

MYANMAR'S NUG CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION FOLLOWING SUPPORT FROM
UN SPECIAL ENVOY

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MYANMAR AID AND THE AVENUES TO HELPING THOSE IN NEED

A recent two-day conference held in Bangkok on the Myanmar crisis offered the participants an opportunity to speak openly, under Chatham House rules, about the challenges and delve into the solutions.

The event entitled: “3 Years after the coup: Towards a democratic Myanmar and its impact along the Thai border”, included a number of Myanmar and foreign experts and was held in the building of the Thai parliament, signifying recognition by the Thai authorities of the importance of the issue.

One crucial subject that was discussed was the delivering of humanitarian aid to those in need in Myanmar. Over the last three years, this has proved a tricky subject in part due to the United Nations and other international NGOs being pressured subtly or not so subtly to funnel aid through the junta and its arm, the Myanmar Red Cross. This issue was touched on by participants, recognizing the difficulties posed by such an approach, the key problem being that aid can be used by the junta as a weapon and that those in need in resistance-held areas may see little or no aid coming through.

Mizzima was able to raise this issue in interviews with some participants. Mr Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar, in an exclusive interview outside of the restrictions of the conference rules, acknowledged the challenges of delivering aid to those in need. As he noted, a total of 18.6 million out of a total population of 55 million are classified as in need.

He said he was “deeply concerned about putting aid in the hands of the military junta” as “the likelihood of it being weaponized is great”. He touched on the need to deliver the aid through people best-

placed to handle it – particularly in the conflict areas.

Dulyapak Preecharush, from Thammasat University, speaking to Mizzima in an interview, indicated that the Thai authorities’ recent moves to propose an “aid bridge” from Thailand to those in need in Myanmar were positive steps. He suggested the Thai government ought do a trial run first before opening up a full delivery service.

Activist Igor Blazevic, writing in a commentary for Mizzima, said “Thailand - with its long border with Myanmar, deep historic and current interconnectedness on so many different levels, and with so many Myanmar stakeholders, activists, refugees and immigrants being in Thailand and on the Thai-Myanmar border - is the critically important country for Myanmar. It can be only welcomed that Thailand is taking this initiative.” However, he warned the programme could get derailed if care was not taken – suggesting large portions of aid could end up in the wrong hands.

What is clear is donors need to engage with independent NGOs and the National Unity Government (NUG), and its related resistance arms, to funnel aid through the border areas to people in need. Small amounts of aid are getting through. But it is clear that many communities, particularly internally displaced people (IDP), are in desperate need.

If Mr Andrews has the figures right, about a third of the population of Myanmar needs help. The question is whether all the talk will translate into a viable model for aid delivery and will this give the donors the confidence to fund the programme.

EDITORIAL

mizzima WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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Cover photo of UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar Mr Tom Andrews by AFP



IN FOCUS





MYANMAR WOMAN OF COURAGE

US First Lady Jill Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken give Myintzu Win of Burma an International Women of Courage Award during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House on March 4 in Washington, DC. Twelve women and one group received awards for international activism work.

Photo:AFP

JUNTA KILLS 30 WOMEN ACROSS MYANMAR DURING FEBRUARY

30 women were killed by the junta in Myanmar and a further 17 were injured during February, according to a report by the Burmese Women's Union (BWU).

The majority of the deaths were due to air-strikes and artillery fire, though some of the women were shot and killed whilst they were under arrest or died in prison, according to the BWU. It also recorded that women had been killed in combat, raped then murdered, burned, tortured, detained, or went missing under unknown circumstances.

Women's deaths during February were recorded by the BWU in Sagaing, Mandalay, Tanintharyi, Bago, and Yangon regions, as well as in Karenni and Karen States.

Cherry Moe a resident of Karenni State highlighted the precarious situation faced by women in Karenni State, where clashes between the Military Council and the revolutionary forces have escalated.

She said: "Mothers with young children and pregnant women in particular are experiencing the erosion of their healthcare rights. They are not only losing

their lives and possessions but also their access to essential medical services. Conflict-driven displacement forces us to flee, with women encountering additional challenges as they lack access to motorbikes or cars, and petrol is prohibitively expensive. Many women have resorted to carrying their children on their backs as they flee on foot. While we try to escape, the junta fires artillery and launches airstrikes against us."

Cherry Moe also urged human rights activists and the global community to document the egregious violations of women's rights in Myanmar and to take decisive action.

Every month since the 1 February 2021 coup women have been killed and injured by the junta in Myanmar.

Since the coup until the end of February 2024 the Myanmar junta has killed 806 women and imprisoned over 3,300, according to the BWU.

JUNTA SETS FIRE TO MONYWA TOWNSHIP VILLAGE TWICE IN FIVE DAYS

A junta troop column raided Hkothan Village in Sagaing's Monywa Township and set fire to houses for the second time in five days, on 5 March.

Almost 100 houses and a village clinic were burnt down and a 90-year-old woman died in the attack.

The attack was carried out by about 30 junta soldiers from the Northwestern Military Command headquarters in Monywa Township and around 20 members of the junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militia.

It followed a junta raid on the village that burned down 88 homes in the village at about 4:00 am on 1 March.

"They're torching the village again, this is the second time. Locals are currently fleeing", said a source from Monywa Township.

Following the junta attacks on the village there has been a mass exodus of frightened villagers from

Hkothan Village, where there were originally about 350 households.

Rumours are circulating that the junta will clear all the villages within a five-mile radius of the Northwestern Military Command headquarters, which is why Hkothan Village was attacked, according to a member of a Monywa people's defence force (PDF).

On 29 February, the junta reportedly set fires in Tegykone, Sonekone, and Paykone villages in Monywa Township. Approximately 50 houses were engulfed in flames and an elderly woman died.

78,737 houses in Myanmar were burnt down by the junta between the coup on 1 February 2021 and 31 December 2023, according to data aggregation organisation, Data for Myanmar. It also said that more houses have been destroyed in Sagaing Region than in any other region.

U.S, PHILIPPINES PARTNER WILL COLLABORATE TO OFFER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG BURMESE YOUTH

On 5th March, USAID announced a cooperation program between the United States and the Philippines that will provide opportunities for Myanmar youth to study in the Philippines starting in July 2024.

On 29 February, the United States government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), launched the Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Program, a five-year, \$45-million initiative that will provide Myanmar youth with the opportunity to pursue quality higher education in several Asian countries, including the Philippines.

Through this program, USAID is partnering with the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to provide full scholarships for students from Burma to enroll in various public and private universities in the Philippines and in online programs through the University of Arizona.

USAID will work closely with CHED to streamline the admissions process for Burmese students and provide support services to facilitate their transition to studying in Philippine universities, including Batangas State University, Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas, St. Louis University in Baguio, the University of the Philippines-Diliman, and the University of the Philippines-Los Baños.

The Burmese scholars are expected to arrive in the Philippines by July 2024 to allow them to begin their studies in the coming academic year.

"Through our partnership with USAID, CHED is honoured to support Burmese youth in higher education," said CHED Chairman J. Prospero De Vera III, DPA. "We continuously advocate for equitable, quality, and inclusive higher education, aiming to empower

students from all backgrounds. Together, we're breaking barriers, building bridges, and driving transformative change through higher education."

USAID's Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Program will provide quality educational opportunities for young community leaders in Burma, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups. The program also offers grants to help higher education institutions in Asia strengthen their capacity to support international students by boosting institutional partnerships, growing regional networks, and expanding community service-oriented activities.

"This scholarship program is a strategic investment in higher education institutions in the region," said USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia Michael Schiffer. "It recognizes our shared commitment to education as a catalyst for positive change in Burma and around the world."

‘LIVING HELL’

**UN Special Rapporteur describes
Myanmar’s ‘living hell’ and the
challenges of delivering aid to
those in need**





The UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Mr Tom Andrews sat down recently for an exclusive interview with Mizzima to discuss the Myanmar crisis and the challenges of delivering aid to a “skyrocketing” number of people in need.

Mizzima: Can you tell us about the areas in Myanmar facing humanitarian crisis and which areas are most in need?

They are immense, right across the board. People are starving, the level of malnutrition has steadily increased. There are 18.6 million people who we know are in dire need of humanitarian aid right now. That compares with 1 million in need of humanitarian aid before the coup. Think about that – 18.6 million versus 1 million. We know what is driving this humanitarian aid crisis, and so we need to do two things. We need to address this massive need by getting the attention of the international community and letting them see and hear how life and death the situation is, and then we

have to address what is driving this humanitarian aid need, and that is this military junta and their assaults on the people of Myanmar that continue unabated.

So it is two pronged, we need to address this escalation of humanitarian need, 18.6 million and skyrocketing, and we need to address the source of this, what is driving this great suffering in Myanmar.

Mizzima: Currently ASEAN is dealing with the military junta and delivering aid through the Myanmar Red Cross, but that aid is not going to the areas of ethnic resistance. So, what would be the solution?

Well, I draw an analogy. If you are a physician and you have a patient who is sick, the first principle is to follow the hypocritic oath which is to do no harm, so do nothing in the name of help that is actually going to hurt, that is going to harm. And I think that the ... I am deeply concerned by putting aid in the hands of the military junta that is responsible for these atrocities.



TOM ANDREWS
UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar

The likelihood of that aid being weaponized is great. This idea of the junta continuing to try to legitimize itself creates this impression of what they don't have is real legitimacy by manipulating this aid and this requirement for MoUs and other documents, both of those are very dangerous and they, I believe, are not helpful. I think what we have to do is, as any good physician would seek to do is not only address the symptoms, and alleviate the symptoms, but cure the disease and the disease is the living hell is what the military junta of Myanmar is causing for the people of Myanmar. That's what we have to cure.

So how do we deal with the enormous human suffering, go to where it is, directed towards those with the greatest capacity to deliver that aid that are accountable to the people to whom they are delivering that aid. And that we are rapidly expanding areas that are in these conflict zones, and rapidly expanding needs, and that is what I think we need to be focusing

on, energy and attention.

Mizzima: When it comes to the international community, the United Nations is transferring the responsibility to ASEAN which has the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus that humanitarian aid is going through. Actually this Five-Point Consensus is not really working well, so in that sense, where is the international community?

Well I think the ... first of all, ASEAN nations and Thailand in particular have a great deal of stake in what is going on inside of the country, and from the perspective of the number of people who are seeking to get out of the country because of this humanitarian crisis, now the wave of young people that are likely to come because of this (military) conscription, the increased suffering that will be caused by that, young people who are needed by families, particularly rural families, to provide, them leaving. So that's a huge problem for Thailand, for the region, and the international community. But look at these scam centers, these massive criminal enterprises that are in Myanmar, that are allowed to exist, allowed to prey on people, not just in this region – 40 countries in the world – we are talking about thousands and thousands of people who are being trafficked into these centers, scamming people from all over the world, making billions and billions of dollars. This is a huge problem and this is another reason why this crisis inside Myanmar is not just a Myanmar crisis, it's a regional crisis, but even beyond the region.

And I will tell you something else. The United States Justice Department released findings, they just released a report not too long ago of a sting operation that they engaged and they found these criminals were selling uranium and yellow-cake plutonium – materials that are used to build nuclear weapons – and they were trying to sell this. The sting operation worked, they caught the bad guys, but the fact is those materials used to produce a nuclear weapon came from Myanmar.

So, we are talking about something – of course the people of Myanmar are suffering the most – but this has great regional implications, has great international implications, and we are all at risk, no matter where we live by this lawlessness that continues to run apace and run amuck inside the country.



TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC, PEACEFUL AND STABLE MYANMAR?

IGOR BLAZEVIC

Parliament House in Bangkok hosted over the weekend a conference entitled “Towards a Democratic Myanmar and its Impact on Security Along the Thai Border”, an important event.

The title of conference states something simple but important. After three years of war, destruction and enormous suffering, Myanmar is not an intractable nightmare. It is possible to move toward a democratic, peaceful and stable Myanmar, and it is possible to do that relatively quickly and easily.

This movement toward democracy and peace is possible only if it also includes movement to a federal Myanmar and if that movement leads to the end of

the military's oppressive dominance and political role.

A little bit of help from neighbours and friends will be highly welcomed, because such help will significantly accelerate developments in a positive direction.

However, the engagement of neighbours in Myanmar's calamitous crisis can also take a wrong turn and make things worse.

The event held on 2-3 March in Bangkok was a good and important one because for the first time in the last three years, Thailand has hosted gathering at which a lot genuine representatives of the people of Myanmar and authentic voices of the different seg-



Igor Blazevic

ments of Myanmar diverse society were among the speakers. Just to mention some: Zin Mar Aung (Minister of Foreign Affairs, NUG), Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun (Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the UN), Saw Nimrod (KNU, Ko Toe (NUCC). ERO leaders were among the speakers as well as several representatives of the Myanmar's brave Gen Z and editors of Myanmar's independent media.

Many proven international friends of Myanmar were among the speakers as well, people like Kasit Piromya (APHR Thailand Board Member and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs), Charles Santiago (APHR Chairperson), Tom Andrews (UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar), Duncan McArthur (The Border Consortium), Jason Tower (USIP) and Matthew Smith (Fortify Rights).

A number of important Thai policymakers and respected opinion-makers attended the conference and spoke at it. It was a real pity that Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahid-

dha-Nukara withdrew participation at the last moment. Hopefully, he did not do that because of a "notification" coming from the bunkered guys in Naypyidaw.

The Myanmar junta sent a "Secret" and ridiculously formulated letter to the Thai Foreign Affairs Ministry expressing "strong objection" to the discussions taking place in Thai Parliament House. They used their usual threatening language saying that the talks will "create a negative impact on the existing friendly bilateral relations between the two countries". The junta also required from the Thai Foreign Ministry to "notify" elected Thai parliamentarians "not to carry out any activities that could hinder the ongoing cordial ties in the future".

The conference was organized at the right place and the right time.

The new Thai government has recently taken a lead role in the international approach towards the Myanmar crisis. ASEAN and the current ASEAN chair Laos are happy to let the Thais take the initiative and deal with the serious and complex problem they do not really have leverage and interest to deal with.

Thailand - with its long border with Myanmar, deep historic and current interconnectedness on so many different levels, and with so many Myanmar stakeholders, activists, refugees and immigrants being in Thailand and on the Thai-Myanmar border - is the critically important country for Myanmar. It can be only welcomed that Thailand is taking this initiative.

However, there is a real danger that the Thai initiative, even if it is well-minded, can from the onset go in the wrong direction. That is why it is important that genuine voices from Myanmar are heard in Bangkok. Something like this was not, unfortunately, happening under the previous Thai government.

What we heard from Thai officials in recent statements, there is a plan to open borders for humanitarian assistance so that success with humanitarian aid can lead to trust building and renewal of "all-inclusive" ceasefire and peace negotiations.

Humanitarian assistance and facilitating political negotiations between the Myanmar stakeholders can be done in a good and productive way, which will truly contribute to bringing positive dynamics. There is not a single other country than Thailand that is better placed to play that role.



However, humanitarian aid and facilitation of political negotiations can also be done in a very wrong way, which will inevitably fail and will just give one more year to Min Aung Hlaing and his illegitimate junta to inflict destruction and suffering on the people of Myanmar.

So the Thai diplomatic initiative, even before it started to be implemented, is standing at a critical crossroads. The question is, will it choose to go in the right direction? Or it will take the wrong direction?

Yes, it is urgently necessary and long overdue to open the Thai-Myanmar border for large scale humanitarian assistance. However, this aid must be distributed through those who are helping and defending people – and who are legitimately representing people. It should be delivered to millions in emergency need through genuine civil society and humanitarian organizations and through existing National Unity Government (NUG) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO) public service bodies.

Cross-border aid should definitely not be delivered through the para-military Myanmar Red Cross because this cannot work and will not work.

It is also critically important that humanitarian aid is not instrumentalized for diplomatic and political purposes of the new Thai-led ASEAN initiative.

There is a real and dramatic need for aid in Myanmar. This growing and deepening humanitarian catastrophe has not been addressed so far because the Myanmar junta has weaponized aid, made it a tool of its notorious “four cuts policy” and because the UN agencies and humanitarian INGOs based in Yangon have allowed themselves to become junta hostages. In order to obtain visas and approval to operate inside the country, they have tacitly and shamefully accepted to deliver aid only where the junta wants them to deliver it, and not to deliver it where it is mostly needed. For the sake of their own institutional interests, UN agencies and many big INGOs have failed the people of Myanmar in the situation of a dramatic humanitarian emergency.

What Thailand now should definitely not do is to instrumentalize aid once more for the wrong purposes.

Delivery of aid should not become a pure PR exercise of an alleged “humanitarian breakthrough”.

The “Thai humanitarian convoy” should not be handed over on the Thai border with a lot of pomp to the military-controlled Myanmar Red Cross to be distributed to 20,000 people in military-controlled territories. This will be a travesty of humanitarian aid. It will be an insult to the suffering and true humanitarian needs of the Myanmar people.

Such showcase of “success of humanitarian opening” should definitely not be misused as a false “breakthrough” that will lead to the Thai Foreign Ministry and ASEAN immediately starting to organize “all-inclusive ceasefire and peace negotiations” which will have as its main hidden agenda intention to bring the military junta out of the cold and offer them incentives with the hope that this can tame the junta and made it acceptable for ASEAN and others.

Everybody familiar with Myanmar is well aware that Thailand and China have significant leverage over many actors in the anti-junta alliance. Everybody knows that Thailand and China are in a position to pressure and blackmail different EROs and other actors of Myanmar politics to join any talks organized by Thailand or China. Even if they are unwilling, they will have no option but to join.

That however will not mean that either China or Thailand, or anybody else, has leverage and influence to persuade or pressure actors of the anti-junta struggle to accept surrender to the ongoing military dominant role in Myanmar politics and the ongoing military’s predatory control over the economy and natural resources.

It is to be highly welcomed if Thailand will be willing to encourage and provide enabling safe space for inclusive political dialogue between different actors of Myanmar who are currently discussing, agreeing and building from the bottom up a new federal democratic country.

In the midst of both a tragic and heroic liberation struggle from the decades of oppressive and predatory military dictatorship, a new Myanmar is emerging. It is in everybody’s interest to encourage and support that development. This is the only path which can bring the peace, stability and functionality to the country from the abyss of current disaster.

The only diplomatic initiative which can save Myanmar from becoming a broken and failed state is

the one which is facilitating political negotiations about a future federal, democratic Myanmar with the military coming under the control of an elected civilian government.

If the current Thai initiative is not to take a tragically wrong direction, it must start with a clear understanding that Min Aung Hlaing and the State Administration Council (SAC) do not want any negotiated solution.

Min Aung Hlaing and his illegitimate and completely discredited and broken junta need a short break due to their current extraordinary weakness. They need temporary ceasefires with few ethnic forces in the border areas so that they can reorganize their depleted and demoralized troops and throw them with full force against the resistance in the central parts of Myanmar.

It is critically important that Thai and ASEAN humanitarian initiative and Thai, ASEAN and China's "ceasefire and peace" initiatives do not just give more time to Min Aung Hlaing to continue its war of terror against the people of the country.

The ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC) did not achieve anything during the last three years. It just gave a free hand to Min Aung Hlaing to wage the war of terror against the Myanmar people – a war which his junta is currently losing.

The new Thai "humanitarian" and "peace" initiative should not make the same mistake and lose one more year. During that year, Min Aung Hlaing will continue his war of desperation. He will try to forcefully recruit tens of thousands of young people and try to force them to fight thousands of other youngsters who have joined the resistance. He will try one more desperate effort to turn one ethnic and regional group in Myanmar against the other. He will try to conscript and misuse Rohingya against Arakan, Bama in Yangon against Arakan in the city, Pa-O against Shan, Shan against Ta-ang, Shanni against Kachin, Mon against Karen, Muslims against Buddhists, Buddhists against Christians and Muslims. Everybody against everybody, just for the sake of Min Aung Hlaing and the military to carry the One Ring that rules them all.

The danger - the real and tragic danger - is that if Thailand, ASEAN and China give Min Aung Hlaing one more year, he will take the war to the cities.

One should be alerted by the clear evidence

that this is already happening. So far the Myanmar military has been destroying and burning villages because they could not control rural areas. Currently, the junta is losing control over cities and, as a response, they have started to use airpower to destroy cities.

This is the same strategy which Assad used in Syria, assisted and encouraged by Putin's Russia. This has led to a minimum of 580,000 people being killed; with 13 million Syrians being displaced and 6.7 million refugees forced to flee Syria. Min Aung Hlaing does not have the military capacity to inflict damage of such proportions, but he can and - as he himself admitted - is willing to do "anything".

He and his junta cannot and should not be part of any solution. Min Aung Hlaing and his junta must go.

The Military cannot have political power in a future Myanmar. Myanmar cannot be a highly centralized, unitary, military dictatorship.

Myanmar can and should be a federal democratic union.

In his opening speech at the Bangkok conference Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun rightly alerted Thai, ASEAN and other international friends that "the ultimate goal of our people is to live in a free, peaceful, inclusive, just and democratic society. The Joint Position Statement was issued on 31 January 2024 by Allied Organizations engaged in revolutionary struggle towards Annihilation of Military Dictatorship and Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union. I can certainly say that there is a broad agreement that the system to build such a society in Myanmar is through the governance system of federalism and democracy given our diversity of ethnic people. Self-governance and equality for all have to be upheld. We need such a system that is supported and sustained by effective, inclusive, accountable security and justice institutions. The biggest and immediate obstacle to the sustainable future of Myanmar is the brutal military dictatorship. Therefore, the first step toward lasting peace in Myanmar is to eliminate military dictatorship."

Hopefully, these and other warnings and recommendations that were voiced at the Bangkok conference will be heard by Thai, ASEAN and China policymakers.

JUNTA DECLARES MARTIAL LAW IN THREE TNLA-HELD TOWNSHIPS



The junta has declared martial law in three northern Shan State towns currently under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), causing residents to worry that junta attacks are imminent.

The junta's North Eastern Military Command was put in charge of the towns of Namsan, Mantong and Namtu in northern Shan State. The order was made under Article 419 of the constitution to allegedly uphold the rule of law and promote peace in the region.

But currently, the junta holds none of the towns. Namsan, Mantong and Namtu were captured by the TNLA on 15, 22 and 28 December 2023, respectively.

The AA's top leadership has regularly conducted public meetings with what they say is an emphasis on a "community-based governance system" in the townships, according to RFA.

In Namtu, municipal, healthcare and electricity services have been restored, according to residents who spoke to RFA, and inhabitants who fled earlier fighting have mostly returned home.

Residents told RFA Burmese that the declaration of martial law came "just as the situation began to stabilize," and said they now fear renewed clashes between the military and the TNLA.

"We are now under TNLA governance, and the junta no longer exists here...Now that martial law has been declared, it's as if they could attack us whenever they want", said a Namtu resident.

All three townships are within 160 kilometers (100 miles) of the Northeastern Command, the resident noted, which "adds to our unease."

"We may need to prepare trenches and bomb shelters once again," she said.

A resident of Namsan told RFA that while the situation in her township wasn't safe before, "now it feels even less secure."

"The use of airplanes to drop bombs and the indiscriminate use of heavy weaponry add to our concerns," she said. "While some people have not yet returned to their homes, others have just come back."

The declaration of martial law in Namsan, Mantong and Namtu was made after the junta returned from Chinese-brokered peace talks, held in Kunming, China from 1 to 3 March, with representatives from the Three Brotherhood Alliance made up of the TNLA, the Arakan Army (AA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

Observers said to RFA that the junta had refrained from declaring martial law in Namsan, Mantong and Namtu townships in northern Shan state because they hoped the TNLA, would join a ceasefire agreement. They added that the imposition of martial law shows that any negotiations have stalled.

These most recent impositions of martial law followed the junta's 28 February announcement of martial law in the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) controlled townships Mongmit and Mabein in northern Shan State.

As of 4 March the junta has declared martial law in 61 townships with a combined population of 8.2 million people, according to data aggregation agency, Data for Myanmar. Martial law was declared in eight townships in 2021, 48 townships in 2023 and five townships so far in 2024.

Reporting: Mizzima, RFA

MYANMAR CONFERENCE HELD IN THAI PARLIAMENT BUILDING

A two-day conference entitled “Three years after the coup: Towards a Democratic Myanmar and Its Impact on Security Along the Border” which addressed the ongoing situation and humanitarian crises in Myanmar was held in the Thai parliament building on 2 and 3 March.

The conference aimed to provide insights into Myanmar’s political, economic, and social developments, facilitate discussions on the current and potential future situations in Myanmar, and devise strategies for Thailand to support Myanmar’s democratic movements.

The event was jointly organised by Thailand’s National Security Council, the Ministry of Border Affairs, the National Reform Council. Representatives from international organisations and news media partners also attended and there were online discussions with Minister Zin Mar Aung from the National Unity Government (NUG) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar’s Representative to the United Nations Kyaw Moe Tun, Saw Nimrod from the Karen National Union (KNU) and a representative of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC).

Discussions also focused on the humanitarian crises impacting refugees in Thailand and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar. The economic repercussions of sanctions and the financial state of the ruling military regime were also discussed.

The conference’s objectives included enhancing Thai-Myanmar border security, evaluating current measures concerning Myanmar, and anticipating potential future threats.

Participants underscored Thailand’s significant role in fostering peace processes, regional security, and economic prosperity in Myanmar.

There was also an art exhibition that showed how Myanmar’s ethnic communities live and how displaced people have been attacked by the junta.

MYANMAR CRISIS MENTIONED IN ROUNDUP OF ASEAN-AUSTRALIA MEETING



While Southeast Asian and Australian leaders on Wednesday warned against actions that “endanger peace” in the South China Sea, following fresh confrontations between Beijing and the Philippines in contested waters, the Myanmar crisis received a brief mention in the ending joint statement.

The ASEAN-Australia meeting focused on regional security and economic issues, including Australia providing energy to Southeast Asia.

The surging conflict in junta-ruled Myanmar continues to frustrate ASEAN leaders, whose efforts to resolve the crisis remain largely fruitless.

Junta leaders have essentially ignored the bloc’s five-point peace plan, painstakingly pulled together in 2021.

“We strongly condemn the continued acts of violence and call for immediate cessation,” the joint declaration from the ASEAN-Australia meeting read, referencing what it termed Myanmar’s ongoing “political crisis”.

“We call for effective humanitarian assistance, and inclusive national dialogue.”

Laos, a communist state with ties to crucial Myanmar ally China, is chairing ASEAN for the first time since 2016.

ASEAN’s 10 member states are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar.

Although Myanmar remains a member, political representatives and military leaders from its ruling junta have been banned from high-level meetings, though a few ASEAN-led meetings have included a low-level Myanmar junta official.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP

FIGHT FOR MYANMAR JADE MINES LEAVES ONE DEAD, 100 HOMES TORCHED



Mine site in Kachin State. Photo: AFP

A three-day junta raid left one man dead and 100 homes destroyed in northern Myanmar, residents told Radio Free Asia on Wednesday.

Joint military forces stormed a village in Kachin state's Hpakant township on Sunday.

The rebel Kachin Independence Army and a local resistance group, the Kachin People's Defense Force, have been attacking a nearby battalion since Feb. 26, making villages prime targets for junta attacks.

The area, known for its jade trade, has been caught between battles of rebel and junta forces vying for control of the region's gem mines.

Troops stationed near Tar Ma Hkan village torched more than 100 homes and shops in the village, residents said.

According to a villager, soldiers shot a man in his 40s as the raid continued into Tuesday.

"This junta column came to reinforce the infantry battalion, but the Kachin Independence Army and the Kachin People's Defense Force intercepted them, so they could not retreat or move forward," he said, declining to be named for fear of reprisals.

"That's why they burned the village. Shwe Nagar Pharmacy, Ma Nge Mobile Phone Shop and a grocery store were also burned and destroyed by junta troops."

More than 4,000 people live in Tar Ma Hkan village, residents said. Most villagers are employed in the jade industry, both in the mining and trade sectors.

Locals said the junta camp near Tar Ma Hkan village was captured by the Kachin Independence army and affiliated defense groups on Tuesday evening. However, RFA could not independently confirm these claims.

RFA contacted Kachin state's military spokesperson Moe Min Thein and Kachin Independence Army information officer Col. Naw Bu for more information on this battle, but neither responded by the time of publication.

Hpakant township was last attacked on Jan. 9, when junta troops used villagers as human shields following a battle with nearby People's Defense Forces.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

INDIAN MP MEETS WITH AA TO DISCUSS INDIA-FUNDED INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT



Indian MP Pu Valavena on the visit. Photo: Supplied

The Member of Parliament (MP) for the Indian state of Mizoram, Pu Valavena, met with officials from the Arakan Army (AA) to discuss building a road from the Indian border to Paletwa Township in Chin State, as part of a transport project.

The Indian MP and his team met AA officials at the border on 29 February and the AA provided security, according to local newspapers from Mizoram State.

They discussed the building of a 110 km long four-lane highway between Zorampu, a village in Myanmar on the border with India, to Paletwa Township in Chin State.

The road will be part of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP).

The project is designed to connect the landlocked states of northeastern India with the rest of India. Currently, the only way to transport goods from those states to the rest of India is to take them through a narrow strip of Indian territory north of Bangladesh and south of Bhutan, known as the Chicken's Neck.

The KMMTTP will provide an alternative, shorter route that will be cheaper and quicker to use. From the Myanmar side of the Indian border at Zorampu, goods will go along the highway to Paletwa Port by truck. They will then be transferred onto boats and taken down the Kaladan River to a port at the mouth of the Kaladan River in Sittwe, Rakhine State, before being taken by sea to the Indian port of Kolkata, 539km away.

India has invested US\$ 484 million into the

project which was started 13 years ago and has missed many deadlines since. So far, in Myanmar, the building of the river port at Paletwa, the dredging of the Kaladan River so that it can take bigger cargo ships and the construction of the port at the mouth of the Kaladan River in Sittwe have been completed, but the road between Zorampu to Paletwa still needs to be built.

Construction of the road was suspended in 2020, but it restarted in early 2023 and as recently as June 2023 the junta Federal Economy and Commerce Minister U Aung Naing Oo said that the road was under construction and that completion of the KMMTTP would not be affected by fighting in Rakhine State.

But, the AA broke a November 2022 ceasefire with the junta in Rakhine State and Chin State in November 2023. The renewed fighting then stopped construction of the road and the AA took control of Paletwa.

The Indian Government had already held talks with the junta about the Zorampu to Paletwa highway, but since the AA has now taken control of Paletwa it is having to deal with the AA.

Though the Indian government is dealing with the AA regarding the Zorampu to Paletwa highway it is still in discussions with the junta about the KMMTTP as the junta still controls other sections of the route, such as the port in Sittwe at the mouth of the Kaladan River.

The original agreement for constructing the KMMTTP was signed between the Indian Government and the Myanmar government.

MYANMAR'S NUG CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION FOLLOWING SUPPORT FROM UN SPECIAL ENVOY



Volker Turk. Photo: AFP

The National Unity Government (NUG) has underlined the recent call by the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar when he called for international intervention in Myanmar amidst the escalating atrocities committed by the illegal military junta.

Describing Myanmar's human rights situation as a "never-ending nightmare, away from the spotlight of global politics", the UN human rights chief Volker Turk said the demand for international action could not have been clearer.

"For the last three years, people in Myanmar have sacrificed everything, and kept alive their aspirations for a better and safer future. They need the entire international community to support them.

"I call for a new approach by ASEAN and States with influence to engage all actors, including the National Unity Government, ethnic organisations and the broader civil society," Turk said.

The NUG, in a press statement 3 March, said the High Commissioner's oral update also lays bare the illegal military junta's escalating, terrifying and dehumanizing atrocity crimes. Among these are airstrikes, artillery attacks and naval shelling against populated civilian areas; the junta's systematic and widespread torture of political detainees, hundreds of whom have died in custody; and its movement restrictions and withholding of humanitarian aid to increase the suffering of millions of people.

Desperate as it loses territory, troops and morale, the junta will plunge to any depth to ensure its own survival. Recent months have seen appalling acts of brutality, including the burning alive of two captured Revolutionary Force members by a pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia. Local villagers were forced to watch.

Now, the junta wants to forcibly conscript young women and men to fight in its horrific war against its own people. This act of collective punishment aims

to destroy new generations of Myanmar youth and will trigger massive population movements as young people flee to safety and to join the Spring Revolution's ranks.

At the same time, resumed conflict in Rakhine State has compelled the High Commissioner to "ring the alarm bells" as spiraling violence threatens new purges against the Rohingya.

The NUG goes on to say that Myanmar fully supports the High Commissioner's calls for:

An immediate end to junta violence, the full protection of all civilians, and the release of all political prisoners.

Meaningful, effective and targeted action to end the military's access to arms, munitions, jet fuel and foreign currency.

A new international approach that directly engages the National Unity Government, ethnic organisations and civil society.

Coordinated action by the international community and the UNCT in Myanmar to implement the Rosenthal report's recommendations and to prevent further atrocities in all possible ways.

The international community must also facilitate the upscaled delivery of direct humanitarian, financial and technical assistance to and through the National Unity Government and ethnic and civil society organizations.

Finally, the Human Rights Council should seize on every opportunity to advance accountability, including by supporting the set-up of a special tribunal on Myanmar.

Myanmar extends its full cooperation to OHCHR and the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, and stands by its international obligations and commitments.

NUG OVERVIEW OF MILITARY OPERATIONS FOR LAST WEEK OF FEBRUARY

Below is the National Unity Government's (NUG) overview of military operations in Myanmar in the last week of February 2024.

During the fourth week of February 2024, resistance attacks escalated in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions, with military camps seized in Kachin State. In the Northern Shan region, where the situation is relatively calm, clashes have arisen between the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), the Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA), and troops of the Military Council.

In Natogyi Township, Narbuu Ain region, Mandalay Division, a 100-strong column of the Myanmar military council was targeted by the PDF Myingyan District No. 4 Battalion, Natogyi PAF, and local defence groups, resulting in the deaths of 7 individuals and at least 10 injuries.

Similarly, along the Myingyan-Taungtar road, the Myingyan District No. 1 Battalion apprehended 7 militiamen, including the village administrator, a member of the Pyu Saw Htee militia.

Elsewhere, the convoy of the Myanmar Military Council's Deputy Minister of Information, U Ye Tint, was attacked with mines on its return journey from the Nationality Resource Development Degree College, resulting in the death of one Myanmar military officer.

People's Defense Forces also seized control of the Kanhtooma Village military camp in Taze, Sagaing Region, confiscating approximately 20 weapons.

The Sikham Gyi (Jehkam) base in Mansi Township, Kachin State, was captured by joint forces comprised of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karenni People's Defense Force (KPDF), and Arakan Army (AA). The operation resulted in the capture of over 40 enemy combatants and more than 50 weapons and ammunition.

Myanmar Military Council's soldiers also deserted their strategic hill in Myohla, Shwegu Township. Additionally, the Kachin Independence Army has seized control of Myitkyina Township, Sinbo town, with the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB- 141) unit near the town coming under attack.

In the the Pa'O Zone, of Hopong Township in northern Shan State, clashes with the PNLA led to the capture of four Myanmar military council and militia members' corpses and five weapons. Similarly, the PNLA captured one military camp in Hopong Township. Moreover, the Loiwoetoke military camp above Htam Sam Cave, situated between Hopong Town and Mongpaw Town, was seized by SSPP and allied forces.

OCHA MYANMAR RELEASES HUMANITARIAN UPDATE REPORT



IDPs receive food rations.
Photo: AFP

OCHA Myanmar (the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Myanmar) in collaboration with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group and UN agencies released an update, covering humanitarian developments, on 3 March.

Amongst its highlights and key messages are the following:

Across Myanmar, 18.6 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2024, with people struggling to survive amid conflict and insecurity, civilian safety and protection threats, as well as soaring inflation that is affecting people's ability to meet basic needs.

Conflict spans various parts of the country with a deteriorating situation in Rakhine, as well as the Northwest and Southeast, driving new displacement. Nationwide, more than 2.7 million people are now displaced.

In Rakhine, people were killed and injured in Sittwe when a stray shell, landed in the downtown market on 29 February.

The closure of roads and waterways in Rakhine since the renewed conflict in November 2023 has led to food scarcity and other supply shortages, as well as increased prices of essential goods.

The situation in northern Shan has been rel-

atively stable following the ceasefire agreed in January. However, landmine contamination, recruitment by armed groups, isolated tensions and movement restrictions remain a threat to local communities. UN staff temporarily relocated from Lashio will soon be returning due to the improved security situation.

Active fighting, administrative restrictions being imposed by all sides, and violence and harassment of humanitarian personnel remain key barriers to accessing affected people and providing lifesaving assistance.

At least 3.2 million people were reached with assistance in 2023 however this support is not as deep or sustained as planned due to underfunding and access constraints.

Through the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan aid workers aim to reach 5.3 million people with urgent assistance for which \$994 million is required. A repeat of 2023 funding levels (HRP 37 per cent funded) in 2024 would be catastrophic for affected people.

As of 30 November 2023, OCHA Myanmar reported that there were 2.7 million internally displaced people in Myanmar, of which 2.4 million have been displaced since the February 2021 coup. 78,000 civilian properties have also been destroyed in the same period.

WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK URGES INTERNATIONAL ACTION TO ADDRESS DEADLY ROHINGYA BOAT CRISIS

The Women's Peace Network released a statement on 4 March calling for comprehensive international and regional action to deal with the Rohingya boat crisis.

The deteriorating situation of Rohingya remaining in Myanmar and as refugees in other countries in South and Southeast Asia is increasingly forcing them into deadly sea crossings, says Women's Peace Network in its latest briefing paper, "The

Rohingya boat crisis: Recent developments and key contributing factors in South and Southeast Asia."

The paper assesses recent developments to the crisis and analyses the key contributing factors to it in the region. It draws particular attention to the year 2023, which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees called the "deadliest year" in a decade for Rohingya's maritime escape across the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and



Photo: AFP

the alarming conditions of the refugees and growing risk of atrocity in their host countries. The majority of the Rohingya had been trafficked from refugee camps in Bangladesh, and later sought refuge in Indonesia and Malaysia, with nearly three-quarters of them being women and children.

“It is extremely disappointing to see a continued lack of protection and policy framework to address the boat crisis despite the drastic loss of life on sea over the years. And it is heartbreaking to witness how these genocide survivors still risk their survival even after being permitted to disembark from boats. Unless international and regional stakeholders act for protection, peace, justice, and accountability for all, this year

will become an even deadlier year for Rohingya than the last,” says Wai Wai Nu, WPN’s Founder and Executive Director.

The briefing paper calls upon governments in the region to ensure full access to security and livelihoods to Rohingya boat people, all of whom have faced abuses for their survival and, without immediate protection, risk being stranded on unseaworthy vessels to die. Immediate and safe disembarkation, search-and-rescue missions, and other forms of protection must be guaranteed to the refugees. Among them, women and girls in particular risk rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, child marriage, and other acts of sexual and gender-based violence throughout their harrowing escape.

Additionally, in a region without a comprehensive or coordinated human rights and refugee protection framework and policies, refugees and asylum seekers risk being subjected to further abuses in their host countries. The paper provides an analysis of such countries, which include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and India.

Ultimately, the root causes of the Rohingya boat crisis must be addressed. They include the situation in Myanmar, which the briefing paper describes as posing a growing risk of recurrence of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority. Since its coup on February 1, 2021, the Burmese military has increasingly targeted Rohingya with laws and policies aimed at further entrenching their apartheid-like conditions, arbitrarily arrested and detained them, attempted to forcibly conscript them, and endangered their lives in its armed conflict with the Arakan Army – all the while committing atrocities of an increasing scale and frequency across the country.

“The international community must immediately address all root causes of the boat crisis with bold and robust actions for justice, accountability, and sustainable peace and security. The briefing paper provides key recommendations to international and regional stakeholders, including UN Member States, ASEAN, and Burma’s neighbouring countries,” says Wai Wai Nu.



'I WILL DO IT AGAIN': MYANMAR STUDENT DEFIES JUNTA FROM JAIL

Student activist Lin Lin led protests against Myanmar's junta, defying the generals for months before being hunted down and caught.

Now serving a 15-year sentence, she regrets nothing.

"I wanted to do that more than anything else," she told AFP during her trial.

"And if you ask what I will do if I am released, I will do it again."

The 25-year-old psychology student grew up during a rare semi-democratic interlude in Myanmar.

When the military staged a coup in February 2021 citing unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud, she joined millions of others demonstrating in the streets.

Soldiers fired live bullets into the crowds, arrested thousands and carried out nighttime raids on suspected dissidents.

The demonstrations gradually fizzled out, but Lin Lin was determined to find a way to keep defiance

against the junta at the top of people's minds.

Inspired by democracy flashmobs in Hong Kong and elsewhere, she began organising protests around Yangon.

She used messaging apps to summon dozens of young protesters, who would converge under colonial-era tenements, outside shopping malls, or at parks and markets.

They would light flares and unfurl banners, a thicket of hands raised in the Hunger Games-inspired three finger salute that has become popular among pro-democracy protesters.

Others criticised the junta through megaphones as passers-by looked on.

Seconds later, the protesters would break apart, scattering down side streets or into waiting vehicles before security forces could arrive.

Each event was filmed and the footage uploaded to social media or sent to journalists abroad.

AFP interviewed Lin Lin during that time in



Photo: AFP

late 2021, when she was living one step ahead of the police and security forces.

"During the protests, I have so much adrenalin," she said from a dim, bare room that would be home for a couple of days.

"It's like my heart is trying to come out of my mouth."

'CAN'T SLEEP'

With the military tightening its grip on life in Yangon, the rush of each protest was followed by fear.

Lin Lin said goodbye to her family and went underground in the commercial hub of around eight million people, changing safehouses every few days and always dreading a knock at the door.

"I can't sleep the whole night," she told AFP at the time.

"When I see the sun's rays in the morning, I feel like I'm safe. After that, I can sleep well."

Security forces have used torture and sexual violence in their crackdown on dissent, rights groups say, and in 2022, the United Nations rights office said at least 290 people had died in custody.

A flash protest in December 2021 organised by another student group in Yangon was rammed by a passing military vehicle, leaving at least three wounded.



Lin Lin's luck ran out that same month.

As she made her way to a protest rendezvous, she was arrested by plainclothes police.

"I had prepared for the worst... but when I was suddenly faced by it, my mouth opened and I just said 'Huh?'" she said from prison.

"I was also thinking to run at first, but the road was very open and they had guns."

In March 2022 a junta-controlled court jailed her for three years under a law that outlaws any action deemed to undermine the military.

The junta has exploited this law -- authored during the British colonial era -- as a catch-all weapon against dissent, using it to jail protesters, actors, and journalists.

Lin Lin was later jailed for another two years for possessing a fake ID.

More than 26,000 political prisoners have been arrested by the junta since the start of the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

LETTERS TO FRIENDS

The monotony of life in prison is broken occasionally by food parcels from home.

Only when she meets family members at court hearings is Lin Lin able to hear news of the turmoil that continues to rock Myanmar more than three years since the coup.

"I avoid depression by thinking of what I did before I was arrested," she said.

She also writes letters to the friends she protested alongside.

"She never mentions her feelings," said Helen, who helped Lin Lin organise flashmob protests and also spent time in jail.

"She doesn't want us to be depressed," she said, requesting a pseudonym for security reasons.

With the military monitoring letters to inmates, political topics are off-limits.

Instead, they write of hotpot and plan trips they will take together in the future.

But last month, a court sentenced Lin Lin to another 10 years for contact with a "terrorist" organisation.

"I'm worried that she can't make it if she has to stay in prison for too long," Helen said.

Lin Lin has stopped counting down the days to her release date.

"I don't want to ask myself how long it is before I can come home," she said.

"I just accept I can come back home after the revolution (against the junta) has won."

AFP

REINCARNATION AND REALPOLITIK: DALAI LAMA'S SUCCESSION DILEMMA

Esoteric questions of reincarnation rarely have real-world political consequences, but many fear the search for a successor to Tibet's Dalai Lama could inflame regional rivalries.

The 88-year-old spiritual leader, Tenzin Gyatso, has shown no indication of serious health issues, and has said that his dreams suggest he could live until he is 113.

But as Tibetans marked on Sunday 10 March the 65th anniversary of the failed uprising against Chinese forces that led to him fleeing into exile in India, the question of who will succeed their ageing leader is in sharp focus.

Tibetan activists are keenly aware that his death will mark a major setback in his push for more autonomy for the Himalayan region.

It would deprive the cause of a Nobel Prize winner whose moral teachings and idiosyncratic humour have made him one of the world's most popular

religious leaders.

Many expect China will name a successor.

That raises the likelihood of rival nominations for the six-century-old post, including one chosen by exiled Tibetans based in India, a regional rival of China.

Tensions between the world's two most populous countries have already flared after a deadly Himalayan border clash in 2020.

Here, AFP explains how realpolitik may impact the question of reincarnation.

REINCARNATION OR EMANATION?

While the bodies of previous Dalai Lamas have been entombed in stupa burial mounds, Tibetans believe their soul carries on, living in a new being.

Tibetan monks traditionally choose the Dalai Lama through a ritualistic search that can take years, seeking telltale signs a child is the reincarnation of a



The Dalai Lama is now 88. Photo: AFP

spiritual leader first born in 1391.

The 14th Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala since the failed uprising in 1959, has floated the possibility of a non-traditional succession.

He already ended the post's political powers in 2011 in favour of an elected Tibetan government-in-exile.

Keeping Beijing on its toes, he has alternatively suggested that his reincarnation could be a girl for the first time, or that he might be the last Dalai Lama.

Instead of reincarnation -- whereby the soul returns in a newborn -- there is also the intriguing possibility of "emanation before death".

In that case, Tibetans believe the Dalai Lama's spirit could transfer to an adult successor.

"It is possible for the Lama to appoint a successor who is either his disciple or someone young who is to be recognised as his emanation," the Dalai Lama said in 2011.

WHAT WILL CHINA DO?

China's officially atheist government has called the Dalai Lama a separatist.

In 1995, Beijing detained a child that the Dalai Lama had recognised as the Panchen Lama -- another influential religious figure.

China, meanwhile, selected another child to become the Panchen Lama.

Rights groups have described the boy who was detained as the world's youngest political prisoner, and his whereabouts remain unknown.

The Dalai Lama is determined his successor will not face the same fate.

"No recognition or acceptance should be given to a candidate chosen for political ends by anyone, including those in the People's Republic of China," he warned in 2011.

"It is particularly inappropriate for Chinese communists who explicitly reject even the idea of past and future lives... to meddle in the system of reincarnation," he added.

He has also preemptively dismissed suggestions his successor's name must be plucked from a "Golden Urn" -- which Beijing controls -- by saying its use "lacked any spiritual quality".

India, meanwhile, which has long-hosted tens of thousands of Tibetan exiles, would be expected to continue its support and back a successor approved in the process set out by the Dalai Lama.

But that could raise tensions between the neighbouring powers, who have already clashed in contested border areas, including Ladakh, home to a sizeable Tibetan population.

WHAT HAS THE DALAI LAMA SAID?

The Dalai Lama has promised to write a "predictive letter" for monks to follow around his 90th birthday in July 2025.

He has said responsibility for choosing any successor will "rest primarily" on his Gaden Phodrang Trust, a Zurich-headquartered foundation.

But he has also suggested he may be the last Dalai Lama.

"If I die before Tibetans regain their freedom, it is only logical to assume that I will be born outside Tibet," he wrote in his autobiography, "Freedom in Exile".

"Of course, it could be that by then my people will have no use for a Dalai Lama, in which case they will not bother to search for me," he added.

"So I might take rebirth as an insect, or an animal -- whatever would be of most value to the largest number of sentient beings."



AFP

UN RIGHTS EXPERT CONDEMNS 'SYSTEMATIC' WAR-TIME MASS DESTRUCTION OF HOMES

An independent UN housing rights expert condemned on Tuesday last week the arbitrary destruction of civilian homes and infrastructure during conflicts, comparing the ongoing bombardment of Gaza with strikes against Dresden during the Second World War.

Citing alarming examples in Aleppo, Grozny, Mariupol, Myanmar, Sudan and Gaza, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, said an “increasingly systematic, massive and arbitrary destruction of civilian housing and infrastructure” during too many conflicts around the world is in blatant violation of international human rights and humanitarian laws.

“We have seen or are seeing such destruction in Aleppo, Grozny, Mariupol, Myanmar and now, in Gaza and parts of Sudan,” he told the Human Rights Council, the UN’s top human rights body.

“When people lose their homes, they lose more than physical structures. A home is more than

property; it is also the repository of memories, hopes and aspirations.”

GAZA: MASSIVE DESTRUCTION

Since Israel declared war following Hamas’s deadly attacks in October, more than 70 per cent of all housing stock in Gaza, and more than 80 per cent in parts of northern region have been damaged or destroyed, displacing over 1.5 million persons.

“What is happening in Gaza shocks the conscience of humanity,” he said.

More than one million people are now crowded into Rafah, grossly lacking in adequate shelter during winter, facing starvation and disease.

“All that makes housing ‘adequate’ – access to services, jobs, culture, schools, religious places, universities, hospitals – have all been levelled,” the Special Rapporteur said, adding that the scale and intensity of destruction in Gaza is “far worse” than in Aleppo, Mariupol or even Dresden and Rotterdam during the Second World War.



Destruction in Gaza. Photo: UN News

CALLS TO END ‘DOMICIDE’

He said that last week, with other Special Rapporteurs, “I called upon States to stop arms transfers to Israel that are being used to destroy housing and displace the people in Gaza.”

“Such arms transfers risk complicity in systematic violations of the right to adequate housing, which may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide under international law,” he continued.

The international community must take action to prevent and end massive violations to the right to adequate housing, he said, referring to his call to the General Assembly in 2022 for recognition of these violations as “a crime against humanity of its own standing – domicide”.

“I regret to note that so far my call has not seen adequate response,” he told the Human Rights Council.

Action areas must aim to outlaw the use of explosives with wide-area impacts in populated areas through an international treaty. Further, such crimes should be investigated through national and interna-

tional tribunals and impunity for perpetrators must end, according to his 2022 report.

HOMELESSNESS AND DISPLACEMENT

In his report, he also drew attention to a range of housing-related concerns, among them calling on States and other actors to renew their commitment to ensure affordable housing and to address homelessness.

He also provided several recommendations, including strategies for averting affordability crises, strategies for safeguarding against human rights violations stemming from housing unaffordability, and strategies for addressing the repercussions of housing unaffordability.

The number of people displaced due to conflict, disasters, development or climate change has sharply increased and is expected to continue to grow, he said.

Some of the drivers of large-scale displacement include unplanned urbanization, land speculation and over-commodification of land and housing and infrastructure projects.

As such, he underlined a need to develop resettlement guidelines to ensure that any plans are carried out in conformity with human rights.

SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council and form part of what is known as its Special Procedures. They are mandated to monitor and report on specific thematic issues or country situations.

Special Rapporteurs are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and receive no salary for their work.

Courtesy of UN News





Photo: Dinis Bazgutdinov

SHAN STATE

Leaks from northern Shan State peace talks

Amid secrecy about what was discussed, there has been confusion about what was agreed between the Myanmar junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance at recent peace talks held in Kunming China.

There is even confusion about the date the talks were held. Originally these talks, the fourth in a series of Chinese-brokered northern Shan State peace talks between the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance were reported to have taken place from 1 to 3 March, but more recent reports say the talks were held from 29 February to 1 March.

Anonymous, unconfirmed briefings claimed that the following had been agreed upon and discussed at the most recent round of talks:

All territory in northern Shan State taken by the Three Brotherhood Alliance will remain under their control.

China's interests in Myanmar will be protected and neither the junta nor the Three Brotherhood Alliance will act in anyway to undermine those interests.

The Myanmar National Democracy Alliance

Army (MNDAA) will be the legitimate and official government of the Kokang Region.

Neither the junta nor the Three Brotherhood Alliance will advance from areas under their control and buffer zones will be established between the two sides' positions.

The junta and Three Brotherhood Alliance will run customs together at Chinshwehaw border trade post in north Shan State, with the Junta taking 70 per cent of the customs duties paid and the MNDAA taking the remaining 30 per cent.

When asked, the junta spokesperson, Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, refused to give details about what had been discussed at the latest peace talks.

All he would say is that they were working on a ceasefire and de-escalating the conflict; management of border trade zones; and maintaining law and order, all of which would stabilise and improve the economic situation for local people.

He said that China and Myanmar would work for stability in the border region and fight against any drug trafficking and cyber crimes in the border region.

He also thanked the Chinese Government for facilitating the peace talks.



JUNTA CHIEF ACKNOWLEDGES WOMEN'S STRIDES AMID CRITICISM OF ITS WOMEN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In an address marking International Women's Day (March 8), the junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, talked about the strides made by women in Myanmar towards equality and urged further efforts to ensure gender parity across all sectors. However, critics argue that women's rights in Myanmar have significantly deteriorated since the coup in 2021.

Highlighting the progress in female literacy rates, which surged from 73 per cent in 2000 to an impressive 85 per cent by 2023, the junta chief underscored the pivotal role of women in education and technology. He noted that nearly half of all students in technological universities and universities of computer studies in Myanmar are female, emphasizing the need for equal opportunities for women in fields such as engineering, technology, and computer science.

The junta chief revealed that the second term (2023-2032) of the national strategic plan for the development of women is currently being drafted.

However, the junta has cracked down on dissent with a particular focus on female activists.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP-B) reported on March 1 that since the coup, women, children, people of diverse sexual orientation, as well as men, have been facing sexual violence from junta soldiers, policemen, prison authorities, and affiliates of the junta all over the country.

AAPP-B said that throughout the ongoing Spring Revolution, the military junta has systematically targeted women, inflicting upon them egregious forms of violence and abuse. These include subjecting them to brutal violence, arbitrary arrests, beatings, torture, and degrading interrogations that violate their dignity. Furthermore, the AAPP-B reported that women have been subjected to sexual violence while in junta's detention, with complete disregard for their reputation.

The AAPP-B also calls upon the international community to promptly take decisive actions in accordance with international law against the junta, which has perpetrated such abhorrent crimes.

TEKNAF PORT MYANMAR-BANGLADESH BORDER TRADE HALTS DUE TO ESCALATING WAR IN RAKHINE



Teknaf, Bangladesh.
Photo: AFP

The bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar through the Teknaf land port came to a complete halt last week due to the escalation of the fighting in Rakhine State between the Myanmar junta forces and the Arakan Army (AA).

No vessels from Myanmar have docked at the port since Sunday 3 March, said Jasim Uddin Chowdhury, general manager of the privately run land port.

Water vessels are used to import items of foodstuffs and general merchandise from Myanmar through the port.

Before that, 15 to 22 vessels with goods such as chilled fish, pickles, dried fish, rice, dried coconuts, onions, gingers, and wood from the country used to dock at the port every day, he said.

Since November, the number of vessels had dropped to five to seven. The imports have remained suspended now, he added.

The local business persons warned that the price of some essentials, including onions and ginger, might rise ahead of Ramadan since the import of the

items from Myanmar has almost stopped.

Myanmar exports ginger, onion, garlic, frozen fish, coconut, betel nut and timber to Bangladesh and it imports potatoes, garments, plastic wares, aluminum and other products from Bangladesh.

The import from Myanmar had been decreasing since November after the AA launched attacks against the Myanmar military forces in Rakhine, which borders with Naikhongchhari upazila in Bandarban and Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas in Cox's Bazar, Jasim said.

Owing to inadequate local production, Bangladesh has to rely on imports to meet the demand for onions and gingers, among other vegetables and spices.

He said the businessmen who import goods from Myanmar are now in a difficult situation as the two banks in Maungdaw and Sittwe that receive foreign demand drafts from Sonali Bank and AB Bank of Bangladesh don't have access to the telecommunication network.

CHINESE OFFICIAL SAYS ‘MORE EFFORT’ NEEDED TO BOOST EMPLOYMENT



Photo: Nuno Alberto

China needs to exert “more effort” to boost employment, a top official acknowledged on Saturday.

Beijing is struggling to revive its battered economy in the face of a prolonged property sector crisis, record youth unemployment and a global slowdown that is hammering demand for Chinese goods.

Youth unemployment hit an unprecedented 21.3 percent in mid-2023, before officials paused publishing monthly figures.

Wang Xiaoping, minister of human resources and social security, said on Saturday China was “confident about maintaining the continued stability of the employment situation”.

But “overall employment pressure has not lessened, and there are still structural contradictions to be solved,” she told reporters on the sidelines of a weeklong annual meeting of the country’s rubber-stamp parliament.

“A portion of workers face some challenges and problems in employment, and more effort needs to be made to stabilise employment,” Wang said.

China’s top leaders this week set an ambitious growth target of around five percent for 2024, which Premier Li Qiang warned would “not be easy”.

The government also aims to keep urban unemployment at around 5.5 percent this year and create more than 12 million jobs.

AFP

CHINA CONSUMER PRICES RISE IN FEBRUARY FOR FIRST TIME IN SIX MONTHS

Chinese consumer prices rose in February for the first time since August, data showed Saturday, bucking a months-long stretch of deflation that compounded the country's myriad economic woes.

The world's second-largest economy posted some of its lowest growth in decades last year and is battling a prolonged property sector crisis and soaring youth unemployment.

But in a rare bright spot, official statistics Saturday showed the consumer price index rose 0.7 percent last month, according to Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) -- the first increase since August.

The figure was higher than a 0.3 percent rise analysts surveyed by Bloomberg had expected and a sharp increase on the 0.8 fall seen in January, their sharpest drop in more than 14 years.

The positive data comes as senior officials meet in Beijing for the annual "Two Sessions" of China's parliament and its top political consultative body, in gatherings that have been dominated by the economy and national security.

On Tuesday, Premier Li Qiang told that gathering the country would seek five percent growth in 2024 -- an ambitious goal that he acknowledged would be "not be easy" given the headwinds facing the economy.

High among those issues has been deflation, which China entered last July for the first time since 2021.

Apart from a brief rebound in August, prices had not risen until last month.

Consumer prices traditionally see a boost during the Chinese New Year period, also known as Spring Festival, which fell in February this year.

"It was primarily food and service prices that rose more," NBS statistician Dong Lijuan said in a statement.

"During the Spring Festival period, consumer demand for food products grew, in addition to rainy

and snowy weather in some regions affecting supply," Dong said.

DEMAND REMAINS WEAK

China's sinking prices are in stark contrast with the rest of the world, where inflation remains a persistent bugbear, forcing central banks to ramp up interest rates.

While deflation suggests goods were cheaper, it poses a threat to the broader economy as consumers tend to postpone purchases, hoping for further reductions.

A lack of demand can then force companies to cut production, freeze hiring or lay off workers, while potentially also having to discount existing stocks - dampening profitability even as costs remain the same.

Given the holiday factor, one analyst cautioned against seeing Saturday's figures as suggesting China was no longer struggling with deflation.

"I think it is too early to conclude that deflation in China is over," Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said.

"Domestic demand is still quite weak. Property sales of new apartments have not stabilised yet," he explained.

And producer prices continued to fall in February, dropping by 2.7 percent, the NBS said.

"Affected by the Spring Festival holiday and other factors, industrial production was in its traditional off season," Dong said.

Investors have called for much greater action from Beijing to shore up the flagging economy.

But despite calls for broader stimulus measures Beijing indicated this week it was unlikely to resort to big-ticket bailouts, setting a fiscal deficit-to-GDP target of three percent, similar to last year.

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

CITY MART HOLDINGS EXPANDS CONVENIENCE STORE BUSINESS AMID FOREIGN MULTINATIONALS' STAGNATION

Myanmar's City Mart Holdings is expanding its convenience store business, seizing the opportunity left by foreign multinationals' stagnant investments, reported the Nikkei Asia.

Last year, City Mart added 31 City Express locations, totaling 125 stores, focusing on directly managed stores rather than franchises.

City Mart aims to balance customer traffic and profitability in its City Express chain this year, according to CEO Phye Min Kyaw.

The company's brands include City Mart supermarkets, Ocean big-box supercenters, and "market-place" supermarkets.

City Mart's expansion centers around Yangon, where consumers have high purchasing power.

Although its supermarket network has remained stable, City Mart has been opening convenience stores at a rapid pace, driven by revived consumer spending post-pandemic.

Japanese trading house Sojitz partnered with City Mart in 2013, enhancing its position as Myanmar's largest retail and distribution group.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

IN FOCUS





HINDU FESTIVAL CELEBRATED

Devotees offer banana and coconut during the Sri Maha Muniswarar temple festival in Yangon, Myanmar, 3 March. The annual festival of the Sri Maha Muniswarar temple is celebrated in the last month of the Hindu calendar.

Photo:EPA

THAI PARLIAMENT BUILDING HOSTS ART EXHIBITION ABOUT MYANMAR JUNTA ATROCITIES

An art exhibition showing the living conditions of ethnic people and internally displaced (IDPs) in Myanmar was held in the Thai Parliament building from 1 to 3 March.

The exhibition was mounted as part of a conference on Myanmar called 'On navigating the evolving landscape of Myanmar' which ran at the Thai Parliament building on 2 and 3 March.

DEFIANT ART

3 YEARS OF RESISTANCE TO THE MYANMAR COUP

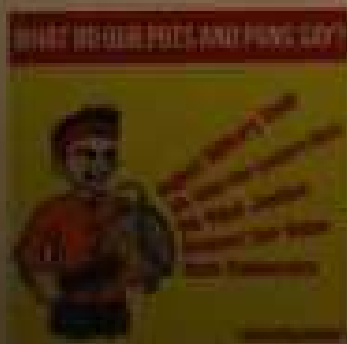
The boards present a selection of artworks from the exhibition by SEA Junction, Raise Three Fingers, and Asia Justice and Rights on the first anniversary of the coup in February 2022 and from the portfolio of Visual Rebellion by two artists, Michi Emma and T.H.A in 2022-2024. Many of the artists prefer to remain anonymous.

Exhibition boards display artworks from the exhibition by SEA Junction, Raise Three Fingers, and Asia Justice and Rights on the first anniversary of the coup in February 2022 and from the portfolio of Visual Rebellion by two artists, Michi Emma and T.H.A in 2022-2024. Many of the artists prefer to remain anonymous.

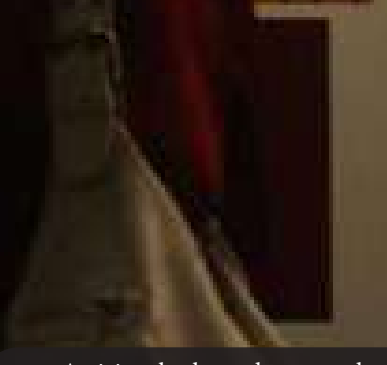
February 2021



POTS & PANS



MYANMAR'S
SPRING
REVOLUTION



A visitor looks at the art at the exhibition. Photo: Mizzima



Inside the Thai parliament.
Photo: Supplied

The exhibition was put on by the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). It showed the lives of ethnic people living on the Thai border and what they have to endure under the junta, concentrating on airstrikes launched against internally displaced people (IDPs). Belongings and personal items left by IDPs fleeing airstrikes were put on display along with data visualisations showing the number of victims and airstrikes.

SEM said that the exhibition had two aims. To raise Thai people's awareness of the airstrikes being launched against unarmed civilians in Myanmar and

the suffering caused by those airstrikes and to launch SEM's campaign to prevent the junta from receiving money that they can use to buy the aviation fuel powering the airstrikes.



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