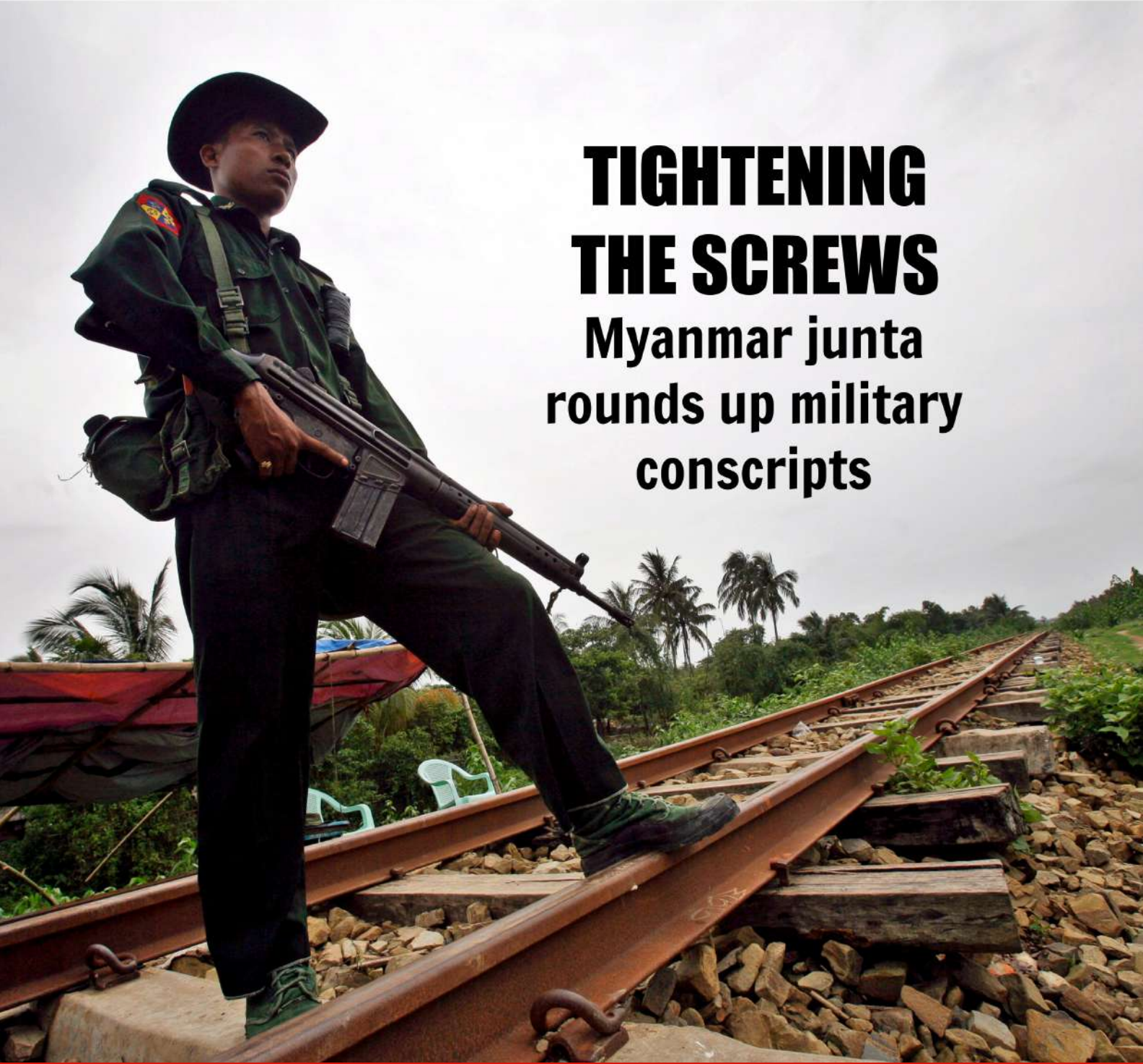


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## **TIGHTENING THE SCREWS**

**Myanmar junta  
rounds up military  
conscripts**

**Myanmar junta targeting healthcare**  
**Post-Covid and the changing face of Thai tourism**

# 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.

# MYANMAR RESISTANCE GROUPS DRIVE HOME MESSAGE TO KICK MILITARY OUT OF POLITICS

Last week a member of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) and high-ranking leaders of three ethnic armed organizations held a news conference in Tokyo in a rare joint move on foreign soil intended to emphasize their unity against the military junta, according to media reports.

Nikkei Asia magazine reports the participants of the press meeting on 15 May included Zaw Wai Soe, the minister of education and health in the National Unity Government (NUG); Salai Thla Hei, general secretary of the Chin National Front; Saw Nimrod, secretary of the foreign affairs department of the Karen National Union (KNU); and Luiz, secretary of the international and alliance relations committee of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

The week-long visit to Japan that began on 10 May enabled the delegates to talk to members of the Japanese government, members of parliament, and NGO representatives. The visit was supported by an NGO.

Japan and its government administrations have long had cordial relationships with the Myanmar regimes and NGOs – at times tip-toeing in support of the various military regimes, the earlier “democratic” administration under Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy, and NGOs.

This visit by the Myanmar resistance delegates to Japan was important, even if it was low-key and did not receive a lot of media coverage. In the press conference, the group requested the Japanese government to support international efforts to prevent the military regime from importing aviation fuel, to convince India not to transfer weapons to the regime, and to promote humanitarian aid via alternative channels other than through the regime.

In addition, they conveyed an important message for governments and

international bodies that may still be labouring under the delusion that the Myanmar military is still an important player to deal with.

At the press conference, the NUG’s Zaw Wai Soe reiterated the demand that the Myanmar military, which ousted the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, must agree not to be involved in national politics in future. What this means is the ditching of the 2008 military-written constitution that assures the military’s political power by stipulating that a quarter of the members of both chambers be appointed by the military’s commander in chief.

This is crucially important to take in. Firstly, the combined forces of the NUG, Peoples Defence Forces (PDFs) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) have surprised international players by their success and tenacity in striking back against the brutal military post-coup. The Spring Revolution has been living up to its name.

Secondly, there is a recognition that “enough is enough” – that the Myanmar military have completely dirtied their copybook with their bitter brutality against the people of the country, the people they are supposed to protect. There is no going back. The Myanmar military have sullied the name of their hero founder Aung San through their horrific conduct.

Moving forward, international players seeking to engage and help solve the Myanmar civil war will need to recognize that the future lies with a plethora of players who have stepped up to the plate in the face of military brutality. Dealing with these “alternative” governing players will not be easy. But diplomats and humanitarian players need to recognize the conflict for what it is – a revolution.

## EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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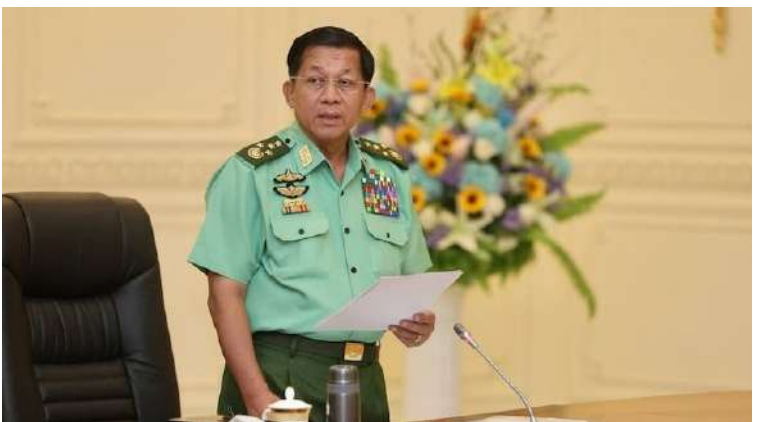
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**Cover photo of a Myanmar soldier by AFP**



Myanmar soldier. Photo: AFP

# TIGHTENING THE SCREWS

## MYANMAR JUNTA ROUNDS UP MILITARY CONSCRIPTS

**T**here are two versions of the Myanmar junta's military conscription drive – the propaganda programme with conscripts smiling and the frightening coercive programme abducting young men off the street.

On 10 February the junta said it would enforce a law allowing it to call up all men aged 18-35 to serve in the military, and women were also listed as eligible.

The military is struggling to crush widespread opposition to its rule following its 2021 coup that ended an experiment with democracy and plunged Myanmar into turmoil. The morale of servicemen is said to be low, particularly due to serious battlefield losses in the north, west and east.

## MISLED FODDER

The junta said it would begin the conscription process after mid-April's Thingyan New Year Festival. But in reality men were starting to be arrested and abducted within days and weeks of the call.

Last week, state media put on a show of new recruits being marched to training centres across the country.

Junta number two Soe Win visited Yangon on Monday last week and was briefed on the "systematic selection" of those being called up, the state-owned Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The first batch of recruits began training in April, according to state broadcaster MRTV, which did not say how many had been signed up. Recruits from the second batch have begun arriving at their training camps, according to a montage broadcast by MRTV last week.

## GREETED WITH FLOWERS

The images showed dozens of men, purportedly at different locations across the country, walking in lines to training centres, some led by soldiers or marching bands.

Groups of women and soldiers formed tunnels to greet some of them with flowers or place garlands on their necks.

One group of men were wearing identical T-shirts with "Natmauk" on the back, the images showed.



All pomp but Myanmar forces are losing the war.  
Photo: AFP

Natmauk is the home town of Aung San, who spearheaded the independence struggle against British colonial rule and is revered by Myanmar's military, which he founded.

The irony of this is not lost on many. Aung San's daughter, democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi, has been detained by the military since the coup and jailed on charges critics say are designed to remove her from politics – 27 years, effectively a death sentence.

## 13 MILLION ELIGIBLE

After arriving at their training centres the second batch of recruits "took a medical test and were issued with food, military equipment and a stipend," MRTV said. It did not say how many men were included in the second batch.

The military service law was authored by a previous junta in 2010 but was never brought into force.

It allows the military to summon all men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve for at least two years.

The service term can last up to five years during a state of emergency, which the junta has extended multiple times since its coup.

Around 13 million people will be eligible to be called up, a junta spokesman has said, though the military only has the capacity to train 50,000 a year.



The conscription drive is splitting Myanmar society. Photo: AFP

## THE REALITY

The frightening reality is the conscription drive has led to panic. Local media have reported cases of young men being pulled off the streets in Yangon and other cities and taken away to undergo military training, although the junta has denied the reports. Some “wet-behind-the-ear” conscripts have been killed within weeks of being inducted, caught up in clashes with resistance forces. The conscription has included the drafting of Rohingya from villages and IDP camps in Rakhine State, pitting them against battle-seasoned Arakan Army forces.

Anecdotal evidence, and on the ground reports, appear to indicate the junta is getting desperate and its forces are brutal in the field. Rights groups say the

junta has burned villages, carried out extrajudicial killings and used air and artillery strikes to punish communities it suspects of opposing its rule.

Thousands of primarily young men have been fleeing the country or fleeing to the hills over the last three months, many entering Thailand legally or illegally, or going further afield to South Korea. But for those who are caught in the draft, the future looks bleak.

*Reporting: Mizzima, AFP*



Forced conscripts are getting limited training and then sent into the field. Photo: AFP



Myanmar nationals escaping from Myawaddy across the border to Thailand. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR JUNTA'S AUNG ZEYA OPERATION STALLS

**T**he State Administration Council (SAC) Operation Aung Zeya military offensive has encountered significant resistance, effectively stalling its advance across the Dawna mountain range.

Spearheaded by a force of 2,000 personnel of No. (55) Light Battalion Division, Tank Battalion, Armour Battalion, and Drone Company, the operation aims to reclaim the strategic city of Myawaddy, a key border trade city on the Thailand-Myanmar border.

However, the joint forces led by the Karen National Union (KNU) have thwarted the military junta's advance, maintaining control over Thingannyinaung, the gateway to Myawaddy.

Despite attempts to reinforce the Aung Zeya column with troops from LID (77), the Myanmar military has been unable to breach the staunch resistance along the Asia Highway and through the dense jungle terrain.

Reports from the frontline indicate fierce battles raging along the Asia Highway, with casualties

mounting on both sides. As of the latest update on 9 May, the toll stands at 300 SAC soldiers killed and 600 wounded, while the KNLA-led resistance forces have suffered 20 fatalities and 600 injuries. These numbers are hard to confirm.

Analysts say the weather is not on the junta's side. The stifling heat of the hot season will soon make way for the rainy season, likely to bog down vehicles and armour. Aung Zeya is viewed as an important military drive by the junta to recapture lost ground – and an important trading hub on an economic and political level.

## Civilians suffer in AA-SAC clashes in Rakhine

The ongoing conflict in Rakhine State has intensified, marked by major military confrontations, airstrikes, and devastating collateral damage. Amidst escalating hostilities between the Arakan Army (AA) and the military junta or State Administration Council

(SAC), civilians are bearing the brunt of the violence.

Recent reports indicate that AA forces have captured the rest of the SAC's battalions in Buthidaung township, compelling the SAC to resort to airstrikes to secure the release of their troops. The AA has claimed they now control Buthidaung. Along the Thandwe-Shwehle road, the AA is effectively cutting off SAC's supply lines and encircling their troops near the Thahtay hydropower project and Shwehle region.

On 9 May, SAC drones bombed Sanae town, an AA-controlled area, near the market and bus station, resulting in no casualties. However, a previous drone attack on 8 May claimed the life of a woman and left seven others critically injured.

Meanwhile, the Pandawpyin border guard police abandoned their positions to relocate to Maungdaw city, sabotaging the Pandawpyin bridge and several others in an attempt to impede the AA's offensive operations.

As the conflict escalates, civilian casualties continue to mount. Tragically, four children lost their lives while playing with discarded ammunition in Khawe village, Paletwa township.

Additionally, SAC airstrikes on 14 May claimed the lives of four individuals, including three women, and injured four others. In Thandwe township, SAC artillery shelling on Linthi village resulted in the deaths of ten villagers, including two children and a senior female.

Amidst the chaos, Rohingya communities are fleeing to AA-controlled areas for safety, with 7,000 Rohingya from Buthidaung seeking refuge. The AA claim they have been providing aid to displaced Rohingya, fostering improved relations between Rakhine and Rohingya communities in areas under AA control. Rohingya individuals say they are enjoying freedom to travel and engage in business activities, contrasting with restrictions imposed in areas ruled by the SAC.

However, amidst these developments in AA-controlled areas, concerns persist over the plight of non-Muslim communities in Buthidaung, where over 5,000 houses have been reportedly burnt down.

Disturbingly reports emerge of Rohingya militias, armed by the military junta, torching houses belonging to the Rakhine community in Maungdaw township. A video surfaced on 13 May, showing Rohingya militias, wearing military uniforms devoid of emblems and armed with BA-63 auto rifles provided by the SAC, setting fire to civilian homes. The junta appears to be pursuing a policy of "divide-and-rule" to hamper the AA advance and to stir up animosity between different

racial and religious groups.

As the conflict in Rakhine State intensifies, the humanitarian crisis deepens, with civilians trapped in the crossfire and subjected to violence perpetrated by the military junta. International attention and assistance are urgently needed to address the escalating crisis and prevent further loss of innocent lives.

## **Rohingya refugees conscripted by ARSA and other Rohingya militias**

Recent reports reveal a disturbing trend of forced recruitment targeting young Rohingya men in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. On 29 April, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) reportedly coerced 500 Rohingya youths, who were sheltering in subcamps 1, 6, 18, and 19, under the guise of the Arakan Army (AA). Witnesses describe abductions from shelters and streets, with some victims reportedly released after paying a ransom.

AA spokesperson Khaing Thukha vehemently denounced the actions of ARSA, RSO, and the Arakan Rohingya Army, disavowing any associated with the forced recruitment. He condemned the exploitation of their organization's name.

Reports have also been coming in that Rohingya men have been abducted in the Bangladesh camps, taken across the border, and dragooned into the Myanmar military – to fight for the military that drove them to flee Rakhine State in 2017.

Simultaneously, the military junta, the State Administration Council (SAC), is conscripting Rohingya youths from internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, Buthidaung, and Maungdaw. These conscripts receive minimal training before being sent to the front lines, where they face off against AA forces. The practice has raised concerns about the safety and well-being of Rohingya communities caught in the crossfire of conflict.

## **AA-junta-China talks go nowhere**

Border News Agency reported that a meeting took place 16 May in Kunming, China, between the AA and the coup Myanmar military. However, negotiations were reportedly difficult.

During five rounds of talks involving the Arakan Army (AA) and the coup Myanmar military, the Arakan issue was discussed privately, but progress was limited.

According to a source familiar with the details of the talks, negotiations with the AA were unsuccessful, with no agreement reached on any issue. Consequently, the conflict in Rakhine is expected to persist.



The UN and NGOs are warning about the dangers posed to Rohingya both in Rakhine and in the Bangladesh refugee camps. Photo: EPA

The meeting was attended by Dr. Nyo Twan Aung, Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Arakan Army (AA), and Lt. Gen. Myo Thant Naing representing the coup Myanmar military.

A political analyst stated to the Border News Agency, "From the outset, China understands its capability to exert pressure in North Shan but not in Rakhine. China lacks influence over the people of Rakhine. Moreover, the Arakan Army (AA) is fighting for the entirety of Arakan, and only the AA holds the authority to determine whether to cease fighting. Neither China nor the Myanmar junta retains the power to dictate terms.

### UNOCHA concerned about conflict in Rakhine

The UN says it is deeply concerned over the escalating conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State, according to a report released on 9 May.

Civilians face devastating violence, rising intercommunal tensions and forced recruitment by

parties to the conflict, UNOCHA says.

Fighting is rapidly escalating between the Arakan Army and Myanmar Armed Forces in Buthidaung in northern Rakhine. This comes amid reports that other armed groups are now joining the conflict, sparking fears of intercommunal violence, as well as fear among civilians and aid workers. As the Arakan Army moves closer to the downtown area, military airstrikes have also intensified.

All parties to the conflict are reminded of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law not to target aid workers or the premises of humanitarian organizations.

Amid the worsening security situation across the country, the UN reiterates its call for the protection of civilians in Myanmar, a cessation of hostilities, and humanitarian access. We also urge all parties to the conflict to stop misinformation and hate speech and promote social cohesion and respect for human rights.

## Call on Indian government to provide humanitarian aid to Myanmar

India should provide humanitarian assistance to the ethnic groups of Myanmar that have been affected by the armed conflict between the Myanmar junta and the Armed Ethnic Organisations (AEOs), leading human rights lawyer Nandita Haksar said, reports The Hindu.

Speaking at an event at the India International Centre on Monday last week, Ms. Haksar urged the Government of India to take a proactive stand, reach out to the affected communities and provide them medical support. She argued that under international humanitarian laws, New Delhi can extend such help without antagonising the military junta in Myanmar.

## POPULAR MIZZIMA VIDEOS

The week's most popular videos.

A fire broke out in Mandalay

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1qkQWSl6v8>

Hundreds of soldiers and army family members led by the deputy commander of the 15th Army Headquarters surrendered to the AA.

[https://youtu.be/9wtvjPN\\_OB4?si=J-kpW0OxqU8WLpi](https://youtu.be/9wtvjPN_OB4?si=J-kpW0OxqU8WLpi)

Arakan Army is trying to seize the remaining cities in Rakhine State

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlmcmbJZeh0>



# မန္တလေးတွင် မီးလောင်မှုဖြစ်ပွား

## MOST VIEWED OF THE WEEK #1

မန္တလေးမြို့၊ အောင်မြေသာစံမြို့နယ်၊ အမရဌာနီအရှေ့၊ အရိပ်မထွက်ဘုရားအနီး၊  
၇လမ်း၊ ၉လမ်း၊ သိမ်ကုန်းရပ်ကွက်တွင် ဖြစ်ပွားခဲ့သည့် မီးလောင်မှုသည်  
စတင်ဖြစ်ပွားပြီး ၄၅ မိနစ်ခန့်အကြာတွင် မီးငြိမ်းသတ်နိုင်ခဲ့ကြောင်း  
အောင်မြေသာစံမြို့နယ် မီးသတ်တပ်ဖွဲ့ဝင် တဦးကဆိုသည်။



## MYANMAR JUNTA PLANS OCTOBER NATIONAL CENSUS

**A** top Myanmar general has called for a national census to take place in October, state media reported Tuesday last week, even as swathes of the country remain outside the junta's control.

The military has justified its 2021 coup with unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud in 2020 elections won resoundingly by civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

Military officials have said a national census must be completed before fresh elections, which junta-backed politicians have hinted could come in 2025.

Junta number two Soe Win made the comments during a visit to commercial hub Yangon on Monday, the Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

He "stressed that preparations must be made for enumerating the population and household census across the nation from 1 to 15 October 2024," the newspaper said.

Officials in Yangon "reported on the progress of... preparations for collection of the census," it said, without giving further details.

Last October, the junta said it was carrying out a pilot census in selected townships in the military-built capital Naypyidaw, the Mandalay and Bago regions, and Karen state.

Critics say the census will be used to step up monitoring of opponents of its coup, including thousands of civil servants, doctors and teachers who have not returned to work in protest.

The Southeast Asian country remains deeply divided by conflict, with civilians caught up in near-daily bomb blasts, targeted killings and clashes between the military and opponents of its coup.

The military has acknowledged it does not fully control swathes of the country and in February activated a long-dormant conscription law.

The United States has said any elections under the junta would be a "sham", while analysts say polls would be targeted by the military's opponents and spark further bloodshed.

Russia, a close ally of the isolated junta, has said it backs the generals' plan for polls.



ASEAN special envoy Alounkeo Kittikhoun, left, with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: Supplied

## TOP ASEAN OFFICIALS MEET MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING FOR 'COOPERATION' TALKS

Myanmar's military chief has held talks with top ASEAN officials on the junta's participation in the Southeast Asian regional bloc, from which it has been isolated since the 2021 coup, state media reported Thursday.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations has led so far fruitless diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict unleashed by the military's putsch, which has displaced 2.7 million people, according to the United Nations.

Myanmar is still a member of ASEAN, but the generals have been excluded from top-level bloc meetings over their refusal to engage in a peace plan and with their opponents.

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing met ASEAN special envoy Alounkeo Kittikhoun and secretary-general Kao Kim Hourn on Wednesday in the capital Naypyidaw, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

They "exchanged views on the issues of Myanmar's cooperation in ASEAN," the state-owned newspaper reported.

They also "discussed the best cooperation of Myanmar in ASEAN, the conditions of Myanmar's participation in ASEAN meetings" and the junta's plan to hold fresh elections, the newspaper said.

The Myanmar crisis has divided ASEAN - long derided by critics as a toothless talking shop.

Indonesian, Malaysia and the Philippines have called for tougher action against the junta, while Thailand has held its own bilateral talks with the generals as well as detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Last year, officials from Indonesia held talks with a shadow "National Unity Government" that is dominated by lawmakers ousted in the coup and which the junta has designated a "terrorist" organisation.

In January, the junta sent a senior bureaucrat to an ASEAN foreign ministers meet in Laos -- the first time the country attended a high-level meeting of the bloc in more than two years.

More than 5,000 people have been killed and more than 26,000 arrested in the military's crackdown on dissent since the coup according to a local monitoring group.

The coup ended a short-lived experiment with democracy and plunged the Southeast Asian nation into turmoil.

Across swathes of the country, the junta is battling established ethnic minority armed groups as well as pro-democracy People's Defence Forces.

AFP



## MYANMAR JUNTA CO-CHAIRLED 43RD MEETING OF ASEAN-CHINA JOINT WORKING GROUP

Last week the Myanmar junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-chaired the 43rd Meeting of ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

According to a junta statement, the 43rd Meeting of ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (43rd JWG-DOC) was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 13-15 May 2024, and it was co-chaired by Mang Hau Thang, Deputy Director-General of the ASEAN Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Mr. Tan Qingsheng, Chinese Head of JWG-DOC and Representative of Boundary and Ocean Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

The meeting was attended by representatives from ASEAN Member States and China, as well as representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat.

The meeting reviewed the progress in the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the current situation in the South China Sea. The Meeting reaffirmed the importance of practical maritime cooperation in building capacities and enhancing

trust and confidence among parties and welcomed new proposals for practical maritime cooperation initiatives, which will enhance preparedness to deal with challenges in the maritime domain as well as contribute to the implementation of the Annual Work Plan on the Implementation of the DOC for 2024. The Meeting continued the negotiations on the SDNT and had preparation for the outcome of the PMC+1 Sessions with China.

The meeting expressed its appreciation and gratitude to Myanmar for its valuable and constructive contributions as the Co-Chair of the JWG-DOC and SOM-DOC meetings for the period of 2021-2024 and looked forward to Malaysia's co-chairing of the JWG-DOC and SOM-DOC meetings for the period of 2024-2027. Myanmar had co-chaired the JWG-DOC meeting for 11 times and SOM-DOC meeting for two times during the coordinatorship of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations throughout the course.

The meeting agreed to convene the 44th JWG-DOC Meeting back-to-back with the 22nd SOM-DOC Meeting tentatively in August 2024 in China.



Lethoketaw village. Photo: Mizzima

## MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES MASSACRE 32 'INNOCENT CIVILIANS' IN SAGAING'S LETHOKETAW VILLAGE

**M**yanmar junta forces besieged and bombarded Lethoketaw Village, Myinmu Township, Sagaing Region on 11 May killing 32 innocent civilians in what has been described as a massacre by the National Unity Government (NUG) in a press release.

A total of 70 members of the Military Council and Pyu Saw Htee militia attacked Lethoketaw Village with heavy and light weapons around 5 am. Six men died as they tried to flee.

Then the junta arrested those fleeing the battle and massacred them in a mass shooting at the Lethoketaw village monastery. Local sources report that 24 men and one woman who hid in the village monastery were shot in the head. The people shot dead were aged between 15 and 88. Further shooting injured 17 people, with one person dying on route to hospital.

In Lethoketaw Village, the troops also set fire to public property, resulting in the destruction of much of the village. Bodies were found afterwards in the burnt down buildings of people who were unable to flee.

As the troops departed more than 20 people were taken as human shields, including mothers with small children to the Gwaybintaw village monastery which is located about two miles away from Lethoketaw village.

According to the NUG, these war crimes were committed by about 40 members of No. 13 Infantry Battalion of Gwaybintaw village in Myinmu Township, No. 909 Field Engineering Battalion, and a joint Pyu Saw Htee Militia, as well as about 30 members of No. 929 Supporting and Communication Battalion from Natyaekan Village of Chaung U Township, Sagaing. A total of 70 joint forces besieged and bombarded Lethoketaw village.

A member of the local resistance force said, "Junta forces surrounded the village and unleashed gunfire using both small and heavy weapons. Tragically, most of the locals gathered at the village monastery were among those killed."

The victims were laid to rest in the cemetery of a nearby village on the afternoon of 11 May, the same day as the harrowing events.

"When we were able to enter the village at noon, we had the grim task of retrieving the bodies. With carts and cars, we transported them for burial in a cemetery located in another village. Amidst widespread fear and dispersal, we buried them alongside remaining villagers and fellow resistance members," said a member of the local resistance force.

A 40-year-old woman from Lethoketaw village said, "I despise the junta soldiers and can't bear to hear their voices. Witnessing the scene of mass slaughter filled me with despair. The more lives they take, the more revolting their actions become."

Lethoketaw village of about 800 houses fell victim to arson perpetrated by junta soldiers in 2023. More than 600 of these houses were destroyed, and the reconstructed dwellings have now suffered a second bout of destruction by fire. The precise count of houses affected in this second arson attack remains unknown, according to local resistance forces.

The Ministry of Human Rights of the NUG has diligently gathered and documented comprehensive data concerning these violations, war crimes, and mass killings. They vow to persist in pursuing justice for these crimes against humanity through all available legal avenues. The Ministry emphasizes the urgent need for action.

The NUG urge the international community to take note that the Military Council has thus far evaded accountability for its recurrent offenses, underscoring the necessity for more robust and effective intervention on the global stage.

# NUG SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA COMMITTED WAR CRIMES IN LETHOKETAW VILLAGE

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) Ministry of Human Rights released a statement accusing the Myanmar junta of committing warcrimes when it massacred civilians in Lethoketaw Village on 9 May.

Below is the statement that was issued by the NUG Ministry of Human Rights on 12 May:

terrorist military junta forces attacked Lethoketaw Village in Myinmu Township of Sagaing Region, bombarding it with heavy and light weaponry

On May 9th, 2024, at about 5 a.m., terrorist military junta forces attacked Lethoketaw Village in Myinmu Township of Sagaing Region, bombarding it with heavy and light weaponry. Six male villagers were killed in this attack. Junta forces also massacred 24 males and one woman by shooting them in the head after seizing a monastery where the villagers were taking refuge. The age of the deceased ranged from 15 to 88 years. Another 17 injured people were taken to hospital, one of whom died en route, bringing the total number of fatalities to 32.

terrorist military junta forces attacked Lethoketaw Village in Myinmu Township of Sagaing Region, bombarding it with heavy and light weaponry

The military junta's forces also set fire to public homes in the village, which were all burned to ashes. Furthermore, over 20 civilians including women and children were used as human shields by the junta's

forces and taken to the monastery in Gwaybintaw Village, more than two miles away from Lethoketaw village.

The above crimes were committed by an estimated joint force of 70 troops drawn from No. 13 Infantry Battalion of No. 33 Light Infantry Division, No. 909 Battlefield Engineering Battalion, No. 929 Support and Communications Battalion, and Pyu Saw Htee Militia formed with veterans.

terrorist military junta forces attacked Lethoketaw Village in Myinmu Township of Sagaing Region, bombarding it with heavy and light weaponry

The Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government strongly condemns the terrorist military junta's ongoing deliberate, widespread and systematic attacks on civilians, many of which clearly comprise war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Ministry of Human Rights has collected and documented comprehensive data regarding the aforementioned violations and will continue to explore all available justice mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity are held accountable. The Ministry calls for more effective action from the international community given the prevailing culture of impunity that the military junta continues to enjoy despite its repeated crimes.



Damaged clinic. Photo: Mizzima

## MYANMAR AIR STRIKE WOUNDS AROUND 20 AT CLINIC IN RAKHINE: MEDIA, ARMED GROUP

**A** Myanmar military air strike on a medical clinic wounded around 20 people in western Rakhine state, according to an ethnic armed group, a resident and local media on Wednesday.

Clashes have rocked Rakhine since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a military junta's coup in 2021.

AA fighters have seized territory, including along the border with India and Bangladesh, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere across the Southeast Asian country.

"I heard a very loud sound of jet fighters flying last night then I heard explosions around midnight," a resident of Wea Gyi Htaunt village, near the town of Kyauktaw, told AFP.

"As soon as I knew it was an air strike, our family fled our house and hid in the woods," she said, requesting anonymity for security reasons.

"I heard that tens of people who were outpatients, medical staff, and local villagers, got injured."

At least 20 people, including outpatients, carers and staff were wounded in the attack that came shortly after midnight, the AA said on its Telegram account.

Five of those were seriously wounded and the clinic had been almost entirely destroyed, it said.

Local media also reported the strike and said 15 people had been wounded.

The resident said the AA had previously taken over the running of the clinic, located near Wea Gyi Htaunt.

The military had shelled the area repeatedly in recent days, she said.

Communication with Rakhine is extremely difficult, with most mobile networks down.

AFP has asked the junta for comment.

The AA is one of several armed ethnic minority groups in Myanmar's border regions, many of whom have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 over autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

The AA claims to be fighting for more autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine population.

Fighting had spread to 15 of Rakhine state's 17 townships since the November outbreak, the UN's human rights chief said last month.

Hundreds of people have been killed or wounded and more than 300,000 displaced, it said.

Clashes between the AA and the military in 2019 roiled the region and displaced around 200,000 people.

The military launched a crackdown on the Rohingya minority there in 2017 which is now the subject of a United Nations genocide court case.



## MYANMAR JUNTA BURNS HOUSES AND VILLAGERS' POSSESSIONS IN HPA-AN DISTRICT VILLAGE

**M**yanmar junta soldiers burned down eight houses after marching into Saw Hae Village in Nabu Town, in Hpa-an District, Karen State at about 10:00 am on 10 May 2024, according to a Karen National Union (KNU) statement.

The attack caused villagers to flee Nabu Village. A Nabu resident said: "The village is small, not far from Kawkaeik. Some villagers have fled, while half remain. The military column simply arrived to set fire to houses, targeting particularly large and well-built ones, before departing."

As well as setting fire to the houses the junta soldiers also set fire to villagers' possessions, such as motorcycles, bicycles, tractors, rice mills and harvested grain, resulting in losses estimated at being more than 110 million kyats.

Previously, on 5 May, the junta launched airstrikes against Baeklaekho Village and Thaekhudel Village in the eastern region of Than Daung Gyi Township, also in Hpa-an Township. The airstrikes killed a child and injured three people in Baeklaekho Village and caused extensive damage to buildings, including a church in Thaekhudel Village.

The relentless human rights violations committed by the junta in the areas controlled by the KNU inflict daily suffering on the populace which means they suffer from psychological problems and feelings of insecurity that force them to flee their homes.



All eyes on Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

# WHO CARRIES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATROCITIES IN MYANMAR?

IGOR BLAZEVIC

In last few days, Myanmar junta has committed two more brutal crimes.

On Saturday morning, junta troops executed 32 villagers in Lethtoketaw in Myinmu Township, Sagaing Region. According to local reports, around 100 soldiers blocked off the village, attacked with explosives and detained civilians sheltering at two monasteries. Hundreds of homes were burned and seventeen villagers were used as human shields.

On Thursday last week, Myanmar's junta bombed a monastery in Akyi Pan Malun village in Saw Township in Magwe Region with 500-pound bomb, destroying the entire monastery and burning it to the ground. A large group of people had gathered in the monastery to discuss plans to establish transport links in the township. At least 14 people, probably more, were burned into unrecognizable ashes. Over 30 were injured, many seriously.

This is nothing extraordinary. The junta has been committing atrocities since the beginning of the coup. Terror against the civilian population is how they are waging the war. The two mentioned crimes have just affected a large number of people at the same time at

the same place. Otherwise, similar things are happening almost on a daily basis in various parts of the country.

The Myanmar junta is a murderous gang, which has always used ethnic cleansing, genocide, scorched earth policy, torture, rape, burning, plundering and extreme brutality as the primary methods of waging war against insurgents and civilians alike. This is deeply and irreparably in their genes.

In this moment, however, they are also desperate. They are under the pressure of the liberation forces from all different corners of the country. They are losing bases, outposts, roads, border crossings, towns, territory, units, soldiers and officers across the country.

In desperation, they are unleashing extreme brutality, as noted in the two incidents.

It is necessary to say with clarity why this level of brutality and criminality is still possible, three years since junta started its war of terror against the whole nation, the war in which junta cannot prevail, but is able to commit this kind of atrocities and inflict an enormous level of suffering and destruction.

This is not possible because of the junta's strength and determination. The junta is weak, is faltering and is ready to fall. It is totally discredited, internally broken and without any game plan. The junta is, like a big bleeding animal, just blindly thrashing around in the rage of a deadly wounded beast.

Such crimes and atrocities, happening repeatedly, are still possible, because of what other countries do and what they do not do. So let us quickly summarize who is enabling the junta crimes and how.

Putin's Russia is investing in the junta's capacity to wage a war of terror by providing it with weapons and spare parts, mainly to preserve the junta's airpower - the single biggest source of atrocities in this moment.

Modi's India is also investing in the junta staying in power in spite of all the crimes and atrocities. India is investing in junta's capacity to continue to wage the war against civilians by providing it with weapons. India is also investing in the junta's economy and would like to help with governance as well, for example with junta's sham elections which the junta promised many times but was not able to organize them.

China is trying to keep Myanmar in its exclusive sphere of dominant influence and to keep everybody else out. So, China is in a cautious, limited way investing in the junta's war capacity, governing capacity and economic capacity. At the same time, China is trying to keep ethnic armed organization along its own borders relatively autonomous from the junta and dependent on China. Weak and internationally isolated the military junta in the centre and, along the borders, strong ethnic militias - also dependent on China - is something China knows how to manage.

ASEAN is doing nothing meaningful. It is just talking from time to time. ASEAN has not even been able to allocate and provide some humanitarian aid under the ASEAN umbrella. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei are not poor countries. But they are not contributing to the aid effort. It is other, far-away democracies, that are contributing to the aid effort.

ASEAN has been primarily concerned to protect its own image, what they call "ASEAN centrality". ASEAN member states want to keep ASEAN in charge of the

Myanmar crisis even if they are not doing anything meaningful.

On different occasions, different ASEAN chairs or other political actors were throwing smoke bombs of diplomatic initiatives to hide the lack of capability and willingness to take real responsibility to solve the Myanmar war. They have been starting initiatives - Five-Point Consensus, Hun Sen's loud and self-promoting "peace facilitation", Indonesia's behind-the-scenes, 300-plus dialogues with "all" stakeholders, the recent Thai "humanitarian initiative" or Thaksin's attempt to play a mediating role - which everybody familiar with reality in Myanmar knows will not work.

Those initiatives were for some time creating a false impression that something was happening and others should support ASEAN. ASEAN member states were successful in preserving "ASEAN centrality" however meaningless it has become.

In the meantime, one massacre of civilians was piling up on another in Myanmar, one junta's air bombardment after another, one act of genocide on the other.

Russia, China, India, Thailand and other ASEAN countries are carrying full responsibility through their actions that are giving a lifeline to the junta, through their wrongly designed diplomatic efforts and through their passivity and ignorance of terrible war crimes, crimes against humanity and enormous suffering happening in their immediate neighborhood.

All having just one source and reason - the illegitimate, murderous, genocidal, kleptocratic gang in uniform which calls itself the State Administration Council.

*Igor Blazevic is a European democracy activist who has years of experience in Myanmar.*



Peter Morris

# AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONFLICT: A CALL TO THE USA

**"**I'm a lawyer and journalist, and I'm an advocate for Burma," begins Peter Morris by way of self-introduction, who was also the former Editor at the Asia Times. "And so that causes challenges sometimes, because when you're a journalist, in theory, you're supposed to be unbiased."

Morris begins with sketching out his background to give context to his recent article published in The Diplomat, "Why the US Needs to Back Myanmar's Spring Revolution."

## MESSAGE TO THE USA

"I was trying to inform US policymakers that the Spring Revolution is on the verge of winning. They're going to win relatively soon! So we've got to think about what to do, and at the very least, you've got to ramp up humanitarian aid, because that will expedite by itself the fall of the junta, because it'll free up resources that are currently being used by resistance organizations to feed and house all these refugees and injured people."

However, his call for urgent humanitarian need addresses not just the Americans, but Myanmar's neighbors as well; he believes that a multilateral approach is the only way it can be truly effective. This is where his interest in China, in particular, comes in. "They want to build this corridor to the Indian Ocean," he says. "But on the other hand, they need stability to do that. And they've realized by now that the junta cannot provide them with this stability. So that's one of the reasons why they tacitly supported Operation 1027." Morris believes Beijing doesn't exactly know how to best achieve its goal of regional stability given the immense complexity of the conflict, which also informs the attempted (but limited) ceasefires it has tried to broker.

## POOR INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE

Morris was also driven to write his article partly based on what he sees as paltry international coverage of the conflict, and a concern that policymakers weren't hearing the full story. Western media has not allocated resources there as they have for such crises as Gaza and Ukraine. As an example, he cites The New York Times' recent article, "The Country That Bombs Its Own People." While satisfied with the piece, which reports on incidents that have been occurring since the coup, he questions the reason for its delayed publication. Rather than taking time to cross check all relevant claims, Morris emphasizes that oral testimonies from affected individuals should act as legitimate evidence in journalism and law, and the many horrible incidents addressed in this article could and should have been reported on soon after they occurred.

Another of Morris's goals in writing his piece was to alert policymakers about future economic opportunities in Myanmar that they should begin preparing for when— not if— the military falls. There is also a need for urgent, nation-building that will require investment, in infrastructure, health, education, and other key sectors. He's especially keen on attracting Japanese investment, given their historic ties, knowing that they "like to do these public-private partnership projects, and so Japanese companies will be eager to get involved, because they can get contracts from Japanese government."

## ASEAN'S ROLE

From there, Morris turns to the question of ASEAN's role and involvement. Somewhat contrary to Kasit Piromya's criticism of Thailand's engagement on a previous episode, Morris feels encouraged by the Thai government's recent statements.

"Thailand is clear that it wants to be a leader in the humanitarian aid effort," he notes. "They explicitly said that if Myanmar falls apart, it's going to affect the entire region." Morris is concerned that the humanitarian needs will only multiply as the end of the conflict gets closer, as the typical military playbook has been to commit yet greater atrocities against the civilian population after suffering losses on the battlefield. "People might complain that Thailand is only working directly with the junta and that's not effective. But I think the only reason they're working with the junta on this is to save face. Meanwhile, they're making alternative plans, such as having a humanitarian aid operation led by ASEAN."

But while the international community may express concern about the country's devastation as the coup stretches on, there has been much debate as to what kind of support is most needed. Morris is by no means a proponent of Americans or others providing lethal aid to the NUG, but he does feel there is much more that can be done; first and foremost, this means ensuring that everything Congress allocated via the Burma Act is delivered immediately. He wonders if perhaps the reason this has not happened is the continual fear of China, and that Beijing could misinterpret such support as the start of a proxy war that the Americans are initiating on their doorstep, prompting them to respond in kind. "But I think they can push the limit a little bit," he adds, "And yes, it's a risk, we don't want to be naive

about it. But I don't think it's a big risk, and it's a risk worth taking. Because the faster the junta is defeated, the less people will suffer." Still, as the junta has not been able to provide the stability that China craves for its investments, Morris thinks that this is a calculated risk that is at least worth considering, especially when taking into account the NUG's recent assurances that it will crack down on scam centers, welcome Chinese investments, and even going so far as to insist it will not recognize Taiwan. "The era of the US doing crazy shit in Myanmar is over," he says wryly.

## A UNIFIED BURMA

Another theme that Morris pushes back against is the idea that the Burmese people are hopelessly fragmented, and that as soon as the military falls, cooperation between the country's different ethnic groups will end. But this is not what he has witnessed thus far. Having attended fundraising events the world over, he is encouraged by how diverse the attendees are. "I talk to these people in Burmese, and they tell me, 'We want to win the revolution! We want to set up a democracy.' Nobody says, 'Oh, we want to win the revolution and set up an independent Karen state or an independent Rakhine State.' I haven't ever heard that. They're really keen about establishing a unified Myanmar." To Morris, the idea of a looming civil war and power vacuum is an old narrative based on past history, rather than one based in recent developments.

"We still have to be patient, that's going to be key," he says in closing. "Nothing good ever comes easy. Rome wasn't built in a day. I've learned that patience is so important in life. There's a lot of momentum right now, especially after 1027, and yes, we want to capitalize on this momentum." With that said, he stresses the importance of taking a moment to appreciate all that's been accomplished up till now. "After all the successes that they've had going up against this powerful military, with little help from the outside, largely on their own, well, it's been an epic struggle, and they're winning! Many books will be written about this struggle. And women are involved, even on the front lines as well. It's nurses doing all kinds of other things, taking leadership roles. It's a movement, it's a revolution."

Listen to the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/39618ab6-92a3-464f-aea6-803a83f0f240>

ဘူးသီးတောင်းမြို့နယ်၊ ရက္ခိုင့်ပြည်  
Buthidaung township, Arakan  
8 May, 2024



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## AA SAYS IT IS SHELTERING MUSLIM IDPS IN BUTHIDAUNG TOWNSHIP, RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) helped about 7,000 Muslim people to escape junta bombardments in Buthidaung Township, Rakhine State and is currently sheltering them in areas under its control, according to the AA.

The AA took over 80 per cent of Buthidaung Township in the first week of May after which fighting stopped in that area. But fighting is still ongoing in the 20 per cent of Buthidaung Township not yet controlled by the AA.

On 8 May the junta fired artillery into and launched airstrikes against the 80 per cent of the township controlled by the AA, even though there was no fighting ongoing in those areas.

The junta bombardment caused 7,000 Muslim villagers to flee from the areas being bombed to other AA-controlled areas of Buthidaung Township.

A statement from the AA's Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO) said that after villages in Buthidaung Township were hit by junta artillery fire and airstrikes the AA had assisted in

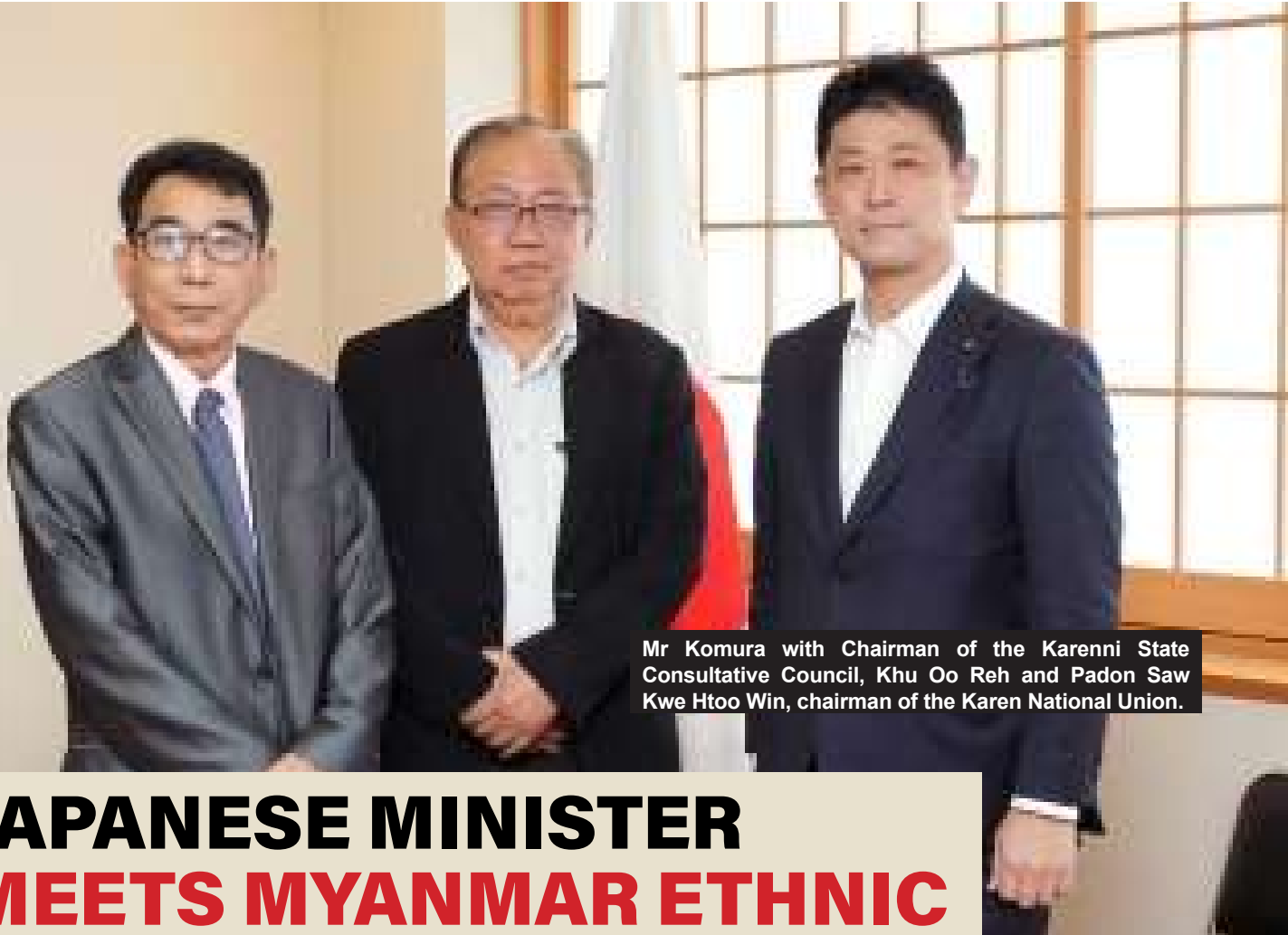
evacuating 7,000 Muslim villagers from those areas.

It claims that the AA is providing assistance and protection for the displaced villagers in other AA-controlled areas.

The villages in Buthidaung Township that had to be evacuated due to the junta bombardment included: Kagyaba, Kanbrun, Alaychaung, Mruangnar, Bagoona, and Latha.

Some villagers, instead of fleeing to AA-controlled areas, fled to an area controlled by the junta's Border Guard Battalion 8 in Buthidaung Township.

In the last month both the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) Chief Volker Türk and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) have released statements expressing their concern about the situation in Rakhine State and how they worry it could rapidly escalate into inter-communal violence.



Mr Komura with Chairman of the Karenni State Consultative Council, Khu Oo Reh and Padon Saw Kwe Htoo Win, chairman of the Karen National Union.

## JAPANESE MINISTER MEETS MYANMAR ETHNIC REPRESENTATIVES

**M**r Komura Masahiro, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan received a courtesy call from a delegation of representatives from ethnic organizations of Myanmar and others in Tokyo, according to a press release 14 May.

The meeting took place on 14 May and lasted about 20 minutes.


Although the Japanese government did not say who attended the meeting, sources indicate the representatives included the Kachin Independence Army, Karenni National Progressive Party, Karen National Union, Chin National front and a National Unity Government representative.

The two people seen in the photo with Mr Komura are Chairman of the Karenni State Consultative Council, Khu Oo Reh and Padon Saw Kwe Htoo Win, chairman of the Karen National Union.

Parliamentary Vice-Minister Komura met with the representatives of ethnic organizations and others to exchange views on the current situation in Myanmar. Mr. Komura said that the Government of Japan would continue its efforts to find a way out of the current impasse through dialogue with various stakeholders in Myanmar.

In response, the representatives of the ethnic organizations expressed their appreciation for the consistent support to Myanmar provided by the Government and people of Japan and also their expectations for Japan's role in resolving the situation in Myanmar.

Both sides confirmed that they would continue to closely communicate with each other toward a peaceful resolution of the situation in Myanmar.



Fixing the electricity in a Yangon neighbourhood.  
Photo: Mizzima

# MYANMAR'S ERRATIC ELECTRICITY SUPPLY IS FORCING SMALL BUSINESSES TO SHUT DOWN

**M**icro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are reportedly experiencing adverse effects due to frequent electricity blackouts, leading to some businesses having to halt their operations.

The state-owned Yangon Electrical Supply Corporation (YESC) reported in April that the production capacity of large hydropower plants in the national power system has decreased due to dry conditions, leading to widespread electricity shortages throughout the country.

An entrepreneur in Yangon explained how the power supply has worsened.

He said: "Previously, if the electricity went off at 9 in the morning, it came back at 1 in the afternoon. Then, it would go off at 5 in the evening and come back at 9:00 pm throughout the whole night until 6 the next morning. It is not like that now. There are more power cuts. That is why we, as self-established entrepreneurs, have stopped operating."

He went on to explain the specific challenges posed to him by an unpredictable electricity supply saying: "I installed an oil mill plant. To run that, I have to apply for a power meter... The lack of a regular power supply means that the products I use to make oil get

destroyed, so we have stopped our business."

Some entrepreneurs have resorted to using electricity generators but as the number of blackouts increases they have to spend ever-increasing amounts on fuel for their generators.

One entrepreneur said: "Previously we could use electricity generators. Now there are many power outages and they are getting worse. I have to spend a lot of money on buying fuel to run the generator. This disrupts the balance between profit and expenditure."

Junta-affiliated media has claimed that the power outages are because people's defence forces (PDFs) have destroyed power lines and blown up electricity substations.

Since the February 2021 military coup, there have been frequent prolonged power outages that significantly impact people's lives, in major cities such as Yangon and Mandalay.

People in Myanmar are eagerly awaiting the arrival of the rainy season in the hope that it will bring relief from the oppressive heat of the hot season and increase hydropower reservoir levels, leading to a more constant electricity supply.



Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum, the Military Chief-of-Staff of the Kachin Independence Army. Photo: Supplied

## NUG EXPRESSES ITS CONDOLENCES ON DEATH OF KIA MILITARY CHIEF-OF-STAFF

On the afternoon of 14 May, the Ministry of Defense of the National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement expressing its profound sorrow and condolences on the passing of Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum, the Military Chief-of-Staff of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum, aged 62, passed away on 13 May, after battling liver cancer. In response to his death, the NUG Ministry of Defence paid tribute to his memory by lowering the flag of the People's Defence Army to half-mast, a solemn gesture honoring his service and contributions.

"It is very sad and heartbreaking to lose someone who is working for the liberation of the country, the liberation of the people, the liberation of the whole country," said Soe Thura Tun, the NUG Union Minister of Electricity and Energy.

Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum had served as the commander of the civilian NUG's Military Region 1, which comprises northern Myanmar and Kachin State. He had been a front-line commander, personally leading Kachin troops in battles against regime forces.

A former Yangon University student, he made the pivotal decision to dedicate his life to the cause of the rebel troops during the 1988 uprising, forsaking

his academic pursuits for the path of resistance and liberation.

"He played the guitar. While attending Yangon University, he was a bass guitar player. If he hadn't been a soldier, he would have been in the music industry," said a People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldier who had met Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum.

He was described by PDF soldiers who underwent KIA military training as a military strategy expert with strong leadership qualities.

"I still remember your words of wisdom when you visited our front line in early 2024, urging us not to repeat the mistakes of the past. We will continue the revolution until the end, just as you taught us, General," wrote a People's Defence Force member from Sagaing Region on social media, reflecting on the enduring impact of Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum's guidance and leadership.

Dr. Tayzar San, a prominent figure in the Spring Revolution in Myanmar, said on his social media: "I had the privilege to know and witness the General's profound military philosophy, extensive military expertise, and unwavering political principles", highlighting the depth of his admiration and respect for Lt. Gen. R Hkawng Lum's contributions and character.

# WORKERS' RIGHTS IN MYANMAR SHOULD BE RESPECTED

**O**n International Workers' Day, 1 May, Myanmar workers showed their collective strength through powerful protests, ceremonies, and statements—both inside the country and beyond, according to campaign group Progressive Voice.

It says that in Myanmar today, workers' rights have hit a horrific low, as workers and trade unions are under constant assault by both the Myanmar military junta and exploitative employers. At the same time, in neighboring countries, workers from Myanmar also face harrowing conditions in maintaining their livelihoods.

Before the coup attempt, workers in Myanmar experienced a brief period with some civic space to organise and advocate openly for their rights. Following its coup attempt, the military junta banned trade unions, labeling them "terrorist organizations." As a result, workers' protections - hard-won gains by the labour movement - have rapidly eroded.

In October 2023, the International Labour Organisation's Commission of Inquiry for Myanmar found the junta's actions "have resulted in far-reaching restrictions on the exercise of basic civil liberties and trade union rights." Nevertheless, workers and trade unions have remained at the forefront of the people's democratic resistance movement, putting their lives on the line for democracy and human rights.

In continuing its targeted assault on workers, last September, the junta ordered overseas workers to remit 25% of their earnings sent back to Myanmar through junta-approved banks. This year, the junta has also weaponized its forced conscription against workers, first by abruptly suspending recruitment drives of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Association.

And as of 1 May, the military junta banned men eligible for its forced conscription from seeking employment abroad. This ban comes after more than 100,000 fled the country in April.

What's more, the junta's repeated targeting of

workers has left them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by employers. From 2022 to 2023, reports of human rights violations in Myanmar's manufacturing sector tripled, with over half the reports relating to garment factories.

The co-chair of the New Light Federation of Labor Unions Myanmar told Than Lwin Times, "Employers are shamelessly leveraging the coup [attempt] to further exploit workers. Amidst multiple crises, workers are primarily focused on retaining their jobs, often at the expense of enduring exploitation by employers."

Verbal harassment, forced overtime, no paid leave, and unlivable wages of 5,800 Myanmar Kyats (\$2.76 US Dollars) per day only scratch the surface of the rampant abuse Myanmar's garment workers - most of whom are women - face. With wages unchanged despite skyrocketing inflation, some workers are eating one fewer meal per day to get by. Women workers also face open sexual harassment.

In April, employees at the KSENG (Myanmar) Apparel factory in Yangon Region were forced to work without breaks to meet productivity requirements and to work overtime until 9:00 pm despite workers' safety concerns.

The conditions are similarly perilous for Myanmar workers who have sought employment in neighboring countries, where many are trafficked and forced into modern slavery.

This March, around 200 Myanmar workers at a garment factory in China were fired and deported after protesting for better wages and working conditions.

In Thailand's agricultural sector, Myanmar workers face - among other difficulties - long hours without overtime pay, substandard housing, and wages far below legal minimums. Likewise, in Thailand's fishing and seafood processing industry, Myanmar workers have long been subject to their employers' whims, enduring unpredictable working hours, wage

deductions for any absence, and insufficient bathroom breaks.

As the junta continues its violent assault on Myanmar's workers, it remains critical for other actors to comply with their international obligations under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and ensure better protection of workers' rights, including safe working conditions and truly livable wages, both in Myanmar and beyond, according to Progressive Voice.

In this vein, the Migrant Workers Rights Network, an organisation for migrant workers from Myanmar working in Thailand, calls for greater legal and social protections for migrant workers in Thailand. These protections from neighboring countries should include the right to unionize, accessible education for migrant workers' children, and clear pathways to obtaining legal immigration status and work permits for both workers and their families.

Furthermore, to build a truly inclusive federal democratic Myanmar, the voices of workers, trade unions, and labor activists must be heard and included at all levels, says Progressive Voice.

Myanmar labour activists have expressed that when human rights issues in Myanmar are discussed, workers' rights are often left out. This is despite workers'

and unions' tireless efforts and sacrifices in the fight for a better future defined by human dignity, equal rights, and freedom from military tyranny.

As Myanmar's people work with unprecedented sacrifices, solidarity, and determination to establish federal democratic governance across the country, it is critical to recognize the struggle and contributions of Myanmar's workers, as well as include their voices in representative governance bodies and incorporate their calls, including for decent, respectful workplaces and higher wages adjusted for inflation and modern living costs, according to Progressive Voice. This also means the collective pursuit of a more democratic economic paradigm, where inequality is reduced, rather than perpetuated and exploited.

In the words of the Solidarity Trade Union of Myanmar, "workers can achieve their rights only by their solidarity." Going forward, Progressive Voice believes this solidarity must be strengthened - across sectors and classes - and transformed into real representation of workers' voices at all levels of government in the new federal democratic Myanmar. Workers' rights must be respected, protected, and fulfilled in the new, inclusive Myanmar that the people are building from the ground up.

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# SUSPENSION OF MEN'S RIGHT TO WORK ABROAD IMPACTS YOUNG MEN SIGNIFICANTLY

PAN PAN

The junta's Ministry of Labour has reportedly banned men from going abroad for work, severely affecting young men. Consequently, many young men hoping to work overseas are anxiously awaiting the reopening of this suspension.

A 24-year-old man preparing to go to Japan expressed his depression over the announcement. However, he has kept himself motivated by continuing to work. "I am preparing to go to Japan. I am attending training by joining the job agency. I only have completed N4 (measure the level of understanding of basic Japanese). With this announcement, I was depressed about whether the announcement counts for all. However, by reading the news and asking other people, this is said to be temporary. I was relieved, then I was depressed again. Now, I am concentrating more on studying Japanese."

Since the promulgation of the Conscription Law on February 10, many young adults and middle-aged people have been continuously going abroad, according to travel and overseas employment agencies. Thousands leave the country every month.

To prevent young adults from fleeing military conscription, the regime has banned men going abroad for work.

Meanwhile, the junta has not issued a clear statement.

As a result, agencies have temporarily halted the process, unable to provide clear explanations to those seeking to work abroad, according to staff from an

overseas employment agency. "Currently, we cannot say exactly when it will reopen for workers. All we can advise is to carry on as usual and be prepared for when it does."

Political analysts noted that while the junta cannot completely stop people from working abroad, it can only impose temporary measures. They believe the junta will not cut the tax flow from Myanmar citizens. The tightened Conscription Law requires young adults to serve in the military upon their return from abroad and to show proof of military service for visa extensions.

Labor activists stated that the suspension has led to more young people leaving the country illegally, facing numerous difficulties and without guaranteed jobs.

A man hoping to work in Thailand said, "If I cannot go (abroad) legally, I will go there illegally, even if it means trouble. I am starving here. My salary of 200,000 kyat is not enough. I am contacting acquaintances to help me get to Thailand. With this suspension, I am going no matter what."

The junta's control over men's permission to work abroad has greatly impacted young men, causing them to lose hope for the future.

However, just a few days after the ban, the junta announced on May 9 that they would allow men to work abroad again after reviewing their personal information. But the situation is still unclear.



Kristina Kironka, centre, with participants at the launch. Photo: Kristina Kironka

## MYANMAR STUDIES CENTER OPENS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Myanmar Studies Center (MSC@UP) was launched at the Palacky University in Olomouc in the Czech Republic on 15 May, according to a press release.

The center is one of its kind in the Czech Republic as well as in Central Europe, where generally little scholarly attention is given to this region in Southeast Asia.

Driven by a commitment to fill this academic void, MSC@UP is dedicated to fostering interdisciplinary research and education centred on Myanmar.

The Center will be led by Dr. Kristina Kironka, who lived in Myanmar from 2015 to 2016. Since then, she has remained dedicated to research of various Myanmar-related topics (see for example the Myanmar Coup Tracker).

Upcoming events by the newly established centre include the Myanmar-themed summer school in June 2024 ("Navigating Geostategic Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific: Focus on Southeast Asia and Myanmar") as well as the Interdisciplinary Myanmar Conference 2024.

Palacky University Olomouc is the oldest university in Moravia and the second-oldest in the Czech Republic. It was established in 1573 as a public university led by the Jesuit order in Olomouc, which was at that time the capital of Moravia and the seat of the episcopacy. At first it taught only theology, but soon the fields of philosophy, law and medicine were added.



Photo: Kristina Kironka



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the visit. Photo: AFP

## XI AND PUTIN HAIL TIES AS 'STABILISING' FORCE IN CHAOTIC WORLD

Leaders Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin framed their nations' ties as a stabilising force in a chaotic world as they met Thursday in Beijing, where the Russian president is seeking greater Chinese support for his war effort in Ukraine.

It is Putin's first trip abroad since his March reelection, and the second in just over six months to China, an economic lifeline for Russia after the West hit it with unprecedented sanctions over its military offensive in Ukraine.

Putin was greeted by Xi at a grand welcoming ceremony outside Beijing's Great Hall of the People, footage by state broadcaster CCTV showed.

In a meeting, Xi then told his "old friend" Putin that China-Russia relations were "conductive to peace".

"China is ready to work with Russia to... uphold fairness and justice in the world," Xi added.

Putin, in turn, told Xi the two countries' relations were "stabilising factors in the international arena".

"Relations between Russia and China are not opportunistic and not directed against anyone," Putin said, according to a Kremlin readout.

Following closed-door meetings, the two leaders then signed a joint statement on deepening their countries' "comprehensive strategic partnership", state news agency Xinhua said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said that China "can't have its cake and eat it too" with regard to the West and Moscow.

"It can't have it both ways, and want to have (better) relationships with Europe and other countries while simultaneously continuing to fuel the biggest threat to European security in a long time," Patel said, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

### NO 'FURTHER ESCALATION'

The Russian leader's arrival came hours after he hailed his country's troops for advancing on "all fronts" on the battlefield in Ukraine, following a major new ground assault.

And the Kremlin said Russia and China had agreed to oppose “further escalation” of the conflict in Ukraine on Thursday.

China has dismissed claims it is aiding Russia’s war in Ukraine and insisted that the West is exacerbating the conflict by sending arms to Ukraine.

Xi has also rebuffed Western criticism of his country’s close ties with Moscow.

But their economic partnership has come under close scrutiny from the West in recent months.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned China’s support for Russia’s “brutal war of aggression” in Ukraine had helped Russia ramp up production of rockets, drones and tanks -- while stopping short of direct arms exports.

China claims to be a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, which it has never condemned and in which it has sought to frame itself as a mediator.

And in a statement to the media following talks with Putin, Xi said the two sides agreed on the need for a “political solution” to resolving the war.

“China’s position on this issue has always been clear,” Xi said in footage broadcast by Russian TV.

That position included “respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries” as well as “respecting the reasonable security concerns of all sides”, the Chinese leader added.

The remarks echo a paper issued by Beijing last year, which Western countries said could enable Russia to hold much of the territory it has seized in Ukraine.

China also “looks forward to the early restoration of peace and stability on the European continent”, Xi said, promising Beijing would “continue to play a constructive role to that end”.

Later Thursday, China’s state news agency Xinhua reported that Beijing “supports the convening of an international peace conference recognized by Russia and Ukraine” in order to “push for an early political settlement.”

Putin also referenced Beijing’s complaints about growing security cooperation between the United States and its allies in Asia, warning of “harmful” military alliances in the region.

On Thursday afternoon, the Russian leader met Premier Li Qiang - China’s number two official - who said Beijing was willing to “continue to deepen cooperation in various fields”.

Putin and Xi then attended a ceremony celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations between Moscow and Beijing, Xinhua said.

## TRANSACTIONS SLOW

China-Russia trade has boomed since the Ukraine invasion and hit \$240 billion in 2023, according to Chinese customs figures.

But after Washington vowed to go after financial institutions that facilitate Moscow, Chinese exports to Russia dipped in March and April, down from a surge early in the year.

An executive order by President Joe Biden in December permits secondary sanctions on foreign banks that deal with Russia’s war machine, allowing the US Treasury to cut them out of the dollar-led global financial system.

That, coupled with recent efforts to rebuild fractured ties with the United States, may make Beijing reluctant to openly push more cooperation with Russia - despite what Moscow may want, analysts say.

AFP

The Google DeepMind logo is displayed in a large, light-colored font against a white background. The word 'Google' is in its signature multi-colored font, while 'DeepMind' is in a dark grey sans-serif font.

Photo: AFP

# GOOGLE'S AI SEARCH REVAMP PUTS PUBLISHERS IN A QUANDARY

**G**oogle's use of artificial intelligence to sum up answers to search queries has publishers wondering if traffic to their websites will wither.

The internet titan announced Tuesday last week it is introducing AI-generated answers to online queries in the United States, in one of the biggest changes to its world-leading search engine in 25 years.

The change will soon spread to other countries, arguably reducing the importance of links and web pages for more than a billion people.

And bloggers, news outlets and others who benefit from people clicking on their links via Google's search results could see audiences dwindle if people are sated by what its "AI Overview" serves up.

"It's going to create a negative impact on brands

and publishers who rely on organic search traffic for sure," Marketing AI Institute CEO Paul Roetzer said of such a scenario.

"We just have no idea how much, and we don't really know what you can do about it."

AI blurbs generated by Google's Gemini technology will offer succinct summaries of what it found on the internet with only a few links to the online sources that supplied the information.

Research firm Gartner predicts traffic to the web from search engines will fall 25 percent by 2026 because of increased reliance on AI in general.

Roetzer noted that Google has not provided much information about how the change might affect advertisers or publishers, essentially asking them to

have faith.

"It's just going to be a grand experiment happening in real time that will move people's businesses one way or the other, depending on how it plays out," Roetzer told AFP.

For now, marketers and publishers have little choice but to keep doing what they are doing, and diversify where they appear online to get noticed in places other than Google searches, he added.

But online audiences have already been splintering as people spend time on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and other venues - so opportunities exist to connect with people there, Roetzer added.

Aware of the negative reactions from publishers and content creators, Google executives insisted on Tuesday that the new formula would encourage users to click on a wider variety of websites, not the other way around.

"We're committed to ensuring a vibrant ecosystem," promised Hema Budaraju, a Google search director, at a press roundtable. In the new version, "sites receive more traffic" than before, she said.

AI-journalism opportunity?

Roetzer said news outlets and other media creators rich with fresh information could strike deals with Google to make money from licensing the data used in AI models.

"There's a chance that AI in a weird way saves journalism, because these (AI) model companies need real-time data," Roetzer said.

"What if these AI companies just fund journalism because they need it?"

CUNY Graduate School of Journalism professor Jeff Jarvis said he didn't blame Google for trying to improve an online search experience that had become "a mess."

He was leery of AI being used in search, however, because "it has no sense of fact."

Jarvis also advocated news outlets make deals with AI titans to provide credible current information, saying "there's an opportunity here for our industry."

"If you have unique and credible authoritative information, you might benefit," he told AFP.

The advertising industry, meanwhile, could take a hit of billions of dollars, according to Jeff Ragovin, chief executive of Semasio.

His company specializes in using semantics for the better targeting of ads.

"For businesses dependent on search rankings, the uncertainty surrounding AI Overview is alarming," Ragovin said.

Still, Google relies on ads for its revenue, so it's not likely to undermine that part of its business to win the AI race against Microsoft and OpenAI, said Media Growth Partners consultant David Clinch.

"They have to bake advertising into it," Clinch insisted.

"Otherwise, they're creating AI just to kill themselves."

Google pushed back at the suggestion that ChatGPT-style AI interactions could impact its business, saying it has found that people use Search more, and are more satisfied with their results when using Overview.

AFP



# BEYOND THE BARRICADES

**"**In the beginning, I didn't believe in non-violence, I thought maybe the armed struggle is better, because it's clearly a good way to make a change. It's very feasible, results-oriented, and you can just expand your territory," says Ye Htet, describing his immediate reaction in the wake of the 2021 military coup in an interview with Insight Myanmar for their podcast.

Ye Htet's thinking was similar to many Burmese who suddenly found themselves trapped in a living nightmare, with their freedoms stripped away overnight and wondering how to respond.

But even as many of his peers took up arms against the junta, Ye Htet's path veered in a different direction: he chose, instead, to dedicate himself to non-violent resistance. "Nonviolence, for these three years, I have seen that it's not just an action, it has a much more deep thinking and a deeper philosophy behind it," he explains.

Initially skeptical that nonviolence could achieve any real results, he soon learned it was not simply a way to confront a brutal adversary. It also pointed towards an inner transformation, of learning to lead a life of non-harm, communicate respectfully and authentically, and develop empathy. However, it was not easy to explain this ideology to other activists, who were committed to armed struggle as the only way to effectively fight the tyranny and terror. "Learning about non-violence,

[you] more clearly see the change mechanism," he says. "Even though it's somehow more difficult compared to armed resistance, like the changes are more subtle and gentle, and it's happening at a deeper down level." Ye Htet seeks to not just replace military leaders with democratically elected ones, but to help create a society that prioritizes an individual's inner transformation equally to the development of more humane social and political structures. "Changing yourself and changing society, it is something that is interrelated and happening at the same time," he says. Ye Htet further clarifies that the particular actions that non-violence advocates may take are not nearly as important as the rationale behind them; thus, much of his group's time is spent studying the core principles of non-violence, translating materials from leading non-violent thinkers around the world, and sharing these ideas with interested newcomers.

Unlike in the immediate weeks following the coup before the crackdowns, when there were many possibilities for nonviolent action, there is now grave danger in organizing public events. This narrowing of the public space has driven many into thinking that armed resistance is the only option left, and at the same time, it has forced Ye Htet and his group to identify options for nonviolent resistance. This is an important development, and Ye Htet notes that he has spoken to a growing number of people in private who acknowledge the risk of long-term consequences associated with militant action, and so are becoming more interested in his group's messaging. He is also concerned that the armed resistance is overlooking the potential of real "people power."

"People really want to take part in the revolution, but apart from holding arms and making donations, they have very few roles, like maybe only clicking and signing petitions are the kinds of things they can do," he says. "If you want to mobilize a movement, you need to really commit to communicate, to build understanding, to convince, and this hard work pay offs and sustains has a sustained impact!"

## CHECK OUT PODCAST

Listen to the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/68697142-b7cd-45a3-97e4-4f63030c4dee>

# MYANMAR JUNTA SEEKS COOPERATION FROM RUSSIAN AEROSPACE ORGANIZATION

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Deputy Director-General of Roscosmos State Space Corporation Mr Savelyev Sergey Valentinovich exchanged views on the enhancement of cooperation in aerospace technology and sending of Myanmar students to the Russian Federation to study aerospace technology, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

Chairman of the State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received a delegation led by Deputy Director-General of Roscosmos State Space Corporation Mr Savelyev Sergey Valentinovich of the Russian Federation at Zeyathiri Beikman on Konmyinthta of Yangon Region on 19 May.

At the meeting, both sides cordially exchanged views on enhancement of cooperation in aerospace technology between Myanmar and Russia, development of human resources, and sending of students from Myanmar to the Russian Federation to study aerospace technology.

Also present at the ceremony were SAC Joint-Secretary Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo, Council member Lt-Gen Nyo Saw, Union Minister at the SAC Chairman Office Ministry (1) Admiral Moe Aung, Union Minister for Science and Technology Dr Myo Thein Kyaw and officials.

The Deputy Director-General of Roscosmos State Space Corporation of the Russian Federation was accompanied by Russian Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Iskander Azizov and delegation members.

The delegates also held a seminar on space technology at the Yangon Technological University



Mr Savelyev Sergey Valentinovich with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

# MYANMAR JUNTA DEPLOYS ADVANCED CHINESE DRONES

Myanmar's military is bolstering its arsenal with cutting-edge Chinese drones, deploying them against its adversaries with growing destructive force, resistance groups told Radio Free Asia (RFA).

An officer from the anti-junta Myingyan District Drone Strike Team said that the new CH-2 and CH-4 drones feature six-bladed hexacopters capable of vertical takeoff and landing.

The CH-4 drone can fire air-to-ground missiles from an altitude of 5,000 meters (approximately 16,400 feet), allowing it to remain beyond the effective range of most anti-aircraft guns, according to OE Data Integration Network (ODIN). As for the CH-2 drone, it is mainly intended for reconnaissance and surveillance missions.

The Myingyan District Drone Strike Team's officer said that the quality of the junta's equipment had improved and that the potential damage they could inflict had increased. The officer added that the junta was now employing advanced methodology.

Resistance groups have also employed drones to combat junta forces.



## NUG MINISTRY ANNOUNCES OVER 505 MILLION KYAT IN HUMANITARIAN AID FOR APRIL 2024

The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of the publicly-mandated National Unity Government (NUG) announced on its official Facebook page that in April 2024, it provided 505.6 million kyat (about US\$126,400; 1US\$= about 4,040 kyat) in humanitarian aid to those in need.

The aid, sourced from donations, included 411.7 million kyat for emergency food for 424,005 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 29.2 million kyat for assistance to 157 deceased people and 269 injured people from conflicts, 12.5 million kyat for Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) staff, 0.9 million kyat for political prisoners and their families, 18.3 million kyat for advance food planning, 33 million kyat for general humanitarian assistance, and so on.



## COMMENT CAMPAIGN AGAINST PTTEP'S SCHOLARSHIP

The Facebook page of Global Myanmar Spring Revolution, a coordination body of worldwide Myanmar diaspora communities leading campaigns for Federalism, wrote that Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP), which allegedly provides billions of dollars to Myanmar junta that commit crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, is trying to hide its bad reputation by offering scholarships for motor vehicle mechanics in cooperation with Myanmar Motor Corporation.

So, on May 18 and 19, the Global Myanmar Spring Revolution and the Blood Money Campaign Facebook pages organized an online "bloody scholarship" comment campaign and urged the people to boycott the scholarship programme.

# 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.