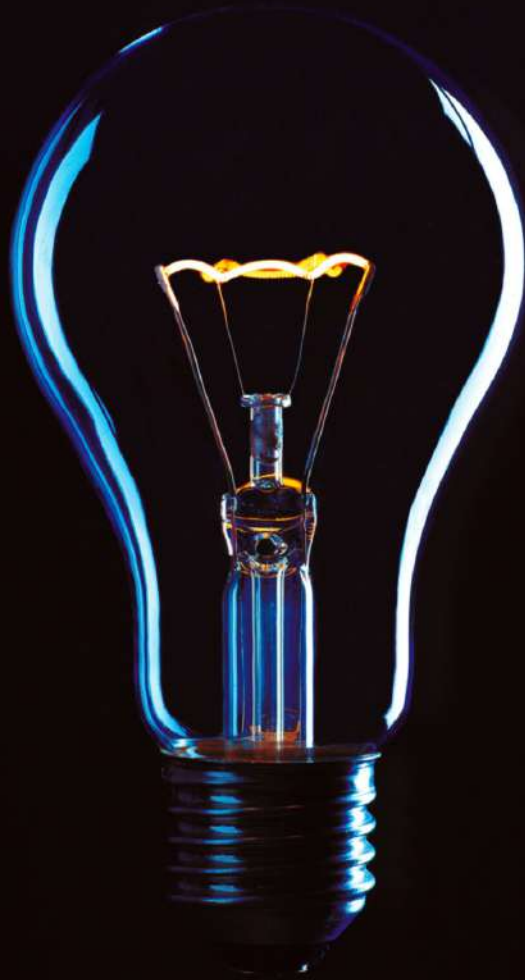


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LIGHTS OUT?

**By 2030, 50% of Myanmar's
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CATCH-22 FOR ROHINGYA CAUGHT UP IN MYANMAR CITIZENSHIP DILEMMA

The figures are sketchy but according to a local media report several dozen Muslim Rohingya women are caught up in a Catch-22 situation in Pathein Prison. Their circumstances provide a window on the dire circumstances for Rohingya in a country that does not recognize them as citizens.

The Arakan Express News recently reported that a large number of Rohingya women imprisoned under immigration laws in Pathein Prison in Pathein Township, Irrawaddy Region, were granted amnesty on 1 August 2023 under the state amnesty announced by the coup military council on that date. However, the Prison Department did not release them because they did not have any identification cards, so they continued to keep them locked up despite the amnesty, saying that they would only be released when officials from the relevant township came to call them, sources close to the women told the news service.

This is a crisis two years in the making. The Rohingya women were among 100 men, women and children who were arrested two years ago in Labutta Township, Ayeyarwady Division, and taken to Pathein Prison two weeks later. The Rohingya children were reportedly separated from their parents and sent to Insein Youth detention center. Some of the Rohingya people who were arrested in early August this year were released under the amnesty, but they were kept in Pathein Prison because they had no place to live.

As the report says, the relevant immigration officials have not yet come to call. The women

are having trouble living and their family members are also worried. The family members have appealed to the authorities to bring the women home as soon as possible and allow them to reunite with their families.

“I heard they were released on amnesty. But they still can’t go home. I heard that they would release them only if the immigration officials from this side came to call them,” a family member said. “Immigration on this side has not been called yet, so they are in trouble over there. In prison, there is only one piece of clothing, so the women have to live with that piece of clothing, even if their health is not good. Family members are also very worried,” said a person close to the family of a woman who was granted amnesty but who remains stranded in Pathein.

The news service claims they could get a response from the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the matter.

This sad tale reflects the difficult situation for Rohingya in Myanmar and ought to ring alarm bells for those eager to see Rohingya go home – whether from the refugee camps in Bangladesh or the IDP camps in Rakhine. The Myanmar junta remains deaf to the call for citizenship for the Rohingya minority. Until this issue is resolved, Rohingya will get caught in a no-mans land if they try to extricate themselves from the “prison” the authorities seek to lock them up in.

The Rohingya women locked in Pathein Prison highlight the unjust policy for Rohingya people.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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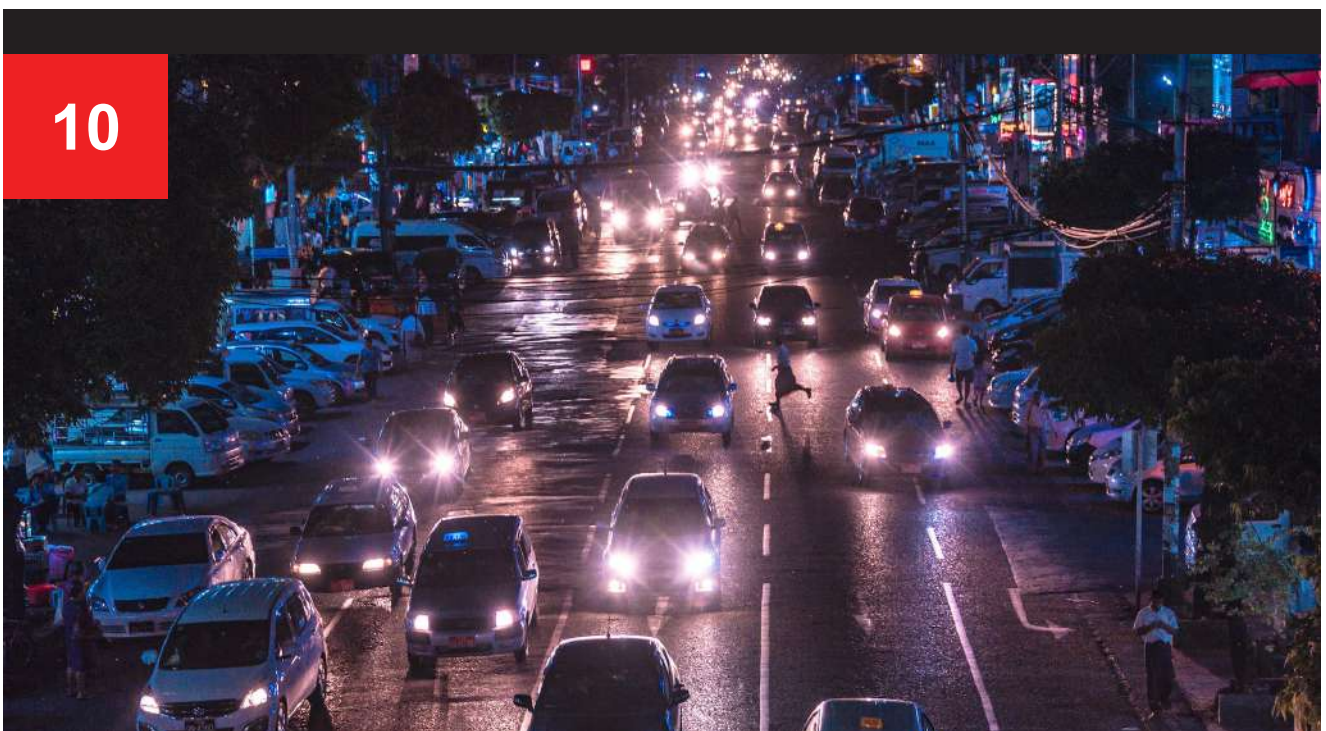
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Cover photo by Alessandro Bianci

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MYANMAR MIGRANTS CRY FOUL

Burmese migrant labourers with photographs of coup ousted detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi shout slogans during a protest against Myanmar's military junta's remittance order, at the United Nations building in Bangkok, Thailand, 24 September. A group of Myanmar migrant labourers working in Thailand held a protest against the Myanmar military junta following its orders forcing migrant workers abroad to remit at least 25 percent of their foreign currency income through the country's official banking channels, while those who do not comply will be banned from working abroad for three years.

Photo: EPA

IN FOCUS



JUNTA ATTACKS TNLA IN MANDALAY REGION'S MOGOK TOWNSHIP

Junta soldiers attacked soldiers from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) stationed near Konesan Village, in Mandalay Region's Mogok Township on 17 September.

There was fierce fighting between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. according to the TNLA. At around 10:00 a.m. the junta started attacking the area with airstrikes and artillery.

There has been fighting between the TNLA and junta troops in Mogok since 10 September during which the junta has launched airstrikes in Mogok Township and the surrounding villages.

A resident of Mogok Town said: "The Military Council conducted airstrikes in the vicinity of villages

outside the township. We are concerned that they may target the town of Mogok. People are frightened, and very few are willing to venture outside now. We only go out if absolutely necessary."

There are no official casualty numbers from the fighting.

The junta troops involved in the 17 September attack on the TNLA were from Light Infantry Division 44, Light Infantry Battalion 102, Light Infantry Battalion 104, and Infantry Battalion 148, according to the TNLA.

It also said that since the last week in July, the TNLA has had 43 battles with the junta army.

CHINA TO HELP MYANMAR JUNTA INTRODUCE BIOMETRIC ID CARDS

The Myanmar junta is seeking China's help in implementing a new electronic identity card (eID) that will contain the holder's biometric information.

China -- a major ally and arms supplier for the junta -- operates a sprawling nationwide surveillance network that collects huge amounts of data from its citizens, ostensibly for security purposes.

Following discussions in China earlier this week, between the junta's Union Minister for Immigration and Population, U Myint Kyaing, and the Chinese Deputy Minister of the National Immigration Agency (NIA) the two countries agreed to cooperate on the eID system and immigration, according to the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

The eID will collect "biographic data and the biometric data of citizens aged 10 years and above", according to state media.

China has a lot of experience with such technology and uses it in an extensive, countrywide surveillance system that monitors its citizens and has been extensively criticised.

The junta wants to bring in eID cards as part of its planned nationwide census, which is supposed to take place in 2024, with a trial due to take place this October.

During the discussions, U Myint Kyaing briefed Chinese officials on October's trial census ahead of next year's national census and asked for "China's cooperation in implementing the eID system", according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

The junta has claimed that it needs to hold a census before it can hold an election, which it claims it will do in 2025.

Critics say the junta will use the census to step up monitoring of opponents of its coup, including thousands of civil servants, doctors and teachers who have not returned to work in protest.

The United States has said any elections under the junta would be a "sham", while analysts say polls would be targeted by the military's opponents and spark further bloodshed.

SEVEN PDF FIGHTERS KILLED IN PALAW TOWNSHIP, TANINTHARYI REGIO

Seven members of People's Defence Forces (PDFs) have been killed and a further six are missing in ongoing fighting that started on 14 September near Myadaung Village, in Lakku Village Tract in Tanintharyi Region's Palaw Township.

Ko Arnold, a representative of Myeik District Battalion 1, one of the PDFs involved in the fighting, said: "Because the fighting situation remains uncertain, preliminary reports indicate that seven resistance soldiers lost their lives, with six of them currently missing, we are also investigation the number of casualties and damage caused during the battles."

He also said that the PDF soldiers suffered such high casualty numbers because they were likely attacked when they had little or no ammunition.

Five junta soldiers and five civilians have also been killed in the fighting which was still ongoing on 18 September, at the time of recording. 20 houses were also set on fire during the fighting.

The fighting has forced people to flee from villages in Lakku Village Tract, including the villages of Lakku, Mhawkyang, Pitat, Tol, and Myadaung.

A displaced man who has fled from Lakku Village Tract said: "These villages have become largely vacant, as those who can afford it are relocating to urban areas. Meanwhile, individuals with financial challenges are choosing to stay in the villages."

AT LEAST 26 JUNTA SOLDIERS KILLED IN SAGAING TOWNSHIP FIGHTING

More than 20 junta soldiers and two members of local defence forces were killed in fighting at Tegyi Village in Sagaing Township at around 09:00 a.m. on 18 September.

The incident was reported by Galonmin People's Defense Force (PDF) which said it was one in a series of skirmishes in Sagaing Township that had started on 14 September and were ongoing at the time of reporting, 20 September.

A resident of Sagaing Township said: "The military situation remains tense in both the western and eastern parts of Sagaing Township, with Military Council soldiers stationed near Ngahtatgyi Pagoda still raiding the nearby villages. There are occasional sounds of artillery firing, causing people to be afraid to venture outside."

Galonmin PDF also recorded the following skirmishes in Sagaing Township:

On 15 September, one junta soldier was killed when Galonmin PDF launched a mine attack on a junta military column marching west of Sagaing Township.

On 16 September at about 3:50 a.m. five junta soldiers were killed and many others were injured when Galonmin PDF attacked a junta unit stationed near Ngahtatgyi Pagoda in Sagaing Township.

There have also been reports of arbitrary arrests in Sagaing Township. In one incident, 10 people sitting in a teashop near Ngahtatgyi Pagoda were detained on 18 September.

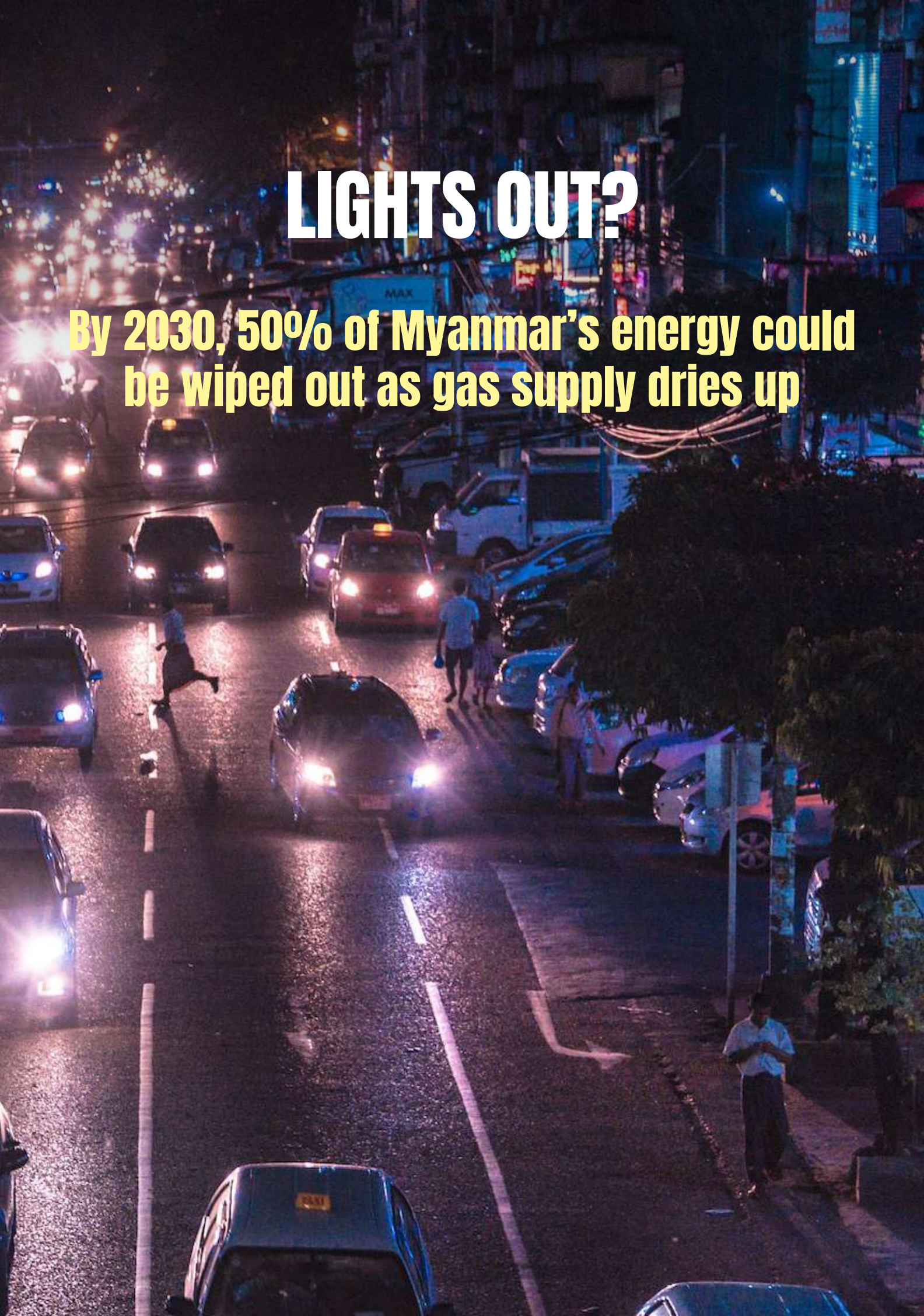
The fighting in Sagaing Township has displaced over 3,000 people in the villages of Thalunhpyu, Nyaungkone, Thapyu, Naypukone, Tegyi, and Thapyaypin.



Fears are being voiced that Myanmar is about to plunge further into the energy crisis. Photo: Zuyet Awarmatik

LIGHTS OUT?

By 2030, 50% of Myanmar's energy could be wiped out as gas supply dries up



Myanmar's energy shortfall is probably the last thing on people's minds at the moment, as the junta-driven conflict against the people worsens. But a foreign energy expert has just issued a dire warning, so shocking it is hard to take on board.

Guillaume de Langre, who worked for several years in Naypyidaw as an adviser to the Myanmar Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MOEE) told Insight Myanmar in a recent podcast that half of Myanmar's electricity could evaporate by 2030. And that is in a country that is only currently supporting half of the country's power needs and where black-outs are the depressing norm.

Just do the maths. It's not hard. Decades of military regimes, including the current illegal junta, have set the Golden Land up for a serious fall.

Without serious energy development over the next seven years, only 25 per cent or so of the country will be left with power by 2030 to 2032.

That in a nutshell is expert de Langre's surprising claim.

BEHIND THE TIMES

Economists have long been warning that Myanmar's energy infrastructure has been subject to serious challenges as it struggled to get out of the Stone Age and roll out in the modern-day world. Coal, gas, hydropower and some wind and solar provide a mismatch for Myanmar that at most powers 50% of the country currently. On a practical level, this is backed by diesel generators sitting outside factories, hotels, and shopping malls.

Energy expert de Langre says that in contrast to Myanmar, other countries in the Southeast Asian region have not been sitting on their laurels. Vietnam, for example, has pushed ahead with solar power and wind turbines and is not regularly plunged into the dark, as so often happens in various areas of Myanmar, including the commercial capital Yangon.



Myanmar police check damaged electricity pylon. Some electrical infrastructure is under attack by the resistance forces. Photo: Insight Myanmar



In less than a decade, Myanmar could face a serious energy crisis with close to three-quarters of the country without electrical power. Photo: Insight Myanmar

And it is not just the threat of being plunged into darkness. The hot season can become unbearable when the power is down for hours, or even as long as one or two days in parts of the country.

But there is a serious threat – until now unspoken - staring the Myanmar people in the face.

“Most of what was expected, unfortunately, about a year and a half ago, has happened in the energy sector. Myanmar is in a deep energy crisis! In fact, there are multiple energy crises now overlapping each other,” de Langre told Insight Myanmar.

Expert de Langre raised some of these issues with Insight Myanmar in a podcast last year.

Now he is back with an urgent call – Myanmar looks set to go back in time.

NEGATIVE OUTLOOK

The negative outlook he delivers emphasizes two important points: one illustrates how ill-suited the present junta has been to meet the country's needs

since assuming power in a coup in 2021; the other highlights how the current, difficult situation is also partly due to many years of mismanagement and neglect under past military regimes. This crisis is six decades or so in the making.

De Langre explains that the implications of failing to resolve the energy crisis will ultimately hit all sectors, from normal family homes to large factories, and from small businesses to schools to hospitals. He adds that power cuts are already occurring without warning, and which last for days, meaning everything from food to vaccines spoil, while businesses have to close, and surgeries are postponed.

Acknowledging that there were many problems even under the National League for Democracy-led government, de Langre points out that only 50% of Burmese had any kind of electricity access, and even those who did might only enjoy a few hours a day. He says, “there was a sense of, ‘Things are going to get better. We are on this rising trajectory.’”

NO HOPE SHORT-TERM

But there is now no hope that anything will get better anytime soon. In a recent survey, de Langre found that a full 30% of small business owners claimed the power scarcity is a direct threat to their livelihood.

Unfortunately, the bad news doesn't stop there. As much as 50% of the power grid is fueled by gas that is produced within Myanmar... but which is expected to run out by 2030 or 2032.

"So let me simplify that and make it clear," he says. "That means that the fuel that is used to produce 50% of the electricity in Myanmar is going to be extinct! It's not being replaced."

That is where Myanmar could go backwards, with only enough power for about 25% of the country if this assessment proves true.

BIG QUESTION

This raises uncomfortable questions at a time when the Myanmar people are struggling with a bitter conflict, a sinking economy, and a sense of hopelessness.

As de Langre notes, how do you run a country and keep the economy ticking over when within a few years, half the existing power supply disappears?

That 25% figure looms large.

Do you replace it with something else? Do you replace it with other gas resources? Do you import gas from abroad in the form of liquefied natural gas? Do you start producing more gas domestically? Or do you replace that gas power generation with other forms of power such as solar, wind or hydropower?

There is no easy answer, and de Langre highlights several contributing factors as to why: exploring new gas fields takes both time and investment, neither of which the regime has at its disposal; importing liquefied gas requires special terminals to be constructed, and although junta leader Min Aung Hlaing approved these, no progress has yet been made; previous plans for building massive power plants, along with laying out a number of solar panels, fell through once investor confidence plummeted following the coup.

What is more, even amid the imminent scarcity their own country is facing, the military continues to export gas to China and Thailand, and de Langre

doesn't expect them to stop anytime soon given the political advantages that brings the junta.

De Langre claims most of this crisis is the result of the coup, though it has its roots in decades of mismanagement and poor policies and decisions that weren't made at the right time.

GREEN ENERGY?

While there are a number of steps the Myanmar junta could take to begin to rectify the problem, "based on the history of the development of electricity and energy, in general in Myanmar, we can mostly deduct that the military sees energy as a source of rents, as a source of foreign currency to fund itself to buy weapons to fund its cronies and so on and so forth, but has little interest in developing energy in terms of what most governments do, which is develop energy to produce development to improve the life of most people, that is not part of the agenda," says De Langre.

In a perfect world, one that imagines a stability that Myanmar currently doesn't enjoy, de Langre would suggest prioritizing solar tenders to attract foreign investment, combining this with wind energy in regions like Rakhine State and the Delta. However, he adds that the intermittent nature of solar power requires additional energy strategies, such as storage and hydro-electricity, to ensure a constant power supply. In other words, he advocates a rapid transition to solar and wind energy while also accounting for long-term energy diversification.

Diversification is important as countries cannot go 100% green and solar and wind power are not sufficient enough to power a whole country, and the solar and wind power infrastructure does not last long, and has to be replaced. Panels and wind turbines degrade quite quickly.

CRISIS SHORT-TERM

"Getting out of this crisis is not going to be a short-term issue. It's going to require years and years of good policy planning, smart policy planning, and rebuilding all of that lost trust with investors, both Burmese investors and foreign investors, rebuilding that trust, and that will take time."

Turning back to the cold reality of the present, de Langre is concerned about what he sees coming. He presents one scenario in which the country's elec-

tricity supply progressively declines, and the regime begins to prioritize vital areas such as the capital, military bases, industrial centers, and certain cities, while vast regions experience a significant reduction in power.

He does think, however, that regional investors could still be attracted if the military can guarantee any degree of stability, which would involve a dramatic - and unlikely - pivot by the current military leaders to permit at least some degree of civil liberties, combined with gradual economic freedoms.

While this may just be a fantasy for present-day Myanmar, this is exactly what has been occurring in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries for years: they have also been run mostly by military dictatorships, yet did not lose sight of their development needs.

For example, de Langre points out that there was more solar and wind capacity added in Vietnam in 2021 than the combined power grid of Myanmar in its entire history! “And when you look at road development, it is the same. When you look at access to clean water, it is the same, that gap with its neighbours is astounding!”

At this stage, the “tragedy of Myanmar”, as de Langre terms it, looks set to be a hard nut to crack.

Just years away lies the specter of lights out for many of the people of Myanmar.

The full podcast can be heard here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/8/30/episode-187-a-light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel>



NGO WELCOMES UN REJECTION OF MYANMAR JUNTA CREDENTIALS, DEMOCRATIC GOVT RETAINS SEAT



Myanmar UN Envoy Kyaw Moe Tun

The Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) welcomes the decision by the UN's Credentials Committee to reject the credentials of the military regime and leave the democratic ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, in his seat in the United Nations.

Writing on 21 September, Chris Gunness, director of MAP, notes that the nine-member committee's decision in favour of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) is all the more remarkable, as Russia and China, both close allies of the junta, are committee members.

Since the failed military coup in February 2021, MAP has advocated with key delegations in New York to ensure that the junta is not recognized. We appeal to other organs of the UN, such as the Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court, to allow the NUG to represent Myanmar, Mr Gunness says in the statement.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, over four thousand people have been killed since February 2021 and nearly 25,000 detained. The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) says in its latest report that it has obtained evidence of mass executions of civilians and mass arson attacks and aerial bombardments of civilian property. The IIMM in its latest report says it has evidence that the military has destroyed entire villages. The UN estimates that nearly two million people have been displaced and according to the World Bank, a quarter of the country's population has slipped below the poverty line.

MYANMAR'S POLITICAL SITUATION IS 'INTERNAL ISSUE', SAYS INCOMING THAI FOREIGN MINISTER



Photo: AFP

The political situation in Myanmar is an “internal issue” and should be addressed using its own law and the mechanisms of ASEAN, said Thailand’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Panpree Phathithanukorn on 14 September.

The Prachathai English, Thailand’s independent online newspaper, reported, quoting the foreign minister, that the role of ASEAN in the region cannot be overlooked, and the Thai government remains committed to abiding by the 5-Point Consensus mechanism on Myanmar adopted to end violence and conflict in the neighbouring country.

Panpree also said that Myanmar needs to manage its internal matters, including conflict, the democratic process, and matters related to Aung San Suu Kyi, but Thailand will engage in discussions with ASEAN to help facilitate peace efforts.

He emphasized that the two neighbouring countries, however, need to engage in formal and informal discussions to address issues that have directly affected Thailand, such as drugs and illegal border

crossings.

ASEAN’s mechanism on the 5-Point Consensus was adopted at a summit in Jakarta, Indonesia on 24 April 2021, among nine leaders of ASEAN member countries and Myanmar’s coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, with the agreement on an immediate end to violence, dialogue among all parties, appointment of ASEAN’s special envoy for mediation of dialogue, provision of ASEAN humanitarian aid, and a visit by the special envoy to meet all parties in the conflict.

However, the Myanmar military chief has defied each point, and continued a brutal nationwide crackdown.

MYANMAR JUNTA MINISTER PUSHES NGOS, INGOs FOR REGISTRATION

Local and international organizations conducting humanitarian work in Myanmar need to register at the relevant government departments, according to reports in the state-owned media.

Home Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Yar Pyae said during a workshop in Naypyidaw on 14 September that proper registration of NGOs-INGOs is required for their operations to be in legal compliance.

“There are potential misuse of humanitarian organizations for illegal activities, and that INGOs and NGOs need to operate within the bounds of the law during their aid activities,” said the junta minister, referring to the Mutual Evaluations Report published by the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), an inter-governmental organization, comprised of 42 members of jurisdictions.

The report of UN human rights office (OHCHR) in June said that Myanmar’s military is killing civilians, destroying food and homes, and keeping the most vulnerable from receiving lifesaving aid.

James Rodehaver, the chief of OHCHR’s Myanmar team explained in the report that since the February 2021 coup, the regime have been instilling

a “climate of fear” to oppress the civilian population, restricting aid access and using “all means” at their disposal to clamp down on civil society.

Ravina Shamdasani, OHCHR Spokesperson, offered a briefing in Geneva on the comprehensive human rights update for Myanmar claiming that intentional obstruction or denial of humanitarian assistance may amount to serious violations of international law.

“The military has operated as if those providing aid are helping those opposed to their rule, rather than respecting their need for protection and facilitating their access and assistance to the civilian population in a time of crisis,” she said.

Shamdasani added that an estimated 1.5 million people have been internally displaced, and approximately 60,000 civilian structures have reportedly been burnt or destroyed, with civilian casualties of at least 3,452 at the hands of the military and its affiliates.

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DETERIORATING WORKERS' RIGHTS IN MYANMAR HIGHLIGHT OVERTIME PAY, UNION SUPPRESSION

In Myanmar a concerning trend has emerged as workers' rights continue to erode. Every day, workers in the country confront a multitude of rights violations, and in recent months, there have been cases where they are compelled to work late into the night without receiving the overtime pay they deserve.

Workers at the Lian Cheng (Myanmar) Garment Factory in Hlaing Tharyar Township Industrial Zone (2), Yangon Region, did not always get their day-offs and were compelled to work late into the night without receiving overtime pay, Moe Sandar Myint,

Chairperson of the Federation of General Workers Myanmar (FGWM), told Mizzima, citing the workers.

"For a worker earning a daily wage of 4,800 Kyat, the overtime pay for one hour amounts to 1,200 Kyat. [Note: US\$1= 3,300 Kyat; the exchange rate on September 16]. Some factories may adjust the daily wage, which subsequently affects the overtime rate. After eight hours of work, overtime is only allowed for a maximum of 3 hours a day. But the workers had to work the entire night, and some had to work till midnight. Some workers are even required to work their



Yangon workers. Photo: EPA

days off. Even when employees do work overtime, they often do not receive their full overtime pay, and there are instances where some workers receive no overtime pay,” she said.

Workers at the factory reportedly wished to protest against these workers’ rights violations. However, their voices remained stifled due to the prevailing atmosphere of fear under the military junta in Myanmar. The incidence of labour rights violations in Myanmar’s factories has been increasing, posing a significant challenge for the FGWM to address effectively, as they’ve done in the past, Moe Sandar Myint said.

The Lian Cheng (Myanmar) Garment Factory is Chinese-owned and employs about 1,000 workers.

Factory workers in Myanmar have faced per-

sistent violations of their rights since the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and many assert that the military coup has only exacerbated their situation. Throughout the pandemic, they have experienced dwindling wages and witnessed a trend where full-time workers are being replaced with day laborers under the guise of workforce reduction, said Moe Sandar Myint.

“It is no longer possible to deal with labour rights issues in the country. Many workers are suffering. Workers are being unfairly forced and exploited by employers who take advantage of political crises. Currently, labour rights violations are at the highest level in Myanmar’s workplaces,” she said.

Lian Cheng factory is adhering to the minimum daily wage rate of 4,800 Kyat, a figure that has remained unchanged since 2018. However, in some instances, workers in other factories are subjected to even lower daily wages, as low as 3,600 Kyat. In such cases, if workers dare to protest, the junta responds with threats and arrests.

In Myanmar, where the cost of living is on the rise, the current minimum daily wage of 4,800 Kyat falls significantly short of meeting basic needs. However, workers are hesitant to voice their concerns due to the prevailing fear of reprisals from the junta. Despite the news media’s repeated coverage and exposure of factory labour rights violations, authorities still fail to take action against the factories.

Myanmar’s Minimum Wage Law was established on March 22, 2013. In 2015, the minimum wage was initially set at 3,600 Kyat for an 8-hour working day. Subsequently, in 2018, the rate was increased to 4,800 Kyat.

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, employers have reportedly been disregarding workers’ rights, subjecting them to oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, the violation of freedom of association is causing the decline of trade unions’ influence and effectiveness.



EU REPRESENTATIVE ON ASEAN TO WORK WITH MYANMAR DEMOCRATIC FORCES



The European Parliament will appoint its own representative to the ASEAN region, who will especially work on Myanmar.

Heidi Hautala, Vice-President of the European Parliament, said in a video message to the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) online ceremony of International Day of Democracy 2023 on 15 September, that it was important to have a strong connection between the European Parliament and Myanmar's democratic forces such as CRPH and National Unity Government (NUG).

She also said in the message that the European Parliament will send their representative to Jakarta, Indonesia, in the coming months and he will work on ASEAN and especially on Myanmar to create links with the CRPH to keep in touch between the two parliamentary bodies.

"The European Union has been strong supporter of the democratic forces and the European Parliament has called for restoration of democracy in Myanmar," she said. "I have to say that the European Union should direct more financial and capacity building support to your democratic forces. So, this is something we are working on permanently."

In her video message, Ms Hautala also praised the great resilience of the people of Myanmar in fighting for democracy and human rights, and condemned the brutal attacks of junta.

"The military junta has committed atrocities beyond all limits and that has to be put on trial. The

international community should do much more and not forget Myanmar amidst other crises," she said.

She also urged ASEAN to show greater support for the people of Myanmar and this has to include continuity with the Laos presidency from the Indonesian presidency, and suggested that ASEAN needs to have a permanent special envoy on Myanmar.

The European Parliament vice-president added, "The international community also has to continue and up its support and increase pressure towards the military junta to step down from power. Indeed, the military has to be sent back to the barracks. They should have no space in political structures in the future. Hopefully, this will be federal and inclusive Myanmar."

The NUG will also have a representative in Brussels, and there is a great potential to improve the cooperation between the CRPH and Myanmar's other democratic forces with all the EU institutions.

The NUG has established representative offices in France, the UK and the Czech Republic, in their efforts to support the voice of a democratic Myanmar.

Dr Zaw Wai Soe, Union Minister for Health and Education visited the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, in late May, and held meetings with officials of the European External Action Services, the bloc's foreign and defense ministry, as well as senior politicians from the EU.

Analysts remarked that the international community has not formally accepted the NUG as Myanmar's government, but these meetings are important for increasing its legitimacy abroad.

EMERGENCE OF CALL CENTRE SCAMS IN YANGON RAISES CONCERNS



Photo: Harish Shivaraman

In the busy centre of Yangon, some illegal activities are happening. These activities are related to call centre scams, which were previously more common in the lawless border areas of Myanmar. But now, a report by RFA Burmese shows that these scams have also set up in Yangon.

Unlike the well-known illegal activities in areas like Shwe Kokko, which are allegedly controlled by Chinese gangsters near the Thai border in Mae Sot, these centre in Yangon looked quite different. In Yangon, they work like regular businesses and don't subject their employees to the usual mistreatment, according to RFA.

Operators in Yangon are taking advantage of cheap office spaces and the large number of educated, jobless residents.

According to RFA, getting hired is quick and easy. Young people in Yangon, attracted by online sales job ads, could land a job in just a few minutes by answering a few questions on a messaging app.

These fresh employees were directed to MMB Tower, a contemporary office complex situated in the centre of Yangon. Once there, they joined a diverse group of people from Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, China, and Thailand, according to RFA.

By October 2022, the fifth floor of the MMB Tower, once used by Yangon Airways, was renovated and became the base for a company called Win Win International E-Commerce, which started advertising job positions on social media platforms.

Once onboard, workers were given access to various phoney social media profiles. They used these profiles to reach out to people who didn't suspect anything, engaging them in romance and financial scams.

With a monthly salary listed at 450,000 Kyat [US\$220], the offer was attractive in a country where the minimum daily wage barely scraped above 4,800 Kyat.

An investigation by RFA uncovered a vast network of cyber scams, including recruiters operating in prominent places like Junction City in the commercial capital.

In related news, United Wa State Army (UWSA), a prominent ethnic militia in Myanmar, has arrested more than 1,200 Chinese nationals believed to be engaged in online scams. These arrests occurred in the Wa Self-Administered Division during raids conducted in early September.

MYANMAR JUNTA 'READY TO START RESETTLEMENT' PROCESS IN RAKHINE: JUNTA MEDIA



Rohingya refugees in a camp in Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

The Myanmar junta says it is ready to start the resettlement process for people displaced from Rakhine State.

In a meeting held last week in Naypyidaw, reported on 15 September by the junta media, the Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung said that the chairman of the work coordination committee led international diplomats including those from the Chinese Embassy on visits to Rakhine State two times to observe preparations for the pilot project of repatriation of displaced persons under the bilateral agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

While the report does not use the word Rohingya it is assumed the meeting was referring to Rohingya and Hindu refugees currently living in camps in Bangladesh, following the Myanmar military crackdown in 2017 that drove an exodus of over 700,000 people.

Union Minister Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung, who is also in the capacity of Chairman of the Rakhine State Stability, Peace and Development Work Coordination Committee, delivered a speech last week at the meeting of the committee at the Ministry of Border Affairs in Naypyidaw.

Myanmar is ready to start reception and resettlement of displaced persons at any time, he said, add-

ing that development undertakings in the state have achieved success to some extent.

Vice-Chair 1 Union Minister at the Union Government Office 2 Ko Ko Hlaing and Vice-Chair 2 Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Soe Win discussed the progress of Rakhine State in all aspects, verifying reception of displaced persons, explaining progress in resettlement measures to the diplomats, humanitarian aid for displaced persons, functions of reception centres and preparations to accept displaced persons, according to the junta media report.

The meeting also focused on the verification of population, international cooperation, preparations to accept those persons, socioeconomic development and security measures.

Myanmar analysts note that the repatriation process has been troubled, given plans to place Rohingya returnees in new settlements have been met with opposition, given calls by the refugees to return to their original places of residence and that the plan does not envisage the granting of Myanmar citizenship.

CSOS PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT TO DISPLACED CHILDREN IN MAGWAY REGION'S YAW DISTRICT



Photo: AFP

Civil society organisations (CSOs) Save for Yaw and ANTS have joined forces to provide educational support to over 26,000 internally displaced children in the Yaw area.

The Yaw area is in Gangaw District, a thin strip of Magway Region with Chin State to the east and Sagaing Region to the west. It consists of the townships of Gangaw, Htilin, Saw, Kyaukhtu, Kyaw, and Laungshal and over 300 villages.

Ma Lili from ANTS (fund-raising organization) said, “Our objective is to provide assistance for the education of IDP children in the Yaw area, including essential items such as writing equipment, school textbooks, accommodations, and the necessary number of teachers.”

Yaw and ANTS have developed a two-pronged plan. Firstly, they are donating writing equipment, textbooks, and teaching materials to schools in need across the Yaw area. Secondly, they are identifying which schools in each township require assistance and giving them financial assistance so that they can buy resources and afford to employ a sufficient number of teachers for a year.

“Most of the children in the villages, excluding urban areas, are attending schools under the National Unity Government (NUG). However, due to teacher shortages and other challenges, the education system has not fully recovered since the military coup. Addi-

tionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the junta’s violent actions have severely impacted the area, making the situation even more precarious”, said Ko Yaw, a representative of Save for Yaw.

Save for Yaw and ANTS are also focusing on providing classroom education to displaced people in the Yaw area. They plan to offer a series of courses to enhance their skills and knowledge.

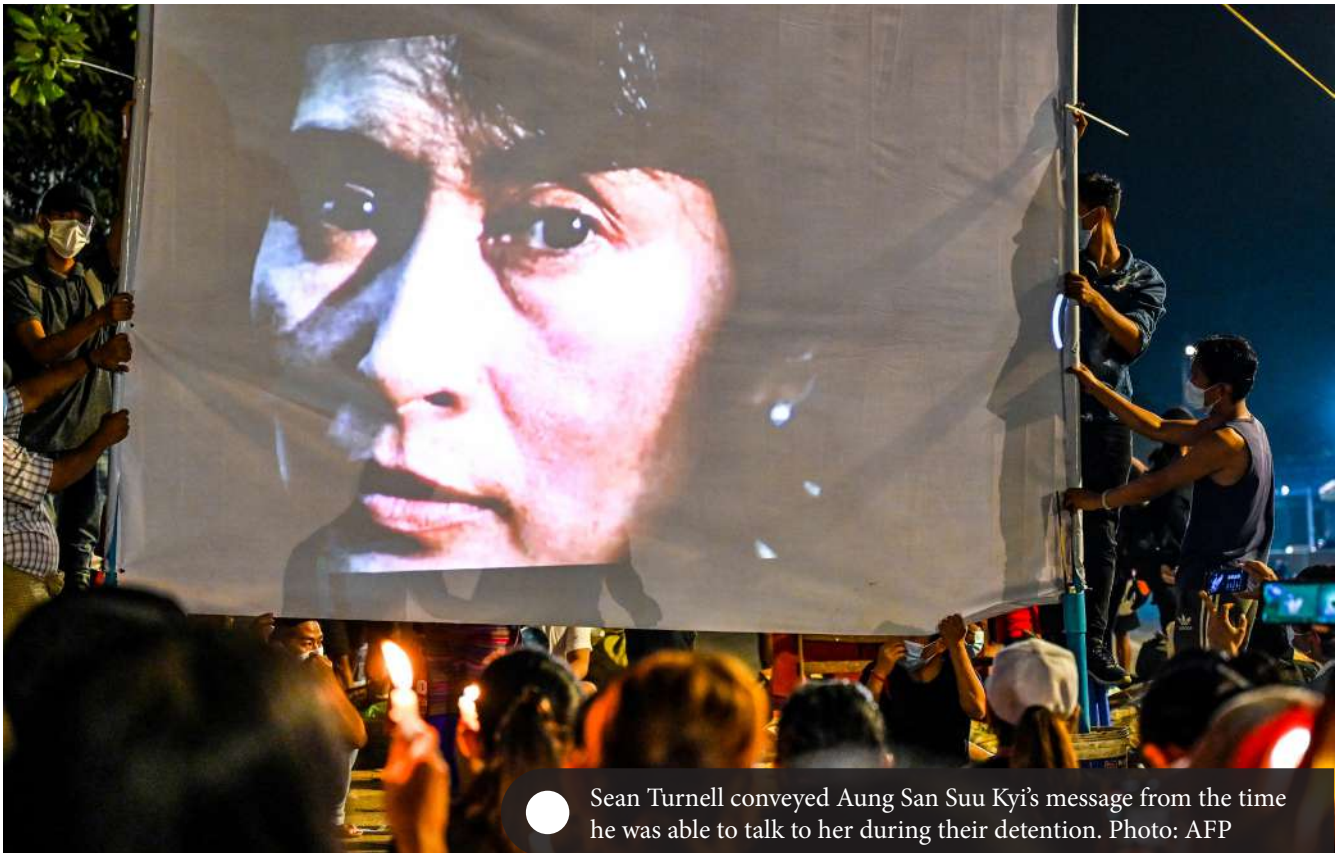
Unfortunately, because the junta has cut internet access in the Yaw area, students cannot be taught online and the only educational option is in-person teaching.

Save for Yaw and ANTS are currently also collaborating on a fundraising campaign for the project. They are aiming to raise 50 million kyats a month to support the educational needs of children in the Yaw area.

the Yaw area is in Gangaw District, a thin strip of Magway Region with Chin State to the east and Sagaing Region to the west. It consists of the townships of Gangaw, Htilin, Saw, Kyaukhtu, Kyaw, and Laungshal and over 300 villages.

It is a strategically important area and the junta has been deploying reinforcements to the area in an effort to establish their control. To do this they have been burning down villages that have offered any support to defence forces.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO KEEP SUPPORTING MYANMAR: SEAN TURNELL



Sean Turnell conveyed Aung San Suu Kyi's message from the time he was able to talk to her during their detention. Photo: AFP

Aung San Suu Kyi has called on the international community to keep paying attention to the situation in Myanmar, according to her former economic adviser, Sean Turnell, in a recent interview with VOA.

He met every week with Aung San Suu Kyi for a year whilst they were on trial together in Naypyitaw. He said that she had a good understanding of what was happening in the outside world because she got information from him and other sources.

She had heard about the war in Ukraine. According to Mr. Turnell, she was aware that the international community's attention had drifted away from Myanmar and that the world was paying more attention to Ukraine. She understands this and thinks that it is entirely reasonable, but she also thinks similar attention should be paid to Myanmar.

Sean Turnell is an Australian economist who was formerly a policy advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi. He was arrested shortly after the 1 February 2021 coup,

on 6 February 2021. He then spent 650 days in prison before being released in an amnesty in November 2022.

During the interview, Mr Turnell also mentioned the situation in Rakhine State whilst Aung San Suu Kyi had been in power. He said that international criticism of her handling of the Rakhine situation was unwarranted.

He claimed that she was doing things in the background that people were unaware of because she could not go public with the information. She was always concerned about what the military was doing in Rakhine State and tried to identify who in the military was responsible for atrocities there. She was trying to put pressure on the military.

As evidence in Mr Turnell's trial, the junta prosecution even produced a document that set out some of the economic measures Aung San Suu Kyi's government was trying to undertake against the military to prevent the atrocities in Rakhine and other places.

KARENNI EXECUTIVE BODY APPEALS TO THAILAND TO ALLOW TEMPORARY SHELTER FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE

The Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC) appealed to Thailand to allow Karenni displaced persons to stay on Thai soil until it is safe to return, to allow humanitarian assistance for displaced persons who crossed over and live in temporary camps in the kingdom, and to allow the referral of patients to Thai hospitals.

The IEC also asked the international community to provide political and humanitarian support to Karenni State and Myanmar, to ensure justice and accountability, and to impose a global arms embargo and stop selling jet fuel to the regime.

Moreover, the Karenni executive body suggested international humanitarian donors review and shift their humanitarian aid strategy and prioritize border-base assistance for IDPs in Karenni State, to provide direct funding and or via INGOs to local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and IEC and or ERO existing structure for delivering humanitarian aid in Karenni State.

The IEC urges Karenni and the Myanmar community across the world to raise public interest and awareness of the human rights violations and IDP

situation in Karenni State, to raise funding for supporting emergency assistance and humanitarian aid, and to coordinate and collaborate with existing promises CSOs, EROs and the IEC.

The IEC asked for urgent humanitarian assistance for displaced persons in Karenni State amid the “4-cuts strategy” of the Military Council as armed conflicts are intensifying across the country.

Since the military coup in 2021, the junta carried out severe indiscriminate attacks on civilians. In Karenni State alone about 250,000 displaced persons have taken shelter in more than 200 camps in Phe Kong, Loikaw, Demoso, Shar Daw, Hprusoe, Baw Lake, Hpausoung, and Mae Set townships.

The IEC also reported over 450 civilians were killed in Karenni State after the military coup and about 2,200 buildings were destroyed.

Humanitarian needs for IDPs include the need for rice, cooking oil, salt and tarpaulins and blankets.

THAILAND URGED TO HALT CROP BURNING AFTER AIR POLLUTION SPIKE



Burning the stubble is proving highly polluting. Photo: AFP

Thailand must ban stubble burning by farmers to improve air quality, the head of a leading agricultural body said last week, after a spike in dangerous pollution left millions needing medical treatment.

The kingdom suffered dire air quality earlier in the year, with Bangkok and the northern city of Chiang Mai ranked among the most polluted cities in the world on some days in April.

Authorities urged people to stay indoors and work from home as concentrations of the most dangerous PM2.5 particles -- so tiny they can enter the bloodstream -- reached unsafe levels.

One of the leading sources of the particles is farmers torching stubble to prepare land for the next crop, with "burning season" peaking between December and April.

The head of the kingdom's top agricultural body said the practice must be halted.

"The government should ban crop-burning -- the method widely used among farmers in Thailand," said Pornsil Patcharintanakul, president of Thai Feed Mill Association (TFMA), which operates under the commerce ministry.

He urged the government of new Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to take action swiftly because of the urgency of the matter.

More than two million people sought medical treatment in Thailand this year because of problems linked to air pollution.

Pornsil, whose organisation monitors the quality of animal feed, said Thailand should follow international farming guidelines that forbid stubble-burning.

He said three years was a realistic timeframe in which to ban the practice.

His call comes as the European Union begins to enforce its "Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism" (CBAM), charging for emissions linked to the production of imported goods.

Srettha's government has said that tackling PM2.5 is one of its priorities, though it has not given details of what it plans to do.

AFP

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CHINA'S XI DECLARES BIGGEST-EVER ASIAN GAMES OPEN

Chinese President Xi Jinping opened the 19th Asian Games in a colourful ceremony in Hangzhou on Saturday, launching a two-week sporting extravaganza that boasts more athletes than the Olympics.

After being delayed by a year because of China's now-abandoned zero-Covid policy, more than 12,000 competitors from 45 nations and territories will battle it out in 40 sports.

In front of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and other visiting leaders, Xi officially opened the Games at the 80,000-capacity Hangzhou Olympic stadium, also known as "the Big Lotus".

Xi was given a rapturous reception by spectators waving mini Chinese flags.

Assad, on his first visit to ally China since the civil war erupted in Syria in 2011, stood up and applauded as his country's team entered the arena and the crowd cheered when his image flashed up on a big screen.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach was also among the dignitaries. Leaders from Cambodia, Kuwait and Nepal, among others, had all been expected to attend.

"Finally we can gather for the 19th Asian Games," Raja Randhir Singh, acting president of the Olympic Council of Asia, told the crowd to more cheers.

"The one-year postponement was unprecedented in OCA history," he added.



China has been trying to show it can put on a major event, even though their fireworks display failed to materialize. Photo: AFP

The theme of the ceremony was water and it also celebrated Hangzhou's ancient history and landscape, while giving a nod to the city's reputation as the unofficial home of China's tech industry.

A "digital torch bearer" strode into the stadium and was projected onto a large screen behind the Games cauldron at the climax.

"I feel very happy and excited," a 35-year-old woman spectator surnamed Zhang said.

"I feel it's a great honour for the city."

Jung-Woo Lee, sport policy expert at the University of Edinburgh, told AFP the Games were "China's post-pandemic soft-power exercise".

China's status as a sporting and business destination took a severe hit during the pandemic, when snap lockdowns and strict travel rules saw almost all international events cancelled in the country.

The event has been rocked by a row between New Delhi and China over three Indian martial arts fighters, with a trip to the city by India's sports minister cancelled on Friday.

China denied Indian claims that the trio had been barred from entering the country.

'OPEN TO ALL'

North Korean athletes, who like those from Taiwan were given loud cheers as they entered the ceremony, are contesting their first major international competition since the pandemic.

But the biggest cheer of all was reserved for hosts China, who are overwhelming favourites to top the medals table, with Japan and South Korea battling for second.

Games athletes will fight for medals in Olympic staples such as athletics, swimming, football, gymnastics and cycling.

ESports will make its debut as a medal event at the Games, in what is seen as a step towards inclusion in the Olympics.

There will also be regional specialities including dragon boat racing, the Chinese martial art wushu and kabaddi.

Nine sports -- among them boxing, break dancing and tennis -- will serve as Asia qualifiers for next year's Paris Olympics.

A sprinkling of world and Olympic champions adds some stardust, including India's javelin king Neeraj Chopra, Qatari high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim and Chinese swimming royalty Qin Haiyang and Zhang Yufei.

Olympic Council of Asia honorary life vice-president Wei Jizhong said having so many sporting disciplines was about giving opportunity to as many athletes as possible.

"We are open to all. This means our Games are not concentrated only for elite sportspeople," he said.

Although the Games officially opened on Saturday, sports such as football, cricket, volleyball and table tennis had already begun.

The Games will be staged at 54 venues -- 14 newly constructed -- mostly in Hangzhou but also extending to cities as far afield as Wenzhou, 300 kilometres (180 miles) south.

AFP

'REFORM OR RUPTURE' SAYS GUTERRES, CALLING FOR MULTILATERALISM TO BE REMADE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Secretary-General António Guterres on Tuesday warned the world is “becoming unhinged” and underscored the United Nations’ *raison d’être*, to resolve global crises during times of “maximum danger and minimum agreement.”

Mr. Guterres highlighted UN’s successful effort in preventing an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea as testament to its determination and effectiveness.

“When no one else could or would, UN determination got the job done,” he said

He emphasized that despite the numerous global challenges, the same spirit of determination

can guide the world forward, urging leaders to remain committed to unity, peace, human rights, and sustainable development for all.

“Let us be determined to ... come together for the common good.”

IT’S REFORM OR RUPTURE

Presenting his annual report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General stressed the need for a modernizing the multilateral system to address contemporary issues.

He pointed out that while the world has evolved, international institutions have not kept pace,



● The UN Secretary General gives his speech. Photo: UN News

potentially making them part of the problem rather than the solution.

He made it clear that there is no alternative to reform, stating “it’s reform or rupture.”

Pledge for peace

He reminded world leaders of the opening words of the UN Charter, emphasizing the pledge to “end the scourge of war”.

“When countries break those pledges, they create a world of insecurity for everyone,” he said, stressing that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has serious implications for everyone worldwide.

“We must not relent in working for peace – a just peace in line with the UN Charter and international law. And even while fighting rages, we must pursue every avenue to ease the suffering of civilians in Ukraine and beyond,” he added.



SUFFERING RISING, SUPPORT FALLING

The UN chief also drew attention to the human suffering resulting from conflicts and natural disasters worldwide, from Sudan to Haiti, and from Afghanistan to Myanmar.

“Needs are rising and funding is drying up. Our humanitarian operations are being forced to make massive cuts,” he said, urging countries to step up funding for the UN Global Humanitarian Appeal.

FOSTER EQUALITY

Mr. Guterres reiterated the UN Charter’s call for promoting social progress, connecting it with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and addressing the issue of global inequality.

Africa’s allocation of more funds for debt interest than healthcare exemplified this inequity, he stressed, stressing the need for immediate steps to advancing the SDG stimulus package of \$500 billion annually and alleviating financial burdens on developing and emerging economies.

COMBAT CLIMATE CHAOS

The UN chief further emphasized the urgency of addressing the climate chaos, which is breaking new records, “but we cannot afford the same old broken record of scapegoating and waiting for others to move first.”

He recalled the Climate Solidarity Pact, with large emitters leading emission reductions and wealthier nations supporting emerging economies.

Mr. Guterres also outlined key immediate steps, including ending fossil fuel subsidies, carbon pricing, and countries fulfilling climate financing promises.

“And to all those working, marching and championing real climate action, I want you to know: You are on the right side of history. I’m with you. I won’t give up this fight of our lives,” he said.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Mizzima

KACHIN STATE

KIA forces destroy two junta fighter jets

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) claims to have destroyed two Chengdu F-7 fighter jets at Nampong Air Force Base, using a rocket launcher, at about 7:00 am on 24 September.

The two Chinese-made Chengdu F-7 fighter jets were refueling at Nampong Air Force Base, also known as Air Force Base 503, just outside Myitkyina Town, when fighters from the KIA and the Kachin People's Defence Force (KPDF) carried out the attack with a 107mm rocket launcher.

"We launched an attack on the junta's air force base using a 107 mm rocket launcher. All four shells successfully hit our targets inside the air base, resulting in the destruction of two F-7 jet fighters. Interestingly, it was revealed that this occurred while the jet fighters were in the process of being refueled," said a frontline source from the KIA.

He also explained that the KIA and KPDF carefully observed and monitored the airbase prior to the attack.

The attack also damaged the air communication office near to the airbase, according to sources at the Northern Regional Military Command.

The junta has not made any statements regarding the attack.

The main junta airbases are located in Hmawbi, Mingalardon, Myitkyina, Taungoo, Namsang, Meiktila, Myeik, Pathein, Tada-U, and Magway Townships. Additional airbases have also been established in Nay Pyi Daw, Homalin in Sagaing Region, and Ann Town in Rakhine State.



RESISTANCE FACTION DEPLOYS WEAPONIZED DRONE TO STRIKE JUNTA AIR BASE, SIGNALING TACTICAL SHIFT IN MYANMAR CONFLICT

The Iron Tiger Battalion, a faction within the Northern Thandaung Defense Force (NTDF), asserted that it employed an improvised drone to drop bombs on a junta air base located in Nay Pyi Taw on September 15, according to local news outlets.

The Iron Tiger Battalion, in conjunction with its allied drone unit Lethal Prop, used a makeshift remote-controlled winged drone to drop two bombs, specifically targeting the aircraft hangars at the Aye Lar military base near Nay Pyi Taw International Airport.

Aerial footage made public by the resistance group displays the remote-controlled drone hovering above the designated target base before dropping the bombs.

Throughout this year, the NTDF has consistently directed its efforts towards the Aye Lar military base. In mid-April, the base came under fire from a rocket barrage launched by the NTDF.

In Myanmar, a coup took place on February 1, 2021, resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government. This event sparked nationwide anti-junta protests, but even peaceful protesters were met with violence as the junta resorted to force. Since then, a robust armed resistance movement has emerged in Myanmar.

The incorporation of drones into the strategies of resistance groups represents a notable tactical transformation. By repurposing readily accessible and cost-effective commercial drones into weapons and deploying them against junta entities, these groups have altered the dynamics of conflict.

Although the resistance forces do not possess the same level of power as the junta in terms of traditional fixed-wing aircraft, their utilization of weaponized drones has, to some degree, balanced the odds.

MYANMAR'S CENTRAL BANK REVOKES 123 FOREX LICENSES



Photo: Mizzima

Companies have been banned from trading dollars for failing to stick to central bank rates.

Myanmar's junta-controlled central bank has revoked the forex licenses of 123 companies, it announced this week.

Tuesday's decision means that 167 companies have been barred from trading dollars in the past nine months.

The companies include forex firms, travel agencies, airlines, hotels, construction companies, gem traders, financial and trading companies.

They include Yangon's famous Sedona Hotel and Myanmar National Airlines.

Radio Free Asia phoned the director general of the central bank's Foreign Exchange Management Department, Nwe Ni Tun, to get details of the latest move but nobody answered.

A source close to the central bank, who declined to be named for security reasons, said the licenses were canceled because companies did not observe the bank's reference exchange rate.

The central bank's reference price is 2,100 kyats per U.S. dollar, which has been in force since

April last year.

In the external market one U.S. dollar trades for between 3,300 and 3,500 kyats, said a businessman who also requested anonymity.

"When the government set the reference price in April 2022 no one could trade at those prices anymore," he said.

"Companies had to send reports every day to the central bank.

"After more than a year of not being able to send accurate reports the central bank shut down these companies' [forex operations]."

One of the travel companies whose license was revoked said that it stopped trading foreign currency since the beginning of the COVID pandemic.

"We haven't done foreign currency exchange for a long time since the COVID-19 period," said the owner who also declined to be named.

"I think our license was revoked because we haven't used it for a long time. "There is no problem because we only do ticketing for airlines."

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

MYANMAR'S DOMESTIC COFFEE STOCK LOW DESPITE HIGH DEMAND FROM FOREIGN BUYERS



Sorting coffee beans. Photo: Winrock

The Myanmar Coffee Association (MCA) says the coffee produced in Myanmar is fetching good prices but they cannot export coffee as the domestic stock of coffee is too low.

The MCA says they could export 75% of raw coffee beans harvested in the 2022-23 season and they have no more coffee stock for export now.

The annual domestic production of coffee varies between 8,000 and 10,000 tonnes. The price of coffee this year is varying between US\$5,500 and around 8,300 per metric tonne depending on the quality of goods.

A coffee farmer from Ywangan said that the current rising coffee price in the global market is not beneficial to them as they did not have coffee stock in their hands for export and they expected to fetch a good price in the next harvest season.

According to the statistics released by the Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization, coffee is mainly grown in Pyin Oo Lwin in Mandalay Region and Shan State and the coffee acreage across the country is over 50,000 acres.

The Russia Trade Development Minister said that they introduced Myanmar coffee to the Russian retail outlets as a permanent category of coffee.

According to trade figures released by the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the trade value between Russia and Myanmar for the period of four months from April to the end of July this year is over US\$34 million and Myanmar exported goods worth over US\$16 million and imported Russian goods worth over US\$18 million in this period.

The coffee harvesting season in Myanmar is from December to March next year. The coffee is traded for the whole year starting from late April every year. The special quality coffee produced in Myanmar is exported to the US and some European countries.

Moreover, varieties of Myanmar coffee are being exported to 14 countries in Asia including Japan and South Korea. In addition, the MCA says that they received new offers from new export markets interested in buying Myanmar coffee.

SURVEILLANCE LOGISTICS E-LOCK SYSTEM WILL BE USED IN MYANMAR CONTAINER FREIGHT TRANSPORT



Photo: EPA

The Military Council's Customs Department said that the secured logistics with the E-Lock system in transporting containers with box trucks commenced at Thilawa Special Economic Zone on 19 September, with a view to ensuring smooth trade flow, according to junta media.

The system will provide real-time monitoring of cargo movements, track and detect the activity and whereabouts of the trucks, give information on number of trips and trade routes and running time also. The system also ensures safe and secured logistics, it is learned.

Moreover, the private sector can gain benefits from this system as it will provide real-time monitoring of cargo movements, track and detect the activity and whereabouts of the trucks, ensure safe and secured logistics and smooth trade flow, combat illicit trade, minimize cargo delays and reduce the loss risks of the goods and save certain fees.

Phase 1 of the E-Lock system will begin on the Yangon SEZ-Myawady route. Then, it will proceed to Yangon-Myawady, Mandalay-Muse and Yangon-Mandalay routes under Phase II.

The Military Council said that E-lock label and seal would clearly show it is legal trade so that it can combat illicit trade and raise the State's revenue.

Moreover, in inspection of goods on the route it will be better to use ICL technology with X-ray machines than the manual inspection as it will save time and have a better chance of exposing and seizing illicit trade and goods.

The seizure of illicit trade and goods in June 2023 is more than previous months. The value of seized goods for the monthly average in freight group-wise is 11.816 billion Kyats.

The seizure of illicit goods in June this year is 4.254 billion Kyats more than the previous month.

The causes of rampant illicit trade in the country are Military Council's incorrect policies, prevailing demand and supply situation, lack of transparency in trade policy and customs working environment and moreover another factor is having the porous international border with insecure border control by security forces.

Smart logistic tracking with an e-lock system is widely used in international countries including neighbouring China and Thailand.

The successful E-lock system will contribute to the ASEAN Customs Transit system to facilitate the movement of goods across ASEAN borders.

Penrose Thitsa

TOP MYANMAR MILITARY OFFICER LT. GEN. MOE MYINT TUN DISMISSED AMID BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION ISSUE

Myanmar's military junta has dismissed Lt. Gen. Moe Myint Tun on charges of bribery and corruption, reported Radio Free Asia.

Moe Myint Tun, aged 55, held the position of the seventh-ranking officer within the military council, officially known as State Administration Council, the ruling body of the junta. He had previously faced sanctions from the United States and several western nations.

In a junta's recent statement, it announced the sudden removal of Lt. Gen. Moe Myint Tun from his roles as the chairman of the Myanmar Investment Commission, the Foreign Exchange Supervisory Committee, and the Central Committee on Ensuring the Smooth Flow of Trade and Goods.

Earlier this month, Moe Myint Tun was arrested by the junta on allegations of receiving millions of dollars in bribes from businesspeople over the past two years. However, the prospect of his facing a trial remained uncertain.

He currently resides in a state of house arrest in Nay Pyi Taw, where he is undergoing questioning, said anonymous business sources.

On September 25, AFP reported an ongoing corruption investigation involving Lt. General Soe Htut and Lt. General Moe Myint Tun.

In the early August cabinet reshuffle this year, the junta's Home Affairs Ministry portfolio transitioned from Lt. Gen. Soe Htut to Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae, who had previously served as the Union Government Office 1 minister.



SUPPORTING THE PLAYERS

Shan United FC fans cheer during the AFC Cup Group F soccer match between Shan United FC and Macarthur FC in Yangon in Myanmar, 21 September.

Photo: EPA

IN FOCUS



BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE SCARES CHINESE TOURISTS AWAY FROM THAILAND

For millions of Chinese tourists, Thailand used to be a happy land of water fights, lantern festivals and delicious food.

But thanks to social media rumours and a blockbuster movie, the kingdom's image among many Chinese people is now one of dangerous illegality and seedy scam border compounds - leaving visitor numbers plummeting.

Thailand is hugely reliant on tourism, particularly from China. The country welcomed more than 10 million Chinese visitors each year before the COVID-19 pandemic - numbers Bangkok is desperate to see return.

DANGER IN MYANMAR, CAMBODIA

But its struggling holiday industry has been hit by viral social media rumours claiming that tourists might be kidnapped and sent across the border to

work in brutal scamming compounds in Myanmar or Cambodia.

Chinese tourist Jia Xueqiong spent a week in Thailand with her husband and daughter, despite her parents' disapproval.

"They felt it was not safe here, and tried to persuade us not to come," said the 44-year-old nurse outside Bangkok's unusually quiet Grand Palace.

"All my friends said 'You go first to explore, if it's okay we will follow'," she said.

Her family and friends' concerns were stoked by "No More Bets", a high-octane thriller claiming to be based on "real events", about a computer programmer who ends up in a violent scamming compound in Southeast Asia after being trafficked through an unnamed country remarkably similar to Thailand.

The movie has some basis in reality.



Chinese tourists in Thailand. Photo: Renato Marques

SCAM CENTERS IN MYANMAR

Extensive reporting by AFP and other media has documented thousands of Chinese people lured to centres in Southeast Asia, mainly in Myanmar and Cambodia, to operate online scams fleecing victims for large sums.

But most of those involved are tricked into it with fake offers of lucrative work - not dragged off the streets while on holiday - and so far, no such scam compounds have been found in Thailand.

Despite only being released in August, "No More Bets" has become the third-most-popular film in China this year, raking in 3.8 billion yuan (\$521 million) and super-charging online discussion about the dangers of visiting Thailand.

Beijing student Leanna Qian, 22, told AFP that while she knew some of the stories were "exaggerated", she was still concerned about travelling to the kingdom.

"I'm worried that we'll be taken to other places, such as Cambodia or Myanmar," she said.

ACTION CALL

Thailand welcomed a record-breaking 11 million Chinese tourists in 2019 - a quarter of all visitors that year, according to official data.

But since the start of 2023, only 2.3 million Chinese tourists have come, and last week the Thai government announced temporary visa-free travel for Chinese travellers in a bid to restart the flow.

Sisdivachr Cheewarattanaporn, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, told AFP that negative online chatter had played a role in the drop.

"Things don't happen in Thailand but Thailand is targeted," he said.

The rumours grew so persistent that earlier this year, the Thai embassy in Beijing released a statement reassuring visitors that officials would "take measures to secure tourists' safety".

And across the border, the president of the Cambodia Association of Travel Agents, Chhay Sivlin, told AFP that the situation was worse.

Chhay Sivlin said her company has received no Chinese tour groups so far this year, and feedback highlighted many tourists' worries about safety.

"If the Chinese government helps, we will receive tourists soon because Chinese people listen to their government," she said.

NEVER RETURN

Back in China, travel agents are switching their focus from foreign trips - which accounted for more than 40 percent of their tourism revenue pre-pandemic - to pushing domestic tours.

Business is also suffering the after-effects of Beijing's draconian Covid control measures, which saw around 1.2 billion people unable to leave China after its borders were shut in 2020.

Gary Bowerman, director of travel and tourism consulting firm Check-in Asia, said it took time for people to get used to travelling abroad again.

"Going out of the country again, you start hearing about these scams... It does have an impact on people's psychological willingness to travel," he told AFP.

Meanwhile, domestic travel is booming - especially for younger people, who view it as an on-trend alternative to flying abroad, Bowerman explained.

In the office of a Beijing-based travel agency, which declined to be identified, staff were busy pushing domestic holiday promotions.

The agency formerly employed more than 200 people but downscaled to only a few dozen as a result of the worsening global economy, visa difficulties, and a slow aviation industry recovery.

"There's not much willingness to go abroad," employee Guo, who asked to be referred to by only one name, told AFP.

And, she added, for Southeast Asia "there's also the fear that they could go but never return."

Outside Bangkok's Grand Palace with her family, tourist Jia dismissed the fears of many inside China.

"It isn't like what's said on the internet, being scammed or other things," she said.

"There is nothing like that at all."

AFP



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