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DRONE WARFARE

**Weakness and strength
in Myanmar resistance
battle against junta**

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MYANMAR JUNTA HAS ITSELF TO BLAME FOR COLLAPSING ECONOMY

Pity the poor diabetic living in Yangon who is so pressed by the high price of medicine that they are having to ration their medicine doses.

This is just one window into the state of the Myanmar economy since the military took over in a coup two and a half years ago. Tightening international sanctions are part of the problem. But when it boils down to reasons why the country's economy is on a downward spiral, the generals in Naypyidaw should stand up and be counted.

As analyst Zachary Abuza put it in a recent commentary published by Radio Free Asia, the degree of economic mismanagement is a crime in itself, right up there with the military's daily war crimes. The economy is the regime's Achilles heel and they don't have the competence to fix it. Their penchant for control has brought banking to a standstill.

It would be comical if it wasn't so serious, with the poor in particular feeling the brunt. As Abuza notes, an August meeting of the Central Bank of Myanmar and other top ministries tapped an intelligence agency to lead an investigation into the high rates of inflation and depreciating kyat. Meanwhile, the regime has revoked the licenses of 30 foreign exchange traders.

Are they serious? This says so much about the junta's way of thinking. They are obli-

ous to the fact that it's their mismanagement that has caused both depreciation and inflation, yet the benighted and paranoid military is convinced that it's the work of saboteurs and speculators, Abuza writes.

All the while, the generals are doing everything they can to enrich themselves and move assets overseas, before it all comes crumbling down.

Investment is down, trade is down, and the junta appears to be wondering why. Only last week the Myanmar garment industry monitor was calling on H&M and other foreign garment makers not to leave Myanmar – but why should they be surprised, given the dire human rights situation post-coup and the way Myanmar-based garment factories treats their workers.

To compound the image problem, Myanmar is gaining a bad reputation as a country that hides away people trafficked into the online scam industry, a kidnapping situation where over 120,000 foreign nationals including young Chinese face violence and possible death if they don't work to bring in ill-gotten gains through illegal telephone scams on a daily basis.

The Golden Land is at war with itself and it is the ordinary people who are suffering, damaged in terms of rights, and hit in the pocket.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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CONTENTS



NEWS & INSIGHT

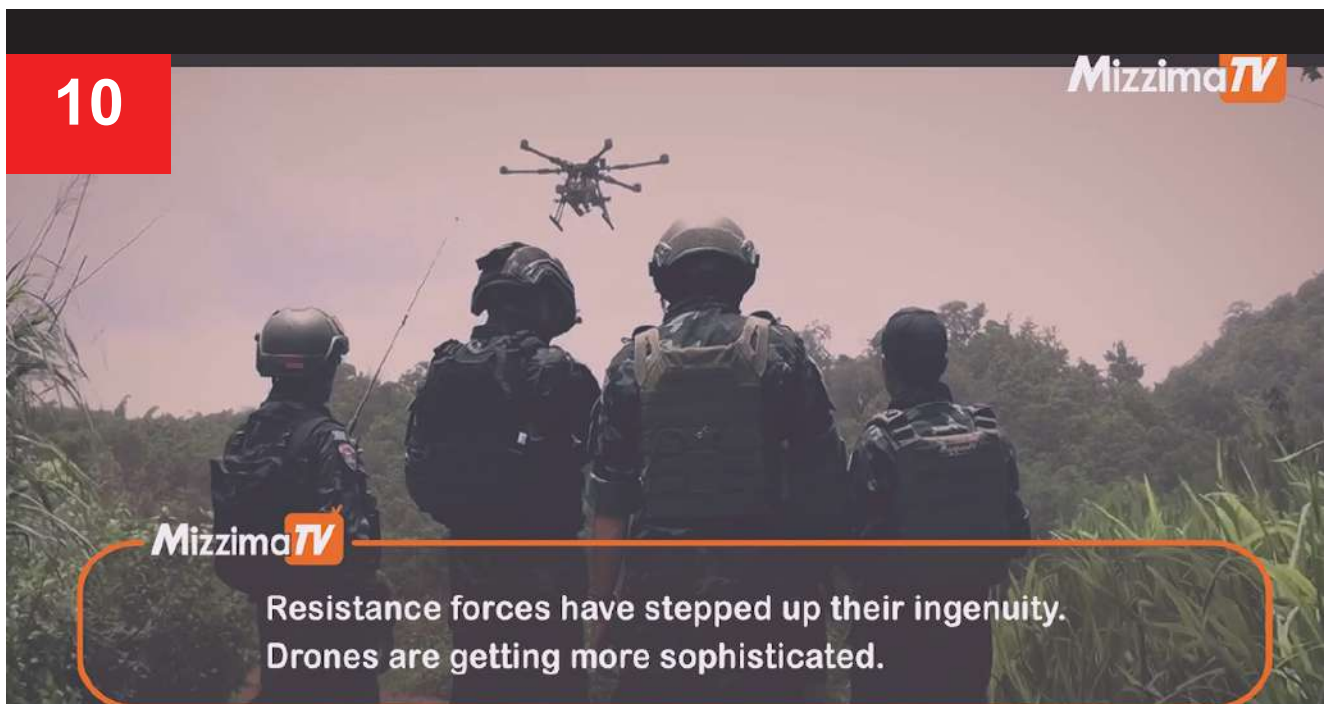
- 3 EDITORIAL
- 6 IN FOCUS
- 8 NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 10 DRONE WARFARE Weakness and strength in Myanmar resistance battle against junta
- 14 NUG 'defeats' 30,000 military junta soldiers over two years of Spring Revolution
- 15 Yangon resistance forces call for financial donors for their weapons and ammo drive

ASEAN MEETING

- 16 ASEAN leaders urge Myanmar junta to stop attacks on civilians



- 18 Myanmar junta condemns 'one-sided' ASEAN statement on violence
- 19 Aung San Suu Kyi reported to be ill
- 20 Myanmar junta 'likely' to hold polls in 2025: party officials
- 22 Shock as Myanmar junta jails Myanmar Now journalist Sai Zaw Thaike for 20 years
- 23 UN chief says 'systematic repression' crushing Myanmar's democracy hopes





- 24 Education under attack in Myanmar, Ukraine and other war zones: NGO

CHINA FOCUS

- 26 China warns against 'new Cold War' as big powers meet in SE Asia
- 28 US, Chinese and Russian officials gather at East Asia summit

INDIA FOCUS

- 30 G20 leaders paper over divisions on Ukraine, climate
- 32 'Historic' EU-Mid East-India trade plan launched
- 34 Fake experts drive disinformation before Bangladesh polls

COMMENTARY

- 36 UN provides funding boost for 'neglected' humanitarian crises
- 38 ETHNIC NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 39 LAST WEEK IN NAY PYI TAW

BUSINESS

- 40 Chinese rare earth metal prices reach high mark after Myanmar production suspension
- 41 Myanmar expects resumption of normal rice export via border trade in October
- 42 'Cascading crises' a threat to long-term global growth
- 43 BUSINESS ALERTS

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

- 44 IN FOCUS
- 46 Christopher Win and a minority within a minority

Cover photo by Alessio Soggetti





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PREPARATION FOR A 'SHAM' ELECTION

Members of the Myanmar junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) speak during a demonstration of voting machines to be used in future elections in Yangon on September 5. Myanmar's junta will likely hold elections in 2025, party officials said, even as the military struggles to crush resistance to its rule.

Photo: AFP

JUNTA BURNS DOWN HOUSES IN SAGAING REGION'S YINMARBIN TOWNSHIP

Junta troops burned down 17 houses in Thapuyabinyoe Village, in Sagaing Region's Yinmarbin Township, at about 4:30 p.m. on 29 August.

The junta soldiers had been extracting timber without authorisation on the border between Yinmarbin and Kani townships before they moved into Thapuyabinyoe Village.

A Thapuyabinyoe Villager said: "The soldiers from the Military Council conducted a military operation in the villages of Yinmarbin, even going as far as stealing children's bicycles from houses. Despite our village being torched by the junta, we are still unaware of whose houses were burnt to ashes as we are too afraid to return."

According to a local resistance leader this was the first time that junta forces had set fire to Thapuyabinyoe, a village of about 600 households.

A local resistance leader said: "Due to the houses being close to each other, the fire in Thapuyabinyoe Village was fierce. Unfortunately, a total of 17 houses were completely burned to ashes."

Following the torching of Thapuyabinyoe Village junta soldiers have stationed themselves in the nearby villages of Kyaukone and Kyaukmhaw. They claim that they have to be there for security reasons.

The junta army's actions in the area have caused tens of thousands of worried villagers to flee from the three villages and the four villages of Sonechaung, Pantainpyin, Sithu and Nwarchankone, all on the border of Yinmarbin and Kani townships.

Currently, there is tension between the junta army and local defence forces in the area. As a result, the local defence forces have warned members of the public to be cautious when travelling in the area.

MYANMAR JUNTA PLANS FOR NATIONWIDE POPULATION CENSUS NEXT YEAR IN PREPARATION FOR GENERAL ELECTION

The Myanmar junta chief is planning a nationwide population census in 2024 prior to the holding of general elections, junta-aligned media report.

At the meeting of the Military Council on 1 September, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing accused the previous civilian government of using false voter lists in the 2020 general elections through an inaccurate population census.

He emphasized the needs of peace and stability for holding a multi-party democratic election and released his plan to hold an event for the eighth anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 15 October.

He insisted on the validity of the NCA approved by the Pyidaungsu Hlutaw, and said he rejected a remark by an ethnic armed group that called for the dissolving of this agreement.

Eight ethnic armed organizations, including KNU, signed the NCA on 15 October 2015 during the term of former President Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government, and two more EAOs signed the agreement under the now-ousted National League for Democracy-led government.

After the military coup in February 2021, the signatories of the NCA - KNU, Chin National Front and All Burma Students Democratic Front - returned to armed struggles against the Naypyidaw regime.

Padoh Saw Tar Doh Moo, the General Secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU), said on 10 August that the NCA has been rendered null and void due to the military coup.

During the 17th Congress of the KNU, he said, "We don't need to follow the NCA anymore because the junta has violated Chapter 1 of the agreement, which is central to the NCA. So, it is absolute nonsense to use the NCA in deceiving the international community or the public and it has no relevance for us."

Myanmar's junta chief said in December 2021 that their regime will hold a general election in August 2023 as a part of their pledge to hand over state power.

However, after four consecutive extensions of the six-month state of emergency in July until January 31 next year, it is unclear when or if the general election will be held.

70 VILLAGERS DETAINED IN NGANZUN TOWNSHIP, MANDALAY REGION

Junta soldiers have detained over 70 villagers from Thargyin Village, in Nganzun Township, Mandalay Region, and are currently holding them in Nandwin Monastery.

On the morning of 3 September about 100 junta soldiers barricaded the entrances and exits to Thargyin Village, a village of approximately 1,000 households. Once the troops had blocked off the village they started to detain villagers and take them to Nandwin Monastery in Thargyin Village, where the junta soldiers are stationed.

“The Military Council was patrolling around the village and detaining villagers. We are afraid to go out, so we have locked our doors and are staying inside. The junta soldiers detained 50 people on 3 September. The number has now exceeded 70 as of this morning [4 September]”, said a resident of Thargyin Village.

Another resident also said on 4 September: “Only men in the village were specifically targeted and detained.”

The detentions follow a 1 September drone attack by defence force fighters on junta soldiers stationed near Thargyin Village, which reportedly killed seven junta soldiers, according to villagers.

Following the drone attack, the junta troops moved their base to Nandwin Monastery in Thargyin Village. After the move, the soldiers started an investigation and started arresting men in Thargyin Village.

The detained men in Nandwin Monastery are being interrogated, according to locals.

Junta soldiers have been raiding villages in Nganzun Township since the beginning of August, according to local sources.

MYANMAR WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE WITH HEALTH AMID SOARING MEDICINE PRICES

The depreciating value of the Myanmar currency, the Kyat has led to rising commodity prices and increasing medication costs due to the need to import medicines from abroad, burdening the people of Myanmar.

Working class people in particular are having a hard time affording medicines due to the rising cost of healthcare.

A resident in Yangon said that people with diabetes have to take medicine and disease control treatment every day, and because of the increasing prices of medicines, they have to reduce their medicine consumption.

“My family members have diabetes and hypertension, conditions that require ongoing medication. In the past, they used to take medicine regularly 2 or 3 times a day. However, with the prices having increased 3 or 4 times, they have been forced to reduce the frequency of the medication,” the Yangon resident said on the condition of anonymity.

“Given the present circumstances, in some cases, curing the disease is beyond our reach,” he remarked. “There are times when we find ourselves anxiously monitoring the illness due to shortages of medication.”

Local drug retailers reported that the prices of essential painkillers and common fever medications have risen, resulting in decreased sales. They noted that the increased drug prices have even led to the closure of some drug sales companies in recent days.

“Medicine sales are low. It’s much lower than before. The price has jumped three, four or five times. The prices of basic drugs such as Decolgen and Biogesic have gone up. Working-class people suffered the worst. Some of them can’t even buy the drugs prescribed by doctors, because they don’t have enough money,” said a woman in Yangon.

Decolgen and Biogesic, well-known paracetamol brands in Myanmar, are primarily employed for alleviating mild to moderate pain, including headaches, backache, menstrual cramps, muscle strains, minor arthritis discomfort and toothache, and for reducing fevers associated with common illnesses like colds and the flu.

The volatility of the dollar exchange rate and the inconvenience of importing medicines from abroad have become pressing issues. Furthermore, the issuance of new Kyat 20,000 banknotes by the junta has worsened inflation.

The Myanmar Kyat has experienced a depreciation, falling from less than 1,400 Kyat per US dollar prior to the coup (before February 1, 2021) to approximately 3,400 Kyat per dollar by August of this year.

Since the military coup in 2021, Myanmar has witnessed a decline in its political, economic, and educational sectors, resulting in increased hardships for its citizens. The cost of goods has surged, leading to long queues at affordable outlets. People are increasingly concerned about the worsening impact on the grassroots and the growing crises they face daily.



The use of drones to bomb Myanmar junta targets is innovative. Photo: AFP

DRONE WARFARE

**Weakness and strength in Myanmar
resistance battle against junta**

The lethality of one of the Myanmar resistance fighters' "weapons of choice" was obvious to see on Sunday 3 September in an attack on the Myawaddy Police Station on the Myanmar-Thailand border.

Five police officials were killed and 12 injured in the early evening attack. First of all, two bombs were dropped into the police compound. Then, as officials took "security measures" after the blasts, another two bombs were dropped, killing five and wounding 12 officers, according to local residents.

The weapon used? One or more drones – remotely controlled flying machines carrying bombs.

Drones have joined improvised explosive devices (IED) as favoured weapons by both People's Defence Forces (PDF) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO) that are attempting to hold an offensive posture in their war against the well-armed Myanmar military.

The success the Myanmar resistance have been having with these weapons heralds progress, yet hints at the desperation of a poorly armed guerrilla force.

The Myanmar resistance faces the might of a battle-hardened and brutal force armed with APCs, tanks, artillery, jet fighters and helicopter gunships, a formidable array impossible to confront head on.

STEALTH TACTICS

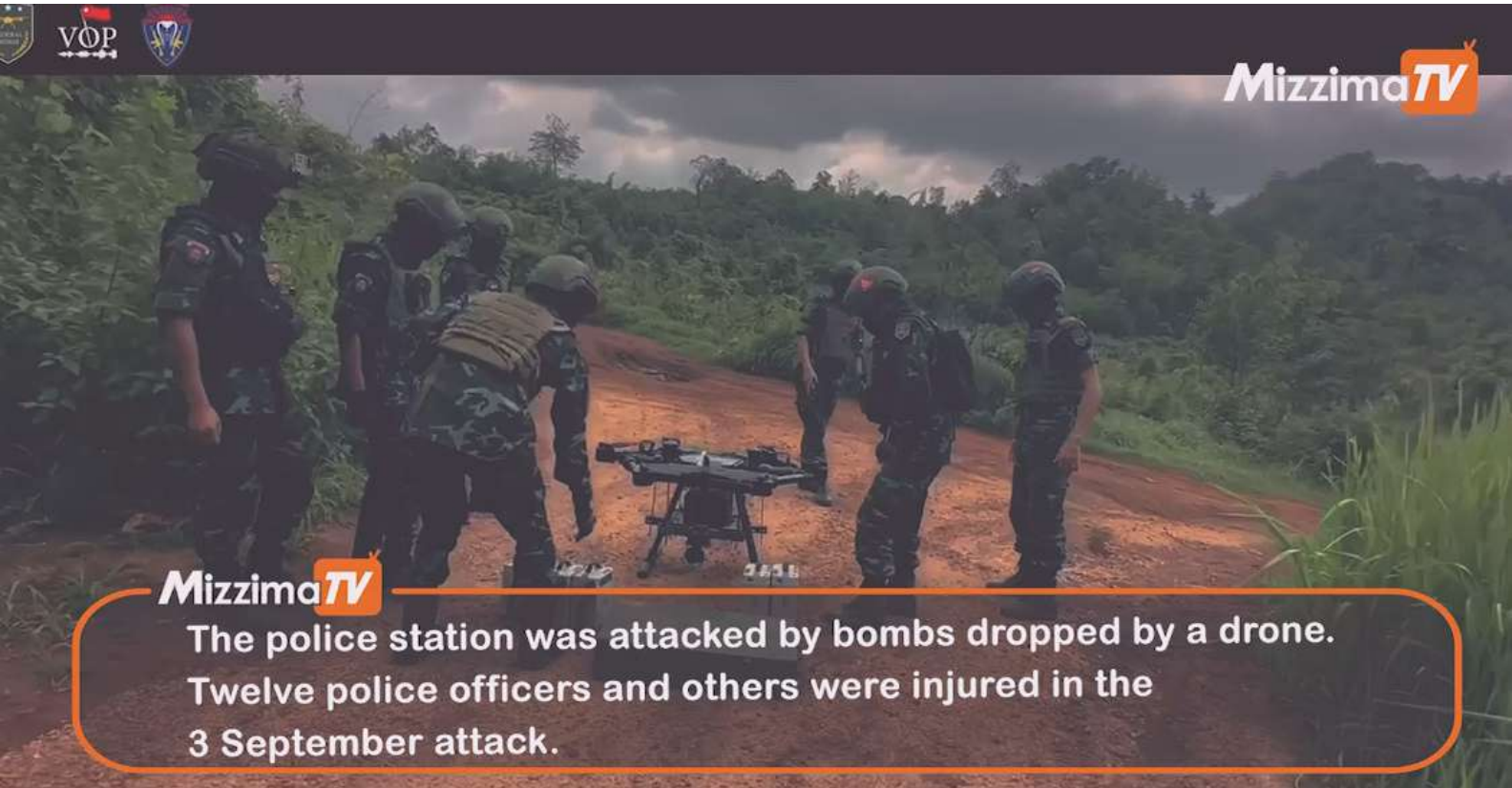
PDFs lack heavy weaponry and anti-aircraft missiles. Hence the need to resort to guerrilla stealth tactics, tactics historically used for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, though the weapons have changed.

Drones have been in the international news for over a couple of decades, with sophisticated versions used by the US military in Afghanistan, and other theatres of war, and the almost comical versions made of cardboard – a sub-set of drones flown by Ukrainian fighters against Russian targets in Ukraine and Russia.

Myanmar resistance drones are a far cry from the frightening and devastating US models. They are makeshift and not large in terms of wingspan. But it appears – judging from the Myawaddy incident – they are capable of carrying out deadly attacks and spreading fear.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

On a similar level, Myanmar resistance IEDs do what they need to do – they damage and destroy vehicles and kill soldiers, even if they were made from crude materials in a bamboo shack. Similarly, shells fired using metal pipes are crude, yet potentially deadly weapons that cause damage and spark fear. That said, some of these man-made forms of weaponry



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The police station was attacked by bombs dropped by a drone. Twelve police officers and others were injured in the 3 September attack.



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**Resistance forces have stepped up their ingenuity.
Drones are getting more sophisticated.**

have exploded during construction, killing or injuring the PDF fighters making them.

RISING TO THE OCCASION

Over two years after the military coup, the Myanmar resistance is rising to the occasion with a variety of innovative weapons of targeted destruction that are reportedly prompting the Myanmar military to change their tactics as the death toll of troops continues to rise.

The NUG last week claimed that the resistance forces over the course of two years of resistance against the Military Council had been involved in 9,900 clashes, resulting in the “defeat of approximately 30,000 Military Council soldiers”. These figures are hard to verify but indicate the Spring Revolution is pursuing a viable resistance war.

Drones are proving a useful tool in the PDF and ERO arsenal. But given the military might arrayed against them, the Myanmar resistance continues to cry out for heavier and better-quality weapons.

“THE SUCCESS THE MYANMAR RESISTANCE HAVE BEEN HAVING WITH THESE WEAPONS HERALDS PROGRESS, YET HINTS AT THE DESPERATION OF A POORLY ARMED GUERRILLA FORCE.”

NUG 'DEFEATS' 30,000 MILITARY JUNTA SOLDIERS OVER TWO YEARS OF SPRING REVOLUTION



Acting NUG President Duwa Lashi La.

Over the course of two years of resistance against the Military Council, there have been a reported 9,900 clashes, resulting in the “defeat of approximately 30,000 Military Council soldiers”, as stated by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) of the National Unity Government (NUG) on 7 September.

Considering the situation, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) of the NUG determined that the Military Council had depleted 12.5 per cent of its forces over the span of the two years of the Spring Revolution

The NUG issued a nationwide call for resistance against the coup d'état military council on 7 September, 2021 – a call that happened seven months after the February coup.

At present, the MOD reports that the NUG has established 293 PDF battalions, with People's Defense Forces (PDF) formed in over 250 townships throughout Myanmar.

As the armed resistance continued over the

span of two years, the NUG successfully extended their operational presence across various regions, including Tanintharyi, Mandalay, Bago (East and West) and Magway regions, Mon State and the Naypyidaw Council area, as highlighted in the MOD statement.

Furthermore, the NUG proudly announced the establishment of Local Resistance Forces and People's Defense Forces in the critical regions of Yangon and Ayeyarwaddy regions, marking a resilient and determined effort in the pursuit of justice and democracy.

The journey towards a free and democratic Myanmar continues, as these developments underscore the unwavering spirit of those who stand in defiance of oppression, according to the NUG.

YANGON RESISTANCE FORCES CALL FOR FINANCIAL DONORS FOR THEIR WEAPONS AND AMMO DRIVE



Photo: AFP

Yangon resistance forces are currently looking for financial donors for their “supply sector” that funnels weapons and ammunition to their fighters in the Yangon theatre of operation, all part of a drive to get rid of the Myanmar military junta.

“The strength and determination of front-line soldiers are essential, but without adequate weapons and ammunition, they cannot effectively engage in combat. It is important to have sufficient funds to purchase the necessary weaponry and ammunition for successful battles. The crucial role of supporters in providing the vital financial support is needed for the operations,” said Ma Kay, a treasurer of the Yangon region operation.

The successful outcome of urban battles relies on the transformation of funding into delivery of weapons and ammunition. The involvement of the supply force section is vital in bringing an end to the Military Council dictatorship and its affiliated organizations in Naypyidaw and Yangon.

Hence, the Yangon revolutionary forces have initiated the recruitment drive for individuals to join the

People Revolution Supply Family (PRF) version 2.0 programme as “supply soldiers” or financial donors.

In the previous People’s Revolution Supply Family - PRF programme, the supply forces ensured that support was distributed proportionally among the PDF forces throughout the entire nation.

“People now have the freedom to select and provide (financial) support to specific states and regions of their choosing under the current PRF 2.0 programme,” said Ma Kay.

She explained that to become a PRF “support soldier”, individuals can contribute a starting amount of \$20, \$50, \$100, or any other monthly amount they can afford. In return, they will receive two cards: the PRF official supply troop card and NUG’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) official supply troop card.

PRF version 2.0 will effectively support and meet the evolving needs of the forces as the revolution gains momentum, according to Yangon revolutionary forces.

ASEAN LEADERS URGE MYANMAR JUNTA TO STOP ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS

Southeast Asian leaders strongly condemned violence and attacks on civilians in Myanmar, directly blaming the ruling junta, with host Indonesia saying at a summit on Tuesday last week that there had been scant progress on an agreed peace plan.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since the 2021 military coup deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's government and prompted a bloody crackdown on dissent.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - long decried by critics as a toothless talking shop -- met in the Indonesian capital Jakarta to seek a united voice on the crisis.

The leaders "urge the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular, and all related parties concerned in Myanmar to de-escalate violence and stop targeted

attacks on civilians, houses and public facilities, such as schools, hospitals, markets," they said in a 19-point statement seen by AFP.

"We strongly condemned the continued acts of violence in Myanmar."

Rights groups have accused the junta of air strikes on rebel strongholds and civilian infrastructure.

Diplomatic attempts to solve the crisis have been fruitless, with the junta ignoring the five-point peace plan agreed with ASEAN members two years ago as well as international criticism, and refusing to engage with its opponents.

An earlier draft statement seen by AFP -- issued by Indonesia with input from all members and thrashed out over several difficult meetings between foreign ministers -- had left its Myanmar section blank.



Indonesia is the current chair of ASEAN.
Photo: AFP

That illustrated the lack of consensus in the 10-member bloc on dealing with a junta whose leaders remain banned from high-level ASEAN meetings.

‘NO SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS’

Indonesian President Joko Widodo urged unity and cooperation “for peace and prosperity” in the region, but his top diplomat said the peace process agreed with the junta to end the violence remained stuck.

“The conclusion is that there is no significant progress in the implementation of the five-point consensus,” Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told reporters.

She also confirmed the Philippines would chair ASEAN instead of Myanmar in 2026, after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said earlier Tuesday Manila was ready to step in to replace the junta rulers.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun confirmed it would be replaced as chair.

“Myanmar will skip ASEAN chairmanship in 2026,” he told AFP, without providing details.

Myanmar previously withdrew from the ASEAN chair in 2006 over a potential boycott by Washington, the European Union and other international powers. The chair went to the Philippines that year.

Myanmar chaired the bloc in 2014 under Thein Sein, the country’s first civilian head of state in more than 50 years.

Another regional diplomat said some ASEAN members were pushing for the junta to be re-invited to the meetings.

Thailand has held its own bilateral talks with the junta and deposed democracy leader Suu Kyi in recent months, further dividing the bloc.

As the summit proceeded without a political representative from Myanmar, officials from political parties in the country sanctioned by the military told AFP the junta would likely hold elections in 2025.

But the United States has said any elections under the junta would be a “sham”.

MAP CONTROVERSY

Beijing’s actions in the South China Sea - which it claims almost in its entirety - were also to feature prominently in discussions, according to the earlier draft communique.

China released a new official map last week claiming sovereignty over the majority of the South

China Sea, sparking sharp rebukes from countries around the region, including Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Leaders were to express concern about “land reclamations, activities, serious incidents” in the waterway, the draft said.

Another Southeast Asian diplomatic source said leaders would aim for the “aspirational goal” of concluding talks with China over a code of conduct in the South China Sea by 2026.

Later in the week, Indonesia will host the 18-nation East Asia Summit, which will include the United States, China, Japan, India and Russia.

Representing Beijing and Moscow will be Premier Li Qiang and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov respectively.

US Vice President Kamala Harris arrived in Jakarta late Tuesday to attend ASEAN’s gathering and the East Asia Summit in place of President Joe Biden.

It is her third trip to Southeast Asia in less than three years, and the White House stressed her focus on “strengthening alliances and partnerships” in the region.

“At both summits, the vice president will underscore the United States’ enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific generally and to ASEAN centrality specifically,” National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters Tuesday.

Harris is also slated to take part in a roundtable with Russia’s Lavrov.

AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CONDEMNS 'ONE-SIDED' ASEAN STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE



The Myanmar junta is not happy with the ASEAN statement on the Myanmar crisis. Photo: AFP

Myanmar's junta on Wednesday last week criticised an ASEAN statement condemning military violence and the targeting of civilians as “one-sided”, a day after it said it would not take up its upcoming chairmanship of the bloc.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 military coup that sparked mass protests and a bloody military crackdown.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has led fruitless attempts to defuse the crisis, with a five-point peace plan agreed with the generals largely moribund and the junta refusing to engage with its opponents.

At a summit on Tuesday, ASEAN leaders called on the military to “de-escalate violence and stop targeted attacks on civilians”.

Host Indonesia said there had been “no significant progress” on the plan.

Myanmar slammed the review as “not objective” and “one-sided”, in a statement published Wednesday in the state-backed *Global New Light of Myanmar*.

It called on ASEAN to “strictly adhere to the provisions and fundamental principles of the ASEAN Charter, especially non-interference in the internal affairs of the member states.”

Internationally isolated Myanmar will not take up its scheduled chairmanship of ASEAN in 2026, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told reporters on Tuesday.

The Philippines will chair instead, as the bloc wrestles with how to engage with the junta, whose leaders are banned from high-level ASEAN meetings.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun confirmed to AFP that Myanmar would not be chair in 2026, without providing details.

Myanmar previously withdrew from the ASEAN chairmanship in 2006 over a potential boycott by the United States, the European Union and other international powers.

The chair went to the Philippines that year.

AFP

AUNG SAN SUU KYI REPORTED TO BE ILL



Photo: AFP

Aung San Suu Kyi is said to be unwell, according to a source familiar with the matter and her UK-based son.

Local news outlets have stated that Aung San Suu Kyi, aged 78, is experiencing severe toothaches, leading to reduced food intake. This condition had caused her to suffer from vomiting and bouts of dizziness. The junta has reportedly refused a request for an external doctor to visit her. She was examined by a prison doctor though she needed a dental specialist for her condition.

The source familiar with the matter said that she remained in prison, despite reports in August that she had been transferred to house arrest.

In a text message to the BBC, her son Michael Aris described junta's denial of her recommended medical care as "heartless and inhumane." The 46-year-old, residing in the UK, stated that his mother

was experiencing frequent vomiting and severe dizziness. "Anyone who has such painful gum disease that they are unable to eat obviously has their entire health at risk if suitable treatment is denied."

Aung San Suu Kyi faces 27 years of detention after the February 2021 military coup, convicted of 19 criminal offences. She denies all the charges, including election fraud, corruption, and incitement.

MYANMAR JUNTA 'LIKELY' TO HOLD POLLS IN 2025: PARTY OFFICIALS

Myanmar's junta will likely hold elections in 2025, party officials told AFP on Tuesday last week, even as the military struggles to crush resistance to its rule.

The military justified its February 2021 putsch with unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud in 2020 elections won resoundingly by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

The coup ended a 10-year democratic experiment and plunged the country into turmoil, with the military now battling opponents across swathes of the country.

"Elections are likely to be held in 2025," a senior member of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party told AFP, requesting anonymi-

ty.

"We have a census-taking process in 2024. Because of the situation (in Myanmar) and that nationwide census process, next year is impossible," they said.

A member of a junta-approved party said it was likely "elections will be held in early 2025", without elaborating.

A junta spokesman did not pick up AFP calls seeking comment.

Thirty-six political parties have been granted permission to take part in any future polls, the junta-stacked election commission said Tuesday, without giving a date for when they would be held.

Seven had been approved to compete coun-



Photo: AFP

trywide, and 29 on a regional level.

It also announced the scrapping of the first-past-the-post system -- under which the NLD won crushing majorities at the expense of military-backed parties.

A proportional representation system would be used across the country, it said.

In March, the election commission dissolved the NLD for failing to re-register under tough new military-authored rules.

Suu Kyi co-founded the NLD in 1988, and won a landslide victory in 1990 elections that were subsequently annulled by the then-junta.

The party carried the torch for democratic aspirations in military-ruled Myanmar and later won big victories over military-backed parties in elections in 2015 and 2020.

Its leadership has been decimated in the junta's bloody crackdown on dissent, with one former law-

maker executed by the junta in the country's first use of capital punishment in decades.

'SHAM'

The junta accepts it does not control swathes of the country and has previously pushed back the timeline for holding polls.

"It's highly uncertain if and when polls will take place, there is no discernible timetable," independent analyst David Mathieson told AFP.

"It shouldn't have to be reemphasised, but any poll any time under whatever conditions will be bereft of legitimacy and meaning."

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing called for "necessary preparations" to be completed ahead of the national census in 2024, the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar reported on Saturday.

An election can only take place after a census has been completed, the paper reported him as saying.

The United States has said any elections under the junta would be a "sham" and analysts say they would be targeted by the junta's opponents.

Russia, a major ally and arms supplier, has said it backs the plan for polls.

Khin Yi, chairman of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party said his party was preparing for a future election.

"There have been threats," Khin Yi told AFP, without elaborating.

"However, I'm moving forward... This time is the period to motivate our party."

The army ruled Myanmar for decades after independence from Britain in 1948, and dominated the country's economy and politics even before the coup.

Myanmar remains mired in almost daily bomb blasts and fighting, with thousands of civilians caught up in the violence.



AFP

SHOCK AS MYANMAR JUNTA JAILS MYANMAR NOW JOURNALIST SAI ZAW THAIKE FOR 20 YEARS



Sai Zaw Thaike. Photo: Myanmar Now

A Myanmar journalist arrested in May while covering the aftermath of a deadly cyclone has been jailed by junta authorities for 20 years, his employer said on Wednesday last week.

The military has waged a sweeping and bloody crackdown on dissent since toppling Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021 and at least 170 journalists have since been arrested, according to the United Nations.

Photojournalist Sai Zaw Thaike was jailed for a total of 20 years, according to his employer Myanmar Now.

He had been indicted on four charges, including breaching a natural disaster law and a telecommunications law, Myanmar Now said.

It said it was not clear on what charges he had been convicted.

Myanmar Now editor-in-chief Swe Win said all of Sai Zaw Thaike's colleagues were saddened by the lengthy sentence.

"His sentencing is yet another indication that freedom of the press has been completely quashed under the military junta's rule, and shows the hefty price independent journalists in Myanmar must pay for their professional work," he said in a statement.

Sai Zaw Thaike was arrested on May 23 while covering the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, which hit

western Myanmar's Rakhine state and neighbouring Bangladesh, killing more than 100 people.

He had been held in pre-trial detention since, without access to a lawyer and denied family visits, according to the statement on Myanmar Now's Facebook page

He was sentenced on Wednesday, the first day of his trial, it said.

A junta spokesman could not be reached for comment about the case.

Myanmar Now had its licence revoked shortly after the coup, along with dozens of other local outlets deemed critical of the military.

Security forces had previously raided its office, the outlet said.

More than 24,000 people have been arrested since the coup that plunged the Southeast Asian nation into turmoil, according to a local monitoring group.

Myanmar ranks 173 out of 180 in the latest World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders.

According to the watchdog's latest figures, 69 journalists are currently detained in Myanmar.

AFP/Mizzima

UN CHIEF SAYS ‘SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION’ CRUSHING MYANMAR’S DEMOCRACY HOPES



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.
Photo: AFP

Hopes of a return to democracy in junta-ruled Myanmar are being crushed by “systematic repression”, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday last week at a summit in Indonesia with the United States, China and regional leaders.

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

“Brutal violence, worsening poverty, and systematic repression are crushing hopes for a return to democracy,” Guterres said before a meeting with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member.

“The situation is untenable.”

The junta was not in attendance after being barred from attending ASEAN summits until it implements a five-point peace plan agreed two years ago.

Guterres said the crisis has “further deteriorated” in the past year and said in an earlier speech the world was witnessing an “enormous tragedy”.

Before his meeting with ASEAN leaders, he repeated a call for Myanmar’s military authorities to free detained leaders and political prisoners and return to democratic rule.

Deposed civilian leader Suu Kyi is among those still in detention.

Guterres also said the conditions for the safe return of Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar

in 2017, many of them to neighbouring Bangladesh, during a brutal military crackdown “are not yet in sight”.

Myanmar is facing genocide accusations at the United Nations’ top court following the mass exodus.

Leaders at the ASEAN summit on Tuesday called on Myanmar’s military rulers to “de-escalate violence and stop targeted attacks on civilians”, a statement the junta condemned as “one-sided”.

Myanmar has also been replaced as ASEAN’s rotating chair in 2026 by the Philippines.

An Indonesian official, who declined to be identified, said “they are still isolated, ASEAN does not trust them”.

Guterres welcomed efforts to resolve the crisis under the five-point peace plan but the junta has largely ignored it.

In a wide-ranging speech earlier at the summit, he called on world leaders to “turn up the heat” on action to solve the global climate crisis.

It came a day after he said “climate breakdown has begun” after the EU monitoring body said 2023 was likely to be the hottest year in human history.

AFP/Mizzima

EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN MYANMAR, UKRAINE AND OTHER WAR ZONES: NGO

Myanmar is one of the countries facing a serious challenge to education. More than 3,000 attacks on education were identified in 2022, a 17 percent increase over the previous year, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) reported in a data release 7 September.

The data were released ahead of the fourth United Nations International Day to Protect Education from Attack, on September 9, 2023. Almost one-third of all attacks took place in just three countries: Ukraine, Myanmar, and Burkina Faso, with the war in Ukraine accounting for the majority.

According to GCPEA, more than 6,700 students and educators were reportedly killed, injured, abducted, arrested, or otherwise harmed by attacks on education in 2022, an increase of 20 percent from

2021. Armed forces and non-state armed groups using schools for military purposes also rose in 2022, with over 510 cases reported, compared with around 450 the previous year. Explosive weapons, both targeted and indiscriminate, were frequently used in attacks on education, causing widespread damage. Unexploded ordnance will continue to pose a deadly risk for years to come.

“The International Day to Protect Education from Attack serves as a stark reminder that schools are not always the safe refuges they should be, but instead are often the sites of extreme violence and terror,” said Diya Nijhowne, GCPEA executive director. “The distressing increase in attacks last year underscores the urgent need for both armed forces and non-state armed groups to safeguard education, including by avoiding using explosive weapons with wide-area



Children in a Karen village school. Photo: AFP

effects in populated areas, such as near schools or universities, and refraining from using schools for military purposes.”

The coalition also released a new 39-page report, *Non-State Armed Groups and Attacks on Education: Exploring Trends and Practices to Curb Violations*, which found that, in 2020 and 2021, more than half of all attacks on education, and a quarter of reported military use of schools and universities, were by non-state armed groups. The report highlights the various motivations these groups have for attacking schools and educators, and provides recommendations and strategies for reducing these attacks. In 2022 and 2023, non-state armed groups continued to perpetrate a significant proportion of all attacks. In just one example, Al-Shabaab, an insurgent group in Somalia, claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack in October 2022 against the Ministry of Education that killed at least 121 civilians and wounded hundreds more.

The Safe Schools Declaration, a political commitment to protect students, educators, schools, and

universities during armed conflict, endorsed by 118 countries, plays an essential role in preventing, and mitigating the impact of attacks on education. By endorsing the Declaration, governments also commit to using the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

The use of schools as bases, firing positions, detention centers, training grounds, and for other military purposes, can convert the schools into military targets, putting the lives of those within them at risk, and deterring students and teachers from attending out of fear or because the schools are closed to education. Those who do attend are vulnerable to sexual violence and recruitment by soldiers. School infrastructure and learning materials are also damaged, affecting the quality of education, and sometimes making learning impossible.

Since 2015, when the Safe Schools Declaration was launched, over a dozen governments have made changes to their national policies, practices, or military manuals, to limit the use of schools for military purposes. Non-state armed groups have also taken measures to safeguard education. In October 2022, several groups operating in Burkina Faso signed unilateral declarations committing to protect educational institutions. In Yemen, the Houthis – who control the capital and other parts of the country – signed an action plan in 2022 to end attacks on schools along with other grave violations against children.

“Despite the chilling statistics on attacks on education and the staggering loss of life and potential that these numbers represent, there is still much hope,” Nijhowne said. “The Safe Schools Declaration and its guidelines on military use of schools provide a roadmap for preserving the lives and futures of students and teachers, and the communities they build. On this International Day to Protect Education from Attack, all countries should endorse the Declaration and put its commitments into action.”

This report was authored by a partner organization, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, and is distributed by Human Rights Watch.



CHINA WARNS AGAINST ‘NEW COLD WAR’ AS BIG POWERS MEET IN SE ASIA

China’s premier said on Wednesday last week that major powers must keep their differences under control and avoid “a new Cold War”, in a thinly veiled reference to Washington, as top Asian and US officials gathered for talks in Indonesia.

Beijing has expressed concern about US-backed blocs forming on its doorstep, while facing disputes with other powers in the region over the South China Sea and other issues.

“Disagreements and disputes may arise between countries due to misperceptions, diverging interests or external interferences,” Li Qiang said at the start of an ASEAN-plus-three meeting with Japan and South Korea in Jakarta.

“To keep differences under control, what is essential now is to oppose picking sides, to oppose bloc confrontation and to oppose a new Cold War.”

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) is holding separate summits with China, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada on Wednesday, providing an arena for big powers to lobby the bloc and their rivalries to play out.

US Vice President Kamala Harris is attending in place of President Joe Biden, while Li was taking part instead of President Xi Jinping.

The Chinese premier’s comments came after Beijing’s Defence Minister Li Shangfu in June warned against establishing NATO-like alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, calling for “inclusive cooperation” instead of “small cliques” at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

Washington is a member of the AUKUS defence partnership with Australia and Britain, and the



China is warning against a “new cold war”. Photo: AFP

Quad, a strategic alliance that includes Australia, India and Japan.

Wednesday's meetings come before an 18-member East Asia Summit on Thursday to be attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the G20 summit in New Delhi at the weekend, where broader geopolitical issues are expected to top the agenda.

Harris met ASEAN leaders, praising them for their "shared commitment to international rules and norms... and regional issues".

In a sign of Washington's increasing regional engagement, she announced the creation of the first US-ASEAN centre in Washington.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol are attending both days of meetings.

'UNDERMINE PEACE'

Yoon reportedly told ASEAN leaders there must be no cooperation with North Korea, which the United States said this week is holding arms talks with Russia.

"Any attempts to forge military cooperation with North Korea... should be immediately stopped," Yoon was quoted by a presidential official as telling an ASEAN meeting, according to Yonhap news agency.

Kishida and Yoon met Li alongside ASEAN leaders, with a row between China and Japan over the release of treated wastewater from the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant one of the topics raised.

"Japan and China talked about Fukushima, but it wasn't heated," a Southeast Asian diplomat who was in the room told AFP.

Chinese state news agency Xinhua said Li outlined Beijing's position on the issue and called on Japan to handle the matter responsibly.

Japan public broadcaster NHK, citing unnamed officials, said Kishida explained Japan's stance to Li and sought Beijing's understanding.

A roundtable involving Lavrov and Harris on Thursday will be the first high-level US-Russia encounter since a foreign ministers meeting in Jakarta in July, where US and European officials rounded on Moscow's top diplomat over the Ukraine conflict.

ASEAN leaders will host summits on Thursday with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

MYANMAR, SOUTH CHINA SEA

Myanmar was also a major issue at the summits with China - a key diplomatic ally of the junta in the former Burma.

Southeast Asian leaders strongly condemned the violence and attacks on civilians in Myanmar on Tuesday, directly blaming the junta.

An ASEAN chair statement released Wednesday said the bloc was "gravely concerned" about the lack of progress on a five-point peace plan agreed with the junta two years ago.

Harris said Washington would "continue to press the regime to end the horrific violence, to release all those unjustly detained and to reestablish Myanmar's path to inclusive democracy".

China also upset several ASEAN members last week when it released a new official map claiming sovereignty over the majority of the South China Sea.

It sparked sharp rebukes from across the region, including Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Some ASEAN leaders expressed concern about "land reclamations, activities, serious incidents" in the disputed South China Sea, according to the chair statement.

Experts, however, said ASEAN leaders would not confront Li to avoid angering Beijing.

"They won't risk the relationship with big powers," Aleksius Jemadu, a foreign affairs expert at Indonesia's Pelita Harapan University, told AFP.

AFP

US, CHINESE AND RUSSIAN OFFICIALS GATHER AT EAST ASIA SUMMIT

US Vice President Kamala Harris, Chinese premier Li Qiang and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov attended an East Asia summit in Indonesia on Thursday last week, offering an opportunity for direct, high-level diplomacy between the rivals.

The meeting brought Washington and Beijing into contact a day after Premier Li Qiang warned major powers must manage their differences to avoid a “new Cold War”, and ahead of the G20 summit in New Delhi this week where Chinese President Xi Jinping will be absent.

Interactions between the officials from the world’s top two economies are being closely watched as they seek to control tensions that risk flaring anew over issues ranging from Taiwan to ties with Moscow and the competition for influence in the Pacific.

“I ask... the leaders of the East Asia Summit, to make this a forum for us to strengthen cooperation and not sharpen rivalries,” Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in opening remarks.

Harris and Li held separate talks with Southeast Asian leaders on Wednesday, where the US vice president discussed “upholding international law in the South China Sea”, a statement from her office said, the disputed waterway where Chinese claims have angered several Southeast Asian nations.

Thursday’s 18-nation summit is the first time top US and Russian officials have sat around the same table in almost two months, after US and European officials condemned Lavrov at a July ministerial meeting over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

It comes as US Secretary of State Antony



Photo: AFP

Blinken announced \$1 billion in new assistance to Ukraine in a surprise visit to Kyiv on Wednesday.

'UNACCEPTABLE'

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Canada's Justin Trudeau and Australian PM Anthony Albanese all attended the summit, as well as leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Yoon told officials that any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the South China Sea were "unacceptable" and called for a "rules-based maritime order" to manage the key transportation route, according to his office.

A leaders' statement seen by AFP omitted any mention of the South China Sea or the Ukraine war.

Albanese met with Li on the sidelines of the summit, confirming he would visit China "later this year" as Canberra seeks to stabilise ties with Beijing.

G20 host Modi addressed ASEAN leaders on

Thursday morning, telling them it is essential to "build a post-Covid rules-based world order" and make collective efforts to ensure a "free and open Indo-Pacific", using another term for the Asia-Pacific region.

'BROKEN'

While the gathering can bring major players together, its ability to help resolve a range of regional and global disputes is limited, experts say.

"It's a sign of the ASEAN convening power but lately we can say that the East Asia summit is broken. It has been turned into a forum for talking points," said Aaron Connelly, senior fellow at Singapore-based think tank IISS.

While Thursday's meeting was more geopolitical in scope, big powers used earlier talks in Jakarta to shore up alliances and lobby the Southeast Asian bloc.

Li travelled on a Chinese-funded high-speed train project between the capital Jakarta and the Javan city of Bandung with a senior Indonesian minister on Wednesday.

Harris held separate meetings with Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr - both ASEAN members - on the sidelines of the summit.

"The Vice President reaffirmed the United States' ironclad alliance commitment to the Philippines, and highlighted the role the US-Philippines alliance plays in ensuring a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific," her office said in a statement.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a wide-ranging speech on the sidelines of the summit called on Myanmar's junta rulers to "open the door" to democracy.

AFP



G20 LEADERS PAPER OVER DIVISIONS ON UKRAINE, CLIMATE

G20 leaders papered over deep divisions on the war in Ukraine and tackling climate change last Saturday, avoiding direct criticism of Moscow and any concrete pledge to phase out polluting fossil fuels.

Leaders of the grouping, which brings together Russia as well as some of Ukraine's most ardent backers, have struggled to agree on much, in particular about the 18-month-old invasion.

But facing a major diplomatic embarrassment, hosts India had pressed members to agree a common statement at a two-day summit in New Delhi.

With Vladimir Putin skipping the summit to

dodge political opprobrium and the risk of arrest on war crimes charges, the G20 denounced the use of force for territorial gain but refrained from direct criticism of Russia by name.

"There were different views and assessments of the situation," the leaders' statement said.

European nations and the United States had pressed for the G20 not to water down its earlier condemnation of a war that has caused food and fuel price spikes worldwide.

With long-time Russian ally India in the G20 chair, Ukraine's allies appeared to have failed in that bid.



The leaders of Saudi Arabia, India and the USA shake hands. Photo: AFP

Nonetheless, a top White House official said they were happy with the outcome.

“From our perspective, it does a very good job,” US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters.

He said the G20 statement stood up “for the principle that states cannot use force to seek territorial acquisition or to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of other states.”

With Putin repeatedly raising the spectre of the conflict turning thermonuclear, Sullivan also pointed to the G20’s agreement that “the use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible”.

‘PHASEDOWN’

On climate, too, the G20 found minimal common ground.

With major fossil fuel producers including Saudi Arabia, Russia and Australia -- and coal-dependent nations such as India and South Africa -- around the table, there was no overarching commitment to phase out the polluting fuels.

Such a measure was deemed “indispensable” by the United Nations just a day earlier to achieve a net-zero goal.

Instead, the G20 countries pledged to triple renewable energy sources by 2030 while committing only to a “phasedown” of coal “in line with national circumstances”.

The G20 countries account for 85 percent of global GDP and a similar amount of global climate-warming emissions, making action in the forum crucial to real progress.

The backdrop to the talks could hardly be starker: the European Union’s climate monitor has said this year is likely to be the hottest in human history, with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva calling it an “unprecedented climate emergency” on Saturday.

On reaching the final agreement, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked leaders for their “hard work” and banged a ceremonial gavel to adopt the declaration.

Modi had a heavy personal investment in the success of the summit, which he has billed as India’s diplomatic coming of age and has used to boost his domestic standing ahead of elections next year.

In another win for Modi’s efforts to portray his country as a voice for the Global South, the Afri-

can Union earlier joined the G20 to give the continent broader representation.

“With everyone’s approval, I request the African Union head to take his seat as a permanent G20 member,” Modi said, claiming it turned the grouping into a “people’s G20”.

The African Union at full strength has 55 members but six junta-ruled nations are currently suspended. Collectively, it has a GDP of \$3 trillion with some 1.4 billion people.

“As a continent, we look forward to further advancing our aspirations on the global stage using the G20 platform,” Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who is at the summit, posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The G20 was conceived in the throes of the 2008 financial crisis as a way to manage the global economy but finding consensus among members has been increasingly difficult in recent years.

Even the very relevance of the grouping was called into question ahead of the summit, with Chinese President Xi Jinping opting to stay at home -- a move widely seen as a deliberate snub.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Europe, the Middle East and India were to unveil plans to more closely bind three regions that account for about a third of the global economy, plans that represent an alternative to China’s vast investment in global infrastructure.

Washington, Saudi Arabia, the EU, the United Arab Emirates and others will sign an agreement on the sidelines of the G20 summit to explore the scheme, officials said.

The agreement comes with Washington actively engaging with Riyadh, a major oil producer and security partner, as it encourages the kingdom to normalise ties with Israel.

The plans will include data, rail, electricity and hydrogen pipeline links, EU officials told AFP.

AFP

'HISTORIC' EU-MID EAST-INDIA TRADE PLAN LAUNCHED

A broad alliance of states on Saturday unveiled ambitious plans to create a modern-day Spice Route linking Europe, the Middle East and India, boosting trade ties with potentially wide-ranging geopolitical implications.

The United States, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates and others launched the initiative to link railways, ports, electricity and data networks and hydrogen pipelines on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in New Delhi.

Although heavily trade-focused, the scheme could have wide-ranging implications -- including developing contacts between long-time foes Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Signatories hope it can help integrate India's vast market of 1.4 billion people with countries to the west, offer a counterbalance to lavish Chinese infrastructure spending, boost Middle Eastern economies and help normalise relations between Israel and Gulf Arab states.

"This is a real big deal," said US President Joe Biden at the launch event, calling the plan "historic".

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the so-called India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor was "much more than 'just' a railway or a cable".

"It is a green and digital bridge across conti-



Photo: AFP

nents and civilisations,” she said.

One proposed project would link railway and port facilities across the Middle East -- including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel -- potentially speeding trade between India and Europe by up to 40 percent.

Pramit Pal Chaudhuri, South Asia practice head at the Eurasia Group, said a shipping container that today travels from Mumbai, through the Suez Canal to Europe could in the future go by rail from Dubai to Haifa in Israel and on to Europe, saving both money and time.

At present, the Suez Canal is a major bottleneck to world trade, handling roughly 10 percent of global maritime trade but often beset by disruptions.

In March 2021, the giant container ship Ever

Given caused a nearly week-long stoppage in Suez traffic after it became lodged diagonally in the waterway.

‘GAME CHANGER’

At the same time, the plan neatly aligns with several of Washington’s goals in the Middle East, and officials say the United States is keen to see the projects take flight.

Biden’s administration is actively prodding Riyadh, a major oil producer and security partner, to normalise ties with Israel after decades of conflict and closed borders.

Saudi Arabia has never officially recognised Israel.

US involvement could also help mend deeply damaged ties between Riyadh and Washington, which frayed after the US-Iran nuclear deal and the 2018 murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

According to details seen by AFP, the economic corridor would develop infrastructure to enable the production and transport of “green hydrogen”.

It would also strengthen telecommunications and data transfers through a new undersea cable connecting the region.

French President Emmanuel Macron said work was now needed to make the plan “real”.

All the projects could also help oil-soaked Middle Eastern states wean their economies off dependence on fossil fuels.

Michael Kugelman, South Asia Institute director at The Wilson Center, said the plan could be a significant response to China’s much-vaunted Belt and Road Initiative.

The so-called BRI has spread Chinese influence, investments and commerce across Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

“If finalised, it would be a game changer that strengthens connectivity between India and the Middle East and would aim to counter BRI,” Kugelman posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.



AFP

FAKE EXPERTS DRIVE DISINFORMATION BEFORE BANGLADESH POLLS



Hundreds of articles praising Bangladeshi government policies apparently by independent experts have appeared in national and international media but the authors have questionable credentials, fake photos, and may not even exist, an AFP investigation has found.

Commentators say it is evidence of a sustained campaign of disinformation by unknown actors ahead of elections due by the end of January but appears to be intended to benefit the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Such articles have been published by Chinese state news agency Xinhua, leading media across Asia, and quoted by the South Asia Brief of the Washington-based Foreign Policy magazine.

Rights groups and foreign powers, including the United States, have long raised concerns over efforts by Hasina's government to silence criticism and stamp out political dissent.

AFP found that names forming a network of so-called experts are producing regular op-ed pieces, some posing as academics from leading global universities, some using stolen headshot photos, and others

making up quotes from real analysts.

"It's a coordinated influence operation," said A Al Mamun, a journalism professor at Bangladesh's University of Rajshahi. "These articles primarily promote narratives that are favourable to the current Bangladesh government."

A surge of articles appeared online around September 2022, when Bangladesh's foreign ministry issued a call for "good columnists" to counter negative "propaganda".

AFP sent multiple requests for comment to top officials at Bangladesh's foreign ministry and information ministry but received no reply.

Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen told AFP he did "not have enough time" to comment.

NO RECORDS

AFP analysed more than 700 articles published in at least 60 domestic and international news sites with bylines attributed to 35 names, all of which appeared for the first time online last year.

The articles overwhelmingly endorse narratives pushed by Dhaka, with some posted on Bangla-

desh government websites.

Many are staunchly pro-Beijing and fiercely critical of Washington - which has issued Dhaka stiff warnings of the need for free and fair elections.

While it was not possible to prove if the 35 names investigated by AFP are real, no online presence apart from their articles could be found, none has a visible social media profile, and none has published research papers in academic journals.

At least 17 of the 35 claimed links to major Western and Asian universities but AFP's digital verification reporters found no records for them.

Eight major universities confirmed that they had never heard of nine of the writers purportedly working for them, including the University of Delaware in the United States, Canada's University of Toronto, Switzerland's University of Lucerne, and the National University of Singapore.

"We checked our school records and do not find his name on our rolls," India's Jawaharlal Nehru University said about one purported writer claiming ties.

Headshot photographs of eight of the reported columnists belong to other people, including a popular fashion influencer on Indian social media.

AFP also found examples where the same article was published using different names in English and in Bengali.

Among the names is Doreen Chowdhury, a seemingly industrious columnist who has written at least 60 articles praising Dhaka's government, supporting growing ties with China, and warning that gun violence in the United States is a "threat to human rights".

Chowdhury's photograph is taken from an Indian actor, while the University of Groningen in the Netherlands - where Chowdhury is reportedly a doctoral researcher in politics - said it has no record of her.

AFP received a response from the email address listed beneath the articles that said Chowdhury was an "alias to avoid security concerns", but the email's author declined to provide a real identity or explain the use of a false photograph.

'ENTIRELY FABRICATED'

Fumiko Yamada, who has had articles published in outlets including the Bangkok Post and a blog by the London School of Economics, is portrayed as a specialist in Bangladesh Studies at Australia's University of Melbourne.

However, AFP found that there are no records of her there and that "Bangladesh Studies" is not a specific research study area.

Articles attributed to Yamada range from praising Hasina's "vital counsel" to blasting Washington's "double standards towards the democracy and human rights of others by incessantly interfering in their internal affairs".

Other articles include fake quotes from real experts.

Gerard McCarthy, a professor at the International Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands, said "entirely fabricated" quotes attributed to him were used in an article condemning "Western duplicity" towards Myanmar, written under the byline Prithwi Raj Chaturvedi.

Newspaper editors said they printed articles in good faith, after reading their academic background and seeing them published elsewhere.

"We trusted the credentials," said Mubin S Khan, feature editor of Dhaka's Business Standard.

Bangladesh's Daily New Age editor Nurul Kabir said he had been sent a slew of op-ed pitches in early 2023, "mostly on topics like Bangladesh's relations with India, China and USA".

He later stopped publishing them, fearing they were "mercenary writers" being pushed by "vested" interests, but was shocked to learn they appeared to be fictitious.

"I should have been a little more conscious in this age of disinformation and propaganda about checking the identities of the writers," he said.

AFP

UN PROVIDES FUNDING BOOST FOR 'NEGLECTED' HUMANITARIAN CRISES

UN relief chief Martin Griffiths released \$125 million from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) on Tuesday last week to assist underfunded humanitarian operations in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East, including Myanmar.

The UN humanitarian affairs office which he leads (OCHA), reported that in 2023, global funding requirements have surpassed \$55 billion to support

250 million people affected by conflict, climate change, disease outbreaks, and other crises.

Faced with these record needs, less than 30 per cent of the target funding goal has been received.

'CRUEL REALITY'

"It is a cruel reality that in many humanitarian operations, aid agencies are scraping along with very little funding right at a time when people's needs com-



Photo: UN News

pel them to scale up,” said Emergency Relief Coordinator Griffiths.

“Thanks to the generosity of a vast range of donors, we can count on CERF to fill some of the gaps. Lives are saved as a result. But we need individual donors to step up as well - this is a fund by all and for all,” he continued.

SKYROCKETING NEEDS

The recent injection brings the emergency fund’s total support to more than \$270 million this year.

This is the largest amount ever allocated, to the highest number of countries, reflecting skyrocketing needs and the fact that regular donor funding is not

keeping pace.

“Funding, generally, is growing in absolute dollar terms. The main issue is that the needs are outpacing that growth, so the funding gap widens,” said OCHA Spokesperson Jens Laerke.

Tuesday’s CERF allocation will help scale up humanitarian assistance in some of the world’s most protracted and neglected crises, including: Afghanistan (\$20 million), Yemen (\$20 million), Burkina Faso (\$9 million), Myanmar (\$9 million), Mali (\$8 million), Haiti (\$8 million), Venezuela (\$8 million), Bangladesh (\$8 million), the Central African Republic (\$6.5 million), Mozambique (\$6.5 million), Uganda (\$6 million), Cameroon (\$6 million), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (\$6 million), and Malawi (\$4 million).

Courtesy of UN News





Photo: Christian Holzinger

KAREN STATE

Myanmar junta soldier who joined KNU awarded 5 million Kyat

Last week the Karen National Union (KNU) central command announced that a soldier from the Infantry Battalion (32) of the Military Council, based in Kyarinseikgyi Township, Karen State, who had deserted to join the KNU, was given a reward of 5 million Kyat.

Sai Phyo Aung, a 22-year-old soldier, surrendered to Company (2) of KNLA Battalion (17).

“I attempted to flee from the Myanmar army due to my dissatisfaction with the unjust and oppressive system of the Military Council. I sought refuge to the KNU and expressed my intention to collaborate and fight alongside the ethnic armed revolutionaries until the military dictatorship is over,” stated Sai Phyo Aung, as quoted by the KNU.

The KNU reported that when Sai Phyo Aung

deserted from the Military Council, he was in possession of a MA-1 assault rifle, five boxes of magazines, 75 rounds of ammunition, and a pair of military uniforms. As a result, he was granted a subsidy of 5 million Kyat.

The KNU has made a statement expressing their open invitation to soldiers under the Military Council to join the side of the people. They have assured these soldiers that if they bring weapons with them, they will be provided with monetary compensation equivalent to the value of the weapons. Furthermore, the KNU has pledged to support their livelihoods.



JUNTA CHIEF COMMENDS PRO-JUNTA MILITIA IN SHAN STATE

The junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing recently expressed his appreciation for pro-junta militia troops by saying they are serving to maintain peace and stability in their own region, according to the junta-controlled media.

The junta chief met with the militia troops from Shan State (North) at the junta's North-East Command Headquarters on 10 September.

During the meeting, he emphasised that these pro-junta militia troops play a crucial role in supporting the security efforts of the State, and they diligently carry out their duties with a strong sense of patriotism to ensure peace and stability in the area.

Highlighting the significance of Shan State (North), which shares its border with China and plays a pivotal role in cross-border trade, the junta chief underlined its importance in both political and economic affairs.

The junta chief engaged in discussions with various leaders of militia groups during his visit. These discussions included meetings with Col Wai Hsan (Retiredd) (the Leader of the Border Guard Force Supervisory Body) as well as leaders of different local militia groups such as Namkham Myoma People's Militia, Pansay People's Militia, Manpang People's Militia, Hseng Keow People's Militia, Monese People's Militia, and Htinpakeng People's Militia.

CHINESE RARE EARTH METAL PRICES REACH HIGH MARK AFTER MYANMAR PRODUCTION SUSPENSION



Rare earth mining in China's Inner Mongolia. Photo: AFP

The prices of Chinese rare earth metal have reached the highest mark within 20 months after the major supplier Myanmar suspended its rare earth mining and production.

Metal market analysts said that the prices usually reached the highest mark when accumulating the metals before the peak season of using them.

The rare earth metal prices usually rise with high demand in September and October when the using of these metals are at a peak.

The price of rare earth metal Dysprosium Oxide reached CNY 2,610 (US\$356) per Kg on 8 September 2023 and it is the highest since May 2022.

These rare-earth elements are mainly produced in Kachin State on the Sino-Myanmar border. Shanghai Metals Market (SMM) says in its news release dated 8 September 2023 that the mining in Panwah which is the major rare-earth mining area in Myanmar has been suspended.

These rare-earth elements are major compo-

nents in production from electronic devices and gadgets such as mobile phones, computers and TV displays to advanced military jet fighters and EVs in their computer control and command systems.

China, which is the major production centre of mobile phones and electric and electronic appliances based on computer control, is producing and mining these rare-earth elements and also they are buying these metals from Kachin State in neighbouring Myanmar.

Canada-based Mining and Exploration research group Adamas Intelligence says that 40% of rare-earth elements demand in China is supplied by Myanmar.

China imported 118,426 tonnes of rare-earth elements in the first eight months of this year and in August alone it imported 12,673 tonnes.

According to the data issued by the US Geological Survey, Myanmar is the third largest producer of rare-earth elements in 2022 after China and US.

MYANMAR EXPECTS RESUMPTION OF NORMAL RICE EXPORT VIA BORDER TRADE IN OCTOBER



Photo: AFP

The rice commodity exchange in Muse said that they expected normal rice exports to China through the Muse border trade post in the coming October.

The border trade rice export fell recently as they had to reduce the export in the wake of rising prices in the domestic market and they hoped that they could resume the normal rice export in the coming October, the exchange sources said.

Previously about 20 truck-loads of rice and broken rice used to enter China daily through this border post and now this number is reduced to merely two trucks.

The trade figures released by the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) show that Myanmar rice and broken rice export prices are rising in export to international buyers.

The prices of rice varieties such as Emata, Ngasein/Yarkyaw and Sin Thukha being exported to

China have reached the highest mark of CNY 3,600 per tonne from the previous CNY 3,450.

The rice prices are rising in the global market after the export ban of rice by the largest exporting country India and then the prices of rice from the major producers and exporters Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar are also rising in the world market.

Myanmar rice export fell by 56% in the past four-month period.

From April to August in this financial year, Myanmar exported 380,000 tonnes of rice and earned US\$166 million from these exports, MRF trade data say.

'CASCADING CRISES' A THREAT TO LONG-TERM GLOBAL GROWTH: G20



● The US economy is in a bad state.
Photo: AFP

The G20 warned on Saturday of significant headwinds and “cascading crises” buffeting the global economy, while saying more pain could be on the way.

“Cascading crises have posed challenges to long-term growth,” said the Group of 20 leading economies, who have been meeting in the Indian capital New Delhi.

“With notable tightening in global financial conditions, which could worsen debt vulnerabilities, persistent inflation and geoeconomic tensions, the balance of risks remains tilted to the downside,” it said in a statement.

Many countries are still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic and drastic commodity price surges triggered by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, while climate change is affecting some of the poorest countries least able to cope.

“Global economic growth is below its long-run average and remains uneven,” the G20 statement said. “The uncertainty around the outlook remains high.”

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday before the G20 summit that, while “aware of the risks to global growth”, she had “been surprised by the strength of global growth and how resilient the global economy has proven to be”.

“While there are risks and some countries that have certainly been affected, overall, the global economy has been resilient,” she said.

For Yellen, the “most important negative influence is Russia’s war on Ukraine”.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

CHINESE AND THAI COMPANIES DOMINATE MYANMAR'S INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE AMID WESTERN SANCTIONS

Chinese and Thai companies have extended their reach into Myanmar, ruled by western-sanctioned military junta, across various sectors, reported the Nikkei Asia.

Since the military staged the coup in February 2021, Myanmar has attracted US\$5.4 billion in foreign direct investment up to March 2023, the Nikkei reported citing the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP Myanmar), a private think tank.

China, including Hong Kong, accounted for the majority, totaling 55 percent or US\$3 billion.

A significant joint venture between Myanmar and China involves the creation of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, a comprehensive initiative aimed at linking mainland China with the Indian Ocean through Myanmar. Chinese companies have taken the lead in constructing railways and ports as part of this ambitious project.

China's Union Resources & Engineering and Yunnan Energy Investment are leading the construction of a colossal US\$2.5 billion power plant in Ayeyarwady Region.

While China has scaled back its infrastructure-centric Belt and Road Initiative, partially due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese investments continue to exert a substantial influence in Myanmar, especially in the face of lacking foreign investments from western nations.

Thai enterprises have also stepped in to contribute to this expanding landscape.

IN FOCUS



FIFA GAME IN YANGON

Myanmar's player Aung Thu, right, and Nepal's player Ananta Tamang, left, fight for the ball during the FIFA international "A" friendly match at Thuwanna Football Stadium in Yangon on September 8.

Photo: AFP



CHRISTOPHER WIN AND A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY



● Christopher Win

“The term ‘double minority’ simply means a ‘minority within a minority,’” Christopher Win explains.

“Rakhine is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar, and Maramagyi is an even smaller group than the Rohingya! I’m from that small minority group, and I work as an ethnic rights activist.”

Christopher delves into his life here in an interview with Insight Myanmar:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/7/31/episode-186-a-double-minority>

MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

The Maramagyi community comprises approximately 10,000 people who share linguistic similarities with the Rohingya; both trace their roots to communities in Bangladesh. However, unlike the Rohingya who are predominantly Muslim, the Maramagyi practice Buddhism, like the Barua people of Bangladesh with whom they share a connection. These groups were possibly part of a migration of native Indian Buddhists fleeing the Mughal Empire as it spread

across the subcontinent in the 16th century. It is noteworthy that two highly revered 20th century vipassana meditation masters, Anagakira Munindra and Dipa Ma, are both of Burua ethnicity.

DISCRIMINATION

Regrettably, the Maramagyi community in Myanmar has endured significant discrimination throughout the years at the hands of the larger Rakhine and Rohingya communities, including intimidation and even violence which has resulted in forced displacement. But not only has the Burmese state not intervened on their behalf, it has imposed its own oppressive measures on the community. For example, it limits the educational opportunities open to the Maramagyi, and bans them outright from entering fields like medicine and engineering. And if this wasn’t enough, the government also subjects them to severe travel restrictions, permitting them to venture outside their region for just 45 days per year. As Christopher points out, just this restriction, itself, limits members of his community from not only attending any school, but also in their work opportunities, and even their ability

to receive extended medical treatment.

BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Christopher recalls being bullied by non-Maramgyi peers, and even physically harassed by teachers at school. Even worse, though his parents are both citizens with national registration cards, Christopher has been denied citizenship himself, making his legal status precarious. He remembers how his father was called a “kala,” a derogatory term that Burmese typically use when referring to Indian Muslims. And when he’s traveled by bus, police at checkpoints have often forced him to exit and demanded that he recite Buddhist prayers as a kind of proof that he wasn’t Muslim.

HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

Christopher had already been involved in activism several years before the coup. He began by documenting human rights violations in Rakhine state, collaborating with human rights organizations, including the UN Human Rights Office.

In this way, he sees himself as an outlier in his small community. “Maramgyi people have this strong inferiority in their mind,” he acknowledges. “They think that standing up against any ruling group is very much like a crime, because they have seen those sort of atrocities for many decades.”

Fear of the potential risks and repercussions of engaging in activist work have significantly repressed the possibility of more widespread organizing within the Maramgyi community. “I think it will take time to heal their inferiority. So far, we don’t have any resistance groups, and they are very afraid.”

Check out the podcast interview with Christopher Win at Insight Myanmar: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/7/31/episode-186-a-double-minority>



● Christopher Win



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