India and Myanmar. Originally, their demand was for a sovereign nation-state but more recently, while keeping alive the original demand they have demanded the integration of Naga areas of Manipur with Nagaland (and also Naga areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh). The Nagas and Kukis have had deadly clashes in the past over territory, but the Nagas have not been involved in the most recent clashes.

The conflict over homelands is relevant in the immediate context because of the army rule in Myanmar and the flow of Myanmar citizens taking refuge in Manipur. The majority of them are Chins but there are those activists who came from as far as Yangon.

The government of India through the home ministry issued an alert to the Northeast states in 2017 to ensure that 'illegal migrants' from Myanmar are stopped from entering India. Then on 10 March 2021 the government warned the state governments against treating them as 'refugees.'

Both the Manipur and Mizoram governments went against the Centre's orders under pressure by the people, who

extended solidarity to the fleeing Myanmarese after the brutal crackdown by the Myanmar army, which staged a coup in February 2021.

All communities extended help to the refugees but the burden of supporting these refugees fleeing from persecution fell on the Kukis, who have provided the refugees with basic amenities. The Manipur government has succumbed to the pressure of the Centre and declared that all the foreigners from Myanmar are 'illegal migrants.' They even arrested a pastor who gave shelter to some citizens of Myanmar.

The government of India, the ministry of home affairs, says it will not recognise the UNHCR identity card issued to refugees, and it will not issue exit permits even to those who get resettlement in third countries.

However, representatives from the ministry of external affairs are on the executive committee of the UNHCR.

The Meiteis and Nagas have expressed apprehension that many of the Chins coming from Myanmar will eventually settle on their lands and be counted as voters. The Meiteis are therefore demanding a National Register for Citizens.

The factor that has complicated the already difficult issue is the government of India's concerns regarding the Rohingyas, the persecuted Muslim minority from Rakhine state in Myanmar. These people have been deprived of citizenship rights in Myanmar and they have virtually become stateless. In the present political climate in India, Muslims Rohingyas have been victimised even more than the other refugees.

The simple solution to the problem could have been to allow the state government to issue identity cards to the refugees coming from Myanmar; this would allow them to get basic humanitarian aid and it would keep a record of the number of 'outsiders;' instead, a section of the Meiteis are demanding that the government have a National Register for Citizens. The cry against 'outsiders' is building up to a xenophobic frenzy and this will only lead to more violence.

LAND QUESTION

The root cause of the conflict is land. The Meiteis, at least some of them, feel that it is not fair that they cannot own land in the tribal Hill Areas whereas the tribals can own land in the Valley. The Manipur government has started evicting tribals from what they call reserved forest areas. In 2020, around 1,346 alleged illegal structures (houses) in areas under Langol Reserved Forest were sought to be demolished and these cases are pending in courts. At least 95 families lost their homes in the eviction drive. The Langol area is in the foothills in Imphal.

There are innumerable legal and illegal ways that tribals have been deprived of their rights to land: in the name of development tribal lands have been taken with a pittance for compensation. The issue of land is also linked to the growing acreage of land being brought under poppy cultivation. The state has been a hub for drug traffickers but now it has become a production centre. These are the main issues that lie at the root of the conflicts in Manipur.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The legislative assembly

should have been the place where issues could have been debated but the tribals are in the minority and cannot influence the decisions even if the chief minister is a tribal leader.

The tribals have their own student organisations and tribal bodies and churches and the Meiteis have their own organisations. There is no organisation or platform where the communities can come together to debate. In any case there is no possibility for open discussions or conversations because every community has its own demands and the demand is backed by an armed group.

The ethnic nationalism is fuelled by religious ideologies. The people of Manipur, till the 17th century, had their own indigenous religions. In the Valley, the Meiteis practiced a religion called Sanamahi with their own temples, elaborate rituals and sacred texts. It was then they were converted to Vaishnavism by Hindu missionaries. Those who did not convert were designated Scheduled Caste in independent India. An articulate section of Meitei nationalists has returned to their old religion. In part, because under the Hindu caste system even the royal family was given the status of OBC and not Kshatriyas.

Taking inspiration from the old Sanamahi tradition two militant Meitei groups have emerged who have spearheaded the violence this time: Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun. Both organisations assert their 'indigenous' faith. Both were involved in the violence in Manipur.

Among the Nagas, there are communities which did not convert to Christianity, and they

practice their indigenous religion. One of them is the Heraka religion. The BJP has appropriated Rani Gaidinliu as a symbol for their movement against Christian missionaries. The RSS has provided a platform for uniting members of these indigenous communities.

The Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo are predominantly Christian. The burning of churches and attacks on Christians in the Northeast has a long history. The Christian missionaries have been trying to aggressively counter the RSS drive to enter the Northeast. They have support of the Christian communities in India and abroad.

In Manipur, there is a small Muslim minority called the Meitei Muslims or Pangals. They have been there for decades, if not centuries. There are Islamic armed groups as well and there is an assertion of Muslim identity after the events of May 1993, when more than 100 Muslims were hacked to death in Imphal. It was this massacre which led to the formation of People's United Liberation Front (PULF) and in 2007, another Islamist outfit operating in Manipur, the Islamic National Front (INF) merged with the PULF.

IDENTITY POLITICS

Thus, there is no platform where all the communities can come together and articulate their demands. Each community thinks of solutions which it believes will solve the problems it faces.

The Naga and Kuki insurgents have been fighting for their own homelands, either within the Indian Union or for independent sovereign states. Some even dream of living in a theocratic state. Political parties and political leaders have links to these armed

groups, and it is dangerous to criticise their politics or their vision.

The middle class within each ethnic group has a vested interest in perpetuating the ethnic identities because it ensures privileges and opportunities. The bankruptcy of politics leads the tribal and non-tribal communities to make the 'outsiders' the scapegoats for all problems; and it is the poorest and most vulnerable section of outsiders, the migrant workers, who are usually the victims of this mindless violence.

No one wants to address the problem of growing poverty and increasing gap between the rich and poor.

Thousands of youth are leaving their villages to become first generation migrant workers in towns and cities all over India and abroad. Outside Manipur these migrant workers bond together as Manipuris.

Many families have land in the shape of paddy-fields, but it does not yield enough to sustain the family and with growing incorporation into the international market the need for cash is increasing. It is this land that the corporations are waiting to get hold of.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Manipur, like the rest of the Northeast, is a playground for intelligence agencies and they play havoc with these identity politics, supporting one armed group against another. Foreign states work through NGOs such as human rights organisations to perpetuate divisions in the Northeast. It was the West which promoted the idea that gross human rights violations were occurring because of ethnic conflicts. Class, caste and patriarchy are not factors rec-

ognised as being the major reasons for human rights violations.

What has the identity politics achieved for the people? The Northeast is on a downward spiral and policymakers have no solutions to offer. The latest data shows that incomes in seven of the eight north eastern states are now below the national average. Just 15 years ago, four of these states had income levels higher than the national average.

Mizoram is one of the fastest growing economies among the states of India while Manipur has become the third poorest state in the country. The appeals for peace are devoid of any content and will do little to solve the problem. What is needed is to recognise that identity politics is not a solution but the problem.

If the people, communities and tribes in Manipur do not come together, their land and resources will indeed go out of their hands. They will be appropriated by large transnational corporations who are waiting on the side-lines to grab them. They will not have to wait for long unless the people of Manipur come together to resist. If they do not, then like Nirmal Nibedon had predicted, all will be losers.

The violence in Manipur reflects a failure of Indian democracy. The national political scene has pushed people into identity politics instead of secular and democratic politics, which brings people together irrespective of caste, community or religion.

The writer Nandita Haksar is an author and human rights lawyer

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UN SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA HALTS HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TO CYCLONE MOCHA SURVIVORS



Myanmar's junta has suspended travel authorisations for aid workers trying to reach hundreds of thousands of people in the cyclone-ravaged Rakhine state, the UN's humanitarian affairs office said Friday.

Cyclone Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour) to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh last month, killing at least 148 people in Myanmar.

The cyclone destroyed homes and brought a storm surge to Rakhine state, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya minority refugees live in displacement camps following decades of ethnic conflict.

Junta authorities this week suspended "existing travel authorizations... for humanitarian organizations," the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a statement.

Plans for distributing aid to cyclone-affected townships that had previously been approved by the junta were also rescinded, it added.

The restrictions would bring "a stop to activities that have been reaching hundreds of thousands of people", it said.

AFP has contacted a junta spokesman for

comment.

Local media reported that the travel ban applied to humanitarian groups working in Rakhine State.

Last month, the UN launched an appeal for \$333 million in emergency funding for the 1.6 million people in Myanmar it said were affected by the storm.

After Cyclone Nargis killed at least 138,000 people in Myanmar in 2008, the then-junta was accused of blocking emergency aid and initially refusing to grant access to humanitarian workers and supplies.

State-owned media reported last month that aid offers from the international community had been accepted.

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

Rakhine State is home to around 600,000 Rohingya, who are regarded by many there as interlopers from Bangladesh, and are denied citizenship and freedom of movement.

Most of the 148 people who died during the storm are from the minority, according to the junta.

AFP

REPORTS CLAIM MYANMAR JUNTA BLOCKING HUMANITARIAN AID, BLOCKING TRAVEL



Photo: AFP

Latest reports from local Myanmar over the last couple of days claim junta authority hindrance of the Cyclone Mocha humanitarian aid effort.

Western News posted a report on 8 June saying that the military regime has suspended the travel authorizations of all international and local aid organisations, including those that were working on the emergency response for the people affected by Cyclone Mocha in Rakhine State. According to a leaked letter sent by the Rakhine State Administration Council (RSAC) to international and local aid organisations, the Minister of Security and Border Affairs has ordered the suspension of all travel authorizations for the aid groups from 7 June 2023.

In another local media report, by Development Media Group, local government administrations in some communities in Rakhine State are reportedly demanding fees to allow the influx of aid into their communities. According to the report, poor families are not receiving relief supplies as they cannot afford to pay the delivery fees to administrators, according to local sources.

Myaelatt Athan, a local media outlet that focuses on issues in Sagaing and Magway regions, posted a report on 8 June saying that the distribution of rice and other items for displaced people in Pauk Township, Magway Region, is faced with restrictions from the Myanmar military since those items are prohibited by the military checkpoints, according to local residents and aid groups.

Pauk Township is located near the border of Magway Region and Chin State and is also on the

road that connects Pakokku Town, which has a good regional economy, and Mindat Township in Chin State, which is a major resistance stronghold in Chin State. Like some other townships in Magway and Chin State, which are mixed areas with Chin State, armed resistance groups are also active in Pauk Township.

After a camp of a local armed resistance group based in the southern part of Pauk Township was raided in early March of 2023, hundreds of local residents from seven nearby villages were forced to flee their homes due to military operations by the Myanmar military, reports Myaelatt Athan.

According to the report, a local resident said a military checkpoint between Pauk and Pakokku is interfering with transport. "If they see rice and other items being transported, they always ask where we are going to take them. If they find out that these food items are to be sent to the rural areas in southern Pauk Township, the security forces at the checkpoint confiscate all of them. Due to these difficulties, displaced people in that area may soon face food shortages," the resident said.

Both local and international aid organizations have been expressing concern about the slow pace of delivery and the Myanmar junta's red tape that appears to be blocking the delivery of aid through to a number of areas.

Cyclone Mocha hit western Myanmar on 14 May causing floods and a swathe of devastation across Rakhine State, Sagaing, Magway, Chin State and Kachin State and resulted in an official tally of about 150 deaths.

UNDP SAYS DIRE NEED FOR ACCESS FOR CYCLONE MOCHA AID



Photo: AFP

UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Myanmar, Titon Mitra, said that time was of the essence for Cyclone Mocha-hit communities as food reserves were being “completely wiped out”, water sources needed to be urgently decontaminated and the monsoon was just “a matter of weeks away,” UN News reports.

Speaking from hard-hit Rakhine State capital Sittwe, Mr. Mitra indicated there was a dire need for access.

“The international community has to be given widespread access to the affected communities. And that’s a very urgent requirement,” he said.

More than two weeks after deadly Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar, aid access is uncertain, disease is spreading, and a major food crisis remains a very real threat, the UN noted recently.

Some 1.6 million people in Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing, and Kachin states are in dire need of assistance after Cyclone Mocha’s 250 kilometre per hour wind gusts destroyed homes, farmland and livestock, the report notes.

Last month, the UN launched a US\$333 million Flash Appeal for Myanmar. While some assistance is coming through, Mr. Mitra said that it was “not anywhere near sufficient” for the time being due to a lack of access and support in rural areas remained “far from adequate”.

The UN official highlighted that a distribution plan has been submitted to the military authorities, stressing that “it needs to be cleared very soon, so international organizations with their CSO partners can move freely”.

More than two years since Myanmar’s generals staged a military coup, sparking widespread ongoing civil unrest and violence, Mr. Mitra insisted that “this really is a time for the depoliticization and the demilitarization of aid, because the needs are absolutely immense”.

The humanitarian aid drive is a mixed picture. Various aid organizations – both local and international – are at work distributing aid, but the distribution in the storm-hit areas appears checkered, with anecdotal accounts of people in need saying either they have not received aid or the amounts are small. Other communities indicate that aid is coming through.

Mr. Mitra said that the recovery may take years, pointing out that the majority of those affected were already “the poorest of the poor”.

Concerns are also mounting fast about the future of rural livelihoods, as some 1,200 square kilometres of land flooded due to Cyclone Mocha, while rains combined with storm surges devastated agriculture and fisheries, the report notes.

Mr. Mitra warned that the provision of relief itself was “not enough” and that if people are unable to plant food crops within the next few weeks, there could be a “major food crisis” emerging in the coming months.

“Households have completely lost their seed stocks. So, we are anticipating, unless there’s an effective response, that food availability and affordability will become huge issues,” he insisted.

Last week, the UN included Myanmar in a list of 18 “hunger hotspots” where critical food insecurity is projected to intensify.

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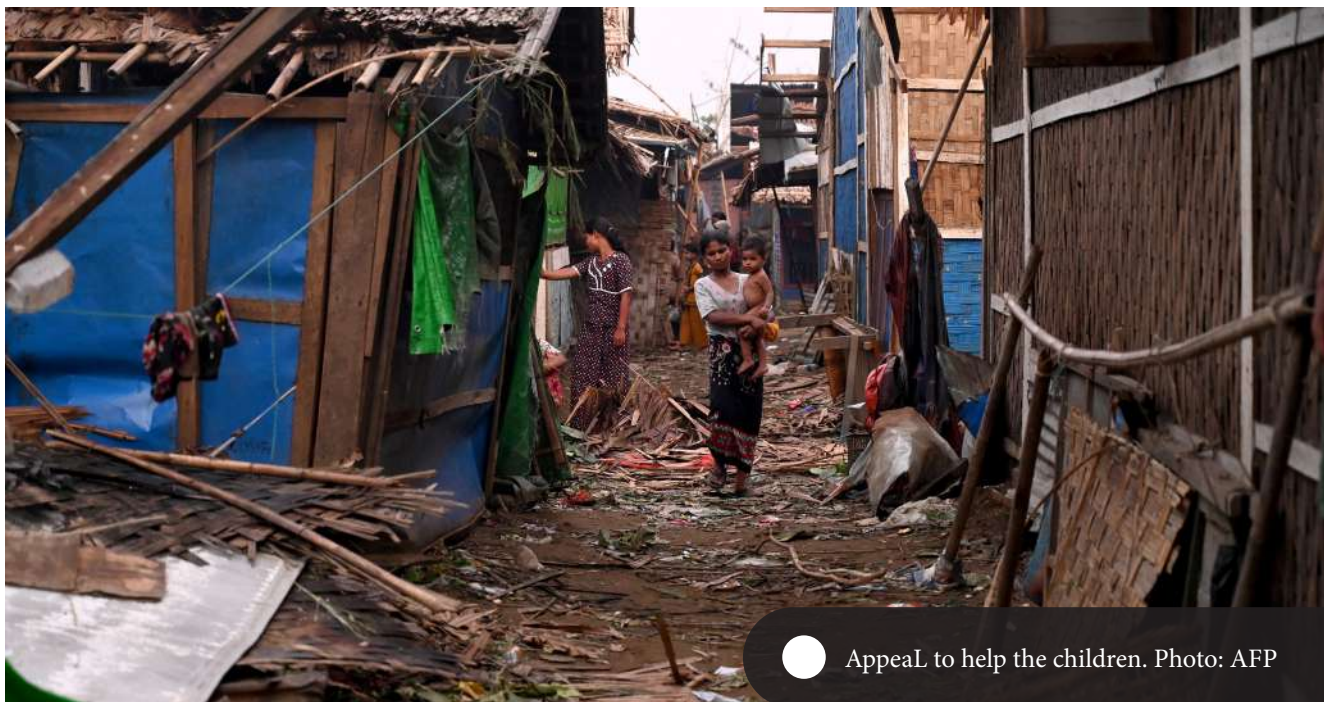
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UNICEF UPS APPEAL TO \$217 MILLION FOR CYCLONE MOCHA VICTIMS INCLUDING 2.3 MILLION CHILDREN



Appeal to help the children. Photo: AFP

UNICEF has increased its appeal to US\$217.9 million to respond to urgent needs identified after Cyclone Mocha and continue delivering humanitarian assistance to displaced people and host communities throughout Myanmar, according to a statement 9 June.

This funding will allow UNICEF and its partners to reach 3.7 million people, including 2.3 million children affected by the humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing armed conflict and Cyclone Mocha. Lack of funding will limit UNICEF's ability to reach more than 930,000 people with critical WASH supplies and services, 2 million children and their parents with psychosocial support and support for child victims of explosive weapons, more than 890,000 children with access to education, and 750,000 children with immunization. The additional funds will also support the rehabilitation of WASH and school infrastructure completely destroyed by the cy-

clone and provide added protection for victims of gender-based violence due to increased vulnerability.

Increased, predictable and flexible funding is urgently needed for UNICEF and its partners to respond to escalating needs in Myanmar and reach people with critical assistance. This funding will enable the most vulnerable children and families to access life-saving and protective services.

One of the strongest cyclones ever recorded in Myanmar, Mocha made landfall in Rakhine State on 14 May 2023. The cyclone continued inland, bringing heavy rains and winds, and leaving a trail of destruction through Chin, Sagaing, Magway and Kachin. An estimated 3.4 million people live in the areas most impacted. Significant damage to houses, shelters for internally displaced people, and public infrastructure has been reported.

Around 17.6 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance before Cyclone Mocha, including 4.5 million in severe conditions, mainly in conflict-affected rural areas. An additional estimated 500,000 in the five states and regions need humanitarian assistance following the cyclone.

The widespread conflict has further deteriorated in 2023. Increased fighting has been occurring nationwide, with notable intensification mainly in the southeast, northwest, and Kachin states. More than 1.8 million people were internally displaced, including 1.5 million newly displaced after February 2021.¹² Of these, over 1.2 million internally displaced people were living in the areas impacted by Cyclone Mocha. Communities in Sagaing Region, hardest hit by the conflict with nearly 763,100 people displaced, suffered additional trauma.

Cyclone Mocha has fur-

ther imperiled nearly 220,000 people living in protracted displacement in Rakhine and the extremely vulnerable non-displaced populations, especially 417,000 stateless Rohingyas and communities affected by conflict, insecurity and rising poverty.

Grave child rights violations, mainly due to the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, airstrikes, and explosive ordnance, continue to be largely reported. Attacks on schools and hospitals have continued at alarming levels, while all armed actors' recruitment and use of children remain a grave concern. As a result, women and children are at increased risk of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Millions of children and adolescents are deprived of the right to education because their safe access to education has been disrupted.

Camp closures, forced return, and relocation remain key protection concerns for displaced people.

The security and protection of humanitarian and front-line workers is also a serious concern, as they are increasingly targeted by parties to the conflict and subject to arbitrary arrests and detentions.

There has been a notable shrinking of humanitarian space, with access to cyclone and conflict-affected populations constrained by new restrictions on nongovernmental and civil society organizations. In addition, analysis shows that 60 per cent of landmine incidents reported in the first quarter of 2023 were in areas affected by Cyclone Mocha, highlighting the high risks of landmines/unexploded ordnance contamination in cyclone-affected areas - creating an additional potential threat to populations and humanitarian assistance efforts.

UNICEF Myanmar's humanitarian strategy is aligned with both the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan and the interagency Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal. It also takes into account the early recovery needs of affected communities.

UNICEF maintains its nationwide focus, capitalizing on its countrywide presence through seven field offices that cover all cyclone- and conflict-affected states and regions. In its response, UNICEF will prioritize displaced children and their families and non-displaced cyclone- and conflict-affected children and communities.

UNICEF will support the expansion of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people through its leadership roles in five clusters and areas of responsibility at national and subnational levels.

A key priority is to ensure that clean water and hygiene kits are delivered to vulnerable households to address immediate needs. In addition, UNICEF will support the restoration of essential water, sanitation and hygiene services damaged by the cyclone.

UNICEF will support children's access to mental health and psychosocial support, quality legal aid, and case management; contribute to mitigating the risks posed by landmines and other explosive ordnance remnants of war; support gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response services; and facilitate monitoring and reporting of grave violations of children's rights. UNICEF will support family tracing and reunification, and provide parenting support to help caregivers better protect and care for their children.

UNICEF will protect children from extreme poverty by providing unconditional cash grants,

using the country's Multidimensional Disadvantage Index as a targeting model for children under age 2, including those with disabilities, in selected townships affected by crises.

UNICEF will support the continued access of crisis-affected children to safe learning environments.

This includes those affected by Cyclone Mocha and the ongoing conflict and displacement. UNICEF will provide complementary learning opportunities tailored to school-age children, and those who were out of the formal system even before the current crises, access to safe temporary learning spaces, critical education supplies, quality teaching and learning materials, and support for children's educators.

UNICEF will provide life-saving emergency medical supplies and services to pregnant women, new mothers and children, and carry out routine immunizations at the community level.

UNICEF will screen and treat children with severe wasting, provide life-saving micronutrient supplements, and strengthen infant and young child feeding practices to prevent severe wasting and mortality among children.

UNICEF will use evidence-based social and behavior change strategies to reach communities with critical information and knowledge through multiple platforms and community engagement.

Importantly, UNICEF will integrate initiatives to ensure protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers into its programmes and partnerships.

It will also build robust feedback mechanisms and periodic consultations to ensure functional accountability to affected populations.

JAPANESE GOVT TO PROVIDE \$1.5 MILLION RELIEF AID FOR CYCLONE MOCHA VICTIMS



The Japanese government announced on 6 June to provide US\$1.5 million in relief aid to the areas affected by Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar.

The Emergency Grant Aid has allocated \$1 million through the World Food Programme (WFP), and \$500,000 through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the areas of food, water and sanitation and shelter.

The Japanese government also gave \$500,000 to Bangladesh through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for water and sanitation.

The severe Cyclone Mocha swept through southwestern Myanmar on 14 May, causing flooding and severe damage with hundreds of casualties including many Rohingya Muslims.

It made landfall in Rakhine State with strong winds gusting up to 230-250 km/h, and also affected Sagaing region with a wind speed of 78 km/h.

The junta regime declared all 17 townships of Rakhine State and four townships - Tiddim, Matupi, Paletwa and Hakha - in Chin State as disaster-affected areas.

Major damage occurred in Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing and Ayeyarwady. Locals in these areas suffered problems with water supplies and sanitation facilities, public infrastructure such as dozens of hospitals and clinics, hundreds of schools, and hundreds of religious buildings, transport infrastructure, such as bridges and roads damaged and damage to the airports of Sittwe and Thandwe in Rakhine State.

Some sources recorded total damages to about 2,500 religious buildings, over 2,000 schools, over 300 hospitals/clinics, and over 800 ships or boats in the cyclone-affected areas in Myanmar.

BANGLADESH MUST SUSPEND PILOT PROJECT TO RETURN ROHINGYA REFUGEES TO MYANMAR: UN EXPERT



Photo: AFP

Bangladesh must immediately suspend a pilot repatriation project for Rohingya to return to Myanmar, where they face serious risks to their lives and liberty, a UN expert said 8 June.

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said there were reports that Bangladeshi authorities were using deceptive and coercive measures to compel Rohingya refugees to return to Myanmar.

“Conditions in Myanmar are anything but conducive for the safe, dignified, sustainable, and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees,” Andrews said. “Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who commanded the forces that launched the genocidal attacks against the Rohingya, now leads a brutal military junta that is attacking civilian populations while denying the Rohingya citizenship and other basic rights,” he said.

Bangladesh officials have stated that an initial group of 1140 Rohingya refugees will be repatriated to Myanmar at an unspecified date and 6000 will be returned by the end of the year. Actions by Bangladesh authorities suggest that the first return could be imminent.

Bangladesh authorities have reportedly threatened arrest, confiscation of documents, and other forms of retaliation for those who resist the government’s plans.

“There are also reports of refugees being promised large sums of money, if they agree to return.

These promises are allegedly being made even as food rations are being cut to \$.27 per person per day for those in the Bangladesh camps. It remains unclear where the funds for repatriated families will come from,” Andrews said.

Under the pilot project, Rohingya refugees will not be allowed to return to their own villages, many of which were razed to the ground during the genocidal attacks of 2017. The refugees would pass through “reception” and “transit” centers in Maungdaw Township, after which they would be moved to a designated area of 15 newly constructed “villages” – places they will not be allowed to leave freely.

In March, Bangladesh authorities facilitated two visits by Myanmar junta authorities (SAC) to the Bangladesh camps. According to reports, at least some of the refugees were coerced into participating in ‘verification’ interviews with SAC officials. Bangladesh and SAC officials also coordinated a ‘go and see’ visit to Rakhine State for some Rohingya refugees. Bangladeshi officials said the refugees had expressed “general satisfaction” with arrangements made for their return, but these assurances were contradicted by reports that those who participated in the trip had unequivocally rejected the repatriation plans.

“The return of Rohingya refugees under these conditions would likely violate Bangladesh’s obligations under international law and expose Rohingya to gross human rights violations and, potentially, future atrocity crimes,” the Special Rapporteur said.

“I implore Bangladesh to immediately suspend the repatriation pilot programme,” Andrews said.

“I also urge the international community to stand with Rohingya refugees in both word and deed.

This must include reversing the failure to provide a humane level of support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who are unable to pursue livelihoods, continue to face hunger and malnutrition, and whose children have very limited educational opportunities,” the expert said.

ROHINGYA TESTIFY ON MYANMAR CRACKDOWN IN ARGENTINA COURT

Members of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority testified in person for the first time on Wednesday last week in Buenos Aires, as part of an Argentinian judicial investigation into alleged crimes by the Myanmar military, an activist told AFP.

The hearing, behind closed doors, was "a historic day for everyone in Burma," as Myanmar is also known, said Maung Tun Khin, president of the British-based Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK.

"Finally in-person hearings are taking place and strong evidence" is being produced in a court of law, he said.

He did not specify the identity nor the number of "survivors" who had testified, nor the facts concerned, for "security reasons."

The hearings of half a dozen people were expected to continue until June 13, according to a source familiar with the case.

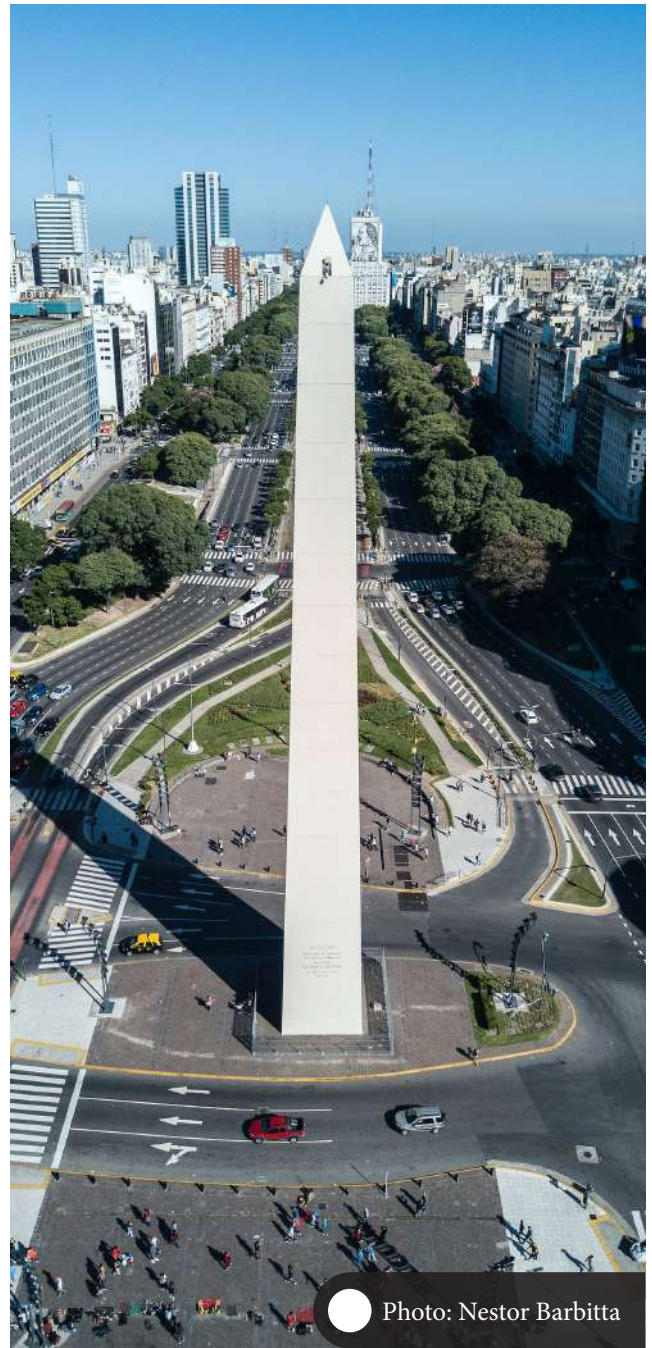
In 2021, Argentina's justice system, responding to a complaint, announced it was opening an investigation into alleged crimes by Myanmar soldiers against the Rohingya, under the principle of universal jurisdiction enshrined in the constitution.

That same year, six Rohingya women, living as refugees in Bangladesh, had participated in a virtual hearing before an Argentinian court, citing sexual assaults and the death of relatives as a result of regime repression.

"In-person hearings of survivors continue, very important evidence is being produced," said Maung Tun Khin.

Argentina's courts have in the past agreed to examine overseas cases under the principle of universal jurisdiction, in particular crimes committed under the fascist regime of Francisco Franco in Spain.

The principle makes it possible to prosecute the alleged perpetrators of some of the most serious crimes, regardless of their nationality or where the crimes were committed.



About 750,000 members of the Rohingya community fled to Bangladesh in 2017 from a crackdown by the Myanmar military, which is now the subject of separate proceedings before the International Criminal Court and for "acts of genocide" before the International Court of Justice.

AFP

MYANMAR SUPREME COURT WILL HEAR SPECIAL APPEAL BY AUNG SAN SUU KYI AGAINST SENTENCE



Photo: AFP

On 2 June, the Myanmar junta's Union Supreme Court agreed to hear a special appeal by Aung San Suu Kyi against her five-year sentence for improperly accepting money and gold.

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi is already being held in prison and is serving a 33-year sentence for multiple charges.

In April 2022 Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to five years in prison for allegedly accepting gold and US dollars in cash from U Phyo Min, the former Chief Minister of Yangon Region.

The lawsuit against her was filed by Ye Htet, the director general of the Anti-Corruption Commission who claimed that Aung San Suu Kyi had received \$60,000 USD and seven viss (11.43kg) of gold from Phyo Min Thein.

In a court hearing in October 2021 Phyo Min Thein testified that he gave the gold and cash to Aung San Suu Kyi and Ye Htet testified that neither the gold nor the money had been found so they could not be produced as evidence.

Aung San Suu Kyi has said that Phyo Min Thein's testimony was "all absurd."

Regarding this case, Aung San Suu Kyi has already had her appeal to the Supreme Court rejected, which is why she has now filed a special appeal.

The date of the special appeal has not yet been fixed.

NUG'S FIRST YANGON PDF BATTALION IS PREPARATORY MEASURE: NUG PM OFFICE SPOKESPERSON

PAN PAN



Photo: AFP

The formation of the first PDF battalion of Yangon Region of the National Unity Government (NUG) does not mean that immediate military action will take place in Yangon, but it represents a preparatory measure for a future military operations in Yangon, and it is a battalion that will march towards the city, Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson of NUG Prime Minister's Office, told Mizzima.

The NUG Ministry of Defence announced on 1 June that Battalion 5101, the first PDF battalion of the Yangon Region, has been formed.

"As a PDF battalion, it's not an immediate entry into Yangon, but given enough time, we can say that Battalion 5101 will march towards Yangon. The well-being and safety of the people are always taken into consideration whenever we implement fighting," Nay Phone Latt told Mizzima.

Furthermore, he emphasized, "Another thing is that we use 'people's militia strategy' so the cooperation of the people is important. So, when the time is right, we will convey the necessary information to the people through various channels. This includes providing guidance on how to safely participate in war."

Nay Phone Latt also talked about the upcoming "Alinzet [Light] for Yangon" campaign to arm Battalion 5101.

"Now the Yangon battalion is starting to form. And training, preparation, and arming will be carried out step by step. Following the military strategy of the MOD [Ministry of Defense of the NUG], depending on the situation in which areas we will carry out attacks, weapons are being provided based on priority levels. Soon, a targeted campaign called 'Alinzet [Light] for

Yangon' will be launched to specifically arm the Yangon Battalion 5101," said Nay Phone Latt.

Yangon resident Ko Tu (a pseudonym) pointed out that engaging solely in combat in rural areas is insufficient for achieving a comprehensive victory for resistance forces.

Ko Tu told Mizzima, "I hold the belief that merely engaging in combat in rural areas will not ensure a complete victory for us. In big cities like this, if you can rule the area, you will be close to winning. The war cannot be won without taking action in urban areas like ours. So, we are ready to cooperate."

According to an anonymous political analyst, engaging in combat within the urban area of Yangon is not currently feasible, as acquiring an adequate supply of weapons for the PDF members will require a significant amount of time and effort.

"It is far from an immediate scenario," he said. "First of all, the challenge is the question of whether the PDFs have enough weapons. They will have to work hard to get enough weapons first."

The NUG's statement highlighted that the formation of the first battalion for Yangon Region aimed to enhance the effectiveness and military strategic approach in attacking the Military Council.

Nay Phone Latt told Mizzima that despite the battalion's formation, the existing urban resistance guerillas would persist in their activities, and when the time is right, we can expect significant military engagements to take place.

"The urban guerilla issues in Yangon will continue as usual. At some point, we will see stronger military operations combined with urban guerilla operations and strategic military maneuvers with the involvement of PDF battalions," said Nay Phone Latt.

When fighting occurs across Myanmar, the Military Council not only harms PDF fighters but also civilians, so some Yangon residents are afraid that the formation of the PDF battalion by the NUG will lead to armed clashes and that the people of Yangon will suffer.

The PDFs, the armed wing of the NUG, were officially formed on 5 May 2021 in response to the military coup in Myanmar.

SHOT MYANMAR MILITARY-SUPPORTING SINGER LILY NAING KYAW DIES OF HEAD WOUND



Lily Naing Kyaw. Photo: Facebook

A week after being shot in the head in front of her home by an unidentified gunman, singer Lily Naing Kyaw passed away at a military hospital on 6 June.

She was living in Yankin Township, Yangon Region and was shot in front of her house by an unidentified man, just after arriving back home by car at 7:00 p.m. on 30 May.

She was receiving treatment at the No. 1 Military Hospital in Mingaladon Township as she was suffering from a serious bullet wound.

Lily Naing Kyaw is renowned for being a nationalist activist and supporter of the military.

According to sources close to the Military Council, Lily Naing Kyaw was cremated on 8 June in the military hospital's grounds in Mingaladon rather than having a funeral service at Yayway Cemetery.

"The funeral was held within the compound of the military hospital, not at Yayway Cemetery. Members of Ma Ba Tha (the patriotic association of Myanmar), Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and the military community attended her funeral," a person close to the military community told Mizzima.

Additionally, the Military Council declared on 6 June that two Special Task Force-STF members who shot her had been detained.

The two men, identified as Kaung Zani Hein (also known as La Pyae) and Kyaw Thura (also known as ET), were reportedly detained early on 4 June at a male dormitory in Kamayut Township, Yangon.

The two detainees testified that on 25 May, 2023, D Nyein Lynn and Hazel—the founders of Special Task Force—sent photos and details about the deceased via a Telegram channel and requested that they kill her. Hazel reportedly sent a Sig Sauer pistol, two magazines, and ammunition on 28 May, the Military Council claimed.

The Military Council has alleged that the people who gave the order to kill the singer were the former student leader D Nyein Lynn and Hazel.

In addition to this, the Military Council's propaganda Telegram channels urged the arrest and imprisonment of former student leaders.

The Special Task Force, however, has not made any statements regarding the case yet.

The person who shot the singer was identified as Kaung Zani Hein (aka) La Pyae and he was arrested after the man's picture was obtained through a security camera installed in front of the singer's house.

Kaung Zani Hein's mother Daw Thae Malar Win and sister Song Thazin Oo, who resided in Yangon Region, Htantapin Township, Yogyi Village, were fatally shot at their home that evening on 6 June, according to a pro-military channel.

They were allegedly killed by Ma Ba Tha and Pyu Saw Htee members, according to local news outlets.

The report's accuracy and the identity of the attackers remain unknown.

ROHINGYA HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISOR'S BROTHER BRUTALLY MURDERED IN YANGON



Than Myint. Photo: Facebook

Than Myint, the eldest brother of U Aung Kyaw Moe, a Rohingya human rights advisor for the civilian National Unity Government (NUG) was tragically found murdered in Yangon by an unidentified group of individuals at approximately 11:00 pm on 7 June.

The human rights advisor told Mizzima that Than Myint was brutally murdered by an unknown group of people who repeatedly stabbed him with a knife.

“He was killed by an unknown group of people with repeated knife stabbing on the street at around 11:00 pm on 7 June. The family discovered his body later, surrounded by a pool of blood. He was a simple man with no issue with anyone. The family found him dead. We do not know exactly who has done it. Perhaps an extremist group,” he said.

He continued that the killing might be intentional and the safety of the remaining family members is now in a critical state.

“An unknown group of people killed him near the house. This killing may have been intentional.

They [the family members] are at risk,” he said.

The killing reportedly took place near Nwe Aye Mosque in Dawbon Township in the commercial capital.

Last week, two pro-junta nationalists, Tint Lwin and singer Lily Naing Kyaw were assassinated in Yangon.

In retaliation, junta supporters seem to have targeted the family members of pro-democracy activists.

Pro-junta Telegram channels incited the junta supporters to attack anti-junta activists and family members of celebrities who have shown support for the pro-democracy movement.

Recently, two people Kaung Zarni Hein and Kyaw Thurawere were arrested by the junta in connection with the murder of singer Lily Naing Kyaw. After that, the mother and sister of Kaung Zarni Hein (one of the detainees) were shot dead by four assailants at their home in Htantabin Township located on the western border of the central Yangon Region.

MYANMAR LAWYERS FACE HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION IN JUNTA COURTS: HRW



Photo: AFP

Myanmar lawyers defending political detainees in junta-run courts are being harassed and even jailed by military authorities, Human Rights Watch said Thursday last week, warning that intimidation was forcing many to stop taking cases.

Since it seized power more than two years ago and plunged the country into turmoil, the junta has arrested tens of thousands in a sweeping and bloody crackdown on dissent.

Rights groups say the military has used the courts to throttle opponents including democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint, who were jailed for lengthy terms by closed-door courts.

Defence lawyers working in “special courts” set up by the junta to try political crimes face harassment, intimidation and threats from authorities, HRW said in a report based on interviews with 19 lawyers.

“In the courtroom, I now have to worry about not getting myself detained rather than speaking the truth,” one Yangon-based lawyer told the watchdog.

“Everyone at the court knows who I am... The junta can detain me at any time, and they can and will make up any reasons they want.”

HRW cited the case of attorney Ywet Nu Aung, who was reportedly detained as she left a hearing where she was representing a former chief minister and member of Suu Kyi’s party, the National

League for Democracy (NLD).

She was accused of helping to provide financial support to anti-junta militias and later sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labour.

Lawyers are regularly barred from communicating privately with clients ahead of hearings, HRW said, and in an overcrowded legal system, some had taken on hundreds of cases.

“Sometimes cross-examination doesn’t even happen,” another lawyer told HRW.

“It’s near impossible to challenge what they (the prosecution) present as evidence, and we never get to have a defendant released on bail.”

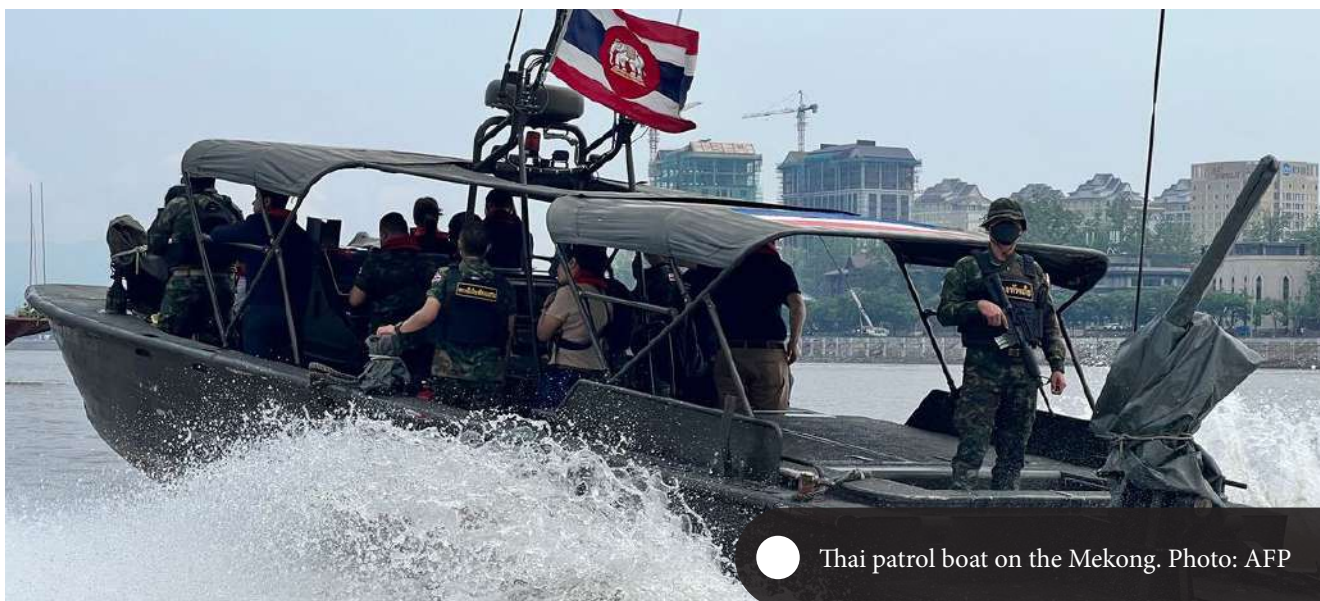
All 19 lawyers told HRW they had experienced “intimidation and surveillance by junta authorities”.

“Few have been willing to put themselves at risk of further surveillance and intimidation and many have stopped taking cases,” HRW said.

More than 23,000 people have been arrested by the junta since the coup in February 2021, according to a local monitoring group.

Last year, a junta-controlled court ordered the execution of a former NLD lawmaker along with a prominent activist over allegations of “terrorism” - Myanmar’s first use of capital punishment in decades.

HUGE INCREASE IN TRANSNATIONAL CRIME AND SYNTHETIC DRUGS IN SE ASIA REQUIRES CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION



Thai patrol boat on the Mekong. Photo: AFP

The trafficking in illegal narcotics, precursor chemicals, timber and wildlife, people and illicit goods across Southeast Asia is being tackled thanks to the support of the specialized UN agency focusing on drugs and crime.

A Thai Navy launch travels at high speed down the muddy brown waters of the Mekong River close to the border town of Chiang Saen in the north of Thailand. To the right is Laos, where huge construction projects funded by foreign investment are rising out of the lush undergrowth along the riverbank and ahead to the left are the dense jungles of Myanmar.

This is the storied Golden Triangle where historically opium was grown to produce heroin for export but where, in recent years, the trade of even deadlier and more profitable synthetic drugs

has taken over.

Thailand, Laos and Myanmar are at the frontlines of illicit trade in Asia dominated by transnational organized crime syndicates.

RIVER SEIZURE

The crew on the Thai boat is buoyant following the recent seizure of 6.4 million pills of the banned and highly addictive synthetic drug methamphetamine, known locally as yaba.

“I was astonished but also really pleased that we seized this amount of yaba,” Captain Phakorn Maniam Head of Operations and Intelligence Section of the, Mekong Riverine Unit, Royal Thai Navy told UN News. “Normally, this amount of drugs is seized on land; it’s a difficult operation apprehending offenders in the middle of the river,” he said, “and so I’m especially proud of our crew, who

are so dedicated to protecting our country and our people.”

A few miles downstream at the small town of Houay Xai on the Laos side of the Mekong, border authorities are celebrating their own significant seizure of drugs; the previous night following a tip-off, a military land patrol caught drug mules carrying 500 kilograms of crystal meth. The previous month 7.1 million methamphetamine pills had also been seized in the same area.

The drugs tracked down in Laos and Thailand had originated in illegal industrial-scale laboratories operated by militias and criminal gangs in the remote mountainous jungles of northern Shan State in Myanmar and were being transited through both countries to the Thai capital, Bangkok, but also across Southeast Asia and to distant lucrative markets including

Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia.

It's difficult to calculate with any certainty what quantity of synthetic drugs is being manufactured in Myanmar, but some estimates suggest many hundreds of tons are being trafficked out of the country.

Despite the seemingly relentless flow of drugs, the Thai and Lao authorities are experiencing some success thanks, in part, to the support of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which is promoting a regional intelligence gathering network.

"With this cross-border collaboration and sharing of information, we have been able to counter narcotics trafficking and also other types of transnational organized crime."

The crime-fighting authorities in Thailand and Laos are collaborating more closely as a result of UNODC's Regional Border Management Programme under which a network of border liaisons offices or BLOs were set up to strengthen cross-border cooperation and information sharing.

The network of over 120 BLOs stretches across Southeast Asia from Myanmar in the west to China in the east and Indonesia to the south and also includes Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

The BLOs are being strengthened with the support of UNODC to counter what the drugs and crime fighting agency's Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Jeremy Douglas, calls "one of the biggest

drug trafficking corridors in the world."

The challenges in disrupting this transnational trade are immense according to Mr. Douglas: "There are complex governance issues at play in the Golden Triangle and inside Myanmar, with fragmented armed groups and militias involved in the drug trade and other illicit businesses that control territory," he said. "At the same time, these groups are operating in very remote places, and in some cases along very porous, open borders. It is easy to traffic drugs and illicit goods in and out of Myanmar, and the situation is very difficult for its neighbours to address."

The increase in the production of synthetic drugs in recent has been "unprecedented" according to the UNODC Regional Representative who believes that collaboration between countries is "fundamental" to preventing trafficking: "This is a shared responsibility; addressing transnational criminality requires states to collaborate to react quickly to what's happening, especially along border areas."

It is not just drugs which are being trafficked across the region. Chemical precursors to manufacture synthetic drugs are being illegally transported into Myanmar in quantities far larger than the drugs that are trafficked out. Trafficking in people, wildlife, timber and weapons is also taking place.

In such a complex and problematic environment, new skills are needed to deal with fresh challenges.

As part of its BLO support,

UNODC has developed training partnerships with agencies across Southeast Asia.

On Highway 1, some 40 kilometres south of the Thai-Myanmar border Police lieutenant Colonel Amonrat Wathanakhsit is taking her students through a practical exercise focused on searching vehicles for contraband.

"Our students are using UNODC knowledge products and training and learning how to question drivers, and they are getting use to how they are behaving. Our students are becoming more confident about identifying which drivers may be hiding synthetic drugs."

Unlike heroin, the production of which is restrained by the natural growing cycle of the opium poppy, methamphetamine can be manufactured almost at will as long as precursor and other chemicals are available.

The collaboration of governments with the support of UNODC is helping to stem the flow of drugs, even if it is widely accepted that seizures represent only a small percentage of the drugs which are trafficked across the region.

Officers like Lt Col Amonrat Wathanakhsit recognize the challenges but she no doubt speaks for many across the region saying that "my job trying to stop drugs is crucial to the security of my country."

Courtesy of UN News

MYANMAR MILITARY TO JOIN FIRST JOINT MILITARY DRILLS OF ASEAN



Defense Attaché of Myanmar to Indonesia, Phyto Zaw Soe attends an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Chief of Defence Forces Meeting in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia, 7 June. Photo: EPA

Southeast Asian nations have agreed to hold their first-ever joint military drills in the South China Sea, Indonesian officials said Thursday last week, as tensions grow over China's increasing assertiveness in the region.

"We will hold joint military drills in the North Natuna Sea," Indonesian military chief Yudo Margono said after a meeting of Southeast Asian defence chiefs in Bali, state news agency Antara reported.

They will take place in September involving all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc and observer member Timor-Leste, he said.

That would include junta-ruled Myanmar, where the military has overthrown a civilian leader and overseen a bloody crackdown on dissent that has resulted in wide-ranging US and EU sanctions.

Margono said the exercises will focus on maritime security and rescue, and will not involve combat operations.

"It is about ASEAN centrality," he said.

The bloc's members have held naval drills with the United States before but never military exercises as a bloc on its own.

The announcement comes after Washington called on Beijing to stop "provocative" behaviour in the disputed waterway after a near-collision with a Philippine vessel and a Chinese fighter pilot's dangerous

manoeuvre near an American surveillance aircraft.

Chinese vessels have also occasionally intruded into the Indonesian-claimed waters of North Natuna where the drills will take place, prompting protests in Jakarta.

China says most of the South China Sea is its own despite competing claims from other Southeast Asian nations including Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Beijing's ships have patrolled the area and when confronted have invoked China's so-called nine-dash line -- an area it claims but is contested by its neighbours -- to justify its alleged historic rights to the waters.

At a summit last month, ASEAN leaders discussed "serious incidents" in the South China Sea and ongoing negotiations for a code of conduct aimed at reducing the risk of conflict there.

ASEAN has long been decried by critics as a toothless talking shop, and its charter principles of consensus and non-interference have hamstrung its ability to take action.

The bloc will hold its next leaders' summit in Indonesian capital Jakarta in September.

AFP

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DOZENS OF CHINESE WARPLANES CROSS INTO TAIWAN'S DEFENCE ZONE



Chinese fighter jet. Photo: AFP

More than 30 Chinese warplanes entered Taiwan's air defence zone over the course of about six hours, the island's defence ministry said Thursday last week, a sharp ramp-up in single-day incursions by China's military.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory and has vowed to take it one day - by force if necessary.

In recent years, Beijing has intensified aerial incursions into the island's air defence identification zone - nearly doubling the air sorties in 2022 compared to the year before.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence spokesman Sun Li-fang announced Thursday that from 5 am local time (2100 GMT), "a total of 37 Chinese military aircrafts" entered Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ.

"Some continued... towards the Western Pacific for long-range reconnaissance training," Sun said at around 11 am.

While not the largest number of incursions this year - that would be 45 sorties on April 9 - Thursday's surge occurred over a much more compressed time frame.

Taiwan's ADIZ is much larger than its airspace, overlaps with part of China's ADIZ and even includes some of the mainland.

Taiwan's military is "monitoring the situation closely", the ministry said on Twitter, adding that patrol

planes, naval vessels and land-based missile systems have been dispatched in response.

They did not clarify if the incursions were ongoing.

Analysts say China's increased probing of Taiwan's defence zone is part of wider "grey-zone" tactics that keep the island pressured.

The incursions came a day after the United States, the Philippines and Japan completed their first-ever joint coastguard drills in the flashpoint South China Sea - which Beijing claims almost entirely.

A surge in warplanes and naval exercises by China's military around Taiwan usually coincides with Taipei making diplomatic engagements with other countries.

China lashes out at any diplomatic action that appears to treat Taiwan as a sovereign nation and has reacted with growing assertiveness to any joint military exercises around the island or visits by Western politicians.

In April, Beijing conducted three days of military exercises simulating a blockade of the island in response to Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen meeting in California.

AFP

CHINA JAILS HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER FOR STATE SUBVERSION



Photo: Wu Yi

China jailed a human rights lawyer for three and a half years for state subversion, his family said Thursday, in the latest blow to the country's embattled civil society under President Xi Jinping.

Chang Weiping was sentenced by a court in northwestern China's Shaanxi province, his wife Chen Zijuan confirmed to AFP.

Known for defending the rights of workers, women and religious and sexual minorities, Chang was seized by authorities in 2020 after releasing a video alleging that he had been tortured during a previous detention.

He was later charged with the crime of "subversion of state power" and tried behind closed doors last year.

His sentence means he will be eligible for release in July 2024, according to the US-based Chen, adding that her husband appeared to be in fragile health.

Chang is an associate of two other rights lawyers who were jailed in April for the same crime following closed-door trials.

Xu Zhiyong and fellow campaigner Ding Jiayi were key figures in the New Citizens' Movement, a civil rights group that called for constitutional reform and criticised government corruption.

Xu - who called for President Xi to step down over his handling of the pandemic - was jailed for 14 years, while Ding received 12 years.

"It is absurd that my husband was sentenced to prison... solely because of his activities as a lawyer and private political discussions at friends' gatherings," Chen told AFP by phone on Thursday.

Civil liberties and freedom of expression have withered in China under Xi's decade-long tenure, rights groups say.

Observers have also regularly raised concerns about due process in the country's judicial system, where the courts have a conviction rate of about 99 percent.

AFP

AI, FACIAL RECOGNITION TECH FRONT AND CENTRE AT CHINA SECURITY EXPO

AI tech that spots “undesirable” behaviour and long-distance facial recognition software were on show Thursday last week at a Beijing expo attended by hundreds of companies - many blacklisted by the United States for their alleged role in repression in China and abroad.

The three-day Security China event bills itself as a showcase of the future of high-tech policing and is backed by Beijing’s commerce ministry and law enforcement bodies.

On Thursday the venue was packed with employees from across China’s security industry and prospective clients, including some foreign customers, as well as curious members of the public.

China is one of the most surveilled societies on Earth, with countless CCTV cameras scattered across cities and facial recognition technology widely used in both day-to-day law enforcement and political repression.

At one booth operated by AI software company SenseTime, sales representatives showed off smart cameras that can be set to recognise certain “undesirable” behaviours - including smoking, physical fights, and not wearing a mask.

Other cameras designed for installation at doorways and checkpoints have the ability to identify attempts to impersonate someone to gain access, such as by holding up a picture or wearing a mask resembling another person.

In one demonstration, an eerily-lifelike mannequin was placed in front of the camera - only for the program to flag that it was not human.

These surveillance systems can also be programmed to watch for fires and alert emergency response personnel.

Hong Kong-listed SenseTime was placed on a US trade blacklist in 2019, accused of being an arm of China’s “military-industrial complex” over the use of its technology in mass surveillance in the western region of Xinjiang.

An estimated one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities have been detained in the region since 2017 under a government campaign that Washington and rights groups have called a genocide.

Another firm, Zohetec, boasted technology with the ability to recognise faces from a distance of 150 metres (490 feet).

Representatives from Tiandy - a Chinese firm also allegedly linked to repression in Xinjiang - showed AFP some of the company’s “smart city” products.

These included cameras that can obtain details about cars such as licence plate numbers and



Photo: Kostiantian Yi

drivers’ faces from a long distance, even at night.

Tiandy’s equipment is used for traffic control by authorities in Beijing and nearby Tianjin, where the firm is based, its staff said.

Another smart city function developed by Tiandy involves identifying pedestrians that break road crossing rules. It posts their picture on a display to “embarrass” the individual and discourage them from reoffending.

“This kind of tool can be quite effective,” a sales staffer told AFP.

Of the relatively small number of foreign customers attending the expo, most hailed from Russia and the Middle East, they said.

Also at the event was Chinese state-owned surveillance giant Hikvision, which is blacklisted in the United States for allegedly helping Beijing carry out a “campaign of repression”.

AFP



Photo: UN News

TIME RUNNING OUT TO SAVE MYANMAR'S RAKHINE FROM HUNGER AND DISEASE POST-CYCLONE MOCHA

More than two weeks after deadly Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar, aid access is uncertain, disease is spreading, and a major food crisis remains a very real threat, the UN said on Friday.

Some 1.6 million people in Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing, and Kachin states are in dire need of assistance after Mocha's 250 kilometre per hour wind gusts destroyed homes, farmland and livestock.

Speaking from hard-hit Rakhine State capital Sittwe, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Myanmar, Titon Mitra, said that time was of the essence as food reserves were being "completely wiped out", water sources needed to be urgently decontaminated and the monsoon was just "a matter of weeks away".

DIRE NEED FOR ACCESS

"The international community has to be given widespread access to the affected communities. And that's a very urgent requirement," he said.

Last month, the UN launched a \$333 million Flash Appeal for Myanmar. While some assistance is coming through, Mr. Mitra said that it was "not anywhere near sufficient" for the time being due to a lack of access and support in rural areas remained "far from adequate".

'Depoliticization, demilitarization' of aid

The UN official highlighted that a distribution plan has been submitted to the military authorities, stressing that "it needs to be cleared very soon, so international organizations with their CSO partners can move freely".

More than two years since Myanmar's generals staged a military coup, sparking widespread ongoing civil unrest and violence, Mr. Mitra insisted that "this really is a time for the depoliticization and the de-

militarization of aid, because the needs are absolutely immense".

RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN JEOPARDY

The recovery may take years, he added, pointing out that the majority of those affected were already "the poorest of the poor".

Concerns are also mounting fast about the future of rural livelihoods, as some 1,200 square kilometres of land flooded due to Mocha, while rains combined with storm surges devastated agriculture and fisheries.

LOOMING FOOD SECURITY CRISIS

Mr. Mitra warned that the provision of relief itself was "not enough" and that if people are unable to plant food crops within the next few weeks, there could be a "major food crisis" emerging in the coming months.

"Households have completely lost their seed stocks. So we are anticipating, unless there's an effective response, that food availability and affordability will become huge issues," he insisted.

Earlier this week, the UN included Myanmar in a list of 18 "hunger hotspots" where critical food insecurity is projected to intensify.

'CYCLE OF SUFFERING'

Already before Mocha hit, 80 per cent of people in Rakhine were living in poverty and 200,000 were internally displaced. In 2022, half of the state's population were cutting down on meals due to the economic crisis, according to UNDP data.

If swift action by the international community did not materialize, "we risk perpetuating an unending cycle of suffering", Mr. Mitra warned.

Courtesy of UN News.



Photo: Matan Levanon

BAGO REGION BUT KNU BRIGADE 3 AREA

Police station attacked, bridges destroyed in Bago's Natthankwin Town

Since 6 June there has been intense fighting between defence forces and Myanmar junta soldiers in Natthankwin Town in Bago Region's Kyaukkyi Township.

According to a report issued by Roma People's Defence Force (PDF), one of the defence force groups involved in the fighting, by 3:30 p.m. on 6 June, more than 10 junta soldiers had been killed and a further seven had been injured.

The fighting started at 4:15 a.m. on 6 June, when joint forces from local people's defence forces (PDFs) and the Karen National Liberation Army's Brigade (3) attacked the police station in Natthankwin Town, an area controlled by Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 3.

The fighting at the police station continued until 7:00 a.m. During the fighting, the junta fired artillery shells into the area and bombed it from fighter jets, causing damage to five houses.

"Five fighter jets flew over the police station and three of them bombed the Natthankwin Police Station area. Five local houses were completely destroyed", a representative of KNLA Brigade 3 said to Mizzima.

There may have been further damage, but it has yet to be confirmed.

Following the attack on the police station, at 8:30 a.m. on 6 June combined defence forces from local PDFs and KNLA Brigade 3 destroyed the Sittaung Bridge that connects Natthankwin and Kyaukkyi Town and the Natywa Bridge that connects Natthankwin and Penwekone Village in Htantabin Township.

A KNLA Brigade 3 member said: "We destroyed the two bridges because these bridges are the main supply routes of the military council and they use these bridges to move columns and transfer supplies like food and ammunition."



CHINA, MYANMAR SIGN COOPERATION DOCUMENTS ON 73RD DIPLOMATIC ANNIVERSARY

The signing ceremony of cooperation documents between China and Myanmar, commemorating the 73rd anniversary of their diplomatic relations, took place in the capital city of Myanmar, Nay Pyi Taw, on 8 June, according to local news outlets and Xinhua.

Speaking at the event, Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai reportedly conveyed China's dedication, emphasizing the resolute stance of China in extending its aid to Myanmar. China also pledged to utilize its capabilities to the fullest, actively contributing to the remarkable progress and development of Myanmar.

Myanmar junta Foreign Affairs Minister Than Swe said that the signing of the documents reflects the outcomes of bilateral cooperation, and the projects will help Myanmar's economic and social development.

He added that since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two nations have respected each other, treated each other on an equal footing, deepened mutually beneficial cooperation, and supported each other on the international arena.

In contrast, a political analyst in Myanmar told Mizzima on the condition of anonymity, "China has consistently approached its relations with Myanmar in a manner that lacks equality. China has been known to collaborate with Myanmar's successive military dictators, prioritizing its own national interests."

CHINA AND MYANMAR DISCUSS KICKSTARTING OF TRADE ROUTE



Officials from China and Myanmar discussed the trade route linking China, Myanmar and India which will connect Linchang District in Yunnan Province and the Indian Ocean at a meeting at the end of May.

China's state-run Yunnan News reported that it expected to transport 10,000 containers of goods along this new trade route but merchants are skeptical about it.

The Linchang Mayor and Myanmar officials discussed this new trade route at a four-day Myanmar- China Trade Fair held in Naypyitaw that ended on 28 May.

The Chinese government designed this new trade route to reach the Indian Ocean by connecting Muse in Shan State to Kyaukphyu deep-sea port in Rakhine State. This will link with Linchang District in Yunnan Province, China.

This link is referred to as a new trade route and China has been building a railroad since 2020 by connecting the Chinshwehaw border trade post in Myanmar. A new road will connect with Muse-Kyauk-

phyu road via Lashio starting from Chinshwehaw border trade post.

A total of 17 companies from Myanmar and China signed nine trade agreements related to this trade corridor.

Under these trade agreements, Myanmar will export mainly agricultural products to China and will import mainly household electrical appliances from China.

Earlier, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang met with Myanmar Military Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyitaw on 2 May.

Mr. Qin Gang told the Myanmar junta chief that they would give development aid to Myanmar to help with this project. Chinese newspapers reported that Mr. Qin Gang told Myanmar leaders that they would give development assistance to help with the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) with help supplied for the agriculture, education and health sectors.

THAILAND CUTS POWER TO CHINESE-BACKED CASINO COMPLEX IN MYANMAR



Photo: Fre Sonneveld

Thailand has cut electricity supplies to a Myanmar border township home to a billion-dollar Chinese-backed development that analysts say is a front for illegal gambling and online scam operations.

Thai authorities halted the power to Shwe Kokko in Myanmar's Karen state from midnight Monday-Tuesday, police chief of Mae Sot district Monsak Kaew-on told AFP.

The electricity was cut after a contract for the Thai side to supply the town ended without the Myanmar junta renewing it, he added.

Many areas along Myanmar's lawless eastern border are awash with Chinese investment, including in casinos, mines and logging.

The sprawling Shwe Kokko complex houses hotels and casinos targeting Chinese customers and is run by the Border Guard Force (BGF), a military-aligned ethnic militia.

A spokesman for the BGF could not be reached for comment by AFP.

Shwe Kokko's main backer is a Chinese national named She Zhijiang, according to a 2020 report by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

His Hong Kong-registered company Yatai has portrayed the \$15 billion project as part of Beijing's "Belt and Road" infrastructure initiative, but the Chinese government has denied any link.

The project was characterised by land-grabbing and an influx of Chinese nationals fleeing a crackdown on organised crime in Cambodia, according to the USIP report. These groups later set up casinos and money-laundering institutions, it said.

In August last year Thai authorities detained She for allegedly running an illegal online casino.

He had been on the run from Chinese authorities since 2012, according to Chinese media.

Myanmar's junta has not commented on the cutting of electricity to the town.

Power outages are common in Myanmar due to a creaky and outdated electricity grid, with demand regularly outstripping supply during the sweltering summer months.

On May 31 the junta-appointed home minister met China's ambassador to Myanmar, state media reported.

They discussed "online fraud and gambling on the Myanmar-China and Myanmar-Thailand borders", and "enhancement of cooperation in the fight against transnational crimes", according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

Karen State has been riven by conflict since Myanmar gained independence from Britain in 1948, with ethnic rebels fighting the military and each other.

AFP

CHINA INFLATION STAYS LOW AS GROWTH SPUTTERS



Photo: Glsun Mall

Chinese inflation came in flat again in May, official figures showed Friday, as the country's economy sputters owing to softening demand and falling exports, leading to calls for a rate cut and a bigger government stimulus.

The consumer price index (CPI) rose 0.2 percent on-year, from 0.1 percent in April, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), said.

The figure was in line with expectations of analysts polled by Bloomberg.

Beijing has kept interest rates low compared to other major economies, but the near-zero inflation highlights challenges faced by policymakers as they try to stimulate the economy.

Top economist and government adviser Liu Yuanchun on Thursday called for regulators to cut borrowing costs further to ease the financing burden of small and medium-sized private businesses.

Private companies' borrowing costs exceeded that of large state-owned enterprises, Liu said, according to Bloomberg News.

Large state-owned enterprises enjoyed loan rates lower than 1.8 percent but many private firms had to pay nearly nine percent, he said on the sidelines of the Lujiazui Forum in Shanghai.

"It'll be better if the rate cut comes as a part of a package of support policies," he said.

China's six largest state-owned commercial banks cut interest rates for savers on Thursday to boost spending, according to announcements on their

websites, after being asked by the central bank.

The country's producer price index (PPI) -- which measures prices paid by wholesalers -- dropped a bigger-than-expected 4.6 percent in May, from a 3.6 percent decline in April, and the biggest drop since 2016.

PPI has fallen for eight consecutive months because of sluggish domestic demand and lower commodity costs.

Other economic data released recently also signal weakness in the world's second-largest economy, despite the lifting of strict pandemic rules at the end of last year.

Exports sank in May for the first time since February, state media reported earlier in the week, breaking a two-month growth streak as a post-Covid rebound faded.

The Chinese economy is weighed down by a debt-laden property sector and a global economic slowdown.

"The risk of deflation is still weighing on the economy," Zhiwei Zhang, Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said.

"The government has not sent a clear signal on potential policy stimulus," he said, adding that the next round of policy reviews may come after July.

Analysts from Capital Economics said: "We still think a tightening labour market will eventually put some upward pressure on inflation later this year."

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

MYANMAR'S JUNTA IMPLEMENTS YUAN-CENTRIC CHINESE BORDER TRADE POLICY

Since June 1, Myanmar's military junta has implemented a new policy mandating traders involved in commerce with China to utilize the Chinese yuan, in a move aimed at reducing the country's dependence on the US dollar, reported Hong Kong based BNN Breaking.

Under the control of the junta, the Foreign Exchange Supervisory Committee has issued a mandate requiring all traders to open local bank accounts denominated in yuan in order to obtain licenses for cross-border transactions. Importers are required to present proof of their yuan holdings, which can be acquired either from export earnings or obtained through domestic banks.

A transformation has taken place within the realm of Myanmar-China trade, ushering in a notable departure from the prior acceptance of both yuan and US dollars as viable means of transaction.

Nonetheless, the move towards a trading system centered around the yuan has seemingly intensified the constraints on traders. In order to import goods, they are now compelled to provide evidence of yuan-based earnings derived from exports.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

IN FOCUS





FORAGING IN YANGON

People search a garbage tank for recyclable items in Yangon, Myanmar, 4 June. World Environment Day is celebrated annually on 5 June and aims to encourage awareness and environmental protection.

Photo: EPA

BURMESE CUISINE EXCITES THE TASTE BUDS IN THE USA



Yunanda Wilson now living in Asheville, North Carolina, USA is effectively an ambassador for Burmese food in the Land of the Brave, Home of the Free at a time of strife for her country.

Calling her company A Thoke Lay, Yunanda runs a Burmese food truck and also caters events, with dreams of one day owning a brick and mortar restaurant business.

In a Podcast interview with Insight Myanmar (see link below), Yunanda talks of her journey and experiences as one of the widespread Burmese diaspora.

One of the biggest questions she gets from customers is, “What exactly is Burmese food?” Yunanda emphasizes the varied descriptions of the cuisine one can hear, saying that is “because we really have such a high influence from all of our neighbors,” referencing the various Chinese, Indian, and Thai foods that have found their way into Burmese recipes. Yunanda ultimately describes Burmese cuisine as a kind of Southeast Asia fusion, albeit with the caveat of unique dishes like mohinga, fermented tea leaves, and the variety of salads. “So when it comes to what makes Burmese food Burmese food, I think what makes it so beautiful is that we have that adaptability that invites different tastes and culture, and we’ll mix it up a little bit based on what locally available.”



Yunanda Wilson

She also notes how the country’s poverty plays a role in how people eat. For example, she explains how, when the Burmese can’t afford meat or fish, they have learned to improvise by adding protein such as chick-pea flour, beans, and nuts. She credits this to a certain resilient spirit that the people have had to develop over several repeated decades of oppression at the hands of military dictators.

But although one might think that living in a state of fear and poverty would bring about greater selfishness in order to survive, Yunanda says it is the exact opposite, in fact: the Burmese people are known to be some of the most generous people in the world. “They’re always watching out for each other,” she notes, “and the connection of food is their way of being like, ‘Hey, I’m here for you, even though politically we might not be able to talk too much, or because I’m scared, but hey, we’re in this together!’ It’s like that unsaid community communication line.”

Another intriguing aspect of Burmese cooking for Yunanda is how Burmese cooks just seem to have an innate ability to combine ingredients in a dish in such a way that all the senses become involved... even when one's pantry is limited. "The ultimate goal for any dish I'm looking for, is it going to have acid? Is it going to have heat, texture, umami, the colors, and the presentation? And even though it's going to hit you with that, it balances, right? You're going to have some sweet but then they put salt in it and sour to just harmonize everything. You would think you're back to zero, because you've balanced it, like it cancels out, but it doesn't cancel out!"

Listen to Yunanda on the podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/5/11/164-flavors-of-freedom>





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