

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## NO CHOICE

Adapting to the heat only option  
during Myanmar crisis

‘Call it a revolution’ – Delving into the Myanmar conflict

Indians cast their votes in world’s biggest democracy



# 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.

# LOCKED IN MYANMAR'S PRESSURE COOKER

Soaring temperatures are arguably the last straw. A heatwave and a poor electricity grid in Myanmar are worsening the dire circumstances for many people as their government tightens the screws.

The illegal Myanmar junta is at war with their people in wide swathes of the country as it attempts to maintain control. It is not just the bombing and scorched-earth tactics, targeting not just the resistance forces but also civilians, killed in cold blood. The junta is worsening the situation as step-by-step it imposes harsh measures and restrictions on the population, increasing the atmosphere of fear.

As we have been reporting, the junta has been imposing a number of regulations that negatively affect the country's population, rolling them out over the last three months.

Arguably the most contentious is the military conscription law announced on 10 February and now in full swing. While the focus is on recruiting men to fight against the resistance forces, even women say they are worried about being drafted.

The conscription law states that men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 are eligible for conscription and if conscripted they must serve a minimum of two years in the army. Additionally, anyone deemed to have "specialist" skills can be conscripted up to the age of 45 for men and 35 for women and will have to serve a minimum of three years. Last week, the junta came up with a new order calling on retired military veterans up to the age of 67 to reenlist.

Many young adults have already fled their homes to avoid being selected for conscription, with thousands trying to get to Thailand, or other countries including South Korea. If people flee after having been selected for military service their family members are often threatened by

the junta and forced to pay money.

Resistance forces and the National Unity Government (NUG) have encouraged people not to participate in the conscription process. In some areas there is unrest over the way junta administrators are summoning youths and selecting them for conscription. Across the country administrators and other officials implementing the conscription law have been killed.

The screws are being tightened in other ways. As of 1 May, the junta has begun blocking male citizens from traveling abroad to work. Officials of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF) say men are temporarily banned from going abroad to work. According to Khaing Gyi, a director of the Aid Alliance Committee (AAC), which handles the affairs of Myanmar workers in Thailand, the junta's action is a fruitless attempt that will not only hurt them but also the governments of other nations and all young men who aspire to work abroad. It can also help the brokers who are illegally trying to smuggle migrant workers.

In addition, the junta's immigration department is only allowing Burmese citizens with a Unique Identification (UID) number to cross the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 1 from Myawaddy to Thailand. Previously, the junta Ministry of Immigration and Population announced that, from 1 May, Burmese citizens without a 10-digit UID number would not be allowed to pass border checkpoints in to China, Thailand and India. Anyone without a UID number has not been allowed to cross into Thailand since 1 May, according to Myawaddy residents.

With the military call-up and bans on escaping, Myanmar's pressure cooker continues to build up steam.

## EDITORIAL

### mizzima WEEKLY

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**Cover photo of children collecting water by Gyan Shahane**







Yangon citizens take a break in a park next to a dried-up pond. Photo: AFP

# NO CHOICE

## ADAPTING TO THE HEAT ONLY

### OPTION DURING THE MYANMAR

#### CRISIS



**F**or Myanmar, scorching heatwaves are a reality during the annual “hot season,” particularly acute this year as the temperature reportedly hit a record high last month, with meteorologists blaming the El Nino phenomenon in part and cyclical changes in climate.

For Myanmar, “feeling the heat” is worsened by the illegal military as they continue to fight their fellow country men and women and at the same time fail to tackle the energy crisis.

Myanmar is no stranger to heatwaves, droughts and floods. But one factor that has seriously affected the people is the failure of successive military regimes to upgrade the power grid to allow people reliable electricity supply to use fans and air-conditioners. Lengthy “brown-outs” have long been a fact of life, so much so that many people in the cities were seen in their droves over the last few weeks taking shade in parks to escape the stifling heat in the confines of their apartments.

## TRYING TO COPE

Finding shade and a cool spot could be referred to as “adaption” – the only way for people to survive as the mercury heads skywards.

Experts say climate change is causing more frequent heatwaves that are more intense and last longer.

Asia is also warming faster than the global average, according to the World Meteorological Organization, a UN agency. In addition, the El Nino weather phenomenon is playing a role this year, said Milton Speer, a meteorologist and visiting research fellow at the University of Technology Sydney.

“The lack of cloud in El Ninos means that temperatures are likely to be higher on average,” he told AFP.

Sea surface temperatures in the region are currently several degrees Celsius above normal, “which helps keep the temperatures higher than average inland overnight, so daytime temperatures start climbing from a higher base.”

There are other factors at play too in Myanmar, including deforestation that reduces shade and

increases dry surface area, leading to water shortages, and the urban heat island effect, where concrete, glass and steel structures absorb rather than reflect heat.

Last week, Myanmar recorded its hottest ever April temperature, authorities said. The mercury hit 48.2C in the town of Chauk in central Myanmar’s Magway region on a day at the end of April, according to a statement from the country’s weather office, the highest temperature seen anywhere in Myanmar in April since records began 56 years ago.

The same day temperatures hit 40C in commercial hub Yangon and 44C in the second city of Mandalay, the weather office said.

## THOSE AT RISK

Most people in Myanmar do not have the opportunity to cool off in air-conditioned shopping malls, that typically have their own diesel electricity generators.

Extreme heat disproportionately affects children, the elderly and those living in poverty. Children, older people and those with pre-existing conditions or disabilities can overheat more quickly. Those living in poverty also often lack cooling solutions at home or are forced to work in conditions without adequate heat protection.

The UN children’s agency UNICEF warned in April that 243 million children across the Pacific and East Asia are at risk from heatwaves.

“Child exposure to heatwaves leads to heat stress,” said Salwa Aleryani, health specialist for UNICEF’s regional East Asia and Pacific office. “Severe issues can develop, such as cardiovascular diseases, organ failure, muscle and nerve dysfunction.”

## MYANMAR GRID

Given the heat, most people would like to turn on a fan or an air-conditioner. But Myanmar has long faced difficulties with power and a limited power grid.

Last week, the junta admitted that Myanmar is producing about half of the electricity it needs each day for the existing grid, blaming scant rainfall for hydropower, lower natural gas yields and attacks by its

opponents on infrastructure.

Rolling power cuts have battered an economy already reeling from unrest sparked by the military's 2021 coup, most recently causing misery across the country as it baked in the heatwave.

Myanmar's electricity grid is producing only 2,800 megawatts of the required 5,443 megawatts needed each day, according to a statement from the electricity authority released by the junta's information team Wednesday last week.

Domestic power production from natural gas was about 446 megawatts less than the normal daily

capacity, and low rainfall had led to a daily shortfall of around 350 megawatts from hydropower sources, it said.

Part of the problem lies in the export of energy resources. Exports of natural gas to China and Thailand are a major source of foreign currency for the cash-strapped junta, earning almost \$300 million per month, according to the World Bank.

The junta also blamed attacks by its opponents for the shortfall in domestic power production. Its coup in 2021 sparked renewed clashes with established ethnic minority armed groups and birthed dozens of newer People's Defence Forces now fighting to overthrow the military junta. Around 350 megawatts from hydropower



Collecting water in the heat. Photo: AFP



plants were lost due to attacks on power lines, the electricity authority said.

Since the putsch, 89 pylons had been destroyed, five power stations had been bombed and there had been 71 attacks on main power lines, it added. About 77 per cent of Myanmar's power plants were located within 10 kilometres (six miles) of "conflict-related fatalities", the World Bank said last year.

The electricity authority also said 400,000 electricity meter boxes had been disconnected for the non-payment of bills. Many across Myanmar have stopped paying utilities and other taxes to protest the coup that ousted the government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Millions are particularly at risk from rising temperatures and the elements. The conflict unleashed by the coup has displaced as many as 3 million people, according to the United Nations. Many of these internally displaced people or IDPs live under scant shelter.

There is no immediate solution to Myanmar's heatwave crisis. The people have to adapt as best they can – and wait until the rainy season, possibly beginning in June.

*Reporting: Mizzima, AFP*



Forest rangers provide water for a village. Photo: AFP





Myawaddy town as seen from the Thai side of the border. Photo: AFP

# BGF TURNS TABLES IN FIGHT FOR MYAWADDY

In a recent development in Myawaddy, a Thai-Myanmar border trade city, unverified reports are circulating regarding the assistance provided by the Karen National Army-Border Guard Force (KNA-BGF) to the junta troops. Sources suggest that the KNA-BGF aided trapped State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers under the No. 2 Thai-Myanmar Friendship bridge and supplied provisions to approximately 200 besieged SAC troops.

The sudden cessation of intense hostilities between SAC troops and resistance forces on 21 April has left both revolutionaries and the public stunned. The retreat of resistance forces from Myawaddy city was reportedly attributed to strategic concerns amid the SAC's "Aung Zeya" operation, according to the Karen National Union (KNU).

Myawaddy, a city under the influence of various armed groups including KNA-BGF, Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNLA-PC), and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), witnessed negotiations between SAC and Karen armed forces leading to the cessation of the conflict.

Conflicting reports have emerged regarding the engagement of the Unity Committee for Karen Armed Groups (UCKAG) in the situation, with some denying any interaction with the SAC. Efforts continue to consolidate control over strategic locations like Thingannyinaung.

Meanwhile, in response to escalating tensions along the Myanmar-Thailand border, the Thai government held a meeting with military and civil officials on 29 April. Bangkok has established a special committee



to oversee border affairs amidst concerns over recent skirmishes.

The BGF emerges as a pivotal player in the Myawaddy region, notably controlling the notorious Shwe Kokko new town, known for its rampant human trafficking and torture of workers. With an estimated manpower of 8,000, the BGF's influence extends deep into the socio-economic fabric of the area.

As the KNU-led resistance forces made strides to assert control over Kawkaik and Myawaddy, the BGF maintained a seemingly neutral stance, refraining from taking sides. However, when the joint resistance forces seized Thingannnyaung, west of Myawaddy, the BGF's actions spoke volumes. They facilitated the relocation of SAC soldiers and their families to Shwe Kokko, prompting a ceasefire from the resistance forces. A prominent revolutionary figure emphasized the significant impact of the BGF's stance, citing their formidable arsenal and economic power.

Recent developments suggest a potential negotiation between the SAC and the BGF for joint administration of Myawaddy, leading to efforts to clear the area. This initiative is purportedly linked to a meeting among four Karen armed forces under the UCKAG.

However, allegations have surfaced tarnishing the BGF's reputation. A 22 April online article by the US Institute of Peace (USIP) implicates BGF leaders Colonel Saw Chit Thu, Lieutenant Colonel Saw Mote Thone, and Major Tin Win in money fraud activities. Colonel Saw Chit Thu allegedly facilitates the transportation of foreign personnel involved in online scams and money fraud businesses. The BGF's accommodation of these unscrupulous elements in Shwe Kokko city has raised concerns. Financially, the BGF reaps substantial gains from the Shwe Kokko project, with an annual income estimated at US\$192 million. However, 50%, a significant portion, is reportedly earmarked for the SAC.

The main "villain" of the piece appears to be Colonel Saw Chit Thu who heads the 8,000-strong army with no special political allegiances and a steady stream of income from criminal enterprises in Myawaddy, according to analysts.

Saw Chit Thu's ties to Myanmar's military rulers, evidenced by an honorary title for "outstanding

performance" conferred on him by junta chief Gen Min Aung Hlaing in November 2022, have helped him build his strength and position, according to Reuters. But Britain has imposed sanctions on him for serious human rights violations such as people-trafficking, and analysts have flagged his ties to border scam centres run by Chinese-led crime networks.

## **Chin State resistance advances**

In a significant development, the resistance forces, comprising the Chinland Defense Force (CDF) and People Defense Force (PDF), successfully seized Kyin Dway town in Kanpetlet township, Chin State, on 29 April. This marked the culmination of a four-month-long battle that commenced on 22 December 2023.

Dubbed the "Chin Brotherhood" operation, the combined forces intensified their efforts on 7 March 2024, collaborating with the Arakan Army (AA). Despite facing airstrikes and ground and helicopter reinforcements of the SAC, the resistance forces persevered, finally announcing the capture of the strategic town.

Kyin Dway town, situated at the boundary of Chin State and Magway region, holds immense military importance. However, even as the resistance forces secured control, skirmishes persist on the town's outskirts.

Prior to the town's capture, the SAC launched airstrikes on Lungdon village's clinic on 28 April, followed by an assault on another rural hospital in Wammathu village, 20 miles north of Mindat town, a mere three minutes later.

## **China sends workers to Kyaukphyu deep-sea port**

China has sent more than 300 technicians and workers to a deep-sea port project in Rakhine State amid intense fighting between the military and the Arakan Army (AA), RFA reports, citing residents.

A ship carrying the crews, along with heavy machinery and food, docked at Maday Island in Rakhine's Kyaukphyu township on the evening of 28 April, the residents told RFA Burmese, after receiving permission from the junta to work on the project in the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, or SEZ. The deployment comes after six months of clashes in





# မြဝတီအနာဂတ် ဘယ်လိုဖြစ်လာနိုင်သလဲ

Rakhine between junta troops and the AA, part of an alliance of three ethnic armies that have pushed the junta back in the western and northern parts of the country.

## Vice Senior General Soe Win resurfaces

On 30 April, Vice Senior General Soe Win resurfaced, appearing in public by visiting the military hospital in Mawlamyine. There, he provided encouragement to the bedridden soldiers, conducted a military operational meeting, and held a meeting with junta regime members of the Mon and Karen states.

He had not appeared in public since 3 April according to the junta press. His prolonged absence sparked speculation regarding his whereabouts. It was rumoured that he may have been targeted by drones from the Alpha Bats Drone Force, a unit of the Shar Htoo Waw Technical Force. This alleged attack occurred while he was commanding the "Aung Zeya" operation, which aimed to reclaim Myawaddy city by

the Southeastern Command in Mawlamyine on 8 and 9 April.

The second attack reportedly resulted in injuries to Soe Win and other generals when a dropped bomb struck the roof of their meeting hall, causing debris to hit him on his shoulder and left thigh. For his injuries, Soe Win received treatment from specially invited Indian orthopedists.

Despite reports of his injuries circulating, the SAC spokesperson twice denied Soe Win's condition to the BBC and VOA Burmese channels. Notably, he was absent from the traditional water festival, an event he customarily attends each year, and an important junta cabinet meeting.

## Junta getting desperate

Three items of news over the last week indicate just how desperate the Myanmar junta is getting to protect its military hold on the country. Firstly, the junta said it was calling on military veterans up to the age of 67 to



reenlist in the military. Secondly, the junta announced that it was blocking men from travelling abroad to work. Only those who had already signed up ahead of 1 May would be allowed to leave the country for their work assignment. Thirdly, the junta is stepping up controls on who can leave the country by only allowing those with a UID number to exit. This is reportedly being enacted at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot crossing, and China and India border posts.

### POPULAR MIZZIMA VIDEOS

The following are the most-watched Mizzima Burmese videos during the last week of April.

“What is the future of Myawaddy?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSncRBgYOtw>

Are we going to see a decisive battle between the Arakan Army and the Military Council Army?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByxBywGA040>

Returning the Military Council flag at the Kha La Ya - 275 camp of the City Guard in Myawaddy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYxPApRuXDY>

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# CALL IT A REVOLUTION

Journalist Anthony Davis, left, with Thai soldiers in the deadly 2010 standoff against Red Shirts in Bangkok. Photo: Supplied

*Journalist Anthony Davis says this current moment can only be correctly understood as a full-scale revolution. That diplomats and other outsiders have largely missed this reality may partly explain why the response has thus far been so underwhelming. "They do not fully understand that this is a revolutionary transformation of Myanmar society. And if they did understand that, they would adopt a very different attitude."*

**A**nthony Davis, a security analyst and consultant specializing in insurgency, terrorism and military affairs in the Asia-Pacific region, recently was interviewed for an Insight Myanmar podcast episode to provide an update on the continuing conflict in Myanmar.

"I'd been looking at insurgencies around the region, primarily in Afghanistan, during much of the 80s and 90s, but also in Myanmar, in Indonesia, in the southern Philippines, and not least in southern Thailand. So, over the years, I have [not only] had a significant amount of what I would call 'on the ground experience' with insurgent groups, but also with government forces countering insurgent groups."

## REPORTING ON THE GROUND

He begins by contrasting his time in Afghanistan several decades ago with his more recent role as an analyst sitting behind a desk. In Afghanistan, he traveled on foot or by horse across the country for several months at a time to assess developments, while since the coup, he has not been able to be on the ground in Myanmar. Moreover, the complexity of Myanmar crisis is compounded by it being what he

calls an "accelerated conflict," meaning events can change rapidly and unexpectedly; in Afghanistan, the evolution of the conflict was much slower. In short, it is very challenging to stay on top of events in Myanmar.

In spite of his distance from the situation in Myanmar, Davis is confident in his assessment that the current moment is different than any time in recent Burmese history, something that many past guests have also expressed.

"Whether they're from a Bamar background, or from ethnic minority areas, in different parts of the country, they subconsciously or consciously made a decision that, 'We've had enough! It is now time to stand up to this regime,' which has been suppressing the Burmese people and suppressing their instincts for democracy since 1962."

## IT'S A REVOLUTION

Davis' analysis leads him to believe that the widespread, popular discontent goes beyond a mere rejection of military rule, indicating something far more consequential. "This is a profoundly revolutionary metamorphoses of Burmese society, at all levels: political, most obviously, [but also] economic, social, and perhaps most important, generational."



To Davis, this current moment can only be correctly understood as a full-scale revolution. That diplomats and other outsiders have largely missed this reality may partly explain why the response has thus far been so underwhelming.

"They do not fully understand that this is a revolutionary transformation of Myanmar society! And if they did understand that, they would adopt a very different attitude." He explains that bona-fide revolutions cannot be resolved through negotiations or resolutions. "There is no way that this is going to be put back in the box and dusted up tidally, and we all move on or go back to the status quo and the military survives in some form."

On the other hand, from ASEAN's ineffective Five Point Consensus to the limited engagement of the West, Davis wonders whether there may not even be a reluctance to recognize this moment as a full-fledged revolution because of how that would shatter the status quo and impel those entities to dramatically change their responses and policies.

### DEEP RESEARCH

What is more, although Davis has studied dozens of insurgency movements and revolutions through history, he cannot locate a single, historical precedent for what is happening now Myanmar. That is because "the revolution emerged from an inchoate, spontaneous popular uprising," even as the leading resistance bodies (such as the NUG and CRPH) are "anything but a revolutionary party," and the country's leading democratic figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, was never really a "revolutionary figure." So even as every aspect of the society is now in open revolt, "there is no revolutionary core at the center, which can direct and organize that struggle." Instead, there are EAOs whose operations are mainly limited to their own respective territories, and the NUG is charged with trying to somehow "herd all these PDF cats loose across the center of the country, [and] herd them into something resembling an army, which sooner or later, will need to confront the military on an on a semi-conventional basis in order to defeat them.

"So yeah," he continues, "it's a revolution, but without a single revolutionary core, and that is a fundamental impediment to its success."

Davis points out that even if outside countries were to finally recognize the

situation in Myanmar not just as a "conflict," "crisis," or "civil war," but an actual revolution, there remains an unusual level of complexity among the various actors and their intentions that would complicate fashioning an appropriate response. "At the end of the day, you're in a very complicated international environment where this is not the Cold War anymore, where you're not on one side or the other." And as if it weren't challenging enough, Davis further argues that "whether you accept the premise of a revolution or you don't, any country's reaction to what is happening in Myanmar is going to be constrained significantly by wider factors in terms of the increasingly fraught, international environment that we now live in."

### HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

With ASEAN showing itself incapable of or unwilling to engage meaningfully, and the West too distracted by their own domestic issues and other international crises, a massive humanitarian disaster continues to unfold with no sign of abating. "The United States has neither, to put it boldly, the bandwidth or the interest to get involved," he says simply.

Moving onto Operation 1027, Davis minces no word in expressing how monumental this recent offensive was. "Essentially, it burst the balloon of military invincibility," he says. "The idea that this is a military which is so central to governance in Burma, is so ubiquitous in terms of its deployments across the country, is so well integrated into society everywhere, that their defeat is impossible. 1027 burst that balloon!"



Young People's Defence Force volunteers train in the jungle in Karen State. Photo: AFP



So if you're sitting in Beijing, New Delhi, or Bangkok, and you've been counting all this time on the basic premise that these guys are not going down, they can't go down, they're too big to fail, whatever happens, they've got to be included, and then you see this invincible army getting rolled over like a bunch of school boys, I mean, this is this is remarkable stuff, really remarkable."

Given that this air of invincibility has since been punctured, one would think that the international community may finally begin to provide greater support to the resistance movement which single-handedly altered this momentum, albeit with heavy losses of their own. And to some degree, this change has been reflected in various countries seeking a closer relationship with the once-ostracized EAOs. But in Davis' estimation, it is an entirely all-too-optimistic view to suggest an imminent collapse of the regime, no matter how bloodied they were in the aftermath of 1027. For one, Myanmar's neighboring countries, which have been quietly betting on the regime, are using the military's losses during 1027 to double down on their support rather than looking for a new side to partner with. "There may be a dynamic where countries... who are now aware that the military is in deep trouble, are actually more likely to step up their support for the military."

### PROTRACTED WAR

Davis estimates that the conflict could still have three more brutal and violent years left. He acknowledges the many variables that could change that timeline, such as if the regime lost all of Rakhine.

As to the possibility of regime change from the inside, he believes that soldiers and generals alike will "dig in" behind Min Aung Hlaing. And despite the military's heavy losses of personnel and morale, Davis points out the uneven nature of resistance efforts. While ethnic groups are able to conduct both semi-conventional and conventional operations in their own regions with great success, PDFs in the heartland are essentially conducting ongoing guerrilla operations, which, he says, "are not going to do what the ethnic groups are capable of doing, namely, overrunning battalion headquarters, capturing towns, etc."

For this reason, another important, potential factor in assessing the direction of the conflict is the state of PDF-EAO collaboration, and how ethnic armies might support the fight beyond their territories. Such a partnership would determine to what extent the battle begins to intensify in the Bamar heartland, as well as urban centers.

### 'STRENGTH OF SPIRIT'

"I think all of us have been humbled by the amazing resilience and strength of spirit that citizens across Myanmar have displayed over the last three years," Davis says in closing. "It's been, in my opinion, without precedent. So many people have lost so much, and that's been really humbling. I would simply say that this is a struggle, which, given the losses and given what's been achieved to date, is worth prosecuting to the end, it's worth pushing on. It's not in the short-term going to get any easier. I fear, it's going to get tougher, bloodier, harder. But I think the nature of this revolution



Female PDF fighters in a hideout near Mandalay. Photo: AFP



## CORE DEVELOPMENTS

is underscored for everybody who's looking at it..."

Davis leaves us with a message.

"Everybody realizes that this revolution is about putting an end to a morally bankrupt regime! And this is a regime which needs to be shown the back door of history. I just hope and pray that the courage and resilience that the vast majority of the population in Myanmar has displayed over the last three years can be sustained in the years to come."

### CHECK OUT PODCAST

Check out the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/6c868fb6-048e-4d5f-b924-76e79e72601d>



Protest by PDF fighters and civilians in Sagaing. Photo: AFP

# NUG CLAIMS TO CONTROL OVER 60 PER CENT OF MYANMAR



Photo: Supplied

The NUG claimed to control over 60 per cent of Myanmar including five border trade cities in its third anniversary statement released on 30 April.

Below is the text of the statement:

The National Unity Government, alongside allied revolutionary forces, has consistently strived to end all tyranny, including the military dictatorship and to form a federal democratic union that ensures peace, freedom, justice, and equality as envisioned since its formation three years ago in April 2021.

A report on achievements within the last three years has been shared on April 16, 2024 through all our communication channels. The achievements and progress were also presented to the Committee

Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) at their 6th Union Parliament meeting held on February 1 and 2, 2024 and to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) at the second People's Assembly from April 4 to 9, 2024.

## POLITICS

A significant stride has been made in solidifying our shared political goals and objectives by fostering collaboration and implementing agreed-upon measures among all stakeholders and revolutionary forces. A joint position statement with allied organizations was published on January 31, 2024, and the shared agreement on objectives, aims, and positions in this endeavour was made public..



### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Regarding foreign affairs, every effort has been made to garner international attention and recognition for the revolutionary process against the dictatorship, uniting all forces while concurrently delegitimizing and halting support to the military council. Every possible avenue is pursued to engage with neighboring and regional countries, ASEAN, the EU, as well as international bodies including the United Nations, various parliaments.

The collaborative work with civil society organisations, international community and Myanmar diaspora and activists around the world has enabled NUG to claim justice for the brutal crimes committed by the military council and to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions. The international aid organizations are called upon to support the revolution and the people in displaced areas.

### MILITARY

The People's Defense Force, established on May 5, 2021, is envisaged to become the federal army in the future. Over the past three years, the PDF has been meticulously formed, trained, and actively engaged in frontline combat alongside ethnic forces, culminating in the execution of strategic offensives. For better coordinated and strategic military efforts, the Central Coordination Committee (C3C) and the Joint Coordination Committee (J2C) was formed in partnership with allied ethnic revolutionary forces. At present, the revolutionary forces and NUG have gained control over 60% of the country, including five border towns, and have conducted synchronized attacks on strategic military council's locations, including Nay Pyi Daw, Pyin Oo Lwin, and their weapon production facilities.

### GOVERNANCE

The National Unity Government has established the People's Administration Teams and People's Security Teams. These administrative and judicial teams are being assembled to mitigate power vacuums in controlled areas, while NUG ministries strive to provide essential public services. The Federal and State Coordination Commission (FSCC) has also been formed to enhance the coordination with federal state administrations.

### FINANCE

The finance sector's motto being 'Cut the income of the fascist military, build the treasure of the Public,' it underscores our commitment to reducing the financial resources of the military council while consistently

raising funds for the revolution. The Ministry of Planning, Finance, and Investment has undertaken various projects, including:

1. The Spring Lottery, which contributed over 436.789 million Myanmar Kyats or 111,700 US Dollars (0.1117 million US Dollars) to the Civil Disobedience Movement from August 2021 to December 2023.

2. Generating a total tax revenue exceeding 23 million US Dollars from NUG controlled 42 townships in 2023 alone.

3. Issuance of Special Bonds from December 2021 to December 2023, resulting in over 44 million US Dollars.

4. Implementation of the End of Dictatorship/Early Partnership Scheme until December 2023, raising over 97 million US Dollars.

5. Establishment of the Spring Development Bank with a funding of 11.8 million US Dollars.

Introduction of the NUG Pay system, circulating 300 million US Dollars in support of the revolution was successfully established.

Furthermore, we are continuously exploring alternative avenues to generate smooth and sustainable revenue from the public, while ensuring accountability in administering tax revenue from controlled areas.

### PUBLIC SERVICES

NUG is actively engaging with the public through independent media outlets, as well as our websites, TV, radio, and social media platforms, through which regular updated news, governance, and the progress of the revolution are provided.

The National Unity Government is committed to assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges encountered over the past three years in implementing necessary changes. We pledge to work together with all revolutionary forces to achieve an ultimate victory and to end the revolution that the people long for.

The military council is now at its lowest point and on the brink of collapse. We call upon everyone to unite and utilize all available resources to bring an end to this fascist military dictatorship through coordinated and collaborative efforts.



# MYANMAR MILITARY CONSCRIPTS VETERANS UP TO 67 YEARS OLD

Myanmar military veterans up to the age of 67 will have to serve in the military for a minimum of three years or they will lose their pensions, according to a Myanmar junta announcement.

Under the Reserve Forces Law veteran officers and soldiers, whether they retired or resigned their positions, will have to rejoin the army and serve in the military reserve force if they pass the military medical exam.

Any former soldier who is summoned to serve in the reserve force must serve a minimum of three more years of full-time service. Anyone who wishes to can extend their three-year term of service by one year up to two times, meaning that those who want to can serve up to five years.

This means that people who are recalled at the age of 67 will have to serve until they are at least 70 and could, if they want to, continue serving until they are 72 years old.

Returning veterans under 55 years of age will have to serve on the frontlines like all other soldiers. Those aged from 55 to 72 years of age will have to instead work at military headquarters and bases or as security guards, according to the Reserve Force Regulations.

The returning reservists will be paid their military wages whilst also still receiving their military pensions.

But, any veterans who refuse to serve after receiving a summons to serve will have the payment of their military pensions suspended.

“This is a very authoritarian and rude action. These old retired soldiers have served in the army for many years”, said a representative of the People’s Embrace, an independent revolutionary organisation that helps people who want to leave the junta army and police forces. “It seems very rude to cut their pensions if they don’t return”, the representative added.

They explained that people who have already served in the Myanmar military know how hard it is to leave after they start serving in the army, so they will try to avoid being re-enlisted, in the same way as youths are trying to avoid conscription.

“I have heard from pensioners who do not want to serve again because of their age and because they have no interest [in serving again]. Now they are starting to contact us to find out how to evade it [having to serve again]”, said the People’s Embrace representative.

The junta promulgated the Reserve Forces Law on 13 February 2024, three days after it activated the Conscription Law on 10 February.



## MYANMAR CITIZENS WITHOUT UID NUMBERS NOT ALLOWED ABROAD

The Myanmar junta's immigration department is only allowing Burmese citizens with a Unique Identification Number (UID) number to cross the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 1 from Myawaddy to Thailand.

Previously, the junta Ministry of Immigration and Population announced that, from 1 May, Burmese citizens without a 10 digit UID number would not be allowed to pass border checkpoints in to China, Thailand and India.

Anyone without a UID number has not been allowed to cross into Thailand since 1 May, according to Myawaddy residents.

UID numbers are issued for free by the junta Ministry of Immigration to holders of Myanmar ID cards, known as National Registration Cards (NRCs), aged 10 and over, who apply for them. They will then be issued a UID number after their personal and biographical information has been recorded.

The issuing of UID numbers is the first step in a junta plan to upgrade the paper National Registration Cards to smart ID cards. The UIDs will eventually be upgraded to smart ID cards.

It is mandatory for all Myanmar citizens to obtain a UID number, not just those who want to travel abroad. A UID number is also required for anyone who wants to apply for or renew a passport.

People in Myawaddy without UID numbers who want to cross into Thailand can apply for them at the Myawaddy Immigration Office. However, there have been long delays due to large crowds, machinery malfunctions, and electricity issues, according to Myawaddy residents.

A resident of Myawaddy, who frequently crosses into Thailand said: "Immigration officers will only issue tickets [temporary border crossing pass/green tickets] to go to Thailand if you provide them with a UID along with your National Registration Card. This requirement was not enforced until 30 April. Obtaining a UID is free of charge. However, when I attempted to obtain one at the Myawaddy Immigration Office, I was unsuccessful. They rescheduled my appointment from Thursday to Monday to Tuesday. It's very disappointing."

Myanmar nationals residing in Mae Sot, Thailand, who hold temporary bridge passes allowing them to cross to Thailand, are concerned as they will only be able to renew their passes with a UID number.

Photo: Harish Shivaraman



## INCIDENTS IN KAREN AND MON STATES AND TANINTHARYI REGION IN APRIL 2024

IDPs take shelter in a cave from junta aerial bombing. Photo: AFP

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) has documented incidents that happened during April 2024 in Karen and Mon states and Tanintharyi region.

### KAREN STATE

During April 2024 eight people were killed, 20 were injured and more than 21,000 were newly displaced in Karen State.

The junta has been intensively bombing Thingan Nyi Naung and its nearby areas in Myawaddy Township, Karen State.

Reports from local news sources indicate that on 3 and 4 April, as well as 28 and 31 March, the junta's Y-12 bombers targeted the villages of Wave Shan and Zayat Phyu Kone near Thingan Nyi Naung. The area also experienced heavy artillery fire.

The conflict between the junta and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) revolutionary joint forces began to intensify again on 7 March and has persisted for almost a month.

The KNLA and its allies captured the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 355 base on 9 March. However, the Karen National Union (KNU) reported that from 15 to 25 March, there was intense fighting to retake the camp, resulting in over 20 junta soldiers being killed and one casualty from the revolutionary forces.

The ongoing battles have caused significant damage to local villages, with many homes destroyed by artillery and airstrikes. Residents have been

injured, and the extent of the damage is still being assessed. Locals from Myawaddy reported continuous bombardment and destruction of homes in Thingan Nyi Naung.

Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 6 in Dooplaya District stated that many houses were burned down due to junta troops setting fires and dropping incendiary bombs from drones.

The KNLA forces are engaging in heavy battles with the junta near Thingan Nyi Naung and Wave Shan village, with intense fighting around junta convoys being sent as reinforcements to Myawaddy.

The junta troops have been accused of burning houses near Byuhar Kone to obstruct the revolutionary forces' counterattacks. During the prolonged conflict in Thingan Nyi Naung, the KNLA seized two headquarters of LIB 355 and LIB 356 and continued to attack the remaining battalions and Byuhar Kone.

The violence has had a devastating impact on civilians, with reports of deaths and injuries.

Over 10,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. Villagers claim that the junta's artillery fire has destroyed nearly all houses in Thingan Nyi Naung and Wave Shan, leaving them in ashes.

Two residents of Kaw Gu and Naung Khit villages in Kawkareik Township, Karen State were injured, and several homes were damaged when the junta's Infantry Battalion (IB) 81 launched artillery attacks. The incident occurred mid-April, just after 12:30 PM, with artillery shells exploding in and around both villages.



Local sources report that six artillery shells landed in Kaw Gu Village and three in Naung Khit Village, causing damage to homes and a monastery. Although the injuries to the villagers were not severe, the impact on the community was significant, with four homes in Naung Khit village sustaining damage.

The shelling appears to have been unrelated to any immediate fighting near these villages. However, ongoing conflicts in nearby Kaw Bain village within Kawkareik Township in Karen State prompted junta troops to advance into Kyaikmayaw Township in Mon State.

This military movement has been accompanied by almost daily, indiscriminate artillery and air attacks, posing ongoing risks to local populations.

Airstrikes on 23 April at 9:00 am in Karen State injured a 48-year-old local woman and led to the destruction of at least seven homes. Despite there being no active armed clashes in the area. The junta dropped 12 bombs from a fighter jet.

Local communities are bracing for a challenging season ahead, with urgent calls for increased aid and a durable solution to their displacement.

## MON STATE

Violence in Mon State has included targeted attacks against health workers and first responders.

At 8:00 pm on 27 March 2024, an ambulance struck a landmine and was shot at whilst travelling on the Yangon to Mawlamyine Highway Road near Ka Mar Sai village, Thaton Township, Mon State. The driver and a patient sustained injuries.

"We struck a landmine and then were shot. The driver and the patient were injured, but others were safe. The gunshots damaged the whole body of the ambulance," said an official from the Social and Rescue Team

A few days later, indiscriminate violence also led to the death of a civilian. On 30 March, at 3:00 pm, the military stationed in Than Ka Laung village shot and killed a Mon man, a 60-year-old from Than Ka Laung village, Kyaikmayaw Township.

A patrolling military junta column shot Nai Ka Rone whilst he was watering vegetable plants on his farm in the southern part of Than Ka Laung village:

"The soldiers are still in the village. More people are fleeing because they are also afraid of being killed or injured in the fighting," said a resident.

When the military junta soldiers saw Nai Ka Rone

and called out to him, he was scared because he did not understand Burmese and did not know what to say or do. In a careless response indicative of the junta's disregard for life, he was shot and died on the spot.

Children are also being targeted by junta violence. At least six civilians, including a child, were injured due to artillery weapons fired by the junta troops into the villages of Thaton Township, Mon State.

Between 27 and 30 March, the junta's LIB 9 attacked villages such as Hton Bo Lay, Chaung Sout, and Htot Kaw Kyoe villages in Thaton Township, and at least 13 artillery shells were launched.

A young boy, 13-year-old Saw Phyo Phyo, was shot dead, and 16-year-old Saw Nay Lin, 23-year-old Chaw Ta Khu, 56-year-old U Maung Htwe, 54-year-old Naw Nor Re, and 57-year-old Tee Pan Sein were hit by artillery mortar shells and injured.

"The Burma Army launched artillery weapons without fighting. Now, those who are in the village have run away. Those who didn't run are staying in bomb shelters. There is not a single day when weapons are not fired," said a Hton Bo Lay village resident.

The attacks and impact on local people forced the residents of six villages, Hton Bo Lay, Hton Bo Gyi, and Chaung Sout, including Htot Kaw Kyoe, to leave their homes and flee to safe places.

Since the attempted coup, those living in Thaton Township continue to be targeted by airstrikes and arrested and used as human shields. In addition to arbitrary arrests and killings, they suffer from various human rights violations.

On 23 March villagers from Min Saw Village in Belin Township, Mon State, were hit by a junta airstrike which destroyed three Kaw Thulay Secondary Schools, two religious buildings, twelve civilian homes, and one also injured a civilian, according to the KNU Thaton District.

The junta in Mon State has been aggressively committing more attacks on the Dhamma Tha Mon Village using heavy artillery and air bombs from both helicopters and ground artillery.

The town and surrounding areas have suffered extensive damage, with most houses destroyed. During the first two weeks of the month, the conflict resulted in the burning of over 300 homes and the displacement of approximately 5,000 individuals.

The Burma Army also targeted Tarana village, a neighbouring village of Dhamma Tha village in Mon State, with severe bombing. The intensity of the assault was evident from the heavy explosions observed. As a



result, the majority of villagers have left their homes. The extent of the damage and casualties is yet to be determined.

As the situation leaves civilian lives at increasing risk, flights to reach safety have become more high risk, according to HURFOM.

In a tragic incident on 14 April, in Than-galaung village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, a Senior Buddhist monk was fatally shot by the junta forces.

Local witnesses report that the attack occurred in the early afternoon. The Senior Monk, identified as U Wara, was travelling by car with a lay disciple from the village school after their meal when ambushed near the entrance to Tarana Village. The soldiers were stationed at that location and opened fire on the vehicle as it approached.

A witness stated, "The soldiers had taken up positions there. They were targeted. The monk and the disciple who was also in the car both died instantly."

This incident is part of a troubling pattern of violence in the region.

In Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, in the village of Kyun-Gone, approximately 20 homes have been destroyed due to indiscriminate artillery fire by the military junta.

The area continues to burn as of this report. The attack started around 11:00 am on the second day of Thingyan, the Burmese New Year festival. The sudden and violent assault forced nearly the entire village to flee, abandoning their homes. To date, over 400 IDPs have had to escape without being able to carry any possessions with them.

Local reports suggest a pervasive atmosphere of fear in Mawlamyine, with residents concerned about the arbitrary phone checks and detention.

From January to April, at least 30 local inhabitants have been arrested in Mawlamyine, Mon State with the majority facing charges under the Anti- Terrorism Act.

There have been frequent and intense battles between the junta and the New Mon State Party (AD – Anti Military Dictatorship) in Kyikemayaw Township, Mon State, with junta's troops stationed in monasteries, schools and houses.

Many of the displaced have found temporary shelter in local monasteries, relying heavily on the support of monks, local organisations, and private donors for basic necessities. However, the impending rainy season threatens to complicate their already precarious living conditions further.

Social workers on the ground highlight additional challenges: "With time, our worry grows that donor support may dwindle, and we heavily depend on this aid for our survival. If the support decreases, our problems with food and shelter will become immediate and more severe," explained a social worker to HURFOM researchers.

## TANINTHAYI REGION

During April 2024, 10 people were killed, 25 were injured and more than 14,000 were newly displaced in Tanintharyi Region.

In Phaung Taw Village in Yebyu Township, junta soldiers and local administration members arrested a father and son at their home on the night of 18 April. U



A bombed house in a Karen village. Photo: AFP

Win Bo and his son, Ko Ye Thwe Naung, were taken into custody. The junta-backed Navy Personnel carried out the arrests, but the specific reasons for their detention remain unclear.

During the arrest, all mobile phones in their residence were confiscated. This incident follows a prior event in February this year, when three villagers, including the former village administrator, were detained by the Junta's Mawrawaddy Navy, based in western Yebyu Township. Of those arrested in February, only the former administrator has been released, while the other two remain in custody. The community is still seeking clarity on the motivations behind these arrests.

Due to escalating military operations by the junta forces, significant conflict incidents have led to widespread displacement in Thayet Chaung Township in Dawei. Local villagers from Sin Ku, Bote Kai, Kywe Zart, Sin Kyan, Laba, Pi-Tai, Pyin Phyu Gyi, and Pyi Phyu Thar, totalling approximately 2,000 households, have been forced to flee the instability in their areas.

These cases of forced displacement have surged in response to the junta's aggressive tactics, including a recent incident on 22 April, where soldiers arrived in Sin Ku Village by vehicle and proceeded to torch several homes, causing fires that spread to neighbouring houses.

In addition to the direct attacks, there have been ongoing encroachments along the Dawei to Myeik highway road, affecting the previously mentioned villages and extending toward Pyin Phyu Gyi and Chauk Char villages with a force of about 30 Junta soldiers. On 23 April, at around 2:00 pm, there were nearly two hours of gunfire between junta troops and local revolutionary forces in the area between Sin Kyan and Kywe Zart villages.

This heightened military presence and the frequent clashes along the Dawei to Myeik highway have led to road closures lasting hours each time a skirmish occurs. The situation has prompted an exodus from eight villages, severely affecting the locals.

"A lot of IDPs are arriving. They flee with what little they can carry, often arriving without any food supplies. We feed them whatever we have," said a woman who spoke to HURFOM.

A student from Sin Ku Village involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) reported, "The village is deserted; everyone has fled because of the junta's troops."

As of 22 April, the region, particularly the eastern part of Thayet Chaung, Dawei District, continues to

experience intense battles between the military junta and revolutionary forces, exacerbating the challenges faced by internally displaced persons who struggle with acute shortages of food and secure shelter.

The Mawrawaddy Navy, operated by the military in western Yebyu Township, Dawei, has been launching indiscriminately firing artillery from their warship stationed on the upper reaches of the Zadee River near Zadee village. This reckless shelling has been ongoing, causing significant distress among the local farm workers, who have been compelled to abandon their farmlands and flee for safety.

From 19 to 24 April the area experienced a brief period of calm each morning, but the Junta Navy subsequently fired at least nine artillery mortar shells daily. A resident from Zadee village Yebyu reported that the continuous bombardment was directly impacting their farmland, with shells exploding on impact.

The fallout from these artillery attacks has been immediate and poses a lingering danger. Unexploded ordnance has been found in the farms and surrounding villages, including Zadee, Htot Wa, Diek Ta Kaw, and Kyauk Hta Yan, endangering lives even after the shelling ceases.

Additionally, the violence has driven gardeners and other workers from areas around Kyat Mouk Taw Monastery and Phyu Net to flee. This incident marks the first instance of such sustained and indiscriminate artillery firing by a warship in this region.

Local sources have also reported that as of 22 April, the military Junta has extended its presence to the western bank of the Yebyu River area, intensifying the tension and fear among the local population.

On 25 April, an elderly woman was tragically killed in Long Lone, Western Dawei when junta troops stationed in the area launched an attack. Soldiers from the Office of the Chief of Military Security Affairs in Long Lone fired approximately five artillery mortar shells.

There was no ongoing combat at the time.

The victim, 75-year-old Daw Khin Aye, was fatally struck by shrapnel from an artillery shell that landed in the courtyard of her home. In the same incident, the explosion injured another older man nearby.

Over the past three months, artillery strikes in Tanintharyi have resulted in injuries to more than 37 civilians and the deaths of at least five individuals.



# MYANMAR JUNTA MURDERS 106 CHILDREN IN FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF 2024



Photo: Lucas Metz

**1** 06 children under the age of 18 have been killed in Myanmar as a result of junta actions from 1 January to 30 April 2024, according to the military council across Myanmar from 1 January to 30 April, 2024.

Of the 106 child deaths 66 were boys and 40 were girls, including a 10-month old girl. Sagaing Region with 29 child deaths was the region that recorded the highest number of deaths.

Of those fatalities half, 53, were caused by junta airstrikes.

An AAPP representative said: "Based on the figures we have released, it's evident that all these individuals lost their lives due to the actions of Military Council soldiers, including airstrikes, artillery shelling,

and brutal arrests. In addition, the Military Council's airstrikes, particularly those targeting places like schools and hospitals, are deeply concerning."

As well as children, junta actions also killed 87 people over the age of 60 from 1 January to 30 April, 2024, according to AAPP. Of those, 48 were men and 39 were women. The biggest junta killer of people over 60 was artillery fire which killed 39 of them. The region with the most deaths of people over 60 during those four months was Sagaing Region with 39 deaths.

The AAPP representative said that data on human rights violations committed by the Myanmar junta gathered by AAPP will be forwarded to the relevant UN organisations for them to document the abuses and take action on them.

# EU EXTENDS MYANMAR JUNTA SANCTIONS FOR ANOTHER YEAR

The European Union (EU) announced on 26 April 2024 that sanctions on organisations and people associated with the Myanmar junta would be extended for another year.

Sanctions that currently apply to a total of 103 individuals and 21 entities including Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and Acting Vice-President Myint Swe have been prolonged for a further year until 30 April 2025.

The decision was based on an annual review of sanctions which decided to keep all restrictions in place due to the continuing grave situation in Myanmar, including actions that undermine democracy, as well as serious human rights violations.

Those under sanctions are subject to asset freezes and providing them with funds or economic resources, directly or indirectly, is prohibited. They are also banned from travelling to any EU countries.

Other EU restrictions still in place include embargoes on arms and equipment, including anything that has a dual use for both civilian and military applications, and export restrictions on equipment for monitoring communications which might be used for internal repression. Any training of and cooperation with the Myanmar Armed Forces is also banned.

The EU is also withholding all EU financial assistance that goes directly to the Myanmar junta or that may be seen to be legitimising the junta.

In its statement the EU renewed its condemnation of the of the military coup and its aftermath in Myanmar and said that it remains deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and the protracted nature of the conflict in Myanmar.

Amongst the organisations included on the EU sanctions list renewal are:

The military-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd. (MEHL), Myanmar Gems Enterprise, Myanmar Timber Enterprise, and the Veterans Organization, along with private companies such as Htoo Group, IGE Company, Asia Sun Group, Dynasty International Group, Royal Shune Lei and Sky Aviation Star Sapphire.

Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), No. 1 and 2 Mining Corporation, the Office of Adjutant General, Directorate of Defence Industries, Directorate of Military Procurement also had sanctions against them renewed.





Maris Sangiampongsa.  
Photo: Supplied

## RETIRED DIPLOMAT APPOINTED AS NEW THAI FOREIGN MINISTER

Retired diplomat Maris Sangiampongsa was appointed Thai Foreign Minister on 1 May 2024, following the resignation of Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara from the post on 28 April.

Parnpree had only recently visited Mae Sot on 12 April to see the situation on the border for himself. He also led a committee of Thai cabinet ministers charged with resolving issues to do with Myanmar.

Parnpree told Thai PBS that he believed the government could find a suitable person to succeed him and hoped the new Foreign Minister could work successfully for the country.

Parnpree was also concurrently serving as a Deputy Prime Minister and he resigned the position of Foreign Minister after losing the position of Deputy

Prime Minister in a cabinet reshuffle.

Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin nominated Mr. Maris, 66, for the Foreign Minister Post.

A former career diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Maris was a member of Mr Parnpree's advisory team. He held a series of ambassadorial postings in Nepal (2009), Australia (2011), New Zealand (2015) and Canada (2018).

His appointment comes at a crucial time as Thailand steps up diplomatic efforts in managing the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR'S CONFLICT OVERRIDES 'SUSTAINABILITY GOALS' AS 2024 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY IS MARKED

MIZZIMA EDITORIAL

The global community marks 2024 World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, an opportunity for all press freedom stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to freedom of expression including press freedom, right to access information and safety of journalists and media workers.

The commemoration has significant meaning in Myanmar as the country continues to experience various forms of media repression by the military junta as the civil war deepens over three years after the 2021 military coup. Independent media outlets have had their offices closed and trashed, and those still active have to work undercover in the country and in exile. A number of journalists have been jailed and tortured. Some have been killed.

Each year the World Press Freedom Day has a different theme. This year's theme is "A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis".

In the UNESCO Concept Note for the day, they stress that sustainable development and the path to the 2030 Agenda are in jeopardy. The triple planetary crisis—climate change, biodiversity loss, and air pollution—along with their connections to public health issues, the need to strengthen democracy, to tackle "disinformation or misinformation" on digital platforms, among other issues have become major challenges for humanity.

This is where the work of journalists is crucially important, the Concept Note says, describing the challenges for the media in terms of the physical

dangers posed in covering environmental issues, the problems of obtaining correct information, and pointing out that the Santiago Declaration stressed the importance of respecting media pluralism and cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity as fundamental factors of democratic societies and which should be reflected in all media.

Prior to the Myanmar junta coup in 2021, there was a small but noticeable uptick in local and international journalists and media organizations tackling environmental issues – notably stories on the energy sector, including hydro power and coal plants, urban and rural pollution, natural resource excavation, and sustainable practices, including the controversy over China-backed copper and rare earth mining. A few investigative pieces stood out for highlighting the environmental damage. At the same time, floods, droughts and heatwaves proved an obvious reminder to the media of issues that deserved attention.

Then 1 February 2021 struck, with the military removing the duly elected civilian government of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi – the move prompting a radical shift in priorities for the media, including running for their lives as they attempted to escape arrest.

Myanmar's United Nations envoy Kyaw Moe Tun touched on this environmental theme, priorities and the dilemma recently in a United Nations General Debate of the 2024 ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum on 25 April, where progress towards Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs and the 2030 Agenda



were discussed.

In his speech, he stressed the importance of sustainable development goals on a global and national level, while the international community provides “an enabling environment and complementary support”.

But the obvious problem was hard to ignore.

“Unfortunately, in my country, Myanmar, the illegal military coup in February 2021 has dismantled our prospects of realizing the SDGs, even the future of our youth,” Kyaw Moe Tun said. “The people of Myanmar are experiencing various grave sufferings due to the military junta’s atrocities.”

The Myanmar envoy, who effectively represents Myanmar’s resistance movement at the United Nations, went on during this speech to outline the key challenges – challenges as we mark this day that directly affect the work of journalists and media people in covering the broad scope of subjects related to Myanmar.

“Myanmar is currently at the intersection of political,

economic and developmental crises. Cooperation and effective assistance from the international community should be ‘conflict-sensitive’ and tailored to the aspiration of our people,” Kyaw Moe Tun said.

“It is crystal clear that ending the military dictatorship and building a federal democratic union is the only way forward to create a conducive environment to the successful implementation of... the 2030 Agenda, above all to the peace and stability in Myanmar,” Kyaw Moe Tun concluded.

As Myanmar’s UN Envoy suggests, Myanmar can indeed play its part in a sustainable future for the world, as can the independent media outlets whose personnel currently put their lives on the line to report. But at this point in time, the Myanmar crisis and civil war to a large extent drown out the calls for sustainability.

Until peace descends on Myanmar, the environment and sustainability are likely to play second fiddle to the media’s journalistic coverage of the Myanmar people’s desperate needs as they are hammered by the junta.

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A gallery assistant puts up Myanmar photographers' photos for an exhibition sponsored by the New York Times held in France. Photo: AFP

## COMMEMORATING VOICES FROM MYANMAR'S MEDIA ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2024

Exile Hub, a non-profit organization formed in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup in Myanmar to support media professionals and human rights defenders, today launched its campaign dedicated to championing media expression. Through compelling narratives from recipients of its Critical Voices Fellowship program, Exile Hub aims to spotlight the critical importance of defending media freedoms in tumultuous times.

The program's participants, predominantly journalists and media professionals fleeing conflict-affected Myanmar or that are currently in hiding, share their compelling stories via curated voice clips on Exile Hub's campaign platform [[www.exilehub.org/onlymyvoiceleft](http://www.exilehub.org/onlymyvoiceleft)]. Representing diverse backgrounds, these individuals range from promising young reporters with nascent careers that were abruptly halted to seasoned journalists whose life's work were disrupted by the suppression of media freedoms.

Following the February 2021 coup, Myanmar witnessed widespread protests which were met with crackdowns by the military junta. Amidst this upheaval, media work was severely curtailed, with draconian restrictions imposed on independent journalism. Journalists faced censorship, arrests, and intimidation for reporting on the unrest, leading to the closure of media outlets and the persecution of media

professionals. This situation which has unfortunately persisted, not only constrained the flow of independent information within Myanmar but has also endangered the lives and livelihoods of the media here.

"It is critical that we prioritize the safety and security of Myanmar media professionals, who routinely face severe repercussions for fulfilling their essential duty of informing the public. The systematic efforts to suppress media have compelled many to conceal or retreat from public view, even in online spaces, resulting in the loss of opportunities, income, dignity, and their very identities. Despite these challenges, their voices remain their most potent and fundamental means of expression. Our goal is to uphold their right to free speech and journalism by shedding light on their plight and advocating for the support they need. By doing so, we not only help safeguard their work but also advance the broader cause of human rights, democratic principles, and social justice," said Yucca Wai, Research Director at Exile Hub.

An Exile Hub research report reveals that 84.8% of journalists currently in exile, including a significant representation from women, cited the dire security situation and threats directly linked to their journalistic work as the primary reason for their departure from Myanmar.

As of April 2024, Reporters Without Borders



reports that Myanmar continues to detain 62 journalists and media workers, reflecting one of the highest rates of imprisonment globally. This alarming statistic underscores the challenges facing media practitioners here amidst broader political repression. Since the coup, over 26,000 individuals have been arrested as political prisoners, painting a grim picture of the systemic stifling of dissent and free speech.

For the past three years, Exile Hub has been active in supporting journalists, media professionals, and other human rights defenders, through a range of support programs and assistance that are tailored to their unique needs. These include its Critical Voice Fellowship (CVF), Critical Voices Production Grants (CVG) for media, vocational and professional development courses, emergency funds support, mental health and psychosocial support workshops, and other ongoing initiatives.

“As we endeavor to amplify the voices of Myanmar’s media community, we would like to urge individuals and organizations worldwide to stand in solidarity and support the crucial efforts of defending the media’s right to work in the face of adversity,” added Yucca Wai, Research Director at Exile Hub.

Exile Hub is a non-profit organization that was formed in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup in Myanmar to support human rights defenders and media professionals facing immediate threats for their essential work in promoting freedom, justice, and democracy. Exile Hub is dedicated to empowering and protecting their voices so that they can safely carry out their professions free from persecution and is committed to providing steadfast support, resources, and advocacy through a wide range of initiatives including the Critical Voices Fellowship (CVF), Critical Voices Production Grants (CVG), capacity-building training, emergency funds support, mental health and psychosocial support workshops, and other ongoing activities.

Exile Hub envisions a world where human rights defenders and media professionals can use their voices freely and safely, without fear of persecution or reprisal, where their essential contributions to society are recognized, respected, and protected. For more information, visit Exile Hub’s website at <https://www.exilehub.org>

## EU VOICES SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

To mark World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2024 the European Union issued a statement in support of journalists and media workers and the work they do.

Below is the text of the statement that was issued by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union.

Every day, journalists and media workers bravely exercise their freedom of expression, often at great personal risk. Independent, fact-based journalism helps protect our democracies by exposing injustices, holding leaders to account and allowing citizens to make informed decisions. In 2024, with elections taking place in over 60 countries around the globe, the work of journalists is more significant than ever. On this World Press Freedom Day, we honour their work and courage.

As our eyes and ears on the ground, journalists must be protected at all times, everywhere. The EU firmly condemns all acts of violence, including threats, against journalists for exercising their profession, whether perpetrated by states, organised groups or individuals. There must be no impunity for such crimes, no matter where they take place.

Journalists and media workers reporting from armed conflict must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. The EU deplors the dramatic increase in the number of journalists killed or injured while reporting on the devastating consequences of war. Far too many journalists have lost their lives in recent months while bringing us the news from Gaza. Journalists also continue to be at risk on a daily basis as they report on Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as from conflicts in Myanmar, Sudan and elsewhere.

The EU expresses serious concern about the practice of denying independent media access to

conflict zones, as a way to control the information space and restrict the public's access to factual and objective reporting.

Around the world, independent media faces a number of existential threats. More than ever, we must take decisive action to ensure that the media can operate in viable political, economic and legal conditions. At home, the EU has taken a significant step to this end with the adoption of the European Media Freedom Act. This landmark legislation seeks to enhance editorial freedom, protect journalistic sources and improve the transparency of media ownership in the EU.

The EU remains steadfast in its commitment to protect media freedom and pluralism across the world. In defending media freedom, we protect not just our right to know, but our very ability to shape a future guided by truth and accountability.



Photo: Alexandre Lallemand

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Cardboard cutouts of PM Narendra Modi in a town as the election approaches. Photo: AFP

# INDIANS CAST THEIR VOTES IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST ELECTION

**NICHOLAS NUGENT**

In a year rich in national elections few carry as much significance as that of India, which last year overtook China as the world's most populous nation. Of a population of 1.44 billion citizens around 970 million are eligible to cast their votes in this the eighteenth general election since Indian independence in 1947.

They will be selecting members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament which in turn chooses the prime minister, who will form the next government with the endorsement of the upper house, the Rajya Sabha.

Voting has traditionally been spread over several days to avoid stretching the security forces too thinly. This year it takes place over seven polling days beginning on 19 April and concluding on 1 June. Once voting is completed in all areas counting begins and the results are due to be announced on 4 June.

Successful candidates in the 543 parliamentary constituencies will take their seats in the Lok Sabha, joining 131 representatives in seats reserved for disadvantaged caste and tribal communities.

Huge effort and expense is exerted to select members of an assembly which is modest in size – smaller than that of Britain's House of Commons, on

which it is based, and of the US House of Representatives. India takes its democratic process seriously and the number of times power has changed in recent years under the country's first-past-the-post electoral system suggests its means of choosing a government works well.

Indian citizens, whether literate or not, are invariably keen to take part in a process in which they are under no compulsion to participate. Voting is voluntary. India is proud to call itself the world's largest democracy.

So what are the prospects that power will change hands under a new government? The widespread expectation is that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will be re-elected as the largest party and that 73-year-old Narendra Modi will begin a third five-year period in office, making him one of the longest serving prime ministers in India's history.

His party, the BJP, won 303 Lok Sabha seats in 2019, and currently rules in alliance with smaller regional parties giving him a Lok Sabha tally of 352. This time the party has set itself a target of 370 seats with the hope that additional coalition partners would take his overall command of seats through the National Democratic Alliance above 400, a figure seldom reached in the past,

causing one political commentator to say he didn't know where the extra seats were coming from.

These numbers matter since gaining two-thirds of the seats in the Lok Sabha gives a government the power to change the constitution. Many of Mr Modi's opponents believe his ultimate intention is to 'de-secularise' the constitution and make India a Hindu nation, as Pakistan became a Muslim nation when Partition split formerly British-ruled India.

Much of the political debate in recent times has revolved around issues to do with religion, notably the government's endorsement of a plan, now fulfilled, to build a Hindu temple – known as Ram Janmabhoomi or Ram's birthplace – at a site in northern Uttar Pradesh (UP) state formerly occupied by a Muslim place of worship. Uttar Pradesh sends the largest number of members to the Lok Sabha and is a state that Mr Modi is determined to dominate.

Since his time as chief minister of Gujarat state, Mr Modi has made no secret of his wish to give greater importance and status to Hindus over followers of other faiths. He rode to power at the centre on a platform that included what is known as 'Hindutva', or Hindu nationalism. His government has also discriminated against Muslims fleeing persecution in neighbouring countries – such as the Rohingya community of Myanmar – under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Critics say the BJP is redefining members of India's

substantial Muslim minority of around 200 million as second-class citizens.

The country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was a determined secularist intent on giving the same rights to followers or worshippers of any of India's many faiths. This provision was incorporated into the constitution during the premiership of Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi.

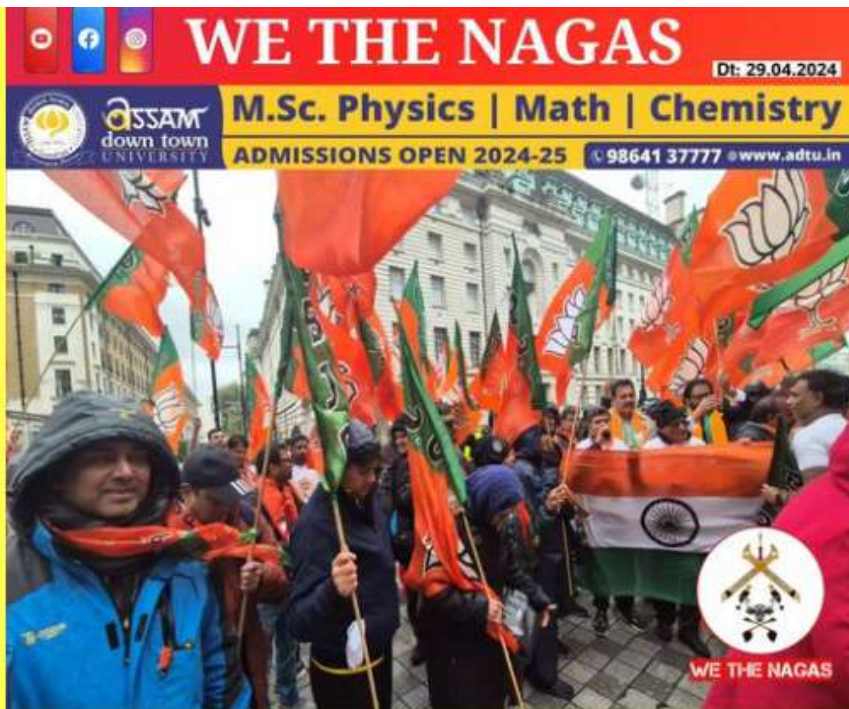
The BJP's main rival for power is once again the Congress Party, more formally the Indian National Congress, which gained power at 11 of the previous 17 elections. It is led electorally by Rahul Gandhi who has politics in his blood. His great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, grandmother Indira Gandhi and father Rajiv Gandhi have all held the post of prime minister and the 53-year old bachelor Rahul aspires to follow in their footsteps. The party's president, 81-year old Mallikarjun Kharge, sits in the upper house of parliament, the Rajya Sabha, so Rahul Gandhi is the party's candidate for prime minister.

Congress is far behind in opinion polls so he is not expected to be in a position to form a government. At the 2019 poll, Congress won 52 Lok Sabha seats, slightly better than in 2014 but far below the record 414 seats captured for Congress by his father, Rajiv Gandhi, forty years ago. According to opinion polls, Congress may not reach its 2019 tally.

Mr Modi is a popular and charismatic leader who can point to plenty of achievements during his ten years in power. The country's annual GDP growth rates of over 6 per cent, forecast to exceed 8 per cent in the current year, puts it high among a handful of countries whose economies are growing especially rapidly, a factor that has gone down well with Indian business leaders.

Among BJP successes in a country which still suffers from widespread poverty and unemployment are the bringing of electricity to more villages and installation of toilets in more homes though the party has not been as successful in creating jobs, always a yardstick by which political leaders are judged.

Mr Modi has invested in infrastructure, notably roads and airports, and presided over a period of prosperity for business as the GDP figures demonstrate. He recently



**"Run For Modi" Event In London To Drum Up**

**Support For PM Modi**



ended a period as president of the G20 forum for international economic cooperation, which gave him a high profile among both developed and developing nations at last year's summit in Delhi, and plays an active role in BRICS, the organisation which links second tier economic powers.

All this spells likely electoral success for a figure who was once ostracised by several nations, including the US, for his allegedly sectarian policies while chief minister of Gujarat, where his antipathy towards the Muslim community was notorious.

That reputation has been in evidence in the current campaign. Riding on the success of the Ram Temple inauguration at Ayodhya in January, Mr Modi has several times referred to Muslims as 'infiltrators with large families' suggesting they are intent on overtaking the Hindu majority – and he was not just referring to those newly arrived in the country. This was a jibe against the opposition Congress Party which he said planned to favour those 'who have more children'. His campaign speeches left no doubt that he regards India's Muslims as less worthy citizens than Hindus, and will have won the approval of his natural supporters.

Congress president Kharge accused the BJP leader of using 'hate speech'. Political analyst Asim Ali told the Financial Times he had never before heard a prime minister 'speak such inflammatory rhetoric'. Daniel Markey of the US Institute of Peace told the New York Times the prime minister was deliberately trying to intimidate the BJP's political opponents and 'would not have made these comments unless he believed he could get away with it'.

The comments signalled a deepening of 'communal rhetoric' between the two main parties which analysts interpret as a sign of desperation on both sides.

At the midway point in polling there are signs that turnout so far has been low. Excessive heat in some areas has been blamed but analysts also suggest an 'anti-incumbency' factor, a feeling it is time for a change of leadership, perhaps in both main parties.

The main electoral battleground is, as always, the northern lowlands, sometimes disparagingly referred to as 'the cow belt' because of the strong following there of Hindu practices. It is an area where communal violence between Hindus and Muslims is most likely to break out. The BJP has set its sights on making a clean sweep of the populous states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which together send 120 MPs to the Lok Sabha. In 2019 the party was disappointed to win only three-quarters of UP seats and fewer than half of those in Bihar because of a proliferation of other parties, though

Congress captured only one seat in each state. This time the BJP hopes to win the backing of both states more comprehensively.

The party's prospects look less promising in India's five southern states where voting patterns have not traditionally favoured the BJP. According to Bangalore-based journalist and film-maker Nupur Basu, the BJP will be 'hard-pressed' to retain the 29 seats it took in 2019. She says this has not stopped Mr Modi campaigning strongly in the south, especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu whose state governments are allied to Congress. It captured no seats in the two states in the previous election and seems determined 'to open an account there' this time. This could accentuate a rift between the BJP-supporting north and the south where Congress, the Communist Party and regional parties are likely to hold sway.

Even without the south, the likelihood is that the BJP will be in a position to form a new government. A fear among non-Hindus is that with a sufficient Lok Sabha majority it will move further towards its ideological Hindutva goal by 'de-secularising' – removing the constitutional pre-amble which protect the rights of followers of all religions.

The party has already been accused of weakening India's democracy by exerting more political control over the Election Commission and the instruments of law and order, including the courts. A recent example was the detention by the Enforcement Directorate of the chief ministers of Delhi and Bihar, the latter being forced to resign his office. The government has also tightened its controls over the media. Some people worry that this expansion of governmental influence and control may be extended further.

Another possibility is that the BJP will alter the balance between central and state governments, reducing the autonomy of the latter. There are already signs of a move in this direction with central government-appointed state governors accused of interfering with the exercise of government in non-BJP ruled states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

The prime minister may go further, it has been suggested, and adopt 'Bharat', the Sanskrit name of the country he used at the G20 meeting in Delhi, as the nation's new name. This would not go down well in southern states whose languages are not based on Sanskrit.

These are apprehensions among those who do not support Mr Modi's ideological goals. For most people the expected declaration of the BJP's victory on 4 June will lead to little change in the way India is governed.

Internationally, allies will congratulate the prime minister and expect 'business as usual.' Mr Modi has played a clever game in recent years balancing the country's overseas interests.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, he felt bound to support Russia from which India buys arms, though he never gave Vladimir Putin his whole-hearted support. At a Central Asian summit soon after the invasion Mr Modi went as far as to tell the Russian leader this was not time for a war. India has subsequently benefited from a discount buying oil that Russia could no longer sell in Europe.

Over the Gaza war Mr Modi has also managed to ride two horses, balancing the country's traditional support for the Palestinians as victims while maintaining his new friendship and trading ties with Israel. As with Russia, he had one eye to his relations with the United States and other western nations. He has had a warm relationship with successive American presidents, including Mr Donald Trump and Mr Joe Biden, and has supported a nuclear cooperation deal signed with the US by a previous Congress government.

Neighbouring countries too are unlikely to see any change in Delhi's policy towards them, least of all the so-called hostile neighbours of Pakistan and China. Concerns about the civil war in India's north eastern state of Manipur and growing instability across the frontier in Myanmar has led the government to commit to building a 1,643 kms fence along the entire border.

According to India's election rules, there can be no predictions or opinion polls while the six-week polling period is active, nor even exit polls showing how many people have voted. So predictions are mere speculation. Indians, and neighbours, need to await the election results in early June to be sure of the way things are heading.

*Nicholas Nugent has reported from South and Southeast Asia for the BBC. He is the author of a biography of the former Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, a book about post-war Vietnam and co-author of Culture Smart! Myanmar.*



Opposition Congress Party candidate Rahul Gandhi out campaigning. Photo: AFP



# OUTSIZED INFLUENCE

“Thailand, Singapore, these countries are very close to us, these are our neighboring countries, but they don’t know Myanmar! So we need to we have to try to express our voice and our feeling about our condition to the world.”

These are the words of a Burmese youth who goes by the Twitter moniker of “Little Activist”.

He was recently interviewed for a podcast by Insight Myanmar.

As someone who had once hardly paid any attention to political matters in his country, he was propelled into action after the 2021 military coup. He dropped out of university, where he was in the process of earning an engineering degree, because he refused to accept any degree offered by what he now saw as an illegal and unjust authority.

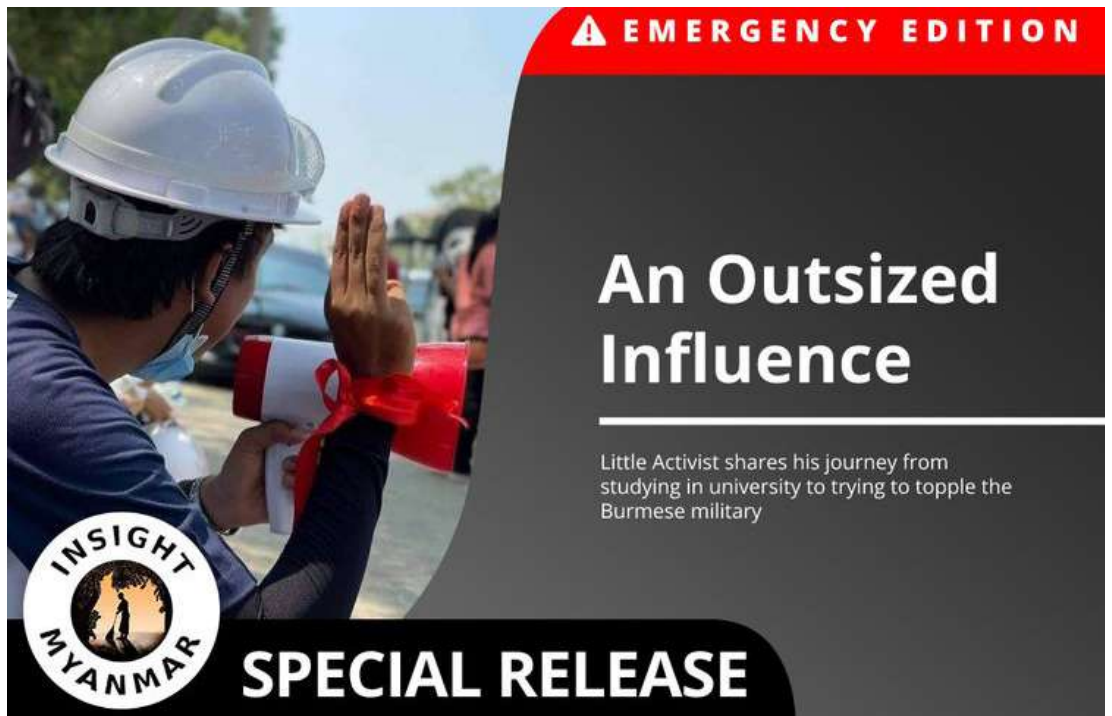
“For people like me, we will never rejoin a university controlled by Myanmar’s military

terrorists!” he exclaims. Instead, he has come to play a leading role in disseminating information about the latest developments in Myanmar, amassing nearly 15,000 Twitter followers. He routinely translates news into English so that outsiders can better understand his country’s horrifying conflict. This is no easy task given that he has been operating entirely in Myanmar, and so is faced with frequent internet outages and safety concerns that put him squarely in the regime’s crosshairs.

More recently, like so many other Burmese, he has grown alarmed and concerned about the junta’s new conscription laws. “With the cover of the law, they [demand] a mandatory military service to everyone in Myanmar!” He attributes this latest development to the

heavy losses they have incurred following Operation 1027, and Little Activist wants the world to know that their resistance will never falter. “It is very hard to express our feeling that we will never fall! We never give up, and we’ll try every possible way to extract our freedom.”

But the threat to safety has never been worse. The regime is demanding updated ID cards for all citizens that now carry GPS tracking, while new passport applications are being denied. These recent conscription laws are adding yet another level of injustice to the horrifying situation, with soldiers engaging in extortion, threatening families with abduction and demanding increasingly steep bribes for their children’s freedom from what could amount to serving as human shields or minesweepers in active conflict zones. Little Activist says that Burmese youth are now essentially “hostages”



of the regime.

As a result, there have been lines stretching in front of various embassies in Yangon made up of thousands of people who have been queuing for hours, if not days, hoping for some chance to escape the draft by leaving the country. Things are no better on the Thai side of the border; police and authorities there exploit and harass Burmese seeking safety. “The top military tiers, they talk to each other. They don’t look on the citizens and the people of their country. They don’t care about us.”

**CHECK OUT PODCAST**

Listen to Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/ea3eb296-897e-4221-a64d-1ed036b6e8cf>

# MYANMAR JUNTA SUSPENDS OVERSEAS WORK PERMITS FOR MEN AMID MANDATORY CONSCRIPTION LAW BACKLASH

The Myanmar junta has announced the suspension of permits for men seeking employment abroad, just weeks following the implementation of a mandatory military conscription law, prompting a surge in attempts by thousands to flee the nation, according to an official of the junta.

On May 2, the permanent secretary of the junta's Labour Ministry told local media about the temporary ban on men departing to work overseas. He said that the measure came into force on May 1 and would continue as required, providing no rationale for the decision.

In February, the junta, facing significant armed struggle to its governance, announced its intention to implement the conscription law enabling it to summon all eligible men for a minimum two-year military service obligation.

As a result of this action, media reports indicated that thousands formed queues outside foreign embassies in Yangon for visas, while others crossed into neighboring Thailand to evade conscription.

So far, men who have already obtained permits to work overseas are not affected by the suspension.

According to a report published by the Myanmar IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) in March this year, more than 10 million people, constituting at least 18.5% of the population, migrated: 6.5 million people aged 15 and above left their households, while 3.1 million people relocated together as households or family units.



# JUNTA SHUTS DOWN PRIVATE HOSPITALS OVER HIRING CDM STAFF

Junta officials have shut down some private hospitals for hiring staff members who have participated in the anti-junta Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), reported Radio Free Asia.

In southeast Myanmar, the Aye Thandar hospital in Mawlamyine, Mon State was recently shut down for three months for employing staff members who participated in the CDM.

The directive came from junta administrators, including the Mon State Ministry of Health.

The regime's crackdown on dissent has extended to private healthcare providers, with warnings issued by the junta's Health Minister Thet Khaing Win.

This action follows closures of hospitals in Yangon and Mandalay for similar reasons in the past.

Two hospitals in Yangon were closed this year for two months by the junta. In Mandalay, six hospitals were compelled to shut down in 2022 due to allegations of hiring workers participating in the anti-junta CDM.





## CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS THE PASSING OF MAHA BODHI MYAING BUDDHIST ABBOT: WAS HE AN ARHAT OR A SUPPORTER OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM?

**M**aha Bodhi Myaing Buddhist Abbot passed away in Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region on April 30. Many social media users, including both junta supporters and pro-democracy celebrities, believed that he was an Arhat, an enlightened monk, so they expressed sorrow for his death.

However, some social media users and activists pointed out that he was a supporter of the ultranationalist and anti-Muslim organization Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, also widely known as Ma Ba Tha.

An old video footage resurfaced and circulated on Facebook, in which the Abbot praised the ultranationalist monk Wirathu. In the video, the Abbot told Wirathu that at that time, if he were present alongside Wirathu, he would also curse South Korean UN envoy Yanghee Lee, who highlighted the plight of Muslim minorities in 2015. At that time, Wirathu called the UN envoy a “whore”.

The Abbot also wrote several poems for Ma Ba Tha.

An intense debate arose between the supporters of the Abbot and the critics, who argued that the Abbot could not be an enlightened monk but was merely a supporter of Ma Ba Tha, which incited several religious conflicts in several areas, including the 2013 Myanmar anti-Muslim riots.

## MYANMAR’S PUBLICLY-MANDATED NUG REAFFIRMS PRESS FREEDOM COMMITMENT

**M**yanmar’s National Unity Government (NUG) has reiterated its support for press freedom and independent media, marking World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

In a statement released on 3 May, the NUG emphasized the crucial role of a free press in fostering public discourse and accountability.

The exiled government pledged to oppose any restrictions on media freedom, protect journalists from harassment, and enhance public access to information.

# 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.