

National Unity Government highlights the Myanmar crisis on Lithuania visit

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# A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

**Arakan Army helps widen war against entrenched and stretched Myanmar junta**

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# JUNTA'S RED TAPE MAKES MOCKERY OF CYCLONE MOCHA AID PROMISES

The six-month anniversary of the destruction of Cyclone Mocha slipped past last week with hardly a murmur, with international and local humanitarian organizations aware they have had little success in helping the victims – particularly those in the IDP camps in Rakhine State, the worst-hit region.

The cyclone came ashore in Rakhine State on 14 May this year, and caused damage across a swathe of Myanmar.

Cyclone Mocha's negative effects were reportedly compounded by flooding during the monsoon season and by the recent less-damaging Cyclone Mamon, adding to the difficulties of those negatively affected.

The humanitarian response to Cyclone Mocha can rightly be classed as a disaster, largely due to the Myanmar junta's red tape and their efforts to use aid as a weapon, allowing what aid was allowed to go through to go to those who are "pro-junta" or in areas under their control.

The junta's claims it helped Cyclone Mocha victims have been shown for what they are – public relations spin to cover up for a policy that aims to use humanitarian aid to further the regime's agenda.

To a certain extent, there is a touch of *déjà vu* in how the generals in Naypyidaw handled the Cyclone Mocha fallout. While the cyclone was nowhere near as devastating or deadly as the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, there were echoes of military junta xenophobia and interference in the humanitarian aid response.

In the wake of this year's Cyclone Mocha, many victims were left to fend for themselves, or received very limited help. A significant number of IDPs in Rakhine are reported to have received little or no humanitarian aid, and many had to use makeshift efforts to rebuild their shelters.

Despite the visits to Myanmar of a number of UN representatives, including Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, only a limited amount of international aid got through to the cyclone victims. Compounding the problem, the UN reports that their "Myanmar fund" is seriously underfunded, which suggests a number of governments are wary of funneling money into a humanitarian drive that would be overseen by a brutal military junta.

There is an alternative. Critics say the UN should do more to engage with alternative channels, including Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) and local NGOs, who have some control over delivery channels to those in need in the country.

Six months on, Myanmar's humanitarian challenge is less about the fallout from Cyclone Mocha and more about the general dire humanitarian situation across Myanmar as the military continues its "war on the people".

Clearly, the UN and other humanitarian organizations need to do far more to funnel in aid through backdoor channels to those in need.

EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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IN FOCUS





## COLD RECEPTION FOR REFUGEES

**A** newly arrived Rohingya refugee walks to the beach after the local community decided to temporarily allow them to land for water and food in Ulee Madon, Aceh province, Indonesia, on November 16, 2023. About 250 Rohingya refugees reached western Indonesia on a overcrowded wooden boat on November 16, 2023, bringing the total number of refugees reported by local officials to have arrived this week to nearly 600. The group was forced to take to the sea again.

Photo: AFP

## RESISTANCE FORCES TAKE CONTROL OF PINLEBU TOWN IN SAGAING REGION

Resistance forces took control of Pinlebu Town in Sagaing Region after the junta troops in the town surrendered at 7:00 p.m. on 7 November.

According to a People's Defence Force (PDF) soldier, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the People's Defence Team forces started attacking the junta positions in Pinlebu at 4:00 p.m. and at 7:00 p.m. the junta soldiers waved a white flag and surrendered.

The PDF soldier said: "Junta Soldiers in the Pinlebu surrendered. We conquered the town peacefully. They showed a white flag."

After the town was captured, at around 8:00 p.m. on 7 November, the junta launched two airstrikes on Pinlebu. Currently, it is not known what damage the airstrikes caused.

According to residents, a significant number of people from Pinlebu had already left the town before

the fighting started. As a result, there have been no reports of civilian casualties or injuries.

On 6 November, KIA-led joint forces successfully took control of Kawlin Town just to the south of Pinlebu Town, according to the anti-junta National Unity Government (NUG).

Also on 7 November, defence forces took control of Khampat in Tamu District, Sagaing Region.

In Northern Shan State, the towns of Chin Shwe Haw, Monekoe, Hpaunghseng, Kyukoke (Pang Hseng), Hsenwi, and Nam Kham are now under the control of the Three Brotherhood Alliances, following its offensive against the junta.

Currently, the junta has only publicly admitted to losing control of Chin Shwe Haw, Hpaunghseng and Kyukoke in northern Shan State.

## FOUR VILLAGERS KILLED BY JUNTA ARTILLERY IN WAW TOWNSHIP, BAGO REGION

Four villagers died and six were injured when the junta fired artillery into Tanawgyun Village in Waw Township, Bago Region, at about 2:30 p.m. on 7 November.

A villager from Tanawgyun Village said: "The three artillery shells struck Thaekwin Harbour, which is near to our village. Most of the injured worked with boats. All of them were ordinary civilians. One of the victims was a woman."

The dead were named as: U Kyaw Myint, Ko Aung San Oo, Ko Aung Ko, and Ko Kyaw Lin Tun. The injured villagers are receiving treatment at Bago Township Hospital.

The shelling of Tanawgyun Village was believed to be retaliation for an attack earlier that day on

a junta camp on the Yangon to Mawlamyaing Highway near Ingapo Village in neighbouring Kyaikhto Township, according to a defence force source.

He said that junta forces frequently fired on civilians after suffering large losses in battles and called these "desperate and unfavourable tactics." Resistance forces have condemned such tactics saying they are clear violations of human rights.

Three women from Hngetpyawlaw Village, in Kyaikhto Township were injured by junta artillery fire last month, according to the Karen National Union (KNU).



# MYANMAR JUNTA SOLDIERS BURN DOWN VILLAGE IN YINMARBIN TOWNSHIP, SAGAING REGION

**M**ost of Lettaungnge Village in Yinmarbin Township, Sagaing Region was burnt down after junta soldiers set fire to it at 8:00 a.m. on 8 November.

Of the original 60 houses in the village, only about 10 remain standing since the junta's arson attack, according to a member of a local resistance force.

They said: "Approximately 50 houses were completely destroyed by the fire. The village has been turned into a ruin."

Locals believe that the arson attack was retaliation by a junta army column for a landmine attack on them the day before, at 3:00 p.m. on 7 November. The attack, which allegedly killed five junta soldiers, took place near to the Kokekosu intersection, also in

Yinmarbin Township.

A villager from Lettaungnge said, "I heard that soldiers died from a landmine attack. I think that the soldiers burnt down our village because they were seriously hurt. Fortunately, no one was injured in the junta's arson attack."

After torching Lettaungnge Village the military column moved on and arrived in Lelngauk Village in Yinmarbin Township on 9 November. As a result, more than 10,000 residents from Lettaunggyi, Lettaungnge, Kokekosu, and Lelngauk villages are said to be fleeing the area.

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# MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON CHIN VILLAGE KILLS 11, INCLUDING 8 CHILDREN

**A**t least eleven people, including eight children, were killed and four women were injured in an airstrike by the Myanmar military on Wailoo Village, located on the border of Matupi Township and Paletwa Township in Chin State, on 15 November.

The airstrike occurred in the early evening while children in the village were studying for school. Two junta jet fighters attacked the village, flying very close to the ground before dropping bombs. The explosions caused extensive damage to the area near the school.

The victims of the airstrike have been identified as Tang Hong (aged 11), Lily Moe (aged 5), Sha Mwe La (aged 12), Kee Nine (aged 9), Nyan Win Aung (aged 7), Bway Kong Tang (aged 7), Zunli San (aged 8), Khaing Thazin (aged 11), Euangsa (aged 65), Thae Naing (aged 39), and a CDM teacher Har Laung.

Over 60 houses in Wailoo Village were damaged by the airstrike, with 18 tin-roofed houses being completely destroyed. Two churches and two schools were also destroyed.

Residents of the village say that the military attacked without any provocation and that there were no ongoing battles in the area at the time of the airstrike.

The Matupi Township Board of Education issued a statement on 16 November expressing its condolences to the bereaved families. The Matupi Township Public Administration also condemned the military regime for the airstrike and reported that local revolutionary forces are conducting emergency responses and rescue operations.



# A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

**Arakan Army helps widen war  
against entrenched and stretched  
Myanmar junta**



• A Myanmar Border Guard Force soldier on the Rakhine border with Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

The Myanmar junta generals will be viewing with unease the surprise end to a year-long ceasefire in Rakhine State as the Arakan Army (AA) opens new fronts in the wake of last month's Operation 1027 in northern Shan State.

On Monday 13 November, in a surprise move, AA fighters clashed with security forces in Rathedaung, Maungdaw, and Minbya townships in Rakhine State, the AA said in a statement – an offensive that ended the fragile peace in the western state.

AA fighters seized an outpost of the border police at Chinkhali in Rakhine state on 14 November, and also attacked military outposts on two hills in Paletwa township in neighbouring Chin State, an AA spokesman said. In Paletwa the military had responded with air strikes and heavy artillery fire and the fighting. Local media also reported the clashes in Paletwa township and said two women had been killed in artillery firing.

The AA has for years fought a war for the autonomy of the state's ethnic Rakhine population, and

has a presence in neighbouring Chin state.

There was a heavy military security presence on the streets in the Rakhine capital Sittwe last week, with police blocking roads to the airport and the local court.

### **NORTHERN OFFENSIVE**

Last month the AA launched a joint offensive with two other ethnic armed groups under the name Operation 1027 across a swathe of northern Shan State near the China border.

The AA, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) have blocked two vital trade routes to China and seized a vital border crossing.

The fighting in the north - which the United Nations says has displaced more than 50,000 civilians - has sparked the most significant military challenge to the junta since it seized power in 2021, analysts say.

Now this new resistance front in the Rakhine



Thousands of civilians have fled from their homes due to the fighting. Photo: AFP



The Arakan Army has broken the ceasefire in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

and Chin states poses serious concerns for the Myanmar junta, yet raises questions over AA's ability to operate over a wide front.

### **STRETCHED JUNTA**

Renewed hostilities in Rakhine State are bad news for Myanmar's over-stretched military forces, in a state that includes Khaukpyu deep-sea port, a crucial hub for Myanmar and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).

Resistance forces are actively fighting in ethnic states, including Shan, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Chin, and in the Bamar heartland including Sagaing and Magway. The now-broken AA-junta ceasefire was viewed as a benefit to Naypyidaw. Now it is shattered.

Junta forces have been fighting back. On Thursday, junta troops shelled the town of Pauktaw and shot at it from helicopters after AA fighters seized the police station, residents said.

The military took control of the town later Thursday, and on Friday, local media cited residents saying that around 50 people had been detained and an unknown number were feared dead. Thousands

had already fled the town of around 20,000 people, the residents said. The UN now puts the number at over 26,000.

The junta has said its forces have taken control of the town but gave no details on casualties or deaths.

The AA said on Thursday that an unspecified number of "civilians of Pauktaw" had been killed by the military after troops entered the town. It pledged to "retaliate".

The junta on Wednesday claimed the AA was "destroying its Rakhine people and regional development" following the AA attacks on security forces.

It remains to be seen how this will play out and whether this Rakhine action is a bridge too far for the AA.

*Reporting: Mizzima, AFP*

# NEW CLASHES IN MYANMAR'S RAKHINE STATE DISPLACE 26,000: UN

**R**enewed fighting this week between Myanmar's military and an ethnic minority armed group has displaced more than 26,000 people in western Rakhine state, the United Nations said on Friday.

Ongoing clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and the military "have resulted in the displace-

ment of 26,175 people" across Rakhine, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in an update.

AA fighters launched attacks on security forces in Rakhine and neighbouring Chin state on Monday, ending a shaky ceasefire and opening another front as the military battles opponents in the north and east.



Photo: Mathias Reding

UNOCHA said at least 11 people had been killed in military shelling of AA positions since Monday.

On Thursday junta troops shelled the town of Pauktaw, 16 miles (25 kilometers) west of state capital Sittwe, and shot at it from helicopters after AA fighters briefly seized the police station, residents told AFP.

The military took control of the town later in the day, and on Friday local media cited residents saying that around 50 people had been detained and an unknown number were feared dead.

UNOCHA said 19,000 people had been dis-

placed from Pauktaw.

“Virtually all” roads and waterways connecting Rakhine townships have been blocked, UNOCHA said, adding most humanitarian activities in affected townships had been suspended.

It added more than 100 people had reportedly been detained by junta authorities since the renewed clashes.

For years the AA has fought a war for the autonomy of the state’s ethnic Rakhine population in their home near the border with Bangladesh.

### **WIDENING CLASHES**

Since last month AA fighters, in alliance with two other armed ethnic minority groups, have been battling the junta across a swathe of northern Shan state near the border with China.

The alliance, which includes the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has seized towns and blocked vital trade routes to Myanmar’s northern neighbour.

The offensive has galvanised other opponents of the military, with clashes spreading to Myanmar’s western and eastern borders in what analysts say is the biggest military challenge to the junta since it seized power in 2021.

On Friday anti-coup fighters in eastern Kayah state said they had torched a courthouse in the state capital Loikaw amid clashes with security forces in and around the city.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Wednesday he was “deeply concerned” about the widening conflict.

**AFP**



# UN OCHA CALLS FOR AID AS MYANMAR FIGHTING EXPANDS

**T**he United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) is calling for humanitarian safeguards as the number of battle fronts increases in Myanmar.

In a flash press release issued this week, the UN OCHA is calling for a halt in clashes and provision

of unimpeded humanitarian access by all parties that is critical to safeguarding the lives and well-being of civilians and aid workers who are delivering life-saving services to people in need.

UN OCHA is calling for aid while admitting that their Response Plan is severely underfunded with



IDPs take shelter in a monastery near Lashio. Photo: AFP



only 28 per cent of requirements received this year.

## **EXPANDED CONFLICT**

Since late October, intense armed clashes, including artillery shelling and airstrikes, have persisted between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), spanning multiple townships in northern Shan. This new front of the conflict has now expanded into the Northwest, Southeast and Rakhine. Initial reports from the field indicate that 75 civilians, including women and chil-



dren, have lost their lives, and an additional 94 people sustained injuries in northern Shan, southern Shan, Kayah, Rakhine and Chin since 26 October 2023. In addition, more than 200,000 people have been forcibly displaced within these states and regions since the new surge in fighting began.

In northern Shan alone, fighting continues to rage in at least 10 townships, leading to a surge in civilian casualties, with 43 fatalities and 71 injuries reported. The number of new internally displaced people (IDPs) since the recent fighting began has climbed to 60,000 as of 14 November, seeking refuge in 100 locations across 12 townships, including religious compounds, host communities, or in forested areas and paddy fields along the China-Myanmar border. IDPs are seeking refuge in religious compounds, while pressure is mounting on these sites not to host IDPs and to encourage their return.

People in northern Shan have reportedly crossed the border into China, but the exact number is still being verified.

In the midst of the ongoing conflict in northern Shan, a bridge on the Mandalay-Lashio Road in Hsipaw township was reportedly destroyed by EAOs on 12 November. Main roads remain blocked by checkpoints established by both conflicting parties, the Lashio Airport is closed, and mobile communication services outside Lashio township are disrupted or limited.

The imposition of martial law by the State Administration Council (SAC) in several townships including Lashio, Hseni, Kutkai, Namhkan, Muse, Laukkaing, Kunlong, and Konekyan until further notice, is exacerbating the challenges faced by the civilian population. Ongoing conflict, insecurity, and access restrictions are severely hampering the civilian population's ability to seek safety and access essential services. Simultaneously, humanitarian partners are confronting significant obstacles in reaching displaced and affected communities. Despite these challenges, efforts persist, with partners delivering cash, food, and essential relief items to those in need while risking their own safety.

## **FIGHTING IN THE SOUTHEAST**

In the Southeast, armed clashes have escalated in Loikaw, Demoso, Hpruso, and at the Shan-Kayah border. According to local partners and sources, a significant number of people (possibly as high as 35,000 people) have recently been displaced in Pekon township in southern Shan and Loikaw township in Kayah, as a direct result of the ongoing hostilities. This figure is currently being verified. Of them, about 1,000 IDPs in the eastern part of Loikaw urgently need shelter, food, and healthcare support. These hostilities have reportedly claimed the lives of at least 28 civilians, with an additional 10 people sustaining injuries in Moebye town of Pekon township and Loikaw township between 11 and 14 November. On 13 November, Loikaw airport was closed until the end of November. The SAC has imposed Martial Law in the urban area of Loikaw Town effective from 11 November and has reinforced its military presence. Responding to heightened tensions, local armed groups in Moebye had issued a warning statement on November 12, urging the civilian population to evacuate to the safest possible locations due to the escalated clashes in the town. Humanitarian access in Kayah remains extremely restricted due to the ongoing conflict, MAF aerial bombardment, and heightened scrutiny of partners at MAF checkpoints.

In Mon, fighting intensified in Kyaikmaraw township since 10 November. Consequently, about 5,000 people have been displaced due to these armed clashes. In addition, the main road between Kyaikmaraw-Chaung Nakwa and Mudon-Chaung Nakwa has been blocked.

## **CONFLICT IN THE NORTHWEST**

In the Northwest, armed clashes have taken place in 18 townships, including Kawlin, Tamu, Pinlebu, and Tigyaing, since late October. According to initial field reports, nearly 90,000 people have been displaced in Sagaing. Communications have been cut off and road access has been blocked in towns where fighting is taking place. Access from Pakokku town in Magway to all areas in Sagaing and Chin has

also been blocked since 11 November. Local partners have been warned to move out from some townships, including Shwebo in Sagaing and Saw and Pakokku in Magway, as intense clashes are expected to take place in Magway and Chin in the coming days. There have been reports of explosions outside Pakokku on 15 November. In Chin, armed clashes have also been taking place in Falam township since 11 November, resulting in the reported injury of three civilians and destruction of several civilian properties. Partners also report that about 5,000 IDPs from Falam township have been displaced to the India-Myanmar border area in Chin. Of them, some 3,000 IDPs have reportedly crossed the border to seek refuge in India while the remainder sought safety in forested areas within Falam township. Local partners also report that the roads between Chin and Sagaing, and Chin and Magway remain inaccessible due to ongoing conflict and blockages. Humanitarian partners are closely monitoring these concerning developments.

## **AA BREAKS CEASEFIRE**

In Rakhine and southern Chin, almost a year following the informal ceasefire between the MAF and the Arakan Army (AA), armed conflict reignited on 13 November, marked by reported clashes and exchanges of fire in Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Minbya and Paletwa townships. At least four civilians lost their lives, and an additional 10 people, including a 9-year-old girl, sustained injuries due to gunfire and artillery shelling in Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, Minbya, and Mrauk-U townships. Initial field reports suggest that nearly 7,000 people in Rakhine, including 2,800 in Rathedaung township and 4,000 in Kyauktaw township fled their homes to safer locations since 13 November, though the exact number of IDPs is still under verification. Compounding the crisis, the Rakhine State de facto authorities have implemented road and waterway blockades, severely restricting movement and transportation to Rakhine. Sections of the Yangon to Sittwe road remain blocked. In Sittwe, the SAC and the MAF have introduced heightened security mea-

asures, deploying troops and armed vehicles, setting up additional checkpoints, and imposing a night-time curfew between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Disruption to communication and internet services is expected in the coming days.

## **HUMANITARIAN NEEDS**

Humanitarian partners in the respective states and regions continue to monitor these concerning developments and in close collaboration with local and national partners, are trying to assess the situation of displaced and host communities. To date, they have identified the most urgent humanitarian needs as cash assistance to meet multiple needs, food, safe shelter, non-food items and hygiene kits, basic health services and protection support. Faith-based organizations, CBOs and CSOs in collaboration with humanitarian partners, continue to provide critical and lifesaving assistance to displaced and affected communities where access is possible, particularly in northern Shan. Simultaneously, operational partners are considering various preparedness measures, including pre-positioning of stocks for rapid deployment, to address the emerging needs in the various states and regions where fighting is taking place.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

As the UN OCHA points out, ongoing fighting and road blockages are exposing people to various protection risks and are restricting the movement of goods and people seeking safety, hindering aid delivery and exposing humanitarian responders to security risks.

The continued interruption in telecommunication services is hampering communication with affected communities, as well as further assessments of emerging needs which are critical to inform humanitarian responses.

Shortages of cash and commodities, as well as the rising costs of essential items in conflict-impacted areas are straining host communities that are already supporting new IDPs.

While \$1 million from the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund is being disbursed to support those responding to emerging needs in northern Shan, this support is insufficient to meet the surge in needs there and in other conflict-areas, with the Humanitarian Response Plan for Myanmar currently just 28 per cent funded. An urgent injection of funding and safe access are needed to allow humanitarians to respond to escalating needs at-scale.

# CHINA'S RESPONSE TO 1027 OFFENSIVE AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

**A** new report by ISP Myanmar analyses the Chinese response to the Three Brotherhood Alliance's 1027 offensive in northern Shan State against the Myanmar junta that started on 27 October 2023.

The report entitled, Operation 1027: China's

Economic Entanglement With Anticipated and Unforeseen Risks, was released on 12 November 2023.

The Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar (ISP – Myanmar) is an independent, non-partisan and non-governmental think tank. Established in 2016, ISP-Myanmar aims to promote democratic lead-



IDPs line up for food in a monastery in Lashio. Photo: AFP

ership and strengthening civic participation in Myanmar through its key strategic programs and initiatives. The institute primarily focuses on research, capacity building, leadership engagement, communication and outreach programs, and desk initiatives on Peace and China issues.

Below is the analysis from the report.

On October 27, 2023, the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA), namely the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National

Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA), along with other allied forces launched the military 'Operation 1027' 1. Since fighting began, border trade with China has effectively halted, particularly trade through the Muse and Chinshwehaw border gates, which together ordinarily account for 91 percent of total border trade between China and Myanmar. The 3BHA forces have recently occupied Kyu Koke (Pang Hseng) as well as Chinshwehaw, and Namhkan, where two of the three planned Cross-border Economic Cooperation Zones to be built by China in northern Myanmar are located. These projects are part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) scheme. The armed challengers have thus seized complete control of the areas important to the future development of CMEC and partial control of at least seven Chinese project sites. These include the planned locations of projects such as the Mandalay-Muse railroad, China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline, the cross-border power grid, and the Gokteik viaduct replacement and the highway expansion project which is scheduled to better connect Nawngkhio (Naung Cho) and Lashio towns on the Mandalay-Muse Highway.

Soon after the offensive began, several high-level meetings were exchanged between the China and Myanmar leadership. On October 29, China's Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman Gen. Zhang Youxia met with the State Administration Council (SAC) Defence Minister Lt. Gen. Tin Aung San in Beijing. On October 30, China's State Councillor and Minister of Public Security, Mr. Wang Xiaohong visited Naypyitaw. Then between November 3-5, China's Assistant Foreign Minister, Mr. Nong Rong separately visited Naypyitaw and spoke with SAC leaders. On November 2, 2023, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mr. Wang Wenbin had also urged 'relevant parties to cease fire as soon as possible, settle differences in a peaceful way through dialogue and consultation' in a press briefing. Importantly though, China did send tanks and soldiers to the border and raised its security levels. Chinese authorities have also recently been conducting extra-territorial arrests of online fraudsters



and those alleged to have committed online slavery. China has already evacuated thousands of victims trafficked into this shady cross-border business world. In addition, China is granting protection in the border town of Mengding to Myanmar refugees fleeing the fighting in Chinshwehaw.

## **PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

Almost half of China's total investment in Myanmar is in Northern Shan State and 'Operation 1027' has already had a direct impact on Chinese interests in the area. The potential impact of 'Operation 1027' on these investments is especially acute in Muse and Laukkaing townships where 3BHA forces now control the areas intended for developing the Chinshwehaw-Lincang and Muse-Ruili Cross-border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZ). The 3BHA advances also have the potential to directly impact other major projects of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor (ILSTC), and Lincang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC). Additionally, the combined average value of daily cross-border trade through Muse and Chinshwehaw border gates is valued at USD 8.91 million. If fighting in the area continues, downstream trade in Myanmar could encounter merchandise shortages, commodity scarcities, and rising prices, while trade partners in China could also face economic losses. For these reasons, if the current turmoil in Northern Shan State persists, Chinese economic interests are likely to be harmed.

China appears dissatisfied with the current political and security power balance in Northern Shan State. Although 'Operation 1027' could lead to short-term regional instability in Northern Shan State, China may still tolerate it. The operation could help resolve the 'Kyar Phyant' (诈骗) online fraud and gambling gangs crisis in the short term. Moreover, the operation's potential long-term impact on China's goal to restructure the power balance in northern Myanmar might make it an acceptable move for China. If China's economic strategy continues to prioritize gaining

and preserving access to the Indian Ocean and exploiting the Salween River basin, and if China sees a new power balance to its liking emerge in the region, perceives a shift in the power balance that aligns with its interests in the region, it may utilize its influence to pressure all warring parties involved in the conflict to promptly cease hostilities and come to a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, the various conflict actors in Myanmar might maintain their own military and political objectives, their own agency, and make their own calculations on whether the current conflict could escalate to an all-out war (See ISP OnPoint No. 17).

Currently, 3BHA forces have taken total control of the Chinshwehaw-Lincang Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zone (CBECZ). The forces also partially controlled Namhkan and Kyu Koke (Pang Hseng) in Northern Shan State where Muse-Ruili CBECZ is planned to construct. The 3BHA and their allies also seized the about-to-operate Kunlong bridge which are important to China-Myanmar trade and planned Kunlong dam. In addition, 3BHA forces control Hseni Town situated on the main trade route<sup>2</sup>, and partially control other areas important to CMEC projects such as the Mandalay-Muse railroad, China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline, the cross-border power grid, and the Gokteik viaduct replacement and the highway expansion project which is scheduled to better connect Nawngkhio and Lashio towns on the Mandalay-Muse Highway. In terms of numbers, since the start of 'Operation 1027' up until November 10, 3BHA and their allies have gained full control of five Chinese project sites planned and currently implemented, and also gained partial control of at least seven other sites where China projects are planned.

China's response to 'Operation 1027' is rather different from its responses to the two most recent incidents of conflict on the border which occurred in 2015 and 2021. It is particularly noteworthy that China's response this time is one of restraint, whereas previous responses were quite combative. This time China has formally urged relevant parties to cease-

fire immediately, cooperate with Chinese authorities to ensure border security, and to take protection and security of China-Myanmar cooperation projects and enterprise personnel seriously. In the past, the Chinese government has directly sent out letters to the Myanmar military, to EAOs involved in the conflict, and called for an immediate ceasefire. At this time though, ISP-Myanmar finds China is only calling for its peace proposals through the media, and is not directly exerting pressure on the conflict parties. However, news reports indicate that China's special envoy did meet with 3BHA representatives and KIO officers separately after 'Operation 1027' had been launched. ISP-Myanmar still needs to verify these reports, but it is reasonable to consider that China is prepared to accept some short-term instability caused by the ongoing conflict.

On the other hand, China can remain calm amidst the period of fighting as it wants to avoid comment or action while it assesses the potential outcomes of the offensive as well as monitors the situation of other forces that may be aligned with the northern EAOs. China might have access to information and internal developments regarding 'Operation 1027' since the warring EAOs enjoy close diplomatic relationships with local Chinese authorities. So far, 'Operation 1027' has not physically damaged any Chinese projects or interests, and has acted only within the necessities of the military operation. China is likely to be attentive to and assess the morale, capacity, and popular support of the armed challengers to the junta. A favorable outcome for China would involve the conflict not adversely affecting its economy, preserving the security of Chinese nationals in Myanmar, and having a hand in developing an incoming regional power structure which remains stable. Importantly, China would also aim to avoid triggering anti-Chinese sentiment among the Myanmar population. Presently, a significant number of Bamar youth involved in the conflict, along with some EAO leaders, have actively emphasized the self-help narrative of revolution, stating 'this war is not particularly related to China; this is our own revolutionary fight.' This sentiment would naturally avoid igniting

anti-Chinese sentiment among the Myanmar population. The primary challenge for China will lie in either convincing Myanmar's conflict actors to cease fighting or in applying the necessary pressure if they persist, when Chinese interests are met.

## **SCENARIO FORECAST**

It seems that China is willing to accept "Operation 1027," which implies that a short-term conflict in the northern Shan State and Salween River basin lasting up to three months might be tolerated, considering the broader political, security, and economic factors mentioned above. However, if the conflict were to escalate and spread to Naypyitaw, and if the NUG and its PDF, groups that China is suspicious of due to their links with Western countries, were to play a significant role, it could potentially disrupt the power balance in Myanmar and even lead to the replacement of the current junta. In such a scenario, China might be hesitant to accept the consequences. Furthermore, if the conflict persists, the probability of other powers, such as Russia or the United States, getting involved, increases. In this situation, China would have a vested interest in ending the conflict as soon as possible. The unforeseen risks associated with being closely tied to the border conflict area would undoubtedly be assessed by China. The unexpected twists and turns of various dynamics make it difficult to achieve a straightforward outcome in any conflict.

*Courtesy of ISP Myanmar*

# CHINA'S HAND IN MYANMAR'S VIOLENT PROGRESS ON THE BRI

ELAINE DANZIGER

The Chinese government's often repeated phrase of "win win" and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs is nothing but a veil to conceal the real driving motive which is its own expansion of trade and connectivity.

The Myanmar state is under increasing isolation from the international community, But China still finds merit in increasing its interaction and trade with the Myanmar military regime. The Chinese administration motto of non-interference in internal affairs can be ideally described in Myanmar as party agnostic but religious Chinese trade and infrastructure.

Kachin Women's Association (KWAT) based in Thailand which is a non-profit organisation working on behalf of Kachin women in its recent detailed report released on 9 October 2023 brought out the key theme of the repressive behaviour of the Myanmar junta also

referred to as the State Administrative Council (SAC) led by Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of the SAC.

The main thread from the KWAT report as well as from USIP (United States Institute of Peace) reports is that China is the key player in instigation of the violence taking place in Myanmar over the last two years. The interests of the Chinese reside in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) projects and connectivity from the west coast of Myanmar to China.

In the recently concluded 3rd BRI forum held in China two key members of the Myanmar junta were invited, Deputy Prime Minister and Transport and Communications Minister General Mya Tun Oo and Minister of Union Government Office Ko Ko Hlaing, who previously served as an advisor to former President Thein Sein. However, the Chairman of the SAC



Photo: Peter Zhou



was not invited to maintain the facade of distance for the international community.

In the white paper released on the occasion of the 3rd BRI forum, the key projects and their progress in Myanmar were highlighted such as under “The construction of economic corridors and international routes...” - namely the China-Myanmar Crude Oil and Gas Pipeline has been completed and entered service. The feasibility study on the Muse-Mandalay section of the China-Myanmar Railway has been completed, and the feasibility study on the Mandalay-Kyaukphyu section has been launched. In the Maritime connectivity area: preliminary work is currently under way on the Kyaukphyu Deep-sea Port project in Myanmar, including geological exploration and environmental and social assessment. China has at least 597 investment projects in Myanmar, totaling about US\$21.9 billion in value, according to junta investment and foreign economic relations minister Dr Kan Zaw.

With all these interests which the Chinese have invested in, their primary motive has been safety of these by having a relationship as well as by supporting the present military junta in Myanmar. Contrast this with the silence of the Chinese government on the growing violence by the junta in Myanmar especially

along the CMEC.

The KWAT data clearly shows escalation in attacks and abuses against civilians by the SAC regime’s forces in Kachin State and northern Shan State since mid-2022, including a sharp increase in the number of victims of aerial bombardment and villagers forced to be human shields.

Most of the abuses have taken place along key transport routes which the regime is attempting to secure to expedite projects under China’s CMEC project. With conventional warfare failing against the resistance forces, the regime is increasingly resorting to collective punishment of civilians to try and assert control over these contested territories.

It also recommends reducing or stopping the CMEC projects in Myanmar amid war and against the wishes of local communities. These projects should be cancelled, and no new investments considered until the military regime is removed and elections held under a new federal democratic constitution, guaranteeing free, prior and informed consent of local communities to any new projects.

The Chinese non-interference in countries has yet another cross against it - in December 2022, China’s new special envoy for Myanmar, Deng Xijun, held his first meetings with seven of Myanmar’s most powerful ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). During a series of subsequent discussions, Deng expressed two policy positions. Firstly, that China would more actively enforce its policy against instability along the border. Secondly, that the EAOs should distance themselves from the National Unity Government (NUG), an opposition body established by lawmakers ousted by the coup, because the NUG had grown too close to the West.

The Chinese playing both sides to further their objective can be clearly seen in Myanmar. They feel they need to play the two sides against each other depending on the urgency of the situation, an action that appears to be their hallmark.

Thus, we see the aggressiveness of the Chinese government in furthering their CMEC programmes by co-opting the Myanmar regime and ignoring the human right violations, pressuring a regime looking for legitimacy in an increasingly isolated world. This is the real face of the “win-win” philosophy of the Chinese government.

*Elaine Danziger is the pseudonym of a journalist who covers Asian affairs.*



# ASEAN DEFENCE CHIEFS CALL FOR END TO MYANMAR CRISIS, ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

**S**outheast Asian defence ministers called for an end to the Myanmar crisis and to the Israel-Hamas war on Wednesday this week as they gathered for talks that included meetings with regional counterparts and the Pentagon chief.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meetings in Jakarta were dominated by issues ranging from the Myanmar crisis to the conflict between Israel and Hamas, as well as Beijing's growing assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea.

Muslim-majority Indonesia's president Joko Widodo called on US President Joe Biden this week to help bring about a ceasefire in Gaza. His defence minister Prabowo Subianto opened talks on Wednesday echoing that call, saying he was "deeply saddened" by events in the Palestinian territory where Israel has launched a relentless assault to destroy Hamas in response to attacks on 7 October.

Malaysian Defence Minister Mohamad Hasan also called for a truce, saying Kuala Lumpur condemned "terrorism in all its forms" and the killing of civilians. "Further loss of life, suffering and destruction should stop and parties must exercise utmost restraint and de-escalate," he added.

Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October killed an estimated 1,200 people, mostly civilians and an estimated 240 others were taken hostage into Gaza.

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says Israel's ensuing aerial bombardment and ground offensive have killed 11,320 people, mostly civilians, including thousands of children. These figures are hard to verify.

In a joint declaration, the ASEAN defence chiefs also urged all parties in Myanmar, where fighting has been raging across the northern Shan state for weeks, "to cease all violence and exercise utmost restraint".

The junta's leaders have been banned from the 10-member bloc's high-level meetings since failing to implement an agreed five-point peace plan following their 2021 coup.

The joint statement reiterated the bloc's call for Myanmar's junta rulers to implement that plan.

**AFP, Mizzima**

# AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S FINAL APPEALS TO BE HEARD FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER



**A**ung San Suu Kyi's final appeals hearings against convictions received from the Myanmar junta will be heard in the first week of December, at the junta-controlled Union Supreme Court, according to legal sources.

Aung San Suu Kyi was originally convicted by the junta of 19 offences and sentenced to 33 years in prison in a series of secretive trials held from June 2021. She still has eight appeals related to those convictions pending. Her total sentence has been reduced to 27 years, still effectively a life sentence. She is 78 years old.

The appeals are related to charges of electoral fraud under Section 130(a) of the penal code, violations of Section 3(1)-C of the Secrets Act, five cases

involving the purported acquisition and leasing of a helicopter for natural disaster prevention and a corruption case involving the offering of gold and dollars to Phyoo Min Thein.

The lawyers representing Aung San Suu Kyi in the appeals trials have been unable to meet with her or discuss the case with her, despite submitting multiple written requests to the court since January 2023.

Previous appeals on the other convictions have already been rejected by the Supreme Court.

# NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT HIGHLIGHTS THE MYANMAR CRISIS ON LITHUANIA VISIT

**M**yanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung together with representatives of the Karen National Union (KNU) and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) recently paid a visit to Lithuania to highlight the Myanmar crisis.

The visit took place in the context of the Future of Democracy Forum, held on 9-10 November, where NUG Minister Zin Mar Aung also delivered a key-note speech on the second day of the event.

On the margins of the conference, the delegation met with the Deputy Chair of the Parliament of the



● National Unity Government delegation in Lithuania. Photo: NUG

Republic of Lithuania Radvile Morkūnaite-Mikulėniene and chair of the Group for Inter-Parliamentary Relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), MP Vilius Semeška as well as other MPs of the group including Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, Andrius Vyšniauskas, Matas Maldeikis.

A separate meeting was organized with the MP Emanuelis Zingeris. NUG FM and other delegates also met the vice-minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania Egidijus Meilūnas,



and head of the Communication and Cultural Diplomacy Department Viktorija Urbonavičiūtė. Two separate meetings were held with representatives of Democratic Belarus, and round-table discussions took place at the Eastern Europe Studies Centre.

Lithuania reiterated its support for the Myanmar people's democratic aspirations and readiness to continue political dialogue. The visiting delegation communicated its calls for political and practical support and shared their assessment of the situation in Myanmar, including on developments on the ground, ASEAN mediation efforts, the role of China, and the growing influence of Russia. Discussions were held also on the challenges that the democratic resistance forces are facing, particularly in terms of communication, political dialogue and consultations.

The following is the text of NUG Minister Zin Mar Aung's speech at the Future of Democracy Forum under the title, "Resilience and democracy – Myanmar is being made new":

I am honoured to be invited to address you today, and to add the voice of the people of Myanmar to this forum. I want to talk to you today about how Myanmar is being made new, by the resilience of the people, and for a democratic future.

I start with resilience. This is the defining feature of the revolution of the people of Myanmar against the unlawful coup that took place in February 2021.

In the early weeks after the coup, the people of our cities, our villages and the countryside – with one voice, they said no. This rejection was and still is a nationwide rejection coming from all social and professional groups. Civil servants, medical workers, teachers, female textile factory workers and railway workers took to the streets to protest the attempted military coup.

The rejection of coup was also a generational uprising of our teenagers and students, of our Gen Z. Half of Myanmar's population is under the age of 30. They have seen a promising future for themselves

during our democratic transition and they have been – and still are – determined not to let the military take that future away from them.

This rejection also united the many ethnic groups across my country in a unifying vision of the federal democratic state. This rejection and this vision unites us still.

While we are acutely aware of the many areas needing for improvements, we are also constantly reminded that ours is a gradual process and that achieving consensus in our large, diverse and inclusive coalition requires genuine consultation. We acknowledge that inclusion and representation of women and minorities remain a major challenge, calling for our seriousness about democratic participation and equal representation. Despite our own shortcomings, our commitment to bringing about democratic change and establishing a federal union should not be doubted.

I am here to tell you that ignoring and overlooking the Burma or Myanmar struggle for federal democracy is hurting not only the people of Burma or Myanmar but also all of us in this room who cherish and value democracy. And I will tell you why.

Myanmar or Burma might look like a far-away country about which democratic countries know little and have no national interests there. However, we are big nation of 55 million people. We are a country with gas, oil and abundance of rare materials. We are a huge fertile land which used to be one of rice baskets of the world. We are placed between India and China, as the only corridor for China to the Indian Ocean.

The Military junta is getting support from Russia. Putin and Lavrov have no qualms in dealing with Myanmar generals. Russia is providing fighter jets and helicopters to the junta. The junta is sending shells from its own stockpiles to Russia to be used against Ukraine. On November 6th, three Russian Pacific Fleet destroyers with around 800 crew docked in Yangon for the first bilateral maritime exercise.

Also, recently, the regime in Belarus has ex-

pressed their interest in creating a trilateral partnership with Russia and North Korea. And Belarus has long had traditional ties with Myanmar Military and has been closely working with Myanmar Military since the outset of the coup. Myanmar has seemingly become a ground for authoritarian regimes to assemble. This, my friends, is a threat to democracy.

If our country will become pariah military dictatorship which has been resituated to live by the authoritarian alliance of Russia, it will become obvious how big a loss we are for the other democratic countries.

We will continue our struggle with or without the support we receive and how ever little we receive. However, I would like you to consider the price we will have to pay when we ignore the people's struggle for democracy in a country like Burma or Myanmar, where the world's common enemy of democracy is finding refuge and building alliances like never before.

Today, I ask you friends of democracy across the world to recognize our resilience and hear our genuine intention to build a new Myanmar.

We need help in this work. This is not the time to let an authoritarian alliance help one more crumbling murderous dictatorship prevail.

We do not ask a lot and we do not ask anything which is not possible.

The junta has just a few remaining sources of revenues. Gas sold to Thailand through the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise is the main one. We welcome the new sanctions that the United States of America has imposed on the MOGE. We need European and Western partners to persuade Thailand to put gas revenues in an escrow account for only next six months' period. That will be enough for the junta to collapse and for us to end violence and to bring the country back to a path of normal economic relations with neighbours and all others.

In Burma or Myanmar, we believe that the only chance to end violence and to build a new future

is for the current junta to be removed. And they are ready to fall. The only question is how long it will take for this to happen, and how much more damage and suffering the junta will be able to inflict through the passivity and inaction of Asian and democratic countries.

There will be no room for the Myanmar military in the future political leadership. We will accept nothing except the rule of law under a “democratic” civilian leadership. But we are not only saying “no”. We are also saying “yes” to a new future for Myanmar.

We are pushing the military back from places where the people give no consent to their dominance. And at the same time, we are creating the foundations for a new state.

The future of Myanmar will be federal, and it will be democratic. It is a future in which the rights of all are respected, in which the curse of ethnic discrimination is lifted from our lands.

This is the work that our National Unity Government is undertaking already now in partnership with our ethnic allies, and with community and civil society groups in a shared process.

Our resilience is strong. We will be victorious in defeating the tyranny. We will build a federal democracy in which all people will be safe and with equal rights.

For our native land, Burma, democracy is particularly essential, because Burma is still a country struggling to overcome the burning fires of decades long civil war, not only to survive but also to rise like never before.

Having learned from our own mistakes and failures as a country that mistreated and marginalised the minorities in the past, our Revolution is now about our desire and commitment to democracy in which we have now come to embrace diversity, equality, and freedom for all of the people of Burma.

To be true to who we really are, a multi-ethnic nation, our Revolution sets out to struggle through this difficult time to establish a federal democratic state

where our peoples and our respective cultures will be celebrated, human rights are respected, and all forms of discrimination against women and minorities are eliminated.

Through the strength of the people and hard work we will achieve this. But we do need the help of the European and world democracies. I would like to reaffirm that our struggle and victory will truly bridge the divided world by promoting democracy, peace, and development to the region and to the world.

I hope the Vilnius Forum will help our voice be heard.

## ABOUT 250 ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN INDONESIA SENT BACK TO SEA

About 250 Rohingya refugees in an overcrowded wooden boat have been turned away from western Indonesia and sent back to sea, residents said Friday last week.

The group from the persecuted Myanmar minority arrived off the coast of Aceh province on Thursday but angry locals told them not to land the boat. Some refugees then swam ashore and collapsed from exhaustion on the beach.

After they were forced back the decrepit boat travelled dozens of kilometres to the coast of North Aceh, where the refugees landed on a beach. But locals again sent them back to the boat and out to sea late Thursday.

By Friday, the vessel, which some on board said had sailed from Bangladesh about three weeks

ago, was no longer visible from where it had landed on North Aceh's shores, residents said.

On the weekend, the boat was reportedly seen further along the coast.

Thousands from the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys, often in flimsy boats, to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

"We're fed up with their presence because when they arrived on land, sometimes many of them ran away. There are some kinds of agents that picked them up. It's human trafficking," Saiful Afwadi, a traditional community leader in North Aceh, told AFP on Friday.

Chris Lewa, director of Rohingya rights organisation the Arakan Project, said the villagers' rejection



Rohingya refugees return to their boat after being refused landing in Aceh, Indonesia. Photo: AFP



seemed to be related to a lack of local government resources to accommodate the refugees and a feeling that they were being taken advantage of by people smugglers.

“Rohingya smugglers do indeed take advantage, using Indonesia as a transit to Malaysia. But, at the same time, no other country would let them in,” Lewa told AFP on Friday.

“It is sad and disappointing that the villagers’ anger is against the Rohingya boat people who are themselves victims of those smugglers and traffickers.”

Lewa said she was trying to find out where the boat went after being turned away but “no one seems to know”.

A 2020 investigation by AFP revealed a multimillion-dollar, constantly evolving people-smuggling operation, stretching from a massive refugee camp in Bangladesh to Indonesia and Malaysia, in which members of the stateless Rohingya community play a key role in trafficking their own people.



## ‘NO PROPER PLACE’

Locals in neighbouring Ulee Madon and Cot Trueng villages gave the refugees supplies, including food, clothing and gasoline, before turning their boat back to sea on Thursday, North Aceh’s Afwadi said.

In an effort to encourage their departure, locals also repaired the boat after Rohingyas on board tried to sink it, he said.

Afwadi was among locals in boats who escorted the Rohingyas’ vessel away from the shore, ensuring it left the area.

A village leader from Ulee Madon said residents did not have the resources to accommodate more refugees, adding that Rohingyas had disappeared from temporary shelters provided in the past.

“We don’t have any proper place to house them. From experience, these people are unruly,” Rahmat Kartolo told AFP late Thursday.

“It’s not that we don’t care about humanity, but these people sometimes run away.”

Nearly 600 Rohingya refugees have reached western Indonesia this week, with 196 arriving on Tuesday and 147 on Wednesday.

UN refugee agency spokeswoman Mitra Salima Suryono told AFP many wanted to reunite with their families who are already in Malaysia, while others just sought protection.

“Many of them said it didn’t matter where they were going. The most important thing for them is they will get safety, security, and livelihood,” said Suryono.

More than 2,000 Rohingya are believed to have attempted the risky journey to Southeast Asian countries in 2022, according to the UN agency.

Nearly 200 Rohingya died or went missing last year while attempting hazardous sea crossings, it has estimated.

AFP

# UK, CANADA, DENMARK, FRANCE, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS BACK UN COURT ROHINGYA GENOCIDE INTERVENTION

Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (jointly) and the Maldives have filed declarations of intervention in the proceedings under Article 63 of the Statute concerning Gambia's case against Myanmar and the alleged crime of genocide against the Muslim Rohingya.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague and the UK government have just issued press releases concerning the matter as of 16 November.

The move by the countries has been welcomed by Rohingya support organizations and NGOs.

The countries mentioned have officially intervened in the case in the court to support charges against Myanmar over allegations of genocide in 2017 against the Rohingya following a move by Gambia to bring the case to the ICJ in 2019.

The following is the press statement issued by the UK government on the intervention:

On 15 November, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom filed a joint declaration of intervention in the case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice.

In these proceedings, The Gambia alleges violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention). It argues that Myanmar's security forces perpetrate widespread and systemic "clearance operations" against the Rohingya, and that "genocidal acts committed during these operations were intended to destroy the Rohingya as a group, in whole or in part,

by the use of mass murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the systematic destruction by fire of their villages, often with inhabitants locked inside burning houses".

Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are exercising the right to intervene in this case under Article 63(2) of the Statute of the Court in order to set out their interpretation of the relevant provisions of the Genocide Convention before the Court. They recall that the Genocide Convention requires States Parties to prevent the crime of genocide and hold those responsible to account.

Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom further reaffirm their commitment to accountability and the international legal order and stress the Court's vital role in the peaceful settlement of disputes as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

# MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS ARRESTED SCAM RINGLEADERS WANTED BY CHINA



Photo: AFP

**M**yanmar's junta said it has arrested two cyber scam ringleaders operating from a lawless northern town and wanted by China, and a third took his own life during the arrest.

Online scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by citizens from China and other countries who are often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots.

The scams anger Beijing, a major ally of the junta, and China has repeatedly told the military to crack down on the industry, which analysts say is worth billions of dollars a year.

"Ming Xuechang, Ming Guoping, Ming Julian... were arrested in Laukkai town in the Kokang self-administered zone," the junta's information team said in a statement late Thursday.

Ming Xuechang "shot himself while he was being arrested and died later while getting treatment", the statement said, without giving details or mentioning when the three had been arrested.

According to media reports, Ming Xuechang was a former representative for the Kokang region in the Shan state regional parliament.

Ming Guoping and Ming Julian had been handed over to Chinese police on Thursday, the junta statement said.

Chinese authorities issued an arrest warrant for the three and another individual named Ming

Zhenzhen last week.

Ming Xuechang headed a group that "organised and opened fraud dens for a long time... carrying out telecommunications and network fraud crimes that target Chinese citizens", according to Chinese state media.

The junta statement made no mention of Ming Zhenzhen.

AFP has contacted the Chinese embassy in Yangon for comment.

The United Nations said this year that at least 120,000 people could be trapped in scam compounds in Myanmar.

Last month an armed alliance of ethnic minority groups launched an offensive against the military across a swathe of northern Shan state, where Laukkai is located.

One of the groups, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), has said it aims to recapture the former boomtown after it was forced out by the military in 2009.

As fighting approaches Laukkai, thousands of Myanmar migrant workers have fled.

Some have told AFP they had walked for days and been forced to sleep by the roadside as artillery and airstrikes pounded the area

AFP

# AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIST SEAN TURNELL RECOUNTS 'KAFKAESQUE' TIME IN MYANMAR JUNTA JAIL

**D**ays after Myanmar's military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, an Australian economist working with her received an anonymous email telling him the police were watching his room and that he should flee.

Sean Turnell, an economics professor at Macquarie University, was detained soon after, as the military launched a sweeping and bloody crackdown on democracy protests and those who had worked with Suu Kyi's government.

Accused of being a spy and convicted by a junta-run court in a case slammed by rights groups, Turnell served 650 days in prison in Myanmar before being pardoned and released last year.

In an interview marking the publication of

his new book about the ordeal, he recounted feeling he might not make it out alive, being a co-defendant with Nobel laureate Suu Kyi and the most memorable birthday cake ever.

The warning email he received from "A Secret Friend" came too late and he was arrested at his hotel shortly afterwards - while giving an interview to the BBC.

Held first in a police station in Yangon, he could still hear the banging of pots and pans that marked the early protests against the coup, he wrote in "An Unlikely Prisoner."

Of the weeks-long investigation into him by the police and military: "I can only use that overused label of Kafkaesque," he told AFP in Sydney.



Australian economist and author Sean Turnell. Photo: AFP

Once, he was presented with a document marked “confidential” and asked how it had come into his possession.

It was a document he had written as part of his work for the government, he explained.

“I said, ‘Look, I had it because it was mine. I wrote it’. And they said, ‘Well, it doesn’t matter. You shouldn’t have had it’.

“And so at that moment, you know, I realised not for the first, not for the last time that I was way beyond the looking glass.”

Away from the interrogations, life in prison was hard and lonely, Turnell told AFP, adding he received “minimal” health attention.

During the steamy monsoon season, he described being “damp and hot and, all at the same time, your food goes mouldy, insects and rats and other rodents come.”

“The health risk factors were to the max,” he said. “I was worried about that. I thought I just might die there.”

Amid the darkness, there were lighter moments too.

On his 58th birthday, his fellow inmates did the impossible and made him a birthday cake in a makeshift oven.

They “somehow managed to get some flour and water and various other things, which you weren’t even sure what they were, some raisins and other things, and made this cake,” he said.

“It was the most wonderful cake imaginable.”

## **ON TRIAL WITH SUU KYI**

Turnell was later moved to a prison in the military-built capital Naypyidaw, where Suu Kyi was his co-defendant in his trial for allegedly breaching the country’s official secrets act.

Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her opposition to a previous junta, was detained on the morning of the coup and hit with a raft of other charges.

She has been largely hidden from view since the coup, appearing only in grainy state media photos, with Turnell one of the handful of people to interact with her.

“She was incredibly strong throughout” their trial, he said.

“She was, I think more concerned to keep the spirits up of the people, like me, charged alongside her, than she was about her own situation.”

The compound she was being kept in was “marginally” better than the cell of an average political prisoner, he said, but added he still worried about the health of the 78-year-old.

During the days they were together, they talked about literature, movies and what little they could glean about world affairs, he said.

They were each jailed for three years on official secrets charges and Turnell was preparing for another Christmas away from his family.

Then a pardon came “out of the blue,” and he was released alongside three other high-profile foreign prisoners -- former British ambassador Vicky Bowman, Japanese journalist Toru Kubota and Myanmar-US citizen Kyaw Htay Oo.

Back in Australia, he spoke to the media about the conditions he was kept in and about the junta’s ongoing bloody crackdown.

He said he later learned this had “upset” the junta, which rescinded his pardon, making him technically a wanted man in Myanmar again, which was a “real shock.”

“I hasten to add it hasn’t dampened my enthusiasm nor sense of duty about speaking out on Myanmar,” he said.

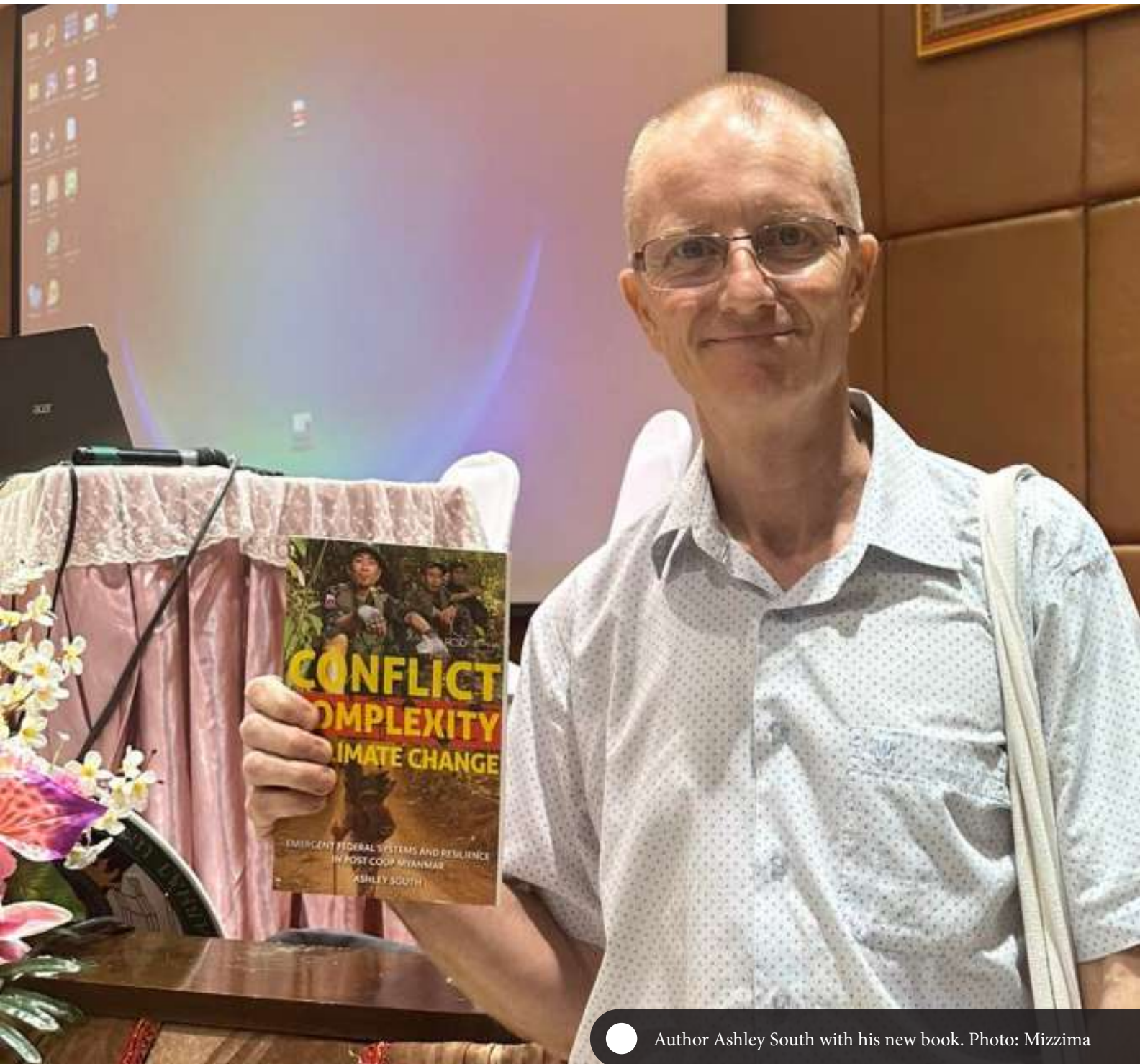
**AFP**

# THE ‘GREEN ROOTS’ OF BURMESE FEDERALISM

REVIEWED BY: JOSEPH BALL

The ongoing crisis in Myanmar presents a unique opportunity for charting the country’s future. It is empowering local actors operating beyond the reach of the junta, laying the building blocks for an emergent federalist state. And the need to address climate change is one feature of this transformative process.

This, in a nutshell, is the central argument laid out by writer and consultant Ashley South in “Conflict, Complexity, and Climate Change: Emergent Federal Systems and Resilience in Post-coup Myanmar” (henceforth referred to as Conflict and Climate Change).



Author Ashley South with his new book. Photo: Mizzima

The book was published by the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Chiang Mai in August 2023.

South employs climate change as a lens through which to view both the failures of the state and a means to explore new political structures.

“Since the military takeover,” writes South, “the challenge is to rebuild Myanmar through a new federating process, including important new (or emergent) stakeholders.” These stakeholders are predom-



inantly identified as EAOs and CSOs. And the key to identifying what local actors should be supported – both domestically and internationally – lies in assessing which have implemented successful adaptations in the absence of central authority and in meeting local needs.

However, some local needs are directly linked to international needs. Nowhere is this arguably more apparent than in the area of climate change. Forest conservation and reforestation are central to protecting biodiversity and drawing down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. And in Myanmar, much of this forested land lies in regions held by EAOs. Referencing the significance of this relationship, *Conflict and Climate Change* assesses “For the first time in history, ethnic actors in Myanmar have globally important roles to play.”

Myanmar’s forests are a linchpin in the fight to limit future temperature changes both regionally and globally. But for years this resource has been abused and exploited. With a deforestation rate of 1% to 2.5% from 2000 to 2020, Myanmar ranked as one of the top ten countries globally for deforestation. But now, some local actors are taking a lead in reversing this trend, including ethnic groups that have banned logging in their areas of control.

In South’s estimation, “If Myanmar’s EAOs can position themselves as protectors of the forest, they can move away from negative associations of EAOs as primarily interested in income generation through resource extraction...In this way, EAOs can move along the spectrum from warlords toward responsible local governance actors.” It then follows that these local actors have earned the support of international donors and aid agencies, who need to “adopt more conflict-sensitive approaches, including principled engagement with the country’s diverse EAOs.”

Not to mention that this relationship between EAOs and the international community, as mapped out in *Conflict and Climate Change*, can serve to help define new funding models for EAOs, via payments from the international community for green public services provided by EAOs for the betterment of all humanity. It is such a symbiotic relationship revolving around the

subject of climate change that is at the heart of South's broader narrative.

And this broader narrative is one of chronicling the rise of EAOs, and to a lesser extent CSOs, in leading the realization of a federal, democratic Myanmar. "Local EAO, state-level, and People's Defense Force (PDF) governance-administration and security structures in post-coup Myanmar can be seen as the adaptive, self-organizing building blocks of emerging federal structures," argues South.

Conflict and Climate Change proceeds to speculate that "Joint EAO-CSO-community action on climate initiatives can be an entry point for enhancing resilience, and developing effective local governance and long-term peace building (with inclusive arrangements to address the potential marginalization of "minorities within minorities")."

Though there is a cautionary tale contained within the narrative, a type of survival of the fittest, of which we may already be seeing the beginnings. As may be naturally predisposed, the more successful groups in administering their areas and in meeting the needs of the people (and environment) can be assumed to receive the most support. And when it comes time to define and direct the "higher (union)-level emergent functions and discussions" these groups will have greater influence. It is a question for any federalist structure, how to balance equal but unequal components.

While climate change forms a foundation for the text's overarching narrative, we must not neglect the Complexity that also features prominently throughout the text. One example of this is the need to address education if federalism is to thrive. As South writes, "Education must cease to be a driver of conflict, and instead must be a federating process in education." If a federalist approach to education is not well designed, explained, and implemented with honest intent, it can be abused to challenge the foundations of diversity within the state and undermine the federalist experiment. We have seen many such instances, such as with Sri Lanka, where educational policy and/or implementation stoked the fires of ethnic conflict.

But the complexity does not stop with education. As we look to a future federal Myanmar, Conflict and Climate Change argues that the components of the federalist state need be regarded "as autonomous, and in effect sovereign." This serves as another example of the complexity involved in charting the path forward for Myanmar federalism. For this autonomy/sovereignty must simultaneously accept diversity as a strength within a new national/common identity. It becomes essential, for example, to avoid the pitfalls of the previous peace process that merely entrenched the concept of a state defined by fixed ethnic groups.

Many would agree that the world is in need of a radical agenda to address climate change. And many would also agree that Myanmar is in need of a radical agenda to address the country's future. To what degree, then, can these two agendas come together? Conflict and Climate Change provides a well-resourced, visionary blueprint for "building back better" in Myanmar – that goes well beyond climate change – arguing that there is "an urgent need to develop narratives and programs to support federalism from below in the context of resilient climate change action in Myanmar."

Ultimately, a peoples' response to issues challenging their livelihood and way of life will depend on their political, economic, and social institutions and on their cultural values. Decisions will be made to prioritize survival. And within this milieu rationality cannot be assumed to be singularly defined. People will calculate their own best interests based on an assessment of the circumstances in which they exist. And their decisions may rest on a complicated combination of factors.

As with so many things, these decisions are largely contingent upon leadership – both at the local level and further afield. We can only hope that such leadership shares a similar vision to Conflict and Climate Change when it comes to preserving the world's resources and the integrity of the Myanmar state.

Conflict, Complexity, and Climate Change can be downloaded at no cost here: <https://rcsd.soc.cmu.ac.th/publications/conflict-complexity-climate-change/>



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# SOME ASPECTS OF CHINA-MALDIVES COOPERATION

SUN LEE



Mohamed Muizzu, president elect of the Maldives. Photo: AFP

**M**ohamed Muizzu, President-elect of the Maldives had fought the election on anti-Indian plank vowing to remove Indian military presence from the island nation. Muizzu as a cabinet Minister for Housing and Environment under former President Yameen was instrumental in permitting Chinese investment into the Maldives for infrastructure development under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the Sinamale Bridge.

Prior to his swearing in on 17 November, Muizzu has said he looks forward to scripting further strong ties between the Maldives and China. Given the perseverance of China in cultivating ties with the Maldives, the incoming government may be inclined to accept or agree to major Chinese proposals for investments. It is in this context that this analysis looks at the existing Chinese proposals for investment and cooperation in the Maldives.

The primary objective of the new Muizzu administration will be to re-activate the China-Maldives Free Trade Agreement. Signed in December 2017, the FTA was pushed through in the Maldives Majlis in violation of constitutional provisions as the majority of opposition leaders were absent at the time of voting. It is a comprehensive document that covers the trade in goods, services, and investment as well as economic and technical cooperation. Foreign ownership of land

has been included as a commitment in the agreement along with “unbound” access for Chinese nationals in the services sector. Significantly, the FTA provides for an overarching “security exemption” (Article 86) relating to the disclosure of any information which is determined to be contrary to the security interests of either party. Further, there are clauses for security exceptions under “trade in services” relating to supply of services for the purposes of provisioning a military establishment.

The next project which China had proposed and is under consideration is the Joint Ocean Observation System, for which the Yameen government had signed a protocol in December 2017. This protocol envisaged the deployment of oceanic buoys throughout the EEZ of the Maldives with transmitters networked to a centrally located control station in Makunmudhoo around 115 km from Minicoy. China had proposed for the observation system to be a part of the BRI Observation and Surveillance networks covering the IOR. The Maldivian Defence Ministry and AGs office had objected to the Chinese proposal in the initial draft protocol that Chinese research vessels and submersibles be allowed unfettered access to Maldivian waters for conducting research. The text was then modified to read that Chinese vessels were required to inform the Government of Maldives prior to entering Maldivian waters.

China's obsession with the BRI and Maritime silk route extended to the Maldives also when they projected the Ihavan Integrated Development project in 2014. This project was originally envisaged under the Gayoom government and taken forward by the Yameen government. A Singapore firm, Surbana Jurong was tasked to develop a master plan for this strategically located atoll along the Eight Degree channel. The project was planned in three phases covering a total area of 4112 hectares of land which 3870 hectares would be reclaimed connecting various islands. The project was planned to be developed over a period of seven years from 2017 to 2024 and include a port, airport, industrial zone and township. Muizzu will seek to revive the project and seek investments from China and Saudi Arabia.

China has also been eyeing a permanent presence in Laamu Atoll and other nearby islands. Laamu is located along the One and a Half Degree Channel in South Maldives. Of the seventeen islands leased to Chinese companies by the Yameen government, eleven are in Laamu Atoll. China has already built a communication tower in Gadhoo Island, where the Maldivian government has made plans to develop another trans-shipment port. China has also constructed a 15 km road linking different islands in the atoll.

China has also shown an interest in developing nation-wide links for which the Maldivian government had developed a strategic action plan. This plan, inter alia, included upgradation and expansion of the Velana International Airport in Male. The Yameen government had signed two agreements, one with China and another with a Malaysian company. China's Temus Group in collaboration with US-based Bain Capital had finalized a takeover of 40% stake of US Blackstone Group in the Trans Maldivian Airways (TMA) in December 2017. Subsequently, China state-owned enterprise AVIC negotiated a takeover of 60% stake in the Maldivian state-owned Island Aviation Services Ltd. The objective of these acquisitions is to dominate inter-island transportation in the Maldives. TMA caters to 45% of tourist traffic transportation and over 50% of the country's tourist resorts.

It is not just the transport sector that China is interested in. Huawei, through its Sri Lankan subsidiary, signed an MoU with the Maldives National Centre for Information Technology (NCIT) to develop IT infrastructure in the Maldives under the SMART Maldives Project with an EXIM Bank of China loan of US\$57 million. The project includes introduction of "smart cards", an all-in-one driver's licence, identity and ATM card and building of a data centre capable of hosting all the hardware for government-wide access control. Qatar's Ooredoo has also partnered with Huawei Marine to launch the Nationwide Submarine Cable Project in the Maldives. China was also keen to establish ground stations for its Beidou Navigation Systems in the Maldives.

On the security and defence front, the Maldives and China signed a five-year defence cooperation roadmap in 2015 for gratis military assistance

worth US\$ 4.2 million. China would want to sign similar agreements with the Maldives National Defence Forces besides offering surveillance aircraft and providing training and capacity building to the Maldivian police. China also has an active interest in obtaining basing facilities in the Maldives. Admiral Wu Shengli, then Commander of PLA Navy accompanied by a ten-member delegation visited the Maldives in November 2015. The delegation included a Deputy Chief of Staff, Deputy Commanders of a Nuclear Submarine and several others. The composition of the delegation represented all spectrum, surface, sub-surface and aviation expertise which was likely to be on a scouting mission to identify a suitable location for a basing facility.

Another delegation led by Vice Admiral Tiang Zong, then PLAN Deputy Commander visited the Maldives in April 2016. The delegation met with, amongst others, the Maldives Transport and Contracting Company (MTCC), one of the largest public companies in the Maldives, doing work on dredging and harbour construction. The first Chinese PLAN ships to visit the Maldives was in August 2017. The visit of three warships was undertaken in great secrecy and the ships were given berthing facilities much closer than the anchorage area generally provided to visiting ships. Chinese scientific research vessels have visited the Maldives at regular intervals in the period 2016-2018. More recently, China has sought permission for the visit of research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03 to conduct marine scientific research in the Maldives' EEZ from February to April 2024. It is expected that Muizzu administration will approve this request.

The above narration of Chinese investment proposals in the Maldives is only an indicative one and many more such projects, proposed and in the pipeline, can be listed. However, the intention here is to suggest the most important ones from the perspective of the Muizzu Presidency which will certainly want to take forward some of these proposals. For instance, ratification of the FTA with China will be a top priority for the Muizzu administration. While India maintains its presence in a minimal manner in military terms, one could forecast a more intense defence partnership with China under President Muizzu.

In the long-run, given the frequent change of guard in the Maldives, it is necessary to consolidate India's ties to ensure long-term stability, irrespective of the change of guard and Chinese attempts to influence the island nation's security policies.

***Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asian affairs***

# FIVE JUDGES ELECTED TO UNITED NATIONS' TOP COURT

**T**he General Assembly and the Security Council on Thursday elected five judges to serve on the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

In parallel and independent voting conducted by secret ballot, the Assembly and the Council re-elected one judge who is currently serving, Hilary Charlesworth of Australia.

Another justice currently on the bench, Kirill Gevorgian of Russia, was not successful in securing another term.

Four new justices were elected: Bogdan-Lucian Aurescu (Romania); Sarah Hull Cleveland (United States); Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico); and Dire Tladi (South Africa).

In the complex balloting procedure, the General Assembly achieved a conclusive result – with five candidates securing absolute majority support – in the first round of voting.

By contrast, the Security Council went through five rounds of balloting.

Each justice will serve a nine-year term, starting on 6 February next year.

**THE CANDIDATES**

The candidates who were not selected were



Photo: UN News

Chaloka Beyani (Zambia); Ahmed Amin Fathalla (Egypt); Kirill Gevorgian (Russia); and Antoine Kesi-Mbe Mindua (Democratic Republic of the Congo).

## **THE ELECTIONS**

The election of the judges or members of the ICJ are held in accordance with the Statute of the Court, the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, and the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council.

To be elected, members must secure an absolute majority in both the General Assembly (97 votes) and Security Council (8 votes).

If in the first ballot in either the Assembly or the Council, the number of candidates obtaining an absolute majority is fewer than five, a second ballot is held

and balloting continues at the same meeting until five candidates have obtained the required majority.

There have been instances in which more than the required number of candidates have obtained an absolute majority on the same ballot. In these cases, the Assembly or the Council continue balloting until only five of the candidates have obtained the required majority.

## **THE 'WORLD COURT'**

The Court is composed of 15 judges, who serve nine-year terms. Five seats come up for election every three years. There is no bar on consecutive terms.

Judges are chosen on the basis of their qualifications, not their nationality, but no two judges can be from the same country. Effort is also taken to ensure a balance in the composition of the Court.

Established in 1945, and based in The Hague in the Netherlands, the ICJ – informally known as the 'World Court' – settles legal disputes between States and gives advisory opinions on legal questions that have been referred to it by other authorized UN organs.

One relatively recent case that gained international attention involved a ruling against Myanmar in January 2020, ordering the country to protect its minority Rohingya population and the destruction of evidence related to genocide allegations. The case was brought by The Gambia against Myanmar.

The election of the first members of the World Court took place on 6 February 1946, at the first session of the UN General Assembly and Security Council.

For a look back at the birth of the ICJ and the crucial role it plays in the work of the United Nations, check out our newly published UN Video piece today, part of our weekly Stories from the UN Archive series.

Courtesy of UN News





Photo: Mizzima

## CHIN STATE

### *Chin defence forces capture two junta camps on Myanmar-India border*

Chin joint defence forces captured two junta camps on the India-Myanmar border and raised the Chin Revolutionary Force flag above them in Rikhawdar in Chin State's Falam Township, on 13 November.

The attacks on the camps, which housed over 70 junta personnel, started at 4:00 p.m. on 12 November. By 5:00 p.m. on 13 November, the Chin joint defence forces had taken control of both camps.

Salai Htet Ni, a spokesperson for the Chin National Army (CNA), one of the forces involved in the assault on the camps said: "We have gained control of Rikhawdar. Some people from the military council have surrendered, while others have departed for Mizoram. The specifics regarding the seizure of weapons are not fully known at this time."

The junta deployed three fighter jets during and after the fighting. A junta helicopter also fired three times during the fighting, according to a local resident who spoke to Mizzima.

During the fighting seven junta soldiers, including a major, surrendered. There were also casualties amongst the junta soldiers, but their numbers are currently unknown.

Eight fighters from the Chin defence forces were killed and a further 10 were injured in the fighting, according to LPS TV News in India's neighbouring Mizoram State.

A 55-year-old man was killed by intense junta artillery fire as he tried to escape the fighting.

A 12-year-old boy and a 67-year-old woman were also injured by an explosion across the border in India's Mizoram State.

Junta soldiers also crossed the border into India during the fighting and were apprehended by the Indian authorities, according to police in Mizoram State.

The defence forces involved in the attacks included the CNA, Chin Defence Force (CDF) Huan-Ingoram, CDF Thantlang and people's defence force units.

### *CNDF captures junta army camp in Falam Township*

The Chin National Defence Force (CNDF) attacked and seized Tibual Junta Army Camp in Falam Township, Chin State, at about 5:00 a.m. on 15 November.

The camp, on the top of a hill in Tibual Village, was seized after an overnight attack that started on the night of 14 November, according to the Rilih Voice, a news agency affiliated with the CNDF.

Reports indicate that the camp was set ablaze during the attack, and a substantial quantity of weapons and ammunition were successfully seized by the forces involved.

The capture of Tibual Camp follows the capture of two junta border camps in Falam Township's Rikhawdar, on 13 November.



## MYANMAR REJECTS UN'S RESOLUTION ON ROHINGYA

**T**he junta has rejected a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the human rights situation of Rohingya and other minorities in the country, according to a statement published in the junta-controlled newspapers.

In a statement, the junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw said that the resolution, which was passed on November 15, without the participation of Myanmar's legitimate representatives, was based on unfounded allegations from opposition groups and biased media.

The junta's ministry added that the resolution failed to condemn the attacks committed by the National Unity Government and People's Defense Force (PDF). The junta, which labeled the NUG and the PDF as terrorists, said that the resistance groups have claimed the lives of more than 6,700 unarmed civilians, including more than 230 children.

The junta's ministry also said that the resolution's use of the term "Rohingya" is unacceptable, as the term has never existed in legal and historical records of Myanmar.

"Myanmar categorically rejects the whole resolution and dissociates itself from the adoption of it," the statement said.

The ministry also expressed gratitude to the friendly countries which dissociated themselves from the adoption of the resolution.

The UN General Assembly's resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar is the latest in a series of resolutions that have been passed by the international community condemning Myanmar junta and army's human rights record. The Myanmar junta has repeatedly rejected these resolutions, calling them politically motivated and biased.

The resolution is also likely to further strain Myanmar's relations with the international community. In recent years, Myanmar has been isolated from the international community due to its human rights record. The country has been under a number of sanctions from the United States, the European Union, and other countries.

In August 2017, the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on the Rohingya minority in Rakhine (Arakan) State, western Myanmar. The crackdown was sparked by attacks on police outposts by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

The Myanmar army's response was swift and merciless. Soldiers burned villages, raped women and girls, and killed thousands of civilians. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

# MYANMAR'S NUG WILL SELL 10% OF SPRING DEVELOPMENT BANK SHARES



Photo: Kachinwaves/AFP

**O**n Saturday, the National Unity Government (NUG) began the sale of Spring Development Bank shares, a sale set to run from 17 to 27 November.

Reportedly, 10% of the Spring Development Bank (SDB) will be offered for sale.

Calvin T, the spokesperson for SDB, said, “Our criteria for subscribing to the shares are straightforward. It necessitates having an SDB account with a balance. There are no restrictions based on nationality; both foreigners and citizens are eligible.”

The deadline for registration is 27 November and the distribution activities will be conducted on 30 November and 1 December.

The shares can be purchased from where the SDB account is opened and also via connections of

the SDB, spread across 22 countries.

According to information posted on its social networking page, the SDB asserts that it holds a legal license for banking and financial services issued by the Interim Central Bank of the NUG.

As announced on 15 November at a press conference on the pre-sale programme of the SDB – also known as the revolution bank – the NUG is the majority owner with plans to acquire 51% of the total shares. The remaining 49% is slated to be sold to the public, according to the SDB.

Tin Tun Naing, the NUG Minister of the Ministry of Planning, Finance, and Investment, stated that the income from the shares sold will be used in important sectors of the revolution. The NUG was set up following the Myanmar military coup in February 2021.



# JAPAN PM SAYS EXPERTS TO TALK IN CHINA SEAFOOD ROW



Checking the quality of the seafood.  
Photo; AFP

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Friday last week that China had agreed to expert-level talks aimed at addressing its ban on Japanese seafood following the release of Fukushima wastewater.

China banned all Japanese seafood imports in August after Japan began to release the treated wastewater from the nuclear plant hobbled by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Kishida said he discussed the wastewater row with Chinese President Xi Jinping when they met Thursday on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific summit in San Francisco.

Kishida said he and Xi agreed to “seek to find a resolution through consultation and dialogue based upon a constructive attitude.”

“In the days ahead, discussions will take place based upon science at the experts’ level,” Kishida told a news conference.

China, which has historic tensions with Japan, has accused Tokyo of treating the sea as a “sewer.”

Japan insists that the discharge is safe, a view

backed by the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and promoted by the United States, Japan’s close ally.

Kishida called on China to make an “objective judgment” on the safety of seafood, which is a major industry in Japan.

“Frankly, we are not at this point in a position to predict the timing of the lifting of the import restrictions,” Kishida said.

“However, the government will be pressing the Chinese government” and taking measures to support Japanese fishermen, he said.

Xi met leaders including US President Joe Biden in San Francisco, mostly showing a softer side as China tries to calm tensions and focus on its faltering economy.

But tensions were palpable with Japan, with Kishida voicing alarm over China’s military activity in waters near Japan.

# US, CHINA COMMERCE MINISTERS PLEDGE TO FURTHER TALKS IN 2024

The United States and China plan further talks on commercial issues next year, the US Commerce Department said Friday in a commitment to continue high level engagement despite tensions.

The announcement came after the US and Chinese presidents, Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, held a summit on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in San Francisco this week.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo spoke with her Chinese counterpart Wang Wentao on Thursday, after the Biden-Xi talks, on the countries' commercial relationship.

"During the meeting, the two discussed progress made under the commercial issues working group and planned to hold an in-person meeting in early 2024," the Commerce Department said in a statement.

Both sides would also hold technical discussions on boosting the protection of trade secrets during proceedings next January.

Tensions between the world's two biggest economies have soared in recent years as both sides clashed on issues ranging from human rights to export controls.

Washington says its export curbs, which aim at reducing China's access to advanced chips critical to the development of AI tech and cutting-edge weapons, are a national security measure.

But Beijing has dismissed those concerns and Xi told Biden this week that such actions hurt China's "legitimate interests."

For now, Raimondo's planned talks follow her August trip to Beijing, and come in spite of both sides' differences.

The Commerce Department plans to work with Chinese authorities as well, to promote ties through the revival of a tourism leadership summit scheduled to take place in May in Xi'an.

"Secretary Raimondo also reinforced that protecting national security is not negotiable," the Commerce Department statement said, adding that US controls are not designed to contain China's growth.

**AFP**

**Penrose Thitsa**

## **MYANMAR'S YOMA GROUP TO RESUME MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN YANGON DESPITE ONGOING CONFLICT IN MYANMAR**

**A**fter a nearly three-year hiatus due to the country's political turmoil, Myanmar conglomerate Yoma Group is poised to restart construction of its ambitious Yoma Central mixed-use development in Yangon, reported the Nikkei Asia.

Preparations for the project's resumption are proceeding as scheduled, according to Yoma Strategic Holdings, the Singapore-listed arm of Yoma Group.

The project, which encompasses four mixed-use buildings on a four-hectare site in downtown Yangon, will feature a mix of residential, office, and retail spaces. Yoma Group holds a majority stake of around 60 per cent in the project, with Japanese partners Mitsubishi Corp. and Mitsubishi Estate taking the remaining share.

In light of the prevailing political uncertainty and the cloudy outlook for office space demand, Yoma Strategic has decided to prioritize the construction of residential towers. The company believes that Yangon's limited supply of high-end housing will drive demand for apartments, particularly for short-term stays and as investment properties.

Originally slated for completion in mid-2021, the Yoma Central project was abruptly halted in February 2021 following the military coup that ousted Myanmar's democratically elected government. The ensuing political and economic instability severely impacted the country's business environment and dampened investor confidence.

The resumption of construction on the Yoma Central project is a sign that some investors are still willing to bet on Myanmar's long-term potential. However, the ongoing conflict is likely to pose significant challenges for the project, and it is unclear when it will be completed.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

# IN FOCUS





## BATTLING IT OUT

**J**apan's forward Ayase Ueda (C) fights for the ball during the Asian 2nd-round qualifier for 2026 World Cup between Japan and Myanmar at Panasonic Stadium Suita in Osaka prefecture on November 16. Japan won against Myanmar.

Photo: Jiji Press – AFP

# MYANMAR'S FAMED INLE LAKE CHOKES ON FLOATING FARMS

From a gently rocking boat, Nyunt Win tends a floating tomato crop in the cool water of Myanmar's famed Inle Lake, nestled in the Shan Hills and once the country's most popular tourist spot.

The floating farms have become as ubiquitous at the UNESCO-recognised reserve as its famed houses on stilts and leg-rowing fishermen, but locals warn that the plantations are slowly choking the lake.

The ever-expanding farms are eating up surface area, sending chemical runoff into the waters, and clogging the picturesque site with discarded plant matter, opponents say.

Nyunt Win once farmed on dry land near Inle,

but he told AFP the "productivity was not great".

Several years ago he bought a share in a floating plantation and now makes 30,000 kyats (\$14) per box of tomatoes.

"We're not prosperous but we can rely on this for a living," he said.

But aquaculture comes at a cost to the lake. The farms must be anchored in place and the produce shielded from the sun -- mainly by invasive water hyacinths.

The weed grows rampantly on the surface of Inle, depleting oxygen levels by blotting out light for other plants, so it makes for a free and abundant



Out on Inle Lake. Photo: AFP

building block for plantations.

Out on the lake, Si Thu Win heaves mounds of water hyacinths and other aquatic plants from the water to shore up and protect his plants.

“The (tomato) plants do not last long if it’s sunny,” he says.

“To protect the roots, we have to cover them.”

## **CLOGGED SHORE**

Between 1992 and 2009, the portion of Inle covered by floating farms increased by 500 percent, according to a report from Myanmar’s government.

And the area under cultivation has only expanded since then, residents say.

“Mass production” now means the price farmers get for their produce is lower, grumbles Si Thu Win.

The farms do not last forever and when they begin to rot, farmers cut them loose and build new ones, leaving rotting mounds of foliage to clog up the lakeshore.

Floating farms are “ruining” the lake, an official from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Local authorities have tried to corral the drifting refuse into designated areas, but they do not have the resources to manage, he said.

“That’s why the lake is getting narrower,” the official said.

Farmers like Nyunt Win deny they are strangling the lake. They say the bigger problem is that decades of slash-and-burn agriculture on the surrounding hillsides have caused soil to wash into the streams that feed Inle, slowly filling it in.

“When I was young the water would cover the top of a 12-foot bamboo pole,” he said.

Now, during the summer months he can “pick up handfuls of soil” from his boat, he said.

The farm boom has pitted tomato cultivators against the fishermen who ply the lake, with 24-year-old Nay Tun Oo alleging that chemical runoff from the crops pollutes the water.

“When I was young and attending school, the

water in the lake was not that bad,” he told AFP, adding that many species of fish that are good to eat can no longer be found.

A 2017 UN report found “considerable overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides” on floating farms, polluting the lake and damaging the surrounding ecosystem.

A new conservation law for Inle was proposed by the regional parliament in 2019 but has not progressed beyond a draft stage.

## **BUSINESS**

Businesses around the lake also worry that its shrinking surface and environmental degradation will drive tourists away.

“Our Inle lake area was very big when we were young,” said Kyaw Kyaw, 38, who owns a jewellery shop on the lake and employs 20 gold- and silver-smiths.

“As there are too many floating farms, the water we use for drinking and washing isn’t clean anymore.”

Inle was once a major tourist destination, drawing around 200,000 foreigners and a million locals a year before the Covid-19 pandemic dented travel.

But there has been no recovery thanks to a military coup in 2021 and clashes between the junta and its opponents across swathes of the country.

Inle Lake lies in the southern part of Shan state, the far north of which has seen fierce fighting over the past two weeks between junta forces and ethnic armed groups.

“It has been three years already... and no foreigners are visiting here,” Kyaw Kyaw said.

Some of his metalsmiths are now learning other languages so they can go abroad for work, he said, while others are now working as carpenters.

Si Thu Win said he did not want to leave the lake.

“We are just happy living in Inle,” he said.

“We are also worried about the lake disappearing.”

**AFP**



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