

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima

WEEKLY
Analysis & Insight



THAI CONCERNS

Myawaddy conflict affects
Myanmar's neighbour

mizzima WEEKLY

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.

PITY MYANMAR'S IDPS FACING HEAT AND RAIN

Internally Displaced People or IDPs in Myanmar are counted in their millions – at least 3 million. But the reality of their existence revolves around individuals or families who live in dire circumstances.

Wherever they live, whether in Myanmar's heartland, or up in the hills of the ethnic regions, they are exposed to the weather and face serious problems in getting enough food, water, medical supplies and shelter.

Right now, the main challenge is surviving the heat of a particularly hot summer with temperatures reaching into the 40s Centigrade. And soon they will face the deluge of the rainy season, which poses its own problems, not least illness due to the weather, dirty water, malaria and dengue fever.

IDPs are in the news. Every other week, the United Nations and aid organizations bring up their case. But the challenge is how to efficiently deliver aid to these people widely dispersed across a country at war, with poor roads and transport options.

Thailand has begun to help with a humanitarian aid corridor in late March that provided aid to 20,000 people in need in Karen State. It was delivered by the Myanmar Red Cross, with questions raised over whether such a process would deliver aid to areas outside the control of the Myanmar junta.

A number of activists and NGOs have called for aid to be delivered through non-state actors, particularly through NGOs and through the auspices of the National Unity Government or NUG, that nominally represents people who have fled their

homes due to the conflict. In the case of IDPs in Karen State, there are calls for aid to go through the Karen National Union or KNU, as many of the displaced people in the state are currently holding out in their territory.

Key players in the aid challenge are the Thai authorities and the donors, including various arms of the United Nations, and an array of small NGOs, many with their feet on the ground in Myanmar.

But the main problem in delivering aid to IDPs appears to lie with the reluctance of state and international bodies to engage with the small NGOs and the NUG. They are used to dealing with state actors, in this case the Myanmar junta and the Myanmar Red Cross.

Activists and NGOs say that unless more flexibility is allowed in the equation, making a difference to the lives of IDPs will continue to be a tough call.

EDITORIAL

mizzima

WEEKLY

Managing Director and Editor In-Chief
Soe Myint

Managing Editor
Thaw Zin Tun

Network Engineer
Wai Min Han

Video and Graphics Editor
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

General Manager
No No Lin

Mizzima Weekly is published by
Mizzima s.r.o

Address:
Salvatorska 931/8,
Stare Mesto, 11000,
Praha 1, Czech Republic

Contact email:
sm@mizzima.com

Phone/Signal/WhatsApp
+420 608 616688

CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

3 EDITORIAL

6 THAI CONCERNS Myawaddy conflict affects Myanmar's neighbour

12 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR
Analysis & Insight

16 CORE DEVELOPMENTS
Report from a conflict zone in Kawthoolei - Insight Myanmar

19 Junta Vice President U Henry Van Thio retires

20 Junta wields fear as a weapon with killing of civilians in Myanmar's Sagaing

22 Myanmar ethnic armed group in Shan State executes three personnel

23 EU criticises MNDA executions

24 Resistance forces disrupt Myanmar junta trade routes, says junta leader

25 Myanmar junta stoking ethnic tension in Rakhine State



27 Bangladesh repatriates Myanmar troops after fighting on border

28 COMMENTARY
India needs to protect its strategic stakes in unstable Myanmar

32 ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
Southeast Asia bakes in unusually hot weather

34 With motorbikes banned, Yangon delivery riders struggle in heatwave

35 Post-WWII order on 'brink of collapse': Amnesty head

37 COLUMNS
INSIGHT MYANMAR – Taming the tiger

38 JUNTA WATCH

39 SOCIAL WATCH

Cover photo of Thai military on the Myanmar border at Mae Sot by AFP





Thai military protect the border.
Photo: AFP

THAI CONCERNS MYAWADDY CONFLICT AFFECTS MYANMAR'S NEIGHBOUR

Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara has been busy, caught up in the Myanmar-Thailand border crisis. Last week on 23 April, he was once again in Mae Sot, this time with VIPs in tow, to assess first-hand the spill-over from the conflict between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its political arm the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar junta over the crucial border trade hub of Myawaddy.

Initial cheers of success by the KNU earlier in April have been dampened by military action from the junta that saw them retake an important post, Khlara 275 or Infantry Battalion 275, from the resistance. With the help of the border guard force, this appears to have put the town back into junta hands.

The KNU's Myawaddy resistance operation had just been a few weeks in the making – a high profile battle for a crucial trading hub – that joins the Brotherhood Alliance's Operation 1027 in northern Shan State and the Arakan Army push on Rakhine State as significant challenges to the junta's military, seemingly stretched to breaking point.

Thailand has a number of reasons for concern, as the Myawaddy conflict spills in one form or another into Thai territory and tests Thailand-Myanmar relations, and impacts the economy. The Mae Sot-Myawaddy border gateway is reported to handle \$1 billion in trade annually.

SECURITY ISSUES

Thailand had a message for the Myanmar players across the border on Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree's visit to Mae Sot last week. On this 23 April trip he was accompanied by Defence Minister Sutin Klungsang and Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

In a press conference at Mae Sot International Airport, the defence minister warned Myanmar's junta and rebel groups against using its territory for "their own sake".

Thailand wants to prevent Myanmar armed groups spilling over the border – and prevent a repeat of Myanmar fighter jets dangerously intruding into Thai air space.

The escalating violence in Myanmar has sent refugees fleeing across the border into Thailand. Junta air strikes on 20 and 21 April, in response to the capture by the KNU and its allies of junta strongholds in Myawaddy, sent about 3,000 people fleeing over the Thai border seeking safety.

Thai Minister of Defence Sutin, speaking at the conference on Tuesday last week, said they were able

to have a discussion and send a message to the other side – namely the Myanmar junta and ethnic groups – regarding whether there are planes to be flown in the area.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Thailand supported thousands of Myanmar citizens who fled the fighting in Myawaddy over the last three weeks. The situation was temporary, with the aim that these refugees would return to Myawaddy once stability is regained in the town – whether under KNU control or junta control.

Thailand has an ongoing challenge with policing the Tak Province-Karen State border in large part due to the ease of crossing the river. Thai military and police are normally active in patrolling the porous border, with the focus on security, and the prevention of the trade in illegal goods, not least narcotics.

On 24 April, the Thai authorities said that they had closed refugee camps where war refugees were accepted on humanitarian grounds after the last batch of these refugees returned back to Myanmar. These refugees fled to Thailand after the war broke out in Myawaddy.

The Thai authorities accepted these Myanmar refugees at five camps opened for them in Mae Sot when they fled from fighting in Myawaddy. And then these refugees returned home daily in dribs and drabs when the fighting receded in Myawaddy. A volunteer who is helping these refugees said that the last batch of these refugees was sent back to Myanmar on 24 April.

The Thai Red Cross branch office in Mae Sot District said that they had closed the donation centre which was open for accepting relief supplies and cash donations.

DIPLOMATIC PUSH

The Myawaddy border crisis has provided Thailand with the opportunity to act as a mediator in the Myanmar crisis that has impacted Thailand and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Foreign Minister Parnpree told last week's Mae Sot press conference that initial discussions had already taken place with various parties in Myanmar, including the military government and ethnic groups, some of which are armed, and that Thailand was also looking to enlist support from ASEAN.

Parnpree raised an issue that has proved controversial – the failed efforts of ASEAN to make progress through their 5-Point Consensus – an agreement signed by the Myanmar junta but one that

has borne no fruit.

The foreign minister said he had been in touch with ASEAN and that he expected a response soon, and possibly a forum meeting.

Analysts, academics and activists have been calling on Thailand to develop a plan to tackle the Myanmar crisis.

Chalida Tajaroensuk, director of the People's Empowerment Foundation, told BenarNews, an RFA-affiliated news service, that Thailand needed to look beyond immediate issues and engage with a broader range of stakeholders.

"The Myanmar military is faltering significantly and it's almost certain that there will be a transition to a federal system. The Thai government is lacking a

long-term plan, mostly addressing immediate issues," Chalida said. "Thailand should elevate its stance, such as hosting a special ASEAN meeting to gather opinions from various countries, involving other sectors including civil society, the media, and even organizations from Myanmar."

AID CORRIDOR

Thailand has been both praised and criticized over its efforts to develop the beginnings of a humanitarian aid corridor to deliver food, water, medicine and shelter to people in need in Myanmar, primarily internally displaced persons or IDPs. A recent convoy crossed the border through Myawaddy to deliver supplies to the Myanmar Red Cross. Concerns were voiced that



Myawaddy residents flee across the river into Thailand. Photo: AFP

this aid would not reach areas outside the control of the junta. However, the KNU did issue a statement, after the Thai delivery, saying aid was received in an area under their control.

NGO activist Chalida said a broader approach to aid was needed, with multiple aid locations. There are said to be at least 2.5 million IDPs spread out in various regions of Myanmar.

"We should look beyond Myawaddy and even engage in talks with the National Unity Government (NUG), as it's clear that the military government cannot sustain itself any longer," she told BenarNews.

HOPING FOR NORMALCY

Given the latest developments, in which the KNLA has withdrawn from the junta post on what they called humanitarian grounds, there appeared to be temporary calm.

"The situation has improved in the past couple of days and we are happy to see it under the good care of the agencies on the ground," said Minister of the Interior Anutin Charnvirakul at Tuesday's conference last week, reported RFA. "We look forward to the normalcy that will come in the days ahead."

Anutin noted that tourists could safely visit Mae Sot and claimed that border trade was still flowing.

"This is Thai sovereign territory and we are well-prepared to respond to any eventuality," he said.

That said, both Myanmar players – the KNLA and the junta – remain in a touchy position with both jostling for position over this important trade hub.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP, RFA

Since this story was written, Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree has stepped down from his government position.



Minister of Interior Anutin, centre, with Foreign Minister Parnpree, left, in Mae Sot. Photo: AFP



Aung San Suu Kyi - photo taken when she was in government. Photo: AFP

THE MYSTERY OF THE 'HOUSE ARREST' OF THE LADY

There is uncertainty over the story of State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint being moved from prison to their respective homes on the evening of 16 April. The report lacks many details on how they were moved and where they are, but it sparked public interest. Till now, the mystery of why and how these moves took place remains.

The junta's spokesperson, Major General Zaw Min Tun, didn't answer the question straight away, but he told foreign media representatives in Yangon on the night of April 15 that "we have severe temperature conditions in prisons. It is not only former President U Win Myint and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who are concerned about these prisoners who need it due to their health conditions; after that, the Ministry of Home Affairs is looking for ways to reduce heat stress for our elderly prisoners."

Since March, the temperature in Naypyidaw has been at highs of between 38 and 42 degrees Celsius, which is reportedly the highest level in Myanmar.

Naypyidaw prison is six miles away from the Presidential Office, which is currently occupied by the coup leader Min Aung Hlaing. The prison is in the middle of an open-air space without shady trees in the vicinity.

Aung San Suu Kyi had been detained in a separate building in the prison ward. She reportedly refused to have an air conditioner installed unless other prisoners also had them installed.

News regarding Aung San Suu Kyi gains public interest but there tends to be something of a black hole and suppression by the junta. Most of the news quotes anonymous sources and the junta's spokesperson, Major General Zaw Min Tun, who is known to be a spin doctor.

April 17 is the first day of the Burmese new year, and there were rumours of the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint spreading among the Burmese. However, only a handful of activists were released with the junta's amnesty, but no news was released about the State Counselor and the president having a reduction in their sentences.

So, at this stage the question remains: where are Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint? Mizzima has investigated this question.

When it comes to Aung San Suu Kyi, there appear to be three possible locations: (1) Suu Kyi's residence in Yangon; (2) her residence in Naypyidaw; and (3) the temporary location where she was detained shortly before being sent to prison.

There are still soldiers guarding her house at No. 54 University Avenue Road in Yangon, and no one is passing through the closed gate. Sources close to her and her party, the National League for Democracy, told Mizzima that she wasn't sent back to Yangon.

In Naypyidaw, she lived in A-33 Myananbonthar Street, Zeyatheikdi Ward, which is in the surrounding area of a complex for ministers and deputy ministers ranking in the government, until before the coup. The residents and neighbours say it is quiet and she wasn't sent back there.

However, prior to her imprisonment, she was shortly detained at a secret location in Naypyidaw, moved from her official residence there, and sent to prison. Although Mizzima can't verify this secret location, it was used to then take her to the special court in Naypyidaw council from there, passing through a heavily guarded street from the side of Latloketaung Tawya, nearby Yazahtarni Road.

There appears to be no significant security personnel presence except for a soldier and one police officer guarding the road. Yazahtarni road connects to Naypyidaw military command and Naypyidaw Council, which is a complex of offices and courts.

Sources in Naypyidaw told Mizzima that she looks like she was temporarily moved out of prison, but it is unclear whether she is now under house arrest.

Likewise, Win Myint was reportedly moved out of prison in Taungoo but no one knows where he is now.

Rumours swirl about General Soe Win's fate

Questions are being raised about why Vice Senior General Soe Win, the junta's second-in-command, has not been seen in public since 3 April.

His latest no-show was at a Union Government meeting held at the State Administration Council (SAC) Chairman's Office in Naypyitaw on the morning of 22 April. As the Vice Chairman of the State Administration



Vice Senior General Soe Win.

Council (SAC) and the Deputy Defense Services Commander-in-Chief for the army General Soe Win would have been expected to attend the meeting.

The last time the 64-year-old General Soe Win was seen in public was on 3 April, at a parade ground ceremony at the Military Combat Training School (Ba Htoo) in southern Shan State, where he was seen meeting with officers.

On 8 April General Soe Win was visiting the junta's Southeastern Military Command Headquarters in Mawlamyine Town, Mon State when the resistance Alpha Bats Drone Force launched a drone attack on the base, according to military sources.

Reports suggest that General Soe Win was injured in the drone attack and required medical treatment, though the junta has not confirmed this.

The Alpha Bats Drone Force said that they attacked the Southeastern Military Command Headquarters

with two kamikaze drones at around 5:00 pm on 8 April, whilst General Soe Win was attending an operational meeting with other senior junta officers.

According to the Alpha Bats Drone Force, more than 30 junta soldiers were wounded and helicopters were damaged in the attack. However, Mizzima has been unable to verify these claims.

Two days after the attack, junta spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun announced that Soe Win was still fulfilling his security and defence duties.

But, despite these claims, General Soe Win has not been spotted on any trips or events since the attack on the Southeastern Military Command Headquarters. He was also not seen at any Thingyan water festival celebrations that he normally attended in previous years.

According to speculation and rumours General Soe Win may have been killed or severely injured during the attack.

Military and political analysts say that the junta might soon announce General Soe Win's retirement due to health issues, to address the rumours and uncertainties.

All that said, over three weeks after his "disappearance" Soe Win is reported to have been seen in Mawlamyine at a junta meeting.

Rumours are also swirling that Lieutenant-General Kyaw Swar Lin, the current Quartermaster-General, will be promoted to Deputy Defence Services Commander-in-Chief for the Army to replace General Soe Win. However, this claim is hard to verify at this stage.

Uncertainty surrounds 'fall of Myawaddy'

Myawaddy town, a focal point of recent turmoil in Myanmar, continues to witness escalating clashes between resistance forces and the State Administration Council (SAC) junta, resulting in significant humanitarian and geopolitical implications. The original cheers from the Karen National Union (KNU), have been tempered

after the junta won back an important junta position, No. 275 Khlara command, on 23 April.

The background to this particular development in the battle for Myawaddy is as follows.

On 19 April night, KNU-led resistance forces executed a strategic maneuver by launching a raid on the No. 2 Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge compound. The compound, housing estimated 200 SAC soldiers awaiting reinforcements, became the focal point of a fierce confrontation. The junta troops had to flee along the Thaungyin River as Thai authorities, who accepted previous times, rejected their entry into Thai territory.

This marked a departure from previous scenarios where SAC soldiers could seek refuge in Thai areas.

The skirmish persisted until the morning of 21 April, resulting in substantial casualties on the junta side, including the demise of Brigadier General Soe Min Htet, commander of the No (44) Light Infantry Division. Faced with mounting setbacks, the SAC forces increasingly relied on airstrikes conducted by Russian-made aircraft, including Mi-35 helicopters. The indiscriminate nature of these airstrikes was witnessed on 22 April when Myawaddy was targeted between



00:25 am to 01:00 am, leading to civilian casualties, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

The KNU-led resistance forces, on 23 April, made the decision to retreat from Myawaddy for two primary reasons. Firstly, to avoid civilian casualties from airstrikes, and secondly, to assault the “Aung Zeya” reinforced column, which was immobilized at the time on the eastern side of Dawna hills as they attempt to reclaim Myawaddy. Reportedly, the KNA—BGF forces brought the SAC soldiers into the No. 275 Battalion base and raised the SAC flag, signaling their success in reclaiming their headquarters from the resistance forces.

In terms of the reinforcement of the SAC, the convoy was still attempting to break through the Dawna Hills even though they met with staunch resistance, resulting in significant losses of personnel, vehicles and armour. Over 3,000 refugees sought sanctuary in Thailand, traversing the Thaungyin River and crossing the No. 1 Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge. The Thai Public Health Ministry reported an influx of 1,686 individuals on 20 April, necessitating coordinated efforts to provide shelter, sustenance, and medical assistance. The refugees were facing lack of clean water, food, and medicine. However, the Thai authorities reported that all of these refugees have returned to Myawaddy – signaling at least a temporary end to hostilities.

Reportedly, 35 wounded SAC soldiers were hospitalized in Mae Sot hospital, and the hospital administrator stated that they will provide their services indiscriminately.

At press time, it is still too early to assess the final outcome of this resistance drive to take this trade hub, though the junta now claims to be in charge.

The position of Colonel Saw Chit Thu’s Karen National Army (KNA) is unclear. The forces, who refused supplies from the SAC in January, currently control Myawaddy maintaining their positions near the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge and patrolling the city.

Amid the escalating tensions, Thai authorities have heightened vigilance along the border, deploying F-16s to patrol the border areas in Tak Province to safeguard national sovereignty.

On 23 April, Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, together with the interior minister and defence minister, made a visit to Mae Sot to investigate the situation on behalf of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN foreign ministers’ call for an immediate ceasefire on 18 April underscores what they consider to be a pressing need for diplomatic intervention to mitigate further bloodshed and address the humanitarian crisis engulfing Myawaddy and border areas.

As the conflict in Myawaddy town unfolds, it has impact beyond national borders, drawing regional stakeholders into a complex web of geopolitical, humanitarian, and diplomatic challenges.

Arakan Army makes further advances in Rakhine

In a recent escalation of conflict in Rakhine State, clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and the SAC forces have intensified, leaving a trail of casualties and destruction in their wake.

On 10 April, a skirmish erupted near Lone village in Ann township, close to the SAC’s Western Command Headquarters. Lasting approximately 30 minutes, the clash saw the junta forces defeated, prompting an airstrike as per their usual response whenever the junta suffers a defeat. The defeated soldiers retreated to their headquarters following the confrontation.

Simultaneously, another clash occurred on the same day near Kan Pyin Thar village in Maungdaw township, with AA claiming to have killed six junta soldiers and wounded eight during the battle.

The following day, yet another skirmish took place near Minbaw village in Ann township, resulting in casualties on both sides. SAC reported five soldiers killed, ten injured, while some AA members also sustained wounds.

In a significant development on 12 April, the Arakan Army (AA) seized the border guard police headquarters in Maungdaw township, located on the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, where a military commander and approximately 100 soldiers were stationed alongside 400 policemen. This operation, which was initiated on 25 March, saw the complete ousting of SAC forces.

During the battle, AA collected the bodies of slain SAC forces along with weapons and ammunition.

The conflict further escalated on 22 April, as a skirmish erupted between AA and junta troops approximately one mile from the Thahtay hydro power station in Thandwe township, near the famed Ngapali beach in southern Rakhine. This marks a significant expansion of AA's operations towards the southern part of the state.

Amidst the conflict, two Bangladeshi fishermen were shot by SAC navy personnel on 21 April while returning from fishing in the Bay of Bengal through the Naf River. One of the fishermen sustained serious injuries and was rushed to Cox's Bazar hospital for treatment.

In another incident, the SAC navy reportedly fired artillery at Dwecha village in Kyaukphyu township, resulting in the burning down of 28 houses on 21 April.

Meanwhile, on 20 April, 200 Rohingyas staged a protest in Sittwe, holding banners denouncing the Arakan Army. SAC soldiers and police provided security for the protest, which locals claim was orchestrated by SAC authorities who pressured the Muslim community to oppose the AA, amidst SAC's significant military losses.

DOUR ASSESSMENT

"Myanmar's Tatmadaw ranks high among the most shameful and pointless military institutions on Earth. It has been at war with the country's ethnic minorities for nearly eight decades, a record no other military can match - and it can't win," says Dominic Faulder, a veteran journalist who has followed Myanmar developments for decades.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



Our relaunch of Mizzima Weekly will provide 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.

- COVER STORY
- ANALYSIS & INSIGHT
- CORE DEVELOPMENTS
- ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
- WEEKLY COLUMNS

Click here to get 3 months Free Subscription!

SUBSCRIBE



Resistance fighter with a drone used for bombing.
Photo: Saw Htee Char - Insight Myanmar

REPORT FROM A CONFLICT ZONE IN **KAWTHOOLEI**

“BOMBING HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, AND RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IS AN INTERNATIONAL WAR CRIME; IT IS ALSO A BURMA ARMY TRADITION”
SAW HTEE CHAR

Saw Htee Char appeared recently on an Insight Myanmar podcast episode to discuss the conflict in Karen and Karenni State. He shares this essay submission, written on April 23, 2024, to update the most recent developments.

For decades Papun town was an island of Burmese military control in a district mostly under indigenous Karen control. It could only be maintained through a heavy army presence, consisting four battalions holding off the Karen National Liberation Army that ruled the rural areas. Then on March 27, 2024, after months of preparation, Karen forces stormed the town, overrunning the vast police barracks and driving occupation troops back into their fortified camps south of town.

Then began the hard work of wearing down and eclipsing those battalions. The first of those, Battalion 19, fell relatively quickly, only three days after the town was liberated. What Karen drones and mortars hadn't destroyed during the battle, junta airstrikes finished off afterward. Not a single room of any building remains intact. Roofs are collapsed, furniture and supplies are splintered and thrown around randomly. Locally-made Karen rocket shells lie among the ruins they helped create. The place is quiet, with the red, white, and blue Kawthoolei national flag flapping high on a pole above

a sign in Burmese that reads, “Morale and discipline must be maintained,” meant to inspire the troops in their occupation of the Karen town.

DRONE ATTACKS

Now the battle has progressed a short distance south to the next battalion camp. The battalions are arranged in a tight sequence along the paved road that leads south to Kamamaung, a smaller town on the border of two neighboring districts. Under the protection of a concrete bunker, a forward Karen command post has been set up. About a dozen soldiers and commanders occupy mats and furniture brought for the purpose. One of them operates a drone control console. Gunfire very close by is from enemy soldiers shooting at the Karen drone that flies over their position, pinpointing the exact location of everything and everyone in it. Just then two enormous booms shake the ground, signaling that another Karen drone has loosed its bombs on the enemy camp. A column of smoke rises among the buildings of the camp.

The crack Federal Wings drone People's Defense Force (PDF) is operating here, as it has alongside the Karen army in Dooplaya and other districts. Federal Wings flies large drones that can drop 120 mm mortar shells with impressive accuracy. These produce enormous explosions that splinter infrastructure inside the enemy camps. The local Karen battalions have drones of their own, but these carry a single 60 mm shell per sortie, and are not as accurate.

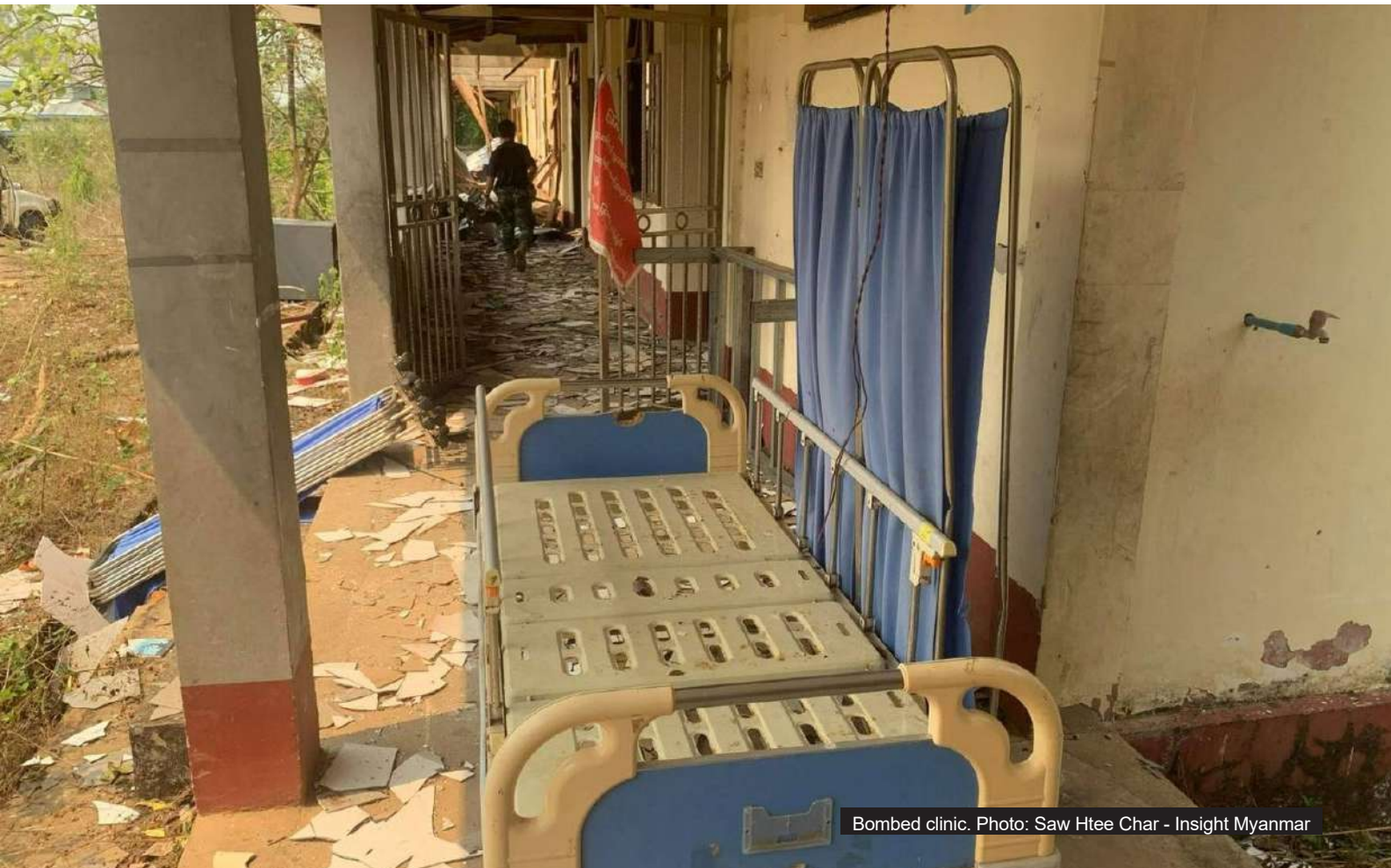
All day, each day, and into the evening, the explosions of drone bombs on the enemy camps can be heard even from many kilometers away beyond the far side of town. Night time is also punctuated by occasional blasts. There is no "safe hour" when the Burmese troops can move without worry around their camps or beyond. They live under siege, hiding in bunkers at all times. Water tanks are riddled with shrapnel and sniper holes. It is difficult to cook, sleep, excrete, or bathe in the dirt trenches. Existence for the occupation troops is no life. Their army can drop supplies to them by parachute from helicopters, but those parachutes are just as likely to drift to the Karen. Sniper fire makes landing the helicopters dangerous. On January 29 Karen snipers shot down a helicopter in Dooplaya District to the south, killing five senior junta officers on board.

STEP BY STEP

Day by day the Karen forces bomb, watch, and carefully position their soldiers, gauging the propitious moment to seize the next camp. It has been three weeks since the last one. Karen commanders are in no rush. Wearing down the enemy, reducing its numbers, destroying its supplies and infrastructure, depressing its morale, is preferable to the heavy losses likely if the assault is launched too soon.

Meanwhile, a couple of kilometers behind the lines, the town shows the signs of the junta's strategy of destroying places it cannot control. Large 500-pound bombs dropped by jets have leveled whole sections of downtown, particularly the commercial district. In a row of former shops, all the brick walls fell in one direction, but then at a certain point they all fell the opposite direction, indicating the shop in which the bomb hit. They are all equally flat now. Other shops across the street had their doors blown off, and someone has helped themselves to the merchandise inside.

A destroyed monastery marks the place where pro-junta civilians thought they would be safe from the bombing from their own side. They were wrong, eight of them were killed, others injured, and they have all now fled to the jungle alongside their Karen and Muslim



Bombed clinic. Photo: Saw Htee Char - Insight Myanmar

neighbors who felt no such privilege.

Outlying residential streets appear deceptively peaceful and normal, except for the fact that all doors are locked and nobody is home. They have all moved to the jungle north of town to be safe from the airstrikes. Civilians return individually on their motorcycles to retrieve supplies and items from home, then return to the jungle.

SAVING MATERIAL

In the properties of the former Burmese administration, the Karen authorities are said to have given their permission for the appropriation of whatever has not been destroyed. It is a strategy meant to save materials from likely bombing. The middle section of the public hospital is collapsed by an airstrike, but it had been evacuated some time before. Bombing hospitals, schools, and religious buildings is an international war crime; it is also a Burma army tradition. Medical supplies, storage bins, and furniture have been carted away from the vacant hospital. Whenever the new Karen administration begins its governance, buildings will need to be repaired, and perhaps some of the removed materials will be returned; others will need to be replaced.

At the district government office bomb damage is light, but all manner of furniture and other useful items are being removed by organizations and individuals, leaving mostly thick files of papers. The Burmese immigration, public health, public works, and other departmental offices were here. Some of this copious paperwork was the occupiers' means of controlling the civilian population. Its education system sought to replace the local Karen language with Burmese. Its public works extended roads into rural areas, over which its army could assert domination. The immigration department was actually a system of identifying and tracking the local people. The Burmese administration had made some effort at modernizing and beautifying the town, with concrete all-weather streets and attractive stainless signposts and large schools. It was hard for the population to appreciate these efforts, however, since they were part of a hated occupation. All the signs are in Burmese; the local culture was not recognized.

'BURMESE MONKS'

Notably unscathed by the bombing are some Buddhist monasteries and temples on the western side of town. They are beautiful. Their tended gardens, golden stupas, and ornate buildings radiate peace amid

the chaos of war. All the monks are gone, like the rest of the population, and locals call them "Burmese monks," foreigners, as if they were part of the occupation. Most of the people of Mutraw District are Christian. The large Karen Baptist Church lies outside of town to the north.

Still further from the front line, in the rubber tree plantations and the jungles north of town, local refugees from the town are camped in temporary bamboo structures they have erected quickly. Some have received some relief supplies from Karen and foreign support organizations. All of these are small, however, and their means limited.

The big international aid agencies are prevented from working here in liberated areas by their formal relationships with the illegal military regime. The United Nations and well-known crisis assistance NGOs all sign agreements with the regime under which they agree to work where, and with whom, the regime directs. Naturally it doesn't want them here or any other place it doesn't control. A few international organizations have opted to work across the border from neighboring countries, through these local partner organizations, signing no agreements with the illegal regime, nor paying it any fees or taxes, and reserving their right to direct their resources to where the refugees are located.

DEALING WITH THE WOUNDED

One small cross-border agency has set up a rear base for assisting the local refugees, another has installed a field surgical unit that serves wounded soldiers from both sides as well as civilians with regular health needs. Still another hybrid foreign-local group maintains a cadre of trained medics closer to the town, ready for each battle. Karen organizations from both Kawthoolei itself and Thailand mobilize and send small shipments of food, rain tarps, and other supplies. Though limited in size and resources, these are the organizations that have kept the three million conflict refugees alive during the three-year-plus war, throughout Myanmar. The multi-million-dollar UN and multi-national agencies are no-shows.

Each day brings the possibility of renewed airstrikes and further destruction. Everyone still in or near the town needs a safe cover to run to when that happens. Bunkers have been dug, and ravines and culverts are used during dry season. At the moment the enemy jets seem to be diverted to faraway hotspots in Myawaddy, Kachin, and Sagaing. The only aircraft in the past few days has been a propeller plane that flies around dropping smaller bombs out the window, a relatively low-tech form of terror from above. Most of

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

the explosions heard are from the Karen army's drone-bombing.

This report will rapidly become out of date. The Karen capture of the remaining camps may take some time, but it appears inevitable. The Burmese junta is rapidly exhausting its once-vast army, and is reduced to forcing unwilling conscripts into brief, nearly meaningless training, then sending them off to face battle-hardened ethnic armies and Peoples' Defence Forces against whom they stand little chance. The timing of the end is not clear, but the demise of the junta is. The persistence and patience of the Karen army's Brigade 5 in Papun is like that of the many fronts across Myanmar on which the junta is being driven steadily backward. The other Karen brigades are doing this also, as are the Kachin, Arakan, and Karenni armies and the

PDFs. Each force does its part, and their combined efforts add up to an unmistakable movement toward the eventual end of the dictatorship.

Check out the **Insight Myanmar Podcast**, which we notified our readers about in our last issue, here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/fa695df8-c254-489c-be8b-46332c49c2ff>

Check out the original report here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/burmadhammablog/2024/4/22/report-from-a-conflict-zone-in-kawthoolei>

JUNTA VICE PRESIDENT U HENRY VAN THIO RETIRES

Henry Van Thio. Photo: Mizzima

The junta's State Administration Council (SAC) has approved the retirement of Vice President U Henry Van Thio due to health concerns.

The SAC issued an official statement signed by Lieutenant General Aung Lin Dwe that announced Vice President (2) U Henry Van Thio's retirement on medical grounds, in accordance with Section 419 of the Constitution, according to a report by the junta-controlled Myawaddy News on 22 April.

The statement gave no details regarding Henry Van Thio's health problems or who will succeed him.

Henry Van Thio was elected as a National League for Democracy (NLD) member of parliament for Chin State Constituency (3) in the 2015 general elections. Following the 2015 elections he was appointed Vice President (2).

Following the 1 February 2021 coup President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, both of the NLD, were arrested and removed from their posts by the junta. But the junta did not arrest Henry Van Thio or remove him from his Vice President's post.

But despite this, following the coup Henry Van Thio disappeared from public view for two and a half years until he attended the junta's National Defense and Security Council meeting on 31 July 2023.

Following his participation in the Security Council meeting the NLD expelled him from the party. Subsequently, he also attended the Security Council meeting held on 31 January 2024.



Man with a child killed in junta bombing in Sagaing.
Photo: AFP

JUNTA WIELDS FEAR AS A WEAPON WITH **KILLING OF CIVILIANS** IN MYANMAR'S SAGAING

New data shows the military killed nearly 90 people in the region in the first quarter of 2024.

Junta troops arrested and killed nearly 90 civilians in northern Myanmar's Sagaing region during the first quarter of 2024, according to data compiled by RFA Burmese, including several elderly villagers and others who were unable to flee military raids.

A stronghold of the rebellion, the Sagaing region has put up some of the stiffest resistance to junta rule since the military's February 2021 coup d'état, and has also endured some of the military's most brutal atrocities during the country's three years of ensuing civil war.

Observers told RFA that the military is attempting to create public animosity towards rebel forces in Sagaing, where its troops have suffered heavy losses

in recent months.

Now, new data compiled by RFA shows that junta troops arrested and killed at least 86 civilians in nine Sagaing townships on the 101 days between Jan. 1 and April 10, or nearly one a day.

The townships of Kawlin, Shwebo and Taze suffered the highest number of casualties over the period, according to the data, which does not include civilians killed by fighting, airstrikes and heavy artillery.

In one of the latest incidents, a combined force of junta troops and pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militiamen raided Shwebo's Shar Tau village on the evening of April 6, arresting and executing nine civilians, residents told RFA.

'THEY KILLED INDISCRIMINATELY'

A woman from Shar Taw said she was irreparably traumatized by the capture and killing of the villagers as they fled indiscriminate shooting by junta forces.

"I was going crazy that day, darting through gunfire and shells with the children," said the woman who, like others interviewed for this report, spoke on condition of anonymity due to security concerns. "At times, I've contemplated ending my own life. It feels like there's no escape."

The victims from Shar Taw included seven villagers aged between 50 and 90, and two people between the ages of 20 and 30, she said.

Two of the victims – both in their 80s – were burned to death in their homes and four others were shot dead in the village. The junta convoy detained a father and son, and a third man, and executed them after leaving Shar Taw.

The woman told RFA that the junta attacked her village entirely without prompting.

"Without doing anything to them, they make problems with us, killing people," she said. "They killed indiscriminately, even those who have never seen a gun in their lives, those struggling to make ends meet, the mentally ill, and those who rely on their neighbors for support."

FEAR AS A WEAPON

According to the list compiled by RFA of civilians arrested and killed in the first quarter of 2024, 22 people died in Kawlin, 19 in Shwebo, 14 in Taze, 10 in Monywa, seven in Khin-U, six in Kanbalu, five in Tabayin, two in Ye-U, and one in Kani. Three of the victims were women and the rest were men.

A member of the anti-junta People's Defense Force, or PDF, in Shwebo told RFA that the junta is intentionally killing civilians in a bid to stir up public animosity towards the rebellion.

"We [rebels] are constantly on the move, mirroring their mobility, which leads to regular confrontations," said the PDF member, who also declined to be named.

"When the junta forces face defeat, they unleash their fury on civilian areas like villages, resorting to arson and destruction."

Kyaw Win, executive director of Burma Human Rights Network, said he believes the military is also using fear as a weapon to fight back against an increasing number of rebel attacks on its forces – particularly in Sagaing and Magway regions.

"Sagaing and Magway are at the forefront of the resistance against the junta's army," he said, adding that the military's "manpower is dwindling" after suffering "significant losses" in the two regions. "While setbacks have occurred elsewhere, these regions appear to be under intensified targeting. The brutality serves to instill fear and dissuade people from challenging their authority."

Attempts by RFA to contact junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun and Nyunt Win Aung, the junta's minister of social affairs and spokesperson for Sagaing region, regarding the arrest and killing of civilians, went unanswered Wednesday.

Legal experts and human rights activists have noted that the arrest and killing of civilians in conflict areas constitutes a grave offense punishable by death, as stipulated in both the Myanmar Armed Forces Act of 1959 and the Geneva Convention.

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

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

MYANMAR ETHNIC ARMED GROUP IN SHAN STATE EXECUTES THREE PERSONNEL

A Myanmar ethnic minority armed group has executed three of its personnel following a public trial held in a town captured from the military in January, media affiliated to the group has reported.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to an array of ethnic minority armed groups, some of which have been battling the military for decades for autonomy and control of resources like jade or opium.

On Wednesday 10 "military personnel" went on public trial for offences including murder, extortion and kidnap in the northeastern city of Laukkai, according to media affiliated with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

The MNDAA is an ethnic Chinese group that holds territory in northern Shan state, close to China's Yunnan province.

A video released by The Kokang media outlet late Wednesday showed the men shackled and wearing identical tracksuits with placards around their necks detailing their names and crimes.

A crowd of onlookers were shown gathered in front of the stage where a man in military uniform read out the sentencing.

Three of the men were sentenced to death for murder and for selling weapons and ammunition stolen from the MNDAA, The Kokang said.

The others received jail sentences.

The trial was an "important measure to educate people not to participate in any crimes against the law," according to The Kokang.

AFP has contacted a source close to the MNDAA for comment.

In January around 2,000 junta troops surrendered Laukkai to the MNDAA following weeks of fighting in one of the military's biggest defeats.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing made a name for himself in Laukkai in 2009 when, as a regional commander, he expelled the MNDAA from the town.

The military then installed a militia that got rich producing drugs and selling a potent cocktail of gambling and sex to visitors from across the Chinese border.

In recent months the town became a hotbed of online scam compounds staffed by citizens of China and other countries often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots.

China - a major ally and arms supplier of the junta - repeatedly told Myanmar's military to crack down on the industry.

The MNDAA offensive that recaptured Laukkai and swathes of other territory from the military had China's tacit backing over the junta's failure to act, according to analysts.

The MNDAA has said it will stamp out all scam compounds.

AFP

EU CRITICISES MNDAA EXECUTIONS

Photo: Alexandre Lellamand

The European Union (EU) issued a statement condemning the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) following reports that the MNDAA had executed three of its soldiers on 24 April immediately after a public trial.

Below is the 25 April statement by the EU:

There have been worrisome reports indicating that the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) sentenced to death ten individuals, three of whom may have been executed on 24 April.

The European Union condemns in the strongest terms the use of death penalty and wishes to reaffirm its strong and unequivocal opposition to it, at all times and under all circumstances. Death penalty is an inhuman and degrading punishment that represents an ultimate denial of human dignity.

An effort integral to the aspirations for federal democracy should be to uphold the rule of law in accordance with high international standards.

mizzima WEEKLY Analysis & Insight



**3 month
Subscription
for 12 Issues
\$9 USD**

Our relaunch of Mizzima Weekly will provide 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.

- COVER STORY
- ANALYSIS & INSIGHT
- CORE DEVELOPMENTS
- ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
- WEEKLY COLUMNS

**Click here to get 3 months
Free Subscription!**

SUBSCRIBE



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

RESISTANCE FORCES DISRUPT MYANMAR JUNTA TRADE ROUTES, SAYS JUNTA LEADER

Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing said, on 22 April, that the Myanmar economy is suffering due to blocked trade routes, economic sanctions and unscrupulous people causing a lack of stability and peace in the country,

He said that if people can overcome these difficulties trade will improve and the value of the kyat will rise. He added that the junta is striving to foster peace and stability by enforcing the rule of law, managing the price of food and essential goods and trying to increase the value of the kyat.

One of the reasons Myanmar is facing economic difficulties is because defence forces have taken over some towns where there are border trade posts and fighting near others has stopped or greatly reduced cross-border trade.

The junta has lost control of six border trade crossings since the end of 2023, due to offensives launched by ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and defence forces.

Currently, the Muse border crossing to China, in northern Shan State, is controlled by the Three Brotherhood Alliance.

Chinshwehaw, another border crossing to China in northern Shan State is controlled by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

The Lweje border crossing to China in Kachin State is controlled by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

The junta has also lost control of two border crossings with Thailand.

Myawaddy in Karen State, across the border from Thailand's Mae Sot, and its surrounding areas are being controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) which recently stated that it would no longer support the junta.

The Mese border crossing with Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province in Karenni State has been occupied by Karenni Defence Forces.

On the border with India, the Chin National Army (CNA) has occupied the town of Rikhawdar in Chin State, across the border from Zokhawthar in Mizoram State, India.

In the 2023 to 2024 financial year, ending 31 March 2024, the cross-border trade at these six border crossings was over US\$4 billion and it made up 52 per cent of the entire cross-border trade that financial year, which was worth about US\$7.6 billion, according to the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI).

This was about US\$800 million or nearly 10 per cent less than the total border trade the previous financial year, from 2022 to 2023, when cross-border trade was worth about US\$ 8.4 billion.

But, trade is not only being disrupted at these border crossings. Trade is also being disrupted because rebel forces control the roads leading to the border, or there is fighting along those roads, meaning goods cannot freely get to and from the borders. Even on trade routes in Myanmar still under junta control, there is frequent fighting.

Traders said that the chaotic situation at border

trade posts and on the routes to the borders has hit Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) particularly hard and caused supply chain disruptions and shortages of imported goods. It has also affected trading partners in neighbouring countries.

The junta Ministry of Economy and Commerce has told traders to change their trading routes and use sea routes rather than going overland.

The junta's Directorate of Trade said that it would

allow goods to travel to and from Thailand via container ships sailing between Yangon and Kawthaung, the most southern town in Myanmar, from where goods can still cross freely into and out of Thailand.

The Myanmar Port Authority also announced that due to the expected increase in maritime trade, it would increase its docking capacity for container ships so that it could accommodate 50 container ships in the month of April.



MYANMAR JUNTA STOKING ETHNIC TENSION IN RAKHINE STATE

Civilians flee fighting in Rakhine State.
Photo: AFP

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) has released a statement saying that it is concerned that the Myanmar junta is stoking inter-ethnic tensions between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities.

Below is the 25 April ARNA statement:

Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) expresses its serious concern over the simmering tensions, between ethnic Rohingya and Rakhine communities, being fuelled by the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA).

The Rohingya people who have long been subjected to crimes against humanity and genocide, perpetrated by the Myanmar military, its partners or non-state actors, are now trapped in limbo as the fighting between Myanmar military and Arakan Army intensifies in Northern Arakan. Besides, there are

other minor factions involved in the conflicts making the ground situation more complicated.

The military is trying to further divide the Rohingya and Rakhine on ethnic and religious lines setting one people against the other. In some places of Arakan the military has forced the ordinary Rohingyas to stage public protests against AA in order to exploit the situation when it is facing defeat.

In this situation, the military has horrendously abducted and forcibly recruited more than 1,000 Rohingya youths from across the Arakan since February 2024, particularly from the townships of Kyaukphyu, Sittwe and Buthidaung. Most recruits were picked up through night raids from IDP camps such as, South Ohn Taw Gyi, North Ohn Taw Gyi, Baw Du Pha I, Baw Du Pha II, Hman Si Taung, Thea Chaung, and Thet Kay Pyin. These unfortunates are being used as

human shields in the frontlines and a number of them have been killed, maimed or injured.

There are reports that the military is forcing the Rohingya recruits or villagers to burn Rakhine homes, buildings or villages, and Rakhine villagers have allegedly responded in kind by burning Rohingya villages. It is particularly disturbing!

Forcing protected persons to serve as human shields is a war crime according to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, and the 1998 Rome Statute. We strongly condemn the Myanmar military for forced conscription of Rohingya men and boys, and demand to cease its attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Conversely, AA has now conscripted about 100 Rohingya youths and ordered the terrified villagers to provide them at least one person from each household, apparently for using as human shields. Rohingya are in a particularly worrisome predicament as the AA used to position itself in and around their villages effectively inviting military attacks, shelling or airstrikes on civilians. AA fighters have seldom threatened the Rohingya villagers either to comply with their demands or leave for Bangladesh.

AA continues to deny 'Rohingya' ethnic identity as evident in the statements or communications of AA's responsible leaders, including the recent interview of the AA Commander-in-chief Gen. Twan Mrat Naing, calling the Rohingya people 'Bengalis', the term used by the military. It is objectionable that he has spread disinformation and propaganda on social media a false news published in The New Indian Express on April 15 alleging that "Islamic terrorists" have taken 1,720 Hindus and Buddhists hostage, thus fostering hatred or causing untoward effects among the communities.

In recent months AA carried out sporadic killings or detained several Rohingya villagers in North Arakan. On the evening of April 17, AA had arrested 5 innocent Rohingya civilians from the Abuja hamlet of Tha Yet Oak village tract in Maungdaw Township. They were all killed, and on April 22, the villagers found their dead bodies near a shrimp farm close to the residence of the village administrator U Tun Aye Maung. We condemn all unlawful killings.

Time and again the AA's spokesperson U Khine Thu Kha warns that except AA no armed organisations will be allowed to operate on the soil of Arakan. This announcement is absurd when Arakan is a home to diverse peoples. It is shocking that good sense does not prevail yet in the minds of the Rakhine leadership; they should come up with a clear policy towards

Rohingya people in the interest of peaceful coexistence in Arakan, which is "a living together in peace rather than in constant hostility".

Since January 23, 2020, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ, World Court) ordered provisional measures on Myanmar 'to take all measures within its power' to protect the Rohingya — whom the Court described as 'extremely vulnerable' — as a part of the ongoing genocide case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar, there have been continual breaches of the order over the past four years. The Court recalled that the State's obligation to prevent and punish the crime of genocide apply at all times, including in situation of internal armed conflict.

The UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk has rightly said: "Rakhine State has once again become a battleground involving multiple actors, and civilians are paying a heavy price, with Rohingya at particular risk;"... "What is particularly disturbing is that whereas in 2017, the Rohingya were targeted by one group, they are now trapped between two armed factions who have a track record of killing them. We must not allow the Rohingya to be targeted again."

We remind that the warring parties have a responsibility to distinguish between combatants and civilians in accordance with the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). "Anyone who is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict is a civilian, and the civilian population comprises all persons who are not combatants... They shall remain immune from military attacks."

We urge the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) for dialogues in order to maintain peace and security in Arakan, to develop mutually beneficial cooperation between Rohingya and Rakhine, and to forge a better, brighter future for all peoples of Arakan, including ethnic Chin, Mro, Khami, Kaman, Dainnet and Hindu etc.



Bangladesh repatriates Myanmar nationals. Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH REPATRIATES MYANMAR TROOPS AFTER FIGHTING ON BORDER

Bangladesh sent home nearly 300 Myanmar troops and civil servants on Thursday last week who fled across the border to escape attacks on their outposts near the frontier between the two countries.

Violent clashes between soldiers of the Arakan Army, an armed group belonging to an ethnic minority, and junta forces since late last year saw hundreds of fleeing troops cross into Bangladesh.

Government officials told AFP that a Myanmar-flagged ship carrying soldiers, police and civil servants departed from the river port of Naniarchar on Thursday.

"All 288 troops, which mostly include Myanmar's Border Guard Police and some army soldiers and immigration officials, left Naniarchar at around 6 am," a senior government official told AFP.

Two other government officials confirmed the departures to AFP. All three spoke on condition of anonymity, citing security reasons.

Bangladesh has stepped up security along its border with Myanmar, fearing that the conflict there could trigger another major influx of Rohingya Muslim refugees caught in the fighting.

The country is already home to an estimated one million stateless Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled a brutal 2017 crackdown that is now subject to a genocide investigation at the International Court of Justice.

Neighbouring India deported last month dozens of Myanmar nationals who fled a recent surge of fighting between the junta and fighters from an alliance of ethnic minority groups near its shared border.

Thousands of civilians have fled the fighting in Myanmar by crossing into neighbouring India, Bangladesh and Thailand.

AFP



Myanmar nationals protest against the military junta in Delhi. Photo: AFP

INDIA NEEDS TO PROTECT ITS STRATEGIC STAKES IN 'UNSTABLE' MYANMAR

Gautam Mukhopadhaya

Over three years since the Myanmar February 2021 military coup that installed a military appointed State Administration Council (SAC) to govern Myanmar, and six months since the coordinated offensive of three Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) representing the Kokang and Palaung ethnicities in northern Shan and the Arakan Army in Rakhine state grouped together as the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA) under Operation 1027, the Myanmar Army has lost more ground to EROs than at any time in its history, and the military government appears to be in a serious crisis that could signal its potential collapse.

However, there are several factors inhibiting a total defeat of the Army or even a balkanisation of Myanmar, including a restraining Chinese hand; uneven progress of the armed opposition in ethnic areas and the Bamar heartland; lack of significant territorial control in the heartland that they could use to establish a seat for the National Unity Government (NUG); opposition restraint and military limitations; their own decision to preserve Burma's unity and integrity through a federal

democratic union reflected in a Federal Democratic Union Charter adopted in 2021; and the Myanmar Army's counter-offensives and willingness to use force to prevent the inevitable.

Nevertheless, India must now prepare for all eventualities and work with new players and realities especially along its borders and in the heartland, but also further to be more active diplomatically to preserve a united Burma that is in its interests. The opposition embodied in the NUG, the National Union Consultative Committee (NUCC) and a host of Civil Society and professional organisations, is determined to press its advantage.

While an imminent breakdown of the Army is unlikely, and the vast majority of towns are still under military control, there has been a paradigmatic shift in the status quo since the last quarter of 2023. Until September 2023, an estimated 50 per cent or more of rural Myanmar was out of the military's hands, but the opposition held no major towns or border trading posts. That changed with the Operation 1027 coordinated military operation (named after the date of its launch) of

the TBA that has triggered similar offensives elsewhere.

Since October 2023, the Myanmar Army has lost around 50 towns to the armed opposition including most border trading posts on the Myanmar-China, India-Myanmar, and Myanmar-Thailand borders, most recently, Lejwe on the Kachin-Yunnan border, and Myawaddy, one of the most lucrative, on Thai border. Until last week it had recovered the administrative centre in the heartland, Kawlin, at great civilian cost using punitive artillery, scorched earth tactics and air power against civilians to avenge defeats by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), though there are signs that it is fighting back tenaciously in Kayin and Rakhine states, in particular Kawkaik, Buthidaung and Maungdaw, though Myawaddy looks like it is back in Army hands.

As things stand now, the Myanmar Army is facing attacks in ethnic areas on virtually all sides: the TBA in Shan State in the north east; the Karenni and Karen EAOs and Bago PDFs in the east from close to the Myanmar capital, Naypyidaw, up to Myanmar's borders with Thailand; the Chins in Chin State in the west across Mizoram and Manipur; the Arakan Army, part of the TBA, in Rakhine, in the south-west along the Bay of Bengal; and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) which too has made significant advances lately in the

north.

Not all anti-government EAOs have joined the resistance on account of internal frictions and tactical considerations, such as the major north and south Shan armies, the SSPP and RCSS, and some are working at cross-purposes, none other than militias raised by the Myanmar Army from its affiliates, known as the Pyu Saw Htee, who actually support the military that is ruling by pure force.

Of these, the Arakan Army and a variety of Chin Defence Forces bordering Mizoram and Manipur with whom they share ethnic and kinship ties, as also the KIA, and the Sagaing Forum of Bamar PDFs that straddle west to east and north-south Indian connectivity initiatives such as the Kaladan project and Trilateral Highway, are of critical importance to us. We should reach out to them if we have not already done so discreetly. Although some of them feel let down by India in the past and have established working relationships with the Chinese, all would welcome greater Indian interest and cooperation with them, not least to limit Chinese pressures and influence. Failure to do so, could make them turn to forces unfriendly to us.

The Myanmar Army may be taking comfort from a two-track civil war, a fast track in the peripheral ethnic areas that it might be prepared to give up, and a slower



Indian border forces on patrol.
Photo: AFP



Myanmar refugees take shelter on Indian territory. Photo: AFP

one in the Bamar heartland that has not yet entered its core 'fortresses' of the Irrawaddy Basin and coasts that it would defend at all costs. But that may be changing. The port town of Sittwe has been under pressure for close to a month, and in the last two weeks, top military targets including an air base in the capital, Naypyidaw, and the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces and the CDS Min Aung Hlaing himself have faced drone and rocket attacks in visits to a Regional Command in Malwamyine and the Defence Services Academy in Pyin Oo Lwin respectively that could not have been possible without insider complicity.

There have also been purges of high military officials for alleged corruption, and a few days back, the arrest of a powerful senior ex-General and later Agriculture Minister in the U Thein Sein government and two others on mysterious grounds, as also the occasional public demonstration by hard-line monks against Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing suggesting that all is not well within the normally monolithic and opaque Army high command too.

The decision last week to relocate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint from a high security prison to house arrest may mark a belated signal to the international community that they need help. It is unlikely to be a signal to the NUG, opposition or even the armed resistance to negotiate or enter into a dialogue that in any case is unlikely to lead anywhere.

For the latter, the end of military rule in any form in favour of civilian rule, and return to the barracks, is non-negotiable.

The most optimistic scenario to preserve the erstwhile Tatmadaw or Myanmar Military is for a significant section of it to split and join the opposition on the latter's terms along with the all the national institutions it has monopolized since 1962, but given the hermetic, almost Masonic character of the Myanmar Army, such a scenario cannot be banked on. A dissolution of the Myanmar Army in toto, (like that of Saddam Hussein's in Iraq) would leave a vacuum that would be a dream for transnational criminal interests, and can be in no one's interest.

The crisis in the Army is also down its ranks. Ground forces have been severely depleted by desertions, low recruitment, surrenders (including one Regional Command in Shan State) and loss of morale. Hundreds have crossed over to India, Bangladesh, Thailand and even China, only to be sent back. The opposition has used light arms and drones to great effect even reportedly bringing down attack aircraft and helicopters in Kachin and Kayin states.

The SAC's attempt to contain this by introducing a conscription law, seem to be floundering with assassinations of administration officials, bribing of officials to avoid recruitment, potential recruits attempting to flee the country, more youth crossing

over to the armed opposition and credible allegations of vulnerable populations (like the Rohingya in Rakhine State) being used as human shields against ethnic forces.

The Indian strategic community within and outside government has been slow to accept that the Myanmar military is in a cul-de-sac; that its only formula of keeping Burma united by force is having the opposite effect; that unlike 1988-90, it will not be able to suppress the popular revulsion against military rule in favour of democracy and federalism; and that the only way to keep Myanmar together is through the will of the Myanmar people for a federal, democratic union that most constituents, but not all, have already adopted.

It has failed to realise that Myanmar is in the grip of a revolution that marks the culmination of its struggle for independence that was arrested by the Tatmadaw, and that could change the face of Myanmar (like the end of the Soviet Union or the break-up of former Yugoslavia) and spell the end of Myanmar as we know it, or reinvent itself as a radically new country. Although, the Indian government has tried to preserve an appearance of 'balance' between the military and democratic opposition, in the popular mind it has been perceived to be pro-junta and is believed to be supplying the junta military hardware. This may not be as true as believed.

China has backed the junta, but been more nimble in playing all sides and is quite capable of taking the lead on a transition suited to it in order to protect and pursue its economic and strategic interests towards the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. It has been remarkably tolerant of the ethnic offensives in Shan and Rakhine states so long as its concerns, including those of transnational criminal financial activities affecting them in Shan state, are addressed. It has brokered a ceasefire, albeit an unstable one, with the Kokang MNDAA and Palaung TNLA in the north east close to China's borders that has virtually ceded control of the Kokang region and 70 per cent of revenues from border trade to the Kokang while retaining 30 per cent for the SAC, and a similar autonomy for the Palaung, in return for limiting their offensive to their areas and not push south towards Lashio, the largest and most important town and garrison in northern Shan State.

The new government in Thailand too has tried to balance its past support for the military, by a more people-friendly approach using humanitarian aid as a vehicle. ASEAN has been hamstrung by its inherently conservative approach towards democratic activism

and lack of internal consensus.

Despite the expectations from the 'Burma Act', the US has limited its involvement to the bare necessary mainly along and across the Thai border, and the West has kept an arms-length from the conflict in line with their retrenchment from democracy projection outside their core areas of interest.

Russia, like China, has been arming the Myanmar Army and backing it politically in the UN Security Council, but is too stretched in Ukraine to play a larger role now.

In spite of their global geo-political rivalry, the US and China have also been holding constructive consultations on Myanmar, and seem to have decided at least for now to keep Myanmar outside their immediate competition.

Though its credibility has taken a beating, India is one of the few countries (together with Japan and a few others) that still has the credentials and the stakes to play a pro-active political and diplomatic, and pre-emptive conflict prevention role to keep Myanmar together, if it chooses to do so. But given its intrinsic bias in favour of the status quo, and faith in the use of force, in contrast to its instinctive support for freedom movements in the past, this is unlikely.

It is also increasingly susceptible to false narratives, analyses and solutions such as what prompted the lifting of the Free Movement Regime or FMR and resort to border fencing, that carry the risk of destabilizing and even opening up settled boundaries in the North East that can be exploited by the Chinese. There are far bigger problems such as the Arakan Army's control over the Kaladan river and Rakhine state where Indian interests (in the Kaladan project) and Chinese strategic investments (in oil and gas pipelines and a deep-sea port at Kyaukphyu) that are part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor begin, intersect and end; or instability along the Trilateral Highway that need to be urgently addressed, rather than futile efforts to close or seal our borders against the bogey of 'illegal immigration' for internal political advantage.

Under the circumstances, it appears that far from remaining helpless spectators complaining about Chinese (and US) conspiracies in Myanmar, India might, by its short-sightedness and intrigue, invite trouble for itself in the sensitive North East of India. One hopes better sense prevails.

Published courtesy of Deccan Herald, Bengaluru.



People take a break from the heat in a Yangon park. Photo: AFP

SOUTHEAST ASIA BAKES IN UNUSUALLY HOT WEATHER

Millions of people across South and Southeast Asia sweltered through unusually hot weather last week as the Thai government said heatstroke has already killed at least 30 people this year in their country.

A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted the region this week, prompting thousands of schools across the Philippines to suspend in-person classes.

In Myanmar, the temperature reached a blazing 45.9C (114.6F) on Wednesday last week, with more of the same expected into the weekend.

The chaos and conflict unleashed by the military's 2021 coup has led to rolling power blackouts in much of the country, hampering people's ability to keep cool with fans and air-conditioning.

A wave of exceptionally hot weather prompted thousands of schools across the Philippines to suspend in-person classes.

An Indian minister blamed hot weather after he fainted during an election campaign speech as the country's weather bureau said severe heatwave conditions were expected in nine eastern and southern states in the coming days.

Even mountainous Nepal issued health warnings and put hospitals on alert on Thursday as temperatures soared in its southern plains.

Scientific research has shown climate change is causing heatwaves to be longer, more frequent and more intense.

The United Nations said this week Asia was the region most affected by climate and weather hazards in 2023, with floods and storms the chief causes of casualties and economic losses.

City authorities in Bangkok gave an extreme heat warning as the "heat index" was expected to rise above 52 degrees Celsius (125 degrees Fahrenheit).

Temperatures in the concrete sprawl of the Thai capital hit 40.1C (104.2F) last week.

The heat index - a measure of what the temperature feels like taking into account humidity, wind speed and other factors - was at an "extremely dangerous" level in Bangkok, the city's environment department warned.

'Danger' zone

Authorities in Udon Thani province, in the kingdom's rural northeast, also warned of blazing temperatures last week.

The health ministry said that 30 people had died from heatstroke between January 1 and April 17, compared with 37 in the whole of 2023.

Direk Khampaen, deputy director-general of Thailand's Department of Disease Control, told AFP that officials were urging elderly people and those with underlying medical conditions including obesity to stay indoors and drink water regularly.

The Philippines' state weather service said the heat index in 38 cities and municipalities, including Manila, would be in the "danger" zone on Thursday - feeling like 42-51C (108-124F).

"Heat cramps and heat exhaustion are likely" in such conditions, the service said, and "heat stroke is probable with continued exposure", the service said.

India's Roads Minister Nitin Gadkari fainted during a speech on Wednesday as he campaigned for the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

"I felt uncomfortable due to the heat during the rally," Gadkari wrote on social media platform X, adding that he had recovered and would continue campaigning.

India is in the middle of a marathon election staggered across six weeks, with large outdoor campaign rallies being staged across the country.

The election commission said this week that it was reviewing the impact of heatwaves and humidity before each round of voting with a view to "mitigatory measures" that would still allow people to cast their ballots.

Nepal hospital alert

In Nepal, temperatures were forecast to soar above 40C (104F) in two southern provinces, and the government ordered officials to prepare.

"We have already circulated messages to local bodies to be alert and asked hospitals to be on standby to serve more patients," Roshan Pokhrel, a secretary at the Ministry of Health and Population, told AFP.

Krishna Kumar Gupta, an official in southern Lumbini province, said incidences of wildfires have also gone up.

"Yesterday it was 43 degrees Celsius and people have also started to feel sick. We are getting complaints of diarrhoea, dehydration and headaches," he said.

April is typically the hottest time of the year in Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia but conditions this year have been exacerbated by the El Nino weather pattern.

There were record levels of heat stress across the globe last year, with the United Nations weather and climate agency saying Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

Thailand has sweltered through a heatwave last week, with a temperature of 44.2C (111.6F) recorded in the northern province of Lampang - just shy of the all-time national record of 44.6C (112.3F) hit last year.

AFP



Yangon delivery rider out in the heat.
Photo: AFP

**WITH MOTORBIKES
BANNED, YANGON
DELIVERY RIDERS
STRUGGLE IN
HEATWAVE**

Delivery rider Than Toe Aung pedals his bicycle through a punishing heatwave in Myanmar’s commercial capital Yangon, where scooters and motorbikes are banned.

He can’t afford a car, and a previous junta outlawed two-wheeled motorised vehicles for “security reasons”, so the employee of the delivery app FoodPanda has no choice but to sweat his way through the streets under his own power.

A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted Southeast Asia in recent days, with temperatures in Yangon hitting 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), according to Myanmar’s weather office.

In some places, authorities have advised citizens to stay at home, but there is no rest for workers like Than Toe Aung, who relies on his bicycle for income.

“I sweat a lot when I am out working,” the 27-year-old told AFP after leaving his room for another scorching shift in the city of around eight million people.

“The temperature is hotter these days.”

He does what he can to cover himself, wearing a hat, a long-sleeved shirt, long socks and gloves.

He also daubs a traditional sandalwood paste called thanaka on each cheek to protect against the sun.

He alters his route to favour shadier streets and relies on watermelon to keep hydrated.

The heat is unrelenting, but also good for business, Than Toe Aung said, as many other drivers choose to take a break, offering those ready to brave the temperatures a chance to make more.

After several deliveries to offices and homes, he has a meal of rice and vegetables on the shaded steps of a shop.

At every pick-up spot he searches for a shady patch.

"Sometimes we have to wait outside for 30 minutes while they prepare the food," he said.

For slogging through the energy-sapping heat, an average rider will make between 20,000 and 30,000 Myanmar kyat (\$10-15) per day, he said.

FoodPanda did not respond to an AFP request for comment on whether it gives guidance to its riders in Yangon on coping with extreme weather.

The heatwave is causing havoc in the city, where a creaky and outdated electricity grid struggles to keep fans whirling and air conditioners humming during the hot season.

"This year is the worst," a 37-year-old pedal-powered trishaw driver told AFP in western Yangon.

"I can't ride even if passengers come at noon... I got a fever for two days last week after riding in the sun."

He said his earnings were down as people were avoiding going outdoors during the day.

"I stay under shady trees near the gate and join only when it is my turn," he said.

AFP

POST-WWII ORDER ON 'BRINK OF COLLAPSE': AMNESTY HEAD

Amnesty International said Wednesday last week that the post-World War II order was on the "brink of collapse", threatened by bitter conflict on multiple fronts to the rapid and unregulated rise of artificial intelligence.

"Everything we're witnessing over the last 12 months is indicating that the international global system is on the brink of collapse," Amnesty's secretary general Agnes Callamard told AFP as the group released its annual "State of the World's Human Rights" report.

"In particular, over the last six months, the United States has shielded and protected the Israeli authorities against scrutiny for the multiple violations committed in Gaza," she said.

"By using its veto against a much-needed ceasefire, the United States has emptied out the (United Nations) Security Council of what it should be doing."

Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel that triggered the Gaza war resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,183 people in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The global rights monitor said that Hamas had carried out "horrific crimes" on Israeli communities bordering Gaza but that Israel had responded with "a campaign of collective punishment"

"It is a campaign of deliberate, indiscriminate bombings of civilians and civilian infrastructure, of

denial of humanitarian assistance and an engineered famine," Callamard wrote in her foreword to the report.

"For millions the world over, Gaza now symbolises utter moral failure by many of the architects of the post-World War Two system," she said.

Israel's allies, including those arming them, were complicit, she said, lamenting a lack of action by international institutions and questioning whether postwar ideals of "never again" were now at an end.

AI threat

Other "powerful actors", including Russia and China, are also "demonstrating a willingness to put at risk the entirety of the 1948 rule-based order", Callamard warned.

The report documented "flagrant rule-breaking by Russian forces during their continued full-scale invasion of Ukraine... and the use of torture or other ill-treatment against prisoners of war".

China too had acted against international law, the rights group said, "by protecting the Myanmar military" despite its attacks against civilians.

"Urgent measures" were required "to revitalise and renew the international institutions intended to safeguard humanity", Callamard said.

"What we are calling for is an urgent reform of the UN Security Council, in particular reform on the right of veto so that it cannot be used in situations of massive human rights violations," she told AFP.

The rise of AI is also a cause for concern, "enabling pervasive erosions of rights... perpetuating racist policies" and "enabling spreading misinformation", the report found.



Amnesty's secretary general Agnes Callamard holds up the new report. Photo: AFP

Amnesty accused large tech firms of ignoring or minimising those threats "even in armed conflicts".

"Tech-outlaws and their rogue technologies" are being left to "freely roam the digital Wild West", which the report said would likely accelerate human rights violations in 2024 - a year of several key elections, including for the US presidency.

"In an increasingly precarious world, unregulated proliferation and deployment of technologies such as generative AI, facial recognition and spyware are poised to be a pernicious foe - scaling up and supercharging violations of international law and human rights to exceptional levels," Callamard said.

"During a landmark year of elections and in the face of the increasingly powerful anti-regulation lobby driven and financed by big tech actors, these rogue and unregulated technological advances pose an enormous threat to us all."

She called on governments to "take robust legislative and regulatory steps to address the risks and harms caused by AI technologies and rein in big tech".

The UK-based rights group also warned that political actors in many parts of the world were "ramping up their attacks on women, LGBTI people and marginalised communities".

AFP



Myanmar junta helicopter gunship fires rockets in a battle. Photo: Facebook

TAMING THE TIGER

Nway is an exiled Burmese activist who is working to help free his country from military rule.

“Unfortunately, in 2020, after the NLD won a landslide election, there was a military coup. And [then] the PDF resistance started. I took part in the resistance as I had years before, but there is a difference this time, too,” Nway tells Insight Myanmar in a podcast.

Inspired by his mother, an active participant in politics since Ne Win’s 1962 coup, Nway’s involvement in the resistance included clandestine communication with Aung San Suu Kyi during her detention and risky efforts to deliver messages to imprisoned allies, among many other important tasks.

Despite the supposed democratic transition post-2010, Nway criticizes this period as superficial, with the 2008 Constitution maintaining military dominance. He rebuked international pressure for elections as a facade of democracy, emphasizing the need for genuine systemic change. The most recent coup escalated his activism, compelling his support for armed resistance and relocation to Mae Sot for safety.

Nway also highlights the intricate relationship between Buddhism and politics in Myanmar, acknowledging the tension between nationalistic and

progressive monks within the context of the country’s struggle for democracy and the military’s manipulation of religion to maintain power.

“If we win the revolution, the international community will see a very civilized society in Burma, which will be very active in promoting peace for the whole world,” Nway says in closing. “But if the junta wins, you will have a society which believes in the stone age. So, I would like to request of you, please understand the feeling of people of Burma! We left our country, we want to be like you, we want our kids to be like your kids, to go to school and also we want to sleep with our family like you want to sleep with your family. That is why we are trying to get rid of the military in our political system. This is not only for a party sake, not only for an ethnicity sake, it is for all the people of Burma and also the people of the world.”

CHECK OUT PODCAST

Listen to Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/58655898-57c0-426a-8d97-21d68a53a9c4>

RUMOUR CIRCULATES SUGGESTING THAT QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL KYAW SWAR LIN TO REPLACE DEPUTY MILITARY CHIEF SOE WIN

Recently, reports circulated suggesting that Quartermaster-General Kyaw Swar Lin, a loyalist of Min Aung Hlaing, might imminently assume the position of deputy military chief, replacing Vice Senior General Soe Win, according to local news outlets. However, no action has been implemented thus far.

Amidst swirling rumours following the Mon State's Mawlamyine drone attack by resistance forces on April 8, speculation grew about the condition of junta's Deputy Chief Soe Win, with reports suggesting he was seriously injured.

His absence from the military council cabinet meeting on April 22 only deepened these concerns, marking another disappearance since April 3.

Soe Win's absence from public events, including the Myanmar Thingyan Festival, where military leaders are typically present, intensified speculation about his well-being. Previously, he attended the festival in Nay Pyi Taw alongside the Chief of Staff's family. His wife, Than Than Oo, was also absent from the festival, leading to speculation that she was attending to Soe Win at a hospital.

Reports from resistance forces claimed Soe Win was at the Southeastern Military Command in Mawlamyine during the drone attacks. But the information could not be independently verified. However, this week he was seen at a junta meeting in Mawlamyine, quietening speculation for now.

Alpha Bats Drone Force, a unit of the Shar Htoo Waw Technical Force, claimed responsibility for the drone attack launched in Mawlamyine.



The pair meeting in October 2013. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA'S HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER ENGAGES IN SECURITY TALKS WITH CHINA

The Home Affairs Minister of Myanmar's junta embarked on a journey to China for security deliberations with Beijing's Public Security Minister, reported the junta-controlled newspapers.

Lieutenant-General Yar Pyae set off for China on April 24 for "working visit to discuss law enforcement and security cooperation from 24 to 29 April." The invitation for this visit came from Wang Xiaohong, China's Public Security Minister.

Wang emphasized the significant strides achieved through the collaborative efforts of China and Myanmar in combating international crimes associated with money scam in Myanmar, reported People's Daily, official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Yar Pyae expressed Myanmar's readiness to strive for more fruitful outcomes in enhancing cooperation on law enforcement and security between the two nations.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government recently brokered an agreement between the Myanmar military and a coalition of ethnic armed groups of Myanmar, which have achieved significant advances in eastern Myanmar since late 2023.



SOCIAL MEDIA AIRS CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING KNU WITHDRAWAL IN MYAWADDY, KAREN STATE

In early April, the resistance forces led by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of Karen National Union (KNU) made significant attacks on junta army camps in Myawaddy area, Karen State.

In mid-April, KNU forces managed to seize the junta's Infantry Battalion 275 in Myawaddy.

With KNLA's capture of almost all junta army camps in Myawaddy, many observers awaited to see if they would seize control of the entire Myawaddy Town.

However, fighting suddenly ceased on April 21. KNLA and its allied resistance forces withdrew from the captured IB 275 in the Myawaddy area. KNLA troops also withdrew from Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge 2.

Consequently, many Burmese people criticized the Karen National Union (KNU), as they believed the KNU and its allied forces had retreated from the area without a valid reason.

Allegations surfaced that some KNU leaders might be involved in businesses that had ties to the Border Guard Force (BGF) led by Saw Chit Thu and the Military Council.

On social media, there was widespread criticism directed at the KNU and the BGF. Cartoons mocking Karen armed forces circulated as well.

Regarding the incident, the KNU said that they withdrew to counter an impending interception on a junta army reinforcement column named Aung Zeya, which was en route to Myawaddy.

Some ethnic pages also condemned those who took Facebook criticizing KNU.

On behalf of the ethnic people, the Facebook page of the Progressive Karenni People Force (PKPF), a youth Karenni group that monitors the ongoing conflict, highlighted that between 2015 and 2020, when Aung San Suu Kyi came to power, then-Myanmar civilian government, instead of forging alliances with ethnic groups, aligned with Min Aung Hlaing's army to suppress the ethnic people using military force.

mizzima WEEKLY

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.