

NUG launches campaign to eradicate violence against women

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**National Unity Government's foreign minister  
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# RESISTANCE THREATS IN THE CITIES INCREASE

Myanmar's resistance forces are upping the ante with talk about increasing their attacks on the country's main cities, Yangon and Mandalay, as Operation 1027 makes the military regime shudder in Shan State in the north, and a new front has opened in Rakhine State in the west, and operations pick up on the eastern border.

People's Defence Forces (PDF) threats to target Yangon and Mandalay appear to have prompted junta raids and arrests, focusing on young people. A Spring Revolution demonstration in a market in Yangon last weekend led to junta forces destroying the market. The junta has arrested nearly 50 young people in and around Yangon over the past three weeks, according to media reports. The people, mostly under 30 years old, were arrested between 1 and 21 November. Approximately 30 of them were arrested in Kayan township, about 40 kilometers east of Yangon. People from the area told media that Kayan People's Defense Force have frequently conducted attacks on junta targets there. It has not yet been possible to obtain information on the reasons for their detention or their whereabouts, and their family members have no access to them, said a resident who insisted on anonymity for security reasons.

In Yangon, the military junta has tightened security. In almost all townships, the junta members with and without weapons have inspected the pedestrians and checked the overnight guest list regularly. In addition, the junta armed forces have been stationed at the public schools, along with military vehicles in sight at some schools in South Dagon, Thimgangyun, Hlaing Tharyar, South

Okkalapa, and North Okkalapa. The revolution forces warned parents not to send their children to such schools. Young people are under threat from the junta, arrested, traded back to their parents for money, or sent to the battlefields to work as porters, despite junta denials.

Fighting has reportedly intensified in Sagaing Region, and Shan, Rakhine, Chin and Karenni States since the start of Operation 1027 on 27 October.

Since the February 2021 Myanmar coup, there has been fighting in over 200 townships, or 67 per cent of all townships across the country, according to ISP Myanmar. Since the February 1, 2021 coup, at least 12,225 clashes have erupted, affecting at least 221 townships, constituting 67% of the total townships in Myanmar. In 2021, clashes unfolded in 110 townships nationwide. The intensity escalated, reaching additional 77 townships in 2022 and further 34 in 2023, marking a total expansion of 111 townships in the conflict landscape, the NGO says.

That said – Yangon, Mandalay and the country's capital Naypyidaw have been relatively quiet when it comes to resistance activity, in part due to the tight grip the junta authorities hold, and the searches, raids and detentions, and a deliberate policy of pursued by the PDFs not to attack, or to keep attacks low-key.

We all know what can happen to a city engulfed by war. Check out the damage in the 1975-90 civil war in Beirut or in the 1990s in Kabul. As Myanmar's resistance forces ratchet up their actions, it remains to be seen how the cities will fare.

EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

**Editor In-Chief and Managing Director**  
Soe Myint

**Contributors**  
Sai Wansai,  
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

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**Contact:** Mizzima Media Group  
Email: [sm@mizzima.com](mailto:sm@mizzima.com)  
Phone: +95-9421010100

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## CHINESE NAVY ARRIVES IN YANGON

**T**his handout photograph taken and released by the Myanmar's Military Information Team on November 27, 2023 shows a China navy ship arriving at Thilawa port in Yangon.

Photo: Myanmar Military Information Team/AFP

IN FOCUS



## MYANMAR JUNTA SEEKS TO PROSECUTE PEOPLE FOR USING SATELLITE INTERNET WITHOUT A LICENSE

The Ministry of Transport and Communication, under the control of the Myanmar junta, announced on 22 November the initiation of legal proceedings against the unauthorized use of satellite internet, satellite communications, radar, and radio equipment.

The junta declared that satellite internet services are being operated illegally within the country, and the users are also employing them in violation of the law.

The military regime issued a warning, stating that unlicensed operation of satellite communication services, along with equipment installation and possession, would be subject to prosecution under Section 67 of the Telecommunication Law.

The regime did not reveal specific details about the locations or organizations that are utilizing the mentioned equipment.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that in some areas where the junta has restricted internet ac-

cess, Starlink Satellite Internet is being used. Additionally, radio communication equipment is also employed in territories associated with revolutionary activities.

Ko Lin, the leader of Myindaung PDF in Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region, said, "No matter how they attempt to restrict us, with modernized equipment gradually coming into our possession, they cannot impede our progress. Their announcement does not pose a problem for the revolutionary forces."

After the 2021 military coup d'état, the junta accused State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi of utilizing telecommunication equipment that was allegedly illegally imported. She was charged under Section 67 of the Telecommunication Law.

This particular section carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison.

## NUG INSISTS 'NO ENGAGEMENT' WITH MYANMAR JUNTA REPRESENTATIVES IN JAKARTA

The National Unity Government (NUG) claims it had no engagement with any individuals from the Myanmar junta, at discussions on the Myanmar crisis held in Indonesia.

The comment was included in a press release from Indonesia's Foreign Ministry following a meeting of the Office of the Special Envoy on Myanmar in Jakarta from 20 to 22 November.

It took place as Myanmar resistance forces were carrying out offensive attacks under Operation 1027 and had captured many military outposts (As of 26 November the resistance forces had captured more than a hundred junta military outposts.)

The NUG issued a statement on 25 November clarifying the comment. It stressed that whilst the NUG took part in the meeting, it had no face-to-face meetings with any of the Myanmar junta representatives who were attending.

The NUG statement said: "As the international community including the United Nations supports ASEAN's intervention in addressing the Myanmar crisis, the National Unity Government has been engaging only with ASEAN at the 'Separate Meeting conducted based on Groupings' of ASEAN."

It also said that the purpose of the engagement was to provide timely updates on the development of the Spring Revolution and to accurately and clearly communicate its position to ASEAN.

The Office of the Special Envoy on Myanmar set up by Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Ministry issued a press release on 22 November saying that it had organised a meeting attended by major stakeholders of Myanmar to push forward implementation of the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and work towards the convening of inclusive dialogue for a comprehensive and durable political solution to the crisis in Myanmar.

It added, "This meeting was conducted separately based on groupings; interlocutors for the Myanmar authority key representatives of the Spring Revolution group including the NUG, as well as representatives of the PPST."

In response to Indonesia's news release, the NUG said, "Without the assurance of ending the military dictatorship and establishing a federal democratic union, without the genuine will of the people, spring forces and alliances, and without a guarantee of a transitional period where justice is fully upheld, there will be no engagement."



# TWO JUNTA CAMPS IN SAGAING'S SHWEBO TOWNSHIP DESTROYED

Two junta army camps were destroyed when forces the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) simultaneously attacked four junta camps in the west of Shwebo Township, Sagaing Region on the morning of 25 November.

Ko Sarn, a press officer from the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), one of the groups involved in the attacks, said: "Four camps, namely Nyaungkine, Zeephyutaw, Theelone, and Teitheetaw, were simultaneously attacked. We managed to cut off the reinforcements of junta soldiers and successfully captured and destroyed Zeephyutaw and Teitheetaw military camps."

He said that Zeephyutaw Camp and Teitheetaw Camp, which had been manned by junta soldiers and Pyu Saw Htee militia members, were captured and destroyed following a two-and-a-half-hour assault by defence forces.

He added that an MI 35 attack helicopter from the junta's Northwestern Military Command had pro-

vided air support for the junta troops throughout the fighting.

According to the BRNA, approximately 20 junta personnel from Zeephyutaw Camp and Teitheetaw Camp were killed during the attacks. One junta soldier was captured and others fled. Five defence force fighters were also injured.

Following the successful attack the returning defence force fighters were welcomed with flowers by the residents of Shwe Bo Township, according to the BRNA.

The attacks were jointly carried out by BNRA Yadanar Theinga Column, BNRA Wimaukha Column, Zero Guerrilla Force (Myingyan), Meiktila Drone Force, Tabayin People's Defense Force, People's Defense Force-Shwebo, People's Security Force-Shwebo and Wild Tiger – Shwebo (LPDF).

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## FIGHTING IN OVER 200 TOWNSHIPS SINCE MYANMAR COUP

Since the February 2021 Myanmar coup, there has been fighting in over 200 townships, or 67 per cent of all townships across the country, according to ISP Myanmar.

According to ISP Myanmar, "Since the February 1, 2021 coup, at least 12,225 clashes have erupted, affecting at least 221 townships, constituting 67% of the total townships in Myanmar. In 2021, clashes unfolded in 110 townships nationwide. The intensity escalated, reaching additional 77 townships in 2022 and further 34 in 2023, marking a total expansion of 111 townships in the conflict landscape."

Fighting has intensified in Sagaing Region,

Shan, Rakhine, Chin and Karenni States since the start of the 1027 offensive on 27 October 2023, by northern Shan-based defence forces and the 1111 offensive by Karenni-based defence forces, which started on 11 November 2023.

Out of the 330 townships nationwide, martial law has been declared in more than 50 townships. These include areas in Sagaing, Yangon, Bago, Magway, and Tanintharyi regions, as well as Karenni, Chin, Mon, Karen, and northern Shan State.

The Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar (ISP – Myanmar) is an independent, non-partisan and non-governmental think tank.



 National Unity Government Foreign Minister  
Zin Mar Aung. Photo: Facebook



# TALKING UP THE RESISTANCE

**National Unity Government  
foreign minister hints at  
coming Myanmar junta  
collapse**

**A** media interview with Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) foreign minister has raised hopes amongst the Myanmar people that the junta is close to collapse.

Speaking to Nikkei Asia magazine during an interview in Tokyo in late November, NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung said the Myanmar junta has faced an unprecedented armed resistance that has pushed it close to collapse.

The Nikkei Asia interview took place at the NUG representative office in Japan's capital. Unfortunately, the magazine reportedly misquoted Zin Mar Aung over the NUG stance regarding dealing with the junta, prompting a call on the magazine for a correction.

That said, the NUG interview marks an important milestone.

It came in the wake of Operation 1027 led by the Three Brotherhood Alliance, composed of three ethnic armed groups - the Kokang army named Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA),

Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA) - named for its 27 October start date.

The joint forces struck simultaneously in northern Shan State, targeting junta army bases, police stations, and pro-military militia installations in Kutkai, Kyaukme, Muse, Namhkam, Nawngkhio, Lashio, and Chin Shwe Haw. Another front has been opened by the AA in Rakhine State, and fighting has seen upticks in the Karenni and Karen states.

Another series of attacks is anticipated within the next few weeks, Zin Mar Aung told the Nikkei.

"The morale of the military junta and the soldiers is at its lowest in history because they are losing their rationale [for governing]," she told the magazine. "We are receiving many defectors and most of the military camps are ready to surrender."

In a major blow to the junta army, all 127 soldiers of Infantry Battalion 129 surrendered to anti-junta resistance forces on 12 November in the besieged town of Laukkaing, on the Chinese border, according to the MNDAA. Similarly, an entire Light Infantry Bat-



Most Myanmar citizens consider the NUG their legitimate government. Photo: AFP



Myanmar's resistance has made serious gains in its war with the illegal military junta. Photo: AFP

talion 125 surrendered to Brotherhood Alliance forces in Konkyan Township in the Kokang area. The mass surrenders further highlight the weakening grip of the military junta on the country.

In the interview with the Nikkei, Zin Mar Aung said, “The military is getting ready to dissolve by itself” due to the fighting from resistance forces.

As part of the transition to democracy, the NUG Foreign Minister told the magazine that her government is committed to transforming the nation’s “unprofessional” army into a force dedicated to “protect the people and institutions”.

“We are not trying to abolish the entire military. We are trying to transform the military. We need heroes and reformists in the military,” said Zin Mar Aung, who added, “The next wave of the operation (of resistance forces) is coming soon.”

She said that political dialogue will be possible only if the junta follows the ASEAN-instituted five-point consensus.

“In order to make this (dialogue) happen, we have preconditions, such as the junta following the five-point consensus.”

This consensus, reached on April 24, 2021, by

ASEAN and Myanmar’s junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, calls for an immediate end to violence, dialogue among all parties, the appointment of a special envoy, humanitarian assistance by ASEAN, and a visit by the special envoy to Myanmar to meet with all parties.

More than two years have passed since the five-point consensus was agreed, but the Myanmar junta has failed to implement its provisions.

The magazine interview was important – but it prompted an element of controversy.

Zin Mar Aung issued a personal statement in the wake of Nikkei Asia’s publication of the story, urging the Nikkei to correct alleged mistakes in the magazine story.

The initial version of the Nikkei Asia’s story says (in indirect speech) that the NUG is preparing for face-to-face dialogue with the military regime.

Zin Mar Aung said in her personal statement in the Burmese language that she has never said anything about preparing for a face-to-face meeting.

Later, the Nikkei’s text was later revised to directly quote the NUG Foreign Minister: “We are preparing for the political dialogue phase-by-phase.”

# MYANMAR'S SPRING REVOLUTION WILL WIN, SAYS ANALYST



Matthew Arnold

**A**nalyst Matthew Arnold was upbeat when he sat down recently with Insight Myanmar for a podcast to assess Myanmar's Spring Revolution.

He sums up his assessment of the Myanmar crisis here:

Operation 1027 was a milestone in Myanmar's revolution. The ongoing successes of Operation 1027 were made possible by 33 months of revolution, both armed and peaceful. In turn, Operation 1027 makes possible the wider waves of junta collapse that can now be expected. Operation 1027 is a historic milestone that built upon what had preceded it and catalyzed everything that comes next.

Myanmar's conflict is that of revolution; namely it is defined by a people in mass rebellion against military dictatorship. Yes, there is a wider history of civil wars across the country and there are massive political cleavages still existing, but the war since

2021 is not a simple continuation or escalation of what came before. Namely, resistance to the junta is driven by a society's desire for a fundamental rupture with its past - a new beginning freed of military dictatorship and defined by inclusion. Foreign cynics can scoff at this point, but masses of Myanmar people sure don't.

The nature of revolution is the basis for understanding what has happened and what might happen next. Wars driven as popular uprisings against a near universally loathed but deeply entrenched dictatorship are defined by inertia and trajectory. Dictatorial regimes most often succeed in snuffing out resistance to their rule fairly quickly. In contrast, Myanmar long ago passed a threshold the junta could no longer realistically collapse resistance to its rule. Instead, resistance to the junta continuously expanded across the country to such an extent that the prospect of success became increasingly clear to those on the ground.

A key logic for instigating Operation 1027 was surely a straightforward assessment of the military balance. This was not confined to the last few months; it was a view of the wider trajectory of the war from the past two-and-a-half years. This trajectory has been increasingly favoring the resistance since at least the end of the dry season of 2022 and became steeper over 2023.

Operation 1027 was implemented by three of the most competent, strategically inclined EAOs in the country. It was not a rash, opportunistic decision and I don't believe one instigated by China. Operation 1027 was a bullish statement of confidence, not a coerced half-step by actors unkeen on it.

The stark truth for the military is simple and becoming bleaker day by day: it faces too much resistance in too many places and doesn't have the depth to recover. This has been the war's trajectory for at least 18 months now but has now escalated markedly over November. The military doesn't have intact reserves at the unit level that it can move as needed. Its inability to launch any notable counter-offensives since 27 October 2023 attests to this reality. The junta will lose more and more towns and ever greater swathes of territory. This in turn will only quicken the pace of the junta's collapse as the resistance achieves greater armaments while the junta loses greater numbers of combat forces and the ability to function coherently as it is attacked across the country.



Arnold is upbeat on the progress of the Myanmar resistance. Photo: AFP

It is easy to find faults in the resistance, to nitpick it in a thousand ways and claim these flaws lead only to defeat or that they mean the best outcome can only be negotiated settlement that accommodates the military. Myanmar's revolution is what it is: a sprawling bottom-up revolt initially driven by the imperatives of local self-defense that grew into a national uprising based on shared aspirations for a better future built upon federal democracy. Yes, more coordination, more messaging, more clarity about its politics, more inclusion, more and better of everything would be wonderful. But the flaws don't detract from the bigger picture. Look around the world and there is no clearer example of a mass movement fighting for a just cause. Moreover, despite whatever its critics proclaim, the raw fact remains, Myanmar's pro-democracy resistance is not being defeated militarily and shows no sign of wavering despite all the horrors the junta has thrown at Myanmar's people.

The junta's incessant brutality has lit a fire it does not know how to extinguish. That will not change. It created this raging inferno of resistance through the arrogance of staging another coup and the mass atrocities it committed afterwards. More atrocities will not shift the war in its favor. The democratic resistance is viable and ascendant to the point where it can achieve outright victory because it is, and will remain, a popular national uprising of a people determined to rid themselves of juntas once and for all.

The junta will lose, it is just a matter of time but likely within the next 3 to 6 months. The post-conflict peace may be messy in places, at least to parts of the international community, but it will not be Syria or the Balkans. There is simply too much social goodwill and solidarity amongst the Myanmar people, the starting and end point of this revolution.

If other countries want to help, let them start by being more open-minded to the prospects for positive collective change rather than driven overwhelmingly by the fear of what might go wrong and the unhelpful, dogged insistence that Myanmar is fractured beyond repair.

Myanmar's future is not set in stone. The world owes the Myanmar people the benefit of the doubt given their collective determination and fortitude to win despite the barbarity of the junta. In multiple ways, this effort has been decades in the making and now it is becoming a reality. This should be all the more evident given the impetus created by Operation 1027.

In such a dark, jaded world, surely the prospect of a genocidal junta collapsing is worth countenancing, preparing for, and, indeed, celebrating.

Check out the Insight Myanmar podcast with Matthew Arnold here: <https://player.captivate.fm/episode/1a123791-2430-492d-8eb2-44b15a9837f7>

# MYANMAR JUNTA DESTROYS MARKET FOLLOWING DEMONSTRATION



**T**he Myanmar junta destroyed a Yangon street market on 26 November, following a surprise anti-junta demonstration by a flash mob at the market the day before.

A flash mob of students and other activists wearing face masks gathered at 40th Market in North Dagon Township on the morning of 25 November. They lined the market making the Hunger Games three-finger revolutionary salutes whilst student activist Ko Nanlin made an impassioned speech through a megaphone to the protesters, stallholders and passers-by.

He talked about the progress of the Spring Revolution and said that although the military is suppressing the people it is crumbling and damaged due to the revolution. He also called on Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) soldiers to leave the army and join the revolutionaries.

Ye Nyi Htet, one of the activists involved in the protest, said: "The purpose of the strike is firstly; to inform the public about the current situation of our Spring Revolution, and secondly; to convey a message, on behalf of the people, to the military personnel under Min Aung Hlaing's leadership who have not yet joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)."

Following the demonstration junta soldiers arrived at the market in a vehicle and inspections were carried out at all the roadblocks in the area.

The next day, according to reports, junta soldiers came and destroyed the market.



# NUG LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO ERADICATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**O**n 25 November National Unity Government's (NUG's) Ministry of Women, Youths, and Children's Affairs started a 16-day campaign aimed at eradicating violence against women and girls.

The inaugural event was broadcast live online on the ministry's social media page.

Political activist Ko Ye Htut said, "Rather than providing more compassionate care for women and children, the reprehensible acts of violence and sexual violence by the military council army are truly appalling and should not be regarded as human behavior."

Gender-based sexual violence does not just occur in conflict situations. It also occurs in normal day-to-day life in forms such as abuse by spouses, stalking, restrictive customary practices and violations of reproductive rights, according to a report by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) and the Karen Women's Organization (KWO).

"I have experienced rights violations, such as being denied the autonomy to make decisions about family succession, and I have faced physical abuse.

However, I am hesitant to delve into the specific details. Speaking openly about these issues may lead to problems with my husband, as it could be perceived as defamation," said Daw Marzin, a mother of three children.

Since the military coup in February 2021, concerns about the safety of women and girls have escalated, with violence being employed as a weapon of war. The Women's Seminar on the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, held in June 2023, highlighted that these violations are attributed to the junta army and its affiliated border guard troops, militia, police, prison staff, and Pyu Saw Htee militia.

Since the coup in Myanmar, military conflict has led to 223 women being subjected to sexual violence, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

Many other UN member countries are also carrying out 16-day campaigns for women's rights.

# MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS REOCCUPY SCHOOLS IN YANGON, TIGHTEN SECURITY

## PAN PAN FOR MIZZIMA

**R**esidents in Yangon have reported that military regime troops have reoccupied primary schools, tightening security measures in Myanmar's largest commercial city.

Parents are reportedly concerned about the renewed military presence in schools, fearing that their children could be used as hostages.

"I've heard that the military is back at some schools. At others, they'll just conduct inspections for a while. So, we're sending our child to school depending on the situation," said a parent from Tamwe Township.

A resident of Shwe Pyi Thar Township in Yangon with ties to local administrators said that military troops have occupied elementary schools, urging the students to be cautious while traveling.

Civilians expressed frustration with the military's actions. However, parents said they have no choice but to send their children to public schools to

avoid disrupting their education.

Junta troops have reportedly tightened security in Yangon and are conducting inspections on the YBS public transportation system. Moreover, the troops, weakened in terms of military strength, are targeting young people in Yangon and arresting them.

The military is reportedly weakened by intense battles in several areas of Myanmar, including Sagaing Region, Rakhine State, northern Shan State and Kachin State. In response to warnings from revolutionary forces about impending battles in urban areas like Yangon and Mandalay, the military has increased security measures in Yangon, according to some civilians.

# CHINA NAVY SHIPS ARRIVE IN MYANMAR FOR JOINT DRILLS



This handout photograph taken and released by the Myanmar's Military Information Team on November 27, 2023 shows senior officers from Myanmar's Navy (R) welcoming members of the Chinese navy upon their arrival at Thilawa port in Yangon. Photo: Myanmar Military Information Team/AFP

Three Chinese navy ships have arrived in Myanmar for joint drills with its navy, the country's junta said last week, as a border conflict strains ties between the Southeast Asian nation and its most important ally.

A destroyer, frigate and a supply vessel carrying hundreds of sailors arrived at Thilawa port on Monday ahead of "naval security exercises between Myanmar and China", the junta's information team said.

It did not give details about the drills or when they would begin but state media reported the Chinese "naval task force" was 700 sailors strong.

Beijing is a major ally and arms supplier of Myanmar's junta and has refused to label its 2021 power grab a coup.

Relations have been tested recently as the junta battles an alliance of ethnic minority groups across a swathe of territory near the China border.

The junta has said the groups are using drones made in China in their offensive that has seized trade hubs and dozens of military outposts in northern Shan state.

Earlier this month protesters gathered at a rare demonstration in Yangon to accuse China of backing the armed groups, in what analysts say was a move sanctioned by junta authorities.

Beijing has expressed "strong dissatisfaction" over the clashes in northern Shan state, home to oil and gas pipelines that supply China and a planned billion-dollar railway link.

China has said the fighting has caused Chinese "casualties" on its side of the border, without giving details.

Beijing has also been frustrated by the junta's failure to crack down on online scam compounds in Myanmar's lawless borderlands that target Chinese citizens.

On Saturday, China kicked off military exercises near the Myanmar border, days after an attack on a compound in the Myanmar border hub of Muse destroyed more than one hundred vehicles.

The offensive launched last month by an alliance of three ethnic minority armed groups has galvanised other opponents of the junta.

Clashes have spread to the east and the west of the country and forced nearly 335,000 people to flee their homes, according to the United Nations.

AFP

# UK GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS MYANMAR HEALTH AS COUNTRY MARKS WORLD AIDS DAY

**A**s Myanmar marked World AIDS Day on 1 December, the UK government highlighted the financial support it is providing the country to help prevent HIV and AIDS transmission in the country, and to help with general health services, particularly to the vulnerable.

Friday 1 December was World Aids Day. It is also part of what is called the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence campaign.

The UK has provided £20 million of funding to health services, including preventing HIV, in Myanmar over the past two years.

People who use and inject drugs are at high risk of HIV infection. Working with partners, the UK

supports them at drop-in centres and through mobile clinics, where they can receive sterile injecting equipment, access testing and prevention services, and get referred for treatment.

In the first half of 2023, the UK's partners have reached over 23,000 people with HIV prevention programmes, tested nearly 13,000 people for HIV, and distributed more than 4.6 million sterile needles and syringes to people who inject drugs to reduce HIV infections.

Other services supported under the UK partner's harm reduction programme include hepatitis B testing and vaccination, hepatitis C testing, condom distribution, health education and referral to oral substitution therapy, and sexual and reproductive health



Carrying out an HIV test. Photo: UK government

services to people who inject drugs, as well as their intimate partners, children, and the broader community. Often poor health, drug use, and domestic violence are intertwined, and victims need a multi-pronged approach.

People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) are often particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, and can face health issues.

Take Lin Lin, a transgender woman and domestic violence survivor from Kachin state, whose name we have changed to protect her identity.

Lin Lin's brother became violent towards her during her gender transition from male to female. Because of the trauma Lin Lin experienced, she attempted to take her own life.

After fleeing her home, Lin Lin had the opportunity to be supported by one of the UK's partners, where she learnt about gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, mental health and psychosocial support.

Lin Lin used this knowledge to help others, and shared safe sex practices and offered awareness and psychosocial support to her peers. She advocated for the use of condoms among sex workers and provided information about available health services.

Today, Lin Lin is not just a survivor of domestic violence, she is also a dedicated advocate committed to helping her peers who are experiencing domestic violence.

"From now on, I'm committed to living my best life and continuing to engage in peer activities. I want to support my LGBTQ peers and break down the stigma surrounding our community. I want to help them avoid the dangerous behaviours that I went through," Lin Lin said.

Illegal drugs are a problem area. Waing Su, a 42-year-old woman in Shan State, says that following her divorce, she started gambling and using drugs. She started taking heroin in a new relationship and the couple were soon without a stable income and, consequently, homeless.

"We weren't able to find a job and barely made ends meet by collecting discarded bottles," Waing Su said.

The couple found support in a UK-funded health drop-in centre, where they could access health services for free. It was here that they were tested for HIV and tuberculosis. The results were positive.

"We felt remorseful and distressed hearing the news. Thankfully, the staff from the organization provided counselling to both of us and referred us to a hospital where we could receive treatment. Now both of us are taking anti-tuberculosis medicine and anti-retroviral treatment regularly," she said.

Help has been provided for female sex workers and drug users in Kachin and Shan states.

Women who use drugs and female sex workers face significant barriers in accessing health services at mixed-gender clinics and drop-in centres, where they are more vulnerable to stigmatisation and judgement.

One of the UK's partners has created a comfortable and safe environment for female drug users in both Kachin and Shan state - where drug use is particularly high - by setting up "women's corners" and introducing women hours at drop-in centres, where women can access health information, treatment services for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and psychosocial support—provided by women counsellors, outreach workers and youth peers. As a result of this support, HIV testing at the drop-in centre nearly doubled in one year.

"Our space at the women's corner is decorated and neat and tidy, and I feel comfortable talking about personal things. I feel secure," said a woman who attended a health consultation at the women's corner in Kachin State.

As Myanmar marks World AIDS Day, the UK government's health support provides the vulnerable with needed care and education – all part of a drive to help reduce the threat of HIV and AIDS.

# MYANMAR MILITARY POUNDS RAKHINE TOWN PAUKTAW DURING CLASHES

**M**yanmar’s military is carrying out a sustained offensive involving fighter jets to regain control of a key town from an armed ethnic minority group, its fighters and residents said on Wednesday last week.

The Arakan Army moved into Pauktaw, a town of 20,000 people close to a crucial deepwater port in the capital of western Rakhine state, on November 15.

It opened a new front in an offensive by an alliance of ethnic minority groups across northern Myanmar that has shocked the nation’s junta, cut trade routes to neighbouring China and led to more than 330,000 people being displaced since last month.

Pauktaw has become one of the key battlegrounds, and residents contacted by AFP on Wednesday reported heavy battles in and around the town, which is 25 kilometres (16 miles) from Sittwe, the state capital.

“They (the junta) have been firing heavy weapons at the town continuously,” one resident told AFP by phone, requesting anonymity for security reasons.

“Yesterday a jet fighter dropped two bombs that started a fire,” said the resident who said they were sheltering in a nearby village, adding the blaze was still burning.



Civilians take shelter from the fighting. Photo; AFP

AFP has reported fighting in Pauktaw over the past two weeks. But the accounts from the residents, as well as a statement from the Arakan Army (AA), provided the most detailed accounts of the battle for control of the town.

A resident of Sittwe said the military was shelling Pauktaw from bases around Sittwe.

“They are firing artillery from Sittwe towards other towns especially Pauktaw every day, day and night,” a resident told AFP, also requesting anonymity.

“We can’t sleep well at night as the sound of shelling wakes us up at midnight,” another resident said.

Footage released on AA’s Telegram account showed plumes of smoke rising from Pauktaw and included the sound of gunshots.

The AA said it was “rescuing” civilians still

trapped.

The United Nations said 18,000 residents of Pauktaw have already fled the town.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun on Tuesday said the military was engaged in fighting around Pauktaw but did not give details.

The AA has for years fought an on-off war for the autonomy of the state’s ethnic Rakhine population in their home near the Bangladesh border.

It is one of dozens of armed ethnic minority groups that have battled Myanmar’s military since independence from Britain in 1948.

Some groups want greater autonomy while others simply want the right to run the lucrative trade in jade, drugs and timber in their territory.

Last month, the AA joined forces with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MND- AA) and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in an offensive against the junta across northern Shan state, which borders China.

Analysts say the current fighting is the biggest military challenge to the junta since it seized power in a 2021 coup.

Almost 200 civilians, including children, have been killed since the offensive began on October 27, according to the UN.

**AFP**



# SEAN TURNELL ON MYANMAR'S TROUBLED ECONOMY

**A**ustralian economist Sean Turnell is well-placed to comment on the state of Myanmar's troubled economy having written a book on it and served as advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi's government from 2016 to 2021. Turnell's devotion to Myanmar saw him caught up in the 2021 coup and jailed for 650 days under a spurious charge of violating Myanmar's Official Secrets Act.

The economist took time out recently for a podcast interview with Insight Myanmar to delve into Myanmar's economic woes. His 2009 book, *Fiery Dragons*, chronicles the country's financial system from colonial times to the present day, and highlights how Burma's intricate financial landscape played a pivotal role in shaping its devolution from one of the

richest countries in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century, to now, one of the poorest.

## COMMAND ECONOMY

The main contributor to that drastic transformation has been the disastrous economic policies initiated by the nation's successive military regimes over the past half century. Turnell starts with Ne Win's 1962 coup, which resulted in a "command economy" where the military held almost total power, including widespread nationalization that trended towards "full Stalinist state control."

He describes how the regime derived its benefits not through robust economic activity, but rather through complete control of the country's natural re-



● Sean Turnell. Photo: AFP



sources, in which they got richer at the expense of the rest of the country. Turnell paints a picture of cronies overseeing a largely “rent-seeking” economy, namely, one centered in people and entities that amass wealth for themselves without creating any corresponding wealth or benefits to society.

“It’s just grabbing hold of that pie, and carving that pie up,” he explains. “It was never about, ‘How can we make a bigger pie?’ That was never the central question of economic decision makers in Myanmar for much of the last half century.”

## **CURRENCY ACTIONS**

On several occasions, the junta abolished, without any warning, entire denominations of currency. While many observers have attributed this to superstitions regarding numerology, Turnell believes it also is related to wanting to control a thriving black market, and is an action that totalitarian states often undertake.

He explains it this way: “There was this burgeoning informal economy which the state had very little impact over. But the one thing that they did have control over was the basic currency unit, within which most of that activity took place. So the idea was, if you demonetized the most important currency notes in that system, it was a way of bringing down that formal economy and in a sense reasserting state control.”

Besides essentially wiping out many people’s savings overnight, another devastating impact of this mercurial policy was that people lost all faith in their own currency. The result of this is that the normal flow of interlocking economic activity that helps sustain a society instead “gets diverted into defensive ways of keeping the state at bay. Nothing can be trusted and investment takes a big hit, and you just start doing all the things you need to do to protect yourself rather than those longer punts in the future.”

## **CONGLOMERATES**

In the podcast, Turnell turns his attention next to the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and the

Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), two major conglomerates overseen by the military. He regards their creation as “a superficial demonstration that that the military understands that the economy was important, and they needed to pull back in that really obvious Stalinist sort of sense, and come up with something else... but not do anything too much to endanger those flow of rents.”

He adds that they may also have hoped that they could improve overall prosperity through these organizations without having to increase civil liberties or political freedoms. Still, little is known about the inner workings of either MEC or MEHL, which Turnell likens to a “black box.” He adds that some researchers tried to dig deeper into them, but so significant were their power that publishers were afraid to go through with the release. Given the lack of transparency and data, Turnell can only guess, but he estimates that before the coup, perhaps 20% of the economy was under their control.

## **OPENING UP**

Diving deeper into the transition period, Turnell believes that part of the openness that was enjoyed during these years was because military leaders acknowledged how poor their country was becoming, and feared that it would soon become a kind of vassal state of China unless they changed tactics.

Thein Sein, in particular, was interested in opening up the economy to more foreign investment, while having little interest in transitioning towards an actual democracy. But once the tight controls were loosened, the pent-up momentum of opportunity and freedom exploded beyond what the regime had expected, and the military began to fear the loss of the privileges they’d long enjoyed.

Indeed, the National League for Democracy (NLD) drafted the Myanmar State Development Plan, which argued that “by dispersing economic power, there would be a dividend politically so that you will

actually begin to dilute some of those really powerful instruments that controlled the Myanmar economy for such a long time, that included the military and a lot of the powerful groups connected to them as well.”

As Turnell notes, this was the military’s worst nightmare.

Similarly, the military’s cronies found themselves facing genuine competition and new regulations in industries where they had long been the only player, and so they saw their market shares dramatically threatened. This was even worse for those engaged in illicit activities, as rule of law could eventually eat away at their profits. Turnell’s hope was that the NLD could find a way to implement reforms rapidly enough that new centers of power could be created, encouraging interests that support reform rather than resisting it, despite the stranglehold of corruption that still marred Burma’s economic landscape. And indeed, this began to occur; some of the military’s cronies started to partner with international corporations that followed strong governance requirements. Following the coup, however, many who had disentangled themselves from the military have fallen back in line because there was scant opportunity for engagement in legitimate business.

## **AFTER THE COUP**

“The disruptive process itself can become quite productive,” Turnell notes, referring to his goal of NLD reform. “Disrupting one part of the economy requires deep disruption in another, and so on, and then you start to build coalitions and other interests in favor of reform, so the hope was that if you could get really things going, that you would be able to get enough incentives out there to bring other people along with you.” And while he did see immediate signs of improvement, he also notes that the military was a huge obstacle to the economy developing how the country’s democratic leaders would have liked. “It was incredibly difficult to get things through,” he says, adding that much of the country’s bureaucracy was almost impermeable to innovation and improvement. “They would

become wealthier, by a wealthier Myanmar. But at the same time, their absolute control particular industries would begin to weaken.”

Turnell admits that the transition period wasn’t perfect, but stresses that it did open things up in ways that had hardly been seen before in Burma.

“It was a mix of things. It still had a large portion completely under state control, and then variations of that leading out to the informal economy, which is about the only bit that was beyond state control. So, it was moving along that continuum, but towards the more economic free end of things.”

## **ATTEMPTING REFORM**

Turning his attention to the civil service, Turnell points out that under the 2008 Constitution, the military retained control of several key ministries, along with their entrenched rent-seeking incentives and corruption. Many civil servants were “big, old men who had grown up under a different system and were highly resistant to change,” so Turnell was pleased to see an influx of younger men and women begin to take on leading roles during the transition period.

“I admired them for their ambition, vision, and courage,” he says, stressing that women in particular helped lead the way despite the obvious social and cultural hurdles in their path.

Turnell can only wonder what might have been in a second NLD term. “It was going to be bold in the economic areas,” he says. “A new set of reform measures were been drawn up, and people were extremely excited about them [and] we expected an acceleration of reforms.”

## **FUNDING THE MILITARY**

Turning his attention to post-coup Myanmar, Turnell touches on a point made in a recent podcast episode with Zach Abuza concerning the military essentially giving itself a 50% budget increase, which it does by simply printing more money. This, of course, results in dramatic monetary instability.

“Even as they print like crazy, they are simultaneously reducing the value of the kyat as they’re doing that,” he notes. In an absurd twist that would be comical if it did not symbolize such dire consequences for the country, Turnell wryly notes that the military has been printing so many banknotes recently that the presses have actually broken down, and they are now having difficulty finding the spare parts from overseas to keep them running! Of course, the regime also routinely steals and plunders whatever it wants from the civilian population as it feels the need, which requires no exchange of currency. But its main concern is access to foreign currency so it can purchase weaponry, which underscores the importance of effective international sanctions.

### **DIRE ECONOMIC STRAITS**

The military has wrecked the functional economy to such an extent that Burmese confidence in the local currency is non-existent, and many people have turned to bartering. Wealthier people hoard gold bars while the poor try to acquire food in exchange for a good or service they can provide.

“What we can say about Myanmar is large parts of the economy are not denominated in the kyat,” he notes. He actually sees three separate “spaces” in the Burmese economy: one revolving mainly around foreign currency for the wealthy, the widespread barter economy, and a smaller one where the kyat is used.

Ironically, the profound economic inequality now found in Myanmar has actually prevented hyperinflation, which would normally be the result of the undisciplined printing of money. Turnell explains that besides the widespread barter economy, which sidesteps the kyat, hyperinflation is curbed by the fact that there are frequent goods shortages, so people cannot buy much anyway, which inhibits the circulation of overprinted kyat notes. And again, even when goods are available, many people simply cannot afford to buy them or prefer to barter for them. For Turnell, the concern of hyperinflation lurks in the background, ready to manifest if any of the mechanical and/or psychological

aspects of the situation begins to shift.

Turnell notes that he was targeted after the coup, likely due to the leading role he played in drafting policies to improve the flailing economy. “There was an anger from the military that they were starting to come under pressure from the sort of reforms that we were doing, and I was a little bit of a bogeyman.”

### **COMMITMENT TO MYANMAR**

He ends by reflecting on how his own personal journey intersected with the trajectory of a nation.

“Obviously, I spent time in prison, but that was of no fault to the Myanmar people as opposed to the regime that rules over exploits them. And I experienced the most extraordinary kindness, compassion and courage at the hands of people in a much worse position than this privileged foreigner talking now,” he says. “If there were a better political environment, Myanmar could be a profoundly better place that its people so profoundly deserve.”

Check out Sean Turnell’s interview on the Insight Myanmar podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2023/10/26/episode-201-navigating-the-financial-landscape>

# 'THE HUMP': INDIA HONOURS US AIRMEN DOWNED IN WWII CHINA AIRLIFT

India paid tribute Wednesday last week to the hundreds of US servicemen killed during World War II with the opening of a museum near its strategic border with China honouring the dramatic Himalayan airlift dubbed "The Hump".

Telling the story of how Allied pilots flew the

perilous route to supply Chinese forces, it includes 80-year-old rusting wreckage and machine guns of some of the 590 planes that crashed into the jungle hills and jagged mountains of India's northeast Arunachal Pradesh state.

Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema



Inaugurating the memorial to the World War II flyers. Photo: AFP

Khandu said it showcased “the remnants of aircrafts that went missing”, as he inaugurated “The Hump WWII Museum” alongside the US ambassador, Eric Garcetti in the town of Pasighat.

Pilots nicknamed the dangerous route over the ice-covered eastern Himalayan mountains “The Hump”, a giant airlift to supply Chinese troops battling Japanese forces after they cut off the overland route through Burma, today’s Myanmar.

It also earned the moniker the “Aluminium

Trail” because of the number of crashes.

The remains of aircraft are still found smothered in Arunachal Pradesh’s rugged jungle hills, sandwiched between Myanmar and China.

Today, Washington and Beijing are rival superpowers, while China claims almost all of India’s Arunachal Pradesh is part of its territory as “South Tibet”.

New Delhi, who is wary of Beijing’s growing military assertiveness along their 3,500-kilometre (2,175-mile) shared frontier, consistently maintains that the state is an “integral and inalienable part of India”.

According to the China-Burma-India Hump Pilots Association, 590 planes went down with the loss of more than 1,650 lives from April 1942 until near the end of the war in 1945.

The National Museum of the US Air Force called it the “greatest sustained aerial transport achievement of the war”.

They ferried some 650,000 tonnes of fuel, munitions and equipment through some of the toughest of flying conditions over the mountains.

The “obstacles posed by terrain and the extremes in climate were difficulties never before experienced in mass operation of aircraft”, the Ohio-based US Air Force museum added, who call it the “world’s first strategic airlift”.

The US Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the US agency that deals with soldiers missing in action, has sent repeated teams to Arunachal Pradesh to locate the remains of missing servicemen.



**AFP**

# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN JEOPARDY 34 YEARS AFTER LANDMARK UN TREATY

**S**tronger action is needed to uphold children's rights in a world where they are increasingly under threat due to conflicts, rising poverty and climate impacts, the head of the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, said on Monday.

Catherine Russell made the appeal in a statement to mark World Children's Day, which commemorates the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

"At no time since the CRC was adopted 34 years ago have children's rights been in greater jeopardy," she said.

## **CHILDREN IN THE CROSSHAIRS**

Although the 1989 treaty acknowledges that all boys and girls have inalienable rights which governments promised would be protected and upheld, "unfortunately, children today are living in a world that is increasingly hostile to their rights," she said.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the ex-

perience of children impacted by conflicts. UNICEF estimates that some 400 million - roughly one in five - are living in or fleeing conflict zones.

"Many are being injured, killed, or sexually violated. They are losing family members and friends. And some are being recruited and used by armed forces or groups," said Ms. Russell.

She added that many have been displaced multiple times, risking separation from their families, losing critical years of education, and fraying ties to their communities.

## **ONE BILLION FACE CLIMATE RISK**

Furthermore, it was "deeply troubling" that this coincides with other threats to children's rights including rising poverty and inequality, public health emergencies, and the climate crisis.

Globally, more than one billion children currently live in countries that are at 'extremely high-risk' from the impacts of climate change, according to UNICEF.



Photo: UN News

“This means half the world’s children could suffer irreparable harm as our planet continues to warm,” said Ms. Russell.

“They could lose their homes or schools to increasingly violent storms ... they could suffer from severe wasting because local crops have dried up from drought ... or they could lose their lives to heat waves or pneumonia brought on by air pollution.”

### **‘CHILDREN NEED PEACE, NOW’**

Ms. Russell called for stronger advocacy towards the fulfillment and protection of children’s rights, including through supporting the alignment of national legal frameworks with the CRC and ensuring accountability for violations wherever they occur.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres put it plainly in a post on the social media platform X, formerly Twitter. “Children need peace, now,” he wrote.

### **‘A DAY FOR MOURNING’**

Also sounding the alarm is the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which “calls for ceasefires and a return to basics of humanitarian law to safeguard all children.”

World Children’s Day has become “a day for mourning for the many boys and girls who have recently died in armed conflict,” members said in a state-

ment.

“More than 4,600 children have been killed in Gaza in only five weeks. This war has claimed the lives of more children in a shorter time and with a level of brutality that we have not witnessed in recent decades,” they said.

### **WAR ON CHILDREN**

Although a UN Security Council resolution adopted last week, which calls for humanitarian pauses and corridors, is a positive step, they said “it does not end the war that is waging on children – it simply makes it possible for children to be saved from being killed on some days, but not on other days.”

The Committee also voiced concern over the thousands of children dying in armed conflicts in many other countries, including Ukraine, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Haiti, Sudan, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

“Verified figures show that in 2022, the global figure of children killed or maimed was 8,630,” they said. “Of deep concern is the fact that up to 4,000 children were denied humanitarian access last year. Given the current situation in Gaza, the number of child victims of these grave human rights violations is rising exponentially.”

### **‘CRISIS POINT’ FOR GIRLS**

The rights experts also highlighted the situation of girls affected by armed conflict which “is also at a crisis point”, with verified reports of the abduction and rape of girls in Sudan and Haiti.

Additionally, they expressed concern over children of “so-called ‘foreign fighters’”, such as those currently in camps in northeast Syria who should be repatriated.

While some States have acted to return children and their mothers, they said an estimated 31,000 children are still living in abysmal conditions in the camps.

They also drew attention to the plight of boys who are being separated from their mothers when they reach early adolescence, as well as several hundred boys who are in prison.

Courtesy of UN News



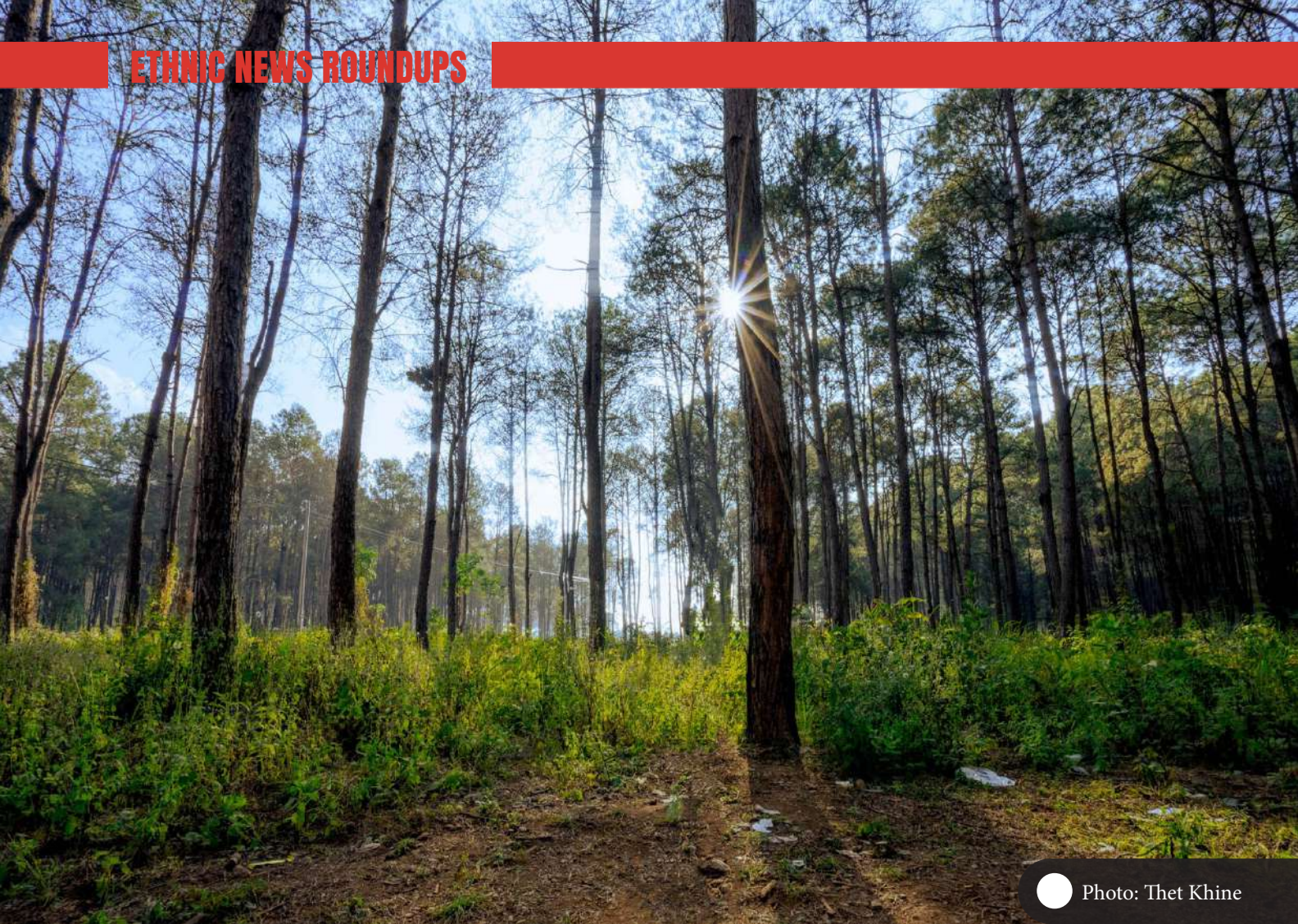


Photo: Thet Khine

## MON STATE

### *Junta police sergeant surrenders to Ye Guerrilla Force*

A police sergeant from Khawzar sub-township police station in Mon State surrendered to Ye Guerrilla Force (YGF) along with all his weapons, on 25 November.

The sergeant, 55-year-old Min Naung, said that his decision was driven by discontent with the junta's actions such as unjustified killings, arson, unlawful seizures, theft, and looting. He also said that he really disliked working for a dictatorship.

Min Naung surrendered with weapons that included a G3 gun, two boxes of magazines, and 100 rounds of ammunition, according to YGF official Lieutenant Kyan Yit.

He said: "This marks the first time in Ye Town-

ship that a policeman has surrendered and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). I urge all soldiers and police to consider joining the CDM and standing with the people."

The YGF publicly announced that junta troops who volunteered to join the CDM would be warmly welcomed by the YGF and gave assurances that the YGF would take full responsibility for the security of any junta personnel who chose to join the CDM.





## CHINA-MYANMAR AGRICULTURAL TECH EXCHANGE HELD IN NAY PYI TAW AMIDST TURMOIL

**A**n event promoting collaboration and technological exchange in agricultural equipment and practices between China and Myanmar, known as the Chinese Agricultural Mechanization Technology and Application Sharing and Exchange Activities in Lancang-Mekong Countries, took place in Nay Pyi Taw on November 30 and December 1, Myanmar, reported People's Daily Online, official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Against a backdrop of conflict and hardship plaguing Myanmar's rural heartlands, this collaborative effort sought to forge partnerships and technological exchanges in agricultural equipment and smart practices between China and Myanmar.

Organized by China Agricultural University with substantial backing from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, in conjunction with Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation, the event brought together officials, experts, technicians, and producers from diverse agricultural sectors, reported the newspaper.

Over 70 percent of Myanmar's population resides in rural areas heavily reliant on agriculture for sustenance.

This event arrives against a backdrop of immense adversity faced by Myanmar's farmers. The agricultural heartlands, particularly in central Myanmar, have borne the brunt of armed clashes, airstrikes, artillery fire, and stringent restrictions on movement and trade since the military coup of February 2021 in Myanmar.

# CASH SHORTAGES GRIP MYANMAR AS PRIVATE BANKS LIMIT WITHDRAWALS

## PAN PAN FOR MIZZIMA



Photo: AFP

Since mid-November, a surge in money withdrawals at private banks has prompted long queues and limited withdrawal amounts, according to residents in Yangon.

Ayeyarwady Bank (AYA Bank), Kanbawza Bank (KBZ Bank), and Co-Operative Bank (CB Bank) have implemented restrictions on daily withdrawal amounts, ranging from 1 million Kyat to 2 million Kyat.

A bank representative explained.

"In the past, the withdrawal limit was 10 million Kyat per week. We had arranged for unlimited withdrawals starting 15 November. But, due to the recent crisis, we have put in a withdrawal limit," explained a KBZ Bank call centre representative.

Until November 15, money withdrawals remained stable in major cities like Yangon and Mandalay. However, the recent uptick in withdrawals has caused disruption.

One Yangon bank customer noted their experience in mid-November.

"I withdrew 5 million Kyat from Ayeyarwady Bank. I needed cash for family reasons, so I went to AYA Bank's Waizayantar branch again, but at that time

I could withdraw only 2 million Kyat. I saw around 30-40 people waiting in line," said the Yangon resident.

Banks are facing cash shortages due to the high demand for withdrawals.

"The panic withdrawals have depleted our cash reserves. We tried to let customers withdraw money as usual before, but now it's difficult to say how much we can allow per customer tomorrow," said an anonymous bank employee.

The recent closure of private banks for an indefinite period in Sagaing Region, Rakhine State, Northern Shan State, and Kachin State, due to ongoing conflicts, has further fueled concerns among residents in urban areas, leading to increased bank withdrawals and the purchase of emergency supplies.

The resistance forces have urged people to stock up on essential medical supplies and exercise caution when traveling, as urban clashes could occur at any time. These warnings have heightened public anxiety, contributing to the surge in withdrawals and supply purchases.

# SOUTH KOREA CALLS FOR OVER 160,000 FOREIGN WORKERS INCLUDING MYANMAR NATIONALS



Photo: AFP

**T**he Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation says that South Korea would call for over 160,000 foreign workers including Myanmar nationals in 2024.

Under the Employment Permit System (EPS), South Korea will call 165,000 unskilled workers next year and it will be the record-high number under this system. The South Korea Ministry of Labour and Employment said on 27 November that the country was facing labour shortages in many manufacturing industries.

These foreign workers will be called for 95,000 in the manufacturing sector, 16,000 in the agriculture and livestock sector, 10,000 in the fishery sector, 6,000 in the construction sector, 5,000 workers in the shipbuilding sector and 13,000 workers will be for the services sector. And a further 20,000 more workers are likely to be called for depending on the scale of the labour shortage situation.

South Korea called over 100,000 foreign workers in 2023 but in previous years it called for only about 50,000 workers.

Myanmar workers said that the target of calling foreign workers for 2024 was higher than previous years.

South Korea will reportedly expand the types of work for foreign workers who come with a non-professional employment visa (E-9).

It will include the restaurants, mining and forest sectors.

Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies are sending Myanmar workers to South Korea under the EPS system for manufacturing, construction and livestock sectors. The four Myanmar private agencies which have an agreement with the South Korea government are sending skilled workers for shipbuilding and dockyard work.

# MYANMAR'S MINISTRY OF HOTELS AND TOURISM PLANS TO ATTRACT CHINESE TOURISTS



Chinese tourists. Photo: AFP

The Military Council's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism said that they were planning to attract Chinese tourists by arranging a Familiarization Trip or Fam trip in the country.

The Deputy Director General of the Hotels and Tourism Ministry, Zeyar Myo Aung, said that they would invite Chinese media, influencers, bloggers and tour operators for this trip.

The Deputy Minister of this ministry and the Chinese delegation led by the China Xizang Autonomous Region government Chairman Mr. Yan Jinhai met in Naypyitaw on 28 November.

The deputy director general of the Hotels and Tourism Ministry explained that this Fam trip would materialize in January 2024 and about 40 people would be invited for it.

The Myanmar ministry invited mainly the Chinese tour companies in Yunnan Province that work for Myanmar tours.

The main aim of this Farm Trip intends to emphasize normal accessibility to Yangon, Bagan and Mandalay tourist destinations.

The deputy director general added that this Fam Trip would help to correct the misleading image of Myanmar to Chinese people.

Moreover, the two sides reportedly discussed cooperation between the two countries for the devel-

opment of the tourism industry and investing in it.

The spokesman of the Military Council Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun said on 27 November at a press conference that China and Myanmar were the strategic partners and they had a sound friendship between the two militaries.

The political and military analysts said their comments on recent live-fire drills on the border and friendship visits by China as an attempt to clear suspicions on China.

China has repeatedly urged to cease armed conflicts in northern Shan State immediately and engage in dialogue to resolve the disputes since the war broke out.

Currently the military conflict is escalating in other areas too and the international community issued travel advisory to their nationals and told them to avoid visiting these places.

The tourist destinations are shrinking in Myanmar after the war broke out between the Military Council and local revolutionary forces.

The Military Council is attracting Chinese tourists while the international community including UK and neighbouring countries are designating Myanmar as a travel risk zone and restricting their nationals visiting Myanmar.

**Penrose Thitsa**

## **YUNNAN AND MYANMAR BUSINESSMEN MEET AMIDST FIGHTING IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE**

**B**usiness leaders from Yunnan Province in China and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) held a meeting on November 29 at the UMFCCI headquarters, according to state-run media.

They focused on investment and trade promotion between the two nations.

Yunnan shares a border of 4,060 km with Myanmar (Kachin and Shan states) in the west.

The business meeting took place while the Brotherhood Alliance composed of the Kokang army Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA) attacked the junta bases in northern Shan State near the Myanmar-China border as a part of Operation 1027, which commenced on October 27. During the operation, the resistance groups seized four border crossings.

During the meeting, a financial bridge was proposed – a direct yuan-kyat payment system to streamline transactions and fuel the engine of trade.

China's investment of 22 billion US dollars in Myanmar, particularly in the garment industry, served as a testament to the potential of their economic partnership.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

# IN FOCUS





## MAKING MERIT

**A** child with candles during the Tazaungdaing festival, also known as the Festival of Lights, in Taunggyi in Myanmar's Shan State. The usually riotous Tazaungdaing festival was muted this year, with revellers staying away and a heavy presence of security personnel, as Myanmar's military battles coordinated attacks across the country.

Photo: AFP

# ASHIN KOVIDA TALKS BUDDHISM AND MYANMAR MILITARY RULE

“The military’s always claimed that they are the guardians of the religion, they are the guardians of democracy. And that they’re the guardians of the country now, after the military coup,” Ashin Kovida tells the Insight Myanmar podcast.

“When they raided my monastery, they said they are the guardians of all [of Buddhism] in the country! I couldn’t say anything because they came with guns.”

Ashin Kovida is one of Burma’s most visible, pro-democracy monastics, and he shares his intriguing story in this Insight Myanmar podcast episode here: [https://insightmyanmar.org/com-](https://insightmyanmar.org/com-plete-shows/2023/10/26/episode-204-ashin-kovida)

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“I was born in a village. There’s no electricity, no television, no motor car... that is called a village in Burma!” Ashin Kovida laughs. He followed a traditional path: receiving a monastic education, then ordaining as a full bhikkhu at the age of 20; he has worn the robes ever since. Early on he was interested in studying English, but was admonished by senior monks who saw the language as irrelevant, and even antithetical to their Buddhist responsibilities. So he continued to learn in secret.

Through his English study, he learned about Western, liberal, political concepts, such as human rights and democracy, but he was initially skeptical of



● Ashin Kovida



them as being foreign. And he was particularly dismissive of Aung San Suu Kyi. However, an educated monk helped him see these subjects in a different light, and Kovida began to understand that he had been indoctrinated by the military's propaganda. Then through listening to the BBC and VOA, and practicing his English with foreign tourists, his views evolved even further. Eventually, he convinced one tourist to smuggle in a copy of Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom From Fear*, and through reading this book, came to believe that in fact, the ideals she espousing were not just important, but even perhaps worth dying for.

Not surprisingly for a monk, he fell back on Buddhist teachings to better understand democracy. "The Buddha was from a family of kings, and so he understood about politics," he explains. "Of course, he didn't get involved in politics for power, but he still gave advice about good governance. The Buddha once told the king not to go against the will of the people. The rulers must rule in accordance with the will of the people. This is the most important thing which is the fundamental of democratic principles. Any government must respect the will of the people. But the military junta, they never respect the will of the people, and at times they are against the will of the people!"

Eventually, his critical engagement on these subjects soon put him in the crosshairs of the regime, so he left for Switzerland as a refugee in 2006, and stayed there until it was safe to return home in 2016. In 2021, the military came for him yet again. They took his devices, and although they didn't arrest him, they did apprehend several other monks at his monastery. Some of these have not been heard of since, and are feared dead. Ashin Kovida fled to Thailand, where he continues to live, advocating for the democracy movement in his native country.

Today, Ashin Kovida is not afraid to call out those monks he feels are too cozy with the regime and who don't speak out against their ongoing campaign of terror.

For him, speaking the truth is a core teaching of the Buddha, adding that at times, it is necessary to

even "give up your life for the truth!" And while he sees many lay activists sacrificing themselves in order to speak this truth, he fears that many monks continue to be brainwashed in seeing the military as their protector, while regarding democracy as a threat that places the entire *Sāsana* at risk.

When it comes to the spread of extremist Buddhist messaging, Ashin Kovida believes that Western media shares some of the blame. For example, he has known Wirathu—the leader of the infamous, anti-Muslim *Ma Ba Tha*—for many years. Before Wirathu became a well-known figure, Ashin Kovida tried to get him to moderate his views, finding him very poorly informed about world events; he also suspected that Wirathu might well be driven by personal animus because his mother had married a Muslim man after his father died. When Wirathu began to gain attention through his Islamophobic rants, journalists flocked to Myanmar to cover him. Ashin Kovida pleaded that they give equal attention to the many progressive monks who vehemently disagreed with Wirathu, but he and his colleagues were never once interviewed to get their views!

"For the [international] media, when a tiger bites a human, this is not a story. But when a human bites the tiger, that's the story! So when the monks are against the dictator, when the monks are against *Ma Ba Tha*, it is not really a story for the media. But when the monks get involved in violence and extremism, that's a shocking, interesting story for readers."

That said, Ashin Kovida readily acknowledges the blame as also lying within Burma, itself. Referencing the Bob Marley song "Get Up, Stand Up," he quotes the line, "You can fool some people sometimes, but you can't fool all the people all the time." He continues, "We were fooled by 969. It's good to note the qualities of the Buddha and the qualities of the Dhamma, but this was misused by the military." But of course, few Burmese remain fooled by the military's xenophobic propaganda. He also criticizes the infamous 1982 citizenship law which excludes the Rohingya, as well as the regime's recent attempt to prohibit marriages between Buddhist

women and non-Buddhist men.

Ashin Kovida also has thoughts on other, well-known, Burmese monks. Touching on Thabarwa Sayadaw, he feels he is quite naïve about ongoing events, and not taken seriously by most Burmese. “There are many Buddhist monks in Burma who do not agree with him. I think he’s a kind of xenophobic too, and because he got support from the conservative Buddhist lay people, he’s afraid to lose this support. Now, the young generations do not accept him anymore. Even the elder generations do not accept him inside the country! We are not afraid of him, but I think we worry more about Sitagu Sayadaw.”

Perhaps the most famous monk in the country, Sitagu’s role was explored in depth in a previous podcast interview with Bhikkhu Cintita. Ashin Kovida describes how Sītagu was initially a strong advocate who stood up to the military, but later came to value popularity and honors over human rights and democracy. Ashin Kovida feels that by this point, Sītagu is quite misinformed about what is really happening in the country. Moreover, Ashin Kovida notes that he had been meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, but after Ma Ba Tha warned him that she did not adequately support the Saṅgha, he ceased to interact with her further. So while Sītagu Sayadaw continues to enjoy close connections with the military, he has lost much of his standing among the people - and many lay Burmese are now willing to voice aloud (or post online) their disdain, which is a sharp departure from past tradition, when the laity would rarely criticize monastics.

While many Burmese monks feel uncomfortable to publicly receive lay criticism, Ashin Kovida welcomes this change. “The Buddha himself encouraged criticism, but of course, constructive criticism,” he explains. “The Buddha allowed anybody to criticize the monks.” He references the story of a young seven-year-old novice admonishing Sariputra, one of the Buddha’s chief disciples, for not wearing his robe properly. “Criticism is not contradicted by Buddhist teachings! So we should criticize anyone who is against the Dhamma.”

He is well aware that his opinion about this is

likely in the minority. “Conservative monks, of course, they are afraid of losing where they are! But I think this is everywhere, it happens in the world. Everything is changing, nothing lasts forever,” he says. “The monks have to change! If they don’t change, they will lose their positions. We have to change the [monastic] education system. They have to open up their mind, and they have to learn.”

Indeed, Ashin Kovida posits that many of these problems can be traced back to archaic monastic education methods, and he criticizes schools that limit their curriculum to just Buddhist studies. Beyond core subjects like math and English that he feels should be taught, he believes that Western philosophy and psychology have a place in the curriculum as well, particularly to show how Buddhist teachings can be understood through those different frameworks. And he welcomes the newest developments in science, feeling that, if anything, they will only prove the essential truths of Buddhism.

Referencing the English phrase, “Reading without thinking is like eating without digesting,” he feels that monks need to spend more time examining, practicing, and applying what’s conveyed in a text than simply memorizing the words.

“We Buddhist monks, we just learn by heart, without thinking anything! So we learn a lot, but we don’t know anything! That’s just borrowing knowledge.” Moreover, he is concerned that limiting the subjects taught in monastic schools does not just isolate monks from knowledge, but it also cuts off their interactions with the wider world. Ultimately, Ashin Kovida believes that this rather isolationist perspective in traditional Buddhist education has the effect of preventing Buddhism from becoming more relevant and meaningful to diverse populations in foreign places. Because Myanmar’s lay population now has ready access through technology to the different ways of thinking and being in the modern world, he thinks monks will no longer be seen as qualified resources if they can’t understand the changing lives of their supporters. “I am not afraid of any foreign influence because I believe in humanity. I believe everybody is a human,”



Monks pose for a photo at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. Photo: AFP

he says simply.

Ashin Kovida further adds that simply wearing the robes of a Buddhist monk or living within a Buddhist monastery is meaningless if one engages in unethical behavior.

“In Western societies, for example, they are not Buddhist, they do not go to the Buddhist temple. But there is a lot less corruption. I don’t say they are perfect, but almost no corruption. Wherever you go, you don’t see anybody steal. But in Burma, even the pagodas are not safe, they worry about losing their motorbikes or something like that. So it doesn’t matter if you call yourself Buddhist or not! Actually, the Buddha said, “When you see the Dhamma, you see me.”

This informs Ashin Kovida’s view as to the future of Burmese Buddhism. At a time when some wonder where the faith is heading while caught in the current strife, his answer is very clear.

“Buddhism doesn’t need to go anywhere! Ledi Sayadaw, was a revolutionist,” he asserts, referring to the famous 19th century monk, adding that many at the

time accused him of being Communist, so radical were his ideas. “He was criticized by conservative monks because he gave a Dhamma talk in plain Burmese language, while the other monks spoke about Dhamma in Pāli, which nobody understood. And so Buddhism doesn’t need to go anywhere, but monks have to change the way to approach the Buddha’s teaching.”

While some have justified extremist and even violent behavior as necessary to “protect” Buddhism, Ashin Kovida rejects this idea wholeheartedly. “We worry about losing Buddhism, which is against the Buddhist teaching, but we don’t need to worry,” he says. “Worrying about losing the Buddha’s teaching is not the way to the Buddha’s teaching! If you want to follow the Buddha’s teaching, just practice, that’s it!”

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