

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Myanmar women worried about military conscription

Myanmar junta raps UN 'one-sided' rights claims

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.

ODDS TIPPING IN THE MYANMAR REVOLUTIONARIES' FAVOUR

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will be sweating. As the military junta oversaw a lacklustre and poorly attended celebration of the Thingyan Water Festival over the last few days, the leader and his minions will be recognizing that their grip on the Golden Land is slipping.

The junta house of cards is collapsing. Over the last few months those cards include military positions in northern Shan State, Rakhine State, Kachin State and the rapid collapse of the border trade hub of Myawaddy in Karen State just last week.

Naturally, Myanmar pundits will be debating how long the junta has to live. But as long as the generals manage to keep a hold on the key cities of Naypyidaw, Yangon and Mandalay, they will claim they remain in control. Unless there is an internal coup, to knock Min Aung Hlaing off his pedestal as reality dawns on his cohorts, the generals are likely to hang on tight, hoping their ruse of holding an imperfect national election, and a push by local and international players for "peace" negotiations, will keep them in play in a future governing line-up for Myanmar.

For the Spring Revolutionaries the war is not yet won. The recent military victories and the instances of junta troops flying the white flag will be a much-needed injection of positivity after over three years of tough and bloody resistance since the February 2021 military coup. But the coming days, weeks and months are likely to be dangerous and desperate as the generals in Naypyidaw try to pull out the stops to prevent further loss of territory and military collapse.

As activist Igor Blazevic notes – see his commentary in this issue – the junta will be getting desperate and may seek to make a mark by countering the Myawaddy victory by the resistance. Many civilians have fled the city as the noise of fighting closed in on them, uncertain of what might happen next. It is unclear how much damage junta forces will cause in their failing efforts to retake this important trade hub.

Clearly, the Myanmar junta is running out of options. But this could still prove a protracted and bitter conflict as the generals double-down in their desperate bid to hang on to power.

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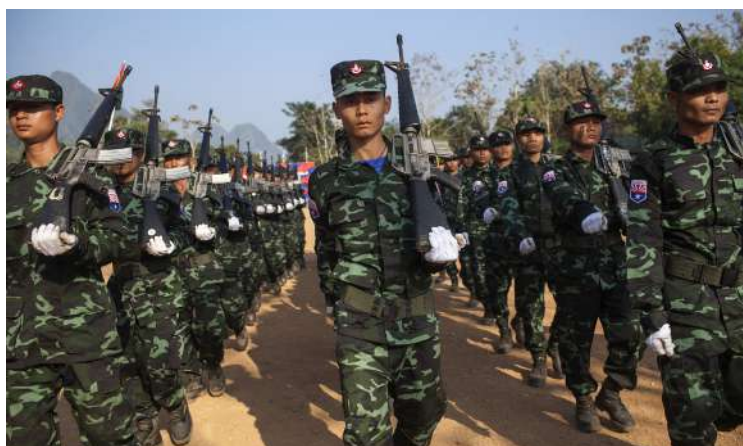
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Cover photo of KNLA fighters by AFP





KNLA fighters on parade. Photo: AFP

INSIDE THE FALL OF MIYAWADDY

Mizzima Commentary

The fall of the important border trade hub of Myawaddy is viewed by many Myanmar watchers as a slap in the face for Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's military junta.

Last weekend, the Myanmar military was in disarray in and around Myawaddy, with soldiers fleeing either over the border into Thailand, or hanging out in the shade of the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge waiting. Columns of junta military reinforcements were reportedly being attacked by opposition forces as they tried to approach the border city in Karen State, apparently intent on retaking military positions.

Karen National Union (KNU)-led resistance forces, a loose conglomeration of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Defense Organisation (KNDO) and the People's Defense Forces (PDFs), launched an assault on Myawaddy town last week, part of a growing push-back against junta positions in Karen State, home to a number of ethnic groups.

The Myanmar junta confirmed Myanmar troops had withdrawn from their positions in Myawaddy, a clear indication that this loss was impossible to cover up.

As we go to press, it is unclear how serious the junta will be in trying to reestablish control or whether this is effectively a "lost cause".

THAI INTERVENTION

On the border near the bustling trading town of Myawaddy, Mizzima and other media personnel in Thailand heard shelling and possibly airstrikes, a reason why hundreds of Myanmar people were queuing at the Thai Immigration gate to seek safety in Thailand.

Given the importance of the border developments, Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara visited Mae Sot on Friday to observe the situation and to talk to the media, following emergency Thai government meetings held in Bangkok.

Thailand has offered to host up to 100,000 people fleeing from the conflict but is obviously keen to tamp down the conflict and resolve the problem, on both humanitarian and economic grounds. As of going to press, however, the numbers fleeing appeared to be in

the low thousands, but not tens of thousands.

Myawaddy is important economically to both Myanmar and Thailand. It matters to the cash-strapped junta, with more than \$1.1 billion worth of trade passing through it in the 12 months to April, according to the junta's commerce ministry. Both countries benefit from the smooth running of the trade hub, the Asia Highway being an important communications lifeline. And there are deeper government ties both in terms of gas supplies from Myanmar, the recent Thai humanitarian aid delivery to people in need in Myanmar, and an underlying long-standing working relationship between Thai generals and the Myanmar junta hierarchy.

During the Thai foreign minister's visit to Mae Sot, soldiers stood on alert alongside armoured cars at the border in heat of 37 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit), their guns on their APCs pointing towards the Myanmar border. Clearly, the Thai government does not want the chaos to spill over the border to disturb the tranquility on the Thai side – just as Thais were celebrating the Songkran Water Festival (known in Myanmar as Thingyan).

'HUMILIATING DEFEAT'

What is clear is the complete capture of Myawaddy town will be a humiliating defeat for the Myanmar junta, which has suffered a string of battlefield losses in recent months that have even prompted rare criticism of Min Aung Hlaing by his own supporters.

Min Aung Hlaing is reported to be under pressure, particularly after the loss of junta positions as a result of Operation 1027 in northern Shan State that kicked off in October 2023 under the opposition Three Brotherhood Alliance, the loss of positions to the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State, and recent advances by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin State.

The military is spread thin and bunkered down, increasingly relying on air and artillery power to keep the Myanmar resistance at a distance. The junta has been rapped for the thousands of attacks made by air strikes and artillery on civilians over the last three years since the 2021 coup.

As of the weekend, Mizzima and AFP reports indicate that the Myanmar junta is sending reinforcements towards Myawaddy, although it was unclear when or how they would arrive because some

routes to the town are in the hands of its opponents. Locals near the town of Kyonedoe along the main highway to Myawaddy told AFP Thursday last week that they had seen dozens of trucks and tanks carrying equipment and hundreds of soldiers.

The military is anxious to avoid losing another major town, analysts say, after the humiliating surrender of around 2,000 troops at the town of Laukkai on the northern border with China in January, and the fall of a number of towns and positions in Rakhine State to the forces of the Arakan Army (AA).

But retaking a position is harder than losing a position.

THAI CONCERNS

Thailand's foreign minister Parnpree warned that his country would not tolerate any violation of its sovereignty, during his visit to Mae Sot.

"Our soldiers are guarding along the border, showing we are ready to protect, and not let anyone violate our sovereignty," he told reporters. "Thailand has clearly stated that we will not allow anyone to violate Thai soil, we will not accept it."

The conflict in Myanmar has provoked a Thai response before, with the kingdom scrambling jet fighters in 2022 after junta planes breached the border during operations against anti-coup fighters.



Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara visits Mae Sot. Photo: Toe Zaw Latt for Mizzima

"I have talked to the army chief, we can't accept if our airspace has been trespassed," Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin reiterated last Friday.

Thai MP Kannavee Suebsang told AFP during a visit to Mae Sot that the Thai government needs to prepare for a potential influx of people fleeing conflict in Myanmar.

"We need to prepare. We need to plan. We cannot just ignore the situation inside Myanmar," he said.

Authorities in Thailand have said they are preparing to accept up to 100,000 people displaced by the clashes.

There is little doubt that the Thai government is using backdoor channels to liaise with the Myanmar junta over the present crisis and the future of Myawaddy. Analysts indicate it makes little sense for the authorities in both Naypyidaw and Bangkok to see the border town damaged or destroyed. The cold facts for Min Aung Hlaing are that the city has been lost but the junta could still benefit from the city functioning as

a trade hub and keeping the Asia Highway open.

The KNU issued a statement last Friday saying it was deeply concerned about security for the people of Myawaddy and was seeking peace. The KNU, as of the weekend, appeared cautious not to rush in to the city.

BEGINNING OF THE END?

Does Myawaddy mark the beginning of the end for junta leader Min Aung Hlaing?

As activist Igor Blazevic indicates, the loss of Myawaddy will be a loss of face for the embattled junta leader and he may feel pressured to respond heavily to indicate the junta remains in charge.

But the fall of Myawaddy could go down in future history books as a crucial turning point in the inevitable collapse of the illegal military regime.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP



Thai soldiers on guard at the border. Photo: Toe Zaw Latt for Mizzima



View of Myawaddy from the Thai side of the border. Photo: AFP

KNU SEEKS PEACE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Karen National Union (KNU) issued a statement on 12 April on the same day the Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara was visiting the Mae Sot border to assess the crisis, backing up the Thai government commitment to help.

The following is the KNU statement:

Karen National Union (KNU) led resistance forces, including the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Defense Organisation (KNDO) and the People's Defense Forces (PDFs), captured Thingannyinaung Tactical Command Base under Burma/Myanmar military's Southeastern Command on the 4th of April 2024. On the 10th of April 2024, they captured 275th Infantry Battalion stationed in Myawaddy Township. However, some troops from

the 275th Infantry Battalion have retreated to the 2nd Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge where they have stationed themselves and taken shelter near the bridge.

Since capturing the bases, our allied forces are conducting military operations to intercept, block, and deter reinforcement troops sent by SAC in order not to lose Myawaddy. Some tasks still need to be carried out in order to reach a secure position in the Myawaddy area. People are urged to live and travel while taking security precautions.

Once the Myawaddy area has reached a secure position, the KNU, with the participation of the local people, will establish administrative matters, prevent illicit businesses, contraband trades and human trafficking, and implement stability, law enforcement,

necessary public services, and facilitate commodity flow in the Myawaddy area from a possible position despite the challenges. We release our positions as follows:

The KNU is deeply concerned about the security of the people living on both sides of the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border, border stability, and access to humanitarian aid, and we will do our best concerning those issues.

The KNU is committed to establishing and maintaining cross-border security and stability. We are making the necessary preparations and arrangements for the continuity of rules-based cross-border activities in line with regional best practices.

In order to establish peace and security for the people living on both sides of the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border, the KNU is working to achieve meaningful cooperation with the Royal Thai Government, local and international partner organizations, including border-based Karen organizations and connecting with all concerned parties.

We respect and honor all our comrades who have sacrificed their lives, blood, and sweat to remove any kind of dictatorship, including the military dictatorship, and establish a new civilian-led federal democratic union that respects diversity and inclusion. The KNU will continue to fight to achieve our goal together with the Ethnic Resistance Organizations and democratic alliances, and we urge the entire people of Kawthoolei and Burma/Myanmar to keep participating and fighting persistently.



Myanmar people flee to the Thai side of the border. Photo: AFP



Security in Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR

CAPITAL NAYPYIDAW REMAINS TIGHTLY CONTROLLED

Despite the flurry of excitement over a barrage of resistance “kamikaze” drone attacks on the junta’s military headquarters and Aye Lar air base earlier this month, the Myanmar junta is trying to convey an atmosphere of confidence that the capital is safe and the junta is taking suitable security precautions – despite the military debacles that have unfolded in the north, west and on the Myanmar-Thai border at Myawaddy.

As reported, the junta received a shock on 4 April People Defense Force (PDF) has launched a series of drone attacks on crucial sites in the capital, Naypyidaw. The Shar Htoo Waw Drone Team acknowledged responsibility for these air attacks targeting important areas including Min Aung Hlaing’s residence, the commander-in-chief’s office, and Aye Lar airbase. For

this significant air attack to the Naypyidaw, the PDF used 28 drones, 12 for the military headquarters, 12 for Aye Lar air base, and 4 for Min Aung Hlaing’s residence. The PDF claims the operation resulted in the death of two soldiers and injury to 15 others. On the other hand, the junta claimed that seven drones entered Zeyathiri township, where the military headquarters are located and about 10:50 am from the southeast and east and they shot down all of drones. Security has been tightened on several roads in Naypyidaw in the wake of the drone attacks.

In other news from Naypyidaw, the Naypyidaw PDF announced that they were taking action against ward and village administrators suspected of helping the implementation of the junta’s military conscription law, initially announced on 10 February. “We are going

to take action anyone working for the conscription law. However, we need to take time due to the security condition of Naypyidaw... We are preparing to be able to take action on wards and villages administrators," a PDF spokesman said.

An incident of forced conscription of a child reportedly occurred in Tatkone township, Naypyidaw. Junta troops allegedly abducted a 15-year-old youth, Phoe Chit, to serve in the military on behalf of his elder brother who had fled to Thailand to avoid conscription. The junta soldiers had searched for the elder brother, Myo Chit, but they took Phoe Chit instead as they failed to find the elder youth.

In other news, Sittaung Urban Guerrilla Force-Naypyidaw attacked a police station in Tatkone township on 2 April. However, details of building damage and casualties have not been reported.

Magway sees PDF guerrilla attacks

The People's Revolution Alliance (PRA-Magway) arrested six soldiers from No.346 Light Infantry Battalion and No.63 Battalion who fled from Rakhine State since the intense clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta troops.

Myingyan Black Tiger-MBT attacked junta troops who were in the Yezagyo general administration office with a 40mm grenade launcher on 2 April. The attack resulted in two soldiers being injured.

The Yaw Revolution Army-YRA attacked a junta column of 70 soldiers with mines in Htee Linn township. That column had torched over 200 houses in Yaymyatni village in Htee Linn township.

Resistance forces from Magway region have attacked two junta defense equipment factories in the region within four days. These factories are strategically located in the centre of the country to avoid being attacked by ethnic armed groups. On 2 April, the local PDF attacked the No (24) Defense Equipment Factory in Pauk township with five 107mm hand made missiles and four 100mm drop bombs, according to a statement from

the Freedom Revolution Force-FRF (local PDF).

The local PDF Black Hawk Seikphyu Revolution Front-BHSRF attacked the junta's No. 21 Defense Equipment Factory, which is manufacturing bombs for air strikes, with 25 hand-made rockets on 5 April. According to BHSRF spokesperson, three ammunition among 20 were destroyed and some junta soldiers were wounded. The factory focuses on production of cluster bombs for the junta's Air Force.

Local PDFs and allies attacked a 100 car convoy which departed from No. 101 Light Infantry Division from Pakhokeku city heading to Chin State. The interception resulted in the destruction of seven cars in the convoy. Although this convoy is aiming to reach Chin State, they are facing attacks from the Magway PDFs. The column's original goal of reaching Chin State has been deterred by the Magway PDFs.

One policeman joined the Myaing PDF with weapons and ammunition on 4 April. He brought two assault rifles and bullets and magazines. Myaing PDF awarded him 15 million kyats and offered shelter in a liberated area, but he insisted on joining the PDF to fight back against the junta.



Hydropower plant. Photo: supplied

On 6 April, Myaing township PDF ambushed a junta support convoy in Pauk township. The convoy consisted of two cars carrying food and one car with a frequency jammer, escorted by a column of 50 soldiers. The attack resulted in the death of seven soldiers killed and injury to three pro-regime militia members.

Resistance alliance forces attacked No. 25 police battalion in Magway city on 7 April. According to the spokesperson of the alliance forces, there were casualties among junta members, though the exact number has not been made public. On the same day, Ghost of Enemies-GOE resistance forces conducted a mine attack on a column of 60 junta soldiers in Myaing township. The attack resulted in the deaths of 4 soldiers and injury to 20 others.

Junta drops cluster bombs on Chin State village

On 3 April, the junta air force bombed a village in Mindat township employing cluster bombs. The air strike wounded five civilians, being wounded, including two children aged between two and four years old, along with two women and one man who sustained injuries. In addition, 12 villagers' houses, a school, and a dormitory for teachers were burned. Concerns have increased among the local people regarding the scattered small bombs from the cluster bombs, which can act like landmines.

US State Department meets with Myanmar's National Unity Government

A significant meeting took place in Washington DC last week between US State Department and USAID representatives and Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) representatives. US State Department Counselor Derek Chollet and USAID Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer met 11 April with NUG representatives including NUG-designated Acting President Duwa Lashi La, NUG-designated Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung, and other leaders.

Counselor Chollet welcomed the NUG's efforts toward inclusive and representative democratic governance in Burma. The Counselor underscored US support for the pro-democracy movement, including efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions in need and build local administrative capacity to provide

vital public services. The Counselor commended the NUG on efforts to build inclusive coalitions with those striving for a democratic future in Burma, including key ethnic and religious groups, particularly Rohingya.

The Counselor and the NUG leaders reiterated the urgency of pressing the military regime to end violence, release those unjustly detained, and engage in dialogue with all stakeholders to promote an end to the conflict and a path toward democracy in the interests of the people of Burma.

On a separate issue, the NUG last week issued a statement welcoming former Australian politician Julie Bishop in her position as UN Special Envoy for Myanmar.

Two major Chinese hydro-power projects an important concern for junta and opposition

Ai Sai (Mao Land)

Significant areas of Myanmar's northern battlefields are effectively large investment projects that potentially benefit not just the Myanmar junta and the People's Republic of China but also opposition forces.

Little wonder that China's interests are to be protected by both sides in the Myanmar conflict as part of the agreement signed recently between the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the State Administration Council or SAC.

Similarly, the opposition National Unity Government has promised to continue a "warm partnership with Beijing", taking measures to safeguard Chinese economic investments and other socio-economic enterprises within Myanmar.

There should be little surprise that all Myanmar groups seek to maintain the China's attention because of the benefits and income to be derived from foreign investment, and the importance of cross-border trade.

Two hydro-power projects stand out when assessing Chinese interests in northern Myanmar.

Recently, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) captured the army's posts, encampments, and light infantry Battalions in Moe Mauk township of Kachin state. And they managed to drive the junta soldiers out of their outpost at the Tarpein hydropower plant.

The TarPein hydro plant lies at the head of Tarpein River and it is a joint venture investment of China and Myanmar. It has been developed to provide 240 megawatts and the project started in 2007. However, the project was impeded by the resumption of the war between the KIA and the junta.

According to the MOU of the hydro-power project, the residual portion of power, altogether 8 per cent out of developed electric power is supposed to be available to the Myanmar people – but there has been no electricity distribution to the people because no power distribution has been installed.

As a result of this failure to honour the agreement, China has acquired this 8 per cent portion of power at the low price of 1 unit for 18 kyats. In addition, the Myanmar government pay back the debt and compensation for the destruction of some parts of plants in fighting around 2011. China has been asking for payments of projects debt by installment.

Tar Pein Hydro-power plant was a player in the resumption of war in Kachin state around 2011. Initial fighting started in response to the Myanmar military checking out security at the plant. This prompted the resumption of fighting between the KIA and Myanmar army.

Tar Pein Hydropower plant is under KIA control now.

Another plant is Ruli hydro-power plant in Nam Kham township in Shan State. It started running in 2008 and with a capacity of 600 megawatts. It directly supports the nickel mine project in Maung Kong in Htee Kyaint township of Sagaing Region. The management of the hydro-power project is under the control of a Chinese company.

Prior to the 2021 coup, a parliament member asked for hydro-power electricity to be supplied to the local people. However, the then government rejected the call, implying the project was under the control of the Chinese company.



NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung. Photo: NUG

THAILAND IS KEY FACTOR TO PREVENT YET ANOTHER CATASTROPHE IN MYANMAR

IGOR BLAZEVIC



Thai soldiers underneath the Friendship Bridge at Mae Sot. Photo: AFP

It was to be expected. Min Aung Hlaing and the State Administration Council (SAC) have suffered in the last few weeks a series of significant defeats in Rakhine and Kachin states and most recently in Karen State with the loss of the important border city Myawaddy.

Those defeats are:

1) humiliating - breaking the moral within the military, seriously undermining trust in Min Aung Hlaing within military and its loyalists;

2) strategic in character - cutting important supply and trade lines, giving control over important border crossings to anti-junta liberation forces, increasing access of resistance to additional resources, and significantly changing the regional and international perspective on capability of junta to be in control.

For those reasons, Min Aung Hlaing and the junta almost do not have a choice but to try to undertake something that:

- 1) immediately attracts media and public attention;
- 2) is destructive and painful to a high extent, so that they redirect attention away from most recent defeats in Kachin state and in Myawaddy.

The SAC cannot undertake a major offensive in Kachin State for logistical and geographical reasons. They can neither send ground troops in to Rakhine State because that will inevitably lead to massive losses and new waves of humiliating surrenders of soldiers.

Myawaddy is the only place where the SAC is able to try to undertake a counter-offensive. The goal of that counteroffensive is not to overtake control over the border city once more. Myanmar military troops and the power-structure that is leading them does not have capacity any more to retake and consolidate control over territories and cities they have lost.

What they can do is to – destroy. And that is what they will try to do.

The SAC does not have much capacity any more. So, they are throwing a lot of what remains and what they can hastily assemble into this one punitive destructive operation.

It is a bit of a make-or-break situation for the junta.

If they do not succeed, if the attempted counter-offensive fails, if the military trucks and reinforcements they are now in a rush dispatching toward Myawaddy from the direction of Hp-an and Mawlamyine will fail

and will bleed along the way, that could be a game-changing event. It will definitely show to the outside world how broken the Myanmar military is. Photos and videos of destroyed trucks and dead soldiers on the roads toward Myawaddy will create powerful shockwaves within the military itself.

Pictures of destroyed military convoy similar to ones that we have already seen in the Chin and Arakan states could finally break the neck of Min Aung Hlaing.

The problem is that the geography in the territory between Mawlamyine, Hpa-an and Myawaddy is different than in the Chin and Rakhine states. For the military it is also easier to quickly assemble a stronger force. They can throw more destructive power against the liberation forces in Myawaddy and on the way to it.

But still, there are many ways the attempted counteroffensive could fail.

There are several chokepoints on the way to Myawaddy. The KNU and its PDF allies hold many positions around Kawkaik. There is also strategic depth south of the road from Kawkaik. One can assume that the KNU and its allies are prepared to at least significantly slow down movement of military convoys and to make them bleed with mines, ambush attacks and different obstacles.

But more is needed on the resistance side to help make an attempted junta counteroffensive a failure.

A lot will depend what the Karen National Army (KNA), the recently renamed former Border Guard Force, will do. Will they remain neutral or they may actively (in low profile mode) help KNU to disrupt and destroy military convoys and troops trying to reach Myawaddy. KNA has military power that can be a game-changer.

There is one more important possible game-changer that can contribute to the failure of the junta's counteroffensive in Karen state.

The junta is throwing its extremely limited capacities on this counteroffensive. All attention is there. The junta's deputy head has been put in charge of the offensive, which shows how desperate the junta is. This is opportunity to hit junta troops from the back in as many places around the country as is possible.

Anti-junta liberation forces now have unique opportunity to show strategic alignment. If many of them or as many as possible undertake simultaneous real and false attacks on junta troops and targets across the huge country, that can significantly distract the attempted counter offensive against Myawaddy. The military needs to feel insecure and under attack it its

rear, so that they do not have the steam to go forward in Karen state.

Last but not the least, Thailand is becoming a critical factor.

If the junta's counteroffensive reaches Myawaddy, that will mean fierce fighting on the Thai border, the destruction of an important trade and border city and large number of civilians fleeing across the border. If the junta's counter offensive is not be stopped through significant diplomatic pressure, Thailand will finish with having 50,000 or more new war refugees on its territory.

The KNU and other revolutionary troops on the ground will for sure at least make enough disruptions and obstacles to slow down junta troops. That is giving some time to Thai government, diplomacy and military to understand in full what is going on and to apply harder pressure on the junta to stop.

Thailand has the leverage and capacity to do so.

The junta's main source of money is MOGE and the gas sold to the Thai state company. The Thai military has more than enough discrete communication channels with the Myanmar military to send them strong warnings that they themselves must stop Min Aung Hlaing from seriously damaging Thai interests.

China with its bully diplomacy had the leverage to pressure both the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance to enter into a ceasefire. It is not sure that the Thai civilian government with its ASEAN constructive engagement instincts has the same skills to be effective in pressuring the junta.

Hopefully, yes.

The counteroffensive against Myawaddy must be stopped before evolving into a full conflagration and before it destroys one more city in Myanmar and before "mad dog" Min Aung Hlaing creates one more humanitarian catastrophe.

Min Aung Hlaing must be stopped.

Thailand and its ASEAN allies have a big role and opportunity to help stop one more disaster before it happens.

Igor Blazevic is a democracy activist with extensive experience in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA SLAMS UN'S 'ONE-SIDED' HUMAN RIGHTS CLAIMS

Myanmar's junta on Tuesday last week slammed the UN's "one-sided allegations" about its human rights record and said it had received no official communication regarding the recent appointment of a new UN special envoy to the conflict-torn country.

The Southeast Asian nation has been in turmoil since the military seized power in February 2021, ending a brief democratic experiment and sparking clashes with ethnic rebel groups and anti-coup fighters.

The junta has reacted with fury to attempts by the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc to establish dialogue between it and its opponents, whom it has vowed to "annihilate".

Last week the UN's rights council adopted a resolution slamming "horrific and systematic human rights violations" in Myanmar.

It also criticised the junta's "stranglehold" on humanitarian assistance, which it said was exacerbating a crisis that has displaced more than 2.5 million people.

That resolution "included unfounded and one-sided allegations," the junta's foreign affairs ministry said in a statement published in the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

"Therefore, Myanmar categorically rejects the resolution."

The statement also said the UN had made "no official communication to Myanmar" regarding last

week's appointment of a new UN special envoy to the country.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed former Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop to the post, which has been vacant since the departure in June 2023 of Noeleen Heyzer.

The Singaporean sociologist was tasked with urging the military to engage in political dialogue with opposing groups and end a bloody crackdown it launched after toppling the government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

She visited the Southeast Asian nation in 2022 and met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and other top military officials in a move criticised by rights groups as lending legitimacy to the generals.

But she was denied a meeting with detained democracy figurehead Suu Kyi and later irked junta officials who accused her of issuing a "one-sided statement" of what had been discussed.

She later vowed not to visit the country again unless she was allowed to meet Suu Kyi, who is currently serving a 27-year jail sentence handed down by a closed-door junta court.

Myanmar's UN envoy Kyaw Moe Tun was appointed by Suu Kyi's government and has refused to leave his post despite the junta's insistence that he no longer represents the country.

AFP

MYANMAR WOMEN FEAR POTENTIAL MANDATORY MILITARY CONSCRIPTION, DESPITE JUNTA ASSURANCES

PAN PAN

Photo: AFP

Recently, General Zaw Min Tun, the junta's spokesperson, said that there were "no current plans" to draft women into the military. However, this announcement offers little comfort to a population wary of the military's historical abuses and deceit.

A human rights activist, speaking on condition of anonymity, emphasized the military's violent past.

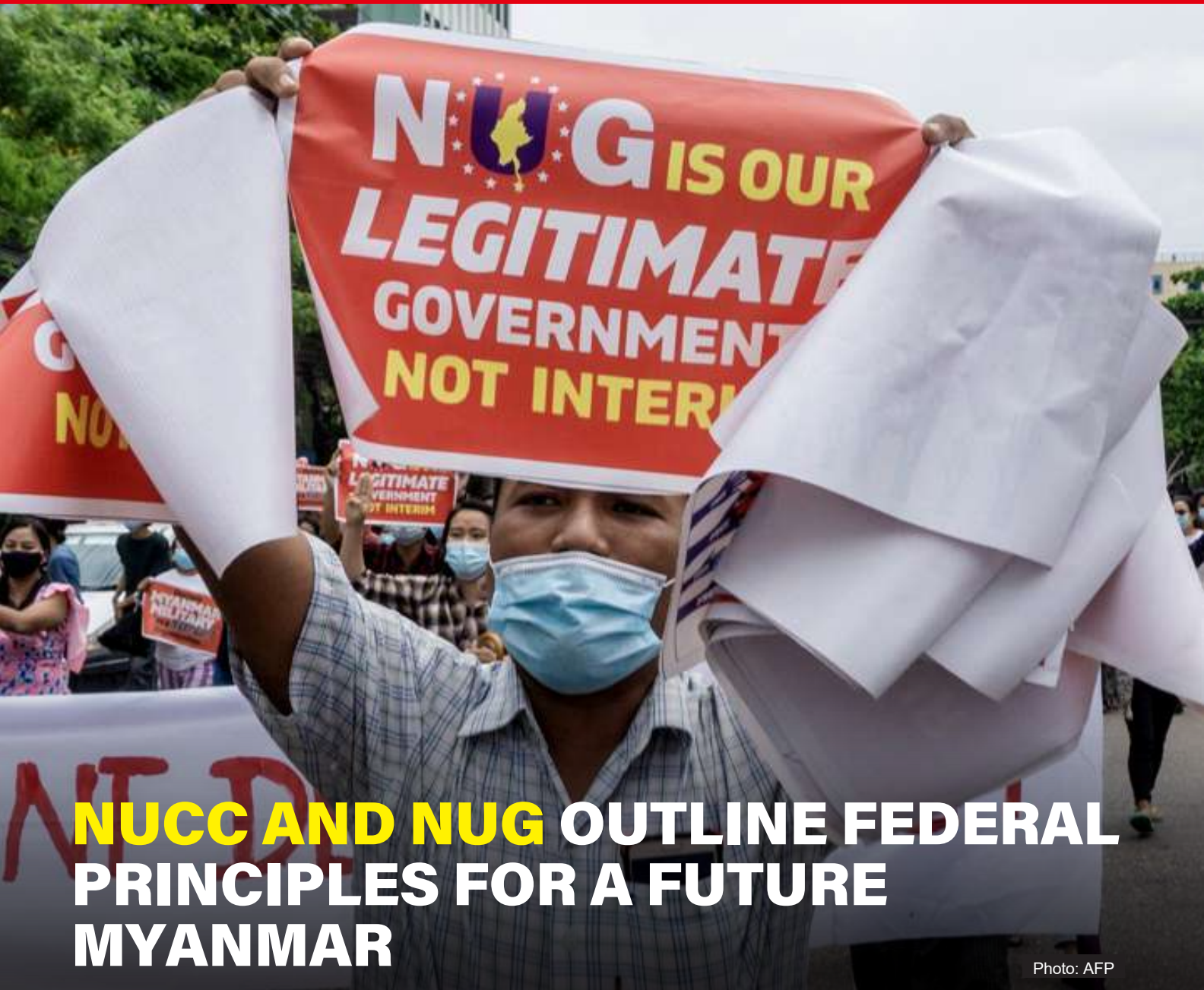
"We must keep in mind that the military is a brutal, savage, and terrorist institution," the activist said. "If we understand this well, the announcements are in vain. Now that every civilian understands it, one should consider the choices to keep oneself safe. The military is frenetic, adjusting the announcement and claiming not to call women to serve to keep their community safe. However, I would like to say it is not a guarantee of security for ordinary women."

This sentiment resonates with a resident of Mogok Town, Mandalay Region.

"We are not relieved from this announcement. As the junta claimed about the fifth cohort, they can recruit

when the time comes. The ordinary people would not be exempted, except their family members. This is just my opinion. The junta does not care about age. We cannot trust those who are killing children and sexually exploiting the elderly. Thus, I am preparing for my children to continue their education somewhere. Their announcement does not provide security, especially women will not be secure."

The junta's initial conscription plan, announced on February 10, reactivates a previously drafted military conscription law. This law mandates the drafting of 5,000 civilians monthly, totaling 60,000 annually. Technically, over 14 million Myanmar citizens are under threat from this draft.



NUCC AND NUG OUTLINE FEDERAL PRINCIPLES FOR A FUTURE MYANMAR

Photo: AFP

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the National Unity Government (NUG) have put forward a Federal Democracy Charter (FDC) to present at the Second People's Assembly organized by the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC).

In a statement, published 10 April, they put forward the following as the FDC:

1. Strengthen the political leadership to align with the evolutions of the revolution. To achieve policy balance, the National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) will be reviewed and reformed, and a progress report will be submitted to the Third People's Assembly.

2. The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) should engage with all revolutionary stakeholders as soon as possible to achieve a political pact.

3. In obtaining the common political pact, NUCC

should initiate discussions with other political and revolutionary forces who are not yet part of NUCC.

4. To clearly discuss the Form of State.

5. To set fundamental policies for the emergence of new states including that of Bamar.

6. To develop directives and/or regulations to enhance communication and collaboration, check and balance between NUCC and NUG in accordance with the Federal Democracy Charter (FDC).

7. To strengthen accountability and improve engagement between the public and political leading institutions, such as NUCC and NUG, Town Hall Meetings, press conferences, and other public relations channels.

8. To avoid repeat of occurrences such as violations provisions of the Federal Democracy Charter (FDC)

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

by the National Unity Government (NUG) by issuing the China Policy Statement, Joint Political Position Statement, and establishing the FSCC without consulting NUCC.

9. To ensure the National Unity Government (NUG) the political guidance and check and balance mechanism of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) by implementing the provisions stated in the Federal Democracy Charter (FDC).

10. To continue the development of Rohingya Policy as soon as possible.

11. To lead the process of the National Apology by the National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) towards the ethnic people regarding the suppressions including the Rohingya Genocide committed by past governments.

12. With the direct leadership of the President, to form a special commission on minority affairs, which will advocate for oppressed ethnic people, including Rohingya.

13. To take actions with a policy of zero-tolerance against sexual harassment, violence, rapes, child rape cases, and killings faced by women and LGBTIQ+ during the revolutionary period.

14. To bring justice for arbitrary arrests, torture, and killings against civilians during the revolutionary period.

15. To establish the federal human rights commission as soon as possible to seek accountability for human rights violations during the revolutionary period.

16. To take effective action on unlawful tax collection processes and set up a systematic process of tax collection in revolutionary force-controlled areas.

17. To identify the monitoring mechanism and financial supervision process on the fundraising and expenditures of the National Unity Government (NUG) through audit and submitting the report to the people's assembly.

18. To assure and protect access to education for all children and everyone during the revolutionary period without discrimination.

19. To protect and ensure equal access to healthcare services for all during the revolution.

20. To eliminate all discrimination against ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability with a zero-tolerance policy.

21. To amend or repeal laws that violate the values of human rights and women's rights.

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MYANMAR DEMOCRACY ICON SUU KYI BELIEVED HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN NAYPYIDAW PRISON

SOE SAN AUNG FOR RFA BURMESE

For over a year, the whereabouts of Myanmar's jailed democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has been a mystery. But a source close to her legal team told Radio Free Asia they believe she is in solitary confinement in Naypyidaw Prison, in the capital.

Each week, her legal team receives a list of items she needs in detention, which they deliver every Monday.

"Last Monday, I delivered the requested materials to Naypyidaw Prison," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity due to security concerns. "I had to send the materials there, so I assumed she was there."

The source said that each week, they inquire about Suu Kyi's health, and authorities say she is "doing well," despite earlier reports that she was suffering from dental issues.

Members of her legal team haven't seen her since Dec. 30, 2022, at Naypyidaw Prison, when the junta barred them from further visiting her. Multiple requests to meet with her have gone unanswered.

Suu Kyi's economic policy advisor, Australian economist Sean Turnell – who was imprisoned with her for a while but later released – and her son Kim Aris also believe she is in Naypyidaw Prison, but have no proof.

Granted freedom in 2010 after years of house arrest under the former junta, Suu Kyi, 78, was arrested in the aftermath of the February 2021 coup, which removed the democratically elected government from power.



As state counsellor, she served as Myanmar's de facto leader. After the coup, she was sentenced by the junta to 33 years on 19 charges, but that sentence was later reduced to 27 years.

Keeping her hidden

Given Suu Kyi's popularity among the public, the junta wants to keep her hidden from view, said political commentator Than Soe Naing.

"As long as she is in the political arena, they cannot compete with her politically," he said. "Therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi was removed from public view without disclosing her exact location."

Attempts to contact Deputy Director General Naing Win, spokesperson for the junta's Prison Department, to inquire about Suu Kyi have gone unanswered.

In January, her son Kim Aris, who lives in the United Kingdom, received a letter from her – the first communication from her since the ban on visits, and the first time he had heard from her since before the coup that removed the democratically elected government that she was de facto leader of.

The letter largely concerned family affairs, and little else, he said.

Aris recently told RFA that she is likely being held in Naypyidaw Prison in solitary confinement, but wasn't sure, and added that the junta had ignored his repeated requests for information on her status.

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

"I have no reason to believe she's been moved to any form of house arrest," he said. "The only house she has is the house in [Yangon], and I know she's not there."

Too hot or too cold

Aris said he doubts his mother has access to the medical treatment she needs for the "ongoing problems with her teeth," which would make eating difficult.

If she is being held in Naypyidaw Prison, he said, she is likely enduring difficult conditions.

"It's either too hot or it's too cold," he said. "There's mosquitoes, there's rats. It's not a very nice place."

It is now the hottest time of year in Myanmar, which has been sweltering in a heat wave with temperatures climbing as high as 40 Celsius (102 Fahrenheit).

U.S. and British Embassies in Yangon did not respond to questions about Suu Kyi's whereabouts, but directed RFA Burmese to earlier statements condemning her detention and calling for her immediate release.

Last month, the junta attempted to auction off her lakeside Yangon home for US\$90 million, but no bidders emerged. At that residence, she had received U.S. President Barack Obama, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning Suu Kyi has seen her reputation tarnish during her time as de facto leader of the country, when she defended the military against allegations of genocide against the Rohingya people at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands.

The military's alleged atrocities included indiscriminate killings, mass rape and village torchings as more than 740,000 fled across the border to Bangladesh.

'Worst of the lot'

Turnell, Suu Kyi's economic policy advisor, was arrested after the coup on charges of espionage and he spent one year and nine months in detention, mostly in deplorable conditions in Yangon's Insein Prison, but



Kim Aris with his mother Aung San Suu Kyi in happier times. Photo: AFP



Sean Turnell. Photo: AFP

also in Naypyidaw Prison with Suu Kyi.

Turnell told RFA that, “to the best of my knowledge, she is where I left her back in November of 2022, which is inside the main Naypyidaw Prison.” He said he’d seen no evidence to support rumors that she’d since been moved to house arrest.

During the time they were together, he said, Suu Kyi was being held in a “small structure [that] had been built for her ... right in the center of the prison compound with a wall around it so that other prisoners could not contact her.”

He described it as a rudimentary, two-room building, “somewhere between a proper structure and a hut,” that lacked air conditioning or curtains for the windows.

Turnell said that the physical conditions, treatment and food in all of the prisons he was held in were “awful,” but he called Naypyidaw “the worst of the lot,” adding that its proximity to the junta generals prompted prison guards “to be that little bit harsher.”

“The climate in Naypyidaw is really horrible,” he said. “It’s in an area that used to be a mangrove swamp... and that’s why the jail was full of insects and rodents and all of that. And, of course, that adds to the discomfort of the place.”

While such conditions would be difficult for any prisoner, they could be life-threatening for someone nearly 80 years of age with existing health problems.

Junta ‘waiting game’

Turnell said Suu Kyi’s solitary confinement in Naypyidaw Prison is just one example of how Myanmar’s current junta is “so much worse than the others... in every aspect.”

“The savagery of it, the brutality, the almost bestial nature of the things that they do is just an order of magnitude worse, it seems to me, than previous military regimes,” he said. “The treatment of Daw Suu just adds to that,” he added, using an honorific.

Turnell said he doubts the military regime will set her free, given the way they have treated her in the three years since the coup.

“They seem to be playing some sort of waiting game,” he said. “But if they are doing that, that may be the wrong strategy for them because the future does not look bright for them at all.”

Translated by Kalyar Lwin and Aung Naing. Edited by Joshua Lipes and Malcolm Foster.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR YOUTH STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATION AMIDST COUP-TRIGGERED POWER OUTAGES

PAN PAN

Under the Myanmar military coup, as the junta can no longer supply electricity throughout the nation regularly, an alternating power outage system in townships is implemented. The only period the junta distributed electricity on time was during the matriculation examination period.

Amid the junta's disruption, some students, who halted their pursuit of higher education as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), or abandoned government universities due to the coup d'état, are now engaging in vocational education while working. However, the nighttime power outages are significantly affecting the studies of those pursuing informal education.

A 23-year-old man with a minor vision impairment, nearsightedness, highlights the challenges he faces when studying at night.

"As someone with nearsightedness, I struggle to focus if the lighting is inadequate. My routine includes attending evening classes and studying at night. On blackout nights, I resort to using candles, but they are not very effective."

He is persistent, despite the challenges. However,

it is not easy.

"I also rely on flashlights and other electric lamps, but I find it difficult to concentrate for extended periods. It hurts my eyes so I need to give my eyes a rest. With (public) electricity, good lighting would not cause much problem. However, nothing cannot be done. I spend less time studying on blackout days, and more time studying when I get the electricity. We need to adapt to it since I cannot say anything critical."

Financial constraints prevent him from purchasing an inverter or generator to mitigate the effects of power outages. His nearsightedness necessitates wearing glasses with a power of 150-170, further complicating his nighttime studies.

Furthermore, during the summer months when hydroelectricity distribution diminishes and natural gas is insufficient, power outages frequently occur. Severe disruptions occur everywhere except in military communities and areas associated with cronies.

Currently, some regions are grappling with extreme temperatures, with Magway Region in Myanmar recording the highest temperature at 44 degrees Celsius, according to the junta's Department

of Meteorology and Hydrology.

Amidst severe temperatures and frequent power outages, students enrolled in online courses face significant challenges, according to a concerned parent who wished to remain anonymous.

“My child is not only tackling regular schoolwork but also attending an online English-speaking course at home. Despite the scorching weather outside, blackouts add to the discomfort. Children are learning in hot weather. They look so pitiful.”

Another mother agrees.

“Internet connectivity is crucial for online learning. Sometimes, the power bank drains, resulting in canceled sessions. We have to rely on inverters when the electricity is cut off. It’s exhausting to deal with interruptions during every session. Electricity is paramount; it ensures students can study without disruptions,” emphasized the mother of a 14-year-old student.

Beyond electricity issues, live music performances at liquor and beer shops pose further obstacles to students’ education. Since the coup, these establishments have increasingly hosted stage performances, becoming popular entertainment venues. Large restaurants and liquor stores feature soundproof setups for performances. However, local beer shops lack such provisions, leading to noisy

gatherings that extend late into the night.

Additionally, as the shops are opened in cooperation with the military and police, the neighbours cannot complain about the loud noise having impact on students.

“The band does not close until around 10:30 pm and 11 pm. No one can tell them since they already have a connection (with the military). I have to study closing all the windows at night amidst hot weather. With hot weather and loud noises, I am planning to move to a quiet place. There is a bar wherever I move. Everyone wants to take a rest at 10 pm. I also study the Japanese language, and they are interfering with my studying,” said a young adult staying in Yangon’s Tamwe Township, crowded with beer shops.

Under the previous civilian government, which was ousted by the military in 2021, electricity was more readily available 24/7, and such disruptions were rare. Moreover, there were fewer stage performances at liquor and beer shops.

However, over the three years since the coup, severe power outages, along with shortages of gasoline and diesel, together with the junta’s recent military conscription drive, have cast a shadow over the future of Myanmar’s youth. Consequently, more young adults are contemplating migration abroad.

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ATTACKS RECORDED ON MYANMAR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Data collection organisation Insecurity Insight has collated a list of attacks on healthcare providers documented by the media, from 20 March to 2 April 2024.

Eight attacks, outlined below, were carried out on Myanmar health providers during that period.

22 March 2024: In La Ei village, Yi Nwe Village Tract, Pekon township, Taunggyi District, a station hospital was severely damaged by bombs dropped by Myanmar military fighter jets. This attack damaged an ambulance parked in front of the hospital, killed two civilians, and injured at least five. At the time of the attack, the hospital was not functioning but used as a storage facility by local health workers and resistance forces. Sources: Irrawaddy and Khit Thit Media

22 March 2024: In Nang Toke Village and village tract, Pinlaung Township, Taunggyi District, Shan State (South), a sub-rural health centre and five civilian houses were damaged by bombs dropped by Myanmar military fighter jets. At the time of the attack, the health

facility was not functioning due to the increase in armed clashes between the Myanmar military and an ethnic armed group Pa-Oh National Liberation Army in the township for two months before the attack. Sources: Khit Thit Media and Mizzima

23 March 2024: In Yesagyo Town and township, Pakokku District, Magway Region, a township hospital, a monastery, a police station, and a veterans' office occupied by the Myanmar military were attacked with small arms, improvised artillery, and armed drones by the local resistance forces. In addition to the exchange of fire on the ground, artillery shells launched by the Myanmar military base camps in the surrounding areas landed in this town during this attack. The hospital was functioning under the junta regime at the time of the attack. Damage or casualties at the hospital were not reported. Sources: Khit Thit Media and Myanmar Pressphoto Agency

24 March 2024: In Kan Htaunt Gyi Village and village tract, Myebon Township, Mrauk-U District, Rakhine State, a station hospital was severely damaged due to bombs dropped by the Myanmar military fighter jets. A 40-year-old female civilian was injured. At the time of the attack, the health facility was not functioning due to the armed clashes in Rakhine State between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army. Sources: BBC Burmese and Mizzima

25 March 2024: In Maungdaw Town, township, and district, Rakhine State, arrest warrants were issued for two medical doctors by the junta authorities. They accuse the doctors of having provided health care to the Arakan Army. These two doctors were blacklisted so they cannot go abroad. The health workers were forced to leave Maungdaw Town for Sittwe Town; however, the victims reportedly did not obey the order. Due to these arrest warrants, other junta health workers having served at the public health facilities in the armed clashes areas in Rakhine state went into hiding. Sources: Delta News Agency, Narinjara and Radio Free Asia.

Insecurity Insight examines threats facing people living and working in dangerous environments. Its innovative data collection and analysis methods generate insights relevant for aid workers, aid agencies and those concerned with the protection of health workers, educators, IDPs and refugees. Insecurity Insight's aim is to empower those who deliver vital services and to give voices to those affected by insecurity.



Photo: AFP

WFP: MYANMAR SUFFERING FROM WORST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN RECENT HISTORY

Food insecurity in Myanmar has risen sharply amid the worst humanitarian crisis in its recent history, affecting 12.9 million or one in four people, according to the World Food Programme (WFP).

Also, 18.6 million people need humanitarian assistance and 2.6 million have been displaced by conflict in Myanmar.

The WFP says that the political crisis, conflict, economic downturn, pre-existing poverty and climate-related shocks are all driving the emergency.

Conflict is spreading into new areas, driving displacement at a record scale. Most displaced people are cut off from access to food and often dependent on WFP assistance for survival.

Meanwhile, the country is highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters. In May 2023, Cyclone Mocha left a devastating trail, with WFP launching a life-saving response for hundreds of thousands of people. Unprecedented floods in October 2023 prompted the WFP to provide emergency food assistance to 24,000 people.

Despite immense security constraints, humanitarian access and funding challenges, WFP said that it is doing its utmost to assist at least 2 million people in 2024, increasingly working with local partners.

WFP's priority is to ensure life-saving assistance reaches communities affected by conflict. Following breakthroughs over the past two years in accessing

hard-to-reach locations, WFP has launched emergency food and nutrition programmes in Kayah State, southern Shan State and Bago Region for thousands of people. Meanwhile, WFP continues monthly assistance to 360,000 people in border areas, including Rohingya communities, who have been displaced for a protracted period.

WFP also provides a comprehensive package of nutrition support to pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children aged between six months and five years. WFP also provides food and cash-based nutrition support to people living with HIV and TB, and delivers nutrition education and counselling.

In areas with relative stability, WFP is creating livelihood opportunities and improving resilience through projects for the development of community assets such as roads, terrace land, irrigation canals, flood-protection dykes and home gardens. In 2023, over 46,000 people received food/cash assistance, as well as health and nutrition education, for their participation in WFP's community resilience projects.

WFP also said that it urgently needs US\$86.6 million to sustain aid for vulnerable communities until May 2024, and it is calling on the international community to scale up its support to the people of Myanmar.



Yangon. Photo: AFP

MIDDLE CLASS 'RAPIDLY ERODING' AS POVERTY SOARS IN MYANMAR: UN

Almost half of Myanmar's population of roughly 55 million people is living below the poverty line - a figure that nearly doubled from 2017 to 2023, a UN report said Thursday.

Underscoring the erosion of the violence-wracked, junta-led nation's middle class, the new report from the UN Development Program says 49.7 percent of Myanmar's people are living on less than 1,590 kyats, or 75 US cents, a day.

That figure was 24.8 percent in 2017.

"The situation is likely to have deteriorated further by the time of this report's release," the UNDP darkly predicted. "An additional 25 percent of the population were hanging by a thread as of October 2023, just above the poverty line."

Since last autumn, clashes have escalated between the military and armed ethnic minority groups, forcing

hundreds of thousands of people to flee, losing their sources of income.

Additionally, the Southeast Asian country has been unable to recover from a 17.9 percent drop in gross domestic product in 2021, when leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government was ousted from power by the military and the COVID-19 pandemic was still a factor.

"A middle class that can buffer shocks and help a country recover faster is rapidly eroding, with a fall back into poverty," the UNDP said.

"The new data show that less than 25 percent of the population in Myanmar manage to secure steady incomes to live above the poverty line," UNDP chief Achim Steiner said in a statement.

"Without immediate interventions to provide cash transfers, food security and access to basic services, vulnerability will keep growing, and impacts will be felt across generations," Steiner warned.

The UNDP estimates that the country would need \$4 billion a year to address its poverty, via cash transfers and other means.

AFP

INDIA SECURES SECOND OVERSEAS PORT SITTWE IN MYANMAR AFTER CHABAHAR IN IRAN

S Venkat Narayan – Special to Mizzima

NEW DELHI, April 9: After Chabahar in Iran, India has gained the rights to operate a second overseas port, Sittwe, in Myanmar. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has approved a proposal for India Ports Global (IPGL) to take over the operations of the entire port located on the Kaladan River.

IPGL is a company 100 per cent owned by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

In the Indian Ocean, China and India are engaged in a struggle to expand their economic influence. Ports have become highly significant in this rivalry. China, in particular, has been aggressively seeking to acquire operating rights for numerous ports in different countries in the region, such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Djibouti in Africa. It has also approached Maldives and Bangladesh to invest in their ports, all of which raise serious concerns for India.

Sittwe began receiving cargo from India in May last year. The first consignment of cargo sailed from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata to the port in Myanmar's sensitive Rakhine state and was received by Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal and his Myanmar counterpart Admiral Tin Aung San.

The port offers a significant connectivity advantage for cargo to reach from Vizag in Andhra Pradesh and Kolkata in West Bengal to the Northeastern states, bypassing Bangladesh.

The MEA approval means the port will now become an India-operated entity. On the financial front, it is expected that IPGL will encourage transactions in the Indian rupee among traders using the port.

IPGL will operate the port with full rights, similar to any other Indian domestic port. The Sittwe deal is more significant than Chabahar, where IPGL has rights to operate only two terminals and not the port itself.



Sittwe port in May last year. Photo: PIB

The Sittwe deal is a long-term one, to be renewed every three years.

Under the agreement, IPGL will raise finance to develop the port, which was initially built with a \$500-million grant-in-aid from India. Situated on the Kaladan River delta, the port has the potential to accommodate deepwater sea vessels.

Current trade volumes between India and Myanmar are limited to construction materials such as cement, steel, and bricks from India, while imports from Myanmar include rice, timber, fish, and seafood. These could now shift to higher value-added products as the port expands.

The Indian states poised to benefit immediately are Mizoram and Tripura. Presently, Indian cargoes travelling to these destinations have to pass through Bangladesh, mainly the Chittagong port.

This scenario could change soon.

"The development of Sittwe port required a dedicated user agency, which has not been possible so far. IPGL will fill that vacuum with long-term planning," said a senior official of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

This port is part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project. Once operationalised, the Sittwe port will enable multimodal transit connectivity with Southeast Asia.

Sittwe Port has been developed under a framework agreement between India and Myanmar for the construction and operation of a Multimodal Transit Transport Facility on the Kaladan River, connecting the Sittwe Port in Myanmar with the state of Mizoram in India.

The approval is also significant for IPGL in other respects, the official said. It clarifies that this company will now spearhead India's overseas port development initiatives. Tanzania, for instance, has requested India's support to develop the potential of its ports.

JAPAN AND THE US: WARTIME ENEMIES TO 'CLOSEST' ALLIES

Photo: AFP

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida last week made the first state visit in nearly a decade by a Japanese leader to the United States, with defence cooperation high on the agenda.

Here are five points about the countries' relationship:

WWII adversaries

Formal ties between Japan and the United States date back to the mid-19th century, when US Commodore Matthew Perry and his "black ships" flotilla forced Japan out of two centuries of self-imposed isolation.

The 20th century brought Japan's brutal rampage across Asia and World War II, which ended in 1945 after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

After Japan surrendered, US occupying forces drafted a new constitution for the country, banning it from using force to settle international disputes.

In 2016, Barack Obama became the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima, where around 140,000 people died in the nuclear attack and its aftermath.

Defence alliance

Today there are 54,000 US military personnel stationed in Japan, mostly in the southern region of Okinawa.

The US presence is important to both nations' defence strategies as tensions rise with China and North Korea, while local opposition to the bases is softening in Okinawa -- a potential front line of any future conflict.

Japan is doubling its military spending as part of an overhaul of its security strategy, and reports say Kishida and President Joe Biden could agree the biggest upgrade to US-Japan command and control structures in decades.

Trade partners

Japan and the United States are each other's top foreign investors. They cooperate on research into semiconductors, nuclear energy and space, among

other fields.

Top Japanese automaker Toyota recently announced it will invest \$1.3 billion into its Kentucky factory to begin US production of electric vehicles from 2025.

But Biden has spoken out against a proposed \$14-billion Japanese takeover of US Steel, which is based in Pennsylvania, a key election battleground.

Diplomatic outreach

Last year, the nations called themselves "the closest of allies and friends, newly committed to achieving peace and prosperity".

The Asia-Pacific region faces "growing challenges, from actions inconsistent with the rules-based international order by China to provocations by North Korea," they said in a joint statement.

But they need other countries' support.

The United States, Japan, Australia and India have formed the Quad grouping, while Kishida and Biden held a historic summit with South Korea's president last year.

This week will see the first trilateral summit between the US, Japan and the Philippines. Kishida is also expected to discuss cooperating on defence technology with AUKUS, which groups the United States, Australia and Britain.

Space and sports

Tokyo and Washington want to work together to land two Japanese astronauts on the Moon in the US-led lunar exploration programme Artemis.

Back on Earth, the two countries also share a love of sports including basketball and baseball, with Japanese megastar Shohei Ohtani joining the Los Angeles Dodgers last December in a record-breaking \$700 million deal.

AFP

CHINA CONDUCTS MILITARY DRILLS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

Photo: AFP

China conducted military "combat patrols" Sunday in the disputed South China Sea, its army said, the same day as joint drills by the Philippines, the United States, Japan and Australia.

The announcement comes one day after defence chiefs from four countries including the Philippines -- which has been engaged in several contentious maritime disputes with Beijing recently -- said they would conduct joint drills Sunday in the area.

Beijing's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command said it was organising "joint naval and air combat patrols in the South China Sea".

"All military activities that mess up the situation in the South China Sea and create hotspots are under control," it said in a statement, in an apparent swipe at the other drills being held in the waters.

Further details about the Chinese military activities in the waterway Sunday were not announced.

The exercises take place days before US President Joe Biden is due to hold the first trilateral summit with the leaders of the Philippines and Japan.

Top US officials have repeatedly declared the United States' "ironclad" commitment to defending the Philippines against an armed attack in the South China Sea -- to the consternation of Beijing.

China claims territorial sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea and has been increasingly assertive in the region in recent years.

China's Coast Guard said Saturday it had "handled" a situation on Thursday at a disputed reef where several ships from the Philippines were engaged in "illegal" operations.

"Under the guise of 'protecting fishing,' Philippine government ships have illegally violated and provoked, organised media to deliberately incite and mislead, continuing to undermine stability in the South China Sea," spokesman Gan Yu said.

"We are telling the Philippines that any infringement

tactics are in vain," Gan said, adding that China would "regularly enforce the law in waters under (its) jurisdiction".

Beijing has brushed aside competing territorial claims by several Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea - a crucial route for global trade - as well as an international ruling that declared its stance baseless.

The drills conducted Sunday by the Philippines, United States, Japan and Australia are intended to "(ensure) that all countries are free to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a joint statement.

Named the "Maritime Cooperative Activity", the drills will include naval and air force units from all four countries, the joint statement said.

There were no details in the statement on what the drills would precisely include.

The Japanese embassy in Manila said in a statement that "anti-submarine warfare training" would be included in the drills.

Last week, Australian warship HMAS Warramunga arrived at the Philippine island of Palawan, which faces the hotly contested waters.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos issued a strongly worded statement on March 28, vowing the country would not be "cowed into silence, submission, or subservience" by China.

Talks between the Philippines and Japan for a defence pact that would allow the countries to deploy troops on each other's territory were "still ongoing", a spokesman for the Philippine foreign affairs department told reporters last week.

Manila already has a similar agreement with Australia and the United States.

AFP

JANE FERGUSON RESEARCHES SHANLAND

“In Chiang Mai, in 1998, I met some Burmese activists and I was not only impressed and humbled by their incredible experience, but also became engaged and interested as well,” says Jane Ferguson in a podcast with Insight Myanmar. “The direct experience of working with folks and getting to know a little bit more about the ethnic tapestry, and then the ongoing civil war in Burma, made me want to ask more anthropological questions related to that.”

This interest would ultimately lead to an academic career, and the subject of today’s talk is Ferguson’s recent book, *Repossessing Shanland: Myanmar, Thailand, and a Nation-State Deferred*. The book’s title refers to Shan attempts to reclaim their land and community after many years of conflict. “This idea of repossession as both a concept and as a metaphor, it engages these different aspects of, ‘What does rightful ownership mean? What does the law mean? What does territory mean?’ across different historical time periods.”

Ferguson’s study of Shanland— which borders China, Laos, and Thailand, and encompasses the infamous “Golden Triangle”— starts with the legendary heroic figure, Suerkhan Fa, whose story blends history with mythology. “Every major Southeast Asian nation state that’s based on an ethnic majority group will have its national heroes that lived in the past,” she explains. “Their kingdoms were in decline, but then there was somebody strong and charismatic who was able to unite all of the kingdoms into a strong and thriving empire. The idea of a historical Golden Age is really important for ideas of nationalism in the present.”

Her theory that contemporary Shan leaders are working to “repossess” the region connects to Suerkhan Fa as the heroic figure who returned from exile to create a Shan empire that united its divisions. In this way, the Suerkhan Fa narrative underscores the historic lack of unity among Shan groups, including into the present.

Ferguson discusses the tendency to superimpose concepts of the present in trying to understand the past. One manifestation of this is the more modern idea of people having a national or pan-ethnic identity. “You don’t know you’re a citizen of a place unless there’s some mechanism for you to learn about it,” she says. In



Jane Ferguson

other words, especially in long ago history, one would likely have no sense of belonging to anything beyond one’s family, community and religion, especially not the somewhat abstract notion of “nation” or “empire” without specific messaging about what that state comprises, how one is a member of it, and what one’s responsibilities as a member of the state are. This certainly describes the Shan and their lack of a sense of belonging to some sort of larger, historical, pan-Shan “nation.”

CHECK OUT PODCAST

For Jane Ferguson’s full discussion of these issues, check out the podcast on Insight Myanmar here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/9ab25030-8201-41a7-971b-d016eab18ea2>



JUNTA'S REPRESENTATIVE CO-CHAIRS ASEAN-CHINA COOPERATION COMMITTEE IN INDONESIA

The Myanmar junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has reported that Aung Myo Myint, (Permanent Representative of Myanmar to ASEAN) co-chaired the meeting of the ASEAN-China Cooperation Committee held on 2 April in Jakarta, Indonesia.

During the meeting, China emphasized that it maintains a steadfast commitment to prioritizing its relations with ASEAN as an integral component of its neighborhood diplomacy efforts.

Both parties shared perspectives on advancements within ASEAN and China, as well as the ongoing strides made in ASEAN-China collaboration throughout the preceding year.

Meanwhile, Thailand and Vietnam committed to pursuing an ASEAN consensus regarding the ongoing conflict in Myanmar during the 5th Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation, chaired by both nations on 12 April.

During the meeting, Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara said both Thailand and Vietnam share the goal of seeking a peaceful and unified political situation in Myanmar.

Retired Lieutenant General Myint Hlaing arrested by junta

Myint Hlaing, retired Lieutenant General, was arrested on April 10 by the military junta at his residence in Naypyidaw, reported British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

He was also former Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation during Thein Sein's administration.

His home was also cordoned off.

The junta has yet to issue an official statement regarding the arrest.

During the tenure of Than Shwe, Myint Hlaing held the position of Northeastern Regional Military Command chief and served as the personal security officer for then-Vice Senior General Maung Aye, the second-ranking figure in then-junta.

A rumour citing military sources said that Myint Hlaing consulted with former military generals, highlighting concerns over military chief Min Aung Hlaing's perceived indecisiveness, suggesting that failure to remove him could lead to the collapse of both the army and the country, with rumours suggesting that his subsequent arrest was due to the leaked information.

General Mya Tun Oo attends Mercantile Marine College Cadet Course graduation event

The junta's Mercantile Marine College Cadet Course No. 15 graduated on April 5 in Kamayut township, Yangon, with top officials, including junta's Deputy Prime Minister General Mya Tun Oo and Yangon Region Chief Minister U Soe Thein, attending, according to junta-controlled media.

The ceremony celebrated the graduation of 179 cadet trainees, including marine officers, engineers, and electrical engineers.

Since its establishment in 1963, MMMC has reportedly trained over 87,000 marine officers and 29,000 engineer officers, fostering a total of 155,506 trainees and 277,695 field experts.

ALPHA BATS DRONE STRIKE: SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ AMID RUMOURS OF MYANMAR MILITARY DEPUTY'S FATE

A screenshot of Alpha Bats' video footage of the drone attack on Southeastern Regional Military Command office in Mawlamyine

Resistance force Alpha Bats used Fixed Wing Drones to attack Myanmar's Southeastern Regional Military Command office in Mon State's Mawlamyine Township while Junta's Deputy Chief Vice Senior General Soe Win was conducting a military operation meeting.

Initially, rumours circulated on social media that Soe Win was seriously injured or had died. Consequently, the general public expressed their happiness on social media due to unconfirmed reports suggesting the demise of the second chief of the Myanmar military,

known for brutally targeting civilians and burning villages.

Under the unconfirmed news about Soe Win's death or injury, a female Facebook user wrote in the comment section, 'May this information be true.' Another Facebook user commented, 'Today seems to be a great day.'

However, on April 10, the junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun denied the news to BBC (Burmese Service), asserting that Soe Win is regularly performing national defense and security duties.

NUG MINISTRY DELIVERS 406.5 MILLION KYAT IN HUMANITARIAN AID

The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) was able to provide 406.5 million kyat in humanitarian aid to those in real need in March 2024, according to NUG's official Facebook page.

These donations are contributions made by the general public. Of the 406.5 million kyat donated, approximately 290 million kyat was spent to purchase emergency food for 154,200 IDPs, according to NUG.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.