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A woman in a pink jacket and blue patterned skirt is walking on a dirt path, using a pair of metal canes for support. To her left is a makeshift shelter made of wooden poles and a green tarp. The background shows a dense forest of green trees.

**THE CRISIS OF
THE DISPLACED**

**Myanmar adding to
the record 114 million
displaced worldwide**

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HOMeward BOUND FOR MYANMAR'S DISPLACED?

Home is where the heart lies. As Myanmar edges towards three years of military rule, the crisis faced by people displaced from their homes by conflict is worsening with no solution in sight.

Last week, the UNHCR said the number of internally displaced people in Myanmar had edged up to about 2 million, many of them facing problems of shelter, food and medicine, with the cool season approaching. In addition, an estimated 70,000 refugees are reported to have fled the country since the coup, and over a million Rohingya remain in camps in Bangladesh having fled military attacks in 2017, some having escaped decades ago.

The displacement of people due to the Myanmar crisis matters and needs to be tackled but there are no easy answers at this stage.

Last week, the United Nations issued a report on conflicts including the situation in Myanmar that have led to a total of 114 million people being displaced around the world. This is contributing to tensions in a number of countries, with growing numbers of the general public raising their voices against the influx of illegal immigrants.

In Myanmar's case, there is pressure to solve the Myanmar crisis and get rid of the military junta before any meaningful return of refugees is considered. For IDPs, there is the possibility of return on a local level, subject to the state of hostilities. But the situation remains volatile, given the ongoing clashes on a number of fronts around the country, the most recent being as

a result of resistance operations against the junta in northern Shan State.

Seldom is the situation either black or white – or simple to solve. For example, it has been reported that some IDPs in Rakhine State actually prefer remaining in their camps because they are receiving some support and their villages have been totally destroyed. Clearly, a “return home” for IDPs here would have to involve humanitarian aid and support to rehabilitate and rebuild communities.

Ideally, when it comes to refugees or IDPs on a global level, the world community should focus on enabling a dignified return home and a rebuilding of communities, including helping countries develop and also improve their economies. There is a growing backlash against the “open-door” policies encouraged by a number of governments, as seen with Germany and the so-called “open border” in the USA, for example.

When it comes to Myanmar, the international community may find itself having to engage with both the Myanmar resistance – including the National Unity Government – and having to deal with the junta, which has been using humanitarian aid as a weapon. Nobody would argue this is easy.

But despite the worsening crisis in Myanmar, the international community needs to begin putting the building blocks in place to enable the dignified and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees when the time is right and the circumstances are right.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

Editor In-Chief and Managing Director

Soe Myint

Contributors

Sai Wansai,
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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Contact: Mizzima Media Group
Email: sm@mizzima.com
Phone: +95-9421010100

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Cover photo of disabled IDP woman in camp in Myanmar by AFP





MARKING 1,000 DAYS

Myanmar protesters stand outside the United Nations building in Bangkok to protest against the Myanmar junta's usurping of power 1,000 days ago on 1 February 2021.

Photo: AFP



1000 DAYS

SINCE COUP IN MYANMAR

အာဏာလုရက် 1000

လူထု လှုပ်ရှားမှု

29.10.2023

TIME: 10.00 - 12.00

PLACE: UNITED NATIONS, BANGKOK

အာဇာနည်တော်ကြည်

NLD ကို မဲပေးမည်



MONYWA PRISON HUNGER STRIKERS TO BE PROSECUTED

Prisoners who went on hunger strike in Monywa Prison last September are going to be prosecuted and have prison sentence reductions rescinded, according to the Monywa People's Strike Committee.

26 prisoners have been charged with illegal associations under Article 147 of the Penal Code. Of those nine were told they would not be eligible for any sentence reductions for a year. They were Ko Wai Moe Naing, the leader of the hunger strike and Ko Phone Myint Aung, Ko Moe Kyaw Htet, Ko Nayzin Lin Htet, Ko Nay San, Ko Chan Nyein Aung, Ko Ye Yint Thu, Ko Kyaw Soe Aye, and Ko Aungthu Hein.

"We received information that the prison will take action in the next few days. As we received the information not long ago, it's likely to happen within the next few days," said Ko Shin Thant, a member of the Monywa People's Strike Committee.

He also said that five prison staff, including the prison chief, U Win Min Latt and the head warden were

dismissed and six prison guard sergeants were demoted.

The junta has yet to make a statement about the affair.

On 8 September, the junta authorities conducted a special investigation at Monywa Prison and confiscated political prisoners' food, clothing, books, and other permitted possessions.

In response 50 prisoners went on hunger strike. Some of them experienced anemia and some fainted as a result of going on hunger strike. The prison authorities then agreed to the hunger strikers' demands and the hunger strike was called off on 13 September. Subsequently, the authorities brought the charges against the hunger strikers.

Since the 1 February 2021 coup until 18 October 2023 over 25,300 people have been arrested across Myanmar, and of those, 19,500 are still being detained, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILLED 364 CIVILIANS IN FIRST EIGHT MONTHS OF 2023

From January to August 2023 the Myanmar junta conducted 478 airstrikes killing 364 civilians and injuring 331, according to a report by Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica.

The report, released on 23 October by Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, an independent non-governmental organisation (NGO), revealed that in the first eight months of the year, there had been an average of almost two airstrikes a day, 40 per cent more airstrikes than in all of 2022.

According to the report, the airstrikes were not just limited to military targets, they also hit civilian gatherings, hospitals, schools, religious structures, residential buildings, and internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. At least 58 religious buildings, 33 schools, and 15 hospitals were damaged in the airstrikes.

This year, the majority of the airstrikes have been launched in the ethnic states of Karenni, Chin, Karen, Kachin, Shan and Mon, and the regions of

Sagaing, Bago, Magway, Tanintharyi and Mandalay, and the Naypyidaw Council area.

There has been a considerable rise in civilian casualties and damage to civilian structures this year, compared to other years, according to Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica.

In all of 2022, there were 339 airstrikes across the country that killed 260 civilians and injured 85.

From the 1 February 2021 coup until the end of December 2021, the junta launched 85 airstrikes that killed 63 civilians and injured 42.

In total, since the 1 February 2021 coup until 31 August 2023, the junta has launched 902 airstrikes that have killed 687 civilians and injured 458.

Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica sourced the figures on which it based its report by using information from over 40 news media sources and more than 1,300 social network pages linked to defence forces and revolutionary organisations.

ONE WOMAN KILLED, ONE INJURED BY JUNTA FORCES IN SAGAING'S TIGYAING TOWNSHIP

One woman was killed and another injured by junta army gunfire in Sagaing Region's Tigyaing Township, at about 4:00 p.m. on 19 October.

The killings were apparently in retaliation for an attack on junta troops earlier that day by people's defence forces (PDFs).

At about 3:00 p.m. on 19 October, PDF forces attacked 10 motorcycles being ridden by junta soldiers and police officers as they rode out of Tigyaing Township. There was a 30-minute exchange of fire in which eight soldiers and a policeman were killed and two policemen were captured by the PDFs.

Half an hour after the fighting, at around 4:00 p.m., two women who ventured out into the street in Tigyaing Township's No. (1) Sanpya Ward were fired on by junta soldiers, according to a local resident.

They said: "The soldiers of the Military Coun-

cil concealed themselves by the roadside and opened fire on the two women."

A member of Tigyaing Township PDF said: "The two women ventured out after the battle, and the Military Council fired upon two women, even though they were well aware that both of them were civilians."

The woman who was killed was 23 years old and the injured one was 18 years old. The injured woman is being treated in hospital.

Though local residents and revolutionary forces claim the women were shot by junta forces, Mizzima has not yet been able to independently confirm this.

The situation in Tigyaing Township is currently volatile because significant numbers of junta forces have been deployed in the area. Around 30 military units arrived at Pitaukhla Port in Tigyaing Township on 23 October, according to local revolutionary forces.

JUNTA-ALIGNED PUBLIC SECURITY UNITS SET UP IN YANGON

Ward administration members aligned with the Myanmar junta have allegedly established public security units in collaboration with disreputable individuals in some areas of Yangon, according to local sources.

The public security units were established in late 2022 and early 2023 across townships in Yangon with each ward unit being made up of between five and 20 men. They are made up of members of the junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militia, thugs, motorcycle taxi drivers, war veterans, pro-military members of Young Men's Buddhist Associations and junta supporters.

The members of the public security units are more powerful than the ward administrators, according to locals. The junta has also been supplying them with arms during public events and celebrations. The junta is apparently also arming people who support ward administrators but are not members of public security units.

"Particularly in North Dagon Township, they've established home-based casinos. They conduct night-time patrols and frequently accompany police and military council soldiers carrying out overnight guest inspections", said a member of a North Dagon revolutionary force.

In North Dagon and South Dagon townships, there are typically a minimum of five members of public security units associated with each ward administration office.

"They are worse than the ward administrators during the overnight guest inspections. Lately, the administrators have not been as bad. In each township bicycle taxi drivers were told to wear similar shirts. Once, an old man, who did not wear a shirt, was forced to kneel in the middle of the road and was slapped in the face. Even at night, those guys extort money from passers-by, even when there are no junta soldiers present", said a scout from a North Dagon defence force.

In the 10 wards of Yangon's Kamayut Township, there are about 200 public security unit members, according to the Kamayut Township Scouts.

When Mizzima investigated it found that members of the public security units actively participated in overnight guest inspections alongside junta troops and ward administration members. They oppress the local populace by doing things like apprehending people on motorcycles, collecting information, and conducting surveillance to help the junta capture revolutionary fighters.



Victim of a land mine - A woman walks using crutches in an IDP camp in Pekon Township. Photo: AFP



THE CRISIS OF THE DISPLACED

**Myanmar one of several
countries adding to the record
114 million displaced worldwide**

Sadly Myanmar ranks with a number of countries around the world that contribute to people displaced from their homes.

The number of people displaced worldwide is estimated to have exceeded 114 million, the United Nations said Wednesday last week, a record figure.

The main drivers in the first half of 2023 were the conflicts in Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; a prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan; and a combination of drought, floods and insecurity in Somalia, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said in a statement.

“The number of people displaced by war, persecution, violence and human rights violations globally is likely to have exceeded 114 million at the end of September,” the agency said.

“The world’s focus now is - rightly - on the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. But globally, far too many conflicts are proliferating or escalating, shatter-

ing innocent lives and uprooting people,” said UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi.

He blamed the international community’s inability to solve or prevent conflicts and urged better cooperation to end violence and allow displaced people to return home.

Grandi was recently in Bangkok discussing displacement in Southeast Asia and the Myanmar crisis which has seen the number of people displaced in-country push up to about 2 million, and refugees in the region and further afield into the tens of thousands.

RECORD NUMBERS

The number of displaced people worldwide jumped from 108.4 million people at the end of last year to 110 million people by the end of June 2023, the UNHCR said in its Mid-Year Trends Report.

A UNHCR spokesman confirmed to AFP the 114 million figure at the end of September was a re-



Over 1 million Rohingya refugees live in camps in Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

cord since the agency began collecting data in 1975.

The new estimate precedes the outbreak of the war between Hamas and Israel.

Hamas gunmen poured into Israel on October 7, beginning an attack that killed more than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, while also kidnapping more than 220 others, according to Israeli officials.

Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry says retaliatory Israeli strikes have killed more than 6,500 people.

The number of people internally displaced within Gaza is estimated at about 1.4 million, according to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA.

ONE IN 73 DISPLACED

More than one in 73 people around the world are forcibly displaced, the UNHCR said.

At mid-2023, there were 35.8 million refugees who had fled abroad, and 57 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Millions more are asylum seekers or in

need of international protection.

Almost one-third of all displaced people originated from just three countries: Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine.

Low- and middle-income countries hosted 75 percent of refugees and other people in need of international protection.

The countries hosting the most refugees are Iran and Turkey at 3.4 million each; Germany and Colombia with 2.5 million each; and Pakistan with 2.1 million.

Nearly half of Syria's population remained displaced at mid-2023: 6.7 million people within the country and 6.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers, with most hosted in Turkey.

Globally, 1.6 million new individual asylum applications were made between January and June 2023 - the largest number ever recorded in the first six months of any given year.

Of those, 540,600 claims were in the United States, 150,200 in Germany and 87,100 in Spain.

"As we watch events unfold in Gaza, Sudan and beyond, the prospect of peace and solutions for refugees and other displaced populations might feel distant," said Grandi.

"But we cannot give up. With our partners we will keep pushing for - and finding - solutions for refugees."

HOMEWARD BOUND

Some 3.1 million people did return home between January and June, including 2.7 million IDPs.

Creating the conditions for an organized return should be a priority.

In Myanmar's case, there is pressure to solve the Myanmar crisis – and get rid of the military junta – before any meaningful return of refugees is considered. For IDPs, there is the possibility of return on a local level, subject to the state of hostilities. But the situation remains volatile, given the ongoing clashes on a number of fronts around the country.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP



KIO VOWS TO BUILD FEDERAL STATE TOGETHER WITH MYANMAR RESISTANCE FORCES



This handout photo taken and released on October 27, 2023 by the Kokang Information Network shows Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) Major General Peng Deqi (centre R) commanding operations against Myanmar's military near Lashio township in Myanmar's northern Shan State. Photo: Kokang Information Network / AFP

The Chairman of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), General N' Ban La, said that they will try to establish a federal state based on the Panglong Agreement in coordination with anti-military dictatorship resistance forces.

Speaking to the 63rd-anniversary event to mark the founding of the KIO on 25 October, General N' Ban La said that people in every corner of Myanmar are facing serious troubles, and the country is heading towards becoming a failed state.

He added that the Military Council is forcing people to serve in militia groups that attack resistance forces.

"The Myanmar military is trying to cause dissent amongst the people. We seriously advise the people not to join militia groups," he said.

The KIO General also said that the world has noticed that many people in Myanmar have been forcibly displaced as the Military Council is torturing and killing civilians.

He suggested people should not support the Military Council's general election as it is not the right strategy to solve the crisis in the country.

The Military Council sees the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the KIO as a considerable threat, as they have been supplying weapons and training to resistance forces since the coup in February 2021.

The junta has been more active in Kachin State. On 23 October 2022, the Myanmar Air Force carried out an aerial attack on an open-air music concert near A Nan Pa Village in Hpakant Township, killing more than 80 people.

In a recent attack on an IDP village near Laiza, at least 29 people, were killed.

Since the coup, the Myanmar military has claimed thousands of lives, and more than 1.6 million people have been internally displaced, bringing the total to close to 2 million displaced.

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ETHNIC REBELS LAUNCH ATTACKS ACROSS NORTHERN SHAN STATE

An alliance of ethnic rebel groups in Myanmar launched coordinated attacks on the military across the country's north on Friday last week, posing a fresh challenge to the junta as it struggles to quell resistance to its rule.

The military's 2021 putsch sparked renewed fighting with powerful ethnic rebel groups in northern Shan state, home to a planned billion-dollar rail link, part of China's Belt and Road global infrastructure project.

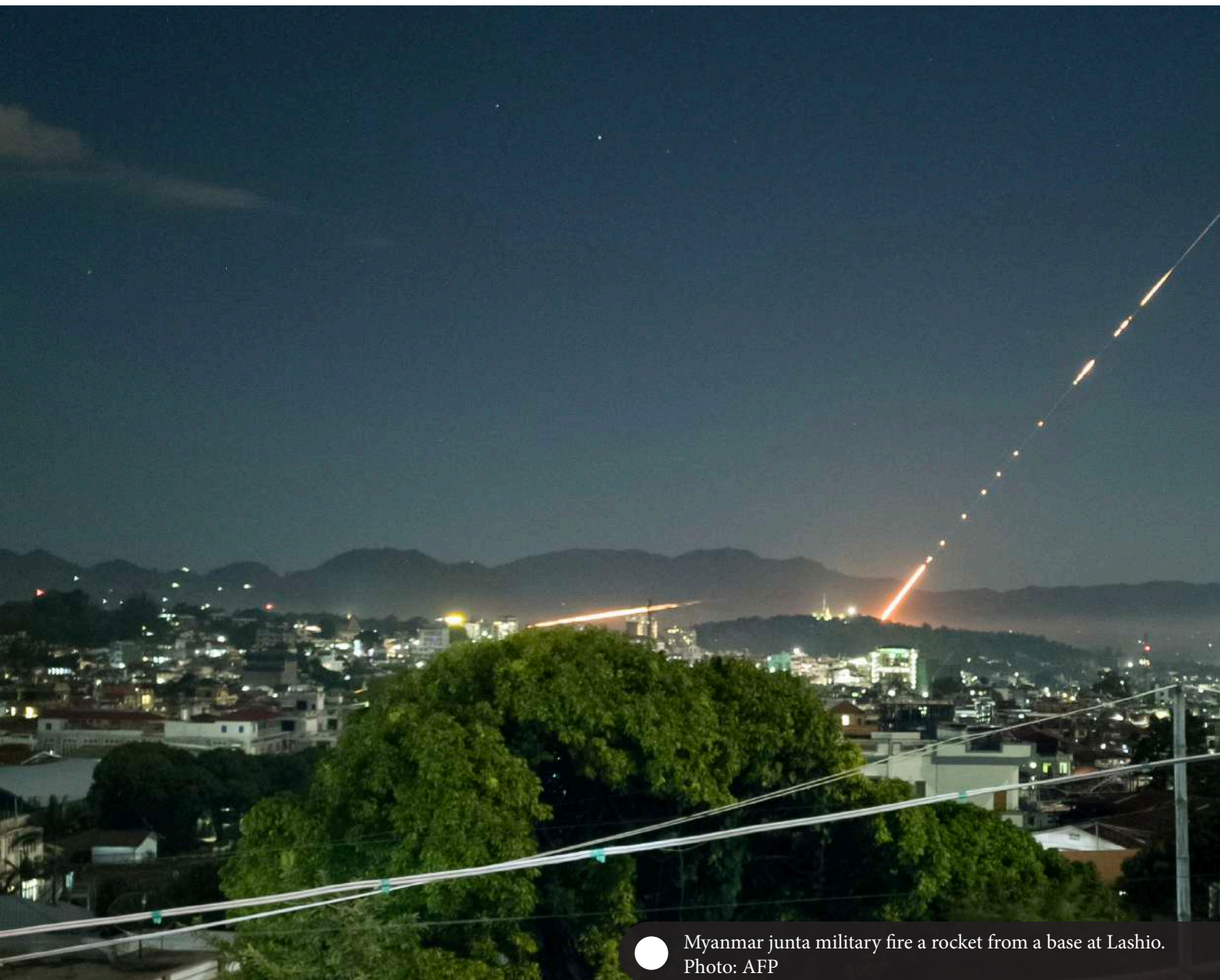
The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar National

Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) launched a "military operation", they said in a statement.

Pro-military Telegram channels said the rebels were attacking 12 towns or settlements across a swathe of Shan state around 100 kilometres (62 miles) across.

The three rebel groups - which analysts say can call on at least 15,000 fighters between them - did not immediately provide details on casualties or whether they had taken territory.

A junta spokesman did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.



Myanmar junta military fire a rocket from a base at Lashio.
Photo: AFP

The MNDA said its fighters had closed the roads from the trade hub of Lashio to Chinshwehaw and Muse on the China border ahead of a “major offensive”.

Footage shared on its media channel showed fighters in what appeared to be an abandoned camp, with weapons and boxes of ammunition scattered across the ground. It did not say where the footage was taken.

Fighting around Lashio - home to the military's northeast command - and near the towns of Muse, Chinshwehaw and Laukkai was ongoing, local media and residents said.

Laukkai is about five kilometres from the border with China.

“All shops are closed and no one is going out,” a resident of Hopang township, around 10 kilometres

from Chinshwehaw, told AFP.

“We can hear the sounds of aircraft and gunfire constantly,” they said, requesting anonymity for security reasons.

A Muse resident told AFP that locals were staying indoors as soldiers patrolled the streets and that the road from the town to the city of Mandalay - a major trade route - had been closed.

A rescue worker in Lashio who requested anonymity for safety reasons told AFP that rebels had begun shelling the military base near the town from 4:00 am (2130 GMT Thursday) and that the military had responded with artillery fire.

All flights to and from Lashio airport had been cancelled on Friday “because of the situation”, an airline ticketing agency told AFP.

China's foreign affairs ministry said it was “closely following” the fighting and called on all sides to prevent the situation from escalating.

NORTHERN CLASHES

In 2017, months of fighting between Myanmar's army and ethnic insurgents in the Kokang border region claimed dozens of lives and sent thousands fleeing from their homes - many to China.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to more than a dozen ethnic rebel groups, some of which have fought the military for decades over autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Some have trained and equipped newer “People's Defence Forces” that have sprung up since the 2021 coup and the military's bloody crackdown on dissent.

Earlier this month nearly 30 people were killed and dozens wounded in a strike on a camp for displaced people in neighbouring Kachin state.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an ethnic rebel group that controls the area, blamed the junta for the attack.

Last week the junta ordered air strikes and troop reinforcements as it tried to recover outposts it had lost in subsequent fighting with the KIA, the military and rebels said.

A KIA spokesman told AFP he was not sure if its fighters had joined Friday's attacks.

AFP



INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE MECHANISM FOR MYANMAR SAYS NUMBER OF JUNTA CRIMES INCREASING

The head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar Mr Nicholas Koumjian has warned that the number of Myanmar junta crimes is increasing.

Mr Koumjian made the statement at the 78th Session of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly on 23 October.

The following is an abridged version of his speech:

It is an honour to appear before this Assembly for the first time to update you on the progress of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

In 2018, this Assembly welcomed the Human Rights Council creating the Mechanism with the mandate to collect and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes committed throughout Myanmar.

We put particular emphasis on collecting evidence of crimes against the Rohingya population that led to hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. We have collected and analysed compelling evidence of the widespread burning of Rohingya villages, the confiscation of property, assaults and killings of civilians and horrific accounts of sexual crimes.

Since the military coup in February 2021, the Mechanism has collected and verified evidence of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed throughout Myanmar. Tragically, in the last year such crimes have only increased in frequency and intensity. We have evidence of brazen attacks on civilians, including mass executions, intentional burning of villages, and more frequent aerial bombings and indiscriminate shelling. We are also investigating reports of widespread arrests without due process, torture, sexual violence, deportation, and forcible transfer.

We are grateful to this Assembly for calling on Myanmar and Member States to fully cooperate with the Mechanism. However, military authorities have ignored our repeated requests for information and access. We also face challenges in conducting investigative activities in other countries, including in the Asia Pacific Region, where most witnesses and information providers are located.

To compensate, we have embraced innovative technology to propel our investigations. Our Open-Source team, for example, uses advanced software to analyse and verify copious quantities of material, such as videos, photographs and geospatial imagery posted on social media. This is then cross-checked against the information received so far from at least 725 sources, including more than 250 eyewitness accounts. The quantity of evidence and information we have been able to collect to date from individuals and organizations is unprecedented and frankly, unanticipated.

We do not intend for the evidence we collect to gather dust in storage; we seek to use it to facilitate justice and accountability in courts and tribunals willing and able to prosecute these cases. We are currently sharing evidence and analysis for three ongoing proceedings focused on crimes committed against the Rohingya, at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and in Argentina. This includes three analytical reports focused on the military chain of command in Rakhine State; the failure of Myanmar authorities to investigate or punish sexual and gender-based crimes; and the organized spread of hate speech content on Facebook by the Myanmar military during the 2017 clearance operations.

I am grateful to the courageous survivors of crimes who have shared their testimonies, and to the many individuals and organizations who provided us with information, often at significant risk. We prioritize ensuring that our interactions with them have the highest level of security and confidentiality.

With the constant increase in the number of incidents we are investigating, our operations have become increasingly complex. The Mechanism needs adequate resources to protect witnesses, ensure the safety and security of personnel and deliver on our mandate.

I am grateful to this Assembly for its support. The cycle of impunity in Myanmar has emboldened the military to commit ever-more brazen attacks on the country's people. The Mechanism is committed to breaking this cycle, and we are focusing all our efforts to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes will one day face justice.

MYANMAR DEPUTY PM AND CHINESE AMBASSADOR IN TALKS

The Myanmar Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, U Than Swe, met with the Chinese ambassador to Myanmar, Mr. Chen Hai, on 23 October to discuss collaborations between the two countries.

In the meeting, they discussed how to improve “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership Relations”.

Amongst topics discussed were ongoing bilateral projects that are part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); ensuring peace, stability and the rule of law in the border areas between China and Myanmar; the repatriation of displaced people to Rakhine State; Chinese support for Myanmar development projects; and collaborating in regional and international affairs.

U Than Swe said that Myanmar is also interested in cooperating with China on major projects, infrastructure development, energy, finance, and improving living conditions. He also emphasised the importance of China’s guidance in establishing a strong economic partnership between China and Myanmar.

On his part, Mr. Chen Hai confirmed that China is committed to developing economic ties with Myan-

mar that will benefit the people of both countries. He said that China would fulfill the agreements made in the meeting, which included collaborating on BRI projects and enhancing the connectivity between the two nations.

Recently, on 17 and 18 October China held the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing to mark 10 years since the start of the BRI project.

Myanmar’s junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing was excluded from the conference. Instead, the Myanmar junta’s Deputy Prime Minister Mya Tun Oo attended the forum. It is believed that China did not invite Min Aung Hlaing because it wanted to avoid global criticism.

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by China in 2013, is a massive infrastructure and economic development project aimed at connecting China with Europe, Africa, and other parts of Asia. It involves the construction of roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure to promote trade and cooperation.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILLED 364 CIVILIANS IN FIRST EIGHT MONTHS OF 2023



Myanmar jet fighters. Photo: AFP

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RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO BE BUILT IN YANGON'S DAGON MYOTHIT DISTRICT



Photo: Alexander Schimmeck

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of friendship between Russia and Myanmar, a Russian Orthodox Christian church will be built on a land area of 1.25 acres in Dagon Myothit (North) in Yangon Region.

On 19 October, a group led by His Eminence Metropolitan Sergyi, a Russian Orthodox Christian bishop for Southeast Asia, met with the mayor of Yangon, Bo Htay, and the mayor said that they would assist in the matter of building the church as soon as possible, as well as providing water and electricity.

“As far as I know, they (Myanmar authorities) are no longer allowed to build churches in Myanmar,” said a person familiar with Christian churches in Myan-

mar. “Even if you seek permission to build a church, it will never be approved. So, people have to gather in houses and apartments for prayer gatherings. Now that Russia has given permission to build a church, who will worship?”

Currently, there are about 260 million Orthodox Christians in the world. It is known that about 100 million of them are from Russia.

SHRF URGES VIETNAM TO INVESTIGATE THE USE OF MYTEL'S NETWORK IN CYBERCRIME IN WA AREA

The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) has urged the Vietnamese government to investigate cybercrime in the Wa area using Mytel telecommunication network, operated as a joint venture between the Burmese military and Viettel, which is owned by Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence.

The SHRF made the remark in the report titled "Trapped in Hell" addressing human trafficking, slavery, and torture by Chinese criminal gangs in northern Shan State since the 2021 military coup. The report was released on October 18.

In the report, the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) has shed light on the experiences of people who fell victim to human trafficking, slavery, and torture orchestrated by Chinese criminal gangs in the northern Shan State of Myanmar, particularly in the Kokang and Wa areas.

These incidents occurred in the aftermath of the military coup in February 2021 and have exposed a collaboration between these criminal elements and local authorities.

A spokesperson of SHRF told Mizzima, "Personally, the Vietnamese government should force Viettel to withdraw the partnership with Mytel. Another thing is, from our collected data, many Vietnamese are currently subjected to sexual slavery. They should speak out for their citizens. Thus, I assume the Vietnamese government should help us."

Despite the junta's direct in-charge and extensive surveillance on the Mytel telecommunication, the network is largely used to commit cybercrimes in the Wa area.

The report pointed out this as a questionable situation where the junta takes no effective action. Mytel is a joint venture between the Vietnamese government-owned Viettel and the Myanmar Economic Corporation.

The "Trapped in Hell" report is based on interviews with three young women and two men who suffered torment by the Chinese criminal gangs operating online money laundering, gambling, and sexual entertainment in Kokang and Wa self-administered zones.

The victims faced physical torture and, in the case of the women, sexual assault when they dared to resist their captors.

In addition to permitting such atrocities, the authorities in Wa area even protect the criminal gangs, according to the interviewees in the report.

Similarly, an online scamming centre in Laukai operated openly under the protection of the regime-aligned Kokang Militia Force.

In response to these findings, SHRF has also urged the Kokang and Wa authorities to cease their collusion with criminal groups and has called upon China to take more substantial action against its citizens involved in these illegal operations.

EU STRONGLY CONDEMNS MYANMAR MILITARY'S RESTRICTIONS, INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF AID



The Delegation of the EU to the United Nations made a statement on 24 October, in response to the presentation and reports from the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee Interactive Dialogue.

The dialogue focused on the human rights situation in Myanmar, and it was taken part by Khaled Khair, the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), Nicholas Koumjian, the Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar, and Thomas H. Andrews, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

The statement of EU delegation highlighted the deepening humanitarian situation across the entire country and the deliberate denial and obstruction of humanitarian access and relief by the military in flagrant violation of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

The EU also strongly condemned these unacceptable restrictions and instrumentalization of relief operations by the military, including after Cyclone Mocha that caused death and destruction in Rakhine and several other regions in May this year.

The statement said that the EU does not regard the military regime that emerged from the coup as having any legitimacy, and strongly condemns the

flagrant violations, abuses and disregard for human rights by the Myanmar military.

The EU delegation also called on the Myanmar military to immediately end all forms of violence against civilians, release political prisoners and others arbitrarily detained, restore democracy and rule of law and ensure justice and accountability for human rights violations.

The statement mentioned that people in Myanmar across the country continue to suffer human rights violations and a humanitarian crisis under the brutal military junta, resulting from the escalation of violence and the brutality of indiscriminate attacks, including airstrikes, arson and burning of villages and other civilian targets, mass killings, torture, sexual and gender-based violence carried out by the military forces on the civilian population.

The EU committed to support the humanitarian relief effort in Myanmar and called on the military to urgently allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

The statement includes the deteriorating human rights situation of Rohingya population who have fled to Bangladesh as well as those who remain in Rakhine State, and the EU recognizes the generosity and efforts of Bangladesh in hosting nearly one million Rohingya.

ONE WOMAN KILLED, ONE INJURED BY JUNTA FORCES IN SAGAING'S TIGYAING TOWNSHIP

One woman was killed and another injured by junta army gunfire in Sagaing Region's Tigyaing Township, at about 4:00 p.m. on 19 October.

The killings were apparently in retaliation for an attack on junta troops earlier that day by people's defence forces (PDFs).

At about 3:00 p.m. on 19 October, PDF forces attacked 10 motorcycles being ridden by junta soldiers and police officers as they rode out of Tigyaing Township. There was a 30-minute exchange of fire in which eight soldiers and a policeman were killed and two policemen were captured by the PDFs.

Half an hour after the fighting, at around 4:00 p.m., two women who ventured out into the street in Tigyaing Township's No. (1) Sanpya Ward were fired on by junta soldiers, according to a local resident.

They said: "The soldiers of the Military Council concealed themselves by the roadside and opened fire on the two women."

A member of Tigyaing Township PDF said: "The two women ventured out after the battle, and the Military Council fired upon two women, even though they were well aware that both of them were civilians."

The woman who was killed was 23 years old and the injured one was 18 years old. The injured woman is being treated in hospital.

Though local residents and revolutionary forces claim the women were shot by junta forces, Mizzima has not yet been able to independently confirm this.

The situation in Tigyaing Township is currently volatile because significant numbers of junta forces have been deployed in the area. Around 30 military units arrived at Pitaukhla Port in Tigyaing Township on 23 October, according to local revolutionary forces.

PREGNANT WOMAN INJURED AND OVER 1,000 DISPLACED BY JUNTA SHELLING ALONG MYANMAR-CHINA TRADE CORRIDOR

A pregnant woman was injured, buildings in three villages damaged, and over 1,000 villagers displaced by Myanmar junta shelling between October 5 and 9, 2023, during fighting against Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) troops along the highway from Hsenwi to Chin Shwe Haw, one of Burma's main trade corridors to China.

In the morning of October 5, 2023, fighting broke out between the junta and KIA troops in Koon Kawk village, about seven miles east of Hsenwi town, along the Hsenwi-Chin Shwe Haw highway in northern Shan State, Shan Human Rights Foundation reports 24 October.

Later that day, at 1 pm, about 50 junta troop reinforcements came in trucks along the highway from the direction of Hsenwi. They crossed the Namtu river into an SSPP-controlled area south of Pang Na village, causing fighting to break out with SSPP troops for about 30 minutes. That evening, the same junta troops, stationed on the Namtu riverbank, fired shells into the surrounding jungle and hills, causing about 60 residents of Phai Kham village to flee their homes at about 7 pm to take refuge in Phai Kham temple.

On October 7, at 10:30 am, shells from junta IB 323 troops (under Hsenwi-based Military Operations Command #16) camped near Nawng Maung village hit Koon Kawk temple. At the same time, SAC troops stationed around Pang Na and Koong Nyaung villages indiscriminately fired shells in the direction of Koon Kawk village. One shell landed north of Koon Kawk temple, one in Koon Kawk village and another outside Koon Kawk village. A shell also landed in Peing Kang village, damaging a cowshed. Due to the shelling, about 10 novices and monks from Koon Kawk temple fled to Ho Mong temple, three miles east of Hsenwi, to take refuge. Hundreds of villagers living along the main road also fled to shelter in Ho Mong temple during this time.

On October 8, at around 11 am, junta troops from IB 323 fought with KIA troops around Koon Kawk village. Shells landed in the village and in the local temple compound, damaging the temple pavilion roof and buildings where novices were staying.

On October 9, at 10:45 am, fighting broke out between junta and KIA troops at Koon Kawk village. A shell fired by junta troops staying at Na Goang village landed in Kawng Khio village, Koon Kawk village tract, injuring a 25-year-old pregnant woman. The shell exploded next to her house, causing shrapnel to hit her in the back while she was lying down at home. She was taken to Lashio hospital for medical treatment. That afternoon, the junta sent in troop reinforcements from ID 99, ID 88 and MOC #12 with two tanks to the fighting area. This caused about 100 Kawng Khio villagers to flee their homes to take refuge at Phai Kham temple.

On October 10, from 1:30 pm to 2 pm, junta troops encamped in Koon Kawk temple compound fired shells into the surrounding hills where KIA troops were staying.

On October 12, 2023, all the displaced villagers returned home, but SAC troops are still staying at Koon Kawk temple and at the hilltop pagoda north of Koon Kawk.

The Hsenwi-Chin Shwe Haw highway forms part of the first China-Burma "sea-road-rail link", from Chengdu in Sichuan province to the Indian Ocean, under China's Belt and Road Initiative. The section of the Chinese railway to Lincang, close to the Burma border, was opened in August 2021.

Over 1,000 villagers fled their homes between October 5 and 10, 2023. The majority took refuge in Ho Mong Temple as it is quite spacious, and easy for local communities to access and provide aid.

Apart from this, several hundred villagers took refuge in other locations: Pang Na villagers fled to Jay Oo temple; Koong Nyaung villagers fled to stay with their relatives in Lashio, Kunlong and Ho Pang; while Kawng Khio villagers and some Phai Kham villagers fled to Phai Kham temple.

SOME FACETS OF CHINESE INFLUENCE IN MYANMAR

SUN LEE



Myanmar-China border wall. Photo: AFP

China has been an influential player in Myanmar's internal affairs since its independence in 1948. Chinese influence manifests at various levels in Myanmar today. Bilaterally, China's relationship with the military-led government has given the latter diplomatic dividends. Domestically, China has very good ties with the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO), which makes it the ideal mediator between the government and the EAOs. A combination of security and economic interests have thus made China turn to Myanmar and establish close ties, especially after the military coup in early 2021.

The Myanmar gambit is part of China's larger plan of penetrating South Asia for security and economic gains at the cost of India. The nature and scale of China's links to the Myanmar's ruling establishment has been subject to considerable scrutiny, with some observers noting that Myanmar is a little wary of Chinese influence, but the latter's penetration is so deep and pervasive that it is difficult for the government to give up the link.

According to Myanmar's Investment and Companies Directorate, between the coup and February 2023, China invested more than US\$ 113 million (Radio Free Asia, 07.04.2023). China is the second-largest foreign investor after Singapore in Myanmar. China has never wavered in its support for the junta since its 1 February 2021 coup, and while other countries

have condemned the military regime, pulled their investments, and refrained from trading with the nation, China has chosen to step up engagement with the generals in Naypyidaw.

Historically, China has dealt only with the military leadership during the more than five decades of junta rule in Myanmar since 1962. The primary reason for widespread anti-China sentiment in Myanmar can be attributed to China's overt and covert support for the country's military rulers. Internationally isolated in the aftermath of the coup, China provided diplomatic support to protect the regime from international condemnation and humanitarian intervention, China has made concerted efforts to block United Nations resolutions that expressed concern over the military and its actions. Also, China has provided Myanmar with loans, investments, and trade to keep the economy afloat.

Significantly, Chinese military equipment has also enabled the generals to quell anti-junta protests and fight insurgencies. Pertinently, many Myanmar locals view the robust and multifaceted Chinese support to the military as being a crucial factor that ensures the longevity of the junta's rule.

One of the best examples of China's presence in Myanmar is the Kyaukphyu Port, under construction on the western most tip of Myanmar, adjoining the Bay of Bengal. It lies in Rakhine State, which also has infrastructure assets like the Kaladan multi-modal transport

corridor, in which India has invested. Recent reports indicate that Chinese activities in the region have intensified in myriad ways. Chinese nationals working in Kyaukphyu are said to have married local Rakhine women in the past few years to become a part of the social landscape. A 2019 Human Rights Watch report revealed cases of trafficking of girls from the states of Kachin and Shan into China, where they are married off to Chinese men.

Myanmar nationals of Chinese descent are buying property in Ann, Maei, Kyaukphyu and Ramree townships, anticipating good price appreciation once the Kyaukphyu SEZ Deep Sea Port Project becomes operational.

How has China managed to acquire land in Myanmar? Extant laws actually make it quite easy for foreigners to do so. Chinese nationals have acquired land in Myanmar either through marriage or by getting Myanmar citizenship by bribing the immigration authorities. The military regime is suspected of having issued IDs cards to Chinese citizens in an effort to influence the forthcoming election. Real estate agents close to the military regime are threatening locals to sell their land or get it confiscated without any compensation. Commander of North-Eastern Command, Brig. Gen. Naing Naing Oo's son has emerged as the biggest real estate dealer in Lashio township and is the only contact for Chinese buyers.

Shan State's capital Lashio, a trading hub between China and Myanmar, is being developed as a China township by converting farmland into commercial plots. Wealthy Kokang businessmen of Chinese origin are rushing to buy land in Lashio to construct casinos and gambling dens. The decline in the economy has forced citizens to sell their land to make ends meet rendering the locals to rent out their premises for running gambling activities. Similarly, a cross-border Economic Zone in Chinshwehaw, linking the Shan township of Laukkai, the capital of the Kokang Special Autonomous Zone, to Lincang in Yunnan province is being constructed (The Print, 11 May 2022). Transit through this route provides the shortest path from Kunming to the deep-water port of Kyaukphyu.

However, Laukkai, with its 30 casinos and 50 hotels, has gained a reputation as a violent and crime-ridden frontier town. In recent years, the Chinese government has been embarrassed by a number of overseas Chinese crime syndicates.

For instance, scandals involving Kokang-run casinos eventually triggered an intervention to shut down their casinos in the southern Cambodian town of Sihanoukville. In Myanmar, the most notorious ex-

ample (The Diplomat, 4 May 2022) is the case of Shwe Kokko Yatai New City in Myawaddy township (Karen State), close to the Thai border. This was the first project in Myanmar that claimed to be associated with the BRI, but it was publicly disavowed by the Chinese government in a public statement saying that "this is a third-country investment and has nothing to do with the Belt and Road Initiative."

Radio Free Asia reports (22 September 2023) that about 1,400 migrant workers (500 carrying single-use temporary border pass, viz., green card and 900 carrying border travel permit viz., red book) are entering China through Muse in Shan State despite a recent wage cut by half by the Chinese employers.

Desperate for work amid the current economic downturn, thousands have been hoping to use the TBP scheme to find long-term employment in China, even though it's only meant for short-term visits. Since most of the migrant workers are from conflict-ridden villages in Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay regions and Shan state, the move could be part of a joint strategy of otherwise populous China and Myanmar's ruling military regime to wean local youth away from anti-regime resistance groups.

Of far greater significance is a recent report that states that China is exploring likely sites of nuclear technology projects in Sagaing and Mandalay regions after Myanmar Ambassador to China sought (16 September 2023) advanced nuclear technology from China for use in Myanmar's agriculture, health and energy sectors. A release by Myanmar's foreign ministry said the Ambassador, Tin Maung Swe, made the request at the China-ASEAN Forum for Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Technology in Nanning, China. The request makes China the second country to be approached by Myanmar regarding nuclear technology. Currently, the military-led government is collaborating with Russia's state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom after opening the country's first nuclear information center in Yangon early this year. The various facets of China's penetration of Myanmar makes it clear that Beijing is present in a big way in Myanmar.

While its cultivation of the military over the years has given it an edge, the real difference is in the Chinese penetration of the socio-economic landscape. It is this factor which makes the spread of Chinese influence, mostly negative, in Myanmar, an inescapable reality.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Myanmar and Asian affairs

FIRST PERSON: FARMERS RUNNING OUT OF WATER IN PUNJAB, INDIA

For farmers in the Punjab region of India, water shortages are a harsh reality, and ahead of the publication of a UN report *Interconnected Disaster Risks*, three rice cultivators have been talking about the challenges they face due to the scarcity of water and the solutions they are adopting.

Water is crucial to rice farmers and when it is lacking, they tend to rely on groundwater.

Globally, water taken from underground reservoirs supports 40 per cent of agriculture, but if groundwater levels fall, it becomes harder to reach over time.

In Punjab known by some as India's breadbasket, groundwater is being depleted faster than it is being replenished.

Three farmers from Punjab explain how they experience water scarcity and how they deal with it.

'NOT JUST A PROBLEM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS'

Amandeep Singh: Ten years ago, the groundwater here was between nine and 12 metres deep, while today it is found between 18 and 21 metres.

We very much rely on groundwater, as we only have access to canal water once a week, which is not sufficient for us.

Every year, we have to dig deeper to reach the groundwater. This is not just a problem for future generations, but something we experience today already. Reaching the groundwater is very expensive,



A pump in Punjab - Farmers are having to drill deeper for groundwater in India's Punjab province. Photo: UN News

but we landowners have no choice.

Because of the reduced groundwater level, not only landowners, but everyone will face losses. We will no longer have water for farming or drinking. Without it, there will be no farming, and therefore no future for landowners.

Harjeet Singh: The groundwater we use for our paddy fields is not being recharged from above. However, without rains, we have to use groundwater, as canal water is not available here.

Seven to eight years ago, we could reach groundwater at 4.5 metres deep, while now it is only reachable at 21 metres. The declining water level affects my income, and I cannot afford to install a borewell.

It would be devastating if the groundwater disappears, and it is important that the world understands our issue, as only then something can happen. One person alone cannot do anything. Only when we come together and make a collective effort something can



change.

Before the groundwater becomes unreachable or runs out completely, we will have to save rainwater in lower places. For now, there is no other solution.

COMBINING TRADITION WITH TECHNOLOGY

Vishvajeet Singh Jyani: Over the years, we have noticed that the rainfall and weather patterns have been quite erratic. The canal water and groundwater we depend upon has also become unreliable.

At our family farm, the main motto is, “traditional wisdom with modern technology”. My father was also a farmer and used many traditional techniques. I completed an education in computer studies, and together we have combined our core strengths by integrating traditional techniques with modern research and technologies to implement good management of natural resources.

The main water source we are provided with is canal water that comes from the Harike wetlands and the Satluj River. We store that water by using our water management system, or we put it in the field. Sometimes, we have to supplement it with groundwater.

The integrated water management system is very important to us because it helps us to save water when it is not required in the field. It functions as a back-up system which supplements our canal water and groundwater.

If there is excess rainfall in the field, we store that as well. Whenever we experience drought-like conditions we can use it to water our land.

We have done much to help the groundwater recharge and are currently very happy that we can reach it between three and six metres.

When groundwater becomes scarce and reaching it goes beyond the possibilities local farmers have, the state and central government will step in. They have already developed plans and have, in some states, even implemented those. Farmers are being incentivized to plant crops other than rice and equally water-guzzling crops.

If you want farmers to save groundwater, simply telling them to preserve it does not work. If they get incentives to plant other crops, farmers will need no convincing. As farmers are the backbone of the country, if they follow suit, society will follow.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Bckfwd

KACHIN STATE

Commander of Northern Regional Command sentenced to ten years prison

The commander of the junta's Northern Regional Military Command has been sentenced to ten years in prison, according to military sources who spoke to the People's Goal nonprofit organisation (NPO).

Earlier this week a military tribunal sentenced General Ko Ko Maung, the commander of the Northern Regional Military Command in Myitkyina, Kachin State, to a ten-year prison term.

According to the People's Goal, General Ko Ko Maung was investigated by the Naypyidaw Chief Inspection Office in July. The investigation focused on the general's alleged involvement in transporting explosive devices to Hpakant Township, Kachin State, and other unlawful activities.

For the three months following the investigation, General Ko Ko Maung, his secretary, a captain

and other senior officers of the Northern Military Command were sanctioned for allegedly engaging in unlawful activities.

Though the general's secretary was implicated in much of the unlawful activity it was the general who was punished. According to People's Goal analysis, it appears that the junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is blaming his subordinates for various crimes and prosecuting them so that he can deny being involved in any of the crimes.

General Ko Ko Maung is a graduate of the Defence Service Academy's Batch 38 and he was the first graduate from that batch to achieve the rank of regional commander. It was well known that he had good connections with Min Aung Hlaing, according to the People's Goal.

Previously, the Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Moe Myint Tun was stripped of his position on 19 September before later being sentenced to 20 years in prison for corruption, according to a junta statement made on 10 October.



MYANMAR SEIZES OVER \$381 MILLION IN NARCOTICS IN DRUG TRAFFICKING CRACKDOWN AMIDST JUNTA'S STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL

In a major crackdown on drug trafficking, Myanmar police have seized over US\$381 million worth of narcotic drugs by October 23, according to the junta's Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw on October 26.

The CCDAC, chaired by Home Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, held the committee's first meeting of 2023 on October 26 and discussed the latest trends and challenges in the fight against drug trafficking. The meeting was also attended by representatives from various government agencies, as well as international partners, according to the junta-controlled media.

Lt-Gen Yar Pyae stressed the need for close cooperation between all stakeholders in the fight against drug trafficking, which he described as a threat to regional stability.

However, experts have warned that the junta's own involvement in the drug trade is undermining its efforts to combat it.

MYANMAR JUNTA TO GIVE TAX CONCESSIONS AND MONETARY RELIEF TO EXPORTERS



Photo: AFP

The Military Council's spokesman Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun said that they were planning and making preparations to give tax relief and monetary incentives to exporters.

They will give tax concessions to exporters as incentives for increasing exports and secondly they will give monetary incentives to the exporters.

It is also learned that migrant workers will be given incentives for their remittance of their salaries to the country.

The Military Council disclosed these plans of relaxation while they were being criticized for tight

monetary policy and strict and heavy taxes being levied on the businesses and expatriates working in foreign countries.

The spokesman said that the detailed plan would be announced later and they could not disclose them at present as they were under consideration and coordination.

MYANMAR OIL MILLERS GIVEN OVER 1,700 MILLION KYAT EACH IN LOANS

Myanmar Edible Oil Milling Development Loans Management Team issued an announcement which says that 21 oil millers were given loans of up to 1,773 million Kyat each.

The Deputy Union Minister of Planning and Finance Maung Maung Win said at the Myanmar Edible Oil Milling Development Loans Management Team meeting held on 24 October that the government had given low interest development loans of 1,773 million Kyat to 21 edible oil millers from seven States and Regions and the Naypyitaw Union Territory in the period from July to October 2023.

These development loans have a 5% per annum interest rate and edible oil millers from seven States and Regions received them for the first batch.

The Loan Management Team said that there were many millers who applied for loans in the second batch in the last week of September and those who meet the requirements and specifications would be given these loans.

The Military Council adopted a policy to reduce edible oil imports and promote oil seed cultivation in the country and manufacturing edible oil domestically.

According to the domestic edible oil production data, there are over 230 large edible oil mills, over

920 medium-size mills and over 3,100 small mills in the country.

Myanmar Edible Oil Milling Development Loans Management Team said that domestic edible oil production made up about 66,000 tonnes.

The Consumers Affairs Department said that the consumption of edible oil in the country is 2.25 ticals (approx. 37 gms) per day per person and the annual demand is about 1.1 million tonnes.

The data released by the Ministry of Economy and Commerce shows that about 60-70% of this annual demand is being imported from the foreign countries.

The Edible Oil Import, Storage and Distribution Supervisory Committee issues the basic wholesale reference price weekly for edible palm oil. This reference price issued on 23 October for the last week of October was 4,395 Kyat per viss (approx. 1.6 Kg) but it was later increased to 4,725 Kyat per viss on 24 October after facing rising prices in the global market.

This latest weekly reference price is nearly 500 Kyat higher than the previous week's price and also the consumers said that the price in the open market rose too by 500 Kyat per viss.

GREEN GRAM PRICE RISES TO RECORD HIGH IN MYANMAR DOMESTIC MARKET

Domestic green gram producers and traders say that the price of green gram is continuously rising as the foreign demand is increasing.

The green gram demand is high in the India market in the eve of festival season though it is the harvesting season of the new crop of green gram and then the demand is getting high in the Myanmar market too and consequently the price is rising.

The green gram produced in India is low in quality and also the yield is low. The India media reported that Myanmar green gram price will be high in the long run.

The price of green gram in the Bayintnaung commodity exchange is 2,765,000 Kyats per tonne and it rose by 85,000 Kyats per tonne in comparison last week.

The green gram price in export quality FAQ (Fair to Average Quality) in early October was just over 2.4 million Kyats per tonne and now it rose to around 2.8 million Kyats per tonne. And the Bayintnaung commodity exchange said that the export price at FOB (Freight on Board) was over US\$900 and now it rose to the range between US\$1,045-1,065 now.

Currently the green gram stock in the domestic market is just over 100,000 tonnes and the merchants predict that Indian buyers will pay better prices for Myanmar green gram. After the harvesting of monsoon paddy in November, it will be the beginning of the green gram cultivation season and then the price of green gram seeds will rise too in the market.

Among the pulses and beans produced in Myanmar, the green gram, mung pea and pigeon pea are the major export items and the main buyer is India. The annual acreage of pulses and beans in Myanmar is over 11 million acres and over 35% of them are green gram and mung peas.

The trade figures show that Myanmar exported a total 133,820 tonnes of green gram, mung pea and pigeon pea to foreign countries in September this year and could earn US\$121.889 million from these exports.

Penrose Thitsa

MYANMAR HOSTS BELT AND ROAD SEMINAR, AMIDST CONCERNS OVER SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Myanmar, on October 26, hosted a seminar to foster collaboration between China and Myanmar in promoting Belt and Road Cooperation, with the goal of sharing development and prosperity, reported Xinhua.

The junta's Union Government Office Minister Aung Naing Oo spoke at the seminar, highlighting the BRI's pivotal role in connecting nations and developing human civilizations. He also noted that the The Belt and Road Initiative will promote cultural exchanges and shared learning on harmonious coexistence.

Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai also spoke at the event, calling for further development of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. He praised Myanmar as one of the countries that has actively responded to the BRI.

About 100 representatives from both countries, including government officials, business people, and media, participated in the seminar in Yangon.

Discussions at the seminar included China-Myanmar BRI projects such as the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and industrial zone, the Muse-Mandalay railway, and the Mandalay-Kyaukphyu railway.

BRI is an infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013. It is aimed at investing in and building infrastructure projects that connect China to Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The BRI is one of the most ambitious infrastructure development projects in history, with an estimated investment of over US\$1 trillion, according to The Business Times.

The BRI has been criticized for a number of reasons, including its lack of transparency, its potential to increase debt levels in developing countries, and its environmental and social impacts. Some critics have also accused China of using the BRI to advance its own geopolitical interests.



MAKING MERIT

People throng Shwedagon Pagoda for the Thadingyut Festival on 29 October.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



CHIN VICTIMS LEVERAGE PHILIPPINES LEGAL SYSTEM TO ATTACK MYANMAR JUNTA



Chin victims make their case in Manila. Photo: AFP

Five Myanmar nationals asked the Philippines on Wednesday to investigate alleged war crimes committed by 10 serving or former members of Myanmar’s military against the mainly Christian Chin minority.

Filipino lawyers representing the Myanmar nationals told reporters they lodged the “landmark” criminal complaint against junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and nine others at the Department of Justice in Manila.

They asked prosecutors to open an investigation into alleged war crimes under a Philippine law penalising “crimes against international humanitarian law, genocide, and other crimes against humanity”.

The five Myanmar nationals are from western Chin state, but now live in Australia, Britain, Canada and India. They were at the justice department in Manila.

“This is a landmark suit because this is the very first time that such a case is being brought before the Philippines,” Romel Bagares, one of the lawyers, told reporters.

Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla said his department would “evaluate” the complaint, which he

described as “very novel”.

“If this is sufficient in form and substance, that’s the time when we will require the respondents to answer these complaints,” Remulla told reporters.

Among the accused is Chin Chief Minister Vung Suan Thang, who is a former military officer. The others are serving members of the military.

The complaint alleged that members of Myanmar’s military killed a pastor and two church elders in Thantlang town, Chin, in September 2021.

It also accused the 10 of “intentionally” directing attacks on churches and the burning of hundreds of houses in the same town between August 2021 and June 2022.

They also allegedly blocked relief supplies from reaching people in Chin state in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha in May.

‘TRULY HISTORIC DAY’

Philippine law allows for the prosecution of war crimes committed elsewhere.

One of the stipulations of the law is that the accused must be present in the Philippines.

According to Gilbert Andres, another Filipino



The petitioners with the paperwork.
Photo: AFP

lawyer representing the Myanmar nationals, if the Philippine justice department were to decide to mount a case against the 10 accused, it could issue subpoenas to Myanmar's Central Authority or go through diplomatic channels.

The toppling of Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a 2021 coup sparked a huge backlash and the military junta is now battling opponents across swaths of Myanmar.

Some of the bloodiest fighting has been happening in Christian-majority areas, including in Chin state.

"This is a truly historic day," Salai Ling, one of the five complainants and also of the Chin Human Rights Organization, told reporters in Manila.

"We are really hoping that with the solidarity and support from the Filipino people and people in the ASEAN region, that we will be able to get some form of justice for the atrocities that our people suffered."

Myanmar and the Philippines belong to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The regional bloc's efforts to defuse the Myanmar crisis have been fruitless so far.

The Philippines is now the subject of an in-

ternational human rights probe, with the Hague-based International Criminal Court investigating "possible crimes against humanity" during former president Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drugs crackdown.

In July, President Ferdinand Marcos said the Philippines was "done talking with the ICC" but would continue to question the tribunal's jurisdiction.

AFP



One of the victims cries at the event.
Photo: AFP



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