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MYANMAR JUNTA MISUSES THE LADY'S VOICE TO TRY TO REMAIN IN POWER

As the dust settles after the recent lacklustre ASEAN foreign ministers' summit in Jakarta, it is clear that a ground-breaking meeting with imprisoned Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been used for nefarious political purposes.

Little was released publicly by Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai regarding his meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw on 9 July, a meeting granted by the Myanmar junta. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the ASEAN foreign ministers' summit in Jakarta last week, Don said: "There was a meeting, she was in good health and it was a good meeting."

Don is reported to have discussed his meeting behind closed doors with the ASEAN delegates. His visit to Naypyidaw was low key and it is unclear what the agenda of the visit was. The only message to be conveyed from Aung San Suu Kyi, according to Don, was: "She encouraged dialogue." The meeting was private and lasted over one hour, a spokesperson from Thailand's foreign ministry added, noting Suu Kyi also "expressed her concern about the toll that the past two years have taken on the people of Myanmar and the economy."

Was the meeting part of a Myanmar junta political game? The National Unity Government (NUG) thinks so. The statement made by Thailand's Foreign Minister Don regarding the State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi is a political tactic, said Kyaw Zaw, a spokesperson of the President's Office of the NUG.

"It seems as an act of stepping on an unjustly-arrested

detained political prisoner for the sake of politics. It is just political tactics. A dishonest attempt is found in this case," said Kyaw Zaw. If Thailand's Foreign Minister has good will and intention, he should demand the immediate release of tens of thousands of unjustly detained political prisoners including the ousted State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, he added. The meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi should have been handled by ASEAN's special representative for Myanmar, says the NUG.

Unless Don comes forward with an official transcript of Aung San Suu Kyi's stated views from the meeting, it is hard to consider the visit anything but a PR move by the Thai caretaker government to help reinforce their call for dialogue – with the Myanmar junta involved in that dialogue process.

As one Myanmar media outlet noted: "Use Suu Kyi to create the illusion that the (Myanmar) military might be willing to soften its position, and then deploy this fiction to weaken domestic resistance and divide international opinion."

Aung San Suu Kyi's voice has been silenced by the Myanmar junta, who have imprisoned her for 33 years on what most believe to be trumped-up charges. Given the opacity of the Thai FM's meeting with The Lady and any message she sought to give, the NUG and other critics believe the generals in Naypyidaw are using the engagement for their own ends, in further desperate efforts to continue their illegal rule.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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CONTENTS



NEWS & INSIGHT

- 3 EDITORIAL
- 6 IN FOCUS
- 8 NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 10 TOOTHLESS TALKING SHOP ASEAN fails to make progress on the Myanmar crisis
- 14 ASEAN lengthy Joint Communiqué includes a mere five paras on Myanmar

MISUSING THE LADY

- 15 Myanmar's NUG calls out 'political tactics' of Thai FM meet with Aung San Suu Kyi
- 16 Blinken says 'must press' Myanmar junta to stop violence, return to democracy



- 17 Indonesian president warns ASEAN 'can't be proxy' of any country
- 18 NUG acting president calls for effective financial support in Spring Revolution

MEDIA

- 19 Polish Embassy in Thailand supports Mizzima training of Myanmar journalists





ROHINGYA SITUATION STALEMATE

- 20 Still unsafe for Rohingya to return to Myanmar: US envoy

CHINA FOCUS

- 22 China's top diplomat says Beijing, Moscow to deepen ties
- 23 China's top diplomat calls on India to meet 'halfway' on border issue

INDIA FOCUS

- 24 EU parliament alarmed by violence in India's Manipur State
- 25 Delhi river reaches record high in monsoon floods

COMMENTARY

- 26 Myanmar atrocities and impunity must end: Türk

28 ETHNIC NEWS ROUNDUPS

30 LAST WEEK IN NAY PYI TAW

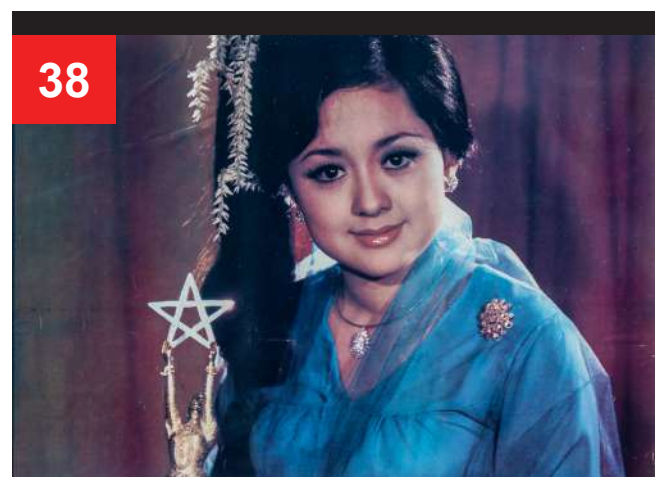
BUSINESS

- 32 Myanmar mining and mineral export including jade falls by about 28%
- 33 CBM changes exchange limit of export earnings to Myanmar Kyat from 65% to 50%
- 34 Yangon blackout caused by emergency repair of Yadana offshore gas pipeline
- 35 BUSINESS ALERTS

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

- 36 IN FOCUS
- 38 Actress May Wynn Maung takes a stand on the Myanmar coup

Cover photo of Myanmar protestor by AFP





PROTESTING IN JAKARTA

A protester takes to the streets of Jakarta, Indonesia last week to call for the ousting of the Myanmar military junta and a return to democracy.

Photo: AFP



DEMOCRACY FOR MYANMAR



LOCOA, JRMK JAKARTA, URBAN POOR CONSORTIUM

HEAD OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI PROTECTION TEAM RELEASED FROM PRISON

Police Inspector Pyae Phyo Naing, who was in charge of Aung San Suu Kyi's protection team whilst she was State Counselor, was released from Yamethin Prison in Mandalay Region on the morning of 5 July.

He had been charged with violating the Myanmar Police Force Maintenance of Discipline Law, for which he was sentenced to three years in prison.

A source from Yamethin Prison said: "He's on his way home right now. He was released after serving his entire sentence in prison. He was charged under The Myanmar Police Force Maintenance of Discipline Law."

He served his full sentence, only receiving a standard remission for prisoners who follow prison

rules.

Sub-inspector Cherry Htet and security officer U Aung Naing Oo, two other members of Aung San Suu Kyi's protection team, are also serving prison sentences in Yamethin Prison.

Cherry Htet was sentenced to five years in prison under Section 505(a) of the penal code and U Aung Naing Oo was sentenced to 15 years in prison under Section 52 (a) of the Counter Terrorism Law and Section 3(1)(c) of the State Secrets Act.

Dr. Myo Aung, the former Mayor of Naypyitaw, U Ye Min Oo, the former Deputy Mayor of Naypyitaw and U Min Thu, a former union cabinet minister, are all also currently imprisoned in Yamethin Prison.

MORE THAN 20 YOUTHS IN YANGON ARRESTED DURING FIRST WEEK OF JULY

Junta soldiers arrested more than 20 youths in Yangon's Mingalardon, Kamaryut, South Dagon, Kyimyindaing and Shwepyithar townships, during the first week of July.

On 1 July, a junta military patrol arrested Nyan Lin Htet, a 24-year-old student studying at Yangon University, near Sanyeiknyein (1) Street on Insein Road, in Kamaryut Township. Mizzima enquired with the Yangon University Students' Union to see if they had any further details about what happened to Nyan Lin Htet, but they have not yet replied.

On 3 July, near Basic Education Middle School - 9 in Yangon's Shwepyithar Township, junta soldiers dressed in civilian clothes arrested a man and a woman while they were hanging a banner that said: "Never forget the day 7.7.1962, [when] history [was] written with the blood of students."

The banner was referring to 7 July 1962 when the then junta, under the dictator Ne Win, violently sup-

pressed a student demonstration of 5,000 students at Rangoon University, (now called Yangon University) killing more than 100 students and arresting another 6,000. The junta then blew up the Rangoon University Students' Union building.

A source from Yangon said: "Youths who live in Yangon need to be especially careful this month because it is the anniversary of the 7 July student uprising. Soldiers are [currently] arresting and torturing innocent civilians in Yangon."

Junta troops are randomly arresting youths, then accusing them of assisting people's defence forces (PDFs) and interrogating them. After interrogation anyone found to be innocent still has to pay a bribe to the soldiers before they can be released.

According to reports, junta forces are randomly arresting and checking young people in Yangon and checking overnight guest registration lists in Thaketa, Hlaing, South Dagon and Sanchaung townships.

POLITICAL PRISONER TORTURED TO DEATH IN MYINGYAN PRISON

A political prisoner, U Sein Win, was tortured to death by the Myanmar junta in Myingyan Prison in Mandalay Region.

One of U Sein Win's relatives told Mizzima that prison officers had contacted the family on 2 July and told them that he had died from a ruptured blood vessel in his stomach.

The relative said: "They [prison officials] didn't give the body back to the family, they just called the family when it was due to be cremated. They had already carried out an autopsy. There were bruises on his right arm and neck."

Sein Win was arrested in 2022, accused of being associated with people's defence forces and sentenced to three years imprisonment for violating Section 505 (a) of the penal code.

According to friends, Sein Win was just an ordinary villager who was in good health and did not suffer from any heart or stomach health issues.

Ko Thike Htun Oo, an official from the Myanmar Political Prisoners Network (PPN) said: "He was amongst the prisoners who were pretty badly tortured in Myingyan Prison. There were four or five of them including him. They were usually tortured in their prison cell."

According to reports, junta soldiers started torturing political prisoners in Myingyan Prison on 21 May

2023, accusing them of communicating with PDFs.

No medical treatment has been provided to tortured prisoners in Myingyan Prison.

Also, on 30 June this year, 14 prisoners were taken from Myingyan Prison to the Light Infantry Battalion (15) base in Myingyan Town to be tortured, according to Ko Thike Htun Oo. He said the 14 are still being held at the base but are due to be transferred to Magway Central Prison and Thetyet Prison.

According to a representative of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), abuse of prisoners has risen throughout Myanmar since the February 2021 coup.

He said: "The kind of abuse that is happening is against the law. Since the terrorist military, led by Min Aung Hlaing, seized power on 1 February 2021 everything they have done has been illegal. On top of that, they unjustly arrest and sentence people who are against them."

He added that junta personnel are purposefully abusing political prisoners and that many political prisoners are dying as a result of being tortured during interrogation or whilst in prison.

The Myanmar junta has arrested 23,674 people since the 2021 coup and of those, 19,311 were still being detained as of 4 July, according to the AAPP.

THABEIKKYIN PDF NEEDS FOOD SUPPLIES

Thabeikkyin People's Defense Forces (PDF) from Mandalay Region says that public contributions are urgently needed so that they can stockpile food and supplies for the wet season.

An official from the Thabeikkyin Township based Thabeikkyin PDF, said: "Because it is difficult to transport things during the rainy season we are stockpiling food such as rice, oil, and salt for our soldiers in Thabeikkyin PDF. As a result, we need a lot of money to buy food."

The local NUG regional military command has forbidden Thabeikkyin PDF groups from issuing any press releases as it is involved in secret military oper-

ations.

Because Thabeikkyin PDF has been making fewer public statements it is receiving less local support as people do not hear about it as much.

The Crows, a local fundraising organisation, has said it will try to get food supplies for Thabeikkyin PDF.

An official from the organisation said: "Thabeikkyin PDF is a revolutionary organisation that actively opposes the dictatorship in Mandalay and Bhamo areas. We are working together on the Food Support Man Myay campaign to get food for PDF soldiers in Thabeikkyin during the rainy season."



ASEAN

24TH ASEAN PLUS THREE FOR

JAKARTA, INDONESIA



TOOTHLESS TALKING SHOP

ASEAN fails to make progress on the Myanmar crisis

AN INDONESIA
2023



FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

INDONESIA, 13 JULY 2023



ASEAN delegates, plus three, grapple with solving the Myanmar crisis. Photo: AFP

ASEAN was struggling with the words to use last week to lay out their stance on the Myanmar crisis, a crisis that has muddied the status of the regional bloc since the Myanmar generals grabbed power in a coup in February 2021.

ASEAN is divided – with a squabble discussed behind closed doors over the Myanmar chair at ASEAN meetings.

ASEAN foreign ministers managed – after a delay – to come together to present a statement in which they condemned the violence in Myanmar again and repeated support for a peace plan ignored by its junta rulers, as the divided bloc struggled to find unity over the protracted crisis.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent.

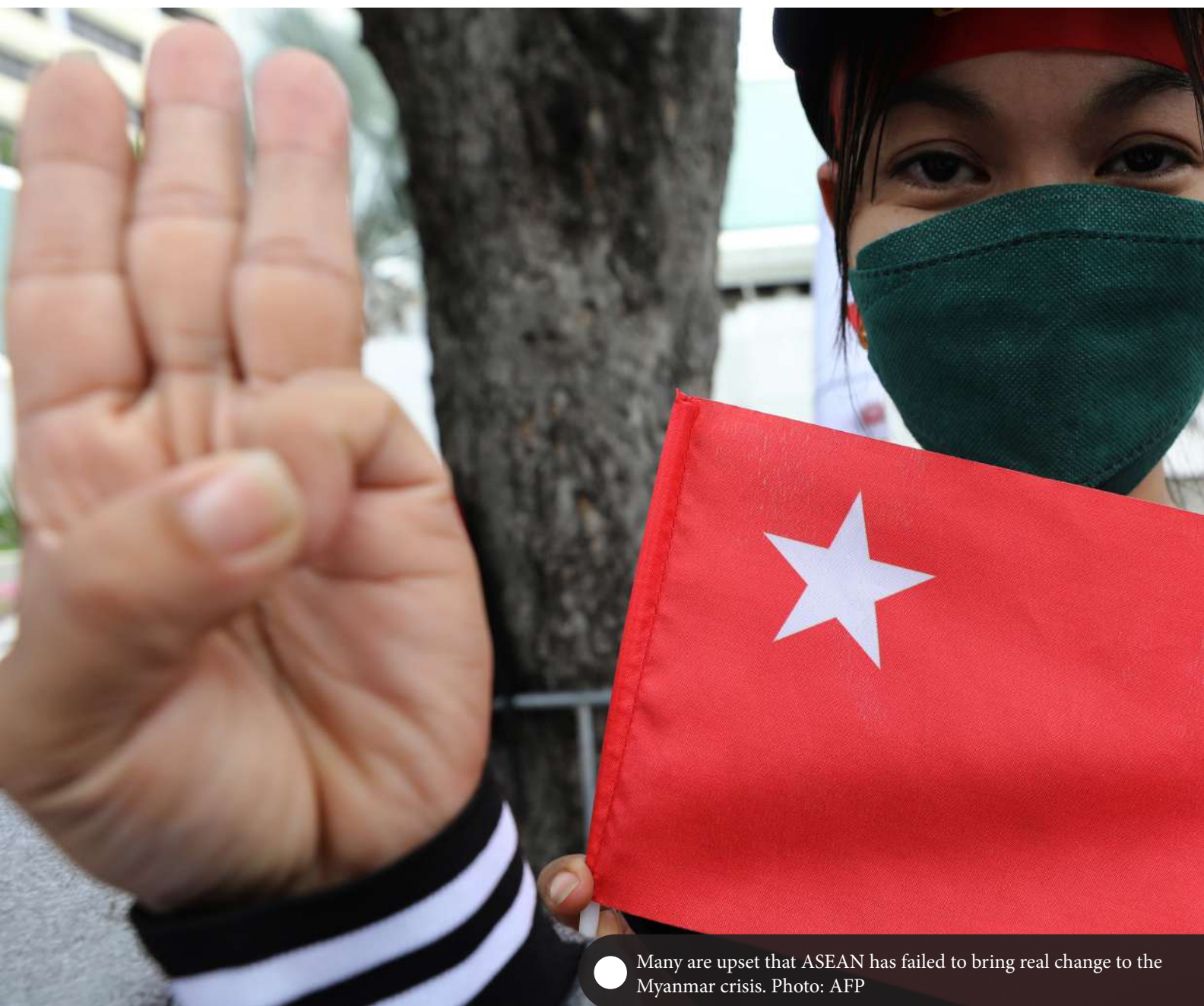
STRUGGLING WITH THE WORDS

A joint communique finally arrived late Thursday, more than a day after a two-day Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meeting ended as the fractured group wrangled over its content and wording.

It said a five-point plan agreed with Myanmar's junta two years ago - which they have failed to implement - remained the bloc's best hope of solving the crisis, despite Thailand launching a separate track to ASEAN efforts in recent months.

"We... reaffirmed our united position that the five-point consensus remains our main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar," it said.

"We strongly condemned acts of violence, including air strikes, artillery shelling, and destruction of public facilities and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence (and) denounce any escalation."



Many are upset that ASEAN has failed to bring real change to the Myanmar crisis. Photo: AFP

It asked all sides of the Myanmar conflict to “create a conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogue.”

SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

ASEAN chair Indonesia had urged a political solution to the crisis at two-day foreign minister talks.

But more than two years after the coup, the divided 10-member bloc’s peace efforts remain fruitless, as the junta ignores international criticism and refuses to engage with its opponents.

Not for nothing is the grouping referred to as a “toothless talking shop”.

A Southeast Asian diplomat attending the meetings told AFP on condition of anonymity the delay was because they were “working on the language on Myanmar”.

The diplomat said some countries wanted outright re-engagement with the junta, while others said

the five-point plan that aims to end the violence and renew talks must remain the basis for re-engagement.

This confirmed the “deep divisions within ASEAN on the Myanmar issue”, the diplomat added.

THAI DIALOGUE TRACK

Thailand has made its own initiative to speak directly with the Myanmar junta and other actors in the conflict, at times raising eyebrows.

Last month, Bangkok hosted the junta’s foreign minister for controversial “informal talks” that further split the bloc.

Then on Wednesday, on the second day of ASEAN talks, Thailand’s top diplomat announced that he met the previous Sunday with Aung San Suu Kyi - who has been detained since the coup, and jailed by a junta court for a total of 33 years.

Don Pramudwinai said he met the Nobel laureate on Sunday in Myanmar’s capital Naypyidaw and that she was in “good health” and “encouraged dialogue”.

Don “freely discussed what he wanted” with Suu Kyi, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said in an audio statement posted by the military’s information team Thursday, adding that her health was “good”.

On Thursday, Don told reporters: “It has been two years now, (and) not much improvement. So there must be re-engagement with Myanmar.”

SAFE, STABLE, PROSPEROUS

Indonesia has said any other efforts must support ASEAN’s existing five-point peace plan.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir told reporters that all members were working towards the “same issue”, which was ensuring that Southeast Asia was “a region that is safe, stable and prosperous”.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said Jakarta had engaged in “quiet diplomacy” with all sides of the conflict, and in its seven months as chair had held more than 110 engagements concerning Myanmar.

But analysts said Thailand was taking the lead on the crisis, undercutting ASEAN efforts and shifting the centre of negotiation to Bangkok. And at a juncture when Thai politics is in flux, following the May election and the turmoil surrounding the question of who will become the next Thai prime minister.

Year after year, decade after decade, ASEAN has struggled over a range of regional issues, in part because of an unwillingness of member states to interfere in each other’s internal affairs.

In the wake of this latest summit, it is clear the ASEAN bloc is struggling to find an answer to the bloody mess in its midst – Myanmar.

Reporting by Mizzima and AFP



ASEAN LENGTHY JOINT COMMUNIQUE INCLUDES A MERE FIVE PARAS ON MYANMAR



Myanmar junta's empty chair at the ASEAN meeting. Photo: AFP

More than two years after the Myanmar coup, the divided 10-member ASEAN bloc's peace efforts remain fruitless, as the Myanmar junta ignores international criticism and refuses to engage with its opponents.

In a lengthy Joint Communique for the 56th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Jakarta issued Thursday after wrangling over the wording on Myanmar, the crisis that has seriously damaged the image of ASEAN is covered in five paragraphs.

The following is the ASEAN stance on the Myanmar crisis:

DEVELOPMENTS IN MYANMAR

142. We discussed the developments in Myanmar and reaffirmed our united position that the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remains our main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar. We strongly condemned the continued acts of violence, including air strikes, artillery shelling, and destruction of public facilities and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence, denounce any escalation, and create a conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogue.

143. We commended the AHA Centre for its partial delivery of aid to 400 households of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Hsiseng Township, located in the Southern Shan State, on July 7, 2023. We appreciated the support of the relevant stakeholders in ensuring safe delivery. We called on further facilitation to ensure the humanitarian assistance can safe-

ly reach the 1,1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) identified in the Joint Need Assessment (JNA) Report of the AHA Centre. We appreciated the support from all stakeholders in Myanmar for helping the completion of the JNA by the AHA Centre in an inclusive manner facilitated by the ASEAN Chair. We called for additional support from the international community for humanitarian assistance to implement the JNA Report.

144. We appreciated the Chair's efforts in intensifying engagement with all relevant stakeholders in Myanmar to build trust and confidence, create a conducive environment, and bridge gaps and differences leading toward an inclusive dialogue for a comprehensive political solution. We supported sustaining such engagements to push for the implementation of the 5PC in its entirety, in line with our Leaders' decision at the 42nd ASEAN Summit. We called for continued support of the External Partners, including the UN and neighbouring countries of Myanmar, to work with ASEAN for concrete implementation of the 5PC.

145. In line with paragraph 14 of the ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the Implementation of Five-Point Consensus, we were briefed by Thailand on its recent activities on Myanmar, which a number of ASEAN Member States viewed as a positive development. We reaffirmed ASEAN unity and reiterated that any effort should support, in line with 5PC and in coordination with the Chair of ASEAN.

146. We will conduct our comprehensive review of the 5PC implementation and submit our recommendation to the 43rd ASEAN Summit.

MYANMAR'S NUG CALLS OUT 'POLITICAL TACTICS' OF THAI FM MEET WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI



Symbol of democracy for Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) claim the recent visit of the Thai foreign minister Don Pramudwinai to jailed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw was a political move.

Don told the ASEAN summit and reporters that he had had a private meeting with the Nobel Laureate in Naypyidaw on Sunday.

The statement made by Thailand's Foreign Minister Don regarding the State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi is a political tactic, said Kyaw Zaw, a Spokesperson of the President's Office of the NUG.

"It seems as an act of stepping on an unjustly-arrested detained political prisoner for the sake of politics. It is just political tactics. A dishonest attempt is found in this case," said Kyaw Zaw.

If Thailand's Foreign Minister has good will and intention, he should demand the immediate release of tens of thousands of unjustly detained political prisoners including the ousted State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, he added. Furthermore, the NUG could not confirm that the meeting actually took place.

Kyaw Zaw pointed out that there is no evidence of the meeting.

The NUG says the meeting should have been handled by the ASEAN Special Representative, questioning why there was the intervention from the Thai foreign minister who is about to step down, following the recent Thai election.

The NUG encouraged ASEAN countries, in helping the Myanmar issue, must reflect the will and attitude of the public, should not attempt to make the situation more complicated, and, in addition, it needs to be in compliance with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus agreement.

The Thai foreign minister told ASEAN and reporters he met with Aung San Suu Kyi and that she was healthy, noting she encouraged dialogue.

After the February 2021 coup, the Military Council prevented State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi from meeting with international diplomats, allowing her to only meet with some National League for Democracy members.

One analyst expressed skepticism over the meeting. The permission for the meeting was granted because, possibly, Thailand's Foreign Minister is certain to be able to discuss a situation that could be acceptable by the Military Council, political analyst Ye Tun said.

"The similar situation is that the military seized power in both countries. Since they have similarities, they could understand each other. It seems that they openly discussed what they would say at the meeting and asked for it," said Ye Tun.

Currently, the State Counselor has been sentenced to 33 years in prison over a total of 19 cases brought by the Military Council.

BLINKEN SAYS ‘MUST PRESS’ MYANMAR JUNTA TO STOP VIOLENCE, RETURN TO DEMOCRACY



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Southeast Asian ministers Friday last week that Washington and regional states must pressure Myanmar’s ruling junta to put down its arms and return to democratic rule.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi’s government more than two years ago, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent and ending the country’s brief democratic experiment.

“In Myanmar, we must press the military regime to stop the violence, to implement ASEAN’s five-point consensus, to support a return to democratic governance,” he told Association of Southeast Asian Nations foreign ministers ahead of talks in Jakarta.

This week’s ASEAN meeting has been dominated by the crisis, which has left the bloc divided about how and whether it should re-engage with Myanmar’s junta rulers.

They have been barred from ASEAN’s high-level meetings but Thailand hosted the junta’s foreign minister last month for controversial “informal talks” that further split the bloc.

The 10-member group has long been decried as a toothless talking shop, and it remains split over diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis as it tries to form a united position on the country.

In a joint communique issued late Thursday, the bloc condemned violence on all sides and reiterated a five-point peace plan largely ignored by the junta should remain the basis of engagement.

But the meeting was dealt a surprise on Wednesday when Thailand’s foreign minister disclosed he met with Myanmar’s ousted democracy leader Suu Kyi on his own on Sunday in the country’s capital Naypyidaw and said she was in “good health”.

AFP

INDONESIAN PRESIDENT WARNS ASEAN “CAN’T BE PROXY’ OF ANY COUNTRY



Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Friday last week said ASEAN cannot become a proxy for other countries, as US-China tensions rise over issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Foreign ministers from the Southeast Asian bloc have gathered in Jakarta for talks about regional issues, from the disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety, to the crisis in Myanmar, where China is the ruling junta's main ally.

Disagreements over the waterway have pitted some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) against Beijing and boosted sympathy for US opposition to China's growing assertiveness. Others have backed Beijing.

"ASEAN cannot be a competition, it can't be a proxy of any country, and international law should be respected consistently," Widodo told the ministers.

"We in ASEAN are committed to strengthening the unity and solidity as well as centrality in ASEAN to guard the peace and stability in the region."

Tensions between the world's two largest economies have soared in recent years over a host of issues, including China's drills around self-ruled Taiwan and sweeping US export restrictions on advanced semiconductors.

The Jakarta meetings have been joined by both China and the United States, whose top diplomats met Thursday in the Indonesian capital.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned China's Wang Yi of consequences after a cybersecurity breach blamed on China again threatened to undermine a nascent stabilisation of ties, a US official told AFP.

Wang told Blinken that the United States should not interfere in China's affairs and should "work with" Beijing to improve their relationship, according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

ASEAN has been divided on the Myanmar crisis and how to engage with its pro-China junta since the 2021 coup plunged the country into violent turmoil.

The bloc issued a much-debated communique on Thursday that repeated its condemnation of violence. It reiterated that a five-point peace plan agreed with the junta, but largely ignored since, must remain the basis for resolving the conflict.

Myanmar remains an ASEAN member but its rulers have been barred from top-level summits over a lack of progress on the plan, which aims to end violence and resume talks between the military and the anti-coup movement.

Thailand has taken a separate track to ASEAN efforts, hosting "informal talks" with the junta's foreign minister and Bangkok's top diplomat met with deposed democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi last week and said she was in good health.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), the party overthrown in the coup, appeared to question the Thai minister's version of events, in which he said she had "encouraged dialogue" to end the crisis.

"Aung San Suu Kyi could not have a chance to talk in front of the public, so it is hard to believe every word from what the Thai foreign minister said," the party said in a Facebook statement.

NUG ACTING PRESIDENT CALLS FOR EFFECTIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN SPRING REVOLUTION



Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG) Duwa Lashi La emphasized the crucial role of effective financial support in the Spring Revolution in ensuring a strong chain of command and the trust of the people's defence forces in their government.

This was the message the acting president had at the 23rd meeting of NUG on 11 July.

The acting president said that the contribution of revolution funds should not be scattered to avoid weakness in financial management.

"The Spring Revolution is based on armed struggle and political ways. A large amount of budget is required in the armed struggle. People have lost their property and possessions under the military regime," he said.

At the meeting, NUG Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than expressed his appreciation for the

financial support provided by the public as it is still a major driving force for the revolution.

"Financial support is necessary for the revolution. We have received only certain portions of funding from some international organizations, and they have not contributed effective funds for the revolution," he noted.

In January this year, the NUG raised more than US\$100 million for the revolution. The funds were mainly received from the sale of the Spring Revolution Special Treasury Bond, the auction of military-owned properties.

After Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine State on 14 May, the NUG established a \$1 million relief fund alongside the forming the Emergency Operations Coordination Committee to deal with the resulting humanitarian needs.

POLISH EMBASSY IN THAILAND SUPPORTS MIZZIMA TRAINING OF MYANMAR JOURNALISTS



The Embassy of Poland in Thailand and Mizzima on Friday 14 July signed a contract whereby the Embassy will contribute US\$18,500 for capacity-building of Myanmar journalists. The funding will help to cover the costs of a fourth batch of training for Myanmar journalists at the Mizzima Media Training Institute (MMTI) to run in 2023.

Upon the signing of the contract, Poland's Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Artur Dmochowski, said: "We are happy to support Myanmar's young independent journalists through the 'Polish aid' project of supporting the Mizzima Media Training Institute (MMTI), which I am sure will contribute to the development of a free media environment in the future".

Poland has a long history of fighting for the right to independent media, including within its own borders. Ambassador Dmochowski himself comes from a journalistic background and was a key figure in Poland's underground journalism movement during the last decade of communist rule in Poland, having been arrested multiple times.

"We, in Poland, may consider ourselves as very lucky to live now in a democratic country, where freedom of speech is considered one of our fundamental rights, with a vibrant and independent media that express a broad range of diverse opinions," not-

ed the Ambassador. "We had numerous challenges throughout our history, particularly living under the communist regime in the 20th century, so we understand well what lack of such basic human freedoms means and we wish Myanmar, and particularly yourselves [Mizzima], as representatives of the media, to enjoy all the democratic liberties as soon as possible."

Myanmar's independent media, including Mizzima, were declared illegal shortly after the Myanmar junta launched its February 2021 coup. Myanmar ranks badly at 173 rd out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index for 2023, having been ranked 139 th prior to the coup.

MMTI is a unique resource for Myanmar's independent media and journalists. Established in August 2022, the facility provides trainees from throughout Myanmar with instruction across several journalistic disciplines given by noted Burmese professionals as well as distinguished foreign guests.

Journalism training for young journalists from Myanmar by the Mizzima Media Training Institute (MMTI) has received financial contributions by the governments of Luxembourg and Ireland besides Poland in 2023.

STILL UNSAFE FOR ROHINGYA TO RETURN TO MYANMAR: US ENVOY



Rohingya refugees in a camp in Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

A top US rights envoy in Bangladesh said Thursday last week that conditions remain unsafe for the return of ethnic Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, with Washington pledging further aid for the crisis.

Bangladesh is home to around a million members of the stateless minority, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar that is now subject to a genocide probe at the International Criminal Court.

“We support efforts to create the conditions for eventual, safe, dignified, informed and voluntary return of Rohingya -- conditions that do not currently exist,” the US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights Uzra Zeya told reporters in Dhaka.

Zeya, speaking after talks with Bangladesh’s Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, commended Dhaka for

“reaffirming their commitment against forced return” of Rohingya people.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have discussed efforts to begin repatriating Rohingya refugees to their homeland, where they have been subject to decades of persecution and are denied citizenship.

“Obviously, we will not do anything to harm the refugees or Rohingyas that we have, who have been welcomed in Bangladesh,” Momen said.

Dozens have been killed in Rohingya camp clashes between rival insurgent forces this year, with Human Rights Watch on Thursday warning of “surging violence by armed groups and criminal gangs”.

The United States is the biggest donor to Rohingya humanitarian efforts, contributing more than \$2.1 billion in aid to Rohingyas and host communities in Bangladesh.

Funding cuts forced the United Nations food agency to cut rations to refugee settlements twice this year, with aid workers warning that the move would likely worsen the already precarious security situation in the camps.

Zeya on Thursday announced a further \$74 million in aid, including for Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh and in camps in Myanmar’s Rakhine state.

The US diplomat also met Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and discussed “the need for free and fair elections” due in January 2024.

AFP

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CHINA'S TOP DIPLOMAT SAYS BEIJING, MOSCOW TO DEEPEN TIES



Wang Yi. Photo: AFP

China's top diplomat said on Thursday last week that Beijing would strengthen ties with Russia in areas of strategic communication and coordination, as the allies' contacts grow closer after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year.

Beijing says it is a neutral party in the war but its refusal to condemn the invasion has led many of Kyiv's allies to accuse it of favouring Russia after emerging as Moscow's most important ally in its current bout of international isolation.

Wang Yi met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting in Jakarta, where both will take part in an 18-nation East Asia Summit ministerial meeting Friday.

"The two sides should... strengthen strategic communication and coordination," Wang was quoted as saying by the Chinese foreign ministry in a statement.

"China and Russia firmly support each other in safeguarding legitimate interests, adhere to the path of harmonious coexistence and win-win development."

Wang was representing Beijing in the Indonesian capital because Foreign Minister Qin Gang was ill, the foreign ministry said on Tuesday.

Lavrov said Moscow and Beijing were maintaining "high-level exchanges" and a March meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Presi-

dent Xi Jinping in Russia had "injected strong momentum into bilateral relations", the Chinese ministry's readout said.

"We have more and more areas where interests and plans converge, so I am looking at further development with optimism," Lavrov said, according to a Russian foreign ministry statement.

China and Russia have ramped up economic cooperation and diplomatic contacts in recent years.

Both sides "exchanged views on strengthening coordination and cooperation under multilateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," Wang said, according to the Chinese foreign ministry statement.

Wang also said both countries would "guard against external interference" and support the ASEAN bloc to grasp "the correct direction of cooperation in East Asia, and maintain... stability in the region".

Xi warned last week against "colour revolutions" and a "new Cold War", according to a state media readout of his virtual speech to a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in India.

Putin, in his first summit since a short-lived mutiny last month by the Wagner mercenary group, said Moscow would "continue to resist external pressure, sanctions and provocations".

AFP

CHINA'S TOP DIPLOMAT CALLS ON INDIA TO MEET "HALFWAY" ON BORDER ISSUE



Monk on the roof of Hemis Monastery in Ladakh, India, close to the India-China border. Photo: AFP

China's top diplomat urged India to focus on "common interests" and meet China "halfway" to defuse border tensions between Asia's most populous neighbours, the Chinese foreign ministry said Saturday.

Relations between India and China have deteriorated in recent months over their contested Himalayan border, and a visa spat in which the two sides have expelled nearly all of each other's journalists.

"China and India's common interests clearly outweigh their differences," Wang Yi told Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, when the two met Friday on the sidelines of Southeast Asian talks in Jakarta, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The two sides should support each other, rather than... suspect each other," Wang added.

India and its northern neighbour are locked in a military standoff along their mostly undemarcated border in the Ladakh region.

Beijing also claims the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of Tibet, and it considers

Kashmir a disputed territory.

"It is hoped that the Indian side will meet China halfway and find a solution to the border issue that is acceptable to both sides," Wang said.

The two countries have agreed to hold the next round of military commander-level talks on the border issue "as soon as possible", the ministry statement said.

Despite frosty relations, China is India's second-largest trade partner.

In 2020, India sought to limit investments from China as political tensions heightened between them, with their soldiers clashing in the disputed Himalayan region.

"China is highly concerned about India's recent restrictive measures against Chinese companies," Wang added, while urging New Delhi to provide a "fair, transparent and non-discriminatory business environment".

AFP

EU PARLIAMENT ALARMED BY VIOLENCE IN INDIA'S MANIPUR STATE



The EU parliament on Thursday last week urged India to end violence and protect minorities in the country's northeastern Manipur state, criticising "nationalistic rhetoric" it said was adding to tensions.

It came as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi began a two-day visit to France, where he will attend the traditional Bastille Day military parade as guest of honour.

MEPs expressed concern over clashes between Manipur's majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around the state capital Imphal, and the mainly Christian Kuki tribe in the surrounding hills.

The EU parliament said that the violence has "left at least 120 people dead, 50,000 displaced and over 1,700 houses and 250 churches destroyed".

MEPs called out "nationalistic rhetoric" and the parliament adopted a resolution on Thursday urging Indian authorities to "promptly halt the ethnic and religious violence and to protect all religious minorities".

The Kuki community had protested Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action.

This also stoked long-held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups.

The resolution noted that "intolerance towards minority communities has contributed to the current

violence and that there have been concerns about politically motivated, divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism in the area."

"The Manipur state government has also shut down internet connections and severely hindered reporting by the media, while security forces have been implicated in the recent killings, something that has further increased distrust in the authorities," it said.

It called for independent investigations and a lifting of internet shutdowns.

It added that "human rights must be at the heart of the partnership between the European Union and India, including in trade relations".

MEP Pierre Larrourou, the text's chief negotiator, said the local government of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was "fanning the flames of conflict".

"By authorizing the armed forces to fire on civilians and cutting off Internet services, the BJP is using the local violence to further discriminate against non-Hindu minorities", he said.

Larrourou called Modi's invitation to the parade in Paris "an affront not only to India's minority communities, journalists and human rights defenders, but also to India as a democracy".

Manipur is part of India's remote northeast, a region linked to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor.

AFP

DELHI RIVER REACHES RECORD HIGH IN MONSOON FLOODS



Flooding in Delhi. Photo: AFP

The river running through India's capital New Delhi has reached a record high due to monsoon floods, authorities said Friday last week as army engineers were deployed to try to contain the waters.

The Yamuna river was flowing in an “#EXTREME FLOOD SITUATION”, India's central water commission tweeted, having reached a record width of 208.66 metres late on Thursday.

The figure surpassed the previous mark of 207.49 metres, reached in 1978, and the flows threatened low-lying neighbourhoods in the megacity of more than 20 million people.

Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India's treacherous monsoon season, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

Authorities deployed army engineers around a barrage and thousands of people have moved to temporary relief camps or nearby elevated roads as areas close to the riverbank were inundated over the past 48 hours.

All schools, colleges, and non-essential government offices have been ordered to remain shut till at least Sunday as several key roads and bridges are also under water.

Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said that state personnel and army engineers were working to “try to ensure that the flood waters do not enter the [main areas of the] city”, but warned that more rain was forecast for Saturday.

Conditions in Delhi may depend on the situation in several upstream northern states which have received heavy to very heavy rains in the last few days.

At least 90 people have lost their lives in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Haryana in recent days, according to local media reports.

Tens of thousands of people have been stranded, with key roads, power lines and communication networks disrupted in the regions because of rain-triggered landslides and floods.

The monsoon brings South Asia around 80 percent of its annual rainfall, which is key to both agriculture and the livelihoods of millions, but brings with it natural disasters every year.

AFP

MYANMAR ATROCITIES AND IMPUNITY MUST END: TÜRK

The Myanmar regime's brutal violence against civilians and its denial of life-saving humanitarian aid reflect "utter contempt for humanity", UN rights chief Volker Türk told the Human Rights Council on Thursday.

Repeated, horrific violations have been recorded by the UN human rights office, including mass killings, extra-judicial executions, and beheadings, Mr. Türk said, while the military has continued to carry out atrocities in Rakhine state, where the Rohingya minority are denied citizenship.

In an address to the Council, he called for an end to impunity by the ruling junta who overthrew the democratically elected Government in February 2021.

"I encourage States to consider a referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We also need to ensure accountability for possible crimes committed by different armed groups."

'DEADLY FREEFALL'

The High Commissioner said the country was continuing a "deadly freefall into even deeper violence and heartbreak".



Refugees flee Karen State to the Thai border. Photo: UN News

Where once there had been optimism and hopes of a more peaceful and prosperous future, civilians were now living “at the whim of a reckless military authority that relies on systematic control tactics, fear and terror”.

He said the economy was spiralling, with the generals exploiting natural resources there “at dangerous rates, causing irreversible environmental harm”.

Voices of civil society and journalists have been strangled, while arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture continue.

He said credible sources indicate that 3,747 people have died at the hands of the regime since taking power, with close to 24,000 arrested.



BARRIERS TO LIFE-SAVING AID

Mr. Türk’s report focuses on the systematic denial of life-saving aid for civilians, and he accused the military of putting in place “a raft of legal, financial and bureaucratic barriers”.

With a third of the population in need, he said the obstruction constituted a deliberate, targeted, and calculated denial of fundamental human rights.

He repeated his call for an immediate end to the “senseless violence” and for the release of over 19,000 political prisoners detained, including the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Mynt.

TOLL ON CHILDREN IMMENSE

The Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, Thomas Andrews, also advocated before the Council, calling for less rhetoric and more action by UN Member States to support the “heroic” people of Myanmar, and asking them to “deny the junta the three things that it needs to sustain its brutality and oppression: weapons, money, and legitimacy”.

More than 800 children have been killed or maimed since the coup began up to the end of 2022, he said, and most were victims of indiscriminate attacks by junta forces.

Speaking later at a press conference in Geneva, the UN-appointed independent expert said in addition to those killed, 3,087 children are behind bars as political prisoners.

“660,000 children are now displaced in Myanmar and 5.8 million children require humanitarian assistance. This is a disaster on top of a disaster, and it has the most profound impact on those that are most vulnerable, and that is the children of Myanmar.”

In a recent report, the Special Rapporteur detailed how the junta had imported more than \$1 billion in weapons and related materials since the military coup, with the full knowledge that these arms could be used to kill thousands of innocent people and to commit probable war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Julie Ricard

KAREN STATE

2,495 battles in KNU areas in the first six months of the year

In the 2,495 battles that took place in Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas in the first six months of the year, 2,363 junta soldiers were killed.

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), and other resistance forces fought 2,495 battles against junta forces and militias in KNU-controlled territory from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023, according to a KNU statement.

It said that a total of 2,632 junta soldiers were killed in the fighting. These included five battalion commanders, five second-in-commands, and nine captains. A further 1,685 junta soldiers were injured.

In addition, 99 military vehicles used by junta troops for military operations were damaged.

On the other side, 76 resistance fighters from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), and joint resistance forces were killed and 257 were injured during the fighting.

According to the KNU statement, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) sheltering in KNU areas has also risen to 599,400 and people are still fleeing ongoing fighting.

Between July 2022 and June 2023, the KNU said it had provided 269,631 IDPs with essential necessities. It also said that now the rainy season has started in Myanmar, IDPs are facing increased difficulties in getting adequate shelter and food supplies and urgently need humanitarian assistance.

Kyainseikkyi Township electricity substation in Karen State bombed

Resistance forces caused 1.5 billion kyats of damage when they carried out a mine attack on an electricity substation on a military base in Karen State's Kyainseikkyi Township on 7 July.

The resistance forces attacked the facility near to Mingalargone Village with four mines at 8:20 a.m. on 7 July. This caused the electricity substation to burn for three hours until the fire was brought under control at about 11:30 a.m. after causing 1.5 billion kyats of damage, according to an 8 July post on a Junta Telegram social media channel.

"The electricity substation used to supply electricity for the military base's security and communication systems", said Aung San Shar, a spokesperson of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Special Operation Force, one of the groups involved in the attack.

He explained: "Military's offices, communication devices, CCTV cameras, military bases and strategic outposts received power supply from this power sub-station." He added that defence forces would continue to attack military facilities to cripple the junta's

administration.

The attack was carried out by the KNLA Special Operation Force and the Cloud Wings Drone Force, though drones were not used in the attack.

CHIN STATE

Three killed in Mindat Township airstrike in Chin State

Three people, including a child, were killed in an airstrike on Wunkhom Village in Chin State's Mindat Township on 3 July.

Junta jets dropped two bombs on the village at about 11:00 a.m., despite there not being any ongoing fighting in the area, according to a representative of the Mindat Chinland Defense Force (CDF-Mindat).

He said: "The junta's bombing took the innocent lives of a 28-year-old woman, a 65-year-old elder and an 8-year-old child. A man also got injured."

Ten houses and a school in the village of about 50 households were also damaged in the airstrike.

Junta Infantry Battalion 274 based in Mindat has also been regularly firing artillery into Wunkhom Village.

"There are no conflicts or military tensions in the area of the village. Despite the serious damage to the school no one was hurt because the airstrike happened on a Saturday. The Military Council carried out the airstrike for no reason", said the CDF-Mindat representative.

KARENNI STATE

13-year-old killed in Mese Township airstrike in Karenni State

A 13-year-old boy was killed and another villager was injured when Myanmar junta airstrikes hit an area of Karenni State's Mese Township where there was no fighting, on 12 July.

The airstrikes hit Kyauksu Village in Mese Township at 12:30 a.m. on 12 July. A 13-year-old boy was killed, another villager was injured and two houses and a church were damaged, according to the Karenni Human Rights Group (KHRG).

A KHRG board member said: "Three bombs were dropped at around 12:30 am on 12 July. A 13-year-old boy died on the spot and an elderly person was injured. Two houses and a car were hit by bombs and a Baptist church was also damaged."

Most of the inhabitants of Kyauksu Village had already fled to safety after fighting between local defence forces and the junta army started in Mese Township on 13 June. But some had returned to tend their farms.

A volunteer helping internally displaced people in Mese Township said: "There are no more civilians in Kyauksu Village. People in the village have fled to the nearest forest to take temporary shelter. However, some people have gone home to farm outside of the village. But, most of the villagers are still staying in the forest because they are scared of artillery shells."

SHAN STATE

KNDF clears mines in Shan State's Pinlaung and Pekon Townships

The Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) has been carrying out de-mining activities since 10 July in the neighbouring townships of Pinlaung and Pekon in Shan State.

A large column of junta troops had marched into Pinlaung and Pekon townships in the last week of February and stationed themselves in the villages of Salone South and Salone North.

There was fierce fighting between junta troops and defence forces until May and more than 100 airstrikes were launched destroying over 300 houses in five villages in Pinlaung and Pekon townships before the fighting started to subside.

An official of the KNDF Central News and Information Department explained: "Fighting gradually declined in June and the military troops started retreating. But, they haven't completely retreated. Some are staying with members of the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) at the PNO-controlled villages."

Before they retreated the troops based at Salone South and North villages planted landmines and it is these that the KNDF has been trying to clear. So far, they have found about 100 landmines.

"Demining is very dangerous. Since we do not have modern technology or minesweepers, our fighters are on the ground using our own search methods. We are responsible for clearing mines in public areas," said the KNDF official.

The KNDF has told residents of Salone South and Salone North not to return home yet as mine-clearing operations are still ongoing.



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF SIGNALS POTENTIAL EXTENSION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY, FURTHER DELAYING JUNTA-BACKED ELECTIONS

Myanmar's junta chief signals potential extension of state of emergency, further delaying elections, suggesting a lack of progress in resolving the turmoil and unrest that has plagued the country since the military coup over two years ago, according to local news outlets.

The violent crackdown on dissent by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's regime has resulted in a staggering toll of civilian casualties, with about 3,800 civilians killed and 24,000 injured.

Despite acknowledging the ongoing unrest, the junta continues to extend the state of emergency.

In a recent meeting with senior officials, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that acts of terrorism were still occurring.

"Many requirements can be seen in the implementation of fully emphasizing the security, peace and stability and rule of law," he said.

MYANMAR JUNTA REJECTS UN REPORT ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT, DENOUNCES ALLEGATIONS AS BIASED AND POLITICIZED

Myanmar's junta, facing mounting criticism for its human rights violations, has rejected a recent United Nations report on Children and Armed Conflict, dismissing it as biased and politicized.

In the junta's recent statement entitled "Myanmar's Response to the report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and its open debate" published in the junta-controlled media, Myanmar disputed the allegations made in the report, claiming they were based on distorted figures and groundless accusations.

"Myanmar also found out that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and certain countries made irresponsible references to Myanmar at the debate," said the statement.

"It is disappointing to find that the distorted report includes country-specific descriptions of Myanmar based on biased narratives and unfounded allegations. Relisting Myanmar armed forces in the Annex of the report demonstrates a clear act of politicization as the author merely includes numbers of alleged violations without verifiable facts such as date, time and place of incidents."

The Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, released on June 27, 2023, highlighted grave violations against children in Myanmar and other countries, including killings, arrests, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

The summary of the UN report said, "Situations with the highest numbers of children in detention: Iraq, Isarel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

The UN report highlights a sharp increase in military use of schools and hospitals, impacting millions of children's right to education in conflict zones.

"A sharp increase (+60%) in the military use of schools and hospitals by both armed forces and armed groups was verified. Most of the 488 cases were verified in Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Overall, millions of children were out of school in conflict situations because of insecurity, attacks on schools or related personnel, or the military use of schools. Schools and hospitals should remain zones of peace to ensure that the right to education of all children is fully protected."

MYANMAR MINING AND MINERAL EXPORT INCLUDING JADE FALLS BY ABOUT 28%



A large piece of jade in a market in Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

According to the trade figures released by the Military Council's Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the export of minerals including jade fell by about 28% in the first three months of this fiscal year.

The export value of Myanmar mineral in the first three months of the 2023-24 fiscal year from 1 April to 30 June was US\$72.795 million and it was about US\$27 million less than the corresponding period in the last fiscal year.

In the corresponding period in the last fiscal year Myanmar exported minerals worth US\$ 100.294 million.

NGO Global Witness urged the international community to boycott gems and jade mined in Myanmar as the proceeds from the sale of these precious stones could be used in financing the illegal activities of the Military Council and they called for banning the export of these precious stones and minerals.

This organization urged the global community to ban the export of these gemstones and jade mined in Myanmar and the companies and buyers should

avoid buying these minerals from Myanmar.

Global Witness said that between 70% and 90% of all jade mined in Hpakant, Kachin State were exported through the border illegally before the coup and also most of the high quality imperial jades are being exported to China by crossing the border illegally now.

A press release issued by the Burma Campaign UK says that Myanmar Army fully controlled the mining and trading of the gemstones mined in Myanmar and Myanmar could earn about US\$2 billion from this business annually after they seized power by coup on 1 February 2021.

From the proceeds from the sale of these gemstones the Myanmar Army could buy arms and ammunition to be used in human rights violations in the country.

The minerals produced by the Myanmar mining industry include gold, jade, pearls, diamonds, lead, tin, antimony, silver, copper, zinc, coal and other minerals.

CBM CHANGES EXCHANGE LIMIT OF EXPORT EARNINGS TO MYANMAR KYAT FROM 65% TO 50%



Photo: AFP

The Military Council's Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) changed its regulation of mandatory exchange of foreign exchange earned from exports to Myanmar Kyat from the previous 65% to 50%.

The exporters can use independently the remaining 50% for themselves, transfer to others who are not an Authorized Dealer (AD) licensee or selling to the AD banks.

The exporters can now sell the 50% of export earnings at the market rate instead of the previous forced exchange of 65% at the reference rate of 2,100 Kyats against the US dollar fixed by the CBM after this notification was issued by the central bank.

The CBM issued this notification on 13 July. Traders predict this will help exporters.

The CBM issued the previous notification dated 5 August 2022 which ordered the exporters to exchange 65% of their export earnings to Myanmar Kyat

at the rate fixed by the bank.

Traders claim the forcible exchange of 65% of export earnings at the rate fixed meant huge difficulties and hassles for exporters.

At a meeting held between the junta chief and Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) on 2 July, the exporters presented their difficulties faced in their business and requested him to ease this ratio from 65% to 35% of export earnings.

Currently the CBM fixed the reference exchange rate at 2,100 Kyat against the US dollar but it is traded in the open market at above 3,000 Kyat.

YANGON BLACKOUT CAUSED BY EMERGENCY REPAIR OF YADANA OFFSHORE GAS PIPELINE



Yangon. Photo: Justin Min

Two years after the military coup, power outages and power shortage have worsened in Yangon which has a population of about six million people.

However, the Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) said that the recent power outage on 10 July was caused by the emergency repair of two compressors from the Yadana offshore gas pipeline.

A responsible official from YESC said that the electricity supply was disrupted temporarily when the two compressors of Yadana gas pipeline were out of order and now one of them has been repaired.

Under these circumstances long and frequent power outages may be experienced in most of the

townships in Yangon Region, according to the official.

Myanmar has a plan to generate 14% of total installed capacity across the country using “Renewable Energy”. Currently the national power grid can only supply 55% of total electricity demand across the country and the Ministry of Electricity and Energy said that they were working to increase this to 75% of total demand by 2025.

A recent World Bank report said that power shortage, load shedding and imposing restrictions on business entities and foreign exchange were the factors hampering the economy in Myanmar.

CENTRAL BANK OF MYANMAR REVOKES LICENSES OF TEN FOREIGN EXCHANGE COMPANIES AMIDST JUNTA CONTROL

The licenses of 10 foreign exchange companies have been revoked by the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), presently under the control of the junta, the junta-controlled media reported on July 13.

As per the official website of the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), the bank has announced on July 12 that the foreign exchange companies in question failed to adhere to the bank's directives and instructions, leading to the revocation of their licenses.

The companies affected by the license revocation were identified by the Central Bank of Myanmar as Kannan Trading, Net Change, Thiri Aung Si, Riverwood Group, Global Myanmar Services, D-Gold, Aurum Image, Hi Welcome Travel & Tours, Sweeties Pearls, and Chase Travels & Tours.

While the statement acknowledged that the licenses were revoked, the bank refrained from specifying the exact orders and instructions that the foreign exchange companies violated.

Presently, foreign exchange companies operating in Myanmar are permitted by the central bank to exchange a single U.S. dollar for 2,100 Myanmar Kyat. Moreover, these firms are subjected to a daily cap of US\$10,000 for currency conversion and are required to provide a transaction record for investigation purposes.

INDIA AND MYANMAR MINISTERS DISCUSS EXPEDITING TRILATERAL HIGHWAY AND ENSURING BORDER STABILITY

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Myanmar's counterpart Than Swe on July 16 to discuss expediting projects, particularly the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, and emphasized the importance of ensuring peace and stability in the border areas, reported Hindustan Times.

The meeting took place during the sidelines of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Mechanism meeting.

"Our discussions focused on connectivity initiatives that have a larger regional significance. These will also be discussed at the MGC meeting this afternoon. Stressed the importance of expediting projects that have faced challenges in the recent past, especially the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway," Jaishankar said in a tweet.

Speaking on July 15, Jaishankar acknowledged that the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway had faced significant challenges due to the situation in Myanmar, emphasizing that it remains a top priority for the Indian government to explore means of resuming the project.

India, Thailand, and Myanmar are collaboratively undertaking the ambitious task of constructing a 1,400-kilometer-long highway that will establish a vital land link between India and Southeast Asia



TRANQUIL SETTING

Buddhist novice monks look at geese at a monastery in Yangon on July 13.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



ACTRESS MAY WYNN MAUNG TAKES A STAND ON THE MYANMAR COUP



May Wynn Maung's understanding of Myanmar is grounded in a maxim that her father, an Army officer, used to repeat: "Even if the water bottle is leaking, it doesn't matter, you have to fill it up again" In other words, no matter how ineffectual a task is, you still have to do it if ordered.

May Wynn's father joined the army when it was still being led by the famous General Aung San. In those early days, it was an anti-colonialist militia fighting for the country's independence. Her father became one of the leaders of a parachute troop, and the family followed him from airport to airport as he moved around the country. After the 1962 military coup, he was told to retire and serve in a government ministry. He wasn't very happy about this, but in line with the above maxim, followed his orders dutifully.

In 1974, May Wynn was a student at Rangoon University, when a protest formed over General Ne Win's refusal to allow a state burial for UN Secretary General, U Thant, a Burmese national. May Wynn witnessed the turmoil erupting around campus and spilling over into the city, in what many would later call a prelude to the larger 1988 protests. As for how it impacted her at the time, she recalls simply, "That's when my feelings of doubt about our military government started."

May became a well-known Burmese actress, and she tells her story as to how she got into the field. Her father had a friend who knew a director who was looking for an actress for a project he was working on,

and asked her to come for an audition. They first met at Shwedagon Pagoda, and then she then did some auditioning, and was chosen for that part, and soon found herself playing the lead actress in feature movies. (There was no color film available at the time in the country, so everything was shot in black and white until the 1990s.) Over the course of her illustrious career, May Wynn starred in over 60 movies, and even won the Myanmar Academy Award for her role in the 1980 film, *Kyi Pyar*.

Although May Wynn was making movies that contained very little in the way of political or even social commentary, military censorship was always around the corner—a fact that Kenneth Wong also spoke about at length during his podcast interview. For example, May Winn says, "You cannot wear certain clothes, not very low-neck blouses, or even big buttons. The censorship won't allow those things, or bell bottoms and that kind of stuff." She remembers one unfortunate actress who was banned from the screen for two years as a punishment for not following the dress code at a single event. It also impacted her personally on more than one occasion. She tells the story of a movie she starred in whose plot centered around a road trip in a car that kept breaking down. The censors were so unhappy that the film portrayed any semblance of real-life problems that they kept cutting away scenes until the movie ultimately lost its coherence. "We cannot do anything about it," she says sadly about her sense of powerlessness, "because we are under the law. So we had to walk the way they wanted us to."



● May Wynn Maung has had an extensive career.

And things would only tighten further. She tells how at one point in the late 1990s, the military drafted a letter stipulating that anyone involved in filmmaking had to promise not to express any political statements of any kind. Eerily similar to the McCarthy era during the Red Scare in 1950s Hollywood, those who refused to sign were banned from the industry.

Even so, it still never occurred to May Wynn to speak out against this infringement on her freedom, as she was still steeped in her father's maxim. "To tell you the truth, at that time, my mind was not that independent and strong, like it is right now. I was just following the directions from the director. I was just doing my job and did whatever they asked me." Though she was unhappy about it, she didn't know how to express her feelings.

May Wynn felt many of her peers were in a similar boat of not being very happy with the military interference, yet feeling unable to do anything about it. "I can understand their fear, so I won't blame them. I hear them, and I hear their feelings. But now, I'm more independent, and I can express my feelings here [in America]." Indeed, May Wynn attributes her move to the United States as enabling her to finally find her voice and speak out for basic rights and freedoms. Finally, she had broken free of her father's maxim that had, until then, so bound her life.

This is certainly the spirit that has animated her following the 2021 military coup. "After seeing all the things in Myanmar, I felt that we need to speak out. We cannot stay quiet!" In addition to her advocacy and fundraising, May Wynn stars in "A Sunny Day," a musical written by her husband, Thet Win. "The musical is based on the coup and the events of the spring revolution," she says. "It highlights how the coup transformed people and the country, and the theme of the musical is national unity. So we open with unity, and we end with hope for the future." The play has been performed in various venues across California, and they are looking to take it on the road to other cities as well.

May Wynn has not stopped her Buddhist meditation practice, even with her move to the United States. While she used to practice Vipassanā in the Mogok tradition in Myanmar, she now follows the teachings of Mrauk U Sayadaw, who regularly visits the

US to teach courses to the Burmese diaspora. Looking back on the crisis in Myanmar, she stresses how critical it is that more monastics become involved with the democracy movement. She has been disheartened to find that some revered monks have been imparting Buddhist wisdom in what she sees as a rather manipulative way that, in essence, is encouraging people to passively accept the military authority. Because some of these monks are rumored to have reached some state of enlightenment, laypeople are very hesitant to criticize such statements.

As for herself, there is no question where her loyalties lie: towards the ongoing democracy movement. "A lot of [Burmese] people are in hardship," she says. "They don't have their jobs, no income, they don't know what to do or how to eat! So that's why we try to help them as much as possible in any way we can. That's how we got involved in these things."

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/6/3/episode-170-acting-against-injustice>



● May Wynn Maung



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