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fails to approve
Rohingya IDP camp
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MYANMAR JUNTA'S BITTER WAR ON CHILDREN

The video footage is hard to watch. The last week or so has seen a barrage of media footage from Mizzima, BBC, Sky News and DW showing harrowing scenes of children running or crouched in terror as Myanmar fighter jets and helicopters bomb civilians in this never-ending civil war.

This media footage from local and foreign media houses will likely shock people into the realization that not only is the Myanmar military targeting civilians – people they have pledged to protect – but that many of them are children and that even schools are targets in this awful war.

In part due to these media stories, it is becoming clearer how Myanmar's civil war is taking a serious toll on children. Over the weeks and months, Mizzima and other independent news outlets have been tallying the cost to children in lives and in terms of their mental state. The crisis has received little in-depth coverage by international media but breaking the silence Sky News, BBC and DW have just run documentaries that will help their audience assess the bitter toll the Myanmar junta is causing in its war on the people.

Highlighted are the harrowing scenes of children under threat, cowering in holes in the ground, or on the floor in their schools.

Last week Mizzima reported that students at schools in Chin State's Mindat Township, under the National Unity Government's (NUG) Board of Education are being taught in trenches because of the risk of junta airstrikes. The children are also being given bomb awareness training by their teachers, who are all taking part in

the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and local defence forces are teaching the children how to flee and hide if they are caught up in a junta airstrike. An official of the NUG's Mindat Board of Education said that the NUG has requested that schools dig trenches to shelter from bombs. The teachers are giving the children bomb awareness training in accordance with NUG guidelines and local defence force comes to teach the children how to run and hide when they hear jet fighters.

Children are targets. He said not only does the junta launch airstrikes and fire artillery into villages, it also targets religious buildings and sites, medical facilities and schools in the same way, which is why children need to be taught to protect themselves in the case of artillery attacks or airstrikes. One of the teachers from Mindat said attacking students with artillery and aircraft was genocide. CDF Mindat has issued a statement advising people to dig trenches where they can safely shelter from junta airstrikes and artillery attacks. As we have reported, UNICEF has warned that women and children in particular are under threat from the fighting, because they are forced to flee their homes, and due to poverty and not having enough to eat.

Local independent media houses such as Mizzima, DVB and Irrawaddy inform a local and international audience week by week, month by month of the threats posed to civilians. But the documentaries run by international media organizations recently help to show the grotesque nature of the Myanmar junta's war on their people and how children live in fear.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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JUNTA TAKES PRIDE IN STATUE

Workers prepare the area around the marble Maravijaya Buddha statue in Naypyidaw on 21 July ahead of its opening on 2 August.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



100 RESISTANCE FIGHTERS ARRESTED IN YANGON IN LAST SIX MONTHS

More than 100 defence force fighters were arrested in Yangon in the first six months of 2023, according to a Yangon-based revolutionary force.

A soldier from the force said: “Some urban guerrillas carrying out the missions were violently arrested by the military. This year, the arrested resistance soldiers have been brutally tortured and unlawfully killed by the military.”

He added that though operations in Yangon have been effective, they have not all been completely successful and now the military faces danger both in rural and urban areas.

Despite successes, urban guerrillas in Yangon have also faced counterattacks from the junta whilst carrying out their missions. They and their families have also faced threats, arrest and even death at the hands of the junta.

Currently, many Yangon urban guerrillas face difficulties in meeting living, transport and mission costs. It is also becoming harder to find safe houses and secure places to stay in the city.

The Yangon Fundraising Army (YFA) is carrying out a fundraising campaign for Yangon defence forces from 10 July to 10 September.

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

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 dat-

ed 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 the 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.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI DOES NOT ATTEND MARTYR'S DAY CEREMONY, BUT HER BROTHER DOES

The jailed former State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was forbidden from attending the 76th Martyr's Day ceremony in Yangon commemorating the assassination of her father General Aung San in 1947, but her eldest brother did attend.

Martyr's Day is a national holiday on 19 July that commemorates the assassination at the Secretariat Office of General Aung San, seven other leaders of the pre-independence interim government, and one bodyguard on 19 July 1947.

The first Martyr's Day was celebrated in Yangon on the day after the assassinations, 20 July 1947. This year was the 76th annual Martyr's Day celebration.

This year U Aung San Oo, the eldest son of General Aung San, attended the ceremony on 19 July at the Martyrs Mausoleum in Yangon, along with relatives of the seven other political leaders and a driver who were killed alongside General Aung San.

During the ceremony, the relatives all laid wreaths, according to a live broadcast by the military-owned MRTV television channel.

Traditionally, high-ranking government officials

visited the Martyr's Mausoleum on Martyr's Day.

But, Min Aung Hlaing, the junta leader did not attend, he has not attended any of the three Martyr's Day celebrations since the February 2021 coup. This year General Tin Aung San, the Union Minister of Transportation and Communication and member of the State Administration Council (SAC) presided over the ceremony.

Whenever she was not imprisoned Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would attend the Martyr's Day celebrations at the Martyr's Mausoleum. The last time she attended them was in 2020.

U Aung San Oo is estranged from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's and is her only surviving sibling. He does not approve of her political work and unsuccessfully took her to court in 2020 to try to get half of her house in University Avenue, Yangon. The Burmese Lawyers' Council said he was doing this as a potential surrogate of the army.

Despite tight security throughout the day revolutionary forces across the country demonstrated and launched attacks in commemoration of Martyr's Day.

YANGON BLACKOUT CAUSED BY EMERGENCY REPAIR OF YADANA OFFSHORE GAS PIPELINE

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.



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Ju Chan



A Rohingya mother and her baby amidst the wreckage of her home in an IDP camp in Rakhine State following Cyclone Mocha. Photo: AFP

Two months after Cyclone Mocha barreled ashore in Rakhine State, one ethnic group is feeling the brunt of the Myanmar junta's indifference, the Muslim Rohingya.

A vast swathe of Rakhine State was hit by high winds and heavy rains that wrecked a large area of the state, ripping off building roofs, knocking down trees and power lines, and proving particularly destructive to the flimsy shelters used by internally displaced people or IDPs.

Many disadvantaged people are calling out for help, but there is one group that appears an outcast, not even on the junta's list.

PERMISSION NOT GRANTED

An increasing number of reports indicate that the Military Council has not approved permission to renovate damaged Rohingya IDP camps and little or no basic humanitarian supplies are getting through.

"The military has not ratified the restoration of the damaged camps. Thus, the IDPs are staying under the tarpaulins and other possible places. It's because almost all houses in the camp do not have roofs anymore. Since the restoration has not been granted, they are staying just like that," an aid worker attempting to help Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe told Mizzima.

Those seeking resettlement, renovation, and relocation of the damaged IDP camps have to seek permission from the state government. However, it was

reported that the Rakhine State government running under the military regime has not allowed the renovation until now, over two months after Cyclone Mocha. Now the winds and rain of the monsoon have set in.

Aid delivery to those in need after Cyclone Mocha has been sporadic at best, or deliberately blocked, but those at the wrong end of the stick are the Rohingya.

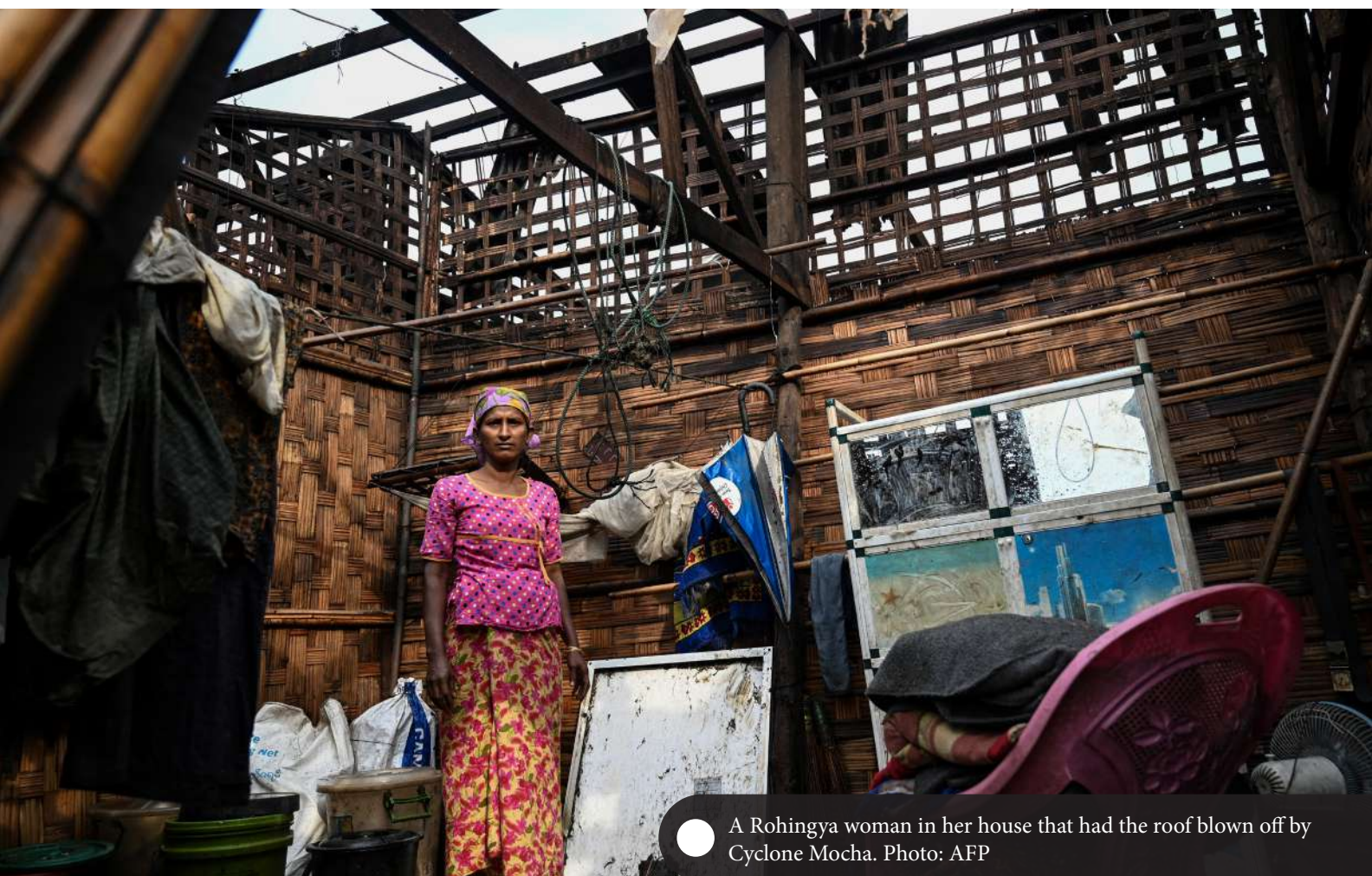
So far, according to local sources, the Rohingya IDPs have not received any support from the regime and the aid materials provided for the Rohingya refugee camps were said to have been confiscated by the administrative officials running under the Military Council, though this is hard to confirm.

ON THE GROUND

An aid worker on the ground in Rakhine State said the situation was difficult for the Rohingya IDPs.

"The government does not support rice or anything. In some places, tarpaulins are provided. Those tarpaulins were not given to the IDPs but kept by the administration. That incident happened at Kaung Oakkar Camp. To say an overall situation of the Rakhine State, it is certain that the IDPs do not receive as much as given by the military to others. The deliveries given by them are very rare too," said the aid worker, preferring not to give his name.

There are 14 IDP Rohingya camps in Sittwe including Kaung Oakkar refugee camp, and all camps



A Rohingya woman in her house that had the roof blown off by Cyclone Mocha. Photo: AFP

are reported to have not received permission for renovation yet.

Although international organizations including the United Nations asked consent from the Military Council to help the Rohingya IDPs, even before the cyclone, they have not received permission to provide aid. Also, even after the cyclone, the Military Council restricted the international organizations' access to travel and help.

The restriction by the military regime on the international organizations regarding their access to travel is "an act of indifference" towards the Rohingya IDPs, the aid worker added.

"Mainly speaking, it is an act of treating IDPs disrespectfully and neglecting them. It's because they know that the IDPs are relying on NGOs and INGOs. The fact that NGOs and INGOs are restricted means that they are stopping the aid reaching the IDPs. Some of the IDPs are struggling badly," he noted.

SOME HELP

Despite the World Food Programme (WFP) providing 27,000 Kyat (approx. \$13) a month per person to Rohingya IDPs, at least that is what is claimed, the unemployed Rohingya are facing difficulties in living due to rising commodity prices.

On 13 May, a day before Cyclone Mocha hit, military troops came warning the Rohingya IDP camps close to the sea to evacuate to a safe place. However, the military failed to provide enough accommodation for hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, according to local reports.

About 98 Rohingya refugees died in Sittwe Town due to Cyclone Mocha, according to a person compiling a list of casualties in the Rohingya camps after the storm hit. The deaths may have been due to drowning in the floodwaters. It is unclear how many of the casualties were women and children.

TROUBLED HISTORY

Myanmar's "outcasts" are likely to be one of the most poorly treated minorities in the world.

About 153,000 Rohingya are living in relief camps in Rakhine State while about 1 million are taking refuge in Bangladesh refugee camps, the UN stated in September 2022.

Myanmar's Rohingya have a troubled history marked by multiple waves of violence and persecution. The crisis for this ethnic group traces back to the 1970s when the Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority group in predominantly Buddhist Burma, faced systematic discrimination and denial of citizenship. General Ne Win's military junta that came to power in 1962 exacerbated their plight by implementing oppressive policies that rendered them stateless and excluded them from basic rights, leading to sporadic violence and forced migration to neighbouring countries. Their circumstances were not helped by the Burma's 1982 Citizenship Law that effectively made them non-citizens.

In the 1990s, the Rohingya crisis escalated

further as the military regime intensified its crackdown on the community, resulting in mass exoduses of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. Reports of widespread human rights abuses, including rape, killings, and destruction of villages, emerged, drawing international attention and condemnation.

The crisis reached a new peak in 2017 when a military-led campaign unleashed brutal violence against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State. The campaign was ostensibly in response to attacks by a Rohingya insurgent group the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army or ARSA on security forces but resulted in a grossly disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force against civilians. Hundreds of villages were burned, and countless innocent lives were lost, leading to a massive refugee crisis as over 740,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in search of safety.

The international community responded with outrage, branding the military's actions as ethnic cleansing and calling for accountability and justice. Humanitarian organizations worked to provide aid to the displaced Rohingya, while diplomatic efforts sought to pressure the Myanmar government to address the crisis and recognize the rights of the Rohingya people. A court case still languishes in The Hague, accusing the Myanmar military of crimes against humanity.

Despite these efforts, the Rohingya crisis remains unresolved, with many of this ethnic group still living in dire conditions as stateless refugees in Bangladesh and other countries, continuing to endure persecution.

What this means for most Rohingya today in Rakhine State is confinement in poorly supplied and maintained camps. Little wonder that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have so far rejected exploratory plans to resettle them in model villages in Rakhine State. These plans prevent the refugees returning to where they used to live, and to not supply them with Myanmar citizenship.

LIMITED FUNDS

Rohingya in Myanmar are arguably the most down-trodden ethnic group in Myanmar today. What this means is they appear to be the last on the list when it comes to the "troubled" humanitarian aid supply crisis post-Cyclone Mocha that has set off alarm bells.

Ongoing conflict and natural disasters are continuing to exacerbate humanitarian needs across Myanmar and there is the problem of under-funding.

Six months into 2023, the combined \$886.7 million Humanitarian Response Plan and Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeals for Myanmar, remain critically underfunded, with only 17 per cent of the required funding received, as of 14 July, according to the UN.

Given the ongoing post-coup crisis in Myanmar, millions of people are living below the poverty line and are in need of help, a mix of various ethnic and religious groups. And bottom of the Myanmar junta's priority list – if there is such a list – lay the blocked outcasts, the Rohingya.

FUNDING ‘SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH’ FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES, UN AGENCIES REPORT

Current funding for critical aid efforts supporting Rohingya refugees living in camps in southern Bangladesh is simply not enough, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has said, as dwindling resources have forced the second ration cut in three months.

In March, the value of the food vouchers for camp residents was reduced from \$12 per person per month to \$10, and in June, to just \$8; the equivalent of 27 cents a day.

“The ration cuts are our last resort. Many do-

nors have stepped forward with funding but what we have received is simply not enough,” Dom Scalpelli, WFP Country Director in Bangladesh, said in a release on Wednesday.

“It is absolutely critical that we give the Rohingya families back the full assistance they deserve. The longer we wait, the more hunger we will see in the camps – already we are seeing more children being admitted into malnutrition treatment programmes.”

Over 950,000 Rohingyas remain stranded in refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, southern Bangladesh.



● Rohingya woman and her children in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photo: UN News

Most of them fled their homes in northern Myanmar following widespread and systemic attacks in August 2017 by the country's armed forces that former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini described as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

'ONLY RELIABLE SOURCE'

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR), which has been assisting the Rohingya refugees since the crisis erupted, said that the WFP food assistance is the "only reliable source they can count on to meet their basic food and nutrition needs."

"But since the start of the year, this lifeline has been under severe pressure due to reduced donor funding."



Alongside fresh food assistance, WFP implements nutrition programmes for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under five years of age.

Despite this additional support, vulnerable households are still struggling to make ends meet. The only solution to prevent the situation from deteriorating further is to restore the full rations for the entire Rohingya population immediately, UNHCR said.

FALLING DONOR FUNDING

In addition to WFP, other UN entities and humanitarian agencies are feeling the impacts of falling funding from donors.

The 2023 Rohingya humanitarian crisis response plan, which requires about \$875 million to reach the nearly one million refugees in need, is only a quarter funded.

The impacts of such cuts are particularly devastating for women and children, who make up more than 75 per cent of the refugee population and face higher risks of abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence, UNHCR warned.

Without enough food and no means of generating a legal income, refugees have resorted to increasingly desperate measures to survive, such as child marriage and child labour, as well as embarking on dangerous boat journeys.

LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMES NEEDED

As the situation of Rohingya refugees becomes protracted and needs continue growing, more support will be needed from the international community.

Johannes van der Klaauw, UNHCR Representative to Bangladesh, said the only way to prevent the humanitarian situation in the camps deteriorating further, is by investing in education, skills training and livelihood opportunities.

"This would allow refugees to become self-reliant and partially fulfill their basic needs through their own means – and above all, to prepare them for rebuilding their lives when they can voluntarily and safely return to Myanmar."

Courtesy of UN News

HRW WARNS OF ‘SPIRALING VIOLENCE’ AGAINST ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Bangladesh authorities are taking inadequate measures to protect Rohingya refugees in camps from surging violence by armed groups and criminal gangs, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said last week.

HRW said the Bangladesh authorities should assist refugees by establishing accessible systems to report crimes and promptly investigate complaints, in a press release on 13 July.

HRW has documented 26 cases of violence against Rohingya, including murder, kidnapping, torture, rape and sexual assault, and forced marriage, drawing on interviews with 45 Rohingya refugees between January and April 2023 and supporting evidence including police and medical reports. Victims report facing layers of barriers to police, legal, and medical assistance, with the authorities failing to provide protection, improve security, or prosecute those responsible.

“Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s past pledges to protect Rohingya refugees are now threatened by violent groups and an indifferent justice system,” said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The Bangladesh authorities’ increasingly evident intention to repatriate the Rohingya does not absolve the government of its responsibility to ensure their protection.”

Bangladesh authorities have reported that armed groups killed over 40 Rohingya refugees in the camps in 2022, while at least 48 refugees were killed in the first half of 2023. Rohingya say the totals are much higher. Seven refugees were reportedly killed in three incidents on July 6 and 7, including a sub-majhi (camp community leader) and alleged members of militant groups.

Many of those killed have been Rohingya community leaders or their family members. Scores of refugees have been abducted for ransom and threatened or tortured. Several Rohingya reported the involvement of armed groups in sexual assault, forced

marriage, and child recruitment.

Refugees describe an environment of escalating brutality and fear, with growing concerns of being targeted by criminal gangs and claimed affiliates of Islamist armed groups. “Every night we hear gunshots,” a Rohingya refugee told Human Rights Watch. “When the shooting starts, we hug each other tightly and wait, fearing it is our turn next.”

Victims of attacks named members of various groups as being responsible, including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Munna gang, Islami Mahaz, and several others. The Bangladesh Ministry of Defense reported that at least 11 armed groups are operating in the camps. Several criminal gangs involved in drug smuggling and human trafficking have been vying for greater control in the camps, with the refugees caught in the middle. Activists, educated people, and majhis are common targets, which has had a chilling effect on Rohingya civil society. At least 16 majhis were killed in the first half of 2023.

No criminal justice system is available to the refugees; they cannot go to the police to file a complaint. Instead, they must approach Bangladesh administrative authorities or security forces in the camps. Several families said they could not get the required approval from the camp-in-charge (CiC), a Bangladesh official, to file a report with the police. Others said they obtained permission to bring a complaint to the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) but could go no further, as the force has no civilian investigative function. Refugees who did manage to register their case at a local police station said there was no follow-up, often because they could not cover the bribes and legal fees demanded.

Several majhis who were killed or attacked over the past year were targeted by alleged ARSA members who considered them informants for Bangladesh authorities. Majhis said that authorities forced them to take part in nighttime watches, to join police

raids, and to identify members of armed groups, at times in front of the suspects. Family members of killed majhis said they had previously requested help from the camp-in-charge and APBn, some even providing lists of those who were threatening them but were ignored.

Of the 26 cases Human Rights Watch documented, only 3 led to arrests. Most victims interviewed said that gangs or armed groups threatened and harassed them after the initial assault, intimidating them into staying silent.

Many victims alleged collusion between security force officers and criminals. The APBn, which has overseen security in the camps since July 2020, is itself responsible for widespread abuses against refugees, including extortion, arbitrary arrests, and harassment.

The police response to the growing violence has been marked by abuse, with indiscriminate raids and violent crackdowns. Refugees allege that APBn corruption has allowed criminal activity to proliferate, while Rohingya not responsible for crimes have ended up under arrest.

“There were so many killings that happened in broad daylight, near the APBn police camp,” said an international aid agency volunteer. “Even after hearing the gunshots, they took no action. When there are killings or violence, the police arrest innocent people, not the real perpetrators. The real ones are given license to do the same thing again.”

Rohingya who sought protection were told to move to other shelters or camps, without any support. Some parents said they sent their children to Malaysia, risking dangerous boat journeys, to protect them from attack. Victims and their family members described ongoing fear and injuries following the attacks, without access to adequate physical and mental health care.

Bangladesh authorities contend that repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar is the only solution for the dangerous situation in the refugee settlements. However, conditions for the safe, sustainable, and dignified return of Rohingya do not currently exist. The Bangladesh government should develop and carry out a rights-respecting security policy to protect the camp population, in consultation with the refugees and Unit-

ed Nations agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, and the UN Population Fund.

UN agencies should task and train personnel to receive complaints filed by refugees, with streamlined, confidential reporting and referral procedures for legal, medical, and protection services, including survivor-centered care. Resources such as safe houses and UNHCR’s protection hotline should be expanded.

Donor governments and UN agencies should press Bangladesh to lift the bureaucratic barriers to accessing local police and courts, as well as all restrictions on access to education and livelihoods to reduce illegal and dangerous economic activity in the camps. The authorities should also end APBn’s use of refugees for compulsory night patrols.

“The Bangladesh government needs to protect Rohingya refugees, rather than let criminal elements drive them out,” Ganguly said. “Donor governments should be helping to meet the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh while pressing for the establishment of rights-respecting civilian rule in Myanmar so they can one day go home.”

USAID WARNS HUMANITARIAN AID RESTRICTIONS IN MYANMAR STILL IN PLACE



Photo: AFP

Millions of people in Myanmar are in dire need of humanitarian support, some due to the devastation caused by Cyclone Mocha.

In a 19 July report from ReliefWeb, citing USAID, access restrictions continue to impede the delivery of critical humanitarian assistance to populations affected by Tropical Cyclone Mocha in Rakhine State.

Health care was affected by nearly 140 attacks and other incidents in Myanmar between 1 January and 16 May, leaving the closure of many facilities and restricting civilian access to critical medical care.

On July 13, the US government announced more than US\$74 million in humanitarian funding for the Myanmar and Bangladesh regional crisis response.

The United Nation's report in January said that 4.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance this year, and its report in March said that 1.5 million people were targeted by the 2023 Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan. UNHCR's

report in June this year said that 1.6 million people were displaced since February 2021, the number of refugees in Bangladesh is about 962,000 and 7.9 million people were adversely affected by Cyclone Mocha.

Myanmar's military carried out large-scale and indiscriminate attacks on civilians after the coup in February 2021. They announced a one-year state of emergency, and arrested civilian government officials, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. This state of emergency has been extended to August 2023.

As clashes have escalated in Myanmar, forced displacement and humanitarian needs have gradually increased in southeastern and northwestern of the country, as well as in the Kachin and Shan states.

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HOW TROUBLED THAI POLITICS MAY IMPACT THE MYANMAR CRISIS: INTERVIEW



Sirada Khemanitthathai

The rough and tumble of the troubled Thai election and the painful formation of the next government in Bangkok may well impact Thai-Myanmar relations and the conditions and status of Myanmar nationals, both migrant workers and political exiles, in Thailand.

Mizzima sat down with Sirada Khemanitthathai, Lecturer at the School of International Affairs, Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration at Chiang Mai University, an expert on Thai-Myanmar affairs, to try to peer through the fog to ascertain the state of Thai-Myanmar relations as Thailand tries to follow the democratic path.

Mizzima: Both Thailand and Myanmar are in the midst of political change. How do you view Thailand-Myanmar relations at the moment?

If we compare or if we look at the last eight to nine years, you can see how strong the ties are between the Thai government and the Burmese gov-

ernment. So, whether through the military-to-military track, or government-to-government, even during the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, they have already had normalized diplomatic relations with Thailand. And then, after the Myanmar coup it is so obvious how the Thai government and Thai military really helped legitimize and practically support Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC). So, during the current uncertainty of the Thai political situation, we still don't know what's going on.

Even the Thai politicians do not know what is going to happen. Anything could happen. So, at least, according to the election result, we still have some opportunities for change in the future regarding Thailand-Myanmar relations, at least the status quo will not be maintained we hope.

We can see how the Thai caretaker government and the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs were represented by the Minister and his advisor, went to visit Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and the SAC and that maybe demonstrates something to the regime in Myanmar, as they are also sensitive about Thai politics. They saw some vulnerability in the Thai-Myanmar relations at the top level.

So, this is an historic time to see if there are any changes in Thailand-Myanmar relations but I would say even if the progressive parties in Thailand can lead the government, Thai foreign policy officially will never, never change in terms of official foreign policy. It's really hard because it is heavily embedded in the Thai bureaucratic system. Not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also other ministries or politicians need to have relations of various kinds with Myanmar. They also need to maintain the bureaucratic ties with the authorities in Myanmar and for them it is the SAC. Even the migrant workers or migrant worker issue or any other transnational issues, they have to link with the SAC authorities when it comes to the bureaucracy.

Realistically speaking is really hard to see significant changes even if progressive parties lead the new government. The government might be led by the Pheu Thai Party. If the Pheu Thai Party leads the

government then when it comes to Thailand-Myanmar relations then they may focus more on economic advantages rather than other issues.

Mizzima: It looks like Pheu Thai Party, not the Move Forward Party, will lead the new Thai government, possibly a coalition including conservatives. How do you view this and how it might affect Thailand-Myanmar affairs?

If that is the case, then I can say Thai politics will be really chaotic. And people wouldn't want to accept that. The other factor is foreign policy is not a prioritized issue for Thailand. And for Thai people, they don't care. I will say that the majority of Thai people don't care about foreign policy. So, it's the last thing that we Thai people and Thai society would focus on. And then if Thai politics cannot be stabilized, then foreign policy will be further marginalised.

It's the last priority for Thai society and politics. And then if Thai politics becomes really chaotic and not normalized, not following the democratic principles or suffering from a lack of legitimacy, then, of course, Myanmar issues and foreign affairs issues will not be really focused on by the government. I think we need to hope for the stability of Thai politics so that the Thai government can help our neighbouring countries as well.

Mizzima: Related to these issues, how do you view ASEAN's stance on the Myanmar crisis in the wake of the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting last week? ASEAN has not been able to achieve much, right?

Right. This is what we've seen and the Burmese people were hopeful for ASEAN to take action and for something to come out of the Five-point Consensus. But Burmese people and Burmese civil society organizations or the communities see nothing, right? It's not effective. They seek something more effective, inclusive, to include all political stakeholders in Myanmar, including the NUG, EAOs, EROs and civil society. We hope that something will come out if Jakarta Indonesia is the ASEAN chair as they have been the most vocal about the Myanmar issue. But time is passing. We are already in July, and nothing really happened and there have been no changes to the Myanmar crisis. And for me, I'm really worried because the next chair of ASEAN is Laos. This is not good for

the future.

Mizzima: There seems to be a split between Thailand's approach to the Myanmar crisis, and other ASEAN members. How do you view that?

Yes, as we can see the Thai caretaker government, the Prayuth government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Khun Don, I think because of the strong ties between the two armies and also, they're also the intention of Mr. Don himself to really want to maintain the conventional diplomacy between Thailand and Myanmar. They have a very, very top-down perspective about the diplomatic relations with Myanmar. They just see the SAC and the Tatmadaw as the main political actors.

I can see how the Thai caretaker government wants to show the international community they have the capacity to convince the SAC in one way, in any way. So, they had to have some influence to have some kind of like, "okay, we have issues with the SAC, because we want to end the violence and want to build a bridge between Myanmar and the world." And then they try to portray that only the Thai government can do that and we will utilize that. Their perspective is we utilize for strong ties and relations with the military regime to make things better. But then that kind of outcome, that hasn't happened at all, right?

So, I think like the current split between Thailand's hardline stance on Myanmar crisis and other members of ASEAN is because of the top-down perspective on diplomacy with Myanmar, and they also have to restore their role as leader of the region. And then they want to show that and demonstrate their capacity and strong ties with the Tatmadaw and that only Thailand can be an agent of change. This is what they want to do, and especially before the end of the term of the caretaker government, they want to make something happen. But then this hasn't happened.

Mizzima: And following on from that, as you say, the Thai Foreign Minister Don went to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi. What was he trying to do with that meeting?

Yes. This follows on from what I've just said. It's just what he and his team want to show that he and Thailand have this capacity to negotiate with different stakeholders, they can access Aung San Suu Kyi, which others cannot do. So, they want to show they

have the capacity to convince the SAC to allow them to meet Suu Kyi. Then I think this is a political symbol in that they can show that they have that capacity, but we don't know yet right? We cannot see any outcome from this meeting with Suu Kyi. Nothing changed at all.

But I can say the Thai caretaker government aim for ending the violence, but because they only see the stakeholders, political stakeholders in Myanmar through a very, very narrow perspective, they only see the SAC versus the NLD or the SAC versus Aung San Suu Kyi, which is not true in terms of Myanmar politics. It's not like that. It's just not a dichotomy between these two. They just want to follow this path.

Mizzima: So, changing the topic, you know over the last three or more years, Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand have faced quite a few challenges. They faced problems in terms of COVID-19 lockdowns and the closing of Thai borders. How do you view the challenges for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand at the moment?

Yes, there are a lot of challenges. So, it was from the COVID-19 period and then the coup and that made everything worse for Myanmar migrant workers. So, now migrant workers aim for more accessible registration and then getting a document from Thailand. Many people want to have jobs in Thailand and then even for the refugees, they want to find a safe place for their lives. So, those who are coming to Thailand without documents they need to be in Thailand in less troublesome circumstances. So, they need documentation within the Thai registration system, so the challenge for them is the documentation and then the registration. Now that seems to be really complicated and pricey, and the Thai authorities are demanding so many documents.

So, I think it's challenging for Myanmar migrant workers in that sense. Then the other thing is some Myanmar citizens have been involved in political activities in Myanmar and then flee to Thailand. They choose to flee and become migrant workers. But there is a problem here. Thailand may ask for documents guaranteed by the Myanmar authorities. In that sense, those who have some political sensitivity, they may not be able to access that kind of document issued by the Myanmar authorities. The Thai government wants the Myanmar authorities to guarantee the

nationality and the documents for migrant workers, but those who are political cannot access the system. So, this is another challenge that we had after the Myanmar coup. And then there are the daily life challenges that they face from local authorities and policemen. Some of them, even if they have documents, still have to face discrimination and are forced to pay daily or monthly bribe payments. So, this is what they are still facing every day.

Mizzima: Obviously the Thai economy is starting to pick up after the COVID-19 restrictions were removed. Are Thai businesses looking for Myanmar migrants?

I will say Thai businesses and Thai entrepreneurs really need Myanmar migrant workers in terms of economic contribution. I think Thai society and the Thai general public realize how important Burmese migrant workers and also other workers from neighbouring countries are. Migrant workers contribute to the Thai economy. I think the Thai general public understand and realize well about the contribution of low-skilled migrant workers. So, I would say the Thai economy needs low-skilled workers. There is high demand for factory and agricultural workers. I heard for many, many Thai entrepreneurs that even they ask for the refugees in the camp to be employed.

Even during COVID-19, the Ministry of Labour in Thailand did a survey asking the businesses in Thailand how many migrant workers they need. I think it was around 2021. Two years ago, the number of labour demand was around 700,000 during the COVID-19. That is the official number. The unofficial number should or must be higher than that. That demonstrates how much Thailand really needs labour from neighbouring countries.

Mizzima: On a different subject, over the decades refugees escaped from Burma and were given refuge in camps along the border. And also more recently, since the Myanmar coup, there's been fighting on the border. Burmese refugees have come across the border, but the Thai government has tried to push them back. How do you view the refugee situation for Burmese refugees in Thailand?

For the refugees, we can distinguish around three types of refugees from Myanmar. So, existing refugees are in refugee camps, which the Thai Gov-

ernment calls temporary shelter. So, this is the first category. The second would be the transient refugees, refugees who fled from the war from conflict to take refuge on the Thai side of the border. The Thai authorities could see across the border, that there is fighting and the people need to flee. And then the third one, is political refugees or political exiles.

So, Thailand has implemented different approaches to these three groups. For the camp refugees in Thailand, during the NLD government, Thailand tried to repatriate them back to Myanmar, but the programme was unsuccessful. So, I think now they are trying to find a way to ask for cooperation from Western countries and resettle some of them. At the same time, there are many advocacy groups and even some government officers who are trying to close the refugee camps. They want to let these refugees integrate into Thai society and the economy, maybe as migrants, or under another status.

But this kind of solution is still in the campaigning stage, and there is advocacy for it. So, we hope that the new government will consider to solve this problem as well.

For the second type of refugees or refugees who flee from war, those who flee come across the border, and Thailand might follow a very minimum standard of care. They need to accept these refugees. They still have to stay restricted in the areas along the border and some of them have to have to live in the jungle on the Thai side.

At least we can see some flexibility, more than in the past, before 2021. Currently, local authorities allow external humanitarian assistance to help refugees fleeing from war on the border. So, I think at the operational level, they seem to understand what's going on and then they have more sympathy. But at the national level, we still don't see any national policy that would help the refugees who flee from war. So, we were looking towards that kind of policy as well.

And for the third, the third type is political exiles, the most difficult and most controversial for Thailand. For Thailand, I think they will not really have a national policy to deal with this group explicitly. So, we hope that they might nowadays just "blur" it. They just blur it. Then the Thai authorities know what's going on and that these people are fleeing from the coup and the political crisis.

But they have no policy to accept political refugees into society at all. So, it's hard and very political. So, hopefully the new government will consider a solution to integrate them.

And then the Thai authorities, the ministries, really care about the state-to-state diplomacy and in state-to-state, that means the military regime. So, they would claim about the non-interference principle, they would claim about border proximity things and interdependence with Myanmar and something like that. But then I can see how the Thai caretaker government takes sides with the SAC. Practically legitimizing them is another form of interference. If they claim non-interference, if they have relations with the SAC, that would be another kind of interference as well. And then for the "good neighbour" narrative that the Thai Government tries to follow. So, I would ask them, what is your neighbouring policy and that when we look at the concept of neighbours that should also involve people. Myanmar people are suffering from the atrocities that are happening. If so, what is your neighbouring policy?

Mizzima: Is there anything else you would like to add?

This is what I said, the "good neighbour" narrative. I think being a good neighbour is to help and assist our neighbour who are the Myanmar people and who really suffer from the political crisis and atrocities. I just hope that any government, whichever party will become the government, they should see this perspective. There are those on the conservative side, I think we, the advocacy groups, we need to work a lot towards this end, seeking humanitarian ends for the people. This is the most important thing is to protect people first because the political crisis in Myanmar will not end soon. It will not be over in a few years. So, the first priority is the lives of the people, and Thailand is a host country for all kinds of displaced people from Myanmar, migrants and refugees, and other refugees. Thailand should be a "good neighbour" who really helps protecting lives. This is the fundamental principle for the civilized world.

BNI HOSTS PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PAPER ON MYANMAR'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



Burma News International (BNI) hosted the presentation ceremony of the research paper titled “A Riddle for International Donor Governments Or Finding Solutions to Humanitarian Crisis” online last week.

In the event, Soe Myint, Chairperson of BNI’s Media Development Committee, expressed concerns over the military’s cooperation in humanitarian aid distribution, emphasizing the need for international organizations to address the issue.

“We need to question the effectiveness of the military’s cooperation approach. Does the aid reach those who truly need it? The challenges lie in not being able to provide any aid to any individual without obtaining any permission from the military, so international organizations, including the United Nations, should find ways to resolve the issue,” said Soe Myint.

BNI’s Managing Director Tin Tin Nyo advocates for urgent collaboration among relevant countries to establish a humanitarian forum amid Myanmar’s escalating crisis.

“Since Myanmar’s crisis has reached an alarming level, it is necessary for all relevant countries to unite and implement a humanitarian forum as soon as possible,” she said.

She emphasized the necessity for ASEAN and the United Nations to enforce the mandatory delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Myanmar across borders, with a particular focus on the crucial role played by Thailand and India in fostering effective cooperation.

The research paper examines the challenges faced by international humanitarian aid organizations and UN agencies in delivering aid to the people of

Myanmar following the military coup in February 2021, resulting in widespread civil war and mass displacement.

The paper reports that at least 1.5 million civilians have fled their homes since the coup because of the civil war and insecurity.

“During more than two years of the military coup attempt in Myanmar, there are 1.5 million civilians who have fled their homes due to fighting and insecurity. If this is added to already-existing IDPs, the total number of IDPs has reached 1.8 million according to the UNOCHA’s report released on 6 May 2023,” said the paper.

The paper says international humanitarian aid organizations and UN agencies have been unable to find alternative ways to ensure access to humanitarian aid in Myanmar due to the Military Council’s restrictions and regional security challenges. As a result, the people in need across the country must rely on people-to-people contributions facilitated by the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs), and Spring Resistance forces, providing aid through regional networks.

The paper highlights that while the entire country is experiencing challenges in humanitarian aid, Sagaing and Magwe are identified as the areas most in need of assistance.

Additionally, BNI’s document proposes that the United Nations should give serious consideration to implementing a no-fly zone, establishing civilian protection zones, and declaring humanitarian corridors at the international level to ensure comprehensive humanitarian assistance reaches the people of Myanmar.

EIGHT MISSING POLITICAL PRISONERS KILLED BY MYANMAR JUNTA



The Myanmar junta has admitted to killing eight political prisoners who were in a group of 37 prisoners removed without explanation by the authorities from Daik-U Prison in Bago Region on 27 June.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), on 27 June, under the pretense of transferring them, the military removed political prisoners from Daik-U (Kyaiksakaw) Prison. A total of 37 political prisoners have since gone missing. However, previously, when concerned families of the political prisoners inquired at Daik-U Prison, the prison authorities repeatedly denied the whereabouts of these prisoners.

On 7 July the family of Khant Linn Naing (aka Ko Khant, aka Let Wel), a political prisoner at Daik-U Prison received a letter from Daik-U Prison saying their son was dead.

On 8 July the family of another Daik-U prisoner, Pyae Phyo Hein (aka Ko Pyae), also received a letter saying he was dead.

The letters stated that while transferring prisoners from Daik-U Prison to Insein Prison, a transport vehicle suffered an accident. Seizing the opportunity, the two of them (Khant Linn Naing and Pyae Phyo Hein) were alleged to have attempted escape. As a result, they were killed by the security forces who fired “warning shots” at them in an attempt to recapture.

Despite the letters being dated as “June 29”, they arrived to the 2 families on only July 7 and July 8 respectively. However, the letter inside the envelope sent to Pyae Phyo Hein’s was in fact addressed to Khin Moe Moe, the wife of the still missing Aung Myo

Thu who was still missing at the time.

This caused massive concern for Aung Myo Thu’s safety, fears which were confirmed when AAPP released a statement on 19 July saying that the families of a further six of the 37 prisoners who went missing from Daik-U Prison, including Aung Myo Thu’s family, had received letters saying that their imprisoned relatives were dead.

The six were named as: Ko Zin Myint Tun (aka Yar Lay), Ko Wai Yan Lwin (aka Gyargyi), Ko Zin Win Htut, Ko Aung Myo Thu, Ko Bo Bo Win, and Ko Nay Aye.

AAPP has increasingly been documenting letters being sent to the families of these missing political prisoners informing them of their deaths and says such letters are not only an act of extrajudicial murder upon political prisoners, but severe psychological torture against family members of the political prisoners in question.

In a statement, AAPP said: “It is clear, these brazen murders of political prisoners in prisons violates not only domestic laws, but also international laws. Such killings mirror the unlawful and sadistic murders of the Jewish community by the fascist Nazi Germany during the World War II. Moreover, political prisoners removed from Daik-U Prison remain missing without a trace. It is currently unknown whether they are dead or alive. These actions overstep the procedures of prison, along with committing the heinous crime of unjust torture and illegal killings. This is also a blatant violation of the ASEAN Human Rights Convention.

“In Burma, the rule of law has been rendered void since the military junta coup by the supporting pillars of junta rule: the judges; soldiers; police; prison staff, who have intentionally perpetrated wrongful arrests, unlawful sentencings, illegal killings, torture and persecution of political prisoners in prisons, at the command of the junta.

“We, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, strongly condemn such unlawful killings and torture, we will do our best to ensure justice for all political prisoners who have been wrongfully imprisoned.

“All perpetrating parties must be held accountable for these acts.”

EU IMPOSES SEVENTH ROUND OF SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR, SIX INDIVIDUALS AND ONE ENTITY TARGETED

PENROSE THITSA

In response to the escalating violence, gross human rights violations, and threats to peace, security and stability in Myanmar, the European Union (EU) has taken a decisive step by announcing a seventh round of sanctions, according to the press release of the Council of the EU.

This latest round of restrictive measures is aimed at targeting six individuals and one entity allegedly involved in perpetuating the crisis in the country.

The move comes as a firm response to the continued crisis in the country, which has drawn international condemnation.

The individuals and entity targeted in the lat-

est round of sanctions have been identified as key players in the ongoing military junta that has been responsible for numerous atrocities. Among the listed are three Union Ministers: Myint Kyaing (Union Minister for Immigration and Population), Pwint San (Union Minister of Labour), and Dr Thet Khaing Win (the Minister for Health and Sport). Additionally, two members of the Military Council, officially known as State Administration Council (SAC) and a Quartermaster General have been included in the sanction list. The SAC is led by Commander in Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who spearheaded the military coup on February 1, 2021. The latest individuals from the Military Council facing sanctions are Aung Kyaw Min and Porel Aung Thein, while Lieutenant General Kyaw



Photo: AFP

Swar Lin, the Quartermaster General, is also subject to the new sanctions.

Notably, the No. 2 Mining Enterprise (ME2), a state-owned enterprise generating revenue for the Myanmar Armed Forces, has also been subjected to restrictive measures.

Myint Kyaing has been the Union Minister for Immigration and Population since August 19, 2021. Before that, he was Union Minister of Labour following the coup in February 2021. He is also a member of the SAC.

Pwint San has been Union Minister of Labour since 19 August 2022. His position as the Union Minister of Labour was confirmed again on February 1 this year.

Dr Thet Khaing Win has been the Minister for Health and Sport since February 1, 2021. Under his authority, numerous doctors faced dismissal and had their licenses revoked for political reasons, while UNOCHA's pleas for increased aid access during the pandemic were consistently rebuffed. Furthermore, private hospitals were pressured not to hire doctors who opposed working under the military regime, according to the official journal of the EU.

Aung Kyaw Min has been a member of the SAC since February 1, this year. He is also the former Chief-Minister of Rakhine State.

Porel Aung Thein assumed his role as a member of the SAC on February 1, this year, and he is additionally affiliated with the military-proxy party, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)

In May 2020, Lieutenant General Kyaw Swar Lin assumed the role of Quartermaster General, the sixth highest position in Myanmar's military. As the head of the Office of the Quartermaster General, a department under the Ministry of Defense, he oversees the procurement of arms and military equipment for the Myanmar Armed Forces. Additionally, Kyaw Swar Lin leads the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), one of the military's major conglomerates and revenue-generating holding companies, said the official journal of the EU.

As of now, the EU has imposed restrictive measures on a total of 99 individuals and 19 entities connected to the military junta. These measures entail asset freezes and travel bans, preventing those listed from entering or transiting through EU territory.

Furthermore, EU individuals and entities are prohibited from providing funds to the designated individuals and entities

The EU has been steadfast in maintaining other restrictive measures against Myanmar, including an arms and equipment embargo, export restrictions on communication monitoring equipment that could be used for internal repression, and a ban on exporting dual-use goods to the military and border guard police. Moreover, military training and cooperation with Myanmar's military have been prohibited.

The EU press release expresses grave concern over escalating violence, human rights violations, and democratic erosion in Myanmar.

"The EU remains deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and the evolution towards a protracted conflict with regional implications. The Union condemns the continuing grave human rights violations including torture, sexual and gender-based violence, the persecution of civil society, human rights defenders and journalists, indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, including a deadly airstrike killing at least 171 persons on 10 April 2023, by the Myanmar armed forces. The dissolution of 40 political parties on 28 March 2023 was another demonstration of the blatant disrespect by the military regime for democracy and the rights and wishes of the Myanmar population," said the press release.

The urgent call from the EU demands an immediate cessation of hostilities and full adherence to international humanitarian law to halt indiscriminate use of force.

"All hostilities must stop immediately. The military authorities must fully respect international humanitarian law and put an end to the indiscriminate use of force," said the press release.

The EU has consistently condemned the military coup in Myanmar since February 2021.

On January 31, 2023, the High Representative issued a declaration stating the EU's readiness to adopt further restrictive measures against those directly responsible for undermining democracy and committing serious human rights violations in Myanmar.

JFM WELCOMES NEW ROUND OF EU SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR

JUSTICE FOR MYANMAR



Campaign group Justice For Myanmar has welcomed the latest round of EU sanctions targeting Mining Enterprise 2 (ME 2), the Quartermaster General, State Administration Council (SAC) members and junta ministers.

ME 2 sits under the junta's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) and is one of five state-owned enterprises within the ministry that are illegally controlled by the junta following its 1 February 2021 coup. ME 2 provide a crucial source of funds to the junta, helping to finance its ongoing campaign of terror against the people.

ME 2 is responsible for the mining of tin, tantalum-niobium, titanium, vanadium, bismuth, molybdenum, rare earth elements, radioactive minerals, rubidium, lithium, hafnium, indium, gold, tungsten and heavy metal, according to data from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. It generates revenue for the junta through profit sharing arrangements with military conglomerates and Myanmar and foreign companies.

The EU has now sanctioned all but one of the junta-controlled state-owned enterprises under MONREC, having already sanctioned ME 1, Myanmar Gems Enterprise and Myanmar Timber Enterprise.

A lack of coordination means ME 1 and ME 2 are not yet sanctioned by the UK, Canada or Australia, while Myanmar Pearl Enterprise is sanctioned by the UK, Canada and the USA but not the EU.

Justice For Myanmar calls on the EU, US, UK, Canada, Australia and their allies to coordinate and sanction all state-owned enterprises under MONREC, as well as Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), which provides the biggest source of foreign revenue to the junta, and the junta-controlled Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank and Myanmar Investment and Commercial

Bank, which the junta uses to receive foreign funds and purchase arms.

The EU has also sanctioned three junta ministers, two members of the junta's State Administration Council and the Myanmar Army's Quartermaster General, Kyaw Swar Lin.

The Quartermaster General of the Myanmar army plays a key role in the military's corrupt business activities, overseeing Myanmar Economic Corporation, the army's real estate developments and the purchase of arms, equipment and technology.

The Quartermaster General's Office has direct and indirect business with a number of international corporations and agencies. For the Y Complex development, the Quartermaster General is in business with the Japanese corporations Daiwa House Industries and Tokyo Tatemono, and the publicly funded Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport and Urban Development (JOIN). For the LOTTE Hotel development, the Quartermaster General is in business with the South Korean corporations POSCO International and LOTTE Hotels & Resorts.

Justice For Myanmar calls on all companies and public financial institutions to urgently and responsibly cut ties with the Office of the Quartermaster General.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "JFM welcomes the latest round of EU sanctions targeting ME 2, the Quartermaster General and other junta members.

"ME 2 and the Quartermaster General play key roles in the Myanmar military cartel, channelling funds to the junta that finance its widening campaign of terror, helping to pay for the bombs, bullets and jet fuel that the junta uses to murder Myanmar people daily.

"The pace of US, UK, EU, Canadian and Australian sanctions are too slow and lack coordination. These governments and their allies need to do far more to cut the junta's access to funds, arms, equipment and technology.

"We urge the EU to urgently follow the US in sanctioning Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank and Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank.

"We call on Australia, Canada, the UK and USA to follow the EU in sanctioning MOGE, and for governments to sanction all MONREC state-owned enterprises."

BRITISH GOVERNMENT CUTS AID TO BURMA BY 70% SINCE COUP



Photo: Shane Rounce

British aid to Burma has been cut by 51% this financial year, and by 70% since the financial year 2020-2021, according to newly published Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office accounts.

As Burma Campaign UK points out, this comes during a time when Burma is suffering its worst human rights and humanitarian crisis ever, after the attempted military coup on 1 February 2021.

“Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is cutting aid to Burma at a time when more people than ever are in desperate need of assistance,” said Anna Roberts, Executive Director at Burma Campaign UK. “Aid to Burma should be increased, not cut, and more aid needs to go local civil society so British aid reaches people in areas not under Burmese military control.”

British aid to Burma has been cut from £61.9 million last year, to £30.1 million in this financial year. Previous government records show that the aid to Burma in 2020 was just over £103 million. This means that aid has been cut by 70% from 2020 to 2023-2024.

These cuts in aid to Burma come after the government’s 82% cuts in aid to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who fled genocide in Burma.

According to Burma Campaign UK the British government has previously tried to disguise the overall cuts in aid to Burma by highlighting statistics for humanitarian aid, rather than overall aid to Burma.

Funding for any development aid programmes discontinued after the attempted coup began should have been reallocated towards the dramatic increase in humanitarian needs but was not.

Even before the coup Burma Campaign UK had been campaigning for a higher proportion of UK

aid to be spent on the humanitarian emergencies in the country. In 2018 DFID was spending three times as much on economic development and governance as on humanitarian aid.

The organisation also points out that even though the Myanmar junta is launching indiscriminate attacks using airstrikes and long-range artillery, the British has so far failed to sanction supplies of aviation fuel to Burma, despite five British companies, UK P&I, Steamship Mutual, Britannia P&I, North Standard and Shipowners’ Club, being involved in the supply chain of aviation fuel deliveries.

If the British Government could sanction aviation fuel supplies it would make it harder for the junta to get aviation fuel and as Burma Campaign says, without aviation fuel, the jets can’t fly and if they can’t fly, they can’t bomb.

The British government had previously led the implementation of sanctions on sources of revenue and arms but there have been no new sanctions in almost four months and major sources of revenue, such as gas, state-owned banks and rare earth minerals have yet to be sanctioned.

The slow pace of sanctions has meant the military has been able to generate revenue to fund arms purchases. The EU has sanctioned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and the US has sanctioned state-owned banks.

But, it is not just the cuts in aid to Burma that Burma Campaign UK finds alarming, it is also the way in which aid is given.

Most of the people forced to flee attacks by the Burmese military are in areas not under the control of the military and where the UN and other agencies do not operate. For most, the only way to reach them is through local civil society organisations, but the British government and other donors provide relatively little aid to them, and apply so many conditions and so much bureaucracy and red tape that local organisations cannot access funds.

“James Cleverly is moving too slowly to cut off sources of revenue and weapons to the Burmese military and is now cutting aid to the people attacked by those weapons,” said Anna Roberts. “Arguing that the British government has also cut life-saving aid to other countries is not a defence justifying these cuts, it’s a disgrace.”

XI HAILS ‘OLD FRIEND’ KISSINGER IN BEIJING MEETING

Chinese leader Xi Jinping hailed former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger as an “old friend” as the two met in Beijing on Thursday last week.

Kissinger’s visit to China this week has seen him call for a rapprochement between Washington and Beijing, which remain at loggerheads over a range of issues, from human rights to trade and national security.

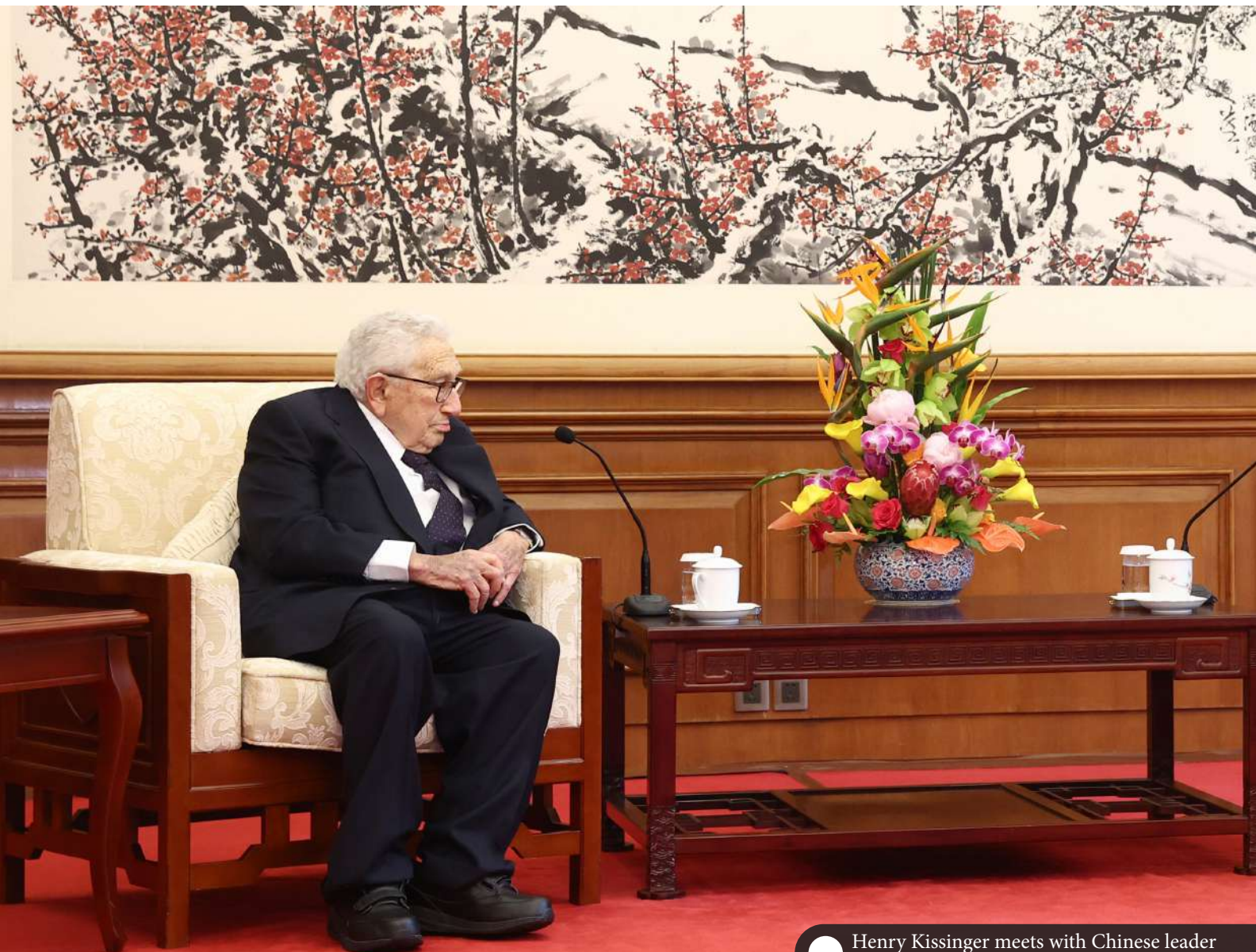
The 100-year-old diplomat was central to the United States establishing ties with communist China in the 1970s and has maintained close contact with the country’s leaders over the years.

“Chinese people value friendship, and we will never forget our old friend and your historic contribution to promoting the development of China-US relations and enhancing the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples,” President Xi told Kissinger on Thursday, according to state media.

“This not only benefited the two countries, but also changed the world,” Xi added.

“The world is currently experiencing changes not seen in a century, and the international order is undergoing enormous change,” the Chinese leader said.

“China and the United States are once more at a crossroads, and both sides must once again make



Henry Kissinger meets with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

a choice.”

Kissinger, in response, thanked Xi for hosting him at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse's building number five - where he met with then premier Zhou Enlai in 1971.

“The relations between our two countries will be central to the peace in the world and to the progress of our societies,” the former diplomat said.

‘UNINDICTED WAR CRIMINAL’

Kissinger secretly flew to Beijing in 1971 on a mission to establish relations with communist China.

The trip set the stage for a landmark visit by former US president Richard Nixon, who sought both to shake up the Cold War and enlist help in ending the Vietnam War.



Washington's overtures to an isolated Beijing contributed to China's rise to become a manufacturing powerhouse and the world's second-largest economy.

Since leaving office, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Kissinger has grown wealthy advising businesses on China - and has warned against a hawkish turn in US policy.

His trip this week also overlapped with a trip by US climate envoy John Kerry, and follows recent visits by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

“Since 1971, Dr Kissinger has visited China more than 100 times,” CCTV said on Thursday.

State news agency Xinhua reported him as telling defence minister Li Shangfu on Tuesday that, “in today's world, challenges and opportunities coexist, and both the United States and China should eliminate misunderstandings, coexist peacefully, and avoid confrontation”.

Kissinger also met on Wednesday with top diplomat Wang Yi, who praised Kissinger's “historic contributions to the ice-breaking development of China-US relations”.

“The US policy toward China needs Kissinger-style diplomatic wisdom and Nixon-style political courage,” Wang said.

Kissinger has long been feted by the American elite and was co-awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating a ceasefire in Vietnam.

But he is seen by many as an unindicted war criminal for his role in, among other events, expanding the Vietnam War to Cambodia and Laos, including heavy bombing campaigns, supporting coups in Chile and Argentina, and turning a blind eye to Pakistan's mass atrocities during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence.

AFP

MODI SAYS INDIA 'SHAMED' AFTER VIDEO SHOWS MOB PARADING WOMEN NAKED

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday last week that the country has been "shamed" by a video showing a mob parading two women naked in a northeastern state where ethnic violence has claimed at least 120 lives.

Speaking publicly about the Manipur clash-

es for the first time since they erupted in May, Modi said his "heart is filled with pain and anger".

"The Manipur incident is shameful for any civilised society," Modi told reporters. "It has shamed the whole nation."

The video clip showed two women walking



Women protest at what they call the inaction of the Indian government on violence against women. Photo: AFP

naked along a street and being jeered and harassed by a mob in the state, where the authorities have imposed an internet shutdown.

It was reportedly filmed in early May, but went viral on social media on Wednesday.

The violence in Manipur, prompted by a dispute over access to government jobs and other perks, has seen homes and churches torched, with tens of thousands of people fleeing to government-run camps.

The clashes between vigilante gangs from ri-

val communities have pitted the majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around Imphal, against the mainly Christian Kuki in the surrounding hills.

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 them and other tribal groups.

The Kuki women reportedly shown in the video told The Wire newsite that police were present at the time, and did not help them.

Manipur's state government, led by the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said it is investigating the filmed incident, with a suspect arrested on Thursday.

Opposition lawmakers in New Delhi have criticised Modi for silence over unrest in Manipur.

The European Parliament has called on the authorities to "promptly halt the ethnic and religious violence" that has left at least 120 people dead, 50,000 displaced and more than 1,700 houses destroyed.

The EU resolution said there were "concerns about politically motivated, divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism in the area".

D. Y. Chandrachud, chief justice of India's Supreme Court, said the abuse of the women seen in the video was "simply unacceptable".

Legal news website Bar and Bench quoted Chandrachud as saying that if the government "does not act, we will".



AFP

NATIONS LINING UP TO JOIN BRICS BLOC: SOUTH AFRICA



BRICS foreign ministers line up. Photo: AFP

Twenty-two countries from around the globe have applied to join the BRICS bloc and more have shown interest, South Africa said Thursday last week, ahead of the five-nation group’s summit next month.

BRICS, a loosely-defined group which sees itself as a counterweight to Western economic domination, derives its name from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The bloc has previously indicated it is open to expansion.

“Twenty-two countries have formally approached BRICS countries to become (a) full member of BRICS, there’s an equal number of countries that have been informally asking about becoming BRICS members,” South Africa’s ambassador-at-large for Asia and the BRICS, Anil Sooklal, told media in Johannesburg.

He listed Iran, Argentina, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia among nations that have expressed an interest.

Growing interest in the bloc is not new but reflects the “confidence” in the work that BRICS has been “championing” over nearly a decade and a half, he said.

BRICS is not only “a power force ... in trying to change the faultlines in terms of global politics, but it is also changing what is happening in the economic

space globally,” he said.

“The current global architecture continues to be unequal, continues to marginalise developing countries... and continues to be dominated by a few hegemonies. We don’t want such a world. We want a world where our voices are heard,” he told AFP.

South Africa will host the BRICS summit in Johannesburg between August 22-24 to which a total of 69 countries have been invited, including all African states.

French leader Emmanuel Macron has asked to attend the summit but no decision has been reached yet on that request.

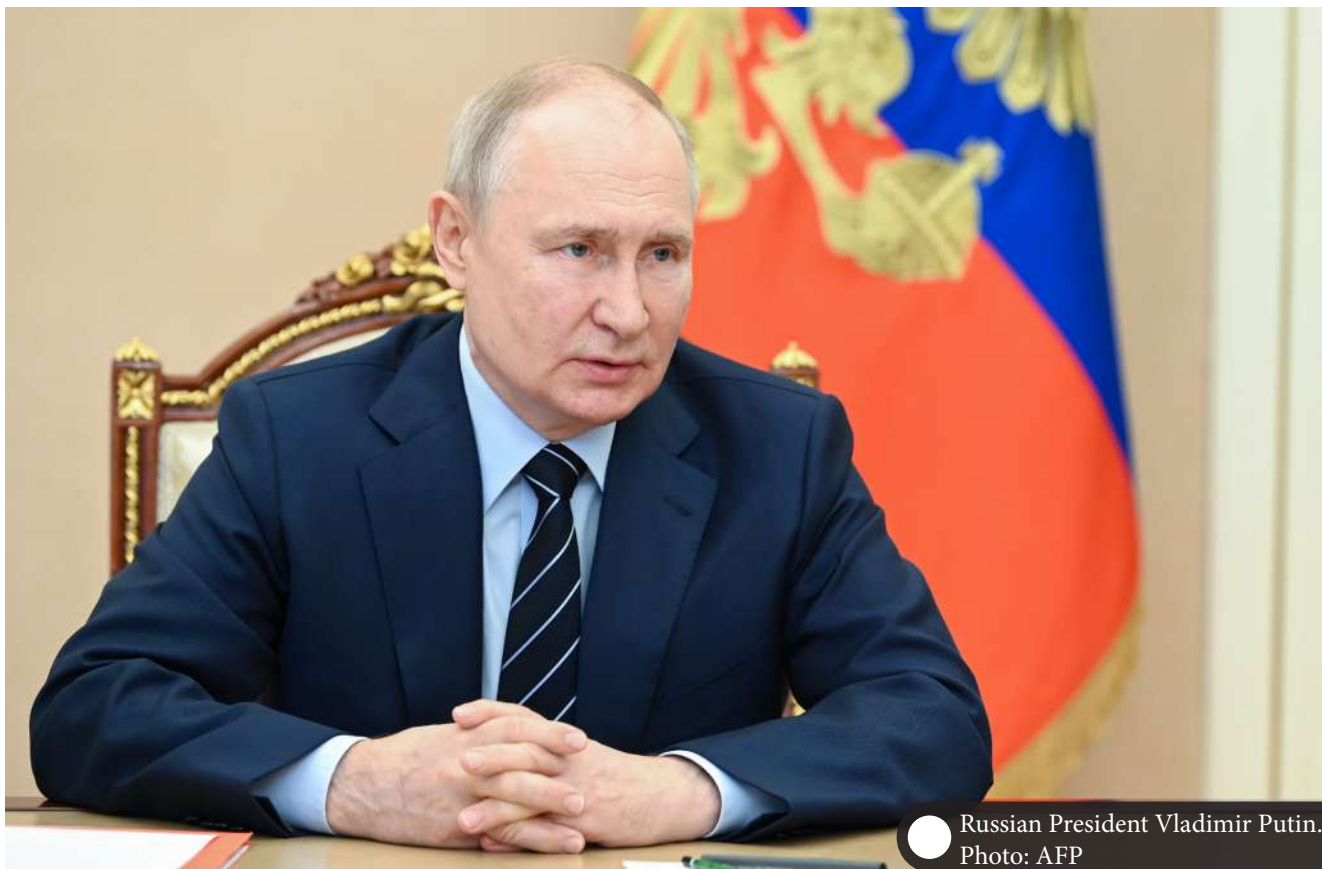
“BRICS is a consensus entity, it’s not South Africa’s decision alone, this has to be consulted,” said Sooklal, adding that Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor “is busy with that process”.

“There is high interest in the summit,” said Sooklal.

Formally launched in 2009, BRICS now accounts for 23 percent of global GDP and 42 percent of the world’s population, according to the summit’s website.

AFP

PUTIN OPTED OUT NOT TO 'JEOPARDISE' BRICS SUMMIT: S.AFRICA



Russian President Vladimir Putin.
Photo: AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin decided against attending an upcoming BRICS summit in Johannesburg in person because he did not want to “jeopardise” the talks, a top South African diplomat said last week.

Putin’s potential visit had posed a diplomatic and legal dilemma for South Africa ahead of the August 22-24 meeting.

He is the target of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant - a provision that South Africa as an ICC member would be expected to implement if he to set foot in the country.

President Cyril Ramaphosa’s office ended the uncertainty on Wednesday, announcing that Putin would not be attending in person and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov would go in his place.

South Africa’s ambassador-at-large for Asia and the BRICS, Anil Sooklal, said that under a “collectively” reached decision Putin would take part in the discussions virtually.

“President Putin understands the dilemma that South Africa faces, but he didn’t want to jeop-

ardise the summit, he didn’t want to create problems for South Africa,” Sooklal told a media briefing in Johannesburg.

Pretoria is the current chair of the BRICS group, an acronym for heavyweights Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which sees itself as a counterweight to Western economic domination.

South Africa had been under heavy domestic and international pressure not to host the Russian leader.

Sooklal said despite Putin’s absence the government was confident that the talks would “be a success”.

The Russian leader “will participate fully in all the discussions,” albeit remotely, he said.

Putin is being sought over accusations that Russia unlawfully deported Ukrainian children after it invaded its neighbour in February 2022.

AFP

‘BOLD AND RESOLUTE’ ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY WAR

Last year, 27,180 grave violations were committed against children caught up in war – the highest number ever verified by the UN, the Security Council heard on Wednesday.

Presenting her latest annual report, Virginia Gamba, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, appealed for “bold and resolute action” to protect boys and girls at risk of death, recruitment, rape and other horrors.

The report covers 26 situations in five regions worldwide, representing another high.

Countries include Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine, which are being featured for the first time. New situations in Haiti and Niger are mentioned and details will appear in next year’s edition.

KILLED, RECRUITED, ABDUCTED

The UN has verified that 18,890 children suffered grave violations during wartime in 2022. Some 8,630 were either killed or maimed; 7,622 were recruited and used in combat, and 3,985 were abducted.

Ms. Gamba said these three violations remained the ones verified at the highest levels, and

they all increased last year.

“Children were killed or injured in airstrikes, by explosive weapons, by live ammunition, in cross-fire, or in direct attacks. In many cases, they fell victim to explosive remnants of war,” she said.

RAPE AND SEXUAL SLAVERY

Furthermore, 1,165 children, mainly girls, were raped, gang-raped, forced into marriage or sexual slavery, or sexually assaulted. Some cases were so severe that the victims died.

The senior UN official underlined the need to never forget that these numbers represent actual children whose individual stories are not told.

She cited examples such as the case of three girls in South Sudan who were gang-raped over a five-day period, a 14-year-old girl abducted and burned alive in Myanmar, and boys killed by an improvised explosive device in a school in Afghanistan.

FACES BEHIND THE FIGURES

“This is why we must remember that behind the figures are the faces of children suffering from armed violence around the globe. We must do more



On the run in Syria. Photo: UN News

to prevent and protect our children from the ravages of armed conflict,” she said.

Ms. Gamba also noted that some child victims are punished for their circumstances instead of receiving protection. Last year, 2,496 children were deprived of liberty for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict.

“Being particularly vulnerable at the hands of authorities, children under detention were exposed to further violations of their rights, including torture and sexual violence. In some cases, they were even sentenced to death,” she said.

SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS ATTACKED

The report further revealed verified attacks on 1,163 schools and nearly 650 hospitals in 2022, representing a 112 per cent increase over the previous year. Half of these attacks were carried out by Government forces.

She said the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes also remains a major concern, with a verified “sharp increase” of over 60 per cent in cases last year, both by armed forces and armed groups.

AID UNDER FIRE

Meanwhile, humanitarians and the vital aid they provide – often the “only hope” for children and communities affected by conflict – have increasingly come under fire.

The UN verified more than 3,930 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children last year. Aid workers were also killed, assaulted and abducted, while humanitarian supplies were looted, and assets and vital infrastructure destroyed.

The Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Omar Abdi, also briefed the Council.

He recalled that the highest numbers of grave violations against children were verified in longstanding protracted conflicts, including in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and Palestine, and Somalia.

CONCERN FOR SUDAN

Although the current conflict in Sudan erupted outside the reporting period, UNICEF is also gravely

concerned about its impact on the 21 million children there.

“More than one million children have now been displaced by the fighting and the UN has received credible reports, under verification, that hundreds of children have been killed and injured,” he said.

Mr. Abdi was adamant that the UN mandate on Children and Armed Conflict is effective, noting that armed groups have released at least 180,000 boys and girls from their ranks over the past 23 years.

However, he said that “as the number of countries on the children and armed conflict agenda grows, so too does the number of children in need of our protection and support”, urging greater international support for UN efforts.

CHILD RECRUITMENT CONDEMNED

A young woman civil society representative also brought perspective from her country, Colombia, which is emerging from decades of war that has left “millions of victims”.

Going only by the name Violeta, she said children and young people there live in constant fear of landmines, armed group clashes and forced recruitment.

“It’s not easy to see how as the days go by, the chairs in the classroom start emptying because boys and girls are either recruited, killed or displaced, and they need to go elsewhere in order to seek better opportunities,” she said, speaking in Spanish.

Violeta made several recommendations for the Council’s consideration, which included condemning and preventing child recruitment, and condemning sexual violence against children and young people in the strongest terms possible

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Matan Levanon

KAREN STATE

Defence forces attack Thandaunggyi Township junta military camp

On 11 July defence forces attacked a junta military camp in Karen State's Thandaunggyi Township but they had to retreat after seven hours of fighting and junta airstrikes.

The defence forces attacked the military camp near to Yardo Village on the Taungoo to Leiktho to Loikaw highway at around 5:00 a.m. on 11 July according to a member of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 2, one of the groups involved in the attack.

They said: "The attack was carried out early in the morning. The fighting lasted quite a long time. They were still shooting until around 12 noon. We weren't able to occupy the camp and we had to retreat."

Another KNLA fighter said that during the fighting three junta fighter jets from Taungoo Air Force Base were used by Military Council to bomb the villages of Yardo, Warhawkho, Kaleihta, and Paralsoe. This destroyed several houses and forced villagers to flee. Villagers were still fleeing the area as of 8:00 a.m. on 12 July.

Junta casualties are currently unknown, but according to reports, one defence force member was killed and three more were wounded.

As of the evening of 12 July, the junta was still sporadically firing artillery in the vicinity of Yardo Village, even though there was no fighting in the area at that time.

The rebel fighters involved in the attack on the military camp were from the KNLA and local people's defence forces (PDFs).

KNU claims Myanmar junta arrested 20 civilians in July with 'no reason'

The Karen National Union (KNU), administering Kaw Thoo Lei territory, says 20 civilians were "heedlessly" arrested from 6-11 July by the Military Council with 18 of them sentenced to jail, according to a 12 July KNU statement.

The Military Infantry Unit (264) arrested and detained civilians who went to buy food in Kyauktada Town. The KNU has a list of the 19 people arrested.

Among them, only Maung Htet Htet was released and 18 were imprisoned, said a family acquaintance.

The whereabouts of Zaw Oo, another civilian who was arrested by the military on 11 July, is not known. The civilians are the residents of Kyaukmaw Payagyi Village, Padekaw Village, Burma Wethlataw Village, and Darkular Village. The arrested were said to have been detained at the Kyauktada Police Station.

Clashes between junta troops and the KNU have been happening in KNU Kaw Thoo Lei Administrative Territory.

Due to the brutality of the military regime, the number of displaced people in the area has reached 599,400 and they are facing many obstacles. Now that it is the rainy season, the displaced people are facing insufficient shelter, food and accommodation. Thus, urgent humanitarian aid is needed, the KNU states.



JUNTA TO UNVEILS GIANT MARBLE BUDDHA STATUE IN NAY PYI TAW AFTER THREE-YEAR CONSTRUCTION

Myanmar junta recently announced that after over three years of construction, the country is set to reveal a giant sitting marble statue of Lord Buddha in its capital, Nay Pyi Taw, on August 1, according to the junta-controlled newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

Named the Maravijaya Buddha Image, this magnificent marble statue stands 63 feet tall and weighs 1,782 tons. Accompanying it is an 18-foot-tall throne, adding an extra 3,510 tons to the overall weight.

“The Buddha image was carved in four parts with the use of CNC technology and all carving processes were completed on 31 March 2022, including a topic on construction of 720 stone plaque chambers on which small pagodas were built,” said the newspaper.

Myanmar Junta cronies have contributed billions of dollars towards the funding of Min Aung Hlaing’s marble colossus, according to news outlets.

Khin Maung Aye, the founder of CB Bank, emerged as the leading benefactor, contributing more than 2.2 billion Kyats. Trailing closely behind were the sons of deceased military officer Aung Thaung, including Myanmar Navy chief Moe Aung, who donated more than 512 million Kyats, followed by Tun Myint Naing (Asia World) with a contribution of 500 million Kyats, and Zaw Zaw Max Myanmar Group of Companies, who pledged 297 million Kyats.

MYANMAR DIGITAL PAYMENTS REACH OVER 31 TRILLION KYAT LAST YEAR, CBM SAYS

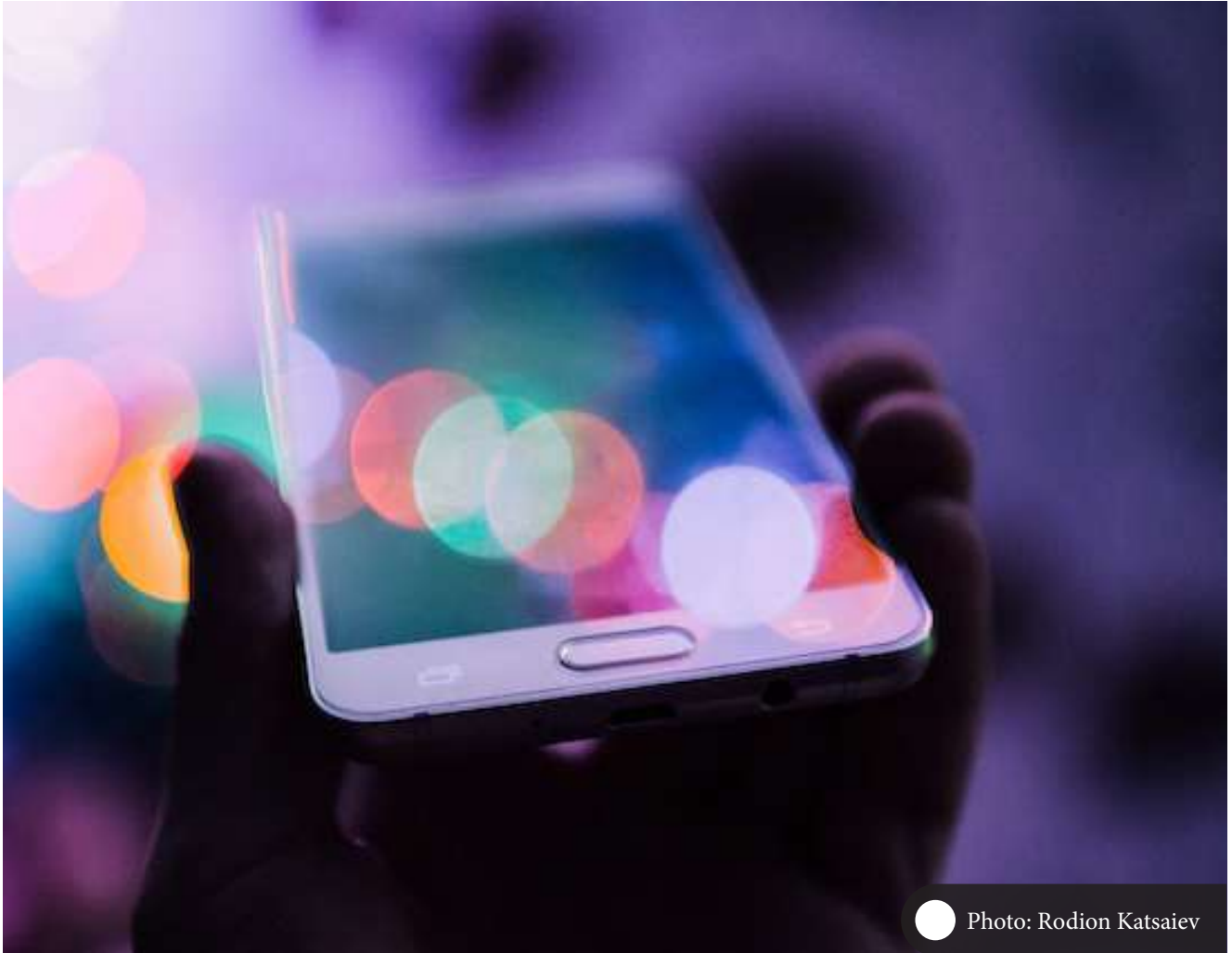


Photo: Rodion Katsaiev

The Military Council's Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) said that the transactions made through E-commerce services such as internet banking, mobile banking, mobile pay and mobile financial services had reached 31,666 billion Kyats in 2022.

This figure rose by 47% in comparison with 2021.

The CBM announcement suggests that Currency in Circulation (CIC) in the country was reduced by the popularity of digital payments and Ecommerce services among people.

The CIC growth rate was 48% in 2021 but it declined to 29% in 2022 and 11% in 2023 up to May, the CBM announcement says.

The digital payment has been widely used

among people since the end of 2020 and about 700 million mobile wallet transactions were made in 2021.

According to the data released by the World Bank, 40% of the over-15 age group in the country used digital payments in 2022 and the major digital payment service providers in the country are Wave Money and KPay.

QUALITY UPGRADING WORK FOR MYANMAR MAIZE EXPORT TO ASEAN AND JAPAN

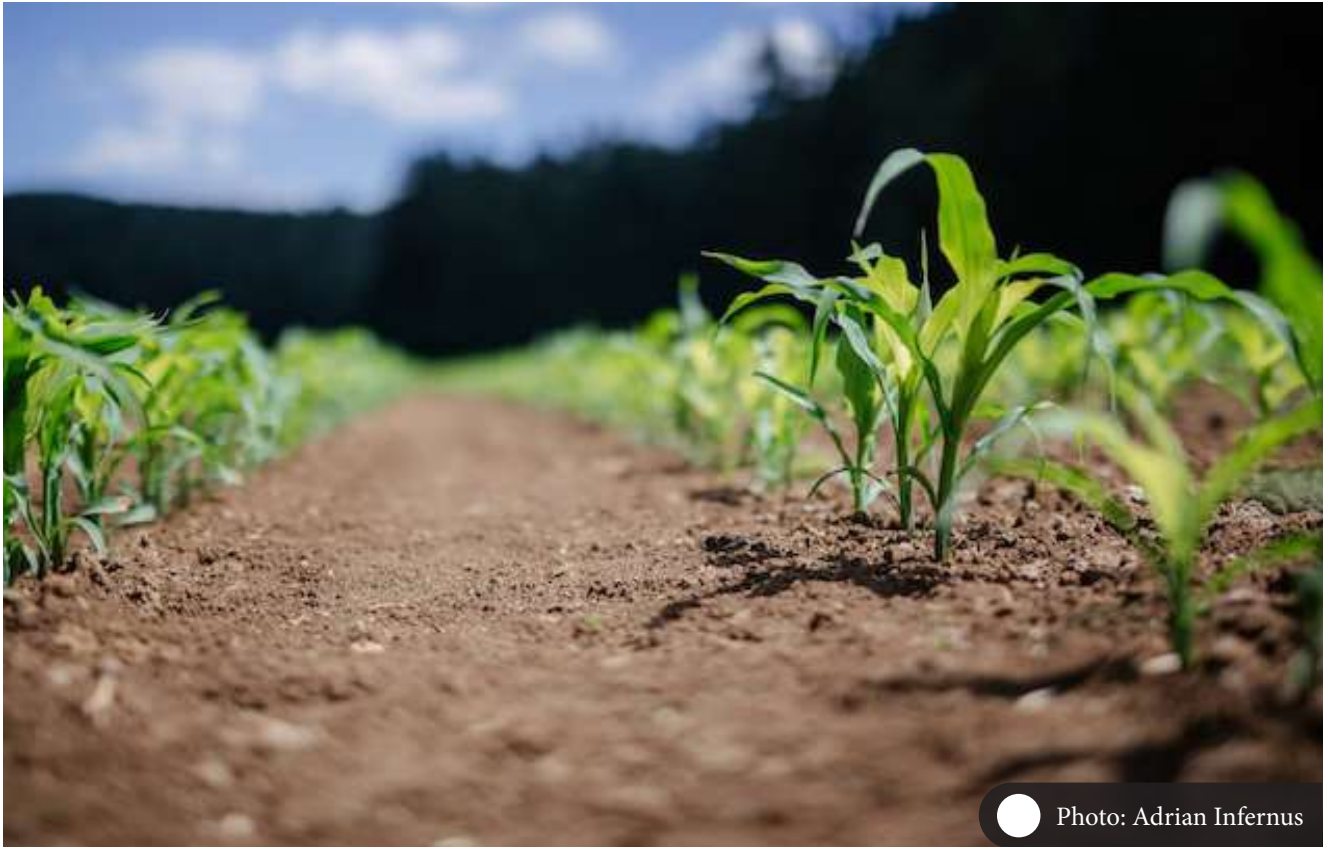


Photo: Adrian Infernus

Myanmar Maize Merchants Association said that they were doing quality upgrading of maize for market expansion of Myanmar maize export to ASEAN countries and Japan this year as they had to rely mainly on the Thailand market at present.

Currently, Myanmar maize is being exported mainly to Thailand. And also Myanmar is exporting maize grown in Shan State as crop substitution in poppy-growing areas to China.

Maize is granted tax exemption from 1 February to the end of August this year by Thailand. Myanmar exported 80% of maize production in the country to Thailand and only 5% were exported to China.

The tax exemption period is not yet over at present but there are fluctuations of prices in the market because of the current situation in Thai politics and then the price of Myanmar maize is at the lowest level of the last six months.

Myanmar maize price is varying depending on the Thai market. Myanmar maize was at 1,300 Kyats per viss (approx. 1.6 Kg) in February but it fell to 1,170 Kyats per viss in the Yangon market at present.

China is buying maize at the price calculated based on the global price. Myanmar maize export to China declined as Myanmar maize price was slightly higher than the world market price.

Moreover, the regulation and restrictions imposed by China on Myanmar maize made the export decline to about 70,000 tonnes per year.

Other factors for Myanmar maize export decline are said to be the monetary policy of Myanmar, inconsistent export policy and hurdles in transport.

So, the Myanmar maize merchants are exploring new markets for their crops and they reportedly have a plan to export Myanmar maize to ASEAN countries and Japan.

CHINESE MORTGAGE STRIKERS DESPAIR AS UNFINISHED HOMES STAY STALLED



Real estate in trouble.
Photo: AFP

Gao Zhuang says he has refused to pay his mortgage for months, a desperate protest against the Chinese property developer he blames for endless delays on the unfinished apartment he bought years ago for his son.

He is one of many victims of a long-running housing crisis still wreaking misery on the lives of homebuyers, many of whom have little legal recourse on what has become an ultra-sensitive subject for the government.

The 49-year-old labourer from central Henan bought an apartment in the provincial capital Zhengzhou for 1.2 million yuan (\$170,000) in 2019, and said he was told it would be completed in two years.

He staked much of his savings on the flat, hoping it would improve his son's marriage prospects and allow his family to start leaving their poorer rural hometown behind.

But the developer announced delay after delay, and construction work ground to a virtual halt late last year.

"The main impact has been on my son," said Gao, who requested his name be changed to avoid repercussions.

"How can he get married without his own place?"

Gao's case is not uncommon.

A wave of mortgage boycotts spread nationwide last summer, as cash-strapped developers struggled to raise enough to complete homes they had already sold in advance -- a common practice in China.

Endemic issues in the real estate sector had been brought to a head in 2020, when the government cracked down on excessive borrowing and rampant

speculation.

Cut off from the easy money that had fuelled the boom of the last few decades, many companies began floundering under accumulated debts.

A slowing economy was hammered further by pandemic-era health curbs, adding to low consumer confidence and a slump in housing demand.

Beijing recently introduced a raft of measures intended to remedy the disarray in the sector.

Although some properties have since been completed, many buyers like Gao are still waiting -- while other issues have surfaced, from slapdash building work to disputes over compensation and pressure from local officials.

'I BLAME THE GOVERNMENT'

The property crisis grabbed headlines for its scale, notably entangling industry giant Evergrande, which flirted with bankruptcy before announcing a massive restructuring deal.

The smaller regional firm building Gao's complex, Henan Jin'en Real Estate, is not publicly listed, making its financial situation hard to discern.

It did not reply to AFP's requests for comment.

Disgruntled homeowners say the compound's estimated 100 undelivered homes and shoddy finishes are evidence the company is struggling.

AFP journalists visiting in June observed crumbling exterior masonry, holes in interior walls, loose wiring and unsecured fire doors.

A handful of workers dug trenches and stacked cinder blocks on the site's periphery, while the sound of drilling emanated from several homes.

Some buyers said the developer had hired a skeleton staff of labourers to justify a rumoured government bailout.

One owner said local officials seemed powerless to ensure the project's completion, adding that "ordinary people have suffered the worst".

"I don't blame the developer -- I blame the government," the middle-aged man told AFP, gazing around the concrete shell of an apartment.

"Some people around here still believe in our government, but I think they're the least worthy of our faith."

AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA EXPLORES FUEL IMPORT SOLUTIONS AND EYES ELECTRIC VEHICLES AMID ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

In light of the economic sanctions imposed by the US and western countries, the Myanmar junta Recently has invited fuel importers and retailers to address the decline in dollar income sources at a meeting, according to Myanmar news outlets.

In the aftermath of the military coup, the junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has repeatedly emphasized the need to reduce imports, including fuel, due to the significant shortage of foreign exchange.

According to sources within the fuel trading circle, it is anticipated that the junta will announce new policies and arrangements to be implemented during the meeting.

Several fuel traders have indicated that the junta's attempt to import fuel from Russia in an effort to reduce costs has not yielded successful results thus far.

Amidst these challenges, the junta has taken additional measures to address the issue of fuel demand and imports in the country. Alongside attempting to import fuel from Russia to cut costs, they have also explored the possibility of importing Electric Vehicles (EVs) with the aim of reducing fuel demand in the nation.

In a recent editorial published by a junta-backed state-run newspaper, it is argued that EVs have the potential to save Myanmar substantial amounts of dollars currently being spent on imported fuel.

JUNTA'S FOREIGN TRADE REACHES US\$9.7 BILLION IN 2023-2024 FISCAL YEAR

In an announcement on July 24, the Myanmar junta's Ministry of Commerce revealed that Myanmar's foreign trade has reached over US\$9.7 billion in the first three months of the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The figure increases, as compared to more than \$9.6 billion registered in the same period a year ago, according to the junta ministry's data.

While these figures may seem impressive at first glance, it is crucial to look beyond the numbers and understand the negative implications associated with the junta's actions.

Under the junta's control, Myanmar's economic policies have been heavily criticized for their lack of transparency and accountability. Despite the slight increase in trade figures compared to the previous year, it is essential to consider the human rights abuses and political turmoil that the military council has inflicted upon the country.

From April 1 to July 14, the country earned more than US\$4.4 billion from exports, but it is worth questioning the nature of these exports and whether they have contributed to furthering the military's oppressive agenda. The junta's iron grip on power has led to the exploitation of the country's resources.

During the period, the export list was dominated by manufactured goods, which held the highest value, earning more than \$2.6 billion. Following closely behind were agricultural products with a value of US\$968.05 million.



PAYING THEIR RESPECTS

A Buddhist monk visits the graves of Myanmar's late minister of education and national planning U Razak and his bodyguard Ko Htwe, who were killed at the time of the assassination of independence leaders including general Aung San, as they mark the 76th Martyrs' Day in Yangon on July 19.

Photo: AFP



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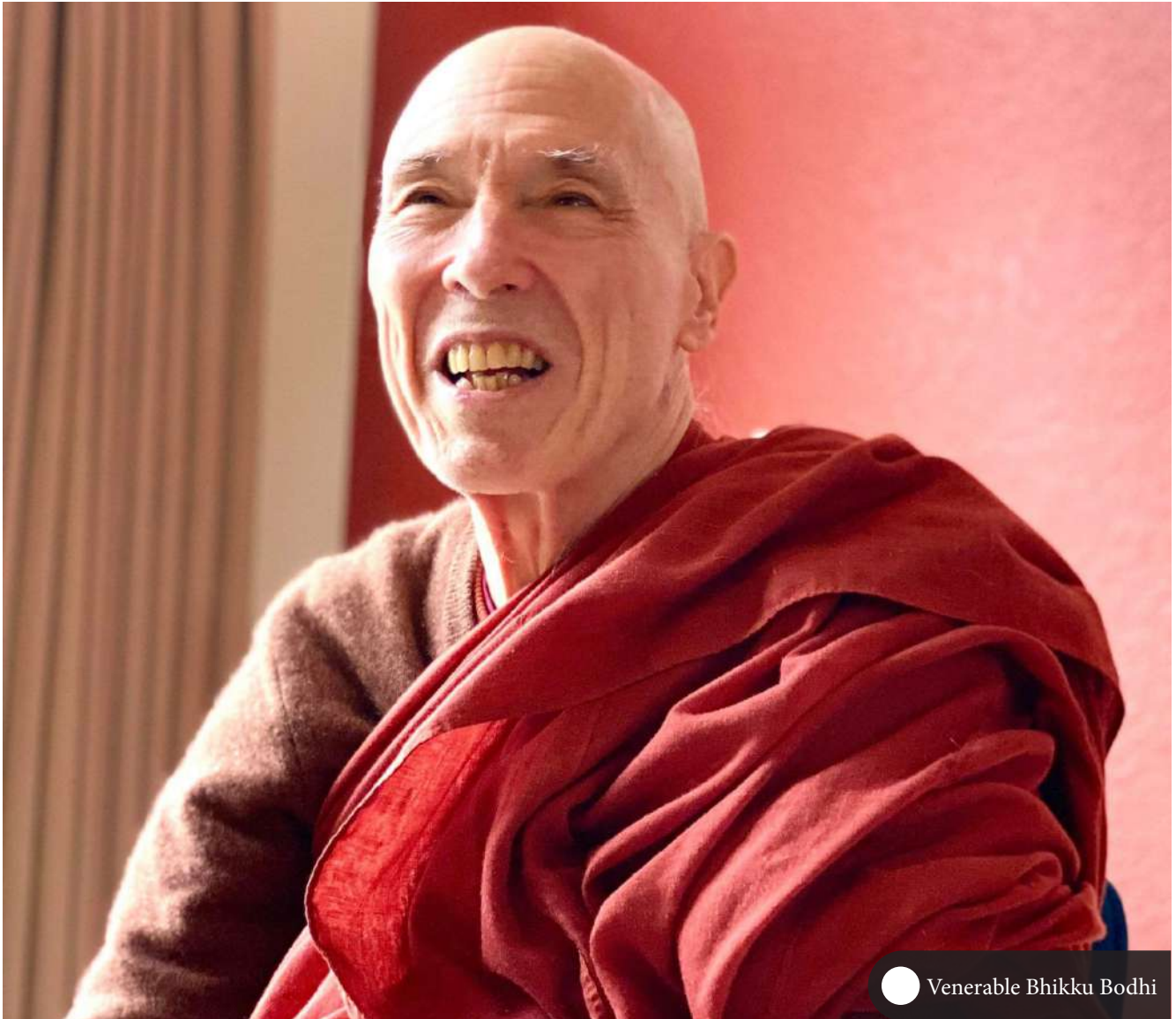
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FLASHBACK

A CONTROVERSIAL TAKE ON BUDDHIST NON-VIOLENCE IN THE MIDST OF WAR



Venerable Bhikku Bodhi

Two years ago, not long after the Myanmar military shattered the illusion of democracy in the Golden Land, Venerable Bhikku Bodhi, a learned American Buddhist monk sparked interest and controversy when he talked to Insight Myanmar to discuss the crisis.

Bhikku Bodhi raised some interesting and awkward questions for the Buddhist Sangha and lay supporters as they faced questions of how they should react to the behavior of the junta armed forces.

The Insight Myanmar podcast “Bhikku Bodhi

on the Crisis in Myanmar” sparked controversy (Listen to the podcast here - <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2021/7/4/episode-61-bhikkhu-bodhi-on-the-crisis-in-myanmar>).

This was not a normal Dhamma talk. Here was an American monk who is one of the most respected living monastics, fielding questions from Burmese Buddhists about the appropriate use of violence and mental volition in resisting the military.

Questions to ponder were how can a dedicated meditator maintain the five precepts when encoun-

tering armed soldiers with orders to abduct, rape, torture, or even kill? How should devoted lay supporters of the Saṅgha respond when much of their own monkhood remains silent even as their country is burning around them? What is the best way that practitioners outside of Myanmar can support the protest movement at this time?

These are just a few of the moral quandaries put to the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, in an interview which he later admitted was “one of the toughest I’ve ever had.”

In truth, the questions were not posed to frame an intellectual, abstract debate; many were sent in by Burmese Buddhist listeners, and concern real-life—and sometimes life-and-death—challenges, in the context of the military’s on-going terror campaign. They are from people desperately seeking spiritual answers that in many cases their own monkhood has unfortunately not been providing.

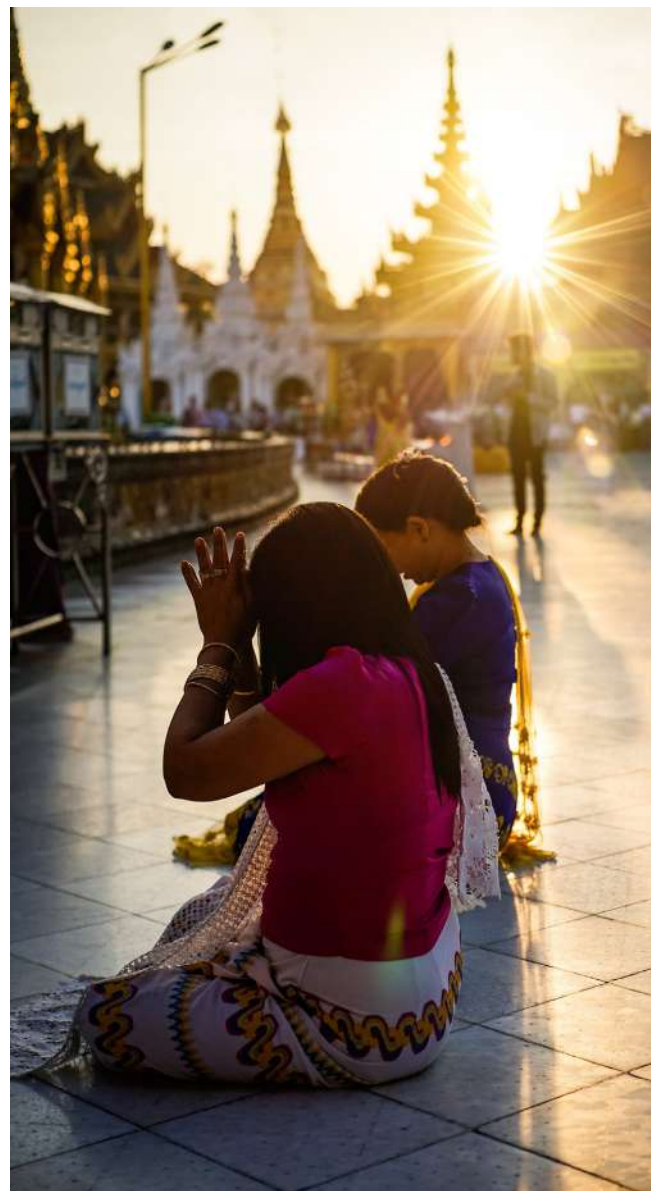
So this interview is not your typical Dhamma talk or theoretical discourse on Buddhist doctrine. With this in mind, Bhikkhu Bodhi emphasizes that his words “should be viewed as my personal opinions, and not authoritative dicta coming down from the high seat of authority, but my opinions, the way to resolve these very difficult ethical dilemmas.” His sensitive and flexible approach enables the Buddha’s teachings to be applied to a many-shades-of-grey reality, and acknowledges that in real life messiness, there may be no good, clean ethical options. Not only are black-and-white, theoretical absolutes not appropriate for people facing such difficult circumstances, they can even have the effect of turning people away from the teachings, bring unrealistic and rarified standards beyond most people’s reach in challenging life situations. So Bhikkhu Bodhi advocates adapting the spirit rather than the letter of the teachings to help us navigate our way through these serious challenges now facing Myanmar.

The discussion is wide-ranging. Other topics posed to Bhikkhu Bodhi range from the way Buddhist monks can engage with this crisis skillfully and in accordance with the Vinaya, to how Buddhist communities can best protect themselves against the terror state while understanding the immutable laws of kar-

ma, to the Rohingya crisis and issues surrounding the integration of Burmese Muslims into society.

None of these have easy answers, and this is the morass that the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi has willingly waded into, knowing there are simply no good solutions. This makes his moral courage all the more remarkable, at a time when many Buddhist leaders, especially those whose lineages trace back to Burma, carry on their teaching schedules while carefully avoiding these difficult questions. We thank him for his courageous willingness to engage on these difficult matters, and for the sensitivity and value of his words of wisdom.

Listen to the full podcast here: <https://insight-myanmar.org/complete-shows/2021/7/4/episode-61-bhikkhu-bodhi-on-the-crisis-in-myanmar>





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