

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## DISPLACEMENT & ESCAPE

Myanmar society  
disrupted by fighting  
and conscription drive

● India has voted - but who is the winner?

# 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.

# ECHOES OF POL POT: THE CRUEL FACE OF THE ILLEGAL MYANMAR JUNTA

In eerie echoes of the brutality of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, the Myanmar military junta is killing and torturing people as it desperately tries to hang on to power in a country inaptly dubbed the "Golden Land".

Just over the last couple of weeks, the horrific story has been exposed of a brutal and vicious massacre of over 50 people in the village Byai Phyu, which is just outside the Rakhine State capital of Sittwe. This is one of many massacres and killings since the 2021 military coup, displaying the brutality of this "Pol Pot-like regime" that appears to hate its countrymen and women. Myanmar coup leader Min Aung Hlaing appears to encourage this horrific behaviour of his troops.

More than 170 soldiers are believed to have raided the village Byai Phyu as part of operations to tackle the Arakan Army (AA) that has grabbed a number of towns and junta military positions in Rakhine.

Witnesses told the media that everyone in the village, which has just over 1,000 households, were kept out in the open for two days, under the sun, with little or nothing to eat or drink, while dozens of men were tied, blindfolded and some taken away in trucks for further interrogation. Many are yet to return.

According to a BBC report, men who had tattoos showing support for the AA were singled out for especially harsh treatment, locals said. One eyewitness said the soldiers cut out the tattooed skin, poured petrol onto it and set it alight. Men were taken away one by one, brutalized and shot. Several women were gang-raped. Valuables were looted. Another eyewitness recalled an army officer telling the villagers he had come from the fighting in northern Shan State, where

the military suffered heavy losses under Operation 1027 late last year, to take his revenge on them.

The National Unity Government (NUG) said in a statement that 51 people aged between 15 and 70 were "violently tortured and killed". The AA estimates the death toll to be more than 70 people.

The Myanmar junta has denied the accusations, but it is clear that this is yet another massacre perpetrated by soldiers on civilians, displaying a level of brutality on a par with Pol Pot and the Killing Fields of Cambodia.

"Myanmar's Year Zero" is happening in front of our eyes – unlike the killings in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 that took place behind a security curtain and media blackout. Independent media reported Myanmar's Byai Phyu massacre a day after it happened, details beginning to emerge a day or two later. Various organizations including the United Nations have spoken out. But it appears tough to hold the Myanmar junta accountable. The junta has no honour and no soul, using their troops to raise fear amongst the population.

"Vicious cruelty" is how the AA referred to this massacre. While some might argue that comparing Min Aung Hlaing to Pol Pot – responsible for the murder of close to 2 million Cambodians – doesn't quite fit, anybody hearing the testimony of the survivors of the Byai Phyu massacre will recognize the similarity between the brutality of the Khmer Rouge and the brutality of the Myanmar junta soldiers. They are perpetrating horrific crimes against humanity, a clear breaking of the laws of war.

## EDITORIAL

### mizzima WEEKLY

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Cover photo of Yangon street scene at night by AFP





Young men have to watch their backs in Yangon and elsewhere as the Myanmar junta steps up their military conscription drive. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR SOCIETY DISRUPTED BY FIGHTING AND CONSCRIPTION DRIVE

**M**yanmar society is in dire straits as the illegal military junta steps up attacks against villages and resistance targets and continues its drive to conscript young men into the military.

The two junta strategies are prompting displacement on a major scale.

The United Nations estimates that junta hostilities have driven around 3 million people to flee their homes, living as internally displaced people (IDPs) or fleeing the country as refugees. The junta appear to have ratcheted up their brutality with massacres becoming commonplace, the latest being the torture, rape and murder of about 76 villagers in Byai Phyu Village in Rakhine State's Sittwe Township.

The UN warns that millions of IDPs in Myanmar are in dire need of humanitarian aid. But little outside aid is being delivered to those in need, due to junta restrictions and an apparent unwillingness on the UN and its partners to send aid through non-government channels, including the National Unity Government (NUG).

Then there is the crisis prompted by the Myanmar military's conscription drive.

A total of 9,000 young men have been dragooned into the Myanmar military since April, according to the analysis and data group Burma Affairs and Conflict Study. About 5,000 were conscripted in April and 4,000 in the latest batch up until early June.

Training for the nearly 4,000 second batch began on May 14 in 16 schools across the country, according to the analysis group. The junta is now recruiting for the third batch.

## STRENGTHENING FORCES

The junta has been seeking to strengthen its forces due to setbacks against resistance forces who are seeking to end military rule.

Under the military conscription law, enacted by the junta in February, men between the ages of 18 and 45 can be conscripted. The announcement has triggered a wave of killings of administrators enforcing the law and driven thousands of draft dodgers into the ethnic areas, neighbouring Thailand and further afield.



Military activity near Myawaddy.  
Photo: Facebook

## FAMILIES SUFFER

According to reports, Myanmar nationals who have fled the country to avoid conscription are afraid that junta authorities will target their family members with legal action and fines. General Maung Maung Aye, the vice chairman of the Central Body for Summoning People's Military Servants, threatened those who failed to join the draft, noting that the junta would use the country's courts to go after them.

Draft dodgers face threats and their families may face large fines.

According to the junta's military conscription law, anyone recruited who fails to join military service without a legitimate reason can be sentenced to prison for up to three years, fined, or both. The law does not outline the punishment for family members of draft dodgers, but it does say that anyone who encourages or assists in the violation of military service can be sentenced to up to one year in prison and fined.

Members of the junta's local administrative bodies are also putting pressure on the family members of those who flee military service. According to reports, men who have fled the country are finding their families are being pressured by the authorities to bring them back home for recruitment.

A young man who asked to use the pseudonym Kyaw Swa due to security concerns, told RFA that he fled to Thailand after being drafted, but said his family

members at home are “under threat”

“After I arrived here, they [junta authorities] kept calling my family at home to bring me back,” he said. “I asked [my family] if I should come back, but they said they don’t agree with it [conscription] and told me that they will ‘address any issue here.’”

Kyaw Swa said junta authorities call his family “every two days” and ask about him, and have also demanded 2-3 million kyats (US\$950-1,430) for a military service substitution.

“If we don’t go back, they will pressure our family members,” he said. “But we aren’t willing to fight for those who are mad with power.”

In the meantime, residents of Ayeyarwady region’s Ngaputaw township told RFA last week that junta authorities are “distributing letters” calling on draft-eligible youths to register for military service and warning that if they fail to do so, “action will be taken against their families”.

## PROTEST IN YANGON

Last week, students staged a rare protest in Yangon calling for the nullification of the military conscription law and an end to the political crisis caused by the military’s February 2021 coup. Members of the All-Burma Federation of Student Unions, the Youth for a New Society, the Mayangone Democratic Front, the Kyimyindaing Networks, Lin Yaung Ni (Youth Organization) and the Owl Community joined the protest at a popular market in the city, carrying signs that read “Oppose the illegal conscription law! and “End the military dictatorship!”

Public protest like this is few and far between as the junta authorities are typically quick to crack down on demonstrations.

## CONCERNS IN THAILAND

A new policy brought in by the Thai authorities has Burmese migrant workers worried in connection with the conscription drive. Aid groups says a new Thai policy requires them to apply for an extension



Burnt out houses in a village in Rakhine State.  
Photo: AFP



to their stay from Myanmar and may subject them to conscription into the junta military.

The Thai Labour Ministry announced in April that workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos working under a government visa sponsorship programme will have to return to their own countries to extend the terms of their four-year contracts when they expire. Ye Min, with the Aid Alliance Committee, which assists Burmese workers in Thailand, confirmed the new visa requirements in an interview with RFA Burmese and said he believes Myanmar's junta requested the policy as part of its conscription drive.

## ROHINGYA RECRUITED

The Myanmar junta drive to recruit soldiers has young Rohingya men in their crosshairs. The junta is forcibly recruiting Rohingyas from villages and IDP camps in the Rakhine state capital Sittwe and threatening to block monthly international aid supplies if they refuse to join military training, according to representatives of the IDPs. Reports of the forced recruitment come amid fresh calls from the international community to monitor the situation facing Rohingya amid fears that attempts by the embattled military to incite tension between Muslim Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine Buddhist communities in Rakhine State is succeeding.

Rohingya, persecuted for decades in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, are getting caught up in the war between the ethnic Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces in Rakhine State, human rights workers say.

Both sides have pressed Rohingya into their ranks and at the same time have accused Rohingya of helping their rivals. In addition, Rohingya militant groups are reported to have forcibly or voluntarily recruited young refugees in the Bangladesh camps to fight for the Myanmar military – the same military that forced them to flee the country in 2017.

In addition, reports suggest that both the AA and junta forces have subjected members of the Muslim minority to violence. The AA denies the allegations it has targeted the Rohingya community.

## UN AND DISPLACEMENT

Myanmar is one of a number of countries worldwide highlighted by the UN where millions are displaced by war.

The United Nations refugee chief criticized the Security Council on Thursday last week over the growing number of people displaced by war and persecution, saying 114 million people had fled their homes worldwide.

“Next month, we will update that figure. It will be higher,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told the Security Council, which he lamented for its inaction since he gave his last toll in October.

“Seven months have passed but the situation has not changed - if at all, it has grown worse,” Grandi said, citing increased violations of international law and the pressures on humanitarian workers. Grandi pointed to the tens of thousands killed in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and “so many other places.”

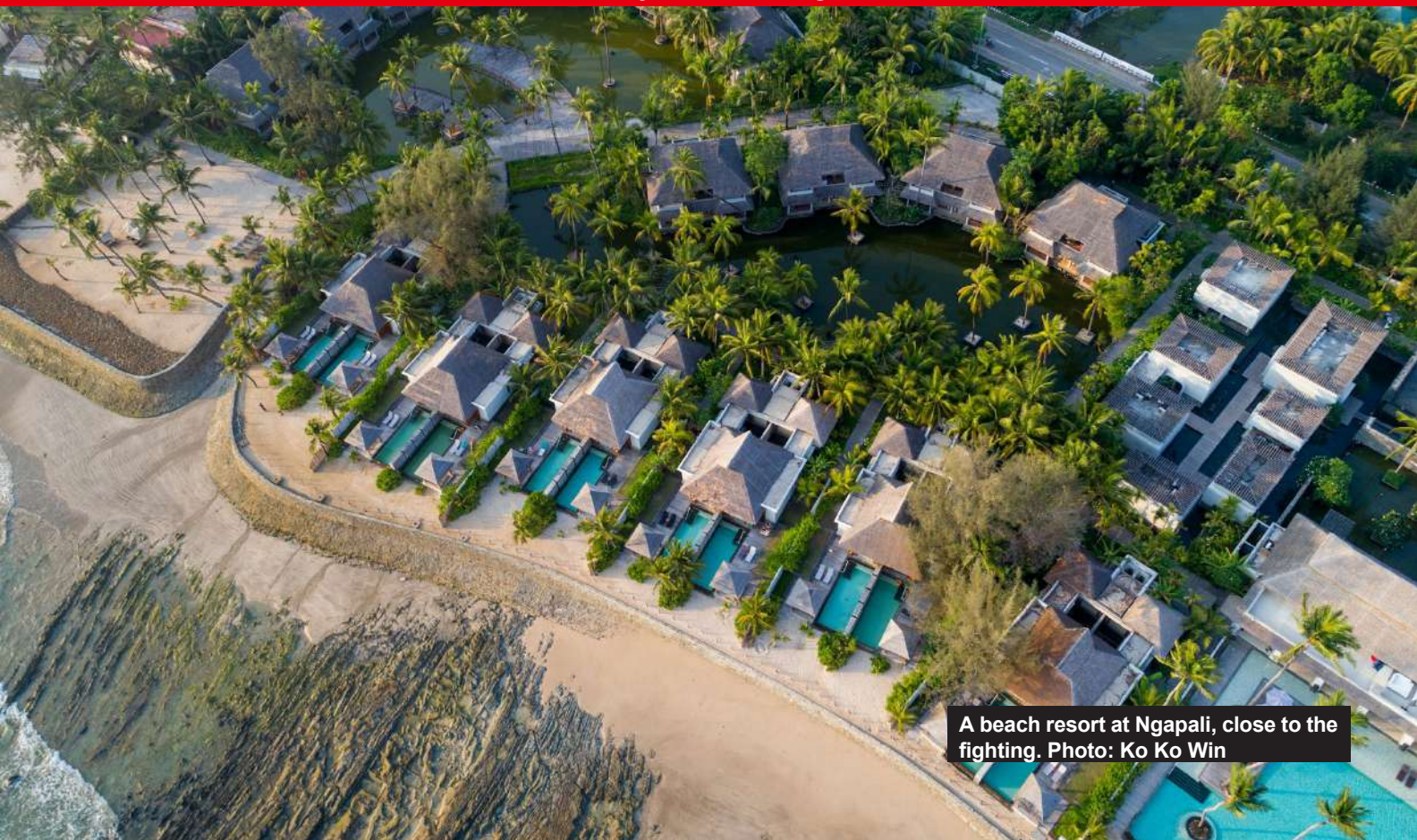
Criticizing the Security Council - long divided by tensions among its veto-wielding permanent members - he said its “cacophony has meant that you have instead continued to preside over a broader cacophony of chaos around the world.”

Grandi added that it is “not too late to try and save countless millions more from the scourge of war.”

Myanmar's case is often mentioned in UN forums, including Security Council meetings, but the UN points to funding shortfalls when it comes to providing humanitarian aid for Myanmar IDPs and refugees.

Myanmar society faces serious challenges as a combination of conflict and conscription drive people to flee.

*Reporting: Mizzima, RFA, AFP*



A beach resort at Ngapali, close to the fighting. Photo: Ko Ko Win

# TOURIST SPOT HIT IN RAKHINE FIGHTING

**O**n June 2, the Arakan Army (AA) launched a significant offensive in Ngapali, a renowned tourist destination known for its picturesque beaches in southern Rakhine State.

The battle raged intensely until the morning of June 4, with the junta deploying fighter jets in defense. Two bombs from those fighter jets landed on a monastery and a hotel compound. The fierce fighting near Gaw Ward forced many locals to flee their homes. However, they could not seek shelter in the town, since they were stopped by State Administration Council (SAC) troops at the entrance to Ngapali.

In the northern part of Maungdaw township, the AA has gained control over the entire area. On the evening of June 3, they continued their offensive, capturing four Border Guard Police posts in southern Maungdaw. The SAC responded by reinforcing the area with 2,000

personnel, amid claims by locals of an additional 2,000 armed Rohingya, bringing the total to 4,000 troops.

Efforts by the SAC to restore public services, including health and education, have been reported. Concurrently, two teachers in Ann township were arrested by the junta.

Amid the rising tensions, accusations have surfaced that the AA burned down Rohingya houses in Buthidaung during a raid. AA leader Tun Mrat Naing denied these claims, stating that over 2,000 houses, predominantly non-Muslim, were burned by junta forces before the AA seized the town.

On May 29, approximately 170 junta troops entered Byai Phyu village, gathering all villagers in a paddy field. Men and women were separated, with the men being tied up with their own clothes. Between midnight

and 4 AM on May 31, gunshots were heard, resulting in the deaths of over 40 men, as reported by women evacuated by junta troops to Sittway city. The villagers had been tortured and deprived of food and water before their deaths. AA reports the death toll from this massacre as 76, with three women raped, two killed, and one missing. In response, the AA has vowed severe retaliation against all involved personnel and battalions. They also accused the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) of involvement, a claim the ALP denies.

The SAC continues to conduct airstrikes on AA-controlled areas in Rakhine State, including Ponnagyun and Pawktaw, resulting in rising civilian casualties.

### YOUNG PEOPLE FLEEING MYANMAR TO AVOID CONSCRIPTION LAW

Since the military junta enforced the 2010 military conscription law in February 2024 there has been panic amongst young Myanmar citizens. The law requires the general public who are within the age ranges of 18-35 (male) and of 18-27 (female) and the educated people whose age ranges are 18-45 (male) and of 18-35 (female) to serve in the junta army. According to the law, the service period is two years for the general public and three years for the skilled employees, which is likely to be extended up to five years in the time of a State of Emergency. This is considered an act to counterbalance the loss of the junta's forces caused by military defections and battle forces. Draft evaders may

be subject to a five-year prison sentence.

This has had a huge impact on the lives of an estimated 13 million young people and want to avoid being drafted for different reasons:

#### (1) Stampede outside a passport office

Soon after the enforcement of the conscription law, many people started seeking to leave the country. In Mandalay, two people died outside the passport office and another two received serious injuries while six people were reported to have suffocated, which was caused by the stampede while queuing for their turn in front of the office.

#### (2) Illegal entry across border

Apart from the efforts to have the passport and visa issued, there have been illegal attempts to leave for Thailand, and regional countries such as Malaysia, through the Thailand-Myanmar border. The illegal entry led to many arrests by Thai authorities. According to Foundation for Education and Development, a migrant assistance organization, the number of the arrested from 15 February to 27 May 2024 was 918. The overall number of detained might be higher than that as it is challenging for the researchers to access certain cases.

To be able to cross the border, these people had to pay agents 20,000 bahts each which is equivalent to around US\$540. However, fines and bribes to pay the Thai police is reported to be double or triple the fees

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**EDITORIAL TALK**

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paid to the agents.

### **(3) Some joined PDFs (People Defense Forces)**

Many individuals have opted to join the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) under the National Unity Government (NUG) or ethnic armed resistance groups. One such individual is an 18-year-old computer science student from Mon State who left her home to join the Karen National Union (KNU). The other is a 21-year-old woman from Bago, a city located 91 kilometers northeast of Yangon, who joined the Bamar People's Liberation Army. Her aspirations of becoming a tourist guide were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup. Encouraged by her mother, she decided to join the revolutionary forces.

## **AA HELD DISCUSSIONS WITH CHINA ABOUT CHINESE INVESTMENTS IN RAKHINE**

The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) has been in discussions with China about Chinese investments in Rakhine State where the AA has captured a lot of territory from the Myanmar junta.

News of the discussions was revealed by AA spokesperson, Khaing Thu Kha, when he responded to a journalist's question at the AA's ninth online press conference, held on 8 June.

He said that the discussions took place after the China-brokered Haigeng Peace Agreement between the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the Myanmar junta that brought an end to their fighting in northern Shan State in January 2024, but did not say exactly when the talks had taken place.

Though the AA is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, (the other members are the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, (TNLA)) no ceasefire was agreed for Rakhine or Chin states where the AA mainly operates.

At the 8 June press conference, Khaing Thu Kha said: "The Republic of China wants peaceful negotiations to get a potential answer. Additionally, it wants to fully protect its economic interests in Rakhine State. It also wants to stabilise border regions."

He also said that it was AA policy to protect economic investments in Rakhine State, but acknowledged that there were still many challenges to implementing a ceasefire in the State.

"We told the junta to stop targeting civilians. But the fighting continues not only in Rakhine but also in other related conflict areas. Thus, it is very challenging to agree a ceasefire," he said.

On 26 December 2023, the China-owned CITIC Group signed a follow-up contract to develop the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port and special economic zone project in Rakhine State. The China-owned Sino-Myanmar gas and oil pipelines also run from Kyaukpyu and cross Rakhine State going before going to Yunnan in China.

## **JUNTA ATTACKS TNLA VIOLATING NORTHERN SHAN PEACE AGREEMENT**

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) said the junta violated the Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement between the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the junta with airstrikes and artillery bombardments in northern Shan State.

The China mediated Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement was signed on 11 January 2024. It was signed between the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance, made up of the TNLA, Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). The signatories of the ceasefire agreed not to attack each other in northern Shan State.

But, according to the TNLA, the junta violated the Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement when it launched airstrikes and artillery attacks on Pantin and Manpain villages in Mongmit Township, northern Shan State, on 9 June at 4:30 pm and dropped a 500-pound bomb, though this has not been independently confirmed by Mizzima.

The attacks injured three TNLA fighters.

According to the TNLA statement, this was not the first time the junta had targeted its camps in Mongmit and Mogok townships. It claimed that the junta had launched at least 10 airstrikes against the camps and fired artillery at them between 1 and 9 June, in violation

of the Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement.

According to TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo there are ongoing military tensions in Mongmit Township. In the last week the junta has also carried out other multiple attacks in Mongmit Township, but those attacks did not break the ceasefire because the junta attacked members of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which did not participate in or sign the Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement.

Lway Yay Oo said: "The Haigeng Agreement is being violated. On our side, we are monitoring the Military Council's movement and their military targets."

According to reports, the situation on the ground in northern Shan State is fragile and deteriorating and the Haigeng Ceasefire Agreement may soon be completely broken.

## MOST VIEWED MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

The following are the most viewed Mizzima Burmese videos of the last week:

Min Aung Hlaing doesn't even have a handful of people he trusts anymore

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASV6xn6FVOM>

Weekend News Roundup | 8 June 2024

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urefaTd\\_P2U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urefaTd_P2U)

"Burmese economy" headed for collapse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHi1kp13t2A>



The Chinese oil refinery in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State. Photo: AFP



Yet another junta military massacre. Photo: Supplied

## ARAKAN ARMY CONDEMNS BYAI PHYU VILLAGE MASSACRE IN SITTWE TOWNSHIP

The Arakan Army issued a statement on 2 June responding to the Byai Phyu Village massacre in Sittwe Township where at least 76 villagers were killed by junta forces on 29 May.

Previous estimates had put the number of dead at 53, but the AA revised this figure to 76 on 4 June.

The statement also refers to “SAC [State Administration Council] trained Muslim conscripts” being involved in the massacre, by which the AA means that Rohingya conscripts serving in the junta army.

The AA statement also accuses fighters from the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) of assisting the junta army in Byai Phyu Village, though the ALA has denied any involvement in the massacre.

Below is the 2 June statement from the AA:

The United League of Arakan strongly condemns the recent egregious and inhumane crimes committed by the fascist military council (SAC), including the detention, torture, and killing of innocent civilians in the village of Byai Phyu, Sittwe, Arakan.

Ferocious fighting continues between the fascist military council (SAC) and the Arakan Army. The Arakan Army has been successfully capturing towns and purging them of SAC forces, having taken over all SAC military bases in Buthidaung. The Arakan Army continues to launch offensives against remaining SAC installations in Ann, Sittwe, Maungdaw, Kyauk Phyu, Taunggup, Thandwe, Gwa, and Man Aung.

In their desperate attempt to defend their remaining military bases, the losing fascist military council has resorted to both defensive and offensive measures.

Additionally, they have been deliberately targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, villages, towns, and crowded places, using arson and aerial bombardments.

On May 29, troops from Sittwe-based DaKaSa, Pakokku-based Brigade 101, and other battalions, along with forces from the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and SAC-trained Muslim conscripts—a column totaling more than 170 soldiers—surrounded the village of Byai Phyu. They arrested everyone in the village, including women, children, and the elderly, forcing them to stay in the scorching sun with their hands tied behind their backs, depriving them of food and water, torturing them, and killing villagers in cold blood in the most brutal manner.

Furthermore, they committed a series of atrocities, including the massacre of more than 50 people, disposal of their bodies, gang-raping women, holding up to a thousand people hostage, and robbing valuables such as gold, cash, and motorcycles. These actions constitute a tremendous and horrendous war crime. This incident will be remembered as an act of vicious cruelty, and the people of Arakan will never forget it.

The Arakan Army has already taken strong retaliatory actions against SAC members responsible for similar crimes in the town of Pauktaw. We condemn the SAC in the strongest possible terms for these war crimes and crimes against humanity. We demand that the SAC immediately cease such crimes. We hereby vow to take strong retaliatory actions against those who gave the orders and the perpetrators themselves.

# OVER 20 PEOPLE KILLED BY MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON SAGAING REGION WEDDING

**A** Myanmar junta airstrike on a wedding in Mataw Village, Mingin Township, Sagaing Region killed at least 20 people and injured many others, at about 8:30 am on 3 June.

According to U Htay, a Mataw villager, bombs were dropped directly on the wedding party, but the bride and groom were uninjured as they were on their way to the village monastery at the time.

"In rural areas, the place where food is cooked and served, and where wedding gifts are provided, are all in small central areas," said U Htay. "The bomb struck this central area, causing all people there to be hit", he added.

According to a member of the Student's Revolutionary Force (SRF) based in Mingina a junta jet dropped three bombs on the wedding.

Speaking at 12.30 pm on the day of the attack, they said: "The wedding was bombed by the Military Council army. A jet fighter dropped three bombs believed to weigh 200 pounds [each]. As of now, there are still people missing, so we cannot confirm the exact death toll."

According to an RFA report, the junta jet dropped two 500-pound bombs and 24 people were killed.

An 8-year-old child was reportedly amongst the dead and more deaths are expected as many of the survivors have serious, life-threatening injuries.

According to some locals, defence force members were also among the dead, though this was not confirmed.

Local defence forces actively helped in rescue efforts by searching for missing people and assisting the injured.

"The estimated death toll is currently around 20. There are also people who are missing so it could rise more, and many are seriously injured", said another villager.

Families have tried to search for the remains of their missing relatives but the numerous dismembered body parts and continuous junta shelling have made that difficult.

U Htay said: "Junta troops are still firing heavy artillery, preventing anyone from daring to collect the dead bodies in the area", adding "They are continuously shooting with heavy weapons."

Following the airstrike, the junta fired artillery into Mataw Village causing more than 2,000 residents from six nearby villages to flee their homes, according to U Htay.

Military-backed Telegram channels said the junta plane dropped the two bombs because a Mingin People's Defense Force's leader was one of the people getting married, though this could not be independently verified.

Aung Myo Min, the human rights minister for the shadow National Unity Government, called the bombings a war crime.

"This is not a military campaign at all, but a deliberate bombing of a civilian wedding," he said. "It is a military strategy and an intentional attack on the civilian population."

Despite numerous attempts, RFA received no response from junta spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun regarding the bombing.

Mizzima has reached out to the Mingin Township People's Administration for comment but has yet to receive a response.

RFA also attempted to contact Nyunt Win Aung, the junta's spokesman for Sagaing Region, to talk about the incident, but he did not respond to several phone calls.

*Reporting: Mizzima, RFA*



**FLASHBACK:** There has long been strong local opposition to the copper mine. Photo: Strike Committee

## PROTESTERS AIM TO STOP WORK AT CHINESE COPPER MINE IN MYANMAR

**H**undreds of people in central Myanmar are protesting against operations at the Chinese-backed Letpadaung copper mine, saying revenue from it supports the junta, residents of the area told Radio Free Asia on Tuesday last week.

The Letpadaung mine in the Sagaing region's Salingyi township has been beset by intermittent protests for more than a decade by villagers angry about being forced off their land, what they see as inadequate compensation and pollution from the mine.

Workers at the joint venture between China's state-owned Wanbao Co. and the military-owned Myanmar Economic Holding Limited company, went on strike soon after the army seized power in a 2021 coup as part of protests across the country against military rule.

The latest round of protests began on May 7 in a bid to force the mine to cease operations, which they say financially support the junta.

"The protest is still going on. We are protesting the Chinese companies that are supporting the junta, which we do not accept," a member of a Salingyi township strike committee told RFA on Tuesday. He declined to be identified in fear of reprisals.

Nearly 80 Chinese nationals arrived at mine sites in early May to keep the project running, residents said.

RFA telephoned the Wanbao Mining Company and Sagaing region's junta spokesperson, Nyunt Win Aung, for more information about the situation but neither responded by the time of publication.

The Chinese embassy also did not respond to inquiries from RFA.

Since the military ousted an elected government in 2021, residents have opposed China's development projects in different parts of the country including Rakhine State and the Mandalay region.



## CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Insurgent forces have seized territory near some of China's projects, forcing the suspension of work. The disruption to projects was a central focus of the latest peace talks that China hosted with representatives of the junta and an alliance of ethnic minority insurgent forces known as the Three Brotherhood alliance in the Chinese city of Kunming in May.

In the past, protests at the mine have been broken up with force and strikers told a 2023 conference that more than 30 people had been killed in various clashes over the years.

The junta had posted troops around the mine so the latest protest is being held some distance from it, another strike leader said.

"The protest could not be held near the project area because the junta troops are guarding the project area," said the strike leader, who also declined to be identified. "Protests are held in safe places."

Residents in three villages near the mine were forced to move because of an expansion of the project last August and soldiers built fences to keep people away.

On Thursday, the junta's foreign minister, Than Swe, met China's ambassador to Myanmar, Chen Hai, in the capital Naypyidaw to discuss issues related to joint projects between the two countries, junta-backed media reported.

The two also discussed China's assistance in developing Myanmar's economy and closer bilateral cooperation.

In an April 17 statement, Wanbao Mining Company said intensive maintenance work on machinery would be required because the project had been halted since 2021 due to land disputes.

*Translated by RFA Burmese. Edited by Kiana Duncan and Mike Finn.*

*Courtesy of Radio Free Asia*

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Photo: AFP

## FIVE DEAD, MORE MISSING IN LANDSLIDE AT MYANMAR RARE EARTH MINE IN KACHIN STATE

A landslide at a rare earth mine in Myanmar killed at least five people, including two Chinese citizens, and left at least seven others missing, a worker at the mine and local media reported 6 June.

Part of a hillside at the mine at Pangwa in Kachin State on the border with China slipped away early Tuesday last week, a source at the mine told AFP, requesting anonymity.

"The whole hill fell down... it wiped out even big trees," the source said, adding that at least seven people were unaccounted for.

Rescuers have found five bodies, including two Chinese citizens, two security guards and one worker, the source said.

AFP has contacted the Chinese embassy in Yangon for comment.

Local media reported that five people had been killed and at least 20 people were still missing from the mine.

Jade and other abundant natural resources in Myanmar's far north -- including timber, gold and

amber -- have helped finance both sides of a decades-long civil war between ethnic Kachin insurgents and the Myanmar military.

The region is also home to heavy rare earth elements which are vital for magnets in electronic vehicles.

There are over 300 mining sites around the town of Pangwa, the watchdog Global Witness said last month, citing satellite imagery.

The rare earth industry in Myanmar was worth around \$1.4 billion in 2023, according to the watchdog.

During the June to October rainy season, landslides are a regular and deadly hazard for the thousands of migrant workers who travel to Kachin state to scrape precious metals and minerals from its hills.

In 2020, heavy rainfall triggered a massive landslide at a jade mine in Hpakant township that entombed nearly 300 miners.

AFP



Photo: AFP

# JUNTA TROOPS ABANDON TWO OIL FIELDS AFTER MILITIA MEMBERS BLOCK SUPPLIES

**J**unta forces have given up control of two oil fields managed by Myanmar's state energy company after rebel guerillas cut off food supply routes to nearby military camps.

Production at the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise's oil fields is the military junta's main source of foreign revenue. The company is estimated to generate US\$1.5 billion in annual revenues – or half the country's foreign currency reserves.

Junta troops abandoned an oil field in Kyauk Khwet village in Myaing township on March 2 and another one in Let Pan To village in Pauk township on April 19, two residents told Radio Free Asia. The oil fields are about 12 km (20 miles) from each other.

"They finally ran out of food and left their camps," said a Myaing township resident, who like others quoted in this report asked not to be identified for fear of retribution. "We did not need to fight them. We didn't do anything with them."

Before leaving, the troops burned down the buildings in both camps and also set fire to the oil field in Let Pan To village to keep equipment out of the hands of residents. A military jet also dropped several bombs on the Let Pan To oil field, the Myaing township resident said.

No one has been seen working at either of the oil fields since the junta troops left, although nearby residents are still able to carry out some small-scale extraction, according to a resident from nearby Pauk township.

"This is a blow to their mechanism. The junta has lost a lot of natural gas," said a former employee of Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise who left after the 2021 military coup to join the Civil Disobedience Movement.

'We are cutting them off'

More than 200 wells have been drilled in the two fields since around 1996, oil field staff members told RFA. The two oil fields produced the maximum amount of oil in 2018 and 2019, with about 1,080 barrels each day.

The wells in Kyauk Khwet have also produced 1 million cubic feet (28 million liters) of natural gas each day, the staff members said.

Other oil fields in Magway region are still under the control of the junta troops, said Yan Gyi Aung, a member of a rebel People's Defense Force, or PDF, group in Magway's upper Minhla township.

PDF fighters are aware of the strategic importance of halting junta operations at the oil fields, he said.

"The junta is getting funds from this. If they get more funds, they will buy more bullets and weapons to kill people," he said. "We are blocking the lifeblood of their revenue and financial resources. Currently, we are cutting them off."

Sanctions were directed at Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise following the February 2021 military coup. Another round of sanctions was announced last year by the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

RFA attempted to contact junta spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun and the junta's spokesman for Magway region, Myo Myint, about the loss of the two oil fields, but they did not immediately respond.

*Translated by Aung Naing. Edited by Matt Reed and Malcolm Foster.*

*Courtesy of Radio Free Asia*



Myanmar Kyat dropping in value. Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA TRYING TO REVERSE ECONOMIC WOES BY PRINTING MORE BANKNOTES

The Myanmar junta has printed approximately 30,000 billion Kyats of banknotes since the February 2021 coup, leading to a sharp decline in the value of the Myanmar kyat.

This information was revealed by the National Unity Government's (NUG's) Union Minister for Planning, Finance, and Investment, Tin Tun Naing, during an NUG press conference about Myanmar's economic collapse on 3 June.

Also speaking at the press conference was the Australian economist Sean Turnell who is acting as a special advisor to the NUG's Interim Central Bank and who was previously Aung San Suu Kyi's economic adviser.

Both Tin Tun Naing and Sean Turnell said that the junta was trying to resolve the financial crisis by printing more money which was one of the causes of the current high rate of inflation.

"Recently, we have seen an uncontrollable rise in dollar exchange rates and gold prices. This is a consequence of the Military Council's actions. They are looking for an excuse to say that this is because of market price manipulation by foreign exchange and gold traders. The real issue is the excessive printing of

new banknotes since they seized power," said Tin Tun Naing.

According to Tin Tun Naing since the February 2021 coup, the junta has printed almost 30,000 billion (30 trillion) kyats of banknotes. In comparison, the NLD government printed far fewer, for instance during 2019 and 2020 it printed 3,656 billion kyats of notes.

Tin Tun Naing said that an undisclosed eastern European country was supplying the junta with the necessary ink, paper and raw materials to manufacture the banknotes.

He also explained that most of the newly printed money was mainly being used for military expenses.

According to the junta, military expenditure in the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year was 1,700 billion kyats, in 2022 to 2023 it was 3,700 billion kyats and in 2023 to 2024 it was up to 5,700 billion kyats. The military budget for 2024 to 2025 has yet to be disclosed.

Tin Tun Naing said that the junta is withholding the latest military budget because it does not want the public to know the extent of its spending on the military, which is leading to the junta excessively printing banknotes.



Photo: AFP

## NUG TRYING TO RECOVER US\$1 BILLION FROZEN BY THE US GOVERNMENT

**M**yanmar's anti-coup National Unity Government (NUG) is actively working to recover US\$1 billion in funds frozen by the US Government.

The efforts to recover the money are being headed by Tin Tun Naing, the NUG Minister for Planning, Finance, and Investment. At the least, he hopes to secure the interest accrued on the frozen funds.

The funds were frozen following the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, when the U.S. government blocked the transfer of approximately US\$1 billion held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, just days after the military seized power and detained Myanmar's democratically elected, leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The transfer of the 1 billion USD was initiated on 4 February 2021, three days after the coup, by the Central Bank of Myanmar. The transfer was initially halted by US Federal Reserve safeguards before an executive order by President Joe Biden permanently blocked the transfer.

At a 3 June 2024 NUG press conference titled "The Economic Crisis in Myanmar", Tin Tun Naing discussed the NUG's attempts to reclaim these funds.

He stressed the importance of the U.S. recognising the NUG as Myanmar's legitimate government as this would help the NUG recover the funds. Currently, the U.S. supports the NUG and imposes sanctions on the junta, but it does not officially recognise either the NUG or the junta as the legitimate government of Myanmar.

He said that if the NUG could get the funds it would use them to fund revolutionary forces and the socio-economic needs of the Myanmar people.

"This issue primarily depends on the decision of President Joe Biden, current President of the United States. This doesn't mean this is hopeless. There is hope. Although it is not easy, we are making significant efforts to achieve this," said Tin Tun Naing.

He referenced a precedent where the European Union agreed to use profits from Russian Government funds frozen by the U.S. to support Ukraine after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He noted that while the circumstances are different, the nature of the frozen funds is similar.

He said: "We are trying to follow that path. While there are some differences in nature, the situation of frozen funds is similar."

"Since the decision depends on the U.S. government, it is difficult to predict when we might get the funds. However, we are trying everything we can with all the available resources and our utmost efforts", he added.

Professor Sean Turnell from Australia, Aung San Suu Kyi's former economic adviser and now the Special Advisor to the NUG's Interim Central Bank, is also helping in the recovery efforts.

Photo: Sergey Zolkin

# MYANMAR CIVILIANS STRUGGLE AS JUNTA'S SOCIAL MEDIA CRACKDOWN DISRUPTS DAILY LIFE

## PAN PAN

The Myanmar junta's crackdown on social media is causing widespread disruption for civilians, affecting various aspects of daily life, according to Burmese users.

The junta's move to restrict certain VPN servers for social media apps since May 31 has created significant challenges.

This has hit online businesses, remote workers, and students who rely on online platforms particularly hard, with disruptions caused by blocked VPN servers.

Since the coup, popular social media apps like Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have been inaccessible due to the junta's restrictions. However, this time, they've gone further by targeting specific VPN servers used to bypass these restrictions.

One online business owner shared their struggles, noting a drop in sales due to communication delays with customers.

"These days, even when customers come to ask, we cannot respond, and they end up buying elsewhere out of impatience. I sell products on my Facebook page. I do not open a physical store, so I am relying on online sales. With poor internet and constant VPN disruptions, it takes longer to respond. I tend to answer customers' questions and sell at once. I have tried various recommended VPNs, but most of them do not work well. Many people run their businesses online, and these restrictions are hurting our businesses."

In Myanmar, economic instability is compounding the situation. The Burmese currency, kyat, continues to depreciate, with the US dollar exchange rate reaching around 5,000 kyat per dollar.

Civilians face difficulties due to the junta's restriction on social media usage.

Moreover, the price of one tical of 24-Carat gold has risen to around 5 million kyat. So, the junta blames the currency traders for the depreciation and blocked some VPN servers to stop the flow of information on social media.

A person also working from home using the internet also mentioned that these restrictions severely affect his work.

"I am a video editor. It causes disturbances when I have to gather necessary data on Facebook and Messenger and communicate with clients. Initially, I struggled like everyone else. However, I bought Premium VPN rather than free ones. This country is going bankrupt where the costs are high, even the internet is not freely available, and we have to pay a high price to use it. I am worried they might completely block internet access later. We might even need to prepare backup communication tools."

Due to the scarcity of job opportunities and low wages in Myanmar, more people are turning to freelance online workers, and individual independent business operators.

So, the junta's internet usage restriction is causing more delays in work and business activities and disrupting information flow.

Additionally, people are also worried about the possibility of complete internet shutdowns.

The economic downturn due to the military junta and imposition of conscription is causing many young people to leave the country. Foreign currency in the country is in high demand and the value of the kyat is also depreciating. This leaves the military regime struggling to manage the situation.



Photo: AFP

## PROMISES UNFULFILLED - MYANMAR'S DEMOCRACY PROMISE GOES SOUR

"When we look back now, it's easier to look at that [transition] period darkly and dismiss it and say it was kind of a mirage," Timothy McLaughlin, author of a recent piece in *The Atlantic*, titled "The Great Democratic Success Story That Wasn't" tells *Insight Myanmar* in a podcast.

"I do think there were some real things happening and definitely benefits. Was it equal across the board? Of course not. And was it halting? Yes, for sure."

Before speaking about his article, however, he discusses his background in reporting on Myanmar, starting with the 2010 and 2012 elections, and then the sweeping, unprecedented changes across society that followed. "The general projection and feeling was one of positivity, especially leading into the 2015 election. It was just a huge amount of excitement and hype around that, with many people getting to vote for the first time."

### US INTEREST

As the thrust of McLaughlin's recent article centers around current US policy in post-coup Myanmar, he first tracks American involvement over the preceding years, describing how Obama took office hoping to

make a fresh start in reaching out to pariah states that the Bush administration had isolated through sanctions and harsh rhetoric. "The idea behind the reengagement [was] looking back at the country and trying to figure out a new path forward, because obviously the old path wasn't working," he explains, attributing that thinking as coming from the top, with Obama, Hilary Clinton, and Jake Sullivan leading the way. But just several years later, that bubble of optimism was burst with the Rohingya tragedy. As the ensuing genocide unfolded, McLaughlin describes the resulting Beltway thinking as, "Okay, we've invested a lot of time and energy in here, what's the end goal?"

McLaughlin characterizes the American sentiment after the 2021 military coup as expecting a fairly brief resistance followed by a bloody and inevitable military takeover... which obviously is not how things have played out. He describes the subsequent American sanctions as essentially "performative" in nature, seeking more "punishment" than holding any hope of effecting real change. He notes, too, that some of the people that had been involved years ago in helping craft Obama's Myanmar policy are back with the Biden administration, and in higher positions to boot. McLaughlin describes them as giving themselves "probably way too much

credit," for their Obama-era policies, especially in their claims of "shifting the mindset of the generals," and they are notably silent today on Burma issues.

### AVOIDING ENGAGEMENT

Overall, McLaughlin describes this crisis as one that most policymakers, anywhere, would simply rather not engage with. "Myanmar is a mess for everybody, not just the countries on its borders," he says, pointing to the cyber-scams, the drug trade, and human trafficking now running rampant, not to mention the possibility of the conflict spilling over borders. "This has become a transnational, criminal state," he says. For that reason, McLaughlin's piece was intended to "call attention to these people who were these great champions, they claimed that they changed everything in Myanmar and that they had forged this new US policy. And now they pretty much have walked away from this issue!"

### CHINESE DISAPPOINTMENT

Then there's China. While some observers have posited that China may have implicitly supported the coup, McLaughlin notes that like everyone else, Beijing is quite unhappy about what has taken place. Indeed, he points to the cozy relations that the NLD had been developing with them before the coup, from investment deals to foreign policy alignment. But he points out that China's position can be best understood when considering the US, as both superpowers are equally wary of how their own Myanmar policy might affect the other. As an example, McLaughlin notes that "when the US decided to say that the military had... carried out the operations against the Rohingya with genocidal intent... we know that the US didn't do that before in the Trump administration, because they were afraid that it would push Myanmar closer towards China." McLaughlin spoke to people on the record who admitted this concern, providing a slightly different angle on the eventual genocide declaration that Secretary Blinken eventually made under President Biden (which was detailed in a podcast interview with the Holocaust Museum's Andrea Gittleman). Still, like many other observers, McLaughlin can't explain the almost complete lack of US engagement, noting that "you would certainly think that with a country that's in Asia, that is at the nexus of China, at least geographically, we'd be getting sort of more attention from the US admin, if only in a self-serving of kind of

way there." (And it is certainly a far cry from countries like Russia, which are continuing to provide the junta arms and legitimacy, and now even taking measures to begin promoting Myanmar's tourism industry!) In any case, the US and China are "both in the [same] boat right now in having to deal with the junta's instability!"

McLaughlin finds it very odd that the US has shown so little interest in a people who have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to risk everything for ideals that America supposedly holds sacred. But he believes this again points back to the primacy of China in their foreign policy calculations. "The overarching issue seems to be where countries in this region fall on China, and that is where the tally is kept." In other words, Myanmar's revolution—and with it, the overall promotion of democracy in the region—isn't as relevant to American policymakers now as where those respective countries stand vis-à-vis the Chinese question. As for the Burmese, he recognizes the enormous confusion and frustration they feel about why their situation has been so neglected, to the point that the imprisoned Win Myint is, in McLaughlin's words, "the most forgotten president that ever lived... They've been jettisoned by the greater international community that was supposed "to be this torchbearer not that long ago."

### TROUBLED AID SITUATION

The next topic that McLaughlin addresses is humanitarian relief. "For many years now, even before the coup, the aid situation in Myanmar was so complicated and very contentious," McLaughlin says. He describes an age-old problem within the large donor/international organization community: whether to go through military actors who claim a veneer of legitimacy—but the aid is then unable to reach critical populations in sensitive areas while cronies skim off the top—or to by-pass the military and go through local, informal networks. This is a subject that Shade went into great detail on a recent podcast episode. The typical donor response has been to use military channels, thus recognizing a kind of legitimacy of the junta, but McLaughlin echoes what many others have said, suggesting that "maybe it's time to start thinking about how to get this aid to places through local actors cross-border, and not through the formal channels that have been obviously controlled and disrupted and used as a weapon by the military in some ways."



## IT'S COMPLICATED

So where does that leave American engagement at present? In a word, as with everything regarding Myanmar these days, it's "complicated." Noting that the US is now overwhelmed with problems in Gaza and Ukraine, McLaughlin quips that this excuse doesn't really fly as Burma predates both crises! Between questioning the involvements and roles of such diplomats as Derek Chollet and Kurt Campbell, he points out the obvious in the form of the upcoming US election between Trump and Biden, and the massive implications that will have on everything related to the US after November. And then there is the Burma Act, which was a major accomplishment to pass, but has since taken some time to figure out actual funding mechanisms for.

That Myanmar is "complicated" also cautions McLaughlin when working out his own analysis and prognosis. "If anyone tells you 100% sure about anything in Myanmar, I think they're lying," he says. "When it comes to Myanmar, people throw up their hands and say, 'Ah, it's really tough. It's really complicated.' Well, yes, it is, most places that are in the state that Myanmar is in are tough and are complicated! If these solutions

were super easy, someone would have done it already. This is what we're seeing that... from Beijing to DC to Bangkok, everyone just wants this to go away... But having that that mindset, do you really hope it just vanishes? It's self-defeating from the start."

And like Anthony Davis and so many other guests on the Insight Myanmar podcast have opined on the past, McLaughlin is well aware that this society is going through a moment.

"Myanmar is not going back to what it was," he says. "What it is in the future, we obviously don't know. But I don't think it's going back to what it was in 2012, or the 2003 era. Something fundamentally is changing here, and it's going to take a while for that all to be seen and sorted. Unfortunately, it's probably going to mean more lost lives and destruction. But I do think that something different is going to emerge from all this."

Listen to the Insight Myanmar podcast here

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/6de08030-b41d-44c1-ba60-25c1acb06e0d>



Protestors abroad make their feelings clear. Photo: AFP



A small group of Czech and Burmese protestors were allowed to protest in front of the Myanmar Embassy stall.

# CZECH AND MYANMAR ACTIVISTS PROTEST MYANMAR JUNTA AT PRAGUE 'FESTIVAL OF EMBASSIES'

A group of Czech and Myanmar democracy activists took turns to protest in front of the Myanmar Embassy stall at the annual “Festival of Embassies” held in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic on Saturday.

According to an agreement with the police, a total of three activists carrying signs were allowed to stand in front of the Myanmar junta stall at one time. Close to a dozen Czech and Myanmar protestors took it in turns to protest.

The 8 June event ran from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm but the junta embassy staff abandoned their stall at 2.00 pm – a likely result of the protest.

Igor Blazevic, one of the Czech protestors, said they took it in turns to stand for six hours under the hot sun with the following message:

“This stall is under control of military junta which has deposed democratically-elected government and which is massacring the civilian population of the country. If you want to know more, please talk with us.”

Blazevic, a long-time pro-democracy activist with years of experience of Myanmar, said “a lot visitors to the Festival of Embassies talked with us and not many visited the junta’s stall.”

The Myanmar Embassy staff tried to get the protestors removed.

“Already in the morning they called police to remove us, but the Czech Republic is free, democratic country and police do not crack down on right of expression of citizens,” said Blazevic.

He said he was glad he and his Czech friends were able to prevent the illegitimate military junta from misusing the Festival of Embassies for their propaganda purposes.

“We have done that for our heroic Myanmar freedom fighters and for our Myanmar friends. Russia was not present at the festival, neither Belarus, nor Iran, nor North Korea. The illegitimate junta should not be there either. It was good they were forced to leave early on,” Blazevic said.

## CORE DEVELOPMENTS

This is the seventh year of the largest international street food festival, an event where the presentations of individual countries are primarily provided by their embassies, honorary consulates, or chambers of commerce. Often, respective ambassadors and their families participate in the event. In terms of the number of participating countries, this is a completely unique event within the Czech Republic.

The Festival of Embassies is organized under the supervision of The Prague 6 Municipality, the event is managed by the registered association of Farmer's Markets.

Individual countries will be presented through their respective stands, where original local dishes will be prepared and served, often by well-known chefs. Even the Ambassadors themselves or their families like to participate in the food preparation. The event follows the simple idea of presenting high quality local food as quality gastronomy.

As part of the wide range of the event programme, music bands and various artistic groups from the participating countries add local flavor from around the world.



Activist Igor Blazevec talks to visitors.



The Myanmar Embassy stall open and closed.





Photo: Road Trip With Raj

# THE FEDERALISM ENIGMA IN MYANMAR POLITICS

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH BALL

As Myanmar's varied resistance groups continue in their quest to end the reign of military rule in Myanmar, a key – if not the key – catchword shared among these groups is that of federalism.

The concept is often held out as a beacon of light at the end of the long and arduous struggle. But the achievement of such a goal is not an easy task. In this context, *The Politics of Federalization in Myanmar* (hereafter referred to as *Politics of Federalization*) offers a timely assessment of the obstacles to, and demands of, federalism, providing a historical background to the country's struggles to come to grips with federalism and offering an insight into what needs to happen to render this vision a reality.

Make no mistake, the advent of a workable federalist system is not an easy task. As author Dulyapak Preecharush remarks in the early pages of *Politics and Federalization*, it is a taxing job to realize "political compromises amid residual conflict." But at the heart of Preecharush's thesis lies the assessment that the "federating process is driven by the three major political issues of constitutionalization, conflict management, and democratization." Yet, crucially,

"each by itself is insufficient to see federalism through."

*Politics of Federalization* identifies four critical junctures in the history of modern Myanmar at which the possibilities of constitutionalization, conflict management, and democratization have coalesced to make the realization of federalism (or at least significant strides toward federalism) a real possibility. These years were 1947, 1962, 1988, and 2011. And, depending on the trajectory of the current conflict, presumably a further opportunity will present itself at some point down the road.

However, previous opportunities for federalism at the identified critical junctures clearly failed. With respect to the current conflict, this proved to be the case in the hoped for transition period commencing with 2011. Nevertheless, *Politics of Federalization* observes that it is important to recognize that, at least in theory, all parties were seeking some form of federal agreement but differed in how to get there and what it should look like. This has been true since the first critical juncture in 1947, when "managing deep-rooted conflict over sensitive ethnic-territorial issues" created conditions arguing for the necessity of a long-term vision of federalism for the country.

At the time of the initial critical juncture, Preecharush continues, "Due to the quick political negotiation between Myanmar leaders and the British government as well as the majority and minority leaders' limited knowledge of constitutional matter and federalism, post-war independent Myanmar faced a problematic state-building project." Today, this limited knowledge regarding federalism, including among the Myanmar population at large, continues to impact the prospects for federalism in Myanmar.

The author continues his analysis with "The events at this critical juncture necessitated a quick outcome, so key actors had to finalize discussions and choose options as promptly as possible. As a result, in-depth insights about federalism and thorough understandings of each key stakeholder's political decisions were overlooked to some extent." This would seem to infer, along with the need for education on federalism, that Panglong was hardly a solution, let alone a comprehensive blueprint for federalism in Myanmar. Rather, Panglong should be understood as a hoped-for starting point for much more detailed discussions and negotiations.

This juncture further highlights the impact of the speed with which Myanmar's leaders pursued the country's post-colonial independence. It was a tactic in stark contrast to some other British colonial territories, such as Malaysia. It was also a tactic, as Preecharush notes, of which the British were highly skeptical owing to "the historical lack of deep integration between the two governing units," namely Burma Proper and the

Frontier Areas. Essentially, Burmese leaders attempted to organize a group – the national community – which did not exist. This may be one reason why a rare, and highly debatable, clause providing for a right to secession was included in the 1947 constitution. Going forward, it will be important to correctly judge an appropriate pace and sequence for the federating process.

All this points to another critical component of the federalizing process: the role of a country's elites and the overlapping nature of democratization, conflict management, and constitutionalization. As *Politics of Federalization* relates, "it is difficult to separate the nature of strategic competition and the belief systems of elites from the federalizing process." Moreover, throughout Myanmar's struggles to come to grips with the dynamics of federalism, "the democratization process, including combining the ethnic Burman Buddhist civilian elite and the Tatmadaw, and peace processes for managing conflict are necessarily connected but insufficiently interlinked in any highly positive way."

*Politics of Federalization* stresses that federalism is not a new concept to Myanmar, while at the same time a concept which all sides to the political struggle accept they must confront. Unfortunately, to date, the story of federalism in Myanmar is one of persistent failure. To look at one recent example, within the post-2011 constitutional amendment process, federalization became a footnote to intra-Burman political posturing. While all sides acknowledged some need for federalism, power politics at the center of the state worked to the detriment of the peace and federating processes. These processes in turn became political tools for the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Tatmadaw through which to pursue their own political objectives vis-à-vis the other.

Continuing with the most recent critical juncture identified by Preecharush, the decade following 2011 served as a transition period during which there arose an increase in political consciousness across Myanmar society. And as we look to the fallout from the 2021 coup, the current conflict continues this transition, albeit in a much more violent form and with deliberation and tolerance replaced by armed opposition, and with military and civilian camps within government replaced by the State Administration Council (SAC), National Unity Government (NUG), and other resistance organizations.

It bears noting that the bulk of *Politics of Federalization* would appear to be drafted, or at least conceptualized, prior to the 2021 coup, with a distinct focus on the center versus peripheral/ethnic aspects of federalism. The author even states his hope that "transitional Myanmar may be used to illustrate some issues in constitutional studies, especially how a current quasi-federal constitution may be amended or

upgraded into a more federal constitution to strengthen democracy and realize a program of reconciliation." This clearly did not happen. What went wrong? And what can be done to solve the federalist enigma in Myanmar when the next critical juncture arrives?

For starters, transitional Myanmar was still dominated by the military. And the infusion of political activity into praetorian society bred instability. *Politics of Federalization* argues that there were options for various types of "incomplete" federalism to begin to address the relationship between the center and the periphery. However, it was the intra-Burman rift that set Myanmar apart and overrode any momentum to focus on federalization between the central government and various ethnic groups.

How this intra-Burman relationship evolves post-conflict will go some distance in dictating what options are available for any post-conflict federalization. We already have an idea of how things will go should the Tatmadaw be able to consolidate their position. The greater unknown is what happens if the opposition win. Authority, for one, must exist before it can be limited. Meanwhile, divided societies without centralized power are inherently unstable. But what would authority/centralized power look like in a post-junta Myanmar?

Without question, should opportunities to nurture federalization arise, Myanmar will need to chart its own path. *Politics of Federalization* explores the case studies of various federalist experiments around the world. And sure, lessons can be drawn. But there is not a single model that could necessarily be transplanted to cure the Myanmar patient. Additionally, given the weak state of political institutions in the country (another situation which must be addressed), the role of elites/leadership will be paramount during any transition. For decades, weak political institutions fueled a lack of political stability, which also provided opportunity for Myanmar's armed forces – as arguably one of the better organized institutions in the country.

Finally, argues Preecharush, those involved in negotiations will need to appreciate "the nature of realist politics. Based on the principle that permanent friends or foes do not exist in politics, only political interests and strategic survival." This observation will undoubtedly hold true as well when Myanmar is presented with the next critical juncture to determine the fate of federalism in the country. We can only hope that it does not become but the next on a list of missed opportunities.

*Title: The Politics of Federalization in Myanmar*

*Author: Dulyapak Preecharush*

*Publisher: Routledge 2023*

*Reviewed by: Joseph Ball*

# CZECHS TO OPEN CULTURAL CENTRE IN TAIWAN, RISKING CHINA'S IRE

The Czech Republic said Monday last week it would open a new centre to boost cultural and diplomatic ties in the Taiwanese capital Taipei shortly, a move likely to anger China.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory under its one-China policy, and last month launched military drills around the self-ruled island.

The Czech Republic, a European Union and NATO member, officially embraces the one-China policy, like the EU, but its officials foster close ties with Taiwan.

"The Czech Centre in Taiwan will launch its activity on Friday, June 14" with an exhibition of Czech photographs, the foreign ministry said.

The CTK news agency quoted Czech Centres head Jitka Panek Jurkova as saying that Czechs "want to be seen and heard in Taipei".

"The Czech Centre in Taipei is designed to deepen the understanding among the Taiwanese public of traditional and especially contemporary Czech culture," she added.

The foreign ministry currently has 28 Czech Centres promoting the Czech Republic in 25 countries across the world but not in China.

AFP

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Narendra Modi at the swearing in of the new Indian government. Photo: AFP

## INDIA HAS VOTED - BUT WHO IS THE WINNER? NICHOLAS NUGENT

Indians have voted and the winner is... democracy. It is difficult to name another clear winner. The losing party, Congress, nearly doubled the number of Lok Sabha seats it won last time to around 100 while the technical winner, the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, won far fewer seats than last time, down from 303 to 240, not enough to form a government on its own in the 543 lower house of parliament.

What made it worse for the prime minister is that he had confidently proclaimed 400 seats as his target, but even with seats gained by allied parties in the National Democratic Alliance he only managed 292 – just enough to constitute a majority. It is little wonder that photographs showed broad smiles on the faces of Rahul Gandhi and fellow leaders of the opposition Congress Party while BJP leaders, the nominal victors, looked sullen.

The result was a shock for the ruling party. The Kolkata-based Telegraph newspaper carried the headline 'India cuts Modi down' while a prominent commentator, Suranya Aiyar, took the setback further declaring 'The king is dead'.

The BJP's 240 parliamentary seats and 53 taken by its allies did at least garner enough for a majority and to form a government, so Narendra Modi is the election victor but will have to bargain with other party leaders in naming his new cabinet and subsequently

introducing legislation. He will find it much harder to push through the sort of controversial legislation that characterised his previous two administrations, like the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which discriminated against Muslim refugees, or the act which abolished autonomy previously enjoyed in Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir state.

So begins the inquest. Why did Mr Modi's BJP win so many fewer parliamentary seats than he or commentators predicted? Indians are inclined to point to what they call an anti-incumbency factor, suggesting many people are tired after ten years of Mr Modi's rule. But this hardly explains why. A more credible explanation is that the so called 'vote banks' of Dalits – once known as 'untouchables' – and tribal communities turned against the prime minister. This was especially true in the populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh where Mr Modi had hoped to capture most of the 80 seats but ended up with only 33. Votes for Mr Modi in his own seat of Varanasi fell back and his party lost the crucial seat of Faizabad to the regional Samajwadi Party, an ally of Congress.

Faizabad includes Ayodhya where Mr Modi's inauguration in January of a vast Hindu temple in a place once occupied by a Muslim shrine, far from being an election winning gesture, appears to have alienated voters in an area with a significant number of Muslim voters. Mr Modi's blatantly sectarian appeal to Hindu

voters and apparent discrimination against India's 200 million Muslims in the campaign appears to have backfired.

Meanwhile Rahul Gandhi, who leads Congress as his father, grandmother and great grandfather all did in their turn, increased his personal share of the vote and now presides over a party celebrating a rebirth. Commentators who predicted the demise of the Congress Party were proven wrong and find the party, which has formed the government more often than not in India's previous 17 elections, in a much stronger position than after the 2019 election.

Another reason for the severe setback for the BJP is economic. Mr Modi's government has played a role in boosting India's economy, now the fifth largest by GDP in the world ahead of the United Kingdom and France, and is regarded as a friend of big business. The Mumbai stock market fell sharply in reaction to the shock election result, though recovered later.

An election pledge of Mr Modi's was to make India a global manufacturing hub. Yet poorer people and farmers have seen little benefit under BJP rule and, crucially, unemployment remains high among young people.

The BJP's investment in bringing electricity connections and toilets to village that previously had none served him well in the 2019 election but helped him less this time. Recent government investment has been aimed at building roads and airports which benefit far fewer Indians.

Mr Modi, a populist, has been accused of behaving like a dictator, allowing little time for parliament to debate divisive topics and steamrolling legislation through the assembly. He is said to have imposed his will on state institutions such as the Election Commission, the Enforcement Directorate and even the Supreme Court, which supported him over the Ayodhya temple.

One of the most egregious examples of what critics describe as playing loose with India's democracy was the imprisonment during the election campaign of the Chief Minister of Delhi, who leads the Aam Aadmi or Common People's Party, on what it was suggested were politically motivated charges of corruption. This alienated voters and gave the Chief Minister hero status when the courts ordered his release.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal capitalised on the situation by pointing out that Narendra Modi will soon be 74, only a year away from his party's proposed retirement age of 75, and suggested the BJP's less popular home minister, Amit Shah, was preparing to

succeed him.

Mr Modi is also charged with suppressing dissent and intimidating India's media, which is no longer seen to be as balanced politically as it once was. That may have been a factor in the failure to predict the election outcome which even supposedly authoritative pollsters got badly wrong. So it is easy to find that the main winner of this controversial election was democracy itself, reaffirming the power of ordinary people in the world's largest democracy and giving a new breath of life to the political opposition and the expression of alternative opinions in the media.

Weakened though he is, Mr Modi has emerged as the winner and was quick to form a government bringing in BJP allies. He will be in no position to alter with the country's constitution which was introduced by the country's first prime minister and Congress party leader Jawaharlal Nehru in 1950. The Congress Party had played on this fear with Rahul Gandhi holding up a copy of the constitution at election rallies. Some people feared Mr Modi wanted to alter a basic tenet of the constitution that would end the commitment to secularism and make India a Hindu state.

The Congress Party, which together with its allies took 232 seats, is now in a much stronger position to challenge the government and will be harbouring hopes of regaining power in five years' time.

Other nations are unlikely to see change in Mr Modi's foreign policy and will perhaps be relieved at the stability his re-election brings. He deserves credit for making India count in international affairs and for strengthening India's traditional non-aligned status by not seeming to favour one nation over another.

His presidency of the G20 group of nations in 2023 brought a lot of attention to India. Mr Modi also played a significant role in BRICS, the economic alliance that groups India with other second level economic powers China, Brazil, Russia and South Africa. He avoided giving his wholehearted support to Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine despite Russia being a major supplier both of arms and oil to India.

He held back from being too critical of Israel, with which India has commercial ties, or of openly backing the Palestinian cause which previous Indian government supported more wholeheartedly.

The United States will be especially pleased that Mr Modi remains at the helm as Washington has been cultivating India as a counter-balance to China with whom US relations are severely strained. President Joe Biden was quick to send congratulations to Mr Modi



on his re-election. The Indian premier counts both president Biden and former president Donald Trump as good friends while also maintaining cordial relations with Mr Putin and President Xi Jinping of China, though relations with the latter have become strained over border clashes.

Newly elected heads of state or government queue up to visit Delhi given the important position it now occupies in world affairs as well as the country's attractiveness as the world's fastest growing economy. India rolls out the red carpet for its Republic Day parade every 26 January. This year President Macron of France was honoured as chief guest; last year it was President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt.

There were already signs that India's policy towards the military junta ruling Myanmar was undergoing change, partly because of the flow of refugees from Chin State crossing the border into India. Diplomats are thought to be arguing that South Block, the home in Delhi of the country's external affairs ministry, should give more attention to the National Unity Government (NUG) coordinating the fight against the military junta in Naypyidaw, Myanmar's capital.

Relations with India's traditional 'enemy' of Pakistan show no signs of easing, especially not with a government in Delhi displaying open hostility to Muslims. However, commentators say recently there has been less friction along the common border or open hostility towards the rulers in Islamabad, who

have themselves just been through an election. But nor are their signs that either side is planning a new peace initiative to overcome differences.

A big question now will be what changes the new government makes on its domestic policy. It can be expected to offer more help towards farmers and the rural poor, not least the deprived castes who are believed to have played a major role in reversing the voting pattern. The risk here is that will undermine business which has transformed India's economy in recent years giving record GDP growth of over 8 per cent.

The new government will be expected to address the serious shortage of jobs for young people, but will be challenged by how to do this without reducing business incentives and reversing Mr Modi's pledge to make India a global manufacturing hub.

An expectation is that in his third administration Mr Modi will be less the world statesman and businessmen's friend and respond more to the basic needs of India's people who have given him such a shock in the 2024 election.

*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.*



An artist displays portraits of all of India's prime ministers. Photo: AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo: AFP

## PUTIN SAYS RUSSIA HAS NO **'IMPERIAL' AMBITIONS**, DOES NOT PLAN TO ATTACK NATO

**R**ussian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday told a meeting of foreign news outlets that Moscow harbours no "imperial ambitions" and dismissed as "bollocks" the idea that Russia could attack NATO.

"There is no need to look for some imperial ambitions of ours. There are none," Putin said in answer to a question from AFP about the presence of Soviet and Russian imperial flags at the headquarters of Russian energy giant Gazprom where the meeting took place.

"There is no need to look for something that is not there," he said, adding: "Don't make up an image of Russia as an enemy. You will only harm yourselves."

"They've come up with this idea that Russia wants to attack NATO. Have you lost your mind? Are you as thick as two short planks? Who made this up? It's nonsense, it's bollocks," Putin told reporters.

Russia denied for months that it was preparing a military offensive in Ukraine before launching the assault on February 24, 2022, accusing Western powers of trying to use their Ukrainian ally to harm Russia.

Russia has also announced the annexation of five Ukrainian regions and several Russian officials, including Putin himself, have pointed out that these territories previously belonged to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

AFP



Photo: All Photo - Bangkok - Unsplash

# CHINA'S PLAN TO SEND TROOPS NEAR VIETNAM THROUGH THE CANAL PROJECT IN CAMBODIA

SUN LEE

The proposal by Cambodia to construct a navigation canal worth US\$1.7 billion that would connect the port of the capital city, Phnom Penh, to the nation's coastline has sparked apprehensions in Vietnam. The worry stems from the potential for this project to facilitate a more substantial presence of the Chinese military.

The Funan Techo Canal project, spanning 180km and terminating in the coastal province of Kep in Cambodia near the Vietnamese border, is anticipated to be undertaken by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, a state-owned entity of China. The project will be executed under a build-operate-transfer agreement, permitting the corporation to manage the canal for approximately 50 years as compensation for financing its construction. The commencement of the project is projected for 2024 with completion expected by 2028.

Cambodian authorities have been vocal about the benefits of the canal, emphasizing its potential to reroute Cambodian trade, bypassing the need for transit through Vietnamese ports. The Prime Minister, Hun Manet, has highlighted the job creation prospects for the 1.6 million inhabitants residing along the proposed canal route, all without increasing the nation's foreign debt. However, a note of caution has been sounded by researchers affiliated with a Vietnamese state-supported institute. They have expressed concerns that the canal, while fostering socio-economic growth, could also serve a "dual-use" purpose by enabling a deeper Chinese military presence in Cambodian territory, uncomfortably close to Vietnam's border.

Mr Dinh Thien and Mr Thanh Minh, two researchers with the Oriental Research Development Institute under the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations mentioned this in an article, that the locks

on the Funan Techo Canal can create the necessary water depths for Chinese military vessels to enter from the Gulf of Thailand, or from Ream Naval Base, and travel deep into Cambodia and approach the (Cambodia-Vietnam) border. The journal article from March 2024 was replicated on the People's Public Security Political Academy's website on the 18th of March.

The two researchers further said that the Funan Techo Canal is not simply a socio-economic project but also has major military value, which would have a strong impact on the defence and security situation of the whole region.

At present, China is assisting in the enhancement of Cambodia's Ream Naval Base. Despite sightings of Chinese warships at Ream as recently as March, Phnom Penh has refuted allegations of providing the Chinese navy access to its base in exchange for this assistance. Vietnam and China have intersecting territorial claims in the South China Sea. The apprehensions voiced in the March article, primarily centered on the potential environmental repercussions of the canal project, are among the most recent concerns highlighted by Vietnamese scholars.

While the official statements from Hanoi have been rather restrained, reports from Cambodian media indicate that Mr. Hun Manet attempted to alleviate the concerns of Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh regarding the canal during his formal visit to Hanoi in December 2023.

A document from August 2023, dispatched by the Cambodia National Mekong Committee to the intergovernmental Mekong River Commission - a group that also includes Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos - states that the Funan Techo Canal would have a minimum depth of 4.7m and a width of 50m at its base. The document further notes that any impact from the canal would be largely temporary and confined to the construction phase. However, a March 2024 article by Vietnamese researchers posits that the canal could lead to a reduction in the water flow into Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

Brian Eyler, who heads the South-east Asia Programme at the Stimson Centre based in the US and is a keen observer of the Mekong River system, has put forth the idea that the Funan Techo Canal could potentially function as a levee. This would obstruct water from reaching crucial areas of the Mekong Delta located in the southern part of Vietnam.

Eyler explained to The Straits Times that this is due to the expansive nature of the Mekong's water flow, which can stretch up to 50km in width as it moves

downstream during the rainy season in the later part of the year.

He elaborated that the canal is set to intersect this vast flood plain, functioning much like a dam. The water, which would typically flow downstream, will encounter the canal and begin to move laterally towards the ocean, guided by gravity and the land's gradient. This will result in the formation of a dry area south of the canal and a more humid region to its north, but China is not interested in the environmental hazards of this region caused by the canal project, China wants to fulfil its strategic interests only.

The Ministry of Public Works and Transport in Cambodia has refrained from responding to any inquiries concerning the environmental repercussions of the canal project. Despite the anticipated commencement of the canal's construction in 2024, a significant number of local residents along the proposed route are still unaware of the specifics of its execution.

In a statement, Mr. Chey Saman, the head of the Somrong Thom commune in Kandal province, which the canal is slated to traverse, shared that the villagers are persistently inquiring about the project. They are curious about its nature, its scale, and the potential impact on their land. They are seeking a fair valuation for their land. Despite their continuous queries, he confessed that he is yet to have any definitive answers for them. Nevertheless, he continues to be an ardent advocate of the development. He pointed out that at present, the local farmers lack a direct route to the global market for their produce, and are compelled to route their goods via Vietnam and Thailand, resulting in lower prices for their crops. He expressed his belief that the canal would pave the way for direct exports, leading to an increase in export prices, thereby enhancing the livelihoods of the people.

China's Funan Techo Canal project in Cambodia in the Mekong River is raising environmental and geopolitical concerns. The construction is disrupting ecological patterns, impacting biodiversity, and altering water flow, which could have severe consequences for local communities and ecosystems. Simultaneously, the project is seen as a strategic move by China to establish a stronger military presence near Vietnam. This dual impact of environmental erosion and potential military escalation underscores the complex implications of such large-scale infrastructure projects, necessitating a careful balance between development and preservation.

*Sun Lee is the pseudonym for a writer who covers Asian affairs.*



Phil Robertson with the late U Win Tin.

## BROKEN DREAMS IN THE LAND OF SMILES

“One of the things I’ve been passionate about and worked on and have done research about is the plight of migrant workers who have come to Thailand from Myanmar, and also from Cambodia, from Laos, and increasingly now from Vietnam,” says Phil Robertson.

Robertson, the longtime former Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch and currently the Director at Asia Human Rights and Labor Advocates sat down to talk with Insight Myanmar for their podcast. He discusses how Burmese migrants fleeing to Thailand to escape the conflict have been faring.

A country with a rapidly aging population, Thailand has long relied on migrant labour to work in trades that locals avoid; Robertson estimates that of the nearly 5 million migrants in Thailand, over 2 million are from Myanmar, a number expected to rise sharply due to the junta’s recent conscription laws.

Although Thai law requires fair pay and safe working conditions for migrants, the reality is far from that. “It is a system that exists in law and regulations,” he says. “But the real idea is that there is impunity to violate the rights of and abuse migrant workers, and that is what we consistently see.” Robertson cites an incident where a Burmese migrant worker was assaulted in the presence of an inspector from the Ministry of Labor, highlighting the stark lack of effective support for migrant workers. “It is quite clear that the Ministry of Labor in Thailand systematically fails to effectively enforce just about any of the major labor laws,” he says. “The law may exist somewhere, but the reality is what the boss says and what the foreman says and what the police outside the gate say.”

The Thai Labor Relations Act bans foreign workers from participating in labor unions, a measure that the International Labor Organization has consistently criticized, though they can advocate for them. However, Robertson paints a dim overall picture of workers’ rights in Thailand. Thai labor unions are pretty toothless, often too weak to effectively advocate for the workers’ rights of Thai nationals, let alone migrant workers. and in some cases they are completely powerless. So even that avenue for organizing and the redress of grievances is closed for Burmese workers. However, Robertson notes that Thai industries producing goods for export have faced increasing scrutiny from Western countries, which are now taking greater care to limit imports produced under sub-optimal working conditions. While there has been some progress in the United States, Robertson advocates for more substantial attention to these issues within EU states.

“People in the European Union need to be demanding that the European Union lay down some clear markers that there has to be labor law reform and human rights reforms in Thailand if they expect to do business. It’s not possible to look the other way anymore.”

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# MYANMAR JUNTA'S CRACKDOWN STIFLES THAI CONDO TRADE, SPURS SALES DECLINE

**M**yanmar's military regime recently launched a crackdown on the trade of Thai condominiums within the country, according to the junta-controlled media and local news reports.

The junta's announcement on June 4 revealed that Aung Kyaw Tun, director of real estate firm Minn Thu Company, alongside the company's general manager Min Thu Kyaw, organized two expos showcasing Thai condos at the Sedona Hotel in Yangon without permission from relevant authorities.

According to the junta's statement, the accused people facilitated payments for the Thai condos from Myanmar buyers to Thailand using illegal channels, including the hundi cross-border money transfer system. While Aung Kyaw Tun has been arrested, Min Thu Kyaw remains at large, attempting to evade arrest.

Additionally, three other Myanmar citizens have been arrested for purchasing Thai condominiums from Min Thu Company. They stand accused of unlawfully opening Thai bank accounts without approval from the Central Bank of Myanmar and using these accounts to wire payments for the condominiums, compounding the charges against them.

The actions taken by Myanmar junta against its citizens purchasing Thai condominiums may lead to a remarkable decrease in condo sales in Thailand throughout the second and third quarters of this year, Bangkok Post reported on June 8, citing Thai Condominium Association.

According to Prasert Taedullayasatit, the president of the association, Thai condominium units valued at more than 1 billion baht were halted from transferring to buyers from Myanmar in April and May due to the Myanmar junta's crackdown.



# JUNTA'S INFORMATION MINISTER EMPHASIZES MUSICIANS' ROLE AMIDST REPRESSION; ARTISTS SEEK RESISTANCE ABROAD

**T**he junta's Union Minister for Information Maung Maung Ohn, on June 1, convened with officials from the music industry at the Myanmar Music Association meeting hall in Yangon, emphasizing the significant role of musicians in alleviating public suffering.

He stressed the importance of cooperation to safeguard musicians' rights and announced plans for Myanmar Music Day celebrations on June 27 at the National Theatre, urging unity among industry stakeholders and pledging government support.

However, the artistic spirit of several musicians and singers of Myanmar was abruptly stifled by the military coup in 2021, extinguishing their flicker of creative freedom. Confronted with the resurgence of oppression and censorship, they are embarking on a journey of resistance.

After the military coup, many famous musicians and singers from Myanmar went abroad as activists. Some of them are singers who hold concerts abroad and raise funds for Myanmar's Spring Revolution.



Photo: Aung Thamardi Gold, Jewellery Shops & Refinery

## 20 GOLD DEALERS DETAINED, 10 MORE GOLD SHOP OWNERS WANTED BY JUNTA AMID ALLEGATIONS OF PRICE MANIPULATION

The junta has detained more than 20 gold merchants and issued arrest warrants for 10 more owners of major gold shops claiming that they were manipulating the local gold price, according to local social media posts and local news reports.

On May 30, when the price of one Burmese Tical (1 Burmese Tical = 16.3 g) of gold rose to 5.9 million kyat, the military junta arrested and interrogated 21 gold merchants and brokers. And then, according to the information given by the arrested gold brokers, the junta has issued arrest warrants for 10 owners of major gold shops in Myanmar.

The gold price in Myanmar has risen from around 5 million kyat per Tical on May 20 to over 5.8 million kyat on May 30.

However, the dramatic rise in gold prices has nothing to do with the owners of the gold shops and is instead due to the sudden over-inflation of the Burmese kyat.

The exchange rate of the US dollar rose from 4,000 kyat per dollar to around 4,600 kyat per dollar in just a few days in late May.

On a Facebook page of Khit Thit Media, a Facebook user writes, "As long as the military council (junta) survives, everyone will be unlucky. So, fight the junta wisely."



The Republic of the Union of Myanmar

National Unity Government

<https://www.nugmyanmar.org>

Statement Regarding Internet Shutdown by Terrorist Myanmar Military Council  
8 June 2024

The National Unity Government is continuously striving to fulfill the Union's ultimate goal of building the peaceful federal democratic union, where freedom, justice and equality prevail, as described in the Part (1), Chapter (4), Section (1) of the Federal Democracy Charter. In addition, every citizen's right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to information are deeply recognized as stated in the Part (1), Chapter (3), Section (1), Article (24) of the Federal Democratic Charter; "Everyone living in the Union shall be entitled to relish basic human rights". The National Unity Government's position statement on freedom of press and news media released on May 3, 2024, in paragraph (6) of the statement, "Endeavours to Strengthen the public's right to information" is also being implemented.

After an attempted unlawful military coup, Myanmar has become the country with the second highest internet shutdown in the world, and 13 out of 14 states are facing internet outages, and more than 80 townships are still facing internet blockages.

Now, the terrorist military council is using the access to information as a weapon and restricting it, banning the right to express and write freely, and shutting down the internet to cover up the general economic crisis that the public is facing and people's growing concerns, and their physical violence; mental blows; and war crimes. In addition, the terrorist military council has blocked the access to Facebook and is developing a social media network with an intention of openly violating public privacy. The newly developed application intends to access the user's data even when the application is not active and has access to the user's camera, user's location, contact phone numbers and be able to read text messages.

## NUG'S FACEBOOK PAGE DENOUNCES JUNTA'S INTERNET CRACKDOWN AMID VPN BAN

The National Unity Government (NUG) posted on its official Facebook page addressing internet restrictions by "terrorist Myanmar Military Council" (the junta).

The NUG represents a government formed in exile by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), comprising elected lawmakers and members of parliament who were ousted in the coup in Myanmar in 2021.

NUG emphasized citizens' rights to freedom of expression and information as per the Federal Democracy Charter drafted by Myanmar's oppositions.

"After an attempted unlawful military coup, Myanmar has become the country with the second highest internet shutdown in the world, and 13 out of 14 states are facing internet outages, and more than 80 townships are still facing internet blockages," said the NUG's statement.

"Now, the terrorist military council is using the access to information as a weapon and restricting it, banning the right to express and write freely, and shutting down the internet to cover up the general economic crisis that the public is facing and people's growing concerns, and their physical violence; mental blows; and war crimes."

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Analysis & Insight



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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.