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China's massive BRI project as
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MYANMAR WOMEN FACE CHINA TRAFFICKING RISK

The problem of human trafficking in Southeast Asia has been in the spotlight over the last year, with the Chinese government expressing concern over Chinese citizens being lured or trafficked for use in illegal and dangerous Myanmar-based scam centres.

But there is also trafficking in the other direction – people being trafficked from Myanmar into China. Poverty and lack of employment opportunities in Myanmar are driving the willingness of both men and women to seek employment in China.

One area of particular concern, highlighted by local Myanmar media, is the significant number of young Rakhine women being trafficked and forced into marriages with Chinese men in Yunnan Province, China. Women's rights activists highlight that the scarcity of local job opportunities and the impacts of poverty, are driving women from various ethnic groups in Rakhine State to seek employment in neighbouring countries such as mainland China and Middle Eastern nations. This trafficking is not new, but it has gone up a notch due to the COVID-19 lockdowns and in the wake of the 2021 military coup.

As the chairperson of the Rakhine Women's Initiative Organization explained to local media, "The primary cause behind this is poverty. When the community cannot provide the necessary conditions for livelihood, and when families struggle to make ends meet, young women feel compelled to seek economic opportunities. This drives them to consider taking up

work and moving to places where such opportunities are more accessible. When people venture to neighbouring countries, including China, often due to human trafficking and illegal labour, it's typically the younger women in the community, who lack a formal education. They may not thoroughly investigate the situation when connecting with brokers; the prospect of securing a job alone seems appealing."

A significant number of Myanmar women find themselves told as wives to Chinese men.

The chairperson says this vulnerability has led some of them into situations where they are sold. Some individuals realise the potential outcome of being sold, but they initially set out to work, only to find themselves in situations where they are coerced into selling their own bodies. It's primarily a result of the desire to avoid returning home empty-handed and the belief that selling their bodies is a way to escape poverty and secure financial resources. Furthermore, the community's traditional way of life is no longer sufficient to meet modern needs, which further exacerbates this situation.

China faces demographic challenges, with an aging population, more men than women, and a large percentage of young people unemployed. There is a ready market for "wives", particularly in the Chinese countryside as many young people have moved to the cities. Many men are left single and find it difficult to meet a suitable partner – hence the market in Myanmar women.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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IN FOCUS





MYANMAR FIGHTER IN NEW YORK

Joshua Van of Myanmar punches Kevin Borjas of Peru in a flyweight fight during the UFC 295 event at Madison Square Garden on November 11 in New York City.

Photo: Sarah Stier/Getty Images/AFP

JUNTA FORCES BOOBY TRAP GANGAW TOWNSHIP POLICE STATION WITH MINES

Junta troops planted landmines before abandoning a police station in Gangaw Township, Magway Region, according to a member of ABSDF Column-3.

On the morning of 4 November soldiers, police and Pyu Saw Htee militia members, abandoned the police station in South Khinyan Village.

After they left members of ABSDF Battalion 12 and people's defence forces (PDFs) found landmines in the compound of the police station and started removing them.

"We do not know how many landmines they planted there, but we have already found 10 until now", said Pyae Phyo Kyaw, an ABSDF Column-3 spokesperson.

After abandoning South Khinyan Village Police

Station the junta forces moved through North Khinyan Village and went to the junta-occupied police station in Hantharwadi Village, also in Gangaw Township.

It is believed that they will continue on towards the neighbouring township of Kalay in Sagaing Region.

"We have received information that they will move on to the junta's regional command in Kalay township," said Pyae Phyo Kyaw.

The day before the junta forces abandoned South Khinyan Village Police Station, on the morning of 3 November, defence forces had attacked and occupied the nearby Minywa Police Station killing six junta soldiers and arresting a further 11 in the process.

JUNTA SOLDIERS' FAMILIES LEAVING PYIN OO LWIN TOWN IN MANDALAY REGION

The families of junta troops stationed in Pyin Oo Lwin Town, Mandalay Region have been leaving the town and relocating since 2 November, according to local residents.

It is believed that they are moving because of the ongoing conflict between junta forces and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Shan State's Nawngkhio Township, just 31 miles away from Pyin Oo Lwin.

A resident said: "We observed family members inside military vehicles leaving the Defence Service Academy (DSA). Many of them are heading towards Mandalay. In addition, we witnessed them departing with both small and large vehicles from Bogyote Village. Their departure doesn't appear to be chaotic; they are leaving in organised groups. Recently, we've

been seeing them leave almost daily."

There is ongoing fighting in Nawngkhio Town and the surrounding areas.

In Pyin Oo Lwin civilians are carrying on with their normal daily routines, whereas the junta military is reportedly on high alert.

On 1 November, fighters from the Northern Alliance and Mandalay People's Defence Force (PDF) attacked a junta convoy of about 150 soldiers in 30 vehicles and two armoured vehicles traveling from Pyin Oo Lwin to Nawngkhio Town.

There was fierce fighting, which resulted in one of the armoured vehicles being destroyed and the defence forces capturing a significant quantity of weapons and ammunition, according to Mandalay PDF.

PDFS TAKE CONTROL OF KAWLIN CITY IN SAGAING REGION

People's defence forces (PDFs) successfully took control of Kawlin City in Sagaing Region on 6 November, according to a statement by the shadow National Unity Government's (NUG's) PDF Military Headquarters.

According to the statement seizing Kawlin Town was part of an operational strategy being led by Kawlin District Military 1 Region. It was the first time the group has successfully managed to capture a district-level city.

The capture of Kawlin City started on 3 November, when defence forces attacked junta positions in the city. They finally gained control of the city three days later on 6 November. In the process, they took control of Kawlin Police Station, capturing all the junta

forces stationed there, and seized many weapons and ammunition.

During the fighting, the junta also launched air attacks that killed some residents and destroyed homes.

The defence forces also managed to take control of the General Administration Office, the High School, the Land Registry Office, and the Myanmar Economic Bank, severely disrupting the junta's control of the city.

According to Kawlin Info, a local news outlet, the fighting in Kawlin has displaced 50,000 people. Also, civilians have been injured and houses have been destroyed.

LANDMINES KILL 10 JUNTA SOLDIERS IN SAGAING'S PALE TOWNSHIP

10 junta soldiers from a convoy scout unit were killed in landmine explosions near to Letaungyi Village in Pale Township, Sagaing Region, on 6 November.

A scout unit of about 30 junta soldiers that was moving ahead of a junta convoy walked into a minefield at about 2:20 p.m. on 6 November according to a soldier from the Daung Min Resistance Force.

He said: "The 30 scout soldiers leading the convoy walked directly into our minefield, resulting in all of them being affected by the landmines. They were unable to return fire, and it was only the soldiers from the military convoy that provided cover from a distance."

According to the Daung Min Resistance Force who had planted the mines, the junta casualties were evacuated by two Mi-17 helicopters from the North-

west Military Command at 10:00 am on 7 November.

"Prior to the arrival of the helicopters, there was intense gunfire in a one-mile radius, and the Military Council cleared the area. Subsequently, two helicopters were dispatched to evacuate the dead and wounded soldiers", said an official from the Daung Min Resistance Force.

According to reports, a junta convoy of 17 vehicles, including cars stolen from civilians, is in the vicinity of Mankyeekan Village, in Pale Township. As a result, over 10,000 residents from nearby villages are being evacuated.



China is watching over Myanmar with concern as Operation 1027 unfolds. Photo: Rafik Wahba

THE CHINA CARD

**Concern over Myanmar's role in
China's massive BRI project as
Operation 1027 hots up**



The Chinese government has expressed serious concern over the Myanmar resistance's Operation 1027 and the threats it poses to Chinese investment, infrastructure and their high-profile Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project as the fighting heats up. Two main China-Myanmar border crossings are currently closed due to the fighting.

In terms of the big picture, Myanmar matters to China as it seeks to spread its trade and communications infrastructure around the world under its BRI project and particularly the importance it places on the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) that links China's southwestern Yunnan Province with the Myanmar's deep-sea port on the Indian Ocean, reducing reliance on the Malacca Strait transport route.

If the Malacca Strait were ever blocked, the Myanmar CMEC corridor – once finished - would provide a level of "life support" for China.

But while Beijing may have voiced alarm, this Myanmar resistance flare-up may only be a relatively small setback for China in terms of its trade and communications outreach around the world under the BRI banner.

SURPRISE ATTACK

The surprise offensive by Myanmar ethnic armed groups under the name Operation 1027 has blocked two strategically vital roads to the Myanmar's biggest trading partner China, choking cross-border commerce and denying the cash-strapped junta taxes and foreign exchange.

Fighters from Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) launched their offensive on October 27 – hence the military operation's name.

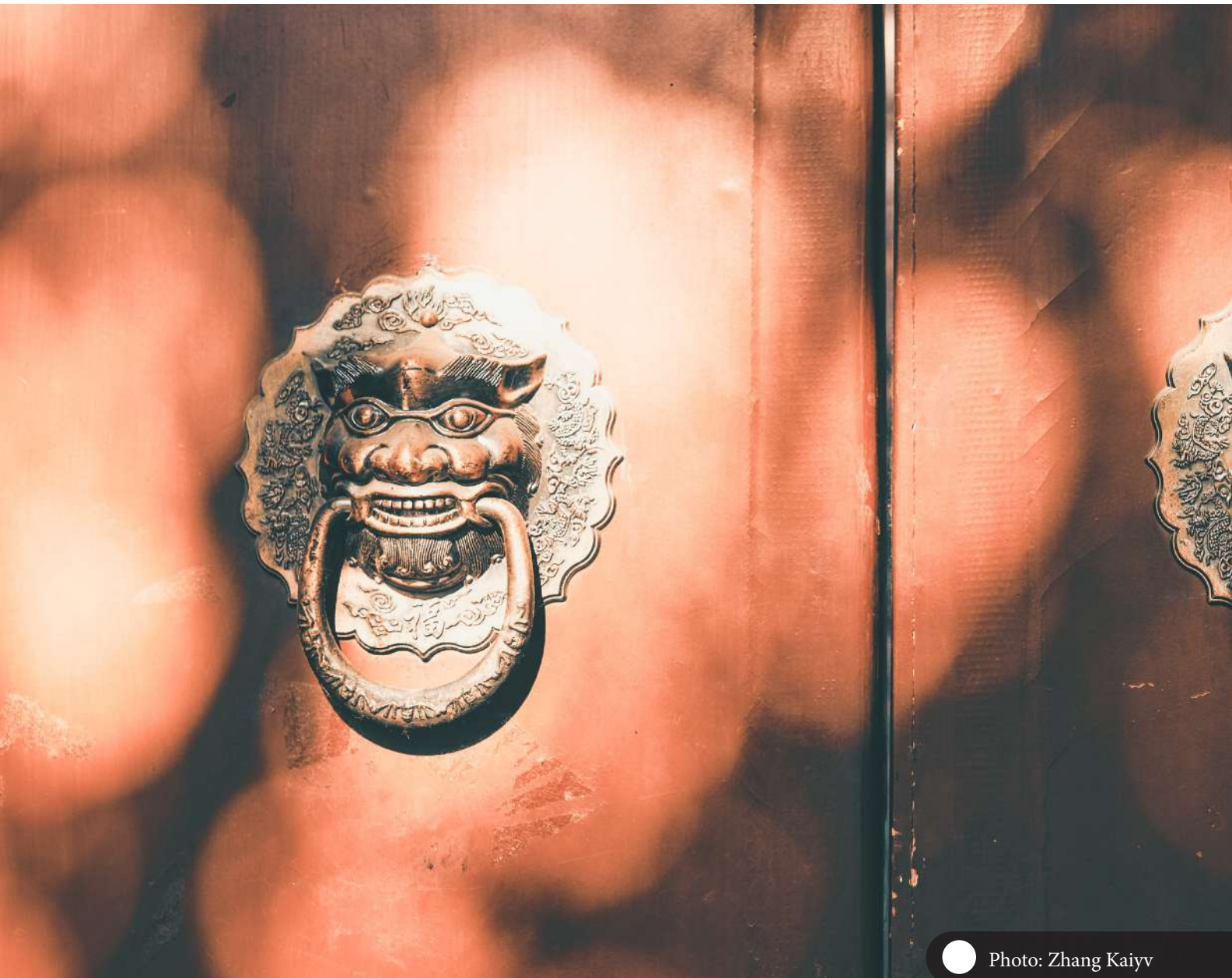


Photo: Zhang Kaiyv

Fighting has raged across northern Shan State for close to three weeks now, displacing 50,000 people, according to the United Nations, and posing the most serious military challenge to the Myanmar generals since they seized power in 2021.

The offensive will “break the country into pieces” if left unchecked, said junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, in a rare admission of the operation’s success against the military since its launch.

The blockage to key transport arteries is already leading to higher prices in Myanmar markets and hampering the junta’s ability to send reinforcements to tackle the offensive.

“We haven’t seen any (goods) trucks since the fighting started” on October 27, a resident of Muse town on the border with China said. “There is no trade crossing.”

Hundreds of trucks a day normally pass through, taking fruit and vegetables into China or bringing back electronic equipment, medicine and consumer goods.

Right now, there is standstill in terms of border crossing.

LOCAL EFFECTS

In the town of Lashio, about 160 kilometres (100 miles) away from Muse by road, residents said they were feeling the impact of the fighting, with the price of rice rising. Goods traffic from Muse has all but halted since the start of the offensive.

Chinshwehaw, another hub on the border with China’s Yunnan province, is also currently closed for business. Last week, the MNDAA posted footage of its fighters raising their flag at the border gate. The junta later admitted it had lost control of the town.

Notably, the Chinshwehaw and Muse crossings carried more than a third of the \$5.32 billion in border trade with Myanmar’s neighbours from April to the start of November this year, according to commerce ministry figures.

Analysts say around a billion dollars of that trade comes from natural gas piped into China through Muse, using the CMEC corridor. More trade likely crosses the border through the black market and is not included in official figures.

CALL FOR A CEASEFIRE

Within a week of the launch of Operation 1027, Beijing was calling for a ceasefire. The Chinese government has expressed concerns for dangers posed to Chinese nationals, and worries that the conflict could spill over the border. A number of Chinese nationals may have been caught up in the fighting, with reports coming through of deaths and injuries on a small scale.

China appears to be playing the game of a strict but concerned neighbour - and playing both sides, the underlying worry being for the safety of its assets. However, Beijing “understood” that infrastructure had not been affected by the clashes, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said Friday last week.

Beijing has relations with the Myanmar junta but also with the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO), with whom it has a working relationship, including the supply of arms to some groups in the north and north-east.

Beijing’s bottom line is its investment and infrastructure – crucially the building blocks of its CMEC and BRI trade and communications funnel, part of its outreach around the world. Although attacks were



made on Chinese factories and investment in Myanmar in the early months following the February 2021 coup, there now appears to be a tacit agreement by the resistance forces not to attack Chinese assets in Myanmar, despite Beijing's recognition of the junta and ongoing relationship.

The previous National League for Democracy-led government had cordial relations with the Chinese government and there appears to be recognition by the National Unity Government (NUG) – the main body facing down the Myanmar junta – that cordial relations matter on a political and economic level, at this time and with an eye to a post-junta era.

CHINA OWED \$1 TRILLION

China has its hands full. On a world level, Beijing is owed more than a trillion dollars through its BRI project, making it the biggest debt collector in the world, a report released last week said, with an esti-

mated 80 percent of the loans supporting countries in financial distress.

Beijing says upwards of 150 countries stretching from Uruguay to Sri Lanka have signed up to the BRI, a vast global infrastructure push unveiled by President Xi Jinping a decade ago.

The first decade of the initiative saw China distribute huge loans to fund the construction of bridges, ports and highways in low and middle-income countries.

But much more than half of those loans have now entered their principal repayment period, said a report released Monday by AidData, a research institute tracking development finance at Virginia's College of William and Mary.

That figure is set to hit 75 percent by the end of the decade, it added.



● A TNLA fighter patrols in northern Shan State. Photo: AFP

Crunching data compiled on Chinese financing of almost 21,000 projects across 165 countries, AidData said Beijing had now committed aid and credit “hovering around \$80 billion a year” to low and middle-income nations.

The United States, in contrast, has provided \$60 billion to such countries a year.

“Beijing is navigating an unfamiliar and uncomfortable role - as the world’s largest official debt collector,” the report said.

“Total outstanding debt -- including principal but excluding interest -- from borrowers in the developing world to China is at least \$1.1 trillion,” AidData said.

AidData, it added, “estimates that 80 percent of China’s overseas lending portfolio in the developing world is currently supporting countries in financial distress”.



‘AIDING THE GLOBAL SOUTH’

Proponents of the BRI praise it for bringing resources and economic growth to the Global South.

But critics have long pointed to opaque pricing for projects built by Chinese companies, with countries including Myanmar and Malaysia renegotiating deals to bring down costs.

And AidData said China has in recent years suffered reputational damage among developing countries, with its approval rating falling from 56 percent in 2019 to 40 percent in 2021.

But China is “learning from its mistakes and becoming an increasingly adept crisis manager”, the study said.

Beijing is seeking to de-risk the BRI by bringing its lending practices more in line with international standards, it stressed.

But also among those methods are “increasingly stringent safeguards to shield itself from the risk of not being repaid”, it said.

That includes allowing key BRI lenders to pay themselves principal and interest due by “unilaterally sweeping” borrowers’ foreign currency reserves held in escrow.

“These cash seizures are mostly being executed in secret and outside the immediate reach of domestic oversight institutions... in low- and middle-income countries,” it said.

“The ability to access cash collateral without borrower consent has become a particularly important safeguard in China’s bilateral lending portfolio.”

At a major summit in Beijing last month marking the project’s tenth anniversary, Xi said China would inject more than \$100 billion of new funds into the BRI.

But a joint report this year by the World Bank and other institutions, including AidData, said Beijing had been forced to hand out billions of dollars in bailout loans to BRI countries in recent years.

SEEKING STABILITY

There is a little doubt that Beijing is hoping the Myanmar fighting will die down and that some form of normality will return to northern Shan State – even if it is minus Myanmar junta military posts, with ethnic armed groups putting up their flags.

Mizzima, AFP

INTERVIEW: OPPOSITION'S OPERATION 1027 IN SHAN STATE INDICATES 'LOW POINT' IN MYANMAR-CHINA TIES

RADIO FREE ASIA

The Myanmar junta has proven incapable of working with the Chinese to advance any of China's economic interests, says an expert on the conflict.

On Oct. 27, the Northern or "Three Brotherhood" Alliance of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Arakan Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army launched "Operation 1027" –



● Fighters mingle with shoppers in northern Shan State. Photo: AFP

named for the date of the offensive. The groups simultaneously struck junta positions in the strategic Shan cities of Kunlong, Hseni, Chin Shwe Haw, Laukkaing, Namhkan, Kutkai, and Lashio, the state's largest municipality. Since then, reports indicate that the alliance has taken some 150 military camps in battles throughout Shan state and caused alarm in the top military brass. The campaign will "break the country into pieces" if left unchecked, said junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing on Nov. 8.



To understand the significance of Operation 1027, Radio Free Asia Burmese reporter Ye Kaung Myint Maung interviewed Jason Tower, the country director for the Burma program at United States Institute of Peace in Washington. Tower has decades of experience researching cross-border conflicts in Southeast Asia.

Radio Free Asia: The Northern Alliance groups have advanced their campaign 1027, a military operation. And it was reported that they have captured more than 100 military outposts and even some important towns in northern Shan State, and some fighting has reached an area not far from where the military academy is located. What's your overall take on Operation 1027?

Tower: In my view, this operation potentially could really be a game changer in terms of the broader revolution and conflict in Myanmar. I think a lot of this in terms of the timing has to do with China's growing dissatisfaction with the junta regime, because over the past five months you've seen where the junta not only has proven incapable of working with the Chinese to advance any of China's economic interests. You've also seen it fail miserably in terms of providing support to China around security interests and cracking down on increasingly malign criminal actors who are harming a global population through scams and human trafficking – a lot of which are targeting Chinese nationals. And so you've seen ... out of frustration, the Chinese side has cracked down in a pretty strong way on the United Wa State Army and on the National Democratic Alliance Army, even detaining high-level Wa leaders like Bao Jin Fang, the number two in the army, and issuing arrest warrants for two other leaders, really showing, I think, very clearly how serious the Chinese side is in terms of wanting the military to try to crack down on this activity.

And despite all of that pressure, the military still failed to act. So I think very clearly you saw they're going to launch this operation. What's very significant about it is just how quickly the Brotherhood has

been able to take major cities within 24 hours of the announcement of the operation. In my view, this was not something that was done quickly. This was a plan that was coordinated over probably a month or more. This operation is a very serious operation. And in order for the Brotherhood Alliance to do this, it would need to have at least tacit support from the Chinese side. And I believe it did have this in this case. Now, what's really interesting about it is the way the Brotherhood Alliances framed this around cracking down on the transnational criminal activity and liberating people from these scam centers. And that does seem to be what a lot of the initial targets are that you are seeing, now the Brotherhood Alliance groups and PDFs go in, identify some of these centers and liberate the scam centers. So you are seeing some of that happening. But of course, I think the bigger issue here is that in Koh Kong, all eyes of the Myanmar army, the four eco Kong clan families that represent the COCOM border guard force have refused to do anything to crack down on this because this is the main source of revenue and a major source of revenue also for the military. And so now you're seeing the Brotherhood really take this into their own hands.

I think the other major factor here is that on one hand, you know, the entire country is watching this operation and they're seeing how weak the Myanmar army is. You know, Myanmar army troops are going in and they're defecting immediately, giving all of their arms over to the Brotherhood alliance. ... And I think this is emboldening everyone. It's letting everyone sort of see just how weak the military has become and how illegitimate it has become. Because the ultimate reason why the Chinese greenlighted this operation is because the junta has failed to take any steps to crack down on this awful transnational criminal activity, which is harming the interests of Thailand, harming the interests of China, harming the interests of really every country around the world. So in that respect, I think this really a game changer, because we're at a point right now where the Chinese side has really reached a kind of a low point in terms of its relationship with the

military junta.

Radio Free Asia: We know that China has played a very important role in the armed conflict in northern Myanmar. And also China has strong ties with members of Northern Alliance groups. So in this case in particular, what led you to the conclusion that China has given the green light to start this military operation?

Tower: I think that the reason why China is comfortable with this operation is because the operation is framed around doing exactly what the Chinese side has been telling the Myanmar army to do for the past four months. But what the Myanmar army has refused to do, which is to crack down on the criminal activity, take down these scam syndicates, free the victims of human trafficking and so on. And so that's, you know, the justification that the Brotherhood is giving for launching this operation. And you do see where it has yielded some successes. You know, there are upwards of around 2,000 people that have now made it out of those scam syndicates in Kokong. You know, rumors are that a lot of the compound owners have fled the area and moved elsewhere. But I think that this also demonstrates just how frustrated that China has become with the military. I mean, if you go back to December or even if you go back to May, the Chinese were giving the military quite a lot in terms of legitimacy and recognition. And I think that that is now being downscaled. I mean, the Chinese side gave Min Aung Hlaing a snub by not inviting him to the Belt and Road Forum. He was rejected from that, I think, largely because of the failures to deal with these issues.

And then also, if you just look at China's economic interests in and in Myanmar, the military just has no capacity to support any of those interests. So I guess from China's vantage point, it has to be starting to think about some of these questions. What value does the Myanmar army really present at this point? It's committing atrocities everywhere. It's blowing up the Chinese border. It's unable to crack down on crime. All of this just really shows you just how poor

the relationship has become between China and the military, and the Chinese side are now looking for other options. It's turning to the Brotherhood; it's turning to the northern (armed ethnic organizations) to try to address some of these problems.

Radio Free Asia: The Myanmar military has used the Belt and Road Initiative projects and other interests in Myanmar as a bargaining chip in dealing with the Chinese government. So do you think they have run out of these bargaining chips at this point?

Tower: I think it's running low on bargaining chips at this point, frankly, because what is the military going to do? I mean, interestingly, while this crackdown and fighting is going on up in the north, we're actually hearing reports that a large number of these scam syndicates are now moving into other parts of the country. They're moving down to Mandalay. They're moving into Yangon. And even that scam syndicates are moving into Naypyidaw. All of this points to, yeah, there's a crackdown. The Brotherhood is sort of fighting this up in the China border area. But the military is continuing to either be completely incompetent and ignore this or to enable the activity in other parts of the country because it's financially benefiting from it. So, you know, I think from the vantage point of external actors who are concerned about these sorts of issues – and it seems that China is increasingly concerned about this – there has to be this question. Why is it that the Myanmar army is not taking action on this issue? And I think the answer is, it doesn't have the capacity, the ability, and it's just simply not a responsible government. And so I just don't really see where the military has much in terms of bargaining power with the Chinese side at this point. I mean, the military doesn't have the ability to control northern Burma. It doesn't have the ability to advance China's projects like the railroad project or the Kyaukphyu project. It doesn't have the capacity to do anything with hydropower projects. You know, the Chinese kind of probably have to be thinking at this point, 'what is this military useful for? How could it help in terms of any of China's main interests?' Because I

think that China is looking at the central Burman government actors ruling in a very transactional way. To what extent can these actors meet some of China's interests and needs? And at this point, it would seem like the junta's failures over the past two plus years in terms of governance, in terms of the atrocities and major mistakes it's made on the battlefield, in terms of the economy, it must really be leading many to draw the conclusion that simply there is nothing that they are able to do, nothing that they can bring to the table.

**Reported by Ye Kaung Myint Maung for
RFA Burmese. Edited by Paul Eckert.**

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

NORTHERN MYANMAR FIGHTING DISPLACES ALMOST 50,000 CIVILIANS: UN



Photo: AFP

Almost 50,000 people have been displaced by fighting in northern Myanmar after an alliance of ethnic armed groups launched an offensive against the military two weeks ago, the United Nations said last Friday.

Fighting has raged for two weeks across northern Shan state near the Chinese border, in what analysts say poses the biggest military challenge to the junta since it seized power in 2021.

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Arakan Army (AA) say they have seized dozens of military outposts and blocked vital trade routes to China.

"As of 9 November, almost 50,000 people in northern Shan were forced into displacement," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said in an update.

Outside Shan state's Lashio township -- home to the military's northeastern command -- internet and phone services were disrupted, hindering humanitarian responses to the fighting, UNOCHA said.

Restrictions on transport and availability of cash were hindering efforts by local humanitarian groups to give out aid, it said.

A further 40,000 people have been displaced by clashes between the military and its opponents in neighbouring Sagaing region and Kachin state since early November, UNOCHA said.

The military has made little comment on the surprise offensive but earlier this week the junta-appointed president warned the country could end up "split into various parts" if the military was unable to "manage" the fighting.

The remoteness of the rugged, jungle-clad region -- home to pipelines that supply oil and gas to China -- and patchy communications make it difficult to verify casualty numbers.

Beijing, a major junta ally and arms supplier, on Tuesday confirmed there had been Chinese casualties as a result of the clashes in Myanmar.

A foreign ministry spokesperson did not say whether the Chinese were killed or wounded, nor where precisely the incident had taken place.

COMMUNICATIONS BLACKOUT

Myanmar's borderlands are home to more than a dozen ethnic armed 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" (PDF) that have sprung up since the coup to fight the military's bloody crackdown on dissent.

Earlier this week, several PDF groups claimed to have seized the town of Kawlin in Sagaing region, home to mostly ethnic-majority Bamar and a traditional recruiting ground for the military.

AFP was unable to reach residents in the area, where internet and phone lines are largely cut.

Sagaing, which borders Shan and Kachin states, has become a hotspot of resistance to junta rule.

Dozens of PDF groups are active across Sagaing, where the military is accused of burning villages and massacring inhabitants.

AFP

CHINA URGES MYANMAR TO 'COOPERATE' ON BORDER STABILITY



Photo: AFP

A senior Chinese diplomat has urged Myanmar to “co-operate” in maintaining stability on their shared border, Beijing said last week, after armed groups fighting the junta seized a strategic trading outpost.

Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong visited Myanmar from Friday to Sunday, Beijing said, holding talks with senior junta officials on clashes the UN said have forced 23,000 people from their homes.

“Myanmar is called on to cooperate with China in maintaining stability along the China-Myanmar border,” said Nong, according to a readout from China’s foreign ministry.

Nong met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Shwe and Deputy Foreign Minister Lwin Oo during his visit, Beijing said.

China also urged the junta to “earnestly ensure the safety of the lives and property of Chinese border area residents, and take effective measures to strengthen the security of Chinese personnel, institutions and projects in Myanmar”, he added.

Recent attacks, launched by an alliance of Myanmar ethnic minority groups in the northeast Shan state, represent the biggest military challenge faced by the junta since it seized power in 2021, analysts have said.

Last week China called for an immediate ceasefire in the region, where a billion-dollar rail route - part of Beijing’s global Belt and Road infrastructure project - is planned.

The junta on Saturday said the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an ethnic armed group based in neighbouring Kachin state, had joined the attacks on its forces, promising retaliation.

Local media reported the junta had shelled the remote town of Laiza on the Chinese border, home to the KIA’s headquarters.

AFP

RUSSIAN JOINT NAVAL EXERCISE WITH MYANMAR NAVY



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with visiting Russian naval chief Admiral Nicolai Yevmenov. Photo: AFP

The head of Russia’s navy met Myanmar’s junta chief ahead of joint naval exercises that began on Tuesday, according to Myanmar state media, the first combined drills by the two countries at loggerheads with the West.

The security exercises involving Russia’s Pacific Fleet and Myanmar’s navy ran from 8 to 9 November in the Andaman Sea, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

Both navies contributed ships and aircraft to drills simulating the “prevention of air, water surface and underwater dangers and maritime security measures”, the newspaper said.

Ahead of the exercise Russian naval chief Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov met junta leader Min Aung Hlaing aboard the Russian destroyer Admiral Tributs and briefed him on the ship’s capabilities, the newspaper said.

Moscow is a close ally of the junta, providing arms and diplomatic support as Myanmar’s military struggles to crush armed opposition to its rule.

The junta has described Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as “justified”.

In September Myanmar and Russia were joint chairs of a “counter-terrorism” military exercise held in Russia’s far east that brought together several coun-

tries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Since seizing power in February 2021 the junta has imported \$406 million in arms and equipment from Russia, the United Nations’ Special rapporteur for Myanmar said in May.

Min Aung Hlaing has made several trips to Russia since the coup and met President Vladimir Putin last year.

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Myanmar rolled out the red carpet for the Russian naval delegation. Photo: AFP

RUSSIAN COMPANY AND MYANMAR JUNTA DISCUSS EXTRACTION OF MINERALS IN MYANMAR



A visiting Ross-Congress Investment Fund delegation met with Myanmar Military Council's officials for extracting metals and minerals in Myanmar, exploration of oil and gas in onshore and offshore wells and to discuss providing technical assistance to Myanmar.

The information released by the Myanmar Ministry of Energy said that they discussed providing technology and investment for directly extracting natural gas from coal deposits.

The Ross-Congress Investment Fund delegation led by CEO Mr. Alexander Sergeevich met Myanmar Energy Minister Ko Ko Lwin in Naypyitaw on 8 October. The following day they met with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

They discussed providing technical assistance and investment for directly extracting natural gas trapped in coal deposits in Myanmar, the upgrading of

oil refineries and fertilizer factories and providing technical assistance for them.

They also discussed promotion of cooperation in the energy sector between the two countries, providing technical assistance in exploration and extraction of oil and gas in onshore and offshore wells, use of digital monitoring software, increasing output of oil and gas in declining onshore wells and potential wells in cooperation with Russian companies.

This delegation also discussed with Myanmar officials for cooperation in solar power energy, energy production, conservation of natural resources and environment conservation.

Moreover, they discussed fertilizer production for agriculture, and producing value-added products of agricultural produce and livestock for export to Russia.

SOE HTUT, ALLY OF MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF, JAILED FOR CORRUPTION: STATE MEDIA



A close ally of Myanmar's top general has been imprisoned for five years on corruption charges, state media said Saturday.

In recent months, the military -- which has faced armed resistance since seizing power in a 2021 coup -- has detained a number of officials as the civil conflict batters the already struggling economy.

The cash-strapped junta is also battling a recent offensive in the north by ethnic armed groups that has choked vital cross-border commerce with China and poses the most serious military challenge to the generals since they took power.

Soe Htut, a former home affairs minister, was removed from the ruling State Administration Council, as the junta calls itself, in a September reshuffle.

"He was indicted under relevant sections of laws and the Court Martial adjudicated his cases and sentenced him to five years imprisonment," state me-

dia outlet The Global New Light of Myanmar reported Saturday.

Soe Htut ordered subordinates to issue passports to companies operating in the country by "inappropriately applying his rank and authority", the newspaper said.

It added that he "took bribes and failed to supervise the undertakings not aligned with the financial rules and regulations for the staff welfare fund of the Ministry of Home Affairs".

AFP

CHINESE WORK PERMITS FOR MYANMAR WORKERS DISCUSSED

The Myanmar junta Minister of Labour, Myint Naung, reportedly discussed allowing Myanmar citizens to work in China, during a recent trip to Kunming in China.

Apparently, amongst the topics discussed were: signing an agreement between China and Myanmar to cooperate in labour affairs; obtaining official work permits and residence permits for Myanmar workers; and ensuring that they are covered by the same Chinese labour laws that protect Chinese workers and receive the same benefits as them.

Despite China and Myanmar sharing a border, Myanmar citizens are not allowed to work in China, according to an employment agency in Myanmar that sends workers to nine other countries, but not China.

China is urging the Myanmar junta to bring peace back to areas in northern Shan State that border China, where there has been fierce fighting between junta troops and the Northern Alliance.

The junta is putting pressure on migrant workers working abroad to pay 2 per cent income tax and remit 25 per cent of their salary through official banks, which will give a far worse exchange rate than can be obtained on the black market.

Labour rights activists say that the junta is trying to exploit migrant workers in this way because its reserves of foreign currency are dwindling.

Out of a Myanmar population of about 54 million, about 4 million people work abroad. Since the February 2021 coup, many more people have gone abroad to look for work.

Thailand is the country that hosts the most Myanmar migrant workers, but there are also many working in Malaysia, Japan, Singapore and Middle Eastern countries, according to data from employment agencies who place workers overseas.

LATEST MYANMAR SANCTIONS BY CANADA, UK AND USA

Below is a list of the companies and individuals sanctioned on 31 October 2023 in the latest round of targeted sanctions by Canada, the UK and the USA, along with previous designations that remain in force.

List courtesy of Justice for Myanmar.

Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE): A state-owned enterprise illegally controlled by the junta and targeted by the USA for the first time with a directive against the direct and indirect provision of financial services, which will go into force on 15 December. This follows a sustained campaign by Myanmar people, civil society and allies.

The financial services directive is an important step to disrupt the flow of funds to the junta but Justice For Myanmar says it falls short of full sanctions that would freeze MOGE's assets and block all trade with the junta-controlled state-owned enterprise.

MOGE was previously sanctioned by the EU.

Mining Enterprise No. 1 (ME1) and Mining Enterprise No. 2 (ME2): State-owned enterprises illegally controlled by the junta and sanctioned by Canada. ME1 and ME2 monopolise the mining sector, receive a share of revenue from private mining companies, and funnel large amounts of revenue to the junta. ME1 and ME2 were previously sanctioned by the USA and EU.

International Group of Entrepreneur Services Company Limited (IGE): A crony company sanctioned by the UK for its business with the Myanmar military, which is a subsidiary of International Group of Entrepreneur Company Limited. IGE Group is a crony conglomerate led by Ne Aung, the son of former junta minister Aung Thaung and brother of junta navy chief Moe Aung. IGE has deep business links with the military, including through the Lotte Hotel, developed on land leased from the Office of the Quartermaster General of the Myanmar Army, as reported by Justice For Myanmar.

IGE Group has at least three companies that remain registered in Singapore: IGE Pte Ltd, UNOG Pte Ltd and IPL Pte Ltd.

International Group of Entrepreneur Company Limited was previously sanctioned by the EU.

Shwe Byain Phyu Group and Thein Win Zaw: Shwe Byain Phyu Group is a crony conglomerate founded by Thein Win Zaw, who is the group's

chairperson. Both were sanctioned by Canada. Shwe Byain Phyu bought Telenor Myanmar, renamed ATOM Myanmar, providing the junta with enhanced surveillance capabilities and access to personal data. Justice For Myanmar has exposed the business interests of Shwe Byain Phyu Group and Thein Win Zaw.

Shwe Byain Phyu has a company in Singapore, Investcom Pte Ltd, which remains registered.

Shwe Byain Phyu Group and Thein Win Zaw have been sanctioned for the first time.

Star Sapphire Group of Companies, Star Sapphire Trading Company Limited, Tun Min Latt and Win Min Soe: All sanctioned by Canada, the group has multiple businesses that generate funds for the Myanmar military, including a casino, a hotel and mining. Star Sapphire Group of Companies and its subsidiary, Star Sapphire Trading, have been key suppliers of arms and equipment to the Myanmar military from Israel and China in particular.

The group is owned by Tun Min Latt and Win Min Soe, who are a married couple and are close associates of junta head Min Aung Hlaing and his children. Tun Min Latt is in custody in Thailand on drug trafficking and money laundering charges. Star Sapphire Group's business with the Myanmar military and links with Min Aung Hlaing's family have been exposed by Justice For Myanmar.

Star Sapphire group has a company in Singapore, Star Sapphire Group Pte Ltd, which remains registered.

Star Sapphire Group of Companies and Tun Min Latt were previously sanctioned by the UK and USA. The USA also previously sanctioned Star Sapphire Trading Company Limited and Win Min Soe.

Cargo Link Petroleum Logistics Company Limited and Khin Phyu Win: Cargo Link Petroleum Logistics (formerly Cargo Link Pongrawe Logistics Company Limited), sanctioned by Canada, is part of the Shoon group of companies (formerly Asia Sun).

Shoon group is the junta's main partner in the import, storage and distribution of jet fuel. The group is led by Khin Phyu Win, also sanctioned by Canada. Cargo Link Petroleum Logistics is the junta's main transporter of jet fuel to military bases and airports across Myanmar. The role of Cargo Link Petroleum Logistics and Khin Phyu Win in supplying jet fuel to the Myanmar military has been exposed by Amnesty

International and Justice For Myanmar.

Shoon group has three companies that remain registered in Singapore: Shoon Energy Pte Ltd, P.E.I. Energy Pte Ltd and PEIA Pte Ltd.

Cargo Link Petroleum Logistics was previously sanctioned by the US, and its parent company, Cargo Link Company Limited, was previously sanctioned by the UK. Khin Phyu Win was previously sanctioned by the USA and UK.

Canada continues to lead in measures to stop the junta's access to jet fuel, which it needs to continue to carry out indiscriminate airstrikes. On 31 October Canada expanded its ban on the sale of jet fuel to include a prohibition on shipping insurance for the transport of jet fuel to Myanmar.

Sky Aviator Company Limited, Heli Eagle Company Limited, Sky Royal Hero Limited, Kyaw Min Oo and Myo Min Oo: Major suppliers of aviation equipment to the Myanmar military and all sanctioned by Canada.

Sky Aviator is owned by Kyaw Min Oo and the linked company, Heli Eagle, is owned by Myo Min Oo, who is his brother, according to Justice For Myanmar sources. Kyaw Min Oo was also sanctioned by the UK.

Since the coup, Sky Aviator has procured equipment from Russia and Ukraine, including YAK-130 support equipment, engines and parts. The Yak-130 is increasingly deployed by the military within populated areas, including in the catastrophic indiscriminate bombing of Pazigy Village in Kantabulu township, Sagaing Region, that killed at least 168 people, including children, in the deadliest airstrike since the military's attempted coup. Sky Aviator's business with the Myanmar military has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

Heli Eagle and Sky Royal Hero have supplied equipment to the Myanmar military following the coup, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. Sky Aviator and Heli Eagle are both registered suppliers of the Myanmar military's Directorate of Procurement and share phone numbers and an email address. According to the UN Special Rapporteur, Sky Royal Hero has a trading relationship with Sky Aviator.

Sky Aviator was previously sanctioned by the EU, UK and USA. Kyaw Min Oo was previously sanctioned by the USA and EU. Heli Eagle, Sky Royal Hero and Myo Min Oo have been sanctioned for the first time.

Myanmar New Era Trading Company Limited and Naing Htut Aung: Myanmar New Era Trading is

a significant supplier of aircraft parts for the Myanmar military from Russia that was sanctioned by Canada. Import data confirms the company's procurement for the military of parts for Mi-17 (Mi-8M) helicopters from Russia between 2017 and 2020.

The Mi-17 helicopter is frequently used by the junta in its commission of war crimes, including in the 16 September 2022 attack on Let Yet Kone Village when the junta indiscriminately bombed a school and a monastery. Myanmar New Era Trading Company Limited is part of the network of International Gateways Group, a major arms broker led by Naing Htut Aung, who was also sanctioned by Canada.

Myanmar New Era Trading and the International Gateways Group network have been exposed by Justice For Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar.

There are at least two companies in Naing Htut Aung's network that remain registered in Singapore: Global Polytech Resources Pte Ltd and Xinchidai Company Pte Ltd.

Myanmar New Era Trading was previously sanctioned by the UK. Naing Htut Aung was previously sanctioned by the USA and EU.

Miya Win International: A private arms broker sanctioned by Canada, Miya Win International has procured unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and parts from Austria's Schiebel Corporation, including after the military's coup attempt. In addition, Miya Win International has played a key role in the military's deal with the Austrian company Diamond Aircraft Industries, a Chinese-owned company with a facility in Canada, to set up local assembly and production of DART-450 aerial reconnaissance aircraft in Myanmar. Evidence of Miya Win International's business with Schiebel Corporation and Diamond Aircraft Industries has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar.

Miya Win International was previously sanctioned by the UK.

Creative Exploration Limited: An arms broker sanctioned by Canada that has imported fuses from India to the Myanmar military, including since the attempted coup, which has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar. Creative Exploration was formerly known as My Space or mySpace. The company has also imported digital forensics technology from the USA.

Creative Exploration Limited has been sanctioned for the first time.

Life and Challenge Company Limited: A supplier of technology, equipment and training to the

Myanmar military and its police that was sanctioned by Canada. In 2018, Life and Challenge was awarded a contract to design and deliver a radar capability development program for the Myanmar military. Life and Challenge's business with the military has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar.

Life and Challenge has a company in Singapore, LANC Pte Ltd, which remains registered.

Life and Challenge has been sanctioned for the first time.

Synpex Shwe Company Limited is an arms broker sanctioned by Canada. The company has procured material from Russia for the Myanmar Air Force following the military's coup and it also supplies raw materials for the military's domestic arms manufacturing industry. Synpex Shwe's involvement in the supply of arms to the Myanmar military has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar.

Synpex Shwe has a company in Singapore, Synergy Tripexin Pte Ltd, which remains registered.

Synpex Shwe was previously sanctioned by the UK.

Suntac Group of Companies, Suntac Technologies Company Limited, Suntac International Trading Company Limited and Sit Taing Aung: Suntac Group of Companies were sanctioned by Canada, while Suntac Technologies Company Limited and Suntac International Trading Company Limited were sanctioned by the USA for supplying equipment to the Myanmar military.

Suntac Group of Companies is owned by Sit Taing Aung, who was also sanctioned by the UK. Sit Taing Aung is Mexico's Honorary Consul to Myanmar. Sit Taing Aung and Suntac's involvement in the procurement of aircraft parts has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, and Suntac's involvement in the military's arms manufacturing industry has been exposed by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar.

Sit Taing Aung was previously sanctioned by the USA, Canada and EU.

Mottama Holdings Limited and Min Dhama Steel Structures Limited: Mottama Holdings is a conglomeration and, together with its subsidiary, Min Dhama Steel Structures, was sanctioned by Canada. The companies supply the Myanmar military's domestic arms industry with raw materials and machinery, as exposed by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. Evi-

dence received by Justice For Myanmar reveals the involvement of Min Dhama Steel Structures in importing steel for the construction of the so-called Honorary Hall of the Residence of the State Administration Council.

Mottama Holdings and Min Dhama Steel Structures have been sanctioned for the first time.

Bhone Min Myat Company Limited and Ever Meter Company Limited: The two companies sanctioned by Canada are used by the military conglomerate Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) to evade international sanctions, according to reporting by Myanmar Now.

Bhone Min Myat was established after the military's coup attempt, reportedly as a front for the MEHL subsidiary, Myawaddy Trading, and has been used to import fuel and palm oil. Ever Meter Company Limited, part of Same Sky Group of Companies, is an MEHL partner that it has used as a front for payments, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. Ever Meter has been a long-time supplier of electricity meters for MEHL.

Bhone Min Myat and Ever Meter have been sanctioned for the first time.

Pye Phyo Tay Za and Htoo Htet Tay Za: The two sons of Tay Za were sanctioned by the UK for their involvement in Htoo Group of Companies, which has multiple businesses with the Myanmar military and its conglomerates. Htoo Htet Tay Za was also sanctioned by Canada, which had previously sanctioned Pye Phyo Tay Za. Htoo Group's business with the Myanmar military and the role of Pye Phyo Tay Za and Htoo Htet Tay Za have been detailed by Justice For Myanmar.

The two brothers were also previously sanctioned by the USA.

Myo Thitsar: A director of the Myanmar military arms broker, Dynasty International Company Limited, who has been sanctioned by the UK. Dynasty International is a major arms broker of the Myanmar military from Belarus in particular. Among other dirty deals, the company has imported spare parts for Mi-17 helicopters. The company is led by Aung Moe Myint, who is the Honorary Consul of Belarus to Myanmar. Dynasty International's business with the Myanmar military has been exposed by Justice For Myanmar.

Dynasty International has a company in Singapore, Dynasty Excellency Pte Ltd, which remains registered.

Myo Thitsar was previously sanctioned by the USA and Canada.

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PROGRESSIVE VOICE: UN MUST NOT NEGLECT MYANMAR

Campaign organisation Progressive Voice is asking the UN to make sure it does not neglect Myanmar in the face of so many global crises.

As the UN General Assembly (UNGA) meets in New York, understandably preoccupied by the latest horrors occurring in Gaza, Progressive Voice says that it is imperative that the UN stops neglecting Myanmar and puts it higher on its agenda.

It says that UN Member States must take all measures to hold the military junta accountable for its mass atrocity crimes, to work towards an arms embargo, and ensure that international aid agencies uphold the principle of do no harm by ceasing engagement with the junta and ensuring aid reaches those most in need via locally-led, frontline humanitarian responders.

Marking 1,000 days since Min Aung Hlaing launched his coup, a campaign by Blood Money Campaign that has been supported by thousands of individuals and organizations around the world is urging Singapore to “immediately block the Myanmar junta’s access to funds, arms, equipment, and jet fuel.”

This is because Singapore arms brokers continue to sell arms to the junta, while military junta and cronies continue to access Singapore’s financial system.

But, as Progressive Voice points out, the junta does not only receive arms from Singapore, Israeli companies have also sold weapons to the junta since the coup.

The problematic sale of weapons was echoed by the report submitted to the UNGA by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, who noted how state-owned enter-

prises from Russia, China, and India, as well as private companies in Thailand and Singapore, among others, continue to sell arms to the junta.

He called for UN Member States to immediately halt “the sale or transfer of weapons and dual-use technologies to Myanmar and holistically sanction arms dealing networks.”

Stopping the flow of arms and related materials, including aviation fuel, to the military junta is all the more urgent given the junta’s increasing use of airstrikes as a reaction to its losing control of more territory and even important towns, as seen in recent days in northern Shan State.

The local research group, Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica has documented 272 airstrikes by the junta between May and August of this year, killing 163 citizens. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, recently told the UN Human Rights Council that “Each day, the people of Myanmar are enduring horrifying attacks, flagrant human rights violations and the crumbling of their livelihoods and hopes.”

But, with the dry season about to begin, a build-up of troops in Karenni State, and an inevitable reaction to recent losses in Shan State, the junta will inflict more aerial assaults, more atrocity crimes, and the humanitarian crisis will surely become more catastrophic.

Progressive Voice believes that at the same time as reducing the junta’s ability to kill and displace the people of Myanmar, UN Member States and agencies must take measures to ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian aid.

This involves recognising the vital role and capacity to deliver assistance of frontline civil society and

community-based humanitarian service providers who have the trust of local communities and access to populations who are most in need.

However, recognition should just be a first step, and decision-making on the programming and implementation of the delivery of aid must be in the hands of such local humanitarian, cross-border actors.

In tandem with the above measures, the UNGA must take measures to pursue justice and accountability under international law for the atrocity crimes committed by the military junta.

As a statement submitted to the UNGA by 440 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations outlined, “The Myanmar military’s decades-long impunity, and thus its systematic and widespread violence, will continue to prevail – and thousands of lives will continue to be lost – unless and until the military faces prosecution and is held to account for its genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

Whether Rohingya, Karen, Bamar, Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist, justice and accountability for the Myanmar military’s crimes will serve to restore a semblance of peace and justice for the long-term recovery of the country. Thus, a UN Security Council resolution that includes a referral to the International Criminal Court or the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal, a global arms embargo, and targeted economic sanctions is vital.

Furthermore, Progressive Voice says if such a resolution is vetoed by China and/or Russia, both major suppliers of arms to the junta, then a UNGA resolution must be passed, as happened with Ukraine.

Lastly, UN Member States must stop lending legitimacy to the junta. Instead, they must publicly and substantively engage with the legitimate governance actors of Myanmar, including the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Resistance Organisations, and

other people’s administrative entities.

The people of Myanmar have had very little support from international institutions and actors. As the UNGA concludes, and with various crises throughout the world taking up their attention, the struggle of the people of Myanmar amid horrific violence at the hands of the military junta must not be neglected, according to Progressive Voice.

There are concrete actions that the UNGA can and must take to tear down the junta and to support the democratic vision of the Myanmar people.

Stopping the flow of arms and aviation fuel to the junta, ensuring humanitarian assistance goes through on-the-ground civil society actors via cross-border channels, and pursuing justice and accountability are three key actions that the people of Myanmar need the world to take.

BORDERS AS WALLS: INDIA IS AMONG THE FEW COUNTRIES WITH EXTENSIVE HARD BORDERS DIVIDING PEOPLE

NANDITA HAKSAR



India-Myanmar border. Photo: EPA

The Indian government has decided to construct a 100-kilometre-long smart fence along the Indo-Myanmar border. The project is a part of the Narendra Modi government's plan to completely seal India's borders with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The smart fence allows the security forces to maintain the surveillance system through a monitor sitting inside their control rooms. Alarms go off as soon as there is any infiltration attempt.

This move is in keeping with the worldwide trend to militarise international boundaries. While on the one hand, the international community speaks of a world without borders, more and more borders are being fortified to control the freedom of movement of people. In an article titled *The Idea of a Borderless World*, Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist, argues that the "capacity to decide who can move, who can settle where and under what conditions is increasingly becoming the core of political struggles."

According to a report entitled *A Walled World*

Towards Global Apartheid brought out in November 2020 by the Transnational Institute, over the last 50 years, 63 border walls have been built worldwide, leading to the growing militarisation of borders. In a table ranking countries by border walls built between 1968 and 2018, Israel has built six walls and India comes next with three border walls covering 6,540 kilometres across 43 per cent of its borders.

The report states the 'drive and profiting from this surge in wall building is an entire Border Industrial Complex. This industry has reinforced a narrative in which migration and other political and/ or humanitarian challenges at the border are primarily framed as a security problem, where the frontier can never be secure enough, and for which its latest military and security technologies are always the solution.'

According to the report, 'India could well be described as an Asian fortress. Since 1992, it has built walls along its entire border with Pakistan, and had already begun to do so in 1989 along the border with Bangladesh. In 2003, it also built a barrier along

a large section of its border with Myanmar. Of India's seven shared borders (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and a few kilometres with Afghanistan), three have barriers along almost the entire border.'

The main reasons given by successive Indian governments for these walls are to prevent immigration from Bangladesh, terrorism and the territorial dispute over Kashmir with Pakistan, and the entry of militants and narcotics across the border with Myanmar.

India and Myanmar formalised their borders with various agreements, and it has been estimated that over 400 of the 1,643-km border has been enclosed, with new reinforcements being made in 2017, in part to prevent the entry of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who are being expelled by Bangladesh.

From 2007, India began to introduce technological improvements to all of its walls, including night-vision devices, handheld thermal cameras, surveillance radars, ground sensors and high-power telescopes. Of India's 15,106 kilometres of land borders, an estimated 6,540.7 kilometres of barriers have been erected, making 43.29 per cent of its borders walled. In addition, the government later decided that it was not enough to control the country's land borders, so satellite systems have been installed to control cross-border movement, a cost of over USD 2 billion. It is in this context we must examine the decision of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to build a smart wall on the Indo-Myanmar boundary.

ACT EAST POLICY

The Northeast region of India comprising the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, is spread over an area of 2.55 lakh square kilometres, which accounts for 7.8 per cent of the total land mass of India. The region shares its international boundaries with four foreign countries—China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The entire area is connected to the Indian mainland by a 22-km land corridor through Siliguri in the state of West Bengal, popularly known as the Chicken's Neck.

The border between India and Myanmar runs for 1,643 kilometres in the four Northeast states: Mizoram (475 kilometres), Manipur (425 kilometres),

Nagaland (200 kilometres) and Arunachal Pradesh (525 kilometres).

In the 1990s, the government of India initiated the Look East Policy. The policy is designed to build closer relations between India and Southeast Asia. Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country that shares a border with India. In 2015, Prime Minister Modi upgraded the policy to Act East. As a part of this new policy, social-cultural ties between the northeast region and Myanmar were promoted and the Free Movement Regime (FMR) was initiated on the Indo-Myanmar border in 2018.

Under the FMR, citizens of India and Myanmar who are residents of any area within 16 kilometres on either side of the Indo-Myanmar border can cross the border on producing a border pass (one-year validity) issued by the competent authority and can stay up to two weeks per visit without a visa. Manipur suspended the FMR in 2020 during the covid pandemic but efforts are being made to open the border for trade again.

INDIA-MYANMAR FRIENDSHIP ROAD BORDER CROSSING

The Manipur government has extended the temporary suspension of FMR along the Indo-Myanmar border for another three months with effect from 15 November 2022 or until such time as the Indo-Myanmar border gates are formally opened by both sides for the movement of people. The justification for this decision is that the FMR may lead to a further increase in 'the number of illegal entry of Myanmar nationals into India in view of the current law and order situation in Myanmar.'

There are over 250 villages with over 300,000 people living within 10 kilometres of the border who frequently cross the border through 150 small and large, formal and informal border crossings. These people have families across the border and their fields too have been separated by the border.

There is a dispute over the demarcation of the international boundary with the local villagers accusing the Myanmar army of removing the border pillars into Indian territory. It has been reported that 99 border pillars (BP 32 to 48 in Churachandpur district, 49 to 89 in Chandel district and 90 to 130 in Ukhrul district) have been moved by the Myanmar army. In some cases, the

Myanmar army has even built army posts after removing the pillars.

Apart from the local disputes, the question remains: can a smart wall be an answer to the problems and challenges facing Manipur state?

INSURGENCY

According to a MHA report, Manipur is affected by the activities of Meitei Naga, Kuki, Zomi and Hmar insurgent groups. Many of these groups have their camps inside the jungles of Myanmar and have links with the insurgent groups across the border. After the coup of 2021, the various armed groups in Myanmar have come together under a joint command to form what are called the People's Defence Forces or PDFs. The PDFs are committed to protecting people from repression by the Myanmar army.

The PDFs are generally larger armed units formed or recognized by the National Unity Government (NUG). The PDFs mainly operate under joint command systems established by the NUG and several ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), many of which have been fighting the Myanmar army for decades. According to estimates, there are roughly 65,000 to 70,000 total PDF troops. Approximately 20 per cent of PDF troops are equipped with military-grade weapons and another 40 per cent have homemade weapons.

In the course of the resistance to military repression, these insurgents cross over to the Indian side, and it has been reported that there is some arms smuggling across the border and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested people involved in this. Can the border fence stop the insurgents from India and Myanmar from crossing the border? It is unlikely because the terrain is such that it would be very difficult to build the fence through the mountain and thick jungles; if the smart fence should be built the insurgents would build tunnels or resort to other means to cross.

India's Myanmar policy of exporting arms to the military junta has made these insurgents hostile to India. There is another aspect linked to insurgency and that is the rise in poppy cultivation and drug mafia.

POPPY CULTIVATION AND DRUGS

According to several reports by experts, a large section of the narcotics business is controlled by

the insurgents in Myanmar and India who in turn are controlled by drug cartels in Myanmar who in turn are controlled by China. These reports do not make clear whether they mean the government or Chinese businessmen who have been involved in illegal activities such as cybercrimes, gambling and drug trafficking; many are wanted by the Chinese government for criminal activities.

A report in the Goa Chronicle, titled The Narcos Manipur: A story of Rs 70,000 crore narcotics business stated: 'The Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Arakan Army (AA), and United Wa State Army (UWSA), along with Myanmar's military, Tatmadaw and People's Democratic Front (PDF) as well as the insurgent groups and sympathizers in Manipur and other Northeastern states are the main players in this illicit flow of drugs along with the involvement of Chinese networks.'

The report further says that intelligence officers who were tracking global narcotics trade and trends put the drug business in Manipur to be about Rs 70,000 crore, suggesting that underground drug manufacturing units have come up in the state. Many of these were busted by law enforcement agencies. In fact, on 30 October 2020, a heroin manufacturing laboratory was raided by Manipur police in which 435 kgs of drugs were seized.

'As the conflict in Myanmar continues, the drug cartels are finding new routes to enter multiple countries, and Manipur along with other Northeastern states is becoming a transit route for global illicit trade. Manipur is an important border state of India with almost 398 km of porous border with Myanmar. Ever since the military junta took over in Myanmar, the production of drugs has risen exponentially on both sides of the international Border. Because of ease in preparation, transportation, no infrastructure required, and low costs attracting more markets, chemical drugs are becoming more and more popular in Myanmar as well as Manipur along with heroin from the existing poppy cultivation,' the report said.

In part, the cultivation of poppy in both India and Myanmar has been dictated by poverty; in India the tribals involved have no other source of income and in Myanmar the military repression has resulted in displacing and destroying villages. The United Nations

Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2023 report documents that an increase of 14 per cent in opium production in the Chin state can have an impact on India.

It is also important to note that Chin State was never part of the previous Myanmar opium surveys as a hotspot, which underlines the significance of the increase in opium cultivation here with the Myanmar-Manipur border. However, it cannot be said that people fleeing persecution in Myanmar and taking refuge in India are involved in drug smuggling. They are not illegal migrants but refugees.

REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR

It is important to understand the impact of the latest round of military repression inside Myanmar. In a pamphlet published jointly by Burma Affairs and Conflict Study (BACS) and India for Myanmar, the impact is summed up:

‘On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military overturned the 2008 Constitution, which was drawn up on their own accord without the will of the people, and forcibly and unlawfully seized control from the elected government. In the span of 30 months since the coup, the aggressive Myanmar military has apprehended and incarcerated over 24,462 citizens, including prominent figures such as public leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar’s elected President U Win Myint. Among the detained were more than 653 children and over 4,897 women, while the number of individuals sentenced to death reached 101. In addition, the ruthless Myanmar military has been responsible for the deaths of more than 4,007 innocent individuals, including 446 children, within the 30-month time frame. Disturbingly, more than 74,874 structures, encompassing religious edifices and houses, have been subjected to arson, with a significant portion of these acts occurring in Sagaing Division (57,503 buildings) and Chin State (1,637 buildings) along the Indian border.’ Furthermore, ‘over 1.1 million civilians have been compelled to flee the country. Hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, with an estimated 50,000 seeking safety in India.’

These refugees include ordinary men, women and children who have been compelled to leave their homes because their lives were in danger. A smart fence would affect these refugees the most. As it is the Manipur government is not allowing them to move from

Moreh the border town and they are not allowed to go to Delhi to seek the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Even those refugees who contact UNHCR are denied basic rights by both the government of India as well as the UNHCR. Many are living on one inadequate meal a day without any prospects of employment, education for their children (since they cannot legally get Aadhar cards), or medical facilities. The UNHCR has long stopped giving financial assistance and denied even rations to refugees during covid.

Mizoram has shown humanity by insisting on giving humanitarian aid to the Chin refugees, but they do not encourage them to make false identity cards or settle down permanently.

What is needed is a policy that encourages development instead of poverty; a policy that addresses the genuine grievances of the people of Manipur instead of divide and rule; and it requires a transparent policy on drugs alongside international cooperation. A smart fence will only help some vested businesses get richer and the ordinary people living in border areas and the refugees will be more vulnerable. There needs to be an urgent debate and public awareness and engagement on the issue.

Courtesy of the author. Originally published in:

<https://forceindia.net/guest-column/borders-as-walls/>

ANALYZING THE INDIA-CHINA STANDOFF ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



Indian forces in the Tawang area of Arunachal Pradesh, an area controlled by India but that China claims. Photo: AFP

Many Indian citizens will find it hard to forget the horrific video footage on the news and social media of Indian and Chinese soldiers in deadly hand-to-hand combat in June 2020 in Galwan Valley on the Roof of the World, a clash that resulted in 20 Indian soldiers being beaten to death with spiked cudgels.

The bloody clash on the Ladakh border with China – which blew up on social media - proved a serious low-point in India-China relations and a stark reminder that border disputes remain a serious challenge, souring what is otherwise a more mature political and economic relationship between these major powers.

This border standoff is the focus of a newly released International Crisis Group report, entitled, “Thin Ice in the Himalayas: Handling the India-China Border Dispute”.

As Crisis Group’s Senior China Analyst and co-author Amanda Hsiao notes:

“The 2020 border clashes showed us that China projects its strategic anxieties onto Indian assertions along their disputed border. Faced with pressures from the U.S., Beijing miscalculated that a significant show of force could quell what it viewed as provocations from an emboldened New Delhi. The potential for strategic distrust to spill over onto the territorial dispute remains.”

Crisis Group’s Senior India Analyst and co-author Praveen Donthi notes:

“Around 50,000 troops remain deployed on each side of the India-China border for a fourth consecutive winter. Twenty rounds of high-level military talks have fallen short of thawing relations between Asia’s two giants, making the increasingly militarised border unpredictable and the threat of renewed clash-

es high. China and India should hedge against risks by creating extra buffer zones in areas with regular standoffs, while building on existing border protocols, particularly the ban on firearms.”

Donthi says the Sino-Indian relationship has hit its lowest point since the border war of 1962. With geopolitical tensions and heightened nationalism in both countries, the next decade looks ominous for the bilateral relationship.

BONE OF CONTENTION

The deadly clash on the India-China frontier in 2020 has caused a fundamental shift in relations between the two Asian giants, the report notes. Anxieties arising from competition for influence in South Asia and globally have spilled over into their border dispute, fuelling military build-ups and heightening the risk of fresh fighting.

What is unfortunate is that “nationalist” governments – under China’s Xi Jinping and India’s Narendra Modi - are hardening their stance on the border dispute. The lack of clarity as to where the line lies means that hostile encounters are bound to recur, potentially even leading to interstate conflict, with far-reaching consequences for regional and global security.

While resolution of the dispute remains elusive, China and India should hedge against risks by creating more buffer zones between their armies and strengthening crisis management mechanisms. The two sides should also resume regular political dialogue to modulate the developing rivalry in their relationship.

TROUBLED FRONTIER

The border dispute between India and China has again become a thorn in the two Asian giants’ sides. Rival claims as to where the frontier lies first flared into war in 1962, poisoning relations until a slow rapprochement began in the 1980s. Built on a willingness to set aside the quarrel given other shared interests, the precarious peace wobbled as China surged economically and militarily. Intensifying competition fuelled nationalism in both countries as well as fear of

losing territory and status.

A fierce round of fighting in 2020, the first in many years, seriously damaged Sino-Indian ties. A resolution of the dispute appears unlikely, but New Delhi and Beijing should explore how they can assure mutual security along a heavily militarised frontier and mitigate the risk of skirmishes escalating into full-blown clashes. They should establish extra buffer zones in well-known contested areas and build on existing border protocols, particularly the ban on firearms. Most importantly, they should return to more regular dialogue at the highest levels, the best way to manage the distrust between them.

THE 1962 SHOCK

Since the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of India established relations in 1950, the importance of the border dispute to broader ties has ebbed and flowed. The India-China boundary runs along the Himalayas, with the discrepancy in claims starkest at the range’s two ends. To the west, China controls 38,000 sq km of territory that New Delhi also claims; to the east, India holds 90,000 sq km that Beijing says belongs to China.

The 1962 war, which saw more than 7,000 Indian soldiers killed or captured, represented a victory for Beijing and a chastening experience for New Delhi. Its legacy reverberates today. Ever since, India has been leery of China’s intentions, while China has been convinced that occasional shows of punitive force are necessary to deter Indian territorial ambitions.

Despite high tensions and occasional altercations, the countries made strides toward keeping the peace. The two governments engineered a détente in 1988, agreeing to delink the boundary issue from their overall bilateral relationship and work toward its political solution. Over the two decades that followed, they agreed on measures to maintain the status quo, a working boundary called the Line of Actual Control (LAC), protocols to reduce the risk of escalation and limits on garrisons along that line. But obstacles in the way of an agreed-upon border also became stark.

DISCREPANCIES

Clarifying the status quo, or where the LAC lies, proved a huge challenge. Moreover, as Chinese confidence and ambition grew in the late 2000s Beijing hardened its position on the question. Hostile encounters between troops increased in tempo.

Frictions continued to rise under President Xi and Prime Minister Modi, both nationalists who see their political reputations as intimately connected to sovereign assertiveness and power projection abroad. Growing rivalry between the two big powers magnified the fears of each about the other's actions along their main shared flashpoint. Deepening security cooperation between the U.S. and India made China uneasy; China's growing political, economic and military clout in India's neighbourhood, as well as its evergreen support for Pakistan, jangled nerves in India.

MESSY ENCOUNTERS

The mutual suspicion soon saw border incidents resurface, in 2013, 2014 and 2017. The 73-day standoff in 2017 at Doklam, a strategic location at the trijunction where India, China and Bhutan meet, appeared to mark a new low, with Indian and Chinese troops forming human chains to stare each other down. Soon thereafter, Beijing ventured a display of force, miscalculating that it could discipline what it perceived to be India's bolder approach on the border. In 2020, thousands of Chinese troops advanced in different locations at the west of the border, triggering clashes with Indian soldiers. Twenty Indians and at least four Chinese died in combat, many in hand-to-hand fighting with crude weapons.

The border seems to have stabilised in the last three years, but dangers remain. The two sides have established buffer zones in areas where standoffs occurred in 2020. They have, however, also fortified their positions with fresh troops, who now number over 100,000 (counting those on both sides), and infrastructure. Roads and settlements on the Chinese side in particular mean reinforcements can arrive quickly. The

build-ups make clear the cost of escalation, encouraging restraint. Still, the 2020 clashes marked a setback in relations, heightening sensitivities to possible threats along the frontier and suspicions, particularly on the Indian side. India now considers China its primary security threat, above Pakistan, long its core pre-occupation. It has deepened cooperation with the U.S. and strengthened ties to other IndoPacific countries in Washington's orbit, including Japan and Australia. China, by comparison, appears comfortable with the degree of control it has of the border, due to its fortifications. It is more content than India with the larger relationship as well, though distrust remains entrenched.

Without improvements in the tone and substance of the bilateral relationship, the threat of fresh outbreaks of fighting persists. The 2020s will present sterner tests than the last few decades did, due to heightened nationalism on both sides as well as geopolitical tensions. Through existing dialogue mechanisms, the two sides should seek to adapt the principle they agreed upon in 1996 of "mutual and equal security" – namely, military deployments of mutually acceptable size near the border – to the reality of a heavily militarised frontier. They should reaffirm their commitment to and explore how to strengthen protocols meant to prevent escalation at the border, including the ban on firearm usage. They should consider returning to discussions to set up hotlines at top military levels to defuse tensions when they arise and establish more buffer zones along stretches of the frontier that have seen sharp confrontation.

Resuming dialogue between the two leaders – largely frozen since 2019, except for meetings at multilateral summits – is vital to managing distrust. It will be difficult, given New Delhi's concern that such talks offer legitimacy to Beijing's characterisation of the border situation as normal. But New Delhi can make clear that reopening communications is intended to manage a competitive relationship and to assert Indian prerogatives – not to paper them over. While political leaders in both states assert the primacy of national

interests, neither country's security would be served by more fighting between armies bristling with modern weaponry.

KEEPING THE PEACE

The International Crisis Group report notes the border dispute between China and India is a legacy of colonial rule in South Asia that has become a major strand in the emerging major-power rivalry of the 21st century.

As nationalist governments have arisen in India and China over the past decade, each has set great store by sovereign assertiveness and global status. The contested border between the two countries has in turn become a theatre for displays of state power and military prowess.

But shows of national strength have also generated growing fears as to the other side's intentions, and heightened sensitivity to perceptions that territory or military superiority is under threat.

The deadly combat in eastern Ladakh in 2020 encapsulated these risks, causing grave damage to the bilateral relationship; Sino-Indian ties are now in their deepest trough since the 1962 war. From a combination of competition and cooperation, India and China appear to have returned to a mode of "armed coexistence", in which each state counts on rival global alliances. Amid mutual distrust, as well as military reinforcements and infrastructure building on both sides, the border remains prone to sudden flare-ups of violence, with consequences that could reach far beyond the region.

Keeping the peace at the border hinges on revitalising the rules of engagement that for decades managed to stop standoffs from escalating into clashes. More and stronger buffer zones, clearer rules on use of firearms and other weapons, and communications channels between the two countries' top brass can all play a vital role.

A comprehensive agreement to demarcate the border would be ideal, but domestic politics in both

countries make this task prohibitively difficult. In the absence of such a deal, political leaders in both countries should seek to complement military protocols with far more fluid high-level engagement. The dispute in the Himalayas is now about strategic competition between the two biggest Asian powers as much as the border's territorial value itself.

Preventing further fighting depends on ensuring that competition can be handled amicably on the high ground to avoid the brutal scenes captured on smartphone amidst the thin atmosphere on the Roof of the World.

***The full report is available from
International Crisis Group at www.crisisgroup.org***

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CRISIS: SILENCE THE GUNS, UN RELIEF CHIEF TELLS PARIS FORUM

The UN's top relief official Martin Griffiths travelled to the Paris humanitarian conference on Gaza on Thursday last week to issue an appeal for a significant break in the fighting there, urging greater protection for displaced civilians.

Echoing his remarks with French President Emmanuel Macron looking on, the head of the UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, stressed the "heart-breaking" plight of children in the territory, whom he saw last week "pleading for a piece of bread and a sip of water".

Mass displacement has led to severe overcrowding in shelters and entire neighbourhoods have been turned to rubble, Mr. Lazzarini said, amid Israel's massive air and ground offensive in retaliation for Hamas' deadly 7 October attacks.

TIME FOR ACTION: GUTERRES

In a video message to the conference, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated his condemnation of the "abhorrent acts of terror" committed by Hamas against Israel and again called for

the unconditional release of all hostages.

He underlined support for civilians in Gaza who now "face a never-ending humanitarian nightmare", stressing that "now is the time for concrete action."

Although some aid has begun to trickle into Gaza, "it's a drop in the ocean" as needs are enormous, he said, urging the international community to step up assistance and protection.

HUMANITARIAN CEASEFIRE, SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

"That means an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. It means ensuring full respect of international humanitarian law. It means protecting hospitals, UN facilities, shelters, and schools," said the Secretary-General.

"It means unfettered, safe, and sustained access to bring in and distribute supplies at much greater scale, volume, and frequency – including fuel. And it means investing in the \$1.2 billion humanitarian appeal that the United Nations has just launched to help



● Palestinian refugees. Photo: UN NEWS

the people of Gaza.”

Mr. Guterres called for support, saying “we can help civilians in Gaza see at last, and at the very least, a glimmer of hope – a sign of solidarity – and a signal that the world sees their plight and cares enough to act.”

PROTECT CIVILIANS ‘WHEREVER THEY ARE’

Mr. Griffiths, who was representing the UN Secretary-General at the high-level meeting in the French capital, described meeting the families of some of the 240 people held hostage by Hamas in Gaza since the militant group carried out its terror attacks in southern Israel over a month ago.

Having also spoken with families in Gaza, Mr. Griffiths said that the situation was “insupportable” and that to allow it to continue would be a “travesty”.

The UN relief chief stressed the urgent need for a humanitarian ceasefire, “silencing the guns” to give some respite to Gazans and allow for vital services to resume.

He also called for the protection of civilians “wherever they are” and reiterated concern over the displacement by Israeli military operations of hundreds of thousands of people from the north to the south of the enclave to “so-called safe zones”, where in fact their security was not guaranteed.



The UN cannot support this proposal without those guarantees of safety, he said.

According to the UN humanitarian aid coordination office (OCHA) headed up by Mr. Griffiths, another 50,000 people reportedly evacuated the north of Gaza for the south on Wednesday through a “corridor” opened by the Israeli military.

MORE AID ACCESS VITAL

At the Paris conference, Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lazzarini made a strong appeal for all parties to respect international humanitarian law in the conflict, which has already resulted in “unconscionable” numbers of civilian victims, and the loss of basic human dignity.

They called for unimpeded access for hundreds more aid trucks to bring food, water, medical supplies and fuel to desperate Gazans.

“Severely limiting food, water and medicine is collective punishment,” which is a violation of international law, UNRWA’s Mr. Lazzarini warned.

Both UN leaders also advocated for the opening of additional border crossings to aid, including Kerem Shalom on the border with Israel, as the volume of assistance coming through the Rafah crossing from Egypt remains insufficient.

To deliver humanitarian services in the face of soaring needs, earlier this week, the UN and its partners issued a \$1.2 billion funding appeal with the aim of scaling up humanitarian operations in support of 2.2 million people in the Gaza Strip and 500,000 in the West Bank.

Helping to mobilize this funding is among the objectives of the Paris conference.

UNRWA ‘LAST GLIMMER OF HOPE’

Mr. Lazzarini appealed to donors to ramp up support to Gazans, stressing that UNRWA is the last glimmer of hope for civilians in the enclave, as staff continue to distribute food and water and serve people in shelters and hospitals, despite the risks.

The UN agency, which has paid a particularly high cost in this conflict with 99 staffers killed in Gaza, will be unable to pay its workers’ salaries by the end of the year, he warned.

FEARS OF REGIONAL PROLIFERATION

Turning to the broader region, Mr. Griffiths said that we cannot ignore the warnings of a further escalation, citing recent flare-ups of violence in Lebanon and Yemen. He also expressed concerns over the rise of antisemitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The UN relief chief stressed the crucial role of multilateral diplomatic efforts to protect civilians, ensure aid access and enable the release of hostages.

Courtesy of UN News



One of the two parachutes used by the two pilots. Photo: Mizzima

KARENNI STATE

Myanmar fighter jet crashes in Karenni's Hpruso Township, junta searches for two pilots

An unknown Myanmar military plane has crashed in Hpruso township, Karenni State in Myanmar on Saturday afternoon at 4:40 pm, according to a Mizzima reporter on the ground.

Two fighter pilots appear to have parachuted to the ground and have escaped. The Myanmar military is reportedly searching for them.

The Mizzima reporter took photos and videos of the discarded parachutes. One video appears to show Myanmar military aircraft on a reconnaissance mission over the crash area.

According to the reporter, he was recording the military aircraft before it has crashed at 4:40 pm.

He saw the jet but paused the video after it has hidden with the cloud.

Suddenly, he saw a loud explosion and a fire.

Two pilots parachuted and landed in two different places: one in Hpruso township and another one in Yardo in Karenni State.

The rebel sources said the fighter jet was shot down by the Karenni rebels during the Hpayaphu (White Pagoda) village battle.

Mizzima is unable to identify the type of fighter jet. The junta's helicopters and reconnaissance drones have been looking for the pilots.



JUNTA BLAMES DRUG TRADE FOR OFFENSIVE OF ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS; WARNS OF COUNTRY'S DISINTEGRATION

Junta-controlled media alleged that a major offensive in Myanmar's northeast by an alliance of armed ethnic minority organizations was fueled by drug trade profits from one of the groups, according to junta-controlled media.

The allegation came after the Three Brotherhood Alliance, a coalition of three ethnic armed groups, launched a coordinated attack in northern Shan state on October 27. The offensive named Operation 1027 caught the junta off guard and resulted in the loss of three towns, including a major border crossing point with China.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the junta chief, claimed that the rebel groups had used drug trafficking profits to finance their attack.

"Earnings from narcotic drugs were spent on seizing power through the armed struggle. Such a plan was covered by drug production and trafficking," he said at a meeting of the state National Defense and Security Council.

The Kokang army Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), one of the groups accused of drug trafficking, denied the allegations.

The junta-controlled newspapers reported that at the defense council meeting, Acting President Myint Swe warned that the country is in critical condition and could be torn apart if the military does not take effective action against the groups that carried out the attacks.

In a warning, junta's Acting President Myint Swe cautioned at a defense council meeting that Myanmar's very existence hangs in the balance if the military fails to act decisively against the perpetrators of the recent attacks.

The conflict in Myanmar has been raging since the military seized power in February 2021, ousting the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup sparked widespread protests and has since escalated into a civil war.

RUSSIA AND MYANMAR DISCUSS TRADE PAYMENTS WITH LOCAL CURRENCIES

Myanmar and Russia discussed the promotion of the use of local currencies in international trade and cross border trade payments, according to junta media.

The Military Council's Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) Governor Than Than Swe received the delegation of Ross-Congress Investments Fund and they discussed these bilateral monetary matters.

They discussed valuation of their currencies in trade between the two countries and for barter exchanges in both goods and currencies, forming joint committees between the two countries, promotion of the use of the Kyat and the Ruble in international trade and cross border payments.

They also discussed payment and settlement systems using digital monetary drawing rights based on a basket of commodities being traded among the largest trade partners of Myanmar.

Russia has designated the large commercial bank, Evrofinance Mosnarbank, to make transactions with Myanmar's banks, which will be chosen by CBM and they will continue the work for payment and settlement matters between the two countries.

Currently, Myanmar is conducting direct payments in local currencies for the expansion of their payment environment such as Yuan-Kyat, Baht-Kyat and Rupee-Kyat, etc. Now direct payment in Ruble-Kyat is being worked out and it has been arranged to facilitate payments between Myanmar and Russia from any domestic bank.

Similarly, Myanmar and Russia are working to use the Mir payment card system in Myanmar and Russia.

MYANMAR RICE EXPORTERS CALLED ON TO CONTRIBUTE TO BUFFER STOCK



Photo: Pierre Bamin

A letter sent by the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) to its member companies says that rice exporters must sell one bag of rice for buffer stock for every 3 tonnes for export to adhere to the rules that apply for an export license, local media report last week.

This export-based supply of buffer stock rice is being implemented beginning in November this year.

The exporters must supply 25% of the quota of this buffer stock physically and they must be sent to the designated warehouse within one week.

The remaining 75% of exporter's buffer stock quota will be recorded on their accounts to be called on if needed.

The MRF urged its members to accept the price of this buffer stock quota at 62,000 Kyats per bag (approx. 50 Kg) for rice bags physically supplied meeting the prescribed quality and specifications.

The MRF notified its member companies, which have completed pre-license inspection, to apply

for supplying the buffer stock quota along with their export license applications starting from 1 November.

The data from MRF shows that Myanmar exported over 580,000 tonnes of rice in the period from April to October in this fiscal year and earned US\$271 million from these exports.

Myanmar exports rice to over 20 countries including China, Philippines, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Belgium, Netherlands and UK and most of them are maritime exports.

The junta also announced that a rice and paddy warehouse online registration system will be started in November this year for controlling price stability in the market and systematic storage of rice and paddy in these warehouses.

Myanmar has the export target of two million tonnes of rice in this 2023-24 financial year and nearly 700,000 tonnes of rice will be exported in the 3-month period of October, November and December.

WORLD BANK OFFERS PROP FOR SRI LANKA'S STRESSED BANKS



Sri Lanka has seen many protests due to the bad state of the economy. Photo: AFP

The World Bank on Friday provided Sri Lanka \$150 million to underwrite savings of millions of depositors in a move that highlights the bankrupt country's financial fragility as it recovers from a crisis last year.

The country's rupee currency plunged almost 50 percent last year after the government declared bankruptcy and defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt.

Acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines led to months of violent protests that forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down and flee the country.

"Sri Lanka's economic crisis highlights the need for strong safety nets to support the financial sector," the World Bank's country director Faris Haddad-Zervos said.

The money will go towards a deposit insurance scheme to protect small savers with less than 1.1 million rupees (\$3,400), who account for 90 percent of deposits.

The economy is expected to contract in 2023 but it has stabilised since the crisis, with inflation falling below two percent after peaking at nearly 70 percent more than a year ago.

Colombo secured a 48-month \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March, but the latest installment of \$330 million has been held up since September as foreign debt restructuring remains inconclusive.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

DEEMONEY AND SCB PARTNER TO FACILITATE CROSS-BORDER MONEY TRANSFERS TO MYANMAR

DeeMoney, Thailand's leading fintech company, has partnered with Thailand's Siam Commercial Bank (SCB) to facilitate secure and convenient cross-border money transfers from Thailand to Myanmar, reported Bangkok Post.

This collaboration aims to address the challenges faced by the more than 2 million Myanmar workers residing and working in Thailand who annually send money back home.

A DeeMoney survey conducted in February 2023 uncovered a striking trend: more than 94 percent of Myanmar workers preferred informal channels like money transfer agents (Hundi) for sending money back home. This widespread reliance on informal methods stems from two key factors: limited access to formal banking services and the allure of more favorable exchange rates offered by informal providers.

Through their strategic partnership, DeeMoney and SCB have taken control of exchange rates between the Thai Baht and the Myanmar Kyat, offering unparalleled rates for money transfers from Thailand to Myanmar. Moreover, DeeMoney is expanding its network to encompass leading bank accounts and electronic wallets (e-wallets) across Myanmar.

The maximum transaction value for each transfer is capped at 50,000 Baht.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

IN FOCUS





CALM AT SUNRISE

The sun comes up over the Bagan plain lighting up a Buddhist temple.

Photo: Yves Alarie

AMERICAN MICHAEL STEIN'S DHAMMA JOURNEY



Michael Stein

American spiritual seeker Michael Stein has had a fascinating and at times trying journey in pursuit of the wisdom of the Buddhist Dhamma over the last six or more decades.

“I grew up in Long Beach, New York, and everything was great until my mother passed away at 14. After that is when I really started to need meditation. I was pretty angry, upset. And it was 1960s,” Stein tells the Insight Myanmar podcast. “After a lot of getting high, hanging around, I got in trouble here and there, and finally, one day, I decided to leave America and go travel a bit.”

This “a bit” turned into years, culminating in a lifelong affiliation with the Goenka organization run by Satya Narayana Goenka, a renowned teacher of Vipassana meditation, who died at the age of 89 in 2013.

Born in Burma to an Indian business family, Goenka moved to India in 1969 and started teaching meditation. His teaching emphasized that the Buddha’s path to liberation was non-sectarian, universal, and scientific in character. He became an influential teacher and played an important role in establishing non-commercial Vipassana meditation centres globally. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 2012, an award given for distinguished service of high order.

For Stein, Goenka’s legacy can ultimately be summarized by what he accomplished.

“He wanted people to be able to meditate, he wanted people to learn this technique, and you have to surrender your life towards doing these things,” Stein says. “That’s the gratitude I have, because I can’t tell



● Satya Narayana Goenka with his wife. Photo: William Stein

you how much it's helped me in my life. I was pretty messed up! I've gone through quite a bit over the years, and whatever came my way, I was not perfect in it, but I had the Dhamma and I kept my sīla, and I got through everything."

Check out Michael Stein's full story on the Insight Myanmar podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/10/26/episode-199-michael-stein>



● William Stein, centre-left, with Satya Narayana Goenka.



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