

'Dramatic increase' in Myanmar war crimes: UN probe

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DIRE FLOODING

**Extensive flooding compounds
damage from earlier Cyclone Mocha**

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RAKHINE STATE IN DIRE STRAITS

Local media and Myanmar junta media reports indicate flooding is worsening in impoverished Rakhine State, in some areas compounding the plight of Cyclone Mocha victims, some of whom are still in need of humanitarian aid.

As heavy monsoon rains continue to fall, all of the main rivers in Rakhine State are flowing above the danger levels, according to the Myanmar Meteorology and Hydrology Department. Of particular concern are the Kaladan and Laymyo rivers that are said to be flowing dangerously high.

Aid organizations had earlier expressed concern that humanitarian aid including shelter materials should have been sent to Cyclone Mocha victims ahead of the monsoon season. However, Myanmar junta red tape is reported to have slowed or blocked aid delivery in a number of areas in Rakhine, with particular concern voiced over the internally displaced people's camps, including the IDP camps of Muslim Rohingya.

Rakhine Communications Hub has been reporting serious flooding in a number of areas of Rakhine over the last two weeks. The flood situation has worsened particularly in the townships of Mrauk-U, Minbya and Kyauktaw, where thousands of residents have been evacuated, according to Narinjara media. A total of 1,140 people, including 730 women, were shifted from the lower areas of

the Kaladan River, Rakhine State Administration Council (RSAC) reported Tuesday.

A RSAC spokesperson noted that following the increase of water level in the Kaladan River, 55 households from Muchaung and 150 households from Kyauk Ta Lone in Kyauktaw Township were evacuated. Similarly, over 1,000 people from Minbya Township were evacuated soon after 20 villages were inundated, he added.

A mother and her baby drowned in flooding in Minbya on 6 August.

According to residents, cars are having difficulty traveling the Sittwe-Yangon Highway in Mrauk-U due to flooding, and the domestic boat service on the Sittwe-Kyaukphyu-Ramree-Taungup route has been suspended.

NGOs have warned that people in IDP camps in Rakhine State are facing problems with shelter due to the damage caused by Cyclone Mocha on 14 May and do not have much food. As of 11 August, there is no update on whether the Myanmar junta and the local authorities have given the green light to international and local humanitarian aid, though some aid has been getting through. The current flooding has worsened the conditions in which NGOs have to operate.

EDITORIAL

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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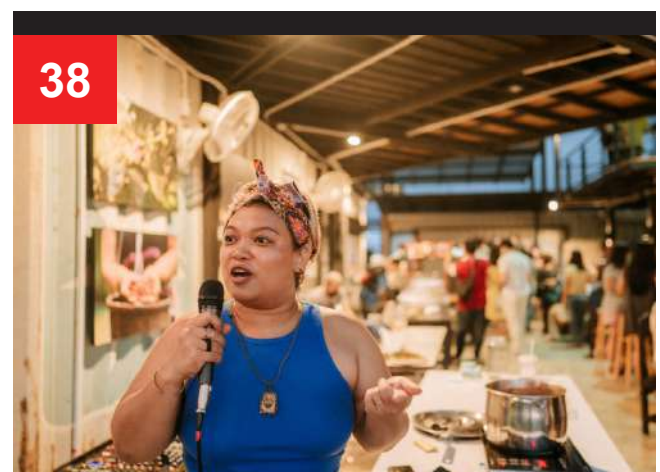
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Cover photo of volunteers delivering bread parcels to people in Bago last week by EPA





PROTEST IN BANGKOK

Myanmar nationals protesting in Bangkok against the Myanmar military junta.

Photo: AFP



YOUTH-LED PROTEST TO COMMEMORATE THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF 8888 UPRISING HELD IN YANGON

To mark the 35th anniversary of the 8888 uprising that challenged the General Ne Win-led one-party dictatorship, revolutionary youths in Yangon held a protest on 7 August in the morning.

The 8888 uprising was a significant turning point in Myanmar's history. It began as a student-led protest against the oppressive military regime but it quickly gained widespread support from all sectors of society. The protests were met with a violent crackdown by the military junta, resulting in numerous casualties and human rights violations on 8 August 1988.

On 8 August 2023 it is the 35th anniversary of the 8888 uprising.

The protest was held in downtown Yangon where security was tight, with demonstrators hanging a banner saying "We must fight till the end".

"We are still young and we must fight to complete the unfinished business of older generations. Young generation and older generation must work to-

gether to bring the dictatorship to an end as soon as possible," a youth who participated in the protest said.

The protest was organized in collaboration with the revolutionary youth from Kyimyindaing Networks (KMD18) and the Mayangone Democratic Front (MDF).

Normally, significant historical events such as the 8888 uprising are commemorated through a variety of activities such as memorial ceremonies, public gatherings, discussions, exhibitions and cultural events. However, after the 2021 coup, many people organized protests and fundraising events for IDPs who have been displaced due to the junta's human rights violations and arson attacks.

The total death toll of the 1988 uprising is unclear but between 3,000 and 10,000 pro-democracy activists were killed.

MYANMAR JUNTA BURNED DOWN 2,741 HOUSES IN JULY

The Myanmar junta burned down 2,741 houses throughout Myanmar in the month of July, according to the Fire Service Department under the National Unity Government's (NUG's) Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration.

The junta burned down houses in Mandalay, Magway, Bago, Tanintharyi and Sagaing regions, as well as Kachin and Karen States, according to the 1 August announcement by the NUG Fire Service Department.

The area that suffered the most burnings was Sagaing Region where 1,750 home, a religious building and a school were burned down by the junta during July. Nine people were burned to death in the fires.

The junta burned down a further 991 houses in

Mandalay, Magway, Bago and Tanintharyi regions and Kachin and Karen states.

According to data provided by the nonprofit organisation, the Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar) at least 81,899 residences were burned down throughout Myanmar between 1 February 2021 and June 2023.

It said that of those 81,899 burnings 59,225, more than 72 per cent, took place in Sagaing Region.

ADMINISTRATOR OF ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY TELEGRAM CHANNEL ARRESTED

The administrator of a pro-junta Telegram channel that published photos of people opposed to the junta so that they could be arrested has been arrested himself.

The Telegram account called Ahnt Bhone Thwin shared photos of anti-military protesters, supporters of the revolution and people taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and called for their arrest.

It was run by Ashin Suradaza, a monk from the Shwe Maung Tone Monastery in Ywar Bae Village-Tract in Bago's Pyay Township. He was detained by the junta in the last week of July and is currently being held in Pyay Prison and six lawyers are assisting him with his case.

Ashin Suradaza had used his Telegram channel to reprimand Minkyaung Sayardaw, the abbot of Minkyaung monastery, in the last week of July, over his alleged involvement in a land dispute. He was arrested after Minkyaung Sayardaw made a complaint to high-ranking junta officials, according to a person

working for Pyay Underground News (PUGN).

They said to Mizzima: "The reason for his arrest is obvious. It is because he insulted Minkyaung Sayardaw, the abbot of the Minkyaung monastery in Yangon Region, which is worshiped by the military regime. He is also incompatible with non-CDM people. Currently, monk Ashin Suradaza is helpless because his defender, Major So Pyae Lin [The commander of Pyay Regional Command Headquarters], has been prosecuted for the immoral pursuit of women."

The Ahnt Bhone Thwin Telegram channel has more than 27,000 subscribers but it has not shared any content since Ashin Suradaza's arrest.

"There were many people, protestors and CDM People arrested because of monk Ashin Suradaza. Although he was working for the Military Council, I just learned that he was arrested by Military Council soldiers", said a Tharyarwaddy District People's Defense Force press officer.

400 ILLEGAL MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS ARRESTED IN MALAYSIA

Over 400 illegal Myanmar migrant workers were arrested by the Malaysian authorities in Taman Len Seng Township in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 5 August.

According to Sayar LL, a legal worker in Malaysia who lives in Taman Len Seng Ward where the illegal migrant workers were arrested, the Malaysian authorities arrested them at 1:30 am on 5 August.

He said: "A large number of Chin ethnic people lived in the three apartments in Taman Len Seng ward that were raided by local authorities early in the morning. Typically, the local authorities raid only one

apartment at a time. Unfortunately, they raided three apartments where it was mostly illegal workers staying. The local authorities arrested illegal workers and their family members, including children."

The arrested workers are being detained at immigration detention centres in Taman Len Seng Township and face an uncertain future as they await the results of legal processes.

Many Burmese nationals choose to migrate to Malaysia illegally due to the economic challenges and limited job prospects in Myanmar.



Volunteers bring bread parcels to people in need in Bago. Photo: EPA



DIRE FLOODING

Extensive inundation compounds damage from earlier Cyclone Mocha

Floods and landslides caused by monsoon rains have killed five people and forced the evacuation of around 40,000 others in Myanmar, officials said last Friday.

Footage from Rakhine state, which was ravaged in May by Cyclone Mocha, showed large areas of villages and farmland submerged by murky, yellow-brown waters. In many cases, this latest deluge compounded the damage caused earlier by the cyclone. Many people have yet to recover or are still waiting for aid in the wake of the cyclone.

Myanmar is hit by heavy rains every year around this time, but extreme weather events have

struck around the globe in recent weeks, including heat waves, storms and flooding.

In Bago, northeast of Yangon, some residents evacuated early while others were caught off guard by the rapidly rising water.

“There are floods every year in Bago but this one is the worst. Normally, the water is around knee- or thigh-deep during the rainy season,” Bago resident Soe Min Aung, 23, told AFP, adding that his family had scrambled to buy a boat.

“Some families moved to a monastery but others stayed because they didn’t think the water would



● Moving people to higher ground in Bago. Photo: AFP

be too high. In some quarters, the water level is higher than two times my height.”

More than 870 people were crammed into a Bago monastery on Friday night and were receiving food from monks and donated supplies.

“We arranged spaces for them to stay,” said local official Khin Maung.

Min Thaw, 66, said the ground floor of his two-storey house was inundated with water and the family had chosen to stay upstairs.

“I think it is the first heavy flood in seven or eight years in Bago,” he said.



EVACUATIONS

Five people have been killed, said Lay Shwe Zin Oo, director of Myanmar’s social welfare, relief and resettlement ministry, and the number of people evacuated across the country was expected to top 40,000 on Friday.

“Our department is giving necessary things for households evacuated to temporary camps,” she told AFP.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated around 50,000 Myanmar people had been affected by heavy monsoon rainfall and rising rivers and creeks since the beginning of August.

“There has been major damage to monsoon paddy crops in Mon and Kayin (states),” the agency said in a statement, adding that water levels in the Bago, Bilin and Salween rivers were now receding.

Flooding began in late July and has affected nine of the country’s states and regions, including Rakhine, Kachin, Karen, Mon and Chin.

In Karen state, a landslide cut off an important highway to a town on the border with Thailand, with the country’s ruling junta saying it could take a month to build a temporary bridge.

Myanmar is in the grip of a bloody civil conflict between the junta, which seized power in a February 2021 coup, and civilian militias opposed to its rule.

According to a local monitoring group, more than 3,800 people have been killed since the coup, a figure the junta puts at 5,000.

The United Nations sharply criticised the junta for its handling of the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, which killed at least 148 people and destroyed many homes. It condemned authorities’ refusal to allow aid workers to access the region, prompting state media to accuse the world body of “arrogance, ignorance and self-interest”. As of mid-August, junta red tape still appeared to be block both international and local aid shipments, though some deliveries appear to be getting through.

Mizzima and AFP

AT LEAST 17 DEAD AFTER ROHINGYA BOAT BREAKS UP OFF MYANMAR: RESCUERS



Rohingya migrants are risking taking to sea to escape Myanmar. Photo: AFP

At least 17 people drowned when a boat carrying Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar's Rakhine state broke up at sea this week, rescuers said Thursday last week.

Thousands of Rohingya risk their lives each year making perilous sea journeys from camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar to try to reach Muslim-majority Malaysia and Indonesia.

Byar La, a rescuer from the Shwe Yaung Meta Foundation in the town of Sittwe, said more than 50 people were thought to be on the boat heading for Malaysia when it got into trouble in heavy seas on Sunday night.

"We found 17 dead bodies... as of yesterday," he told AFP.

"We found eight men alive. Police have taken them for questioning."

Rescuers are still trying to find those unaccounted for, he said, although the exact number on board is not known.

Rakhine in Buddhist-majority Myanmar is home to around 600,000 Rohingya Muslims, who are considered migrants from Bangladesh and are denied citizenship and freedom of movement.

DEADLY SEA CROSSINGS

More than 3,500 Rohingya in 39 vessels attempted crossings of the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2022, up from 700 the previous year, according to the United Nations refugee agency's January data.

At least 348 Rohingya died or went missing at sea last year, the agency said, calling for a regional response to stop further drownings.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says calls for maritime authorities in the region "to rescue and disembark people in distress have gone unheeded with many boats adrift for weeks".

Amnesty International likens the living conditions of Rohingya people in Rakhine state to "apartheid".

A Myanmar military crackdown in 2017 forced some 750,000 Rohingya to flee Rakhine for Bangladesh following widespread accounts of murder, arson and rape.

Myanmar is facing genocide accusations at the United Nation's top court following the mass exodus.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have discussed efforts to begin repatriating Rohingya refugees to their homeland.

A top US rights envoy in Bangladesh said in July conditions remain unsafe for the return of ethnic Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

Funding cuts forced the United Nations food agency to cut rations to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh twice this year.

A cyclone ravaged Rakhine in May and the military junta has blocked international efforts to deliver aid.

Myanmar has been in chaos since Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government was toppled in a military coup in February 2021, ending its brief period of democracy.

AFP

UN WARNS MYANMAR LABOUR MARKET REMAINS FRAGILE

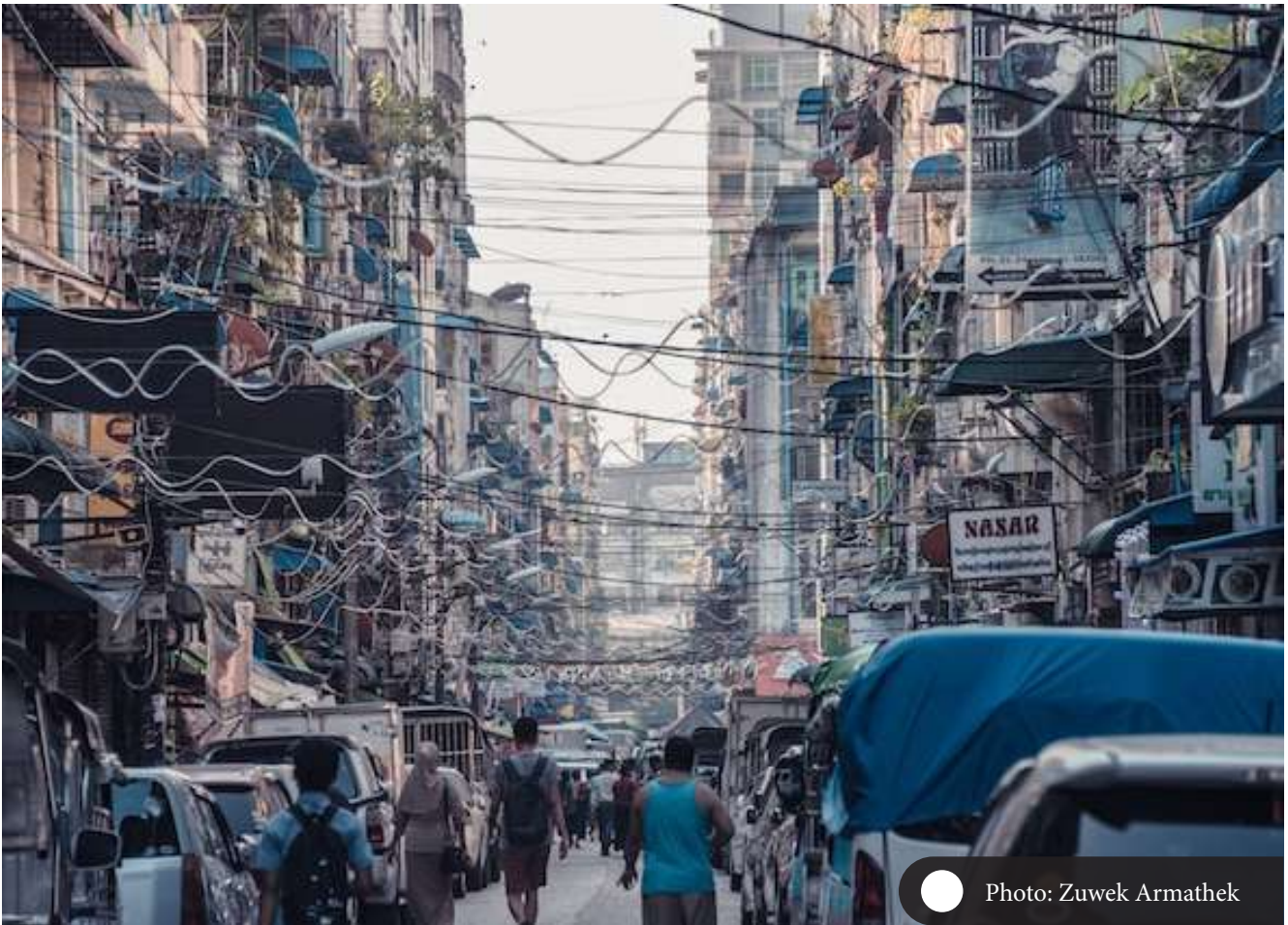


Photo: Zweek Armathek

The Myanmar labour market continues to suffer from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the 2021 military takeover and subsequent socio-economic turmoil, according to a new labour market update issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO Brief issued at the end of last month finds that all metrics point to challenging labour market conditions in the country.

A recent recovery in employment numbers in some sectors has failed to keep pace with population growth. As a result, a significant drop is seen in the employment-to-population ratio, which, at 54.5 per cent in 2022, was 8.2 percentage points below the 2017 level.

The report says the quality of jobs has declined with more workers pushed into the informal sector. Labour productivity has also fallen with estimates

showing an 8 per cent drop in 2021 and a further 2 per cent loss in the first half of 2022.

The disproportionate impact on women is also revealed, with the employment-to-population ratio of women in Myanmar declining by twice as much as that of men.

Donglin Li, Liaison Officer, ILO Myanmar, said, “Employment conditions in Myanmar remain fragile and challenging with many workers facing a very uncertain future. The restoration of democracy remains critical to the future prospects of Myanmar and its people and is a necessary pre-condition of social justice and decent work.”

‘DRAMATIC INCREASE’ IN MYANMAR WAR CRIMES: UN PROBE

UN investigators said last week they had gathered strong evidence of surging war crimes in Myanmar, including mass executions and sexual violence, and were building case files to help bring perpetrators to justice.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a coup deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s government in February 2021, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent that has sparked fighting across swathes of the nation.

The United Nations’ Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) said it had evidence that Myanmar’s military and affiliated militias were

“committing increasingly frequent and brazen war crimes”.

It pointed among other things to indiscriminate aerial bombardments, the burning of villages and mass killings of civilians and detained combatants, as well as torture and horrific sexual violence.

The investigation team warned in its annual report that “the number of incidents bearing the hallmarks of serious international crimes” had surged since the coup.

“Every loss of life in Myanmar is tragic, but the devastation caused to whole communities through ae-



UN is warning that the number of war crimes in Myanmar is increasing. Photo: AFP

rial bombardments and village burnings is particularly shocking,” Mechanism chief Nicholas Koumjian said in the statement.

“Our evidence points to a dramatic increase in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the country, with widespread and systematic attacks against civilians, and we are building case files that can be used by courts to hold individual perpetrators responsible.”

‘HIGHEST LEVEL OF CRUELTY’

The IIMM was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect evidence of the most serious international crimes and prepare files for criminal prosecution.

While the team has never been permitted to visit Myanmar, it said it had engaged with over 700 sources and had collected “over 23 million information items”, including witness statements, documents, pho-

tographs, videos, forensic evidence and satellite imagery.

The team - already cooperating with the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court - said it “plans to accelerate its collection of evidence of the most serious international crimes”.

The investigators said they were particularly looking for “linkage evidence” demonstrating responsibility of specific individuals, especially high-level officials.

The IIMM report explained that military commanders have a duty under international law to prevent and punish war crimes committed by those under their command.

“Repeatedly ignoring such crimes may indicate that the higher authorities intended the commission of these crimes,” the report said.

It highlighted evidence of the use of child soldiers by “various armed actors”, and said it was seeing “more and more evidence concerning torture, sexual violence and other forms of severe mistreatment at numerous detention facilities”.

The evidence indicated that such crimes were “being committed with the highest levels of cruelty and harm to the victims, including rape with objects, other forms of humiliation, mutilation, gang or serial rape and sexual enslavement,” the report said.

The IIMM said it was also investigating rampant sexual violence committed during the bloody crackdown on Myanmar’s Muslim Rohingya minority that in 2017 resulted in the displacement of nearly a million people.

“Sexual and gender-based crimes are amongst the most heinous crimes that we are investigating,” said Koumjian, saying these were “pervasive during the Rohingya clearance operations.”

AFP



NLD'S FORMER VICE PRESIDENT HENRY VAN THIO DISMISSED FROM PARTY



Henry Van Thio speaking at the UN when the NLD-led government was in power. Photo: AFP

Henry Van Thio, the vice president of National League for Democracy (NLD) government, was dismissed from the party, according to a press statement of the party on 9 August.

The statement came out after he attended the meeting of National Defence and Security Council organized by the military regime on 31 July, together with the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Speaker T Khun Myat during the previous term of parliament.

The statement said, "Although U Henry Van Thio was a vice-president selected by the party during the term of previous Hluttaw from 2016 to 2021, he was seen on 31 July 2023 working together with the military regime which is committing many war crimes including atrocity, torture, arrest and killing civilians. NLD party convened an interim emergency meeting of second central committee on 8 August 2023, and decided to remove him as a member of the party."

The decision of the NLD central committee included that the former vice president took an oath to follow objectives and policies of NLD party that prioritized the will of the people, and he also betrayed his pledges as a representative of the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) of the NLD to implement the needs of people who voted for him in the 2020 General Election.

After the military coup in February 2021, nine CEC members of NLD, including the chairperson and the vice-chair, as well as many party members have been arrested. Senior CEC member Nyan Win died in prison as he had no access to proper medical treatment.

NUG, NUCC REITERATE SPRING REVOLUTION MEANS ‘SYSTEM CHANGE’ RATHER THAN ‘REGIME CHANGE’

The ultimate goal of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution is to establish a new federal democratic union with a change of system instead of just regime change, according to a joint statement by the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and National Unity Government (NUG) on 6 August.

The statement titled ‘Common Position of Revolutionary Organizations Fighting Together in the Spring Revolution’ said that current illegal military seizure of power must be permanently removed, along with permanently ending the custom of military coups and the involvement of the military in politics.

It also emphasizes the establishment of a “Federal Union Army” comprised of different ethnic groups, to fight against external threats, and the federal army will be under the control of a civilian government unconditionally.

The statement mentioned implementing transitional justice mechanisms to address human rights violations, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and other crimes against generations upon all classes and ethnic groups in successive eras to prevent further such violations.

The NUCC and NUG has rejected political moves that deviate from the vision and values for building a federal democratic union, and pledged to join hands with people of all ethnic groups across the country through collective leadership and collective responsibility on the basis of equality until the ultimate goal of the Spring Revolution is achieved.

The NUCC is formed of 33 member organizations from five categories—the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, NUG, influential ethnic groups, civil society actors, and trade unionists.

The NUG’s Defence Ministry has formed PDFs in more than 250 townships along with 259 regiments and units. More than 100 of the 354 Local Defence Forces (LDFs) formed in urban and rural areas are affiliated with the NUG’s PDF regiments and units.

In diplomatic efforts, the NUG has opened representative offices in key countries, including in the United States, in February, this year.

HR ADVOCATES DEMAND ASEAN SET UP COMPLAINTS MECHANISM FOR MYANMAR PEOPLE

A leading Burmese Human Rights organisation and a group of lawyers from the Philippines and Indonesia have presented a petition to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta demanding accountability and justice for the people of Myanmar.

The main complainant, Salai Za Uk, Deputy Director of the Chin Human Rights Organisation, (CHRO) urged ASEAN to establish a permanent office for its Envoy to Myanmar. “The current ‘revolving door’ policy where there is a new ASEAN envoy every year, allows the junta to run rings around the Association. We need a permanent office for an ASEAN envoy that is permanently focused on Myanmar, monitoring the situation there on a long-term basis, tracking crimes and coming up with innovative ideas to promote justice, peace and stability.”

The ASEAN petition follows a new report by the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), which says there is “strong evidence” that the Myanmar military has committed three types of war crimes with increasing frequency and brazenness: indiscriminate or disproportionate targeting of civilians using bombs; killings of civilians or combatants detained during operations including in mass executions; and large-scale and intentional burning of civilian dwellings and other civilian buildings.

Filipino lawyer, Romel Bagares called for ASEAN “to establish a functioning mechanism for individual complaints. In addition, we’d like to see a fact-finding mission regarding alleged war crimes and other international crimes in Myanmar; and, further down the road, a regional criminal tribunal, or a comparable justice process, to hold perpetrators accountable. We believe ASEAN is in the best position to address human rights issues within the ASEAN community.”

His colleague Gilbert Andres, a leading human rights lawyer in Manila, said “according to the United Nations Office High Commissioner for Human Rights, since the coup over two years ago, the Myanmar military’s ‘four cuts’ strategy has resulted in at least 3,452 persons killed and 21,807 persons arrested. The Myanmar military has targeted civilians with airstrikes and artillery shells, has burned or destroyed about 60,000 civilian structures including churches, and internally displaced about 1.5 million people. The Myanmar military is literally waging war against its ci-

vilian population and is committing gross human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity on a daily basis. ASEAN must establish effective human rights mechanisms for the protection of its own community, such as the people of Myanmar.”

Both Filipino lawyers have extensive experience litigating human rights cases in the Philippines and also teach international law in a number of Philippine law schools.

Khin Ohmar, a long-term Myanmar human rights activist, said “as a survivor of the military’s massacre of over 3,000 peaceful protestors during the 1988 democracy movement, I welcome this historic petition to ASEAN. The Myanmar military’s enjoyment of blanket impunity for decades of gross crimes is emboldened by ASEAN and the UN’s inaction, while domestic justice mechanisms have all been weaponized by the military. Only by holding the military to account will atrocities stop. It is past time ASEAN and the international community corrected their course and take actions to achieve justice and accountability for the people of Myanmar.”

The petition to ASEAN was also signed by Feri Amsari and Shale A -Ghifari of Themis Indonesia, who recently initiated proceedings against the Myanmar junta at Indonesia’s Constitutional Court. Amsari said “the Constitutional Court made clear to us that it supported universal jurisdiction and regional approaches to accountability in Myanmar and that is precisely what we are proposing: a regional solution to a regional crisis. ASEAN must live up to the promise of its charter and not abandon the people of Myanmar in their hour of need.”

A number of legal cases against the Myanmar junta are being initiated in jurisdictions across South East Asia.

According to Chris Gunness, Director of the Myanmar Accountability Project which is supporting this work, “universal jurisdiction is a firmly established principle in international law and ASEAN states accept the validity and importance of universal jurisdiction. ASEAN as a regional organization is well placed to coordinate action in response to core international crimes attracting universal jurisdiction and contributing to customary international law.”

INDONESIA SAYS MYANMAR SOLUTION NEEDS ‘POLITICAL WILL’ FROM ALL SIDES



Photo: EPA

Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Tuesday last week said a resolution to the Myanmar crisis that has dragged into its third year needed “political will” from all sides of the conflict, as divided Southeast Asian nations step up diplomatic efforts.

The country has been ravaged by violence in the two years since civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was deposed in a coup and hit with 19 criminal cases ranging from corruption to breaching COVID-19 rules.

“We are aware the situation in Myanmar is still full of challenges. We must also realise this situation can only be resolved if there is political will from all parties,” he told an anniversary event for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Indonesian leader told foreign dignitaries the 10-member bloc, which includes Myanmar, must continue to work together to find a breakthrough to the crisis.

“ASEAN, as a big ship, must move forward. This big ship must continue to sail,” he said.

“This big ship cannot sink because this is our responsibility to hundreds of millions of people inside.”

Indonesia is this year’s chair of the ASEAN bloc and will host a leaders’ summit in September. Ja-

karta has engaged in what it calls “quiet diplomacy” with the Myanmar junta in a bid to bring it back to the negotiating table.

Widodo said the bloc’s efforts to solve the crisis would continue along the lines of a five-point deal agreed with Myanmar’s junta two years ago.

But the junta has largely ignored that agreement, which aims to end violence and resume talks between the military and the anti-coup movement.

ASEAN has been divided over how to engage with junta since the 2021 coup and has barred it from high-level summits over a lack of action on the five-point agreement.

Thailand has taken a separate track to ASEAN efforts, hosting “informal talks” with the junta’s foreign minister.

Bangkok’s top diplomat also said last month that he met with deposed democracy leader Suu Kyi and said she was in good health.

The junta has since granted the 78-year-old a partial pardon, reducing her 33-year sentence by six years.

AFP

CHINA RAINS DEATH TOLL RISES AS NEW STORM APPROACHES

The death toll from record-breaking rains across northern China rose to at least 78 last weekend, as authorities warned of more flooding and another storm approached the country this week.

Deaths from flooding in Hebei province rose to 29, state media reported Friday, after Storm Doksuri, which hit mainland China as a typhoon two weeks ago, brought on the most severe rainfall since records began 140 years ago.

Rescuers have continued to search for people swept away by the floods, as another storm, Khanun, approaches over the weekend.

The deluge followed weeks of historic heat, with scientists saying such extreme weather events

are being exacerbated by climate change.

Streets in parts of Hebei, which borders the capital, were still caked in mud when AFP visited on Wednesday.

Residents were scrambling to recover waterlogged belongings and clean up damaged homes.

During a visit to affected communities last week, Hebei province party chief Ni Yuefeng said that the area could “reduce the pressure on Beijing’s flood control” and serve as a “moat” for the capital.

As of Thursday, 29 people had been killed by the rains across the province, six of whom had been previously listed as missing, state broadcaster CCTV said Friday.



Chinese soldiers clearing up after a flood.
Photo: AFP

Sixteen are still missing.

In Beijing, at least 33 people have died, including two rescue workers, authorities said this week.

And more than a dozen people were killed in northeastern Jilin province after torrential rain last week.

In neighbouring Liaoning province, two deaths were reported after the first few days of intense rain in late July.

On Friday, state news agency Xinhua said that another flood control team had been sent to the province, where “the local flooding situation remains severe”.

Heavy rains are expected again over the weekend as tropical depression Khanun -- formerly a typhoon -- approaches China.

Emergency alert levels are being held in place across northern China, Xinhua said, with key river-

ways being closely monitored.

HEAVY DAMAGE

China’s state media has hailed the government’s efforts to mitigate damage from the inundations, with coverage focused on tales of mutual aid and selfless officials working tirelessly on rescue efforts.

But a week after the waters first swelled, some villagers in Hebei told AFP they did not receive adequate warning from the authorities about when the floods would come.

The Chinese government on Wednesday last week said it would allocate one billion yuan (\$139 million) to compensate residents in areas that had been inundated to control flood levels in downstream areas.

The fund would pay for “damage to crops, animal and poultry farms, commercial forests, houses and agricultural machinery”, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

In Hebei alone, officials said almost four million people had been affected by the flooding, with 40,900 houses having collapsed, according to local media.

Hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops have been damaged in the province.

Insurance providers in Beijing are paying out at least 380 million yuan in claims for losses caused by the recent rains, according to Xinhua.

The bad weather is not limited to northern China.

On Friday, the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters said heavy rain was also likely over the weekend in the southwestern provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan, and the northwestern provinces of Gansu and Qinghai, according to Xinhua.

At least seven people died in a flash flood southwest of Sichuan’s capital Chengdu this week, after an unexpected tide of water washed away a number of tourists on the Longxi River.

And in Gansu, five people were killed when they were swept away by mountain torrents after a rainstorm alert on Thursday, Xinhua said.



AFP

BIDEN CALLS CHINA ‘TICKING TIME BOMB’ OVER ECONOMIC WOES



US President Joe Biden. Photo: AFP

US President Joe Biden said Thursday last week that China’s mounting economic problems make the country a “ticking time bomb.”

“China is a ticking time bomb in many cases,” Biden said at a private fundraising event in the western state of Utah.

The Democrat pointed to the country’s high unemployment and aging workforce, saying “China is in trouble.”

“When bad folks have problems, they do bad things,” he said.

Biden offended Beijing in June by describing his counterpart Xi Jinping as a “dictator,” in a comment slammed as a “provocation” by China’s foreign ministry.

Biden insisted Thursday that he was seeking “a rational relationship with China.”

“I don’t want to hurt China, but I’m watching,” he said.

The United States recently relaunched its dialogue with China, with a succession of visits to Beijing by senior American officials, including chief diplomat Antony Blinken.

The aim of Blinken’s trip was to turn the page on recent tensions surrounding a Chinese balloon described as a “spy” operation that was shot down by the United States in February.

AFP

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She now lives on government and charity handouts in a crowded camp in Moirang district, with around 250 people living in a guesthouse with mattresses covering every space on the floor.

"I just want to go back," she said. "Churachandpur is where I have lived all my life - it is my home too."

'HOUSES ON FIRE'

L. Sonia, another Meitei in the same camp, said she made desperate calls to local politicians when gangs rampaged through her neighbourhood in Churachandpur.

"Their problem is with the government, right? Why set our houses on fire?" she asked angrily.

"People are moved to relief camps after floods, but they get to go back to their homes... What do we do?"

The far-flung states of northeast India - sandwiched between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar - have long been a tinderbox of tensions between different ethnic groups.

In Manipur, conflict erupted from a mix of causes including competition for land and public jobs, with both sides blaming state and national government for failing to stop the violence.

India's Interior Minister Amit Shah has promised an "impartial investigation" into the violence and has said the government "stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Manipur".

But violence continues and those left homeless are angry.

"Tens of thousands of people in Manipur are crying, what is Narendra Modi doing!" Sonia shouted, in a desperate appeal to the Indian prime minister. "Are we not Indian citizens?"

'EVERY DAY WE CRY'

Communities are divided. In Churachandpur, Meitei are no longer welcome.

Dummy coffins line the route into the district as a terrifying warning to Meitei, and road signs with the Churachandpur name have been scored out because it is derived from an ancient Meitei king.

The Kuki have built a bamboo hut memorial with images of their people killed, including the youngest, a two-month-old baby.

One message reads that their "blood will never go in vain".

In a camp for the Kuki displaced, 40-year-old Vaneilhing, a mother-of-two who ran a shop before she fled, described how a mob of hundreds dressed in black appeared at her house. First they looted it and then set it ablaze.

"Every day we cry... some people didn't even find the time to wear their shoes before they ran," she said, too scared of possible reprisals to give her full name.

The community gathers at night in a makeshift chapel, praying and singing hymns in a bid to drown out the crackle of gunfire between vigilante militia forces.

Joy was tempered with gloom when a baby was born earlier this month in the camp.

"What is this baby going to do now? Where will it go?" asked Vaneilhing.

AFP

FOOD SYSTEMS CONTRIBUTE TO SOLVING ‘WORLD’S MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES’

Population growth, urbanization, changing consumption patterns, and climate change are making it more challenging to feed the world according to a senior official at the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Corinna Hawkes the Director of the FAO Division of Food Systems and Food Safety says a holistic and sustainable approach is needed that considers economic, social, and environmental factors, and that brings people together, to ensure nutritious food and sustainable livelihoods for all.

She was speaking ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit+2 Stocktaking moment, which will consider global agrifood systems.

WHAT IS THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM?

Corinna Hawkes: The agrifood system is everything that is connected to food and agriculture. What we eat as well as the way that food is sold, distributed and processed. It also includes how food is

grown or harvested on land, at sea, and other non-food products, such as fuel and fibre. All these processes involve a whole host of activities, investments, and decisions.

An agrifood system pulls together all of this into an interconnected system; for example, if we want to grow fruits and vegetables for people to eat healthier, we have to think not just about growing the vegetables, but also about how they are delivered to people.

Agrifood systems are also a space for solutions including for climate change, biodiversity loss, malnutrition, chronic diseases, unsafe food, poverty and to counter a lack of urban sustainability. Agrifood systems are the solution to the world’s most important challenges.

WHY DOES THE WORLD NEED TO TRANSFORM AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS?

Right now, the power to provide those solutions is not there. The agrifood system is sick. The



Photo: UN News

way it is designed and functions means that it is weak, worn out and lacks resilience.

So, the frustration and the challenge here, is that the potential power of the agrifood system to provide these solutions is lost until we transform it to make it stronger.

Some of the major challenges include the way food is grown and produced is contributing to climate change, which in turn weakens the agrifood system.

WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A CURRENT MAJOR CHALLENGE IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS?

One thing we have done is to take too much diversity out of the system which includes everything from what is on our plates all the way back to the farm. So, we need to bring that diversity back.

Over the last decades there has been a specialization in producing certain key commodity crops. This was a great idea from the perspective of productivity and efficiency; it cheapens food, it means you can trade the food, and it reduces the cost of production. It is important we produce these crops efficiently.

But what we have seen is that reducing diversity too much reduces the resilience of the system. And we have seen with recent conflicts how reliance on certain key producers further weakens resilience.

Diversity is also good for biodiversity and the environment, as well as nutritionally for consumers.

HOW CAN THESE CHALLENGES BE OVERCOME?

There are many ways to transform agrifood systems. The most important way is to bring all the systems together which necessitates bringing people together.

One of the major challenges is that different people are trying to fix biodiversity, nutrition or food safety, while others are trying to fix poverty and the livelihoods of agricultural producers.

We need to come work together in the system and figure out how to provide these solutions. This way we will begin to see that the agrifood system may appear to be a problem because it is weak, but it actually is something really powerful.

WHAT GOOD PRACTICES ARE BEING ADVANCED RIGHT NOW?

I am really excited about some of the initiatives that are taking place at the subnational, urban and city levels. There is so much energy in large and small cities where local authorities and multiple stakeholders are really taking action.

They are improving market infrastructure so that people are more able to access food, so that food is safe and loss and waste is reduced.

So, we are beginning to see these important connections being made, and that is happening in hundreds of cities around the world.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM THE UPCOMING UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT +2 STOCKTAKING MOMENT?

What I am hoping to see from the Stocktaking meeting two years after the UN Food Systems Summit is that governments and many other stakeholders will come together to honestly discuss the challenges and to share their successes and their challenges in making change.

I would like to see a sense of solidarity between governments and other stakeholders who can agree that they will do better together if they share experiences and good practices to overcome challenges.

The ideal outcome of the summit is that the momentum created will continue and that the commitment to change will not just stay as a commitment but will lead to actions on the ground to really bring change.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Danny Postma

CHIN STATE

Civilian and defence force fighter killed in Tonzang Township, Chin State

One Chin resistance force fighter and one civilian died during two days of fighting on 1 and 2 August in Chin State's Tonzang Township, according to locals.

Chin Defense Forces attacked Tonzang Police Station in Tonzang Township on the evening of 1 August and the fighting continued until 7:00 a.m. on 2 August.

"One of our soldiers was shot twice and killed during the fighting on the night of 1 August. We do not know how many casualties the military soldiers suffered, but I assume that at least five died", said a representative of Hualngoram Civil Defence force (CDF).

The dead defence force fighter was named as Lalramchuana. Another defence force fighter was also slightly injured on 2 August.

At around noon on 2 August junta soldiers fired from the police station at a couple who were riding past on a motorcycle. They killed the man and injured the woman, both of whom lived locally to the police station. The woman suffered a stomach injury and is currently receiving medical attention.

People living close to the police station have been fleeing, according to Chin resistance forces.

Amongst the defence forces carrying out the attack were the Chin National Army (CNA), Hualngoram CDF, Tonzang CDF and the People's Defense Army (PDA).

Locals concerned as Arakan Army moves into southern Chin State

Arakan Army (AA) columns have recently moved into several townships in southern Chin State causing concerns to the residents living there.

According to residents, AA columns have entered the

townships of Paletwa, Mindat, Kanpetlet, and Matupi, all in southern Chin State, north of Rakhine (Arakan) State.

A fighter from the Matupi People's Defence force (PDF) said: "We have reached a mutual understanding with the AA troops, allowing them to travel within our territory. However, we have made it clear to them that they should refrain from sleeping and camping in villages."

Despite any such agreements the appearance of the AA troops in southern Chin State has alarmed locals who fear it will lead to an increase in violence and ethnic conflict in the areas where they are stationed.

A Matupi resident said: "There were AA troops sleeping on the side of the Matupi Road. Initially, I mistook them for the [Myanmar] military army and I was ready to flee. Later I noticed that they were wearing AA logos. I do not live in fear of either the [Myanmar] military army or the AA troops. Additionally, I want to know the reasons why the AA is setting up encampments on Chin land instead of remaining in Rakhine [State]."

According to a political analyst from Chin State, AA troops have reportedly established a presence in nearly all townships within southern Chin State.

They said: "It has been nearly ten years since the AA troops first established their presence in Paletwa, Chin State. However, following the military coup, the troops expanded their presence to include Kanpetlet and Mindat townships, organizing themselves by battalion. Additionally, AA troops have also arrived at Lalengpi, which is a border area between Matupi and India. This issue will potentially lead to future conflicts between the Chin and Rakhine communities after the revolution."

On 7 March 2020, the Chin National Front (CNF) issued a statement urging the AA to refrain from using Chin State as a military camp for its operations.



UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF HOLDS TALKS WITH MYANMAR JUNTA LEADERS AMIDST HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

A delegation, headed by Martin Griffiths, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, arrived in Nay Pyi Taw on August 15. During their visit, they engaged in discussions with key junta leaders, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, according to local news outlets and junta-backed media.

Amidst the United Nations' assertion of severe humanitarian aid restrictions imposed by the junta in Myanmar, the UN humanitarian chief met with the military chief to address these pressing concerns.

The junta reported that they discussed the lack of assistance from international organizations, including the United Nations, during severe incidents such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Cyclone Mocha outbreak in Myanmar.

The UN humanitarian chief also held separate meetings with the junta's Foreign Affairs Minister Than Swe, Home Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Yar Pyae and MUnion Government Office No 2 Minister Ko Ko Hlaing.

Due to the meeting, analysts expect that the military junta will relax strict rules limiting aid to victims of Cyclone Mocha.

New-York based international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch warned on June 20 of the escalating obstruction of humanitarian aid by the Myanmar junta in the month following Cyclone Mocha, putting thousands of lives at immediate risk and endangering millions of people.

MYANMAR FUEL PRICES RISE SHARPLY



Photo: Sophie Jones

Fuel prices have risen sharply in Myanmar largely due to a sudden rise in foreign currencies exchange rates.

According to the price quotations issued by the Petroleum Products Regulatory Department (PPRD), the price of 92 Ron petrol rose to 2,310 Kyat per litre and it is sold in Kentung at 3,120 Kyat per litre due to extra for transportation costs.

According to statistics released by the PPRD, the petrol price has reached over 2,000 Kyat per litre mark since 12 July and it rose by 330 Kyat within one month.

The fuel prices are rising along with other imported commodities when the US dollar exchange rate has reached around 3,500 Kyat against the dollar in the domestic money changer market.

The price of fuel in Yangon Region are 2,310 Kyat per litre for 92 Ron petrol, 2,420 Kyat for 95 Ron petrol, 2,500 Kyat for diesel and 2,575 Kyat for pre-

mium diesel respectively, the fuel reference prices issued Friday say.

Like in Yangon, the price of 92 Ron petrol is over 2,300 Kyat per litre in Mandalay, Naypyidaw, Bago, Magway, Dawei, Monywa, Patheingyi, Hpa-an, Mawlamyine, Lashio and Taunggyi. Similarly, the price of this fuel is over 2,400 Kyat per litre in Myittha, Sit-twe and Loikaw while 2,630 Kyat in Hakha and 3,120 Kyat in Kentung.

In Yangon Region, the prices of fuel on 10 August were 2,195 Kyat per litre for 92 Ron petrol, 2,310 Kyat per litre for 95 Ron petrol, 2,360 Kyat per litre for HSD (500 ppm), 2,440 Kyat per litre for HSD (50 ppm) respectively. (HSD – High Sulfur Diesel, ppm-parts per million)

MYANMAR JUNTA STRUGGLES TO REPAY \$400 MILLION CHINESE BANK LOAN DUE TO JUMP IN DOLLAR PRICE



Photo: AFP

The Ministry of Cooperative under the then PM Thein Sein-led government borrowed US\$400 million with a high interest rate from the Export Import Bank of China. Today, the Military Council and the cooperative societies are reportedly having difficulty in repaying this dollar denominated loan when the dollar exchange rate rose to 3,400 Kyats against the dollar.

The US dollar exchange rate was around 1,000 Kyat against the dollar when the Cooperative Ministry borrowed this dollar denominated US\$400 million loan. Now the exchange rate jumped to 3,400 Kyat when the repayment is due, hence the difficulty.

The China Exim Bank lent US\$400 million at a 5% interest rate per annum.

When PM Thein Sein was in power, Cooperative Minister Kyaw San borrowed US\$100 million

on 18 October 2013, another US\$300 million in 2015 at the interest rate of 4.5% per annum. This US\$400 million loan was disbursed to Central Cooperative Society under the Ministry, States/Regions Cooperative Societies and Township Cooperative Societies.

Of the US\$300 million loan borrowed in 2015 the Cooperative Ministry used the US\$30 million loan in buying farming machinery and equipment by installments, US\$ 50 million for giving agricultural loans of 100,000-500,000 Kyat to the farmers, and US 220 million for giving loans to cooperative societies members who had never received such loans before. Most of the recipients of these loans were reportedly the people who had good rapport and connection with military, companies and cooperative societies.

MYANMAR PRAWN EXPORTS DECLINE



Photo: Ettiene Girardet

According to the Myanmar Fishery Department, during the first four months period from April to July in this fiscal year Myanmar prawn exports declined by over 30% in comparison with the corresponding period of last fiscal year.

Myanmar could export only over 3,200 tonnes of prawn in the first four months in this fiscal year and earned over US\$12 million from these exports. This is a 1,674 tonne drop from 4,886 in the same period last year.

Contributing factors to the drop include power shortages and outages that caused problems with cold storage.

Myanmar exports its fishery products to a total of 40 countries including Japan, Middle Eastern countries, EU countries, Malaysia, China (Taipei), Australia, and Thailand.

The fishery products are being exported by both sea trade and border trade but Bangladesh has currently halted the buying of fishery products from Myanmar.

MAI'S NEW ROUTE: DIRECT FLIGHTS TO RUSSIA'S NOVOSIBIRSK AMIDST GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS

Myanmar Airways International (MAI), affiliated with a junta crony, plans to launch direct flights connecting Myanmar and Russia's Novosibirsk in September, reported local news outlets

Novosibirsk is the third largest city in Russia and it plays a significant role as a major hub for nuclear energy and technology production.

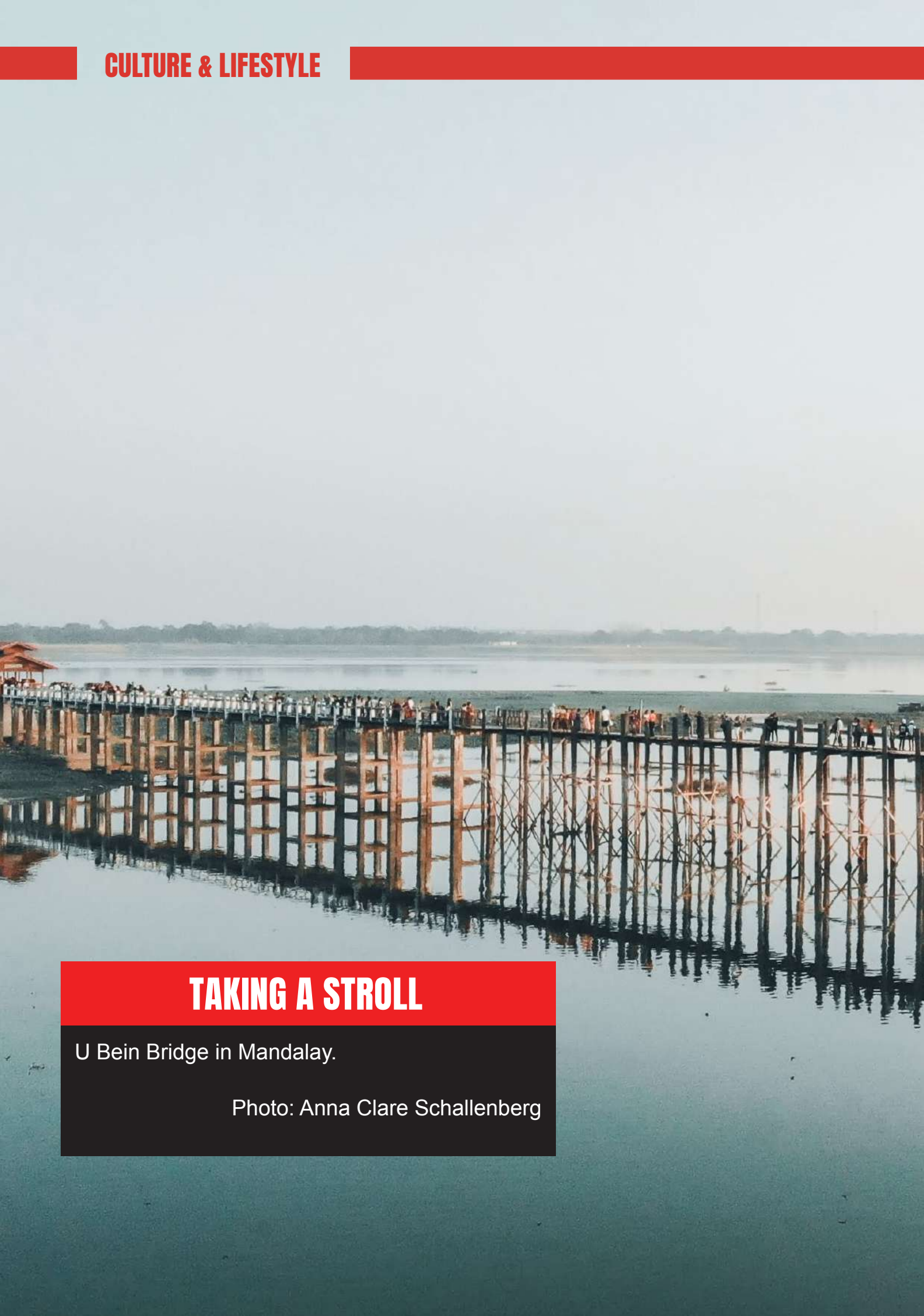
Commencing on September 5, MAI is scheduled to operate flights from both Yangon and Mandalay to Novosibirsk every Tuesday and Saturday.

In a twist of connections, MAI's ownership lies with Aung Aung Zaw, known for sponsoring junta boss Min Aung Hlaing's global journeys.

The upcoming direct flight to Novosibirsk marks the airline's inaugural venture beyond the borders of Asia.

Amidst a complex geopolitical backdrop, the planned direct flight to Novosibirsk may hold far-reaching implications.

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews recently said in May, "Russia and China continue to be the main suppliers of advanced weapons systems to the Myanmar military, accounting for over \$400 million and \$260 million respectively since the coup, with much of the trade originating from state-owned entities."



TAKING A STROLL

U Bein Bridge in Mandalay.

Photo: Anna Clare Schallenberg

IN FOCUS



USING BURMESE COOKING AS ADVOCACY IN THAILAND

Trish is on a culinary mission following her escape from the demonstration-torn streets of Burma.

The expert cook and entrepreneur found herself feeding protestors in the wake of the 2021 Myanmar military coup. But she was forced to flee to the safety of Thailand as the junta authorities began to home in on her for possible arrest.

Check out her story on this Insight Myanmar podcast: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/7/21/episode-180-cooking-up-a-revolution>

Trish now lives in Chiang Mai, which, perhaps because of its burgeoning Burmese community, has added a number of new Burmese restaurants to its already vibrant culinary scene. Although the city has long been famous for its Asian cuisine, until recently it was limited to Thai, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese. For Trish, this hinted at an underlying prejudice that many Thais hold towards their neighbors; indeed, having worked in Thai restaurants, she is familiar with this kind of discrimination, noting how some Thai staff felt uncomfortable taking orders from a Burmese boss. And she feels the same is true about



Thai attitudes towards Burmese food. “They are brain-washed to think that Burmese food is dirty and unimportant,” she says. “The way they think about food is also how they think about the people, and that becomes an issue. So, for us to raise awareness about what’s happening in Myanmar, we have to... start breaking down the stereotypes as well. I find that food is like a very easy way. Food storytelling can entice people into talking about geopolitics.”

Yet Trish didn’t just see her cooking as playing an important role in helping break down Thai stereotypes about Myanmar. She explains how, just as Bamar culture has dominated her country for generations, so has Bamar cuisine. For that reason, she has taken it upon herself to research recipes from Myanmar’s many ethnic and religious minorities and expose them to a Bamar audience.

Interestingly, her mission to document her country’s indigenous dishes came from watching the television show *Chef’s Table*, in which a Mayan cook was explaining how preserving traditional recipes meant more than just food: it was a part of not losing their culture and history. “I wanted to bring that community and show people that how diverse Myanmar is, and there’s so many different types of food.”

Check out her story on this Insight Myanmar podcast: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/7/21/episode-180-cooking-up-a-revolution>





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