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building muscle in
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CYCLONE-BATTERED RAKHINE BECOMES MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLAYGROUND

Myanmar's military junta is grinning as it plays games with Myanmar's dire straits state, Rakhine.

The junta games involve dividing the masses, sparking alarm, playing with aid, playing with health, pressing forward with income-making infrastructure and battering down a minority that ranks as the world's most oppressed.

Welcome to Rakhine State, one of the poorest states in the Myanmar union.

The situation would be laughable if it wasn't so serious.

The junta games are multifaceted.

This week, hyped up rumours of clashes and tension between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya appear part of a "divide and rule" strategy by the generals to ramp up the pressure. Queries have been raised as a story popped up that alleged the Myanmar military is working with a troublesome bunch of militants, the Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army (ARSA), in a play-off against the Arakan Army (AA), unlikely as this would appear.

According to a Border News Agency (BNA) 23 August report, information obtained from ARSA members and some officers of the military regime by BNA, under the arrangement of the military commander in Buthidaung township, 75 AK guns were planned to be transferred through intermediaries in order for ARSA members to have some military equipment in Maungdaw township. While many might dismiss this claim, rumours in the air add to the confusion.

At the same time, calls for help from Cyclone Mocha-hit residents grow shrill as little or nothing comes from the junta meeting with the UN humanitarian aid head Martin Griffiths. Griffiths was trying to get permission to funnel international aid to those in need. So far, we have heard nothing about a junta "green light". Many

distressed residents – particularly internally displaced people (IDP) and Rohingya communities – stand empty-handed or with a pittance. Add to that the promise made in July by junta leader Min Aung Hlaing that necessary health workers would be appointed for the hospitals in the state. While the pledge has not yet been implemented, the junta's health minister popped off to a recent glad-handing ASEAN health meeting, unlikely to have been pressed by ASEAN delegates about the dire health situation in Rakhine, or the country as a whole for that matter. The junta is allegedly responsible for the deaths of 90 health workers since the 2021 coup.

As if to rub people's noses in it, the junta announced this week its excitement at forging ahead with the Kyauk Phyu-Mandalay railroad and further development of the Kyauk Phyu SEZ and Deep Sea Port in Rakhine aimed at helping China with needed trade goods and fuel supplies - essentially a "nice little earner" for the Naypyidaw elite.

The junta games are serious.

A snapshot of the chess moves highlighted this week is merely a reminder of what the Myanmar people have in their heart-of-hearts known all along that when it comes to Rakhine - the Myanmar military is on a land grab and coffers-filling control mission that seeks to squeeze the most out of this impoverished state and push what they call the "Bengali" out of the picture. Junta strategy over kicking out the Rohingya, or allowing them back, involves a slight of hand in which they steal the land of those who have fled. Even those Rohingya allowed back under a troubled organized repatriation programme will find themselves corralled into camps, not back on their land, lacking citizenship ID to travel.

Editorial continues on page 9.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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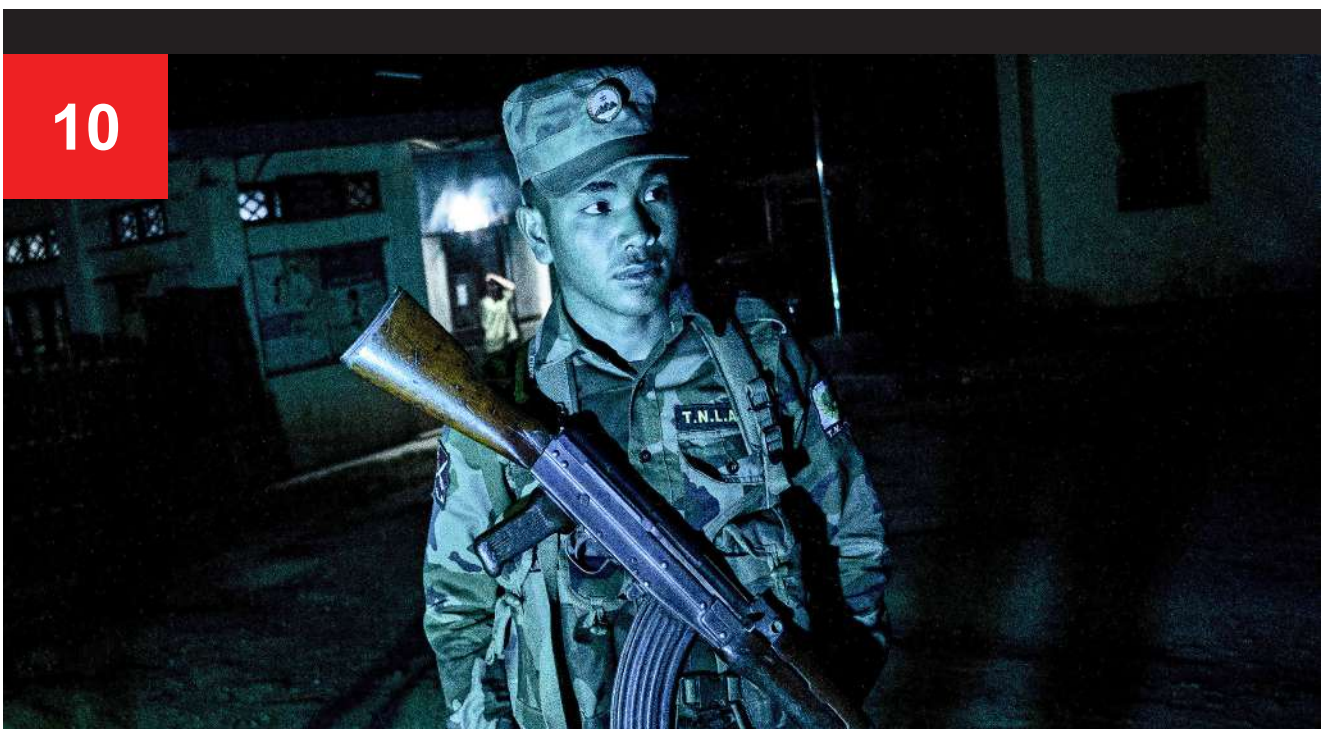


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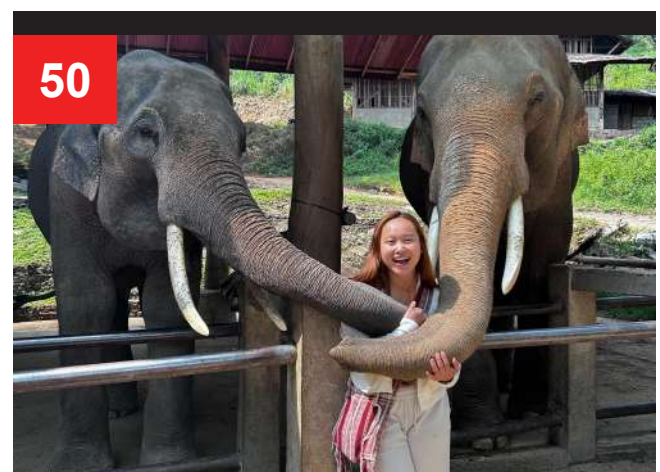
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Cover photo of a TNLA fighter by AFP







IN FOCUS

MONSOON WOES

Rickshaw driver carries passengers on a rain-sodden street in Yangon last week in the continuing wet season.

Photo: AFP

NUG CALLS FOR PEOPLE TO GIVE MONTHLY DONATIONS

The shadow National Unity Government (NUG) is urging people to give monthly donations of \$20 USD to support the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) fighting the junta in Myanmar.

The NUG has said people making such contributions are like supply troops for the PDFs and have called them the second People's Revolutionary Supply Family (PRF 2.0).

Ko Kyaw Kyar, the Director General of the NUG's Administration and Finance Department under the Ministry of Defence said: "If you are committed to supporting the PDF and ensuring the success of this revolution, I urge you to take two important actions. The first step is to join as a supply troop, and the second is to gather others to join as well. By following these two steps, there is no reason why the revolution should not succeed."

The first iteration of the People's Revolution Supply Family (PRF) distributed over 10.93 million USD of foreign and domestic donations to over 300 PDF battalions throughout Myanmar.

The newer PRF 2.0 was unveiled on 28 Au-

gust. It will be officially launched in September with the aim of providing even greater assistance than the first PRF, according to Ko Kyaw Kyar.

People from anywhere in the world can become PRF 2.0 supply troops. To qualify they must pledge a monthly donation of \$20 USD or equivalent in another currency.

Under the previous PRF scheme donations were equally divided amongst PDF groups, but under the current PRF 2.0 scheme donors can choose to send their donations to specific states and regions.

Transparent accounts for the scheme showing where money is spent will be released and the Union Reserve Fund of the NUG Minister of Defense will fund spending in any areas that receive insufficient donations, according to Ko Kyaw Kyar.

Currently, there are hundreds of thousands of PDF fighters in Myanmar, but there are only 20,000 regular donors or supply troops supporting them. The PDFs are in need of financial support to more effectively fight the junta.

BAGO REVOLUTIONARY FORCES URGE PEOPLE TO NOT USE NEW 20,000-KYAT BANKNOTES

Bago revolutionary forces issued a statement on 28 August urging people not to use the junta's new 20,000-kyat banknote and to instead try to dismantle the junta's financial system.

The statement was jointly issued by people's defence forces from Moenyo, Tharyarwaddy, Okpho, Minhla, Nattalin, Zigon, and Gyobingauk townships and local public administrations.

It urged people to not use the newly issued 20,000-kyat banknotes. It acknowledged that workers are currently facing challenging situations, but encouraged them to cooperate with the wishes of the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) and minimise their use of the 20,000 kyats banknotes, to help prevent inflation and fight against the junta financial system.

"We are appealing to the public to collaborate with the NUG and refrain from engaging with the military regime. We also urged people to actively participate in the battle to dismantle the financial infrastructure of the Military Council", said the deputy chief of

Tharyarwaddy Township Public Administration.

The revolutionary forces statement also encouraged people to report to the NUG's Counter-Terrorism Central Committee any banks or other financial outlets that are circulating the 20,000-kyat banknotes.

The junta started issuing the 20,000-kyat banknotes on 31 July. On 24 August the NUG's Counter-Terrorism Central Committee declared that the new banknotes were not legal tender. It encouraged private banks and financial institutions not to issue the banknotes and warned that there would be legal consequences for organisations that did not comply.

Revolutionary forces in Sagaing and Magway regions have already also called for people to not use the 20,000 kyat notes.

Political analysts and economists have warned that the issuing of new banknotes is a sign of financial instability that could lead to inflation and instability causing hardships for ordinary people.

USDP COORDINATOR ASSASSINATED IN OKPHO TOWNSHIP, BAGO REGION

Myo Zaw Aung, a coordinator for the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was shot and killed in Kwaychaung Village, Okpho Township, western Bago Region at 9:30 a.m. on 26 August.

He was shot dead at a betel nut shop near to the liquor store he owned.

Okpho People's Defense Force (Okpho PDF) claimed responsibility for the shooting, saying that Myo Zaw Aung was targeted because he was a prominent supporter of the military regime.

He was reportedly undergoing combat training with the pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia. He also spied and reported on revolutionaries, which resulted in their arrest. He also participated in the apprehension of staff taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and helped in the recruiting of staff who were not taking part in the CDM, according to Okpho PDF.

Following the shooting the junta arrested one person and sealed the house of another saying they were involved in the shooting, despite them having no involvement with it.

On the same evening, 26 August, U Kyaw Min Lwin, a resident of Chinsu Village, was arrested by junta soldiers and police officers under suspicion of having connections to PDFs and being involved in the shooting, according to residents of Okpho Township.

Then, on 27 August the junta sealed the house of Ko Aye Swe in Kwaychaunggyi Village because they suspected him of being involved in Myo Zaw Aung's killing

A representative of Okpho PDF stressed the men were innocent. He said: "They [the junta] are able to act as they please. Ko Aye Swe was not arrested because he was not present when the soldiers from the military council sealed off his house. Both of them have no connection with us. We don't know them."

This sort of behaviour by the junta in the face of losses is not uncommon in Bago Region, according to residents and resistance fighters in the region. Whenever a junta-associated person or official is shot or otherwise targeted junta soldiers and police officers will often randomly arrest people in the vicinity of the attack who had no involvement in the incident.

Editorial continues.

The junta games are long.

A combination of almost absurd news headlines this week – a juxtaposition of development and lack of aid bleeding the population dry – actually offers an insight into the long game that the generals have been playing now, not just for years, but for decades.

Rakhine, for all its poverty, is potentially rich given its natural resources, position as a transit route for trade and fuel, and its status as a border province. Just look at that Indian Ocean doorway to China, a great money-making scheme. So, the generals have long had their eye on sucking up the benefit from this state and getting rid of "undesirables" who get in their way.

The Muslim Rohingya do not need reminding of the oppression they have faced as a community over the decades as the generals sought to wipe out any right to citizenship for people painted as intruders, denigrated due to their religion and their race. At the best, the current junta plans to lock potential Rohingya returnees in camps and restrict their movement, as mentioned. At worst, the junta dreams of driving them out altogether, a process energized in 1982, in the 1990s and in 2016-2017 – the military operations in the latter allegedly an act of genocide if international courts rule accordingly.

Just last week Rohingya and supporters marked the sixth anniversary of the pogrom by the Myanmar military that killed so many and drove over 700,000 to flee to Bangladesh. Today, refugee host Bangladesh is losing patience, calling this week for the start of a refugee return programme this year. But watch "mission impossible" roll out at the junta arranges camps and repatriation and a host of players – including most Rohingya refugees – push back if full citizenship is not provided.

It can be argued that only the death of the junta will provide a glimpse of hope that these exiles will be given full rights and a dignified return.

Finally, the junta games are shameless.

Cyclone-battered Rakhine has become the junta's playground, one in which the generals show no compassion, seeking to squeeze the most impoverished state dry for financial and political gain, and fobbing off foreign dignitaries who come cap-in-hand to their door, even if they come under the mantle of the hallowed United Nations.

When it comes to the Rakhine, the junta is indeed playing shameless multifaced games, games in which the cards are in their favour, all directed from the safety and comfort of their ivory tower in Naypyidaw.



TNLA CONUNDRUM

Expansion or consolidation for an armed ethnic group building muscle in Shan State



TNLA soldiers in training in Shan State. Photo: AFP

At face value, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) is just one of many ethnic armed groups laying claim to territory in crisis-plagued Myanmar in the wake of the 2021 coup. They field from 7,000-15,000 fighters, taking a largely defensive posture in the face of junta forces, though recent clashes have occurred, and they side with the National Unity Government (NUG) and People's Defence Forces (PDF).

But they have control of a growing swathe of territory in northern Shan State and the people living there, with implications for international donors seeking to support civilian populations in an increasingly fragmented Myanmar.

The TNLA are the subject of a new report by the International Crisis Group published 4 September entitled: "The Ta'ang Army Expands in Myanmar's Shan State".

WHY THE TNLA MATTERS

"Since Myanmar's 2021 coup, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has significantly expanded its territory in northern Shan State, and now has checkpoints on the outskirts of major cities," says Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh, Thomas Kean.

"The military has been so stretched fighting new resistance forces elsewhere in the country that it has done little to stop the TNLA – it certainly doesn't want to face another well-armed ethnic armed group on the battlefield.

"The TNLA doesn't just control territory, it's providing schools, health facilities and a judicial system, often in cooperation with Ta'ang civil society. This has enhanced its popularity with many Ta'ang people, but other ethnic communities and ethnic armed groups in northern Shan State feel threatened by its recent expansion," he notes.

The International Crisis Group has an important suggestion for this group.

"To avoid provoking conflict with other ethnic armed groups or the military, the TNLA should shelve further territorial expansion and instead focus its attention on improving its self-administration. International actors should do what they appropriately can to boost the role of civil society in delivering services and maintaining positive relations between the diverse ethnic communities of northern Shan State," says Mr Kean.

KEY POINTS

The key points the International Crisis Group report notes, including a call-out to the TNLA, are as follows:



TNLA soldiers load up supplies. Photo: AFP

Firstly, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has used Myanmar's post-2021 coup crisis to expand its territory in northern Shan State, recruit fighters and strengthen its parallel administration. Although it has quietly supported anti-coup resistance forces, it has clashed with the military only rarely and has met with regime representatives.

Secondly, the TNLA's expansion has created tensions with other ethnic armed groups and non-Ta'ang communities in northern Shan State. The group's ambiguous political positioning since the coup reflects the complex environment in which ethnic armed groups operate. It also helps explain why building a countrywide anti-regime alliance with both Bamar and ethnic groups has proven so difficult.

Thirdly, the TNLA, which seeks greater autonomy, should focus on caring for the people under its control through improved self-administration rather than expanding its territory further. It should also reform its recruitment practices – that include child soldier recruitment. Foreign donors should increase funding for local civil society organisations delivering services in Shan State.

REPORT FINDINGS

Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) – one of the country's most powerful ethnic armed groups – has strengthened its control of a swathe of territory in northern Shan State. In conjunction with Ta'ang civil society organisations, it is working to maintain the rule of law, deliver health and education services, and improve the local economy.

Unlike some of Myanmar's other ethnic armed groups, it has mostly avoided confronting the military since the coup (although there have been a number of clashes recently: Mizzima notes). Instead, it has provided covert support to anti-junta forces and engaged indirectly with new opposition political institutions.

The group's ambiguous post-coup positioning reflects its long-term ambition to achieve autonomy.

Since its inception in 2009, the TNLA has slowly acquired more strength and territory. It garnered popular support among the Ta'ang by pushing a strict anti-drug use policy and bringing together disparate communities under a common ethnic identity. Other ethnic armed groups in Myanmar – including the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and, more recently, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which is the largest such group and controls an autonomous region in Shan State – provided the training and weapons the TNLA needed to build up its armed forces.

Over the past decade, it gradually expanded its geographical footprint. For much of that time, it regularly clashed with the Myanmar military and its allied militias, as well as the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), a rival ethnic armed group.

JUNTA DISTRACTED

The 2021 coup has further strengthened the TNLA's hand. Busy fighting on other fronts, the Myanmar military has largely withdrawn from the northern Shan State battlefield, enabling the group and its allies to gain territory and expel the RCSS from the area. The TNLA, which counts an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 personnel (other estimates claim 7,000-10,000: Mizzima notes), can now project power into nearby towns. The military's withdrawal has also enabled the TNLA to assert authority in places it controls and govern in a way that advances its goal of building a robust, autonomous Ta'ang nation.

Working in partnership with Ta'ang civil society organisations, it has followed the lead of larger armed groups and created an incipient "Ta'ang State", complete with courts, schools and health facilities. This quasi-state is very much a work in progress, but since the coup the group and its civil society partners, many of which are women-led, have moved well down the road toward creating a de facto autonomous governing body.

The report claims that to focus on consolidating control, the TNLA has staked out a middle ground in Myanmar's post-coup conflict. It now tries to steer clear of clashes with the military. Although the Ta'ang group has been an important source of training and weapons for new forces resisting the junta, it has avoided publicising this support. It has also kept "informal" its engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG) – a parallel administration set up by lawmakers ousted by the coup – instead allowing Ta'ang civil society groups and politicians to lead the way in building these relationships.

The TNLA has also maintained contact with the junta. Along with two other ethnic armed groups, it recently had a rare meeting with regime negotiators tasked with striking ceasefire deals.

NEIGHBOURING BIG BROTHER

It did so under pressure from Beijing. China has longstanding ties to Myanmar, with which it shares a 2,160km border, and since the late 1980s has invested heavily in its neighbour, in part through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In order to protect its economic interests, China is particularly keen to keep the southern border it shares with Shan State stable.

The TNLA's positioning helps explain why building an anti-military coalition in Myanmar has proven so difficult. Most ethnic armed groups are hostile to the military regime, but they also see little prospect of it collapsing, making them reluctant to cement alliances with the NUG or armed resistance.

Chinese pressures further push these groups away from overt confrontation. At the same time, the TNLA and other ethnic armed groups are influenced by their communities, civil society organisations, and the broader domestic and even international public. They thus have to balance various demands when determining the best pathway to achieving their objectives – in the TNLA's case, a de facto autonomous Ta'ang State.

FRAGMENTATION

The group's expansion in recent years also reflects a broader fragmentation within Myanmar's national borders that has accelerated since the 2021 coup. With the central administration unable to operate normally, non-state armed groups such as the TNLA or civil society organisations working in the areas they control are the purveyors of public services to millions of people. Together, the TNLA and Ta'ang civil society organisations run schools, provide health care, collect taxes and administer justice systems.

The TNLA's rise is not without risk to it or the people under its control. Further expansion could provoke conflict with either other ethnic armed groups or the military. Even absent TNLA growth, the military may at some point seek to recapture some of the lost territory.

It is important to recognize that non-Ta'ang people in Shan State feel threatened by the TNLA's gathering might, and this could fan inter-communal tensions. The high costs associated with maintaining a large armed force and system of governance also mean that the TNLA runs the risk of overreach. The need to raise revenue already appears to be pushing it into competition with other ethnic armed groups and pro-military militias, which could lead to sharpening hostilities.

GROUP RECOMMENDATION

Given the reality of state fragmentation in Myanmar, the people of northern Shan State will be best served through a combined effort by the TNLA, civil society and donors to manage conflict risk, improve governance and deliver services, the report suggests.

The TNLA should refrain from further expansion, which would risk renewed conflict, and take

greater care to avoid provoking other ethnic minorities living in its territory. It should reform its recruitment policies, including by ending conscription – often enforced through violence or threats thereof – and cracking down on recruitment of child soldiers.

Meanwhile, donors should expand support for civil society organisations in northern Shan State, including not only Ta'ang groups but also those run by other ethnic minorities. Strengthening civil society would not only allow these groups to provide more services to civilians, but it would also afford them a degree of moderating influence over the leadership of armed groups, particularly when it comes to maintaining peaceful inter-ethnic relations in this corner of war-torn Myanmar.

RISING UP

Although the TNLA is newer than many of Myanmar's other ethnic armed groups, its roots lie in a 60-year armed struggle for greater autonomy for the Ta'ang people.

Referred to as "Palaung" by the country's majority Burmans, the Ta'ang speak Mon Khmer languages and live mainly in the mountains of northern Shan State, including some particularly remote areas. Smaller Ta'ang communities reside in southern Shan State, China's Yunnan province and northern Thailand. At least three major Ta'ang sub-groups, speaking six Ta'ang languages, are dispersed throughout parts of Myanmar. Historically, the community has had little interaction with the Myanmar state.

Geographical isolation, however, did not insulate the Ta'ang from the conflict that gradually engulfed Shan State following Myanmar's independence in 1948. A year after General Ne Win's 1962 coup, Ta'ang political leaders formed the Palaung National Front to fight for autonomy from the military regime. In 1976, some members broke away to create a new armed group, the Palaung State Liberation Organisation (PSLO), and allied themselves with the KIO. The PSLO kept up its struggle throughout Ne Win's rule, which ended in 1988 amid national protests. Another military regime quickly took over, however, launching a bloody crackdown on demonstrators.

Soon after the new junta seized power, it started cutting ceasefire deals with ethnic armed groups in Myanmar's borderlands. The PSLO resisted at first, but its leaders were forced to accept a ceasefire in 1991 after a devastating military operation targeting Ta'ang civilians.

The PSLO gradually lost influence and territory, until eventually the regime compelled it to disarm in 2005. During the ceasefire period, illicit drugs began



The Ta'ang community is being supported by the TNLA as it consolidates control over territory in Shan State. Photo: AFP

to flood into Ta'ang communities, and human rights groups reported high rates of addiction. Like other minorities, the Ta'ang came to see the influx of narcotics as a "military strategy" aimed at "destroying" their identity and undermining their political goal of greater autonomy.

ANTI-DRUG

The Ta'ang struggle for autonomy went on, however. The drug addiction crisis, in parallel to the PSLO's weakening, strengthened the belief among the Ta'ang that they needed a new armed group to protect themselves, though the group took some time to come together. Just months after the PSLO reached a ceasefire in 1991, disgruntled members formed a new organisation, the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), based on the Thai-Myanmar border, which was primarily a political entity rather than a fighting force. By the late 2000s, the military regime was pressuring many of the country's ethnic armed groups to become Border Guard Forces under its control, leading to a certain level of solidarity among them. In 2009, the PSLF formed an armed wing, the TNLA, with support from the KIO, which provided the new outfit with training and weapons.

THE USE OF TA'ANG

The TNLA is both an armed group and a nation-building project. The PSLF's decision to use the term "Ta'ang" – which is how the Ta'ang people refer to themselves – as the name of its armed wing reflected a "reshaping of the ethnonational collective identity". It was a way for the TNLA to assert leadership of peoples beyond the area traditionally considered the Ta'ang

hometown, including Ta'ang subgroups in other parts of Shan State, as well as in China and Thailand.

Using the word Ta'ang was also a symbolic rejection of the Palaung Self-Administered Zone created under Myanmar's 2008 constitution, which encompasses only two townships (Namhsan and Mantong). The TNLA instead fights for a larger "Ta'ang State" that would be carved out of present-day Shan State, within a genuinely federal system. At the same time, retaining "Palaung" in the name of the political wing emphasised the continuity with earlier resistance movements.

GROWTH IN STRENGTH

During Myanmar's decade of political liberalisation, from 2011 to 2021, the TNLA grew slowly but steadily into one of the country's most powerful ethnic armed groups. Particularly in the early years, its key strategy was to pursue a harsh antidrug policy – drug users were forced into rehabilitation camps – that was highly popular among the Ta'ang. After it had established a foothold in isolated areas of northern Shan State, its influence burgeoned. With a strictly enforced recruitment policy that required most Ta'ang households with more than one child to supply a soldier, the group expanded its forces. It soon began to clash with the military and its allied militias.

Despite its growing clout, the TNLA was largely excluded from the peace process that Myanmar President Thein Sein initiated in 2011. It was one of the few ethnic armed groups that did not sign a bilateral ceasefire with the quasi-civilian government between 2011 and 2021. It participated in collective negotiations over the text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA),

but the Thein Sein government, under pressure from the military, later blocked the TNLA from signing the accord.

Heightened conflict and the exclusion of several groups from the peace process spurred non-signatories into closer political and military collaboration, including joint offensives.

In late 2015, amid a steady increase in clashes with the military, the TNLA found itself battling a new foe. Shortly after signing the NCA that October, the RCSS began to move its forces from the centre and south of Shan State into northern areas, allegedly with the Myanmar military's support. Fierce firefights erupted between the TNLA, on one side, and the RCSS and the army, on the other, taking a severe toll on the locals and exacerbating tensions between the Ta'ang and Shan peoples.

For much of the liberalisation decade from 2011 to 2021, the TNLA was on a war footing, fighting either the military, military-backed militias or other ethnic armed groups. It had little time to focus on administration or service delivery. That changed in about 2018, after the TNLA gained a firm foothold in parts of northern Shan State. Around the same time, the group began shifting away from the KIO, which had reached an informal ceasefire with the military, toward building closer relations with the UWSA. TNLA members were dispatched to UWSA territory for administrative training, which gradually led to improvements in TNLA governance and services.

At the same time, Myanmar's imperfect but nevertheless marked political liberalisation created greater space for Ta'ang civil society and political groups to operate. The Ta'ang National Party was formed to contest the 2010 elections, and from 2012 civil society organisations that had been based in Thailand, such as the Ta'ang Women's Organisation and the Ta'ang Students and Youth Organisation, moved inside Myanmar, focusing on issues such as empowerment of youth and women, documentation of human rights violations and environmental protection. After the Thein Sein government lifted longstanding bans on the teaching of minority languages, Ta'ang literature and culture committees also emerged.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The International Crisis Group report offers suggestions of ways forward for this ethnic armed organization.

In barely a decade, the TNLA has gained control of a large section of northern Shan State, encompassing significant parts of at least eight townships.

Taking advantage of a lull in fighting after the February 2021 coup, it has encouraged Ta'ang civil society to greatly expand services to Ta'ang people, which in turn has helped enhance the group's popularity. The TNLA now has a firm grip on the mountains of northern Shan State, and it is unlikely to be dislodged in the foreseeable future, given both the weakness of the military and the priority China puts on stability along the border.

At the same time, its territorial expansion and continued cooperation with post-coup resistance forces carry a risk of renewed conflict with the military. In places, the group's expansion has also created tensions with other minorities and ethnic armed groups, which could spark clashes affecting civilians.

The TNLA's consolidation of power is symptomatic of the fragmentation in postcoup Myanmar. A multitude of armed actors are carving out territory for themselves.

The TNLA's approach of avoiding direct confrontation with the military while quietly supporting anti-military resistance forces reflects the complexity of the situation Myanmar's ethnic armed groups face. Reconciling their long-term objectives with pressure from their base to confront the regime makes for a rocky path to tread.

Complicating matters further, Beijing is keen to reduce tensions along the border it shares with Myanmar. Although TNLA leaders are sympathetic to the anti-military resistance movement, they are unable or unwilling to formally participate. Instead, they play a behind-the-scenes role. That helps explain why it has proven so difficult for the NUG and its allies to build a broad alliance to topple the regime, as many hoped might be possible at first.

SAY NO TO EXPANSION

Against this backdrop, the best near-term hope for the Ta'ang people of northern Shan state is that TNLA and its civil society partners will provide them with governance, services and a level of security that in the absence of the state will otherwise likely be unavailable. Some of its actions to date are positive. Others – particularly those that involve underaged or forced recruitment of foot soldiers – should be stopped.

To the extent that the TNLA is considering expanding its territorial control, it should shelve the idea, recognising that it could wind up provoking both competing armed groups and the military regime. More effective self-administration will be a better focus for its efforts, and international actors should do what they appropriately can to assist it in this endeavour.

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MYANMAR'S LANDMINE CLEARERS WORKING WITH PLIERS AND BARE HANDS

Six men prod and poke at dense undergrowth in eastern Myanmar with rakes and hoes - not farmers, but a rebel unit clearing deadly landmines from the war raging between the junta and pro-democracy fighters.

A mine is spotted and one man lifts a mud-caked, palm-sized device from the earth with his bare hands and passes it to a comrade who deactivates it - with an ordinary pair of pliers.

The shoestring deminers are scouring the hills and fields of Kayah State on the border with Thailand - a hotbed of resistance to the Myanmar military's 2021 coup.

More than 100,000 people have been displaced there, according to the United Nations, and those trying to return home do so at the peril of mines retreating fighters leave behind.

"The areas we need to clear are very wide and we have to use many soldiers to clear the mines," said Sin Phyu, from the anti-junta Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF).

"Even if we could afford to buy a mine detector it would still not be enough for this operation... We just work slowly with the equipment we have."

The KNDF is one of dozens of groups battling to restore democracy in Myanmar after the military deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's government.

The rebel groups have caught the army off-guard with their effectiveness, analysts say - despite being forced to rely on weapons captured from the military, bought on the black market or manufactured in highly dangerous makeshift arms factories hidden in the jungle.



● Makeshift way to remove mines. Photo: AFP

But despite efforts to clear them, landmines are taking a cruel toll on civilians.

Hla Win, 34, had been living in a displacement camp in Pekon township in neighbouring Shan state after fighting broke out near her village.

In June, with the rainy season underway, she set off for her village with three friends to fetch blankets to protect against the cold in the camp.

Before she reached home she stepped on a mine.

“My body jumped up and down suddenly,” she told AFP from the tent she lives in with her child.

“I didn’t feel anything on my leg because of the shock. But I saw my leg was missing.”

She spent the next 13 days in a hospital where doctors amputated her maimed leg, and now she relies on a crutch to get about.

“I’m angry with myself when I can’t go out like other people,” she told AFP.

“My mind tells me I want to go somewhere but my body can’t.”

‘SHOCK’

Myanmar is not a signatory to the United Nations convention against anti-personnel mines.

Last year Amnesty International said Myanmar junta troops were laying landmines on a “massive scale” around villages where they are battling anti-coup fighters.

When junta troops have been pushed back from an area, Sin Phyu’s team go on patrol, clearing undergrowth to detect mines hidden beneath.

“We give priority to demining because then the villagers can do agriculture and can live in their villages,” the bespectacled 31-year-old said.

His team typically find between 60 and 70 mines each month, mostly of the M14 variety first deployed by the United States in the 1950s.

The KNDF plants mines too, Sin said, although only to guard their bases and at battlefield areas.

He added that the KNDF also warns villagers not to rush home after junta troops have withdrawn from areas around their villages until they have been declared safe.

TRAUMA

Former KNDF fighter Joseph also lost his leg after stepping on a mine during a clash with the military in Kayah in January last year.

The 19-year-old received medical treatment in time, unlike other comrades who he says have bled to death after being hit.

Eight months later he received a prosthetic leg and can now manage riding a motorbike to get around. He can no longer fight at the front, and works instead for a pro-democracy radio station.

But he struggles with trauma.

“I have had depression since this injury. Sometimes I wanted to harm myself and thought about taking my own life,” he said.

The KNDF has not published figures for how many of its fighters have been wounded or killed by landmines.

In February the UN said landmines and unexploded munitions injured or killed more than one person every day in Myanmar last year.

“There will be more landmines to be found” across Kayah’s war-ravaged landscape, says Sin.

In the displacement camp with her child, Hla Min is still hoping to receive a prosthetic limb.

“I think it’s my fate that this happened to me,” she said.

“There were many people who had walked on this road but I was the one who stepped on a landmine.”



AFP

RIGHTS GROUPS SLAM MYANMAR USE OF CLUSTER MUNITIONS



Photo supplied.

A coalition of rights groups on Thursday last week condemned Myanmar for the army's renewed use of cluster munitions by the government, demanding an immediate end to the practice.

The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) said the military junta, which seized power in February 2021, had used such weapons on several occasions - as recently as June.

It was, they argued, in violation of international law.

"Myanmar's production and use of cluster bombs is gravely concerning as these indiscriminate weapons primarily kill and injure civilians," said group researcher Dr. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan.

"There can be no justification for using them. All governments should condemn this use of an internationally banned weapon."

Myanmar is not a signatory to a 2008 convention ratified by 112 countries and signed by 12 banning the weapons.

A CMC statement said their use in the country had come to light in the form of new information including photographs.

Cluster munitions are delivered by artillery, rockets, missiles, and aircraft, opening in mid-air

and disperse dozens or hundreds of submunitions or 'bomblets', over a wide area. Many of them do not explode on initial impact but - like landmines - can wound and kill, for years.

The CMC said its monitor had asked Myanmar's defence ministry to confirm or deny its production and use of cluster bombs but had not received a response.

Myanmar told the UN General Assembly in November 2019 it could not join the convention until a nationwide peace agreement was in place.

The army has met stiff opposition to the coup which turfed out the administration led by now jailed Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, leading to unrest which has left thousands dead.

The CMC is a coalition of rights groups based in around a hundred countries around the world and includes Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

AFP

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TOWARDS A NEW FEDERAL BURMA: CONFLICT, COMPLEXITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

ASHLEY SOUTH



In the absence of a legitimate state in Myanmar following the 1 February 2021 coup, political sovereignty reverts to the nations that were yoked together as a colony of British India in the nineteenth century. Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), new state-level bodies and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have key roles to play in building a new Burma based on these proto-states, from the “bottom up.”

Before the coup, the challenge in Myanmar was to federalize a relatively unified - albeit deeply contested - state, following decades of conflict. Since the military takeover, the challenge is to rebuild Burma through a new federating process.

The disruptions of climate change will further drive fragmentation of the state. In the absence of credible and legitimate central authorities – with the SAC junta pillaging the country - EAOs and CSOs

are key climate change actors. Together with indigenous communities, they have globally important roles to play in adapting to and mitigating climate change through nature-based solutions.

FEDERALISING AND FEDERATING PROCESSES

Like “peace”, “federalism” means different things to different stakeholders. Calls for “genuine federalism” are widespread. However, the concept has not always been clearly articulated.

Technically, federalism means a mixed sovereignty system of government, dividing power and authority between a central (Federal/Union) and local (State/Region) governments. In post-coup Myanmar, a new type of federalism is emerging from the ‘bottom-up’, out of EAO and state-based systems - many of which have been established for decades, but have

re-renewed political relevance. Indeed, post-coup Myanmar is experiencing a “federating moment” unprecedented since independence.

The February 1947 Panglong Conference can be seen as such a federating moment, in which leaders from - but not necessarily fully representative of - Shan, Chin and Kachin nations came together to form an independent union after the withdrawal of British colonial power. The 1947 constitution of the Union of Burma, promulgated a few months after the Panglong Conference, was federalist in appearance but centralising in practice – not least, because the Rangoon government retained budgetary control over ethnic States. Over 75 years later, federalism needs to be re-negotiated to create a genuine federal union.

Previous attempts to achieve federalism in Burma failed due to lack of political will on the part of the military, and successive central governments (and to a lesser degree, due to the lack of clear strategy on the part of ethnic nationality leaders). These issues were evident long before the November 2020 elections and February 2021 coup.

Like its military predecessors, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which ruled on Myanmar Army sufferance from 2016-20, paid little attention to ethnic nationality concerns and demands. The NLD oversaw a peace process begun by the previous U Thein Sein military-backed regime, leading to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of October 2015. However, the NCA process was largely discredited and stagnating by the time of the coup.

Following the coup, EAOs such as the Karen National Union, Kachin Independence Organisation, Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party and Chin National Front have been at the forefront of resisting the SAC junta, together with hundreds of newly formed Peoples Defence Forces (PDFs). Key EAOs have expanded their territorial control, liberating scores of bases from hard-pressed Myanmar Army forces. More than a dozen of the longer-established EAOs - some fighting the SAC, some not - provide basic health and

education services, access to justice and emergency relief to millions of vulnerable people in conflict-affected areas.

ETHNIC NATION OR STATE-BASED FEDERALISM?

Since the coup, new state-based political coordination and governance bodies have emerged across the country, redefining the meaning of resistance and self-determination in Myanmar. Mostly conceived in relation to geographic territories – rather than the more narrowly-defined ethnic communities mobilised by EAOs – these are potentially the most inclusive polities in the country’s history.

State-based bodies have been established in Kachin (the first), Mon, Karenni, Chin and Shan States, and in Tanintharyi, Irrawaddy and Sagaing regions. In some areas, similar roles are played by Peoples Administrative Bodies (PAB) - especially in Bama-majority districts where EAOs mostly do not operate. In their liberated areas of Sagaing, Magwe and elsewhere, some PDFs and PABs have assumed responsibilities for law enforcement, relief and education provision, often - but not always - under the guidance of the NUG.

A Critical Juncture: struggles for climate justice in Myanmar.

The disruptions of climate change will drive further fragmentation of the state of Myanmar - which was never perceived as legitimate by many ethnic nationality citizens, especially those in conflict-affected areas. Climate change also provides opportunities to explore new political structures and sovereignties. Local actors are already working on a range of adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, they face serious challenges in the face of continued SAC attacks on the environment and civilian communities.

In March 2023 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, the UN body for assessing the science related to climate change) issued its 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report, stating that:

“Human-caused climate change ... has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people. Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected.”

Impacts are likely to be exacerbated by the Niño weather event in 2023-24. The window of opportunity to address these challenges is rapidly closing.

In the next few years, global temperatures are likely to rise by more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (breaking the goal set in the 2015 Paris climate agreement) - exposing the world with further extreme weather patterns, including increased incidence of droughts and floods across Southeast Asia. Low-income countries will be particularly hard hit, especially those already facing humanitarian (man-made and natural) disasters.

Myanmar bears little responsibility for the climate crises affecting the region and the planet. Historically, as one of the most under-developed countries in Asia, Burma has played a very minor role in producing the carbon dioxide emissions driving climate change. Nevertheless, the country is highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards. The new abnormal includes global pandemics such as Covid-19.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS IN MYANMAR

National daily average temperatures rose 0.25°C per decade between 1981 and 2010 (maximum temperatures increasing by 0.4°C per decade). This trend is expected to continue, with communities across Myanmar reporting unusually high temperatures and inconsistent rainfall in 2022-23.

There is a lack of climate data Myanmar, especially since the coup. However, a rare recent study (Tun Oo et al 2023) notes that:

“The southwest monsoon has arrived later and departed earlier with heavier rainfall and harsher weather... Sea levels are rising in coastal areas, and there has also apparently been an increase in saltwa-

ter intrusion onto farmlands... since the year 2000, cyclones now occur almost annually compared to once every three years on average in preceding decades”.

Flooding is the most frequent hazard in Myanmar. An estimated 28 million people live in districts with a high risk of flood exposure - especially in coastal areas, along the Ayeyarwady River and in Karen State.

According to my research, farmers in Karen and Kachin States, the Dry Zone and elsewhere are beginning to notice impacts on rice and other crops. High temperatures and erratic rainfall are affecting yields, with serious implication for food security.

EAOS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN MYANMAR

Several longer-established EAOs have developed progressive forest management practices and policies, often with the support of CSOs. The peoples and EAOs of Myanmar demonstrate great resilience in the face of natural and man-made disasters. This is due to and reflected in social bonds of mutual trust and solidarity, and participation in ethnolinguistic and faith-based networks (forms of ‘social capital’).

Globally, the roles of non-state armed groups have been overlooked in relation to climate change. The roles of EAOs (not ‘Non-State Armed Groups’) in relation to climate change in Myanmar are particularly important following the coup.

The SAC junta has issued new logging and mining concessions, threatening forest and other natural resources at a time when the world is turning towards these “green assets” to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Meanwhile, EAOs control extensive territory, including some of the most important remaining forests in mainland Southeast Asia. For generations, these forests and other natural resources have been sustainably managed by resilient local communities, in line with customary laws and practices which help to conserve unique habitats and eco-systems and sustainable local livelihoods.

Nevertheless, most EAOs have been involved in logging, mining and other environmentally destructive practices - which continue to this day. To be credible custodians of globally important forests and biodiversity hotspots, EAOs need to demonstrate improved governance and stewardship of natural resources. Deforestation is a major driver of climate change, so EAOs must act responsibly and adopt sustainable and transparent forestry practices.

ADAPTATION

As political authorities, EAOs and state-based bodies have responsibilities and opportunities to support communities in adapting to the impacts of climate change. Working in partnership with CSOs and technical experts, EAOs can take the lead in identifying future livelihoods and food/human security stresses, and useful local adaptations.

Globally, research shows that the top-down, centralized model of working with states on climate action is often ineffective, especially in conflict-affected contexts. Localisation is essential to effective adaptation and mitigation, and is central to good practice in Disaster Risk Reduction. Furthermore, the federal principle of 'subsidiarity' (decision-making and resources at the most local level practicable) supports localisation of climate change action in the Myanmar context.

A major component of adaptation will be working with farmers to identify which crops and farming techniques are most suitable. This may include new types of agricultural production, different varieties of rice and other crops, and technologies of planting and harvesting. In addition to climate change-adapted agriculture, key elements of future sustainability will include new off-grid solar and hydro-power technologies for local energy production and livelihoods.

MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

Myanmar contains the largest forest reserves in mainland Southeast Asia – from Kachin State in the north to Tanintharyi in the south (areas under the con-

trol of the KIO and KNU respectively). These forests are crucial to mitigating climate change in the region and globally, helping to reduce the risks of massive future temperature changes.

The 2022 COP-26 climate conference in Glasgow focused attention on the importance of conserving old-growth forests, and the huge contribution of carbon draw-down to climate change mitigation, as trees remove CO₂ from the air through photosynthesis. According to IPCC member, Professor Paulo Artaxo Neto, there is "no cheaper, easier, and faster way to reduce CO₂ emissions than by reducing tropical deforestation."

Far from being marginal regions, the ethnic homelands of Burma are at the centre of global struggle to address climate change - as well as leading Myanmar's struggle against the SAC. We must act to conserve these extraordinary landscapes and nations.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media Group.

This article is based on Ashley South, 'Conflict, Complexity and Climate Change: emergent federal systems in post-coup Myanmar' (Chiang Mai University RCSD - International Development Research Centre 2023).

<https://rcsd.soc.cmu.ac.th/publications/conflict-complexity-climate-change/>

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS TRAFFICKED INTO ONLINE CRIMINALITY ACROSS SE ASIA

Criminal gangs in southeast Asia are using torture and abuse to force hundreds of thousands of people into an online scam operation which generates billions of dollars per year, the UN rights office (OHCHR) said last week.

OHCHR said that at least 120,000 people across Myanmar and another 100,000 in Cambodia may be held in situations where they are forced to execute lucrative online scams - from illegal gambling to crypto fraud.

Other States including Lao PDR, the Philippines and Thailand have also been identified as main countries of destination or transit.

VICTIMS, NOT CRIMINALS

“People who are coerced into working in these scamming operations endure inhumane treatment while being forced to carry out crimes,” said UN rights chief Volker Türk. “They are victims. They are not crim-

inals,” he insisted.

The latest OHCHR report sheds new light on cybercrime scams that have become a major issue in Asia, with many workers trapped and forced to participate in scams targeting people over the internet.

The report notes workers face a range of serious human rights violations, and many have been subjected to abuses such as torture, arbitrary detention, sexual violence and forced labour.

Victims of such operations can be scammed an average of \$160,000 each, often through sophisticated scripts sent via unregulated social media applications.

According OHCHR, these victims come from across the ASEAN region as well as mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, South Asia and even further afield from Africa and Latin America.



Photo: John Schnobrich

Mr. Türk called on States to ensure justice “for the people who have been so horrifically abused.”

NOTICEABLE TRENDS

Speaking in Geneva, Pia Oberoi, OHCHR’s Senior Advisor on Migration and Human Rights in Asia Pacific, said ongoing regional “economic distress” paired with the COVID-19 pandemic has meant there is a lack of regular and safe pathways towards decent work opportunities.

“This has meant populations are more likely to rely on recruitment forums or intermediaries,” so criminal gangs are increasingly targeting individuals through these platforms, suggesting victims are destined for real jobs.

“There weren’t red flags being raised” - particularly for the more educated, multilingual young men who the report notes are frequent victims.

“It follows a pattern of how labour migration has taken place in the region, and also speaks to the sophistication of these fraudulent recruitments,” added Ms. Oberoi.



WEAK REGULATIONS

According to OHCHR, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated response measures had a drastic impact on illicit activities across the region - with increased virtual work and the movement of business to less regulated spaces.

Ms. Oberoi said the situation is “unfolding in locations where regulation is weak,” such as conflict affected border areas in Myanmar, “with little to no rule of law” and in “laxly regulated jurisdictions such as special economic zones in Laos PDR and Cambodia.”

Describing the trends across the region, she added that the ability of ASEAN nationals to travel across borders without a visa, also means there is a “lack of protection sensitive screening”, as officials don’t always have the training to “identify protection sensitive responses.”

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS

Although there are several regional legal frameworks to prosecute such crimes, OHCHR said there is a lack of implementation by States and often forced criminality is not seen as a legal violation.

Even when victims are rescued or escape, rather than being protected and given access to the rehabilitation and remedy they need, they are often subjected to criminal prosecution or immigration penalties, OHCHR said.

“All affected States need to summon the political will to strengthen human rights and improve governance and the rule of law, including through serious and sustained efforts to tackle corruption,” said Mr. Türk.

“Only such a holistic approach can break the cycle of impunity and ensure protection and justice for the people who have been so horrifically abused.”

Courtesy of UN News

MYANMAR EXPELS TOP EAST TIMOR DIPLOMAT



NUG delegation meets with Timor-Lester President Jose Ramos-Horta in Dili. Photo: NUG

Myanmar's junta on Sunday last week ordered the expulsion of East Timor's top diplomat in the country over a meeting his government held with a banned shadow administration.

The Southeast Asian nation has been locked in crisis since the military seized power in February 2021, ending a brief experiment with democracy and sparking violent clashes.

The military has designated the shadow administration known as the National Unity Government (NUG) - dominated by exiled lawmakers working overseas to overturn the coup - as a terror organisation.

Last month, East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta met with NUG foreign minister Zin Mar Aug in the capital Dili.

On Sunday, Myanmar's ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the "irresponsible actions" of East Timor, ordering the country's Charge d'Affaires in Yangon "to leave no later than 1 September 2023".

The ministry said in a Facebook post that East Timor was "encouraging the terrorist group to further committing their violations in Myanmar".

East Timor condemned the expulsion order, reiterating in a statement "the importance of supporting all efforts for the return of democratic order in Myanmar".

Dili also urged the junta to "respect human rights and seek a peaceful and constructive solution to the crisis".

East Timor is due to become the eleventh member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

However, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao said earlier this month the young democracy could reconsider its bid to join the ASEAN should the bloc fail to persuade Myanmar's junta to end the conflict.

The grouping has made little progress since the coup in 2021, with the army largely ignoring a five-point deal aimed at ending the violence.

ASEAN has also been divided over how to engage with Myanmar's military.

While the junta has been banned from high-level summits, ASEAN member Thailand has hosted informal talks with Myanmar's foreign minister.

Linn Thant, an NUG representative based in Prague in the Czech Republic, condemned the junta's decision and told AFP that there was no justification for the expulsion of the Timor East diplomat.

The whereabouts of the diplomat is currently unclear.

AFP

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ASEAN ORGANISED MILITARY EXERCISES TO BE CO-CHAIRIED BY MYANMAR JUNTA

Campaign group, Justice For Myanmar, has condemned ASEAN's move to organise a military exercise in Russia, co-chaired by the Myanmar military junta.

The exercise will provide the junta with improved military capabilities as it wages a campaign of terror against the people with indiscriminate airstrikes, shelling, murder, rape, torture, arbitrary detention, and the deliberate torching of homes, villages and crops, said Justice for Myanmar.

The military exercise is due to take place from 25-30 September in Ussuriysk and Vladivostok, according to a recent update to ASEAN's defence calendar.

Ussuriysk and Vladivostok are under Russia's Eastern Military District, which is engaged in Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Vladivostok is the headquarters of Russia's Pacific Fleet and Ussuriysk is the headquarters of the 5th Combined Arms Army.

The military exercise is part of the ASEAN De-

fence Ministers 'Meeting-Plus Experts 'Working Group on Counter Terrorism, which the Russian regime and illegal Myanmar junta are leading.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers 'Meeting (ADMM) platform is chaired by Indonesia's defence minister, Prabowo Subianto.

Justice For Myanmar and other Myanmar and international civil society organisations have repeatedly called on ASEAN to bar the junta from ADMM, and for member states and dialogue partners to boycott ADMM activities that include the junta.

Justice for Myanmar said that if it goes ahead, the upcoming field training in Russia will deepen ASEAN's complicity in the junta's ongoing commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Myanmar.

ASEAN tabletop military exercise fuels junta violence

In August, the junta hosted an ASEAN tabletop military exercise in Naypyidaw, which provided di-



Myanmar air force fighter jets. Photo: AFP

rect military support to junta troops as they slaughtered Myanmar people.

In propaganda published after the ASEAN tabletop exercise, the junta confirmed that the exercise supported operations against the legitimate National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) and People's Defence Forces (PDF).

The junta justified the actions against the PDFs and NUG by illegally designating them as terrorist organisations, whereas in reality, it is the junta that is a terrorist organisation, under both Myanmar and international law.

The junta said of the tabletop exercise: "Myanmar, where the attacks of NUG/PDF terrorists occur in recent political development, has gained invaluable experiences from the opportunity to work closely together with international community in the counter terrorism measures."

The tabletop exercise involved the junta's Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), elite troops trained for urban warfare. Unverified reports suggest SOTF was involved in the junta's bloody and brutal crackdown of peaceful protesters following the military's illegal coup attempt. The ASEAN tabletop exercise featured a demonstration by SOTF, and the junta reported that the international participants "recognized

the physical strength and mental toughness of male and female SOTF members who are well-disciplined and well-trained."

Justice For Myanmar welcomes the decision of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the USA to not attend the tabletop exercise, and condemns ASEAN, and countries that participated, which included all remaining ASEAN members and the dialogue partners China and India. The junta responded that refusal to attend the military exercise "infringes the meaning of supporting terrorism and terrorist acts."

The tabletop exercise was opened by the junta's Chief of General Staff for the army, navy and air force, General Maung Maung Aye, who is sanctioned by the EU.

The EU noted that in addition to Maung Maung Aye's direct responsibility for numerous human rights violations, he is involved in the purchase of Russian arms and "helps to strengthen the Myanmar Armed Forces international positioning through meetings with counterparts from other countries".

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung said: "ASEAN's decision to provide training for junta troops in counter-terrorism tactics is abhorrent and untenable.

"ASEAN, its member states and dialogue partners know full well that the junta commits atrocities with total impunity, and that military training emboldens it and aids and abets its international crimes.

"ASEAN is not only failing to resolve the crisis in Myanmar through its Five Point Consensus but is actively undermining its own commitment to the consensus by backing the junta with military support and legitimacy, while also impeding international action.

"Indonesia as the Chair of the ASEAN Defence Ministers 'Meeting must immediately cancel the exercise and ban the junta from all activities.

"ASEAN members and dialogue partners should boycott the exercise if it goes ahead and refuse to attend all other ADMM activities that include the illegal junta.

"ASEAN's military training clearly shows that claims of 'ASEAN centrality' is a cover for business as usual with the terrorist junta, at the expense of the lives of Myanmar people.

"The UN Security Council and governments need to urgently step up and take concrete steps to block the junta's access to funds, arms, equipment and jet fuel, and refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court."



UN CHIEF CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PROTECT ROHINGYA AND OTHER MINORITIES IN MYANMAR



Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh in 2017. Photo: EPA

The Secretary-General of United Nations has called on the international community to show solidarity with the people of Myanmar in a recent report.

The “Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar” was posted by UNOCHA covering the period from 15 August 2022 to 14 August 2023.

The UN chief urged the member states to create more opportunities for the voices of the most vulnerable to be heard, while the General Assembly and the Security Council remain important platforms to support Myanmar people who are vital in complementing the efforts of ASEAN to help resolve the crisis in Myanmar.

The report includes information on the brutal repression of Myanmar military, which reportedly committed sexual and gender-based violence, noting thousands of people, including children, have been killed since the coup in February 2021.

The report also said since February 2021, more than 64,000 Myanmar people have fled and remain outside the country, while over 1.6 million people have been internally displaced.

It also remarks that Myanmar military has failed to carry out meaningful action to address the root cause of the displacement of the Rohingya population who remain displaced domestically and abroad, including nearly 1 million Rohingya in Bangladesh.

The UN Secretary General said in his report that the organization will continue to stand in solidarity with Myanmar people and to support their democratic aspirations for an inclusive, peaceful and just society and the protection of all communities, including the Rohingya who have no access to civil and citizenship documentation. This is due to complicated and lengthy procedures, such as designating Rohingya as “Bengali”, leading them to face significant challenges in registering the births of their children and updating household lists, which affects their freedom of movement, access to services, school enrolment and civil and other key documentation, including with regard to housing, land and property.

The UN chief also emphasizes the dire living conditions of the 5.4 million affected population of Cyclone Mocha in Rakhine and north-west Myanmar, as the situation was worsened due to the restrictions of Myanmar military on the cyclone-related distribution and transportation plans of the United Nations and the temporary suspension of travel authorizations for humanitarian organizations in Rakhine.

He also urged the Myanmar military and all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians, and called for full cooperation with relevant mechanisms such as the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, including providing access to Myanmar, witnesses, victims and crime scenes.

CHINESE DELEGATION DISCREETLY ARRIVES TO HOLD MEETING WITH KACHIN GOVERNMENT TEAM

A government delegation from China's Nujiang sub-province, accompanied by a dedicated security team, arrived on the morning of 24 August for a covert meeting with the Kachin State government under the Military Council, according to local sources.

The Chinese delegation met with the leader of Kachin State government for various reasons. It is common for China to engage with the government in Myanmar, as part of their efforts to maintain stability along their shared border.

According to a high-ranking official of the Kachin State government, it has been confirmed that the delegation of about 20 people arrived in Myitkyina town, where the Kachin State government office is situated, via a chartered plane.

Based on information from Mizzima reporters in the state, the delegation team is staying at the Yadana Thatchan Hotel, located in the heart of Myitkyina. It is reported that the hotel is owned by an affluent individual who maintains a close association with the Military Council of the Northern Regional Military Command based in Myitkyina.

According to an undisclosed member of the Kachin State government, the Nujiang sub-province, which is under the administration of Yunnan Province in China, has come to meet with the Kachin State government under the Military Council to discuss matters related to border trade.

Apart from the security team accompanying the delegation, the Northern Regional Military Com-

mand has provided security by deploying at least two fully armed battalions.

The purpose of this meeting also could be to discuss various matters of mutual interest, such as bilateral relations, regional stability, and potential areas of cooperation.

The townships of Bamaw, Momauk, and Mansi in Myanmar share borders with China's Yunnan Province, specifically with Baoshan District and Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture.

Additionally, the townships of Panwah, Tsawlaw, and Khaunglanhpu in Kachin Special Region (1) share borders with China's Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture located in Yunnan Province.

Within Kachin Special Region (1), China has undertaken extensive rare earth mineral extraction activities, backed by significant investments.

China has economic interests in the region, particularly in terms of natural resources and infrastructure development projects. Engaging with the local government and other ethnic armed groups allows China to protect its investments and maintain influence in the region.

NGO CALLS ON 9 MYANMAR TYCOONS TO STOP FUNNELING FUNDS AND ARMS TO JUNTA THROUGH SINGAPORE

Justice For Myanmar spoofs Forbes 30 Under 30 to profile tycoons funneling funds, arms and related equipment from Singapore to illegitimate junta, in a press release 1 September.

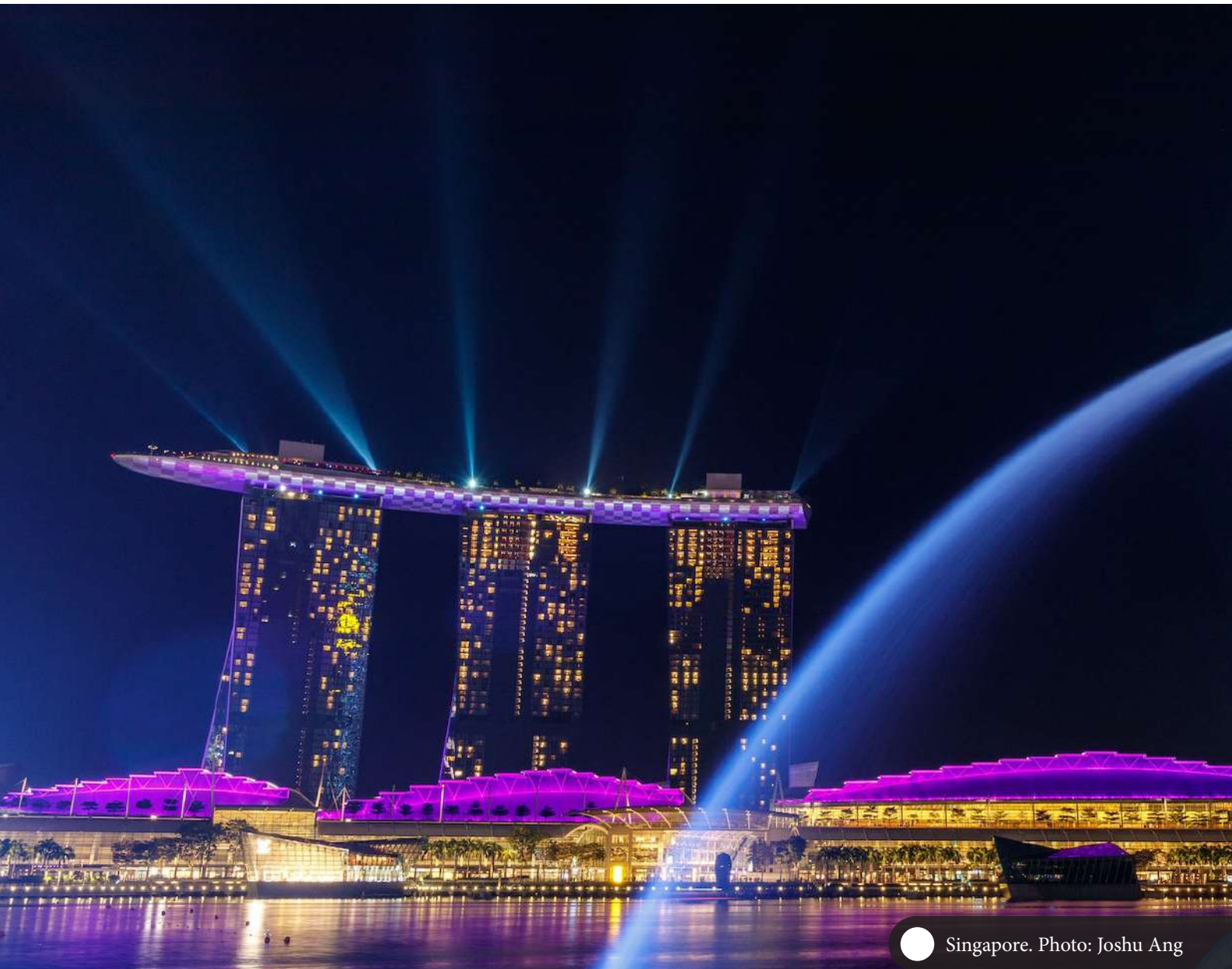
Justice For Myanmar launched a new effort to draw attention to tycoons supporting the illegal Myanmar military junta. The inaugural Dirty Over 30 list features nine tycoons who continue to funnel funds, arms and related equipment to the junta through the “business-friendly” haven of Singapore, which is currently the third-largest supplier of arms and equipment to the Myanmar military. Future editions will feature tycoons in other regions who are enabling and profiting from the crisis in Myanmar.

The campaign is launching ahead of the 2023 ASEAN Summit in Indonesia to pressure Singapore and other ASEAN member countries to more effectively block the movement of funds and arms to the Myanmar junta.

MEET NINE PARAGONS OF DIRTY BUSINESS

The Dirty Over 30 Singapore edition includes nine businesspeople who’ve amassed sizable fortunes funding brutality, mass-murder and war crimes in Myanmar and who continue to do business in Singapore. They include:

- Tay Za, Founder and Chairperson, Htoo Group of Companies



Singapore. Photo: Joshu Ang

- Naing Htut Aung, Founder and Managing Director, International Gateways Group of Companies
- Aung Hlaing Oo, Founder and Managing Director, Myanmar Chemical & Machinery Group
- Aung Moe Myint, Founder and Director, Dynasty Group of Companies
- Tun Min Latt, Founder and Managing Director, Star Sapphire Group of Companies
- Khin Phyu Win, Founder and Director, Asia Sun Group of Companies
- Jonathan Myo Kyaw Thaug, CEO, KT Group
- Thein Win Zaw, Founder and Chairperson, Shwe Byain Phyu Group of Companies
- George Yin Soon, Investor

The Dirty Over 30 list parodies the Forbes 30 Under 30 list. Portraits of the Dirty Over 30 “dishonourees” were created using real photos and sophisticated

AI facial composites. The profiles include factual details about their lives and dirty business dealings. Notably, in what has been called the “30 Under 30 pipeline to prison,” the pattern of unethical and illegal behaviour amongst “honourees” of the Forbes 30 Under 30 list suggests that the profiteers on the Dirty Over 30 list may not be outliers in the business world.

PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE SINGAPOREAN GOVERNMENT

The Singaporean government has already committed publicly to stopping the movement of arms to Myanmar, but so far their efforts have fallen short. A recent report from the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar identifies 138 unique suppliers in Singapore doing \$247 million worth of trade with the Myanmar military. The report concludes that if the Singaporean government successfully stopped all arms trading to the Myanmar military from its jurisdiction, it would “significantly disrupt” the junta’s ability to commit war crimes.

Since the coup attempt in 2021, the Myanmar military has killed at least 4,023 people, including children, committed widespread torture and has arbitrarily arrested over 24,000 people. Many have been killed through indiscriminate airstrikes that require a continued supply of aircraft parts, jet fuel and raw materials that the military needs to manufacture bombs and bullets. It has jailed and tortured countless others.

With the Dirty Over 30 project, Justice For Myanmar calls on Singapore to:

Introduce sanctions to stop the direct and indirect transfer of arms, dual-use goods and technology to the Myanmar military.

Block the junta’s access to Singapore’s financial system through targeted sanctions, including on junta banks.

Expedite and make public ongoing investigations into Singaporean companies that have supplied arms, dual-use goods and technology to the Myanmar military.

Push for more sanctions from other ASEAN countries on the Myanmar military and entities that transact business with it.



AMNESTY CALLS FOR ACTION ON RIGHTS IN CHINA'S XINJIANG



A woman passes a closed mosque in Urumchi, Xinjiang, China. Photo: AFP

Amnesty International decried Thursday the “woefully inadequate” international response after the UN released a bombshell report last year detailing a litany of abuses in China’s Xinjiang province.

On the first anniversary of the report, Amnesty lamented that the international community, including parts of the United Nations, had “shied away from the kind of resolute steps needed to advance justice, truth and reparation for victims”.

The rights group singled out UN rights chief Volker Turk for failing to “clearly emphasise the urgent need for accountability for (China’s) alarming violations”.

His predecessor Michelle Bachelet released her long-delayed report on the situation in Xinjiang on 31 August 2022, just minutes before her term ended, after facing significant pressure from Beijing to withhold the document.

It detailed a string of violations against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, urging the world to pay “urgent attention” to the human rights situation in the far-western region.

The report - harshly criticised by Beijing - highlighted “credible” allegations of widespread torture, arbitrary detention and violations of religious and reproductive rights.

And it brought UN endorsement to long-running allegations that Beijing had detained of detaining more than one million Uyghurs and other Muslims and forcibly sterilised women, with possible crimes against humanity.

NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

But UN Human Rights Council member states last October narrowly voted to reject even holding a

debate on its contents.

Turk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, has vowed to “personally continue engaging with the (Chinese) authorities” about the rights violations detailed in the report.

But Amnesty complained that his public follow-up had so far been lacking.

“We need national and international officials, including human rights officials such as the high commissioner, to use all levers at their disposal ... to seek meaningful change in China’s repressive policies,” said Sarah Brooks, Amnesty’s deputy regional director for China.

They should, she said, be “engaging in frank, evidence-based dialogue with the authorities about their human rights violations.”

Brooks highlighted that the anniversary of the report’s release came the same week as Chinese President Xi Jinping made a surprise visit to Xinjiang’s regional capital Urumqi, where he called for more curbs on “illegal religious activities”.

“The one-year anniversary of the (UN) report must be a call to action,” she said, stressing the urgent need for an independent international investigation into violations in Xinjiang.

“Families of those who have been arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared or mistreated want and deserve answers and accountability, not delays and compromises.”

AFP

US LAWMAKER PROMISES ‘RESOLUTE REACTION’ IF TAIWAN ATTACKED



Taiwan fighter jet. Photo: AFP

Any unprovoked attack on Taiwan will result in a “resolute reaction” from Washington, US Congressman Rob Wittman said Friday during a visit to Taipei.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory to be taken one day, by force if necessary, and it has ramped up pressure in recent years with near-daily air incursions and frequent military drills around the island.

Wittman, a Republican, is vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee, which oversees funding for the US military, and is leading a delegation on a three-day visit to Taiwan.

“President Tsai (Ing-wen), know that any, any hostile, unprovoked attack on Taiwan will result in a resolute reaction from the United States,” he said during a speech Friday.

Wittman said peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region is built on “a foundation of strength”.

“We know strength is the best deterrence to anyone that may think there is an opportunity to act badly in this region.”

While the United States officially recognises Beijing over Taipei, it is Taiwan’s key ally, providing

weapons and aid to boost its defences against an increasingly aggressive China.

Wittman also promised Friday to help resolve the delivery backlog of weapons purchased by Taiwan.

This week, US President Joe Biden’s administration approved direct military aid to Taiwan for the first time under a financing programme for foreign governments.

But the State Department insisted this move did not imply any recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty -- a red line for Beijing.

This followed the approval in July of \$345 million in military aid to Taiwan from leftover US stockpiles.

AFP

INDIA SEES HOTTEST, DRIEST AUGUST SINCE RECORDS BEGAN

India has reported its hottest and driest August since national records began more than a century ago, the latest in a string of records broken worldwide as climate change intensifies.

August falls in the middle of India's annual monsoon, a season that usually brings up to 80 per-

cent of the country's yearly rainfall.

Heavy downpours brought deadly floods to parts of India's north during the month, but on the whole, rains were much more subdued, resulting in record heat.

"Average mean and maximum temperatures



An Indian worker quenches his thirst on a street in Delhi, India. Photo: AFP

in August 2023 were the record highest since 1901,” the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

“The large rainfall deficiency and weak monsoon condition is the main reason.”

IMD data showed August average rainfall of 161.7 millimetres (6.4 inches) this year, 30.1mm lower than the previous August record in 2005.

With millions of farmers dependent on monsoons for their crops, summer rains are vital for India’s food security and the livelihood of its rural workforce.



The monsoon occurs when summer heat warms the landmass of the subcontinent, causing the air to rise and sucking in cooler Indian Ocean winds, which then produce enormous volumes of rain.

But it also brings destruction every year in the form of landslides and floods. Melting glaciers add to the volume of water while unregulated construction in flood-prone areas exacerbates the damage.

Despite the record-low rainfall, at least 65 people were killed in August by flood waters and landslides triggered by heavy downpours around India’s Himalayas.

India’s weather department has declared a heatwave almost every year in the last decade, with temperatures sometimes touching 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit).

Worldwide, temperature records have tumbled in recent years, as climate change makes meteorological conditions more volatile.

July 2023, marked by heatwaves and fires around the world, was the hottest month ever registered on Earth, according to the European Union’s climate observatory Copernicus.

Emissions of greenhouse gases are enabling increasingly intense and long-lasting heatwaves.

AFP

COUPS ONLY MAKE CRISES WORSE: GUTERRES

Highlighting the “succession of military coups” unfolding across Africa, UN Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday last week emphasized the need for durable democratic governance and the rule of law.

Wednesday’s military takeover in Gabon came on the heels of Niger last month, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Chad, Guinea, Sudan and Mali in the years prior to that. Overall, all recent coups except Myanmar, in 2021, have taken place on African soil.

The announcement of the takeover in Gabon came shortly after election results were announced saying incumbent president Ali Bongo had been re-elected, amid reports of irregularities at the polls.

“Many countries face deep-seated governance challenges. But military governments are not the solution,” Mr. Guterres stressed, speaking at a press encounter at UN Headquarters, in New York.

“They aggravate problems. They cannot resolve a crisis; they can only make it worse.”



Photo: UN News

'CREDIBLE' INSTITUTIONS

The UN chief called on all countries to urgently establish credible democratic institutions and rule of law.

Mr. Guterres highlighted the need to strengthen international bodies such as the African Union, in their diplomatic efforts to foster peace, stability and democracy on the continent.

At the same time, conditions need to be created that allow African citizens to address the root causes of political instability; lack of development being a major factor, he said.



“Development is a central objective if we want to create conditions for peace and stability in Africa,” the Secretary-General said, in response to a question from a journalist.

DIPLOMACY MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Mr. Guterres also spoke of a series of high profile upcoming trips, where he aims to drum up support for diplomacy and multilateralism, leading to the high-level opening of the UN General Assembly, in late September.

This weekend he will be travelling to the Africa Climate Summit in Kenya, from where he will travel to Indonesia to attend the 13th ASEAN-UN Summit.

Next, he will head for the Indian capital, Delhi, for the G20 Summit, and then on to Cuba for a Summit of the G-77 and China.

“I look forward to engaging with global leaders at these four very different summits before the world comes together for the opening of the General Assembly”, Mr. Guterres said.

DIALOGUE THE ONLY WAY

Key items on his agenda for the four summits include climate action in Africa, the crisis in Myanmar (ASEAN-UN Summit), reforming global financial institutions (G20), and getting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development back on track (G-77 and China).

“Diplomacy is more important than ever to navigate the tensions of our emerging multipolar world,” the UN chief said, adding:

“Dialogue remains the only way to find joint approaches and common solutions to the global threats and challenges that we face.”

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Te-Pania

SHAN STATE

Junta kills farmer, injures wife and demands 3,500,000 kyats for their return

Junta troops arbitrarily shot and killed a farmer and then arrested his wife in Pekhoh Township, southern Shan State, according to the Shan Human Rights Foundation.

The junta soldiers then demanded 3,500,000 kyats to release the woman and her husband's body.

The junta troops started randomly firing at the couple as they were working in a field near Kawng Ee Village, Pekhoh Township, southern Shan State, on 21 August 2023. The husband, aged 31, was killed instantly and the wife, aged 28, was injured. The junta troops then arrested the injured wife.

Earlier that day, the couple, from Koong Suan Village, had taken advantage of a lull in fighting between the junta and defence forces to go to their farmland between Kawng Ee and Settaw villages. They were clearing their land to plant corn when, at 8:00 a.m., five junta soldiers from the Paykone Hill junta

army camp came towards the field where they were working and shot at them for no reason.

The husband was hit by six bullets and he died on the spot. His wife was hit in the shoulder and injured. The junta troops took the corpse and the injured woman back to the Paykone Hill camp.

Their relatives went to Paykone Hill camp to beg the junta troops to release the farmer's body and the woman, but the soldiers demanded a payment of 3,500,000 kyats to release them.

The woman and the body of her husband were only released after relatives paid the junta soldiers 3,500,000 kyats, on 22 August.

The Paykone Hill camp was set up by the junta army in 2022.



FIVE NCA-SIGNATORY ETHNIC GROUPS AFFIRM NCA'S VALIDITY AND PUSH FOR AUTONOMY RIGHTS AMIDST MYANMAR TURMOIL

Saw Mra Razar Lin, the spokesperson for the five Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-Signatory [NCA-Signatory] Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), said that the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) retains its validity, according to local media outlets.

She made the remark in a press conference following the peace talks that took place in Nay Pyi Taw between the five NCA-Signatories and the junta-backed National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee (NSPNC) from August 29 to 31.

Saw Mra Razar Lin underscored the profound significance of the NCA for the entire ethnic community, highlighting that national-level political dialogues have been conducted in strict adherence to the agreement's provisions.

The five NCA-Signatories are Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), and Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO).

The NCA was signed on October 15, 2015, by former President Thein Sein, with observers and delegates from the United Nations, the United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, and the United States in attendance.

Following the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, the Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF), and All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) withdrew their endorsement of the NCA due to the coup.

In the peace talks, the NCA-Signatories discussed adding constitutional articles that will guarantee the right to autonomy that the ethnic groups want, Saw Mra Razar Lin recently told Voice Of America.

HONG KONG BASED V-POWER COMPANY CEASES FOUR PROJECTS IN MYANMAR



Photo: V Power

The Hong Kong based V-Power Company said in its financial report this week that it had ceased four of its five gas-fired power generation projects in Myanmar after incurring losses.

V-Power, which has been in power generation projects for many years, said that though the domestic economic situation was seemingly stable in the first half of this year in Myanmar, foreign companies were facing difficulties in doing their business as the foreign exchange reserve was dwindling in the country.

The Financial Report said that these projects ceased as the contracts expired and only one project in Myingyan with 109.7 MW-capacity was still in operation.

Among the V-Power's projects in Myanmar, Kyaukphyu 3, Thanlyin and Thaketa projects ceased their operations in July and October last year.

Similarly, CNTIC V-Power Energy vessel which supplied LNG for LNG-to-Power projects in Yangon with installed capacity of 750 MW also left Myanmar at the end of March this year.

For the six months ended 30 June 2023, the segment revenue from IBO (Investment, Building and Operating) business was approximately HK\$408.0 million, representing a decrease of approximately HK\$458.3 million or approximately 52.9% as compared to the corresponding period in 2022. The decrease in

revenue was mainly attributable to the decline in contribution from projects in Myanmar of approximately HK\$141.4 million, the financial report said.

In the near future, the Group will focus on overcoming the operational and financial challenges brought by its previous business exposure in Myanmar, including executing an asset redeployment plan, enhancing cost control and optimising inventory management, the financial report further said.

V-Power has investments in Europe, South America and Asia of which Myanmar stood first in profit making for the group and it earned nearly US\$60 million from investments in Myanmar in 2020 before the military staged a coup in 2021.

V-Power said that they were currently disassembling the power generation equipment in Myanmar for redeployment of these assets in other areas having investment and profit-making potential.

The dollar exchange rate with Myanmar currency Kyat was rising and has reached a record-high mark after economic sanctions imposed by the international community and deterioration on all fronts.

The ministers of the Military Council are inviting international investors to make investments in solar, hydro and wind power. They invited Chinese investors to come and invest in Myanmar in these renewable energy projects.

MYANMAR AND OTHER RICE EXPORTING COUNTRIES STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN NORMAL PRODUCTION



Photo: Pierre Bamin

The research organizations which monitor commodity prices said that the Asian countries which produce 90 per cent of world rice production were struggling to maintain normal rice production this year.

The Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) recently announced that they would suspend rice export for about one and half months to contain the rising price in the domestic market.

Under the recent junta's restriction, the traders could not store more than 20,000 baskets (approx. 46 lbs) of paddy or worth about 200 million Kyat so that some predicted that the Military Council would take action against the illegal rice and paddy trading out of their control and monitoring.

This restriction might lower the rice prices in the market but the producers in the lower strata will face the problem of the rice price not covering their production costs.

The In-charge of All Burma Farmers' Union, Ayeyarwady Region said that the production costs for monsoon paddy was varying between 500,000 to 600,000 Kyat per acre this year and it rose by nearly 50 per cent of rice product last year.

Similarly, the Chairman of All Rakhine State Farmers' Union said Cyclone Mocha and subsequent floods caused declining monsoon paddy acreage this year and it could affect food security in the Rakhine State.

Recent floods that occurred last month damaged over 70,000 acres of paddy fields and the farmers had to spend over 100,000 Kyat per bag for fertilizer. Farmers had to spend more to cover bigger production costs in their farming.

While there is lowering monsoon paddy acreage and declining per acre yield the traders might buy paddy by giving competitive prices as they have the export potential. So the Chairman of All Rakhine State Farmers' Union warned that the rice price would surge significantly in the coming harvesting time of monsoon paddy.

After the export ban of rice by the world's largest rice exporter India in recent months, the supply of rice in the global market fell by about one fifth.

Similarly, Myanmar which is the fifth largest rice exporter in the world with over 2 million tonnes annually also decided to suspend rice export for 45 days.

In the meantime, the Philippines and Indonesia are eager to buy more rice. The Indonesia BULOG Public Corporation (logistics bureau) said that they were trying to import rice from Myanmar and Cambodia.

The Thai authorities suggested to their farmers to lower the rice acreage this season to save water resources. Currently the rice prices are soaring in all of these countries.

SRI LANKA RECORDS LOWEST INFLATION SINCE ECONOMIC CRISIS



Photo: Adam Vandermeer

Inflation in crisis-hit Sri Lanka eased to 4.0 percent in August, the lowest since before last year's unprecedented financial crisis, official figures showed Friday last week.

The island nation endured months of food, fuel and medicine shortages after a foreign exchange crunch that sparked widespread protests culminating in the ouster of its president.

But the crisis has since eased, with headline inflation down from 6.3 percent in July and 69.8 percent at its peak last September.

Sri Lanka's central bank has said it expects the figure to continue its downward trend in the medium-term.

The country defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt last year but secured a four-year, \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March.

An IMF team is due in Colombo this month to review Sri Lanka's progress in repairing its ruined

finances and to decide on releasing another \$330 million loan tranche.

The international lender of last resort has said Sri Lanka's economy showed "tentative signs of improvement" but warned Colombo still needed to pursue further painful reforms.

Last year's economic crisis sparked months of civil unrest that eventually toppled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa after a mob of protesters stormed his compound.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has doubled taxes, removed generous subsidies on energy and sharply raised prices to shore up state revenue.

In the latest such move, the government raised petrol and diesel fuel prices by up to 11.2 percent with effect from Friday.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

CAMPAIGN GROUPS WELCOME US SANCTIONS ON FUEL AND COMPANIES

The recent adoption of sanctions by the United States on two Myanmar state-owned banks, the issuance of a determination on the jet fuel sector, and sanctions targeting a supplier of jet fuel to the Myanmar military has been welcomed by the campaign groups Justice For Myanmar and The Sentry.

They say that these measures are designed to further weaken the Myanmar junta's ability to access the weapons that it uses in the brutal war it is waging against the country's population, including through indiscriminate airstrikes.

As global leaders are about to meet in Myanmar's region, first for meetings with ASEAN in Indonesia from September 2-7 and then for the G20 summit in India from September 9-10, The Sentry and Justice For Myanmar reiterate their call for the US and likeminded partners to take the gloves off and adopt much stronger sanctions on the Myanmar junta and its enablers.

The US's show of resolve would be significantly strengthened by joining the European Union in sanctioning the Myanma Oil & Gas Enterprise (MOGE), the junta's single largest source of foreign currency earnings.

The US and its partners have already improved coordination to more effectively target military-owned businesses, state-owned enterprises, and networks of individuals and corporate entities that enable the junta's access to international trade and finance. However, this coordination is far from comprehensive, creating loopholes for the junta and its networks of enablers.

For instance, while the US has sanctioned the Star Sapphire Group of Companies' co-owners, Tun Min Latt and his wife Win Min Soe, for their firms' involvement with the import of military equipment, the United Kingdom has not sanctioned Win Min Soe to date, and other US partners including the EU, Canada, and Australia have yet to adopt sanctions on the Star Sapphire companies and their co-owners.

At the time of his arrest by the Thai police in Bangkok in September 2022 on charges of drug trafficking and money laundering, Tun Min Latt held assets in the names of the two adult children of Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the Myanmar junta, according to Justice For Myanmar and Reuters. These assets included the property deed for a luxury condominium and bankbooks for Thai bank accounts.

The US should urge the newly elected leader of its longtime ally Thailand to effectively enforce sanctions targeting the junta's sources of funds, equipment, and jet fuel, and to more broadly ramp up the fight against illicit financial flows, as the crisis in Myanmar and other regional trends lead to the rise of transnational crime in the Mekong region.

Enhanced collaboration between regulatory authorities, law enforcement agencies, and banks—the latter acting as gatekeepers to the international financial system—is essential in that regard.

Singaporean banks have reportedly strengthened their compliance and risk management measures toward Myanmar since the coup. It was stated during parliamentary questions in July 2023 that, "as Myanmar is on the blacklist of the Financial Action Task Force [FATF], financial institutions in Singapore have also been applying enhanced due diligence for Myanmar-linked customers and transactions that present higher risks."

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

IN FOCUS





AT SUNSET

Boatman traveling on Inle Lake in Shan State.

Photo: Mateo Massimi

REACHING OUT TO THE MYANMAR DIASPORA



Tu Lor Eh Paw with her father.

“I think my mission has always been about the people, especially the youth in the K’Nyaw community and in the Myanmar diaspora community. So, my work at the Urban Village plays a lot into that role. My current position is working directly with the K’Nyaw and Karenni youth to make them feel a sense of belonging in this tiring and sometimes judgmental world.”

So says Tu Lor Eh Paw.

One of six siblings, Tu Lor Eh Paw grew up in a bamboo hut in a tiny village in Karen State. Her mother was a local Karen Christian missionary, and Tu Lor grew up celebrating Christian holidays and basing her ethics and values on Christian teachings. When Tu Lor was just a child, her mother unfortunately passed away, and her father made the difficult decision to move most of the family to a refugee camp. He felt he just couldn’t support the entire family in the village anymore, and there was a constant fear of the military.

After two years in a Thai refugee camp, the family moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Arriving in the thick of winter, her first thought was, “Hey, what’s all this white stuff?!” They did not have the right

clothing for that climate, knew few people there, and couldn’t speak any English. Her siblings ended up going to different schools.

Fortunately, Minneapolis boasts a sizeable Karen community, which Tu Lor quickly integrated into. Tu Lor has since made the most of her new life in the United States, but she can’t help but feel a sense of guilt when thinking of her remaining family back home. She is constantly thinking of what she can do in the United States that will help those back home, which is a challenge with the conflict continuing to rage.

While Tu Lor is hopeful about the democracy movement in Myanmar, she is tired by the ongoing stress and trauma, tired of the international community barely paying attention or providing support, and tired of hearing about yet more airstrikes around her home village.

“But I am hopeful that we’re finally going to get the freedom that we want,” she says.

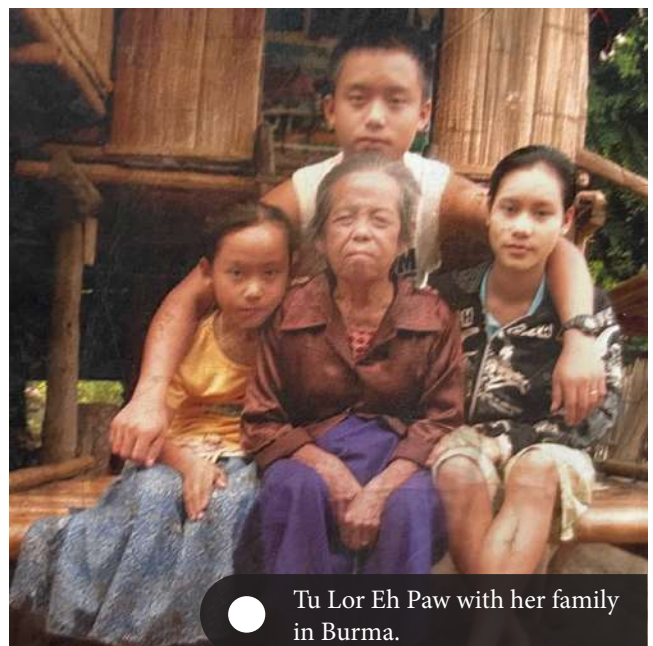
Listen to Tu Lor Eh Paw’s story on the Insight Myanmar Podcast:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/7/31/episode-184-rising-above-borders-bonus-shorts>

And check out her sites The Urban Village and Gold Futures:

<https://www.theurbanvillage.org/>

<https://goldfutureschallenge.org/vote/>



Tu Lor Eh Paw with her family in Burma.



Tu Lor Eh Paw has been reaching out to the Myanmar diaspora.



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