

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



BATTLE FOR SITTWE

Myanmar junta
evacuates villages
around embattled
Rakhine State capital



The borders of conflict - Indian insight into Myanmar

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

CHILD LABOUR WORSENS IN MYANMAR'S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in Myanmar last week urged all stakeholders to honour their commitment and take decisive action to eradicate child labour in the country on the occasion of World Day Against Child Labour on 12 June.

In Myanmar, according to UN reports, the security situation has deteriorated, with 40 percent of the population living below the national poverty line and over three million internally displaced persons, one third of whom are children. The promulgation of the 2010 People's Military Service Law earlier this year has further exacerbated the crisis, leading to an increase in individuals fleeing conscription.

Findings from an ILO study on child labour cases conducted in selected states of Myanmar indicate an increase in child labour levels partly driven, amongst other factors, by parents preferring their children to work as means to avoid conscription. This aligns with an ILO report on Vulnerabilities in Child Labour (2022) highlighting that child labour rates in conflict-affected countries are 77 per cent higher than global averages.

"We remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation and escalation of the conflict in Myanmar," said Yutong Liu, ILO Myanmar Liaison Officer-Representative. "More children are living in poverty, facing movement restrictions, or displacement, making them increasingly vulnerable to child labour. Children should not be victims of conflicts in any form. Instead, they must be protected and allowed to continue to be a beacon of hope for the future of the country. On this World Day Against Child Labour, it

is crucial for all stakeholders to honour their commitments to Convention No. 182 and intensify efforts to combat child labour," Mr. Liu added.

The ILO continues to monitor the situation of children in the country and supports partners in tackling child labour through community-based child labour monitoring, awareness raising, and skills and livelihood support in the Ayeyarwady and Yangon regions, Shan and Mon states.

The adoption of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) marked a significant milestone in the fight against child labour worldwide. Now, 25 years on, the universal ratification of Convention No. 182 in 2013, is an achievement worth celebrating.

However, the global fight is far from over. An estimated 160 million children worldwide are still engaged in child labour, with 79 million involved in hazardous work, one of the worst forms of child labour.

The ILO launched a three-month campaign in Myanmar starting 1 June 2024 that will engage social partners, civil society organizations, and development partners in training and awareness-raising activities across the country and on social media platforms.

EDITORIAL

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Managing Director and Editor In-Chief
Soe Myint

Managing Editor
Thaw Zin Tun

Network Engineer
Wai Min Han

Video and Graphics Editor
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

General Manager
No No Lin

Mizzima Weekly is published by
Mizzima s.r.o

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

Contact email:
sm@mizzima.com

Phone/Signal/WhatsApp
+420 608 616688

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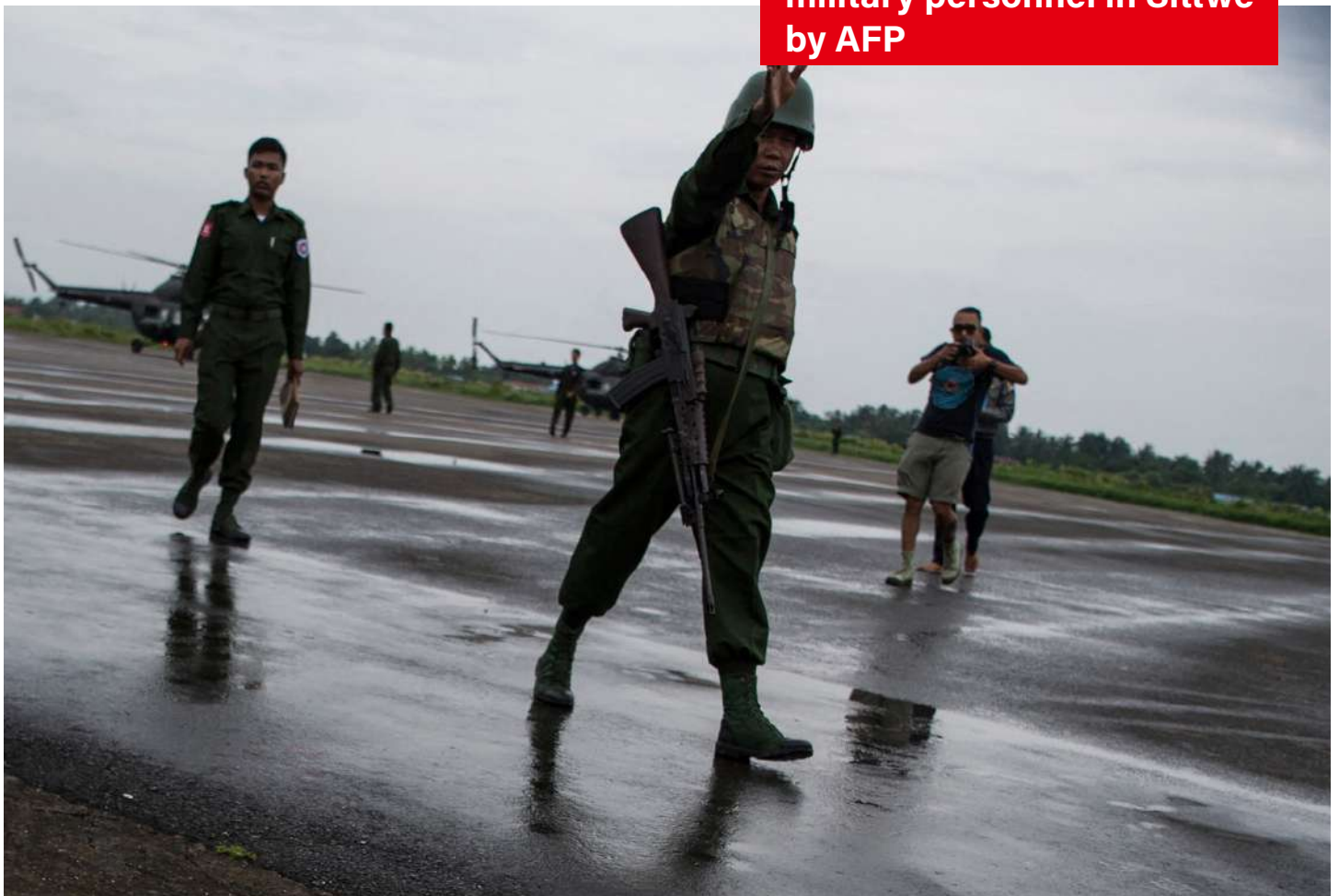
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Cover file photo of Myanmar military personnel in Sittwe by AFP





Myanmar soldiers are digging in for the battle of Sittwe against the Arakan Army. Photo: AFP

BATTLE FOR SITTWE

MYANMAR JUNTA EVACUATES VILLAGES AROUND EMBATTLED RAKHINE STATE CAPITAL

The Myanmar junta's military forces are battering down in Sittwe city in Rakhine State ahead of an expected siege by Arakan Army (AA) forces.

Last week, the junta ordered thousands of people living in villages outside of the state capital to leave their homes and head into the city, residents said.

Sittwe city is one of the few holdouts for junta troops in western Rakhine state, where the military has lost swathes of territory to the Arakan Army (AA) in recent weeks.

The AA, which says it is fighting for autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine population, has vowed to capture Sittwe, home to a Chinese and Indian-backed deep-sea port and around 200,000 people.

Residents of about a dozen villages around Sittwe were given five days to leave their homes and move to the state capital, a resident said.

"The army threatened to shoot and kill if they found someone after the deadline" which expired on Saturday, she said. The junta allegedly threatened a "massacre" if villagers did not comply – like they recently carried out in the state.

A resident of Sittwe put the number of villages ordered to evacuate at around 10, saying that residents had been told "to move out for security reasons". The villages were home to around 3,500 people, the Sittwe resident said, requesting anonymity. The villages include Yae Chan Pyin, Aung Taing, Kyet Taw Pyin, Pa Lin Pyin and Ohn Yae Paw. The military had not arranged for temporary shelters in Sittwe.

"People have to move to their relatives' homes from other villages," they said.

A Sittwe resident said the junta may have concluded that AA troops would like to use the villages for their attack on the city.



Myanmar junta has ordered villagers around Sittwe to take shelter in the city. Photo: AFP

“So, the junta has removed all people from the villages,” he said. “They are making human shields to protect their base in Sittwe city.”

The forced removal of people from their homes is a violation of human rights, AA spokesman Khaing Thukha said.

“It is different from the evacuation of people from conflict-affected areas,” he said. “But now, people are being forced to move only into the city – not to any other areas.”

Local media also reported the order to evacuate villages in the area.

The AA ended a ceasefire in November that had been in place during the military’s February 2021 coup d’etat. It now occupies nine townships in Rakhine state, along the border with India and Bangladesh, as well as Paletwa township in neighbouring Chin state, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere across Myanmar.

A battle between the AA and the junta for control of Sittwe has been anticipated for several months. It is viewed as a crucial fight for control – given the strategic importance of the city and it housing the deep-sea port and terminus of oil pipelines vital to the China Myanmar Economic Corridor. Junta troops have been preparing for the defense of the city by deploying heavy weapons, warships and a large number of ground forces in the surrounding villages, several residents said.

This month, the AA said junta troops had killed more than 70 civilians in a raid on Byain Phyu village, north of Sittwe. The junta said the claim was “propaganda” and accused AA fighters of launching attacks on Sittwe from surrounding villages.

Phone and internet services have been all but cut off across Rakhine state, making it difficult to verify reports of violence. The junta forces appear to be digging in for what is considered to be the last major target for the AA in Rakhine State.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP, RFA



The Myanmar military is strengthening their position on land, sea and air. Photo: AFP

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Cleaning a temple in Myawaddy as the rainy season sets in. Photo: AFP

RAIN STOPS PLAY AS AUNG ZEYA OPERATION BOGS DOWN

The Aung Zeya military operation, moving towards the important border trading town of Myawaddy, has not made any progress on the Dawna mountain range according to the defectors from No. (55) Light Infantry Division. These soldiers had already surrendered to the Three Brotherhood Alliance resistance forces in the Lawkkai war on 4 January 2024

and brought in to the Myawaddy front. The column has made little headway and remains bogged down in the Dawna mountain range. The junta, hindered by the onset of the monsoon season, has resorted to indiscriminate artillery and drone strikes in place of ground maneuvers.

“They are firing without targets to make false reports to their commanders,” claimed a Karen revolutionary source. The Aung Zeya military operation, initiated on April 12, 2024, has lasted exactly two months and the progress remains very slow.

On June 3, joint revolutionary forces cleared a battlefield, discovering nine soldiers’ bodies, an RPG launcher, and some ammunition. Despite two months of the Aung Zeya operation, it has seen no significant advancement and continues to suffer personnel losses. Resistance attacks have reportedly resulted in over 300 casualties, including more than 20 officials, over the past 21 days, according to one of the defectors. However, the junta lists the fallen soldiers as missing or AWOL.

Meanwhile, the BGF/KNA is responsible for the security of Myawaddy, the destination of the Aung Zeya operation, deploying approximately 2,000 troops.

Three days of torrential rain caused significant flooding in Myawaddy, beginning on June 6, 2024. The water level started rising on the night of June 8, but not from the Thaungyin River. Instead, the flooding was due to the town’s weak irrigation system and small creeks from the surrounding mountain range. With no rain on June 9, locals anticipated the water level would drop within a few days. By the following morning, the rain had stopped, and the situation returned to normal. The flood primarily affected lowland wards and the Myawaddy-Kawkkreik old highway.

ARAKAN ARMY CLAIM PROGRESS IN RAKHINE

At a June 8 press conference, Arakan Army (AA) spokesperson Khine Thukha, stated that the AA will engage in discussions with the government regarding the political aspirations supported by the Burmese people. Thukha emphasized that ceasing the ongoing conflict is currently impossible despite Chinese mediation efforts. He accused the junta of continuing to target innocent civilians in Rakhine State, exacerbating the conflict in allied regions.

On June 6, the AA seized Border Guard Police post No. (6), which houses 600 personnel, followed by the capture of post No. (9) on June 7, after four days of attacks. In southern Rakhine’s Thandwe, two junta battalions and reinforcements have taken positions at Thandwe airport, preparing defenses against an impending AA offensive.

Tragically, approximately 60 villagers from Singaung village in Thandwe township were killed, and many others injured, due to junta airstrikes and naval artillery. The AA released a list of 14 confirmed deaths and additional injuries, noting that many victims remain unidentified.

In an attempt to hinder the AA’s advance towards Maungdaw, junta troops destroyed the Alethangyaw bridge on the Maungdaw-Angumaw road. Locals accused the military of sabotaging the bridge to prevent the AA from capturing Maungdaw City, the last major city in northern Rakhine State.

Concurrently, junta authorities have forced residents from 12 villages in Sittwe township to relocate to Sittwe city, reportedly to use them as human shields against the approaching AA forces. (See Cover Story in this issue)

Following the AA’s seizure of border guard police posts, several border guard policemen and their families attempted to escape by sea. However, they faced a motorboat accident after being denied boarding on a rescue vessel. Shockingly, junta forces not only refused them passage but also opened fire on the retreating policemen and their wives and children.

CONSCRIPTION UPDATE AND THE QUESTION OF WOMEN

The implementation of Myanmar’s new conscription law is having significant repercussions on the nation’s youth, driving many to seek opportunities abroad amidst rising inflation and dwindling job prospects.

The junta has recently conscripted young men for the second batch of military training for public military service. In a bid to stem the exodus of young people, the State Administration Council (SAC) has introduced a Unique Identification (UID) system for those leaving the country. This system mandates the entry of personal data to be accessible to SAC officials, creating an additional layer of oversight for those departing Myanmar.

In a notable development, the SAC has announced that women will be conscripted starting with the fifth batch of public military service. Despite an earlier declaration in February stating that women would not be called up for military service, the SAC's defense minister has directed all military commands to prepare for the recruitment of women. Training is scheduled to commence around July or August, following the conclusion of the fourth batch of conscripts. The recruitment list will target women aged 21 to 24.

According to the conscription law, women aged 18 to 27 are eligible for military service, with the age limit extended to 35 for professionals. This move marks a significant shift in Myanmar's military recruitment policy and highlights the increasing pressures on the nation's youth and women amidst the ongoing socio-economic challenges.

VIOLENCE AND ARSON ATTACKS ESCALATE ACROSS MYANMAR

From 29 May to 2 June Myanmar's military junta killed at least 75 ethnic Rakhine civilians during attacks on villages outside of Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State. Soldiers reportedly entered Byine Phyu and forced residents to the center of the village, where they separated men and women for questioning and subsequently killed many of the residents, reports ReliefWeb. A survivor recalled the harrowing event, stating, "[The soldiers] started questioning the male villagers. If [the men] had a tattoo on their back, neck or arms, [the soldiers] stabbed the tattoos with knives. They were asked whether they were [Arakan Army] AA or not. Villagers did not have time to answer. They were shot dead immediately." Reports indicate that the soldiers raped the women before killing them.

The junta's attacks near Sittwe are the latest deadly incident following weeks of escalating attacks on civilians and intensifying clashes with the Arakan Army (AA) across Rakhine State. The junta has intentionally stoked ethnic divisions and violence in Rakhine State between ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya communities. On 17 May the AA took control of the predominantly Rohingya town of Buthidaung, killing at least 30 people, displacing thousands of Rohingya civilians and reportedly setting fire to the town. Prior to this attack, junta forces, including Rohingya who were forcibly conscripted, set fire to the homes of ethnic Rakhine. The junta has reportedly threatened to restrict humanitarian aid to the Rohingya in Sittwe that dodge the conscription notice, as well as allegedly mandated evacuations of towns surrounding Sittwe. Local residents have claimed that the junta has forced the displaced civilians to relocate to Sittwe, raising fears of the junta's plans to use them as human shields to defend the capital.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said, "Once again, the world seems to be failing a desperate people in their hour of peril while a hate-driven unnatural disaster unfolds in real time in Myanmar's Rakhine State... the military's role is clear in fostering toxic conditions in Rakhine State, from propaganda fueling ethnic tensions to the forced recruitment of young Rohingya men into the junta's military." UN Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned the escalating violence, calling upon all parties "to exercise maximum restraint, prioritize protection of civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law and prevent further incitement of communal tension and violence."

Meanwhile, the crises in other parts of Myanmar have significantly deteriorated as the junta continues to use widespread arson and bombing campaigns to target populations, including in Chin, Kayin and Kayah states. On 3 June a junta airstrike on a wedding ceremony in Mingin Township, Sagaing Region, killed at least 28 people. Targeted and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, as well as killing and torture are prohibited under international law and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The international community must impose additional sanctions on the junta to deprive the military of the funds, jet fuel and legitimacy it requires to continue to perpetrate atrocities against civilians. The AA and military must cease causing harm to the Rohingya and other civilians, as well as refrain from targeting and destroying protected civilian infrastructure.

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Downward Spiral
Kyat's plunge since military takeover deepens economic crisis

■ Kyat's Spot Rate

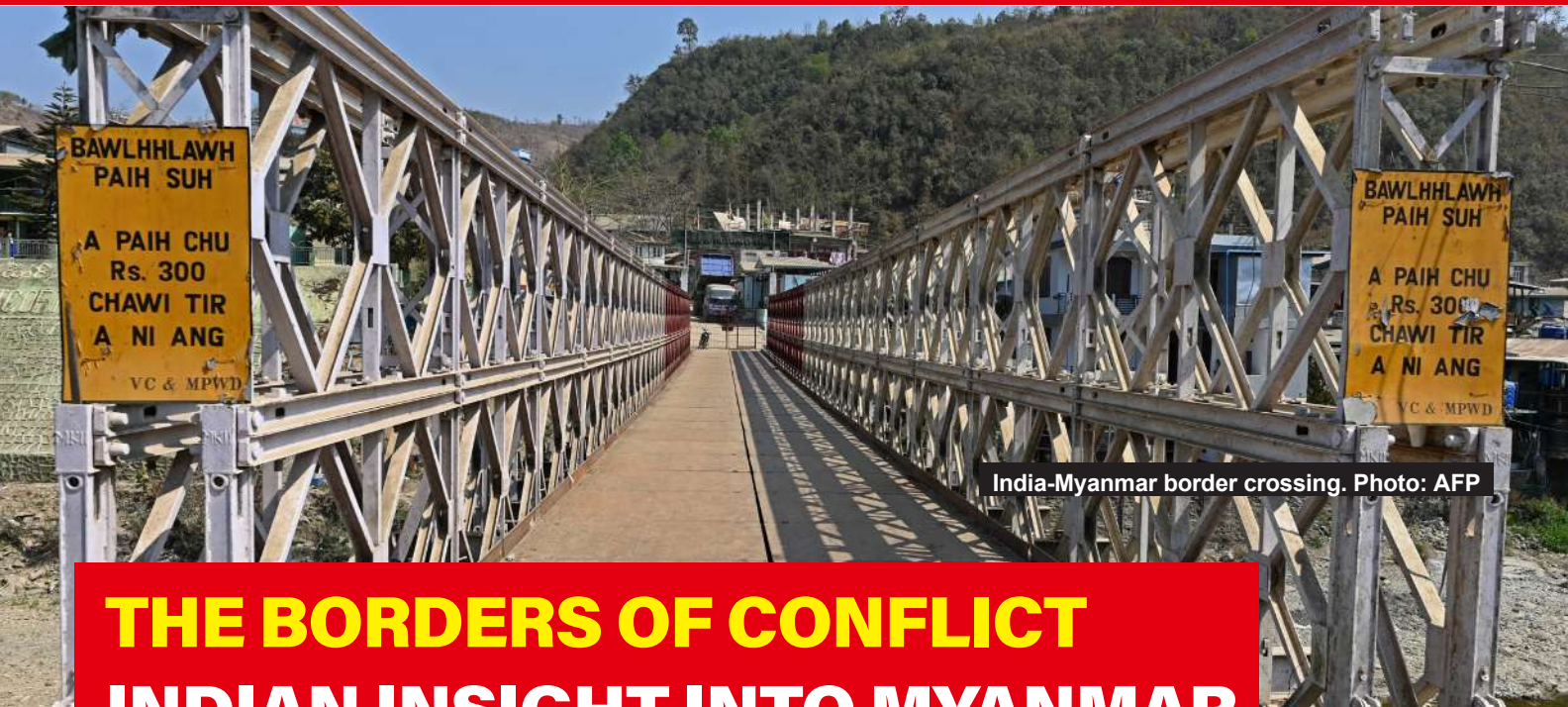
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COMMON GROUND

ဦးကျိုးအောင်လတ်
ငါရန်သတင်းတစ်ရာ

ဦးကျိုးကျိန်

မဆူမြတ်
သံလွင်ခက်မိဒီယာ တာဝန်ခံ



India-Myanmar border crossing. Photo: AFP

THE BORDERS OF CONFLICT INDIAN INSIGHT INTO MYANMAR

“It’s not just the Northeast that guides, in many ways, the Indian government’s outlook towards Myanmar,” explains Angshuman Choudhury, a policy analyst and researcher at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, talking in an interview with Insight Myanmar. “There are also broader concerns relating to the geopolitical and geostrategic landscape of South and Southeast Asia, and which have undergone tectonic shifts over the last few decades. These concerns are also to do with what is known as, quote-unquote, the ‘national security interests of India.’ I’m always keen to debate on this term, like what does it really mean? What does ‘national security’ mean?”

BORN IN ASSAM

Originally from Assam, which is not far from the 1,640-kilometer-long border with Myanmar, Choudhury has been reporting on how the coup has reshaped relations between the two countries. He describes how, from 2014, the Modi administration has been shoring up relations through the creation of a land bridge from northeast India into Myanmar. “The Indian government invested a lot of money, diplomatic assets, and political assets to build seamless, west-to-east overland connectivity and improve people-to-people contacts, and to improve the economic relationship and bilateral trade, including the border trade.”

The situation has been complicated because of ethnic rebels from the Indian states of Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur. Indian military operations pushed them out of their home states, and after trying unsuccessfully to gain footholds in Bangladesh and Bhutan, they eventually found refuge in the Sagaing region of

Myanmar in 2003, from where they have launched attacks into India. It has become a varied and confusing amalgam of groups and coalitions, perhaps the most notable and influential being the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). New Delhi has been trying for years to encourage its Burmese counterparts to take action against these insurgents, but to little avail. As a result, India started providing arms to and coordinating strategy with the Myanmar military in the hopes that it would better be able to act against Indian insurgent groups; however, the Myanmar generals instead have mostly used the weapons to suppress its own country’s ethnic groups, although they did manage to eventually disarm the NSCN, in exchange for which India supported Myanmar’s operations against the Arakan Army (AA).

MODI AND SUU KYI

During the transition period, Modi had a close relationship with the Aung San Suu Kyi administration; Choudhury points out how even during state visits, he was careful never to criticize the unfolding Rohingya crisis, in what many international organizations and experts have since called a genocide. Aside from some concern that the refugee crisis might spill over onto their side of the border, the Indian government did not pay much attention to the Rohingya until an aggressive Hindu nationalist movement took power in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). “We’ve seen over the last few years, under the BJP government, that there has been a sharp increase in anti-Rohingya directives in Indian media, social media circles, and even political circles,” he explains. “The Rohingya have been routinely

cited or projected as a threat to national security as criminals, terrorists, and essentially unwanted outsiders." Coupled with the insurgent groups on the border, these problems culminated in a call to "fence the border" and seal it off entirely, not unlike Trump's rhetoric in wanting to build a wall on the US-Mexico border.

Choudhury emphasizes that a thorough understanding of the region's context and history requires knowledge of the agreement known as the Free Movement Regime (FMR). Established in the post-war era, it refers to the policies of India and Burma which each allowed ethnic groups in the region to cross the other's border. It was based in recognition of the fact that their presence there predates modern map-making, which is a function of colonialist thinking. In each case, the policy allowed indigenous peoples to cross the other's border and remain for a limited period (though the restrictions in the respective policies were not entirely the same). "There was a very profound understanding that, look, this is an open border! These people have been living here since time immemorial, they've been crossing back and forth. What's the sense in stopping them and creating new waves of discontent along the border?" But in 2004, with pressure mounting to clamp down on roving insurgent groups that had been causing havoc, New Delhi moved to restrict their side of the FMR. Then in 2018, the two countries' policies were bilaterally formalized into an agreement between the two governments for the first time in history. Choudhury explains that this was very much in the interests of India's Act East Policy, which aimed to develop greater connections into Myanmar. "So in many ways, that was the zeitgeist of the time, to have an open border policy, to not just 'Look East,' but also 'Act East.'" After the coup, however, there was significant pressure from Indian media to revoke the FMR, yet Modi resisted doing so for years, highlighting his commitment to maintaining close ties with Myanmar even amid ongoing conflict. However, the challenges at the border ultimately proved overwhelming, and the Ministry of Home Affairs recently announced the suspension of the FMR.

COUP SPARKS EXODUS

The 2021 coup set in motion a mass exodus of refugees fleeing state violence across this same, porous, northeast Indian border. Yet even though the uptick in immigration and resulting border problems were the direct result of the military takeover, few Indian leaders have called the junta out for it. "We haven't seen India blame the junta for the crisis," he says. "In fact, we haven't really seen India blame the junta for anything at

all, since the coup, for any of the violence!"

Echoing the words of Hunter Marsten on a previous episode, Choudhury describes the Indian system as "a delicate dance of federalism between two centers of power, at the provincial and federal level." The Mizoram state government, in particular, has made a point of welcoming the largely Chin refugees, and by doing so has openly defied an order from New Delhi to refuse turn back the refugees. "It was quite a unique political event at the time," he acknowledges, adding that the newly elected party, the Zoram People's Movement, has similarly insisted on maintaining humanitarian support, though with limited funds. "Delhi recognizes that it cannot push the Mizoram government into a corner over this issue. So it has allowed the Mizoram civil society and the state government to do whatever it wants to support the refugees." He explains this is also because the national government requires a close working relationship with local governments in order to effectively manage "a very complex" situation in its multi-ethnic borderlands.

'DISPLACED NATIONALS'

Still, Mizoram is rather remote, and with no UNCHR office located in the northeast, many refugees are simply not able to travel beyond there, cutting them off from work and education opportunities. In fact, India refuses to call these peoples anything other than "displaced nationals," as it was not a signatory on the 1967 Refugee Convention, and so does not recognize "refugees" in any form. This also means that anyone who enters India without proper documentation is officially an "illegal immigrant" and subject to immediate detention. And that is what often happens in nearby Manipur, whose local government is not nearly as welcoming, essentially viewing them "interlopers, poppy cultivators, drug smugglers, and criminals in general." Nonetheless, many Manipur residents are from the Kuki community and share an ethnic bond with the Chin, so there has been some measure of community support in the absence of aid from local authorities. Still, Choudhury asserts that while New Delhi would likely never move to fence the border or send in the army to Mizoram or Nagaland, he could see such a scenario playing out in Manipur, where the anti-refugee sentiment runs much higher.

Moving on to tackle the question as to how India has been responding to the 2021 coup overall, Choudhury characterizes their engagement as non-interventionist and risk-averse. He argues that, like many of Myanmar's neighboring countries, the Indian government is hard-wired to believe that the military will remain the primary, governing force in Myanmar,

despite the mounting evidence to the contrary. Choudhury describes their thinking as follows: "The military is facing extraordinary levels of resistance across the country, but eventually it will come back and stabilize the country and crush the resistance properly, and things will go back to normal." Essentially, this means that New Delhi's emphasis on not jeopardizing its relations with the Burmese military has led to staying silent on the subject of the latter's continued human rights violations, a shift he describes as moving from idealism (which could manifest through the support of pro-democracy actors) to pragmatism (working with whoever is deemed to be in power). Essentially, this means that New Delhi's emphasis on not jeopardizing its relations with the Burmese military has led to staying silent about the latter's continued human rights violations. This approach, while always pragmatic at its core, has seen shifts in its degree of engagement based on the prevailing political climate in Myanmar, oscillating between cautious support for democratic movements and a more pronounced alignment with the military for strategic stability. Choudhury continues his summary of New Delhi's calculations: "As long as we are able to maintain our working relationship with the key power center in Myanmar, then then we are certain that we can take care of our own interests."

INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONSHIP

And this is what Choudhury has seen being played out since the coup. "The fact that India not just maintained its relationship with the Myanmar military, but also upgraded and became much closer to the Myanmar military, even through the years of the democratic transition, really showed the fact that the thinking in Delhi is the Myanmar military is not going anywhere, anytime soon! They saw the Myanmar military as a formidable political force, not just a security actor, but a key political force in Myanmar." He believes that Modi's earlier close relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi, rather than a contradiction to this strategy, was actually a validation of it, with Modi shrewdly positioning himself close to a charismatic and beloved popular figure. And when the tides of power changed, so did he.

While some might call out New Delhi's refusal to so much as acknowledge Myanmar's democratic leaders as a flaw in their so-called pragmatic approach, since the democratic forces may very well win out in the end, Choudhury sees it more as an affirmation that they firmly believe the military will retain power. He suggests that despite possessing detailed and granular intelligence about the latest developments pointing to the military steadily losing ground, India's higher echelons of

political and strategic decision-making might not be adequately leveraging this intelligence to make proactive decisions, highlighting a paradox in India's typically active foreign policy stance. "In Delhi, there is also a kind of arrogant, patronizing attitude... which is that, 'Okay, we're like the big brother or the parent, and we've got to talk to our kids who are fighting, and we've got to just make them sit down and talk to each other and things will be fine.'"

'BLOODBATH' JUST NEXT DOOR

But in reality, this miscalculated intelligence results in New Delhi not just misconstruing a truly pragmatic approach—one that responds to real developments on the ground—but also in violating its core ideological principles as well. "That is where there has to be a red line in every foreign policy or moral red line where you put your feet down and say... 'Hundreds of people are dying on a weekly basis right next door, and we can't just sit and watch the bloodbath, because India's stated position has always been that we are a country that cares for the people of Myanmar.'" He notes how, despite the fact that India is willing to turn a blind eye to the junta's human rights violations in the service of pragmatic engagement, they have also, at times, shown a commitment to fostering a more equitable system in Myanmar, such as through programs that train Burmese stakeholders in parliamentary democracy practices. Furthermore, India's model of federal democracy has served as an inspiration for many Burmese leaders, who aspire to draft a new charter for their country once their military is toppled. Yet even in this regard, it is not so straightforward, as under the Modi administration, "we have also seen a sharp democratic backslide in many ways on political freedom, civil rights, media rights, and more importantly, on pluralism and secularism in India."

Choudhury further emphasizes that cultural diplomacy has been another, key factor linking India's Act East pivot to not only Myanmar, but the wider Southeast Asian region. One illustration of this is highlighting the Buddha's Indian origins (an example being the extended talk that Modi gave on the life of meditation teacher S.N. Goenka). "They have created something called the Buddhist Circuit, which encourages monks from Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, to travel to India for pilgrimages, particularly to Bodhgaya in Bihar, and we have seen several flights from Myanmar to Bodhgaya in recent times." They have also loaned out Buddhist relics to countries in the region, as well as helping restore Buddhist sites. Another, less savory example is India's increasing anti-Muslim rhetoric. "Many Hindutva activists and provocateurs in the last few years have

used the Buddhist, ultra-nationalist example, especially on the Rohingya front.”

FEW SIDE WITH DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

Sadly, however, the current policy perspectives on Indo-Burmese relations is widely shared by a cross-section of political and media figures, with only very few standing on the side of the democracy movement. “As far as Myanmar is concerned, there is almost an across the board consensus that ‘we’ve got to play safe.’ There is an understanding that we need political stability in Myanmar in order to ensure economic development and economic relationship with India, and also to prevent the spillover of the conflict into northeast India... In fact, in that sense, there is a bipartisan consensus between India’s ruling party and opposition parties over this issue.”

COUNTERING CHINA

The one other factor that Choudhury emphasizes is the specter of China, and their massive investment projects as part of the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). This has caused the Indian government to counter China’s influence on its doorstep with its own economic initiatives, especially in Rakhine state where the Chinese have the Kyaukphyu project. This includes investments in oil and gas, as well as significant connectivity initiatives like the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project. Additionally, India funds various local projects through its developmental aid program,

making Myanmar one of the top recipients of such aid. Moreover, Indian private companies are keenly interested in Myanmar’s markets, and the bilateral trade between the two countries has not significantly declined since the coup. Myanmar’s role is also pivotal in the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), where it stands as one of the two Southeast Asian members alongside Thailand. Choudhury further references the SOC (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) to contextualize India’s development aid to Myanmar within its broader regional strategy, highlighting Myanmar’s strategic importance to India compared to even SOC member states.

But if there was ever a chance that New Delhi could be swayed to shift its policy and be more welcoming to the democratic movement, what argument will work to make it reconsider? Choudhury argues that for this to happen, the opposition needs to assert that “it is by working with us that you will be able to protect and stabilize the border, including the projects that you most care about [in Myanmar]... Those arguments need to be made more forcefully and articulated more clearly from the NUG side.”

Check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/d6460215-274f-4d0f-98db-069c26e7a548>



Kids in Myanmar’s Sagaing Region on the Indian border play war games. Photo: AFP



Damaged clinic. Photo: Supplied

INSECURITY INSIGHT CONTINUES RECORDING ATTACKS ON MYANMAR HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Insecurity Insight has identified 418 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Myanmar during 2023, for the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC).

This compared to 280 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in 2022.

In 2023, 37 health workers were killed and 102 health workers were arrested. Health facilities were damaged or destroyed, and occupied. This was similar to the numbers killed in 2022, but kidnappings of health workers quadrupled in 2023 when compared to 2022.

Health workers were threatened and harassed by conflict parties, including being warned by resistance fighters that they must join the CDM, while facing the risk of being targeted with violence or arrested by the Myanmar armed forces for doing so.

Cases of health facilities being occupied by the Myanmar military, militia, and other allies more than tripled in 2023 compared to 2022. Most involved the Myanmar armed forces using health facilities as bunkers or bases for military operations. These occupations were most frequent in Sagaing region, but were dispersed across 12 other areas.

Opposition forces increasingly used drones armed with explosives to attack Myanmar armed forces occupying health facilities.

Most cases were recorded in the northern central areas surrounding the cities of Sagaing and Mandalay, and where Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay regions border one another, reflecting the overall concentration of fighting in these areas where opposition groups' resistance to military rule is high, according to Insecurity Insight.

It said that incidents also occurred in Shan state bordering Sagaing and Mandalay, especially after Operation 1027. Cases adversely affecting health care also continued in Rakhine State.

Similar to previous years, most incidents were attributed to the Myanmar armed forces. Ethnic armed organisations that included the Arakan Army, the Chinland Defense Force, the Karen National Liberation Army, and Pyi-thu-sit, Pyu-saw-htee, and Swan-arr-shin militias were named in some incidents, but less often than the Tatmadaw.

As in previous years, incidents mostly affected staff working for the national health structure.

More recently, from 15 to 28 May 2024 Insecurity Insight documented the following attacks on healthcare facilities in Myanmar:

15 May 2024: In Wea Gyi Daunt Village and village tract, Kyauktaw Township, Mrauk-U District, Rakhine State, a station hospital (primary-level, public) was destroyed and at least 20 civilians, including two nurses

and two patients, were injured by bombs dropped by a Myanmar military fighter jet. Among them, five got critical injuries. At the time of the attack, the hospital was operated under the governance of the Arakan Army since their takeover of the town in mid-February 2024. Sources: Development Media Group, Independent Mon News Agency, Khit Thit Media, Khit Thit Media II, Narinjara, New Age and The Tanintharyi Times

16 May 2024: In Gon Hnyin Seik Village and village tract, Thayetchaung Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region, a sub-rural health centre (primary-level, public) and a civilian house were damaged by bombs dropped by the Myanmar military airforce. One civilian was killed and another injured. Sources: Tanintharyi Times and Than Lwin Times

19 May 2024: In Tha Yae Kone Baung Village and village tract, Maungdaw Township and district, Rakhine State, a sub-rural health centre (primary-level, public) and five civilian houses were damaged by bombs dropped by the Myanmar military fighter jets. At least two civilians were injured. Sources: Narinjara and Radio Free Asia

As reported on 21 May 2024: In Na Mee Village and village tract, Indaw Township, Katha District, Sagaing Region, a sub-rural health centre (primary-level, public), a staff house for health workers, a library, a village hall, and a religious building were occupied by a joint force of Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Arakan Army (AA), and People Defence Force (PDF). Source: Facebook

As reported on 22 May 2024: In Takaung Town, Thabeikkyin Township and district, Mandalay Region, a station hospital (primary-level, public) and three monasteries were occupied by the Myanmar military. Source: Mandalay Free Press

Insecurity Insight documents attacks on health workers, facilities and patients for the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC), a group of international nongovernmental organisations working to protect health workers, services and infrastructure.

JUNTA HOSTS JUNKET FOR CHINESE TRAVEL AGENTS IN BID TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

More than 40 Chinese travel agency employees and social media influencers were given a junta-led tour of Mandalay, Yangon and the ancient city of Bagan last month in the latest effort by Myanmar's military rulers to boost a dwindling tourism industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the chaos and fighting that have plagued the country following the 2021 military coup have combined to deal a significant blow to tourism numbers.

More than 4 million tourists visited Myanmar in 2019, according to the World Tourism Federation. Those numbers plummeted to 130,000 in 2021 and 230,000 in 2022.

Even Bagan – a UNESCO World Heritage site that is home to soaring spires and iconic Buddhist pagodas and temples – remains empty of tour groups, according to a tour guide who, like other sources in this story, wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

"Since the coup d'état, Bagan has had a complete absence of foreign visitors," he told Radio Free Asia. "Recently, guests from Spain emailed me expressing their desire to explore Bagan, but they also emphasized that Myanmar is not a safe destination given the current situation."

The Chinese delegation arrived for their visit – officially referred to as the "Myanmar-China Tourism Promotion Familiarization Trip" – on May 10. They were also scheduled to visit the seat of government, Naypyidaw, and the beach resort town of Ngwe Saung.

"The aim is to boost the number of Chinese tourists visiting Myanmar's destinations and raise awareness of Myanmar's destinations in the Chinese tourism market," according to the junta-controlled Myanmar News Agency.

'IRREPARABLE DAMAGE' TO THE INDUSTRY

But two foreign tour operators said they didn't think the effort would attract a rush of Chinese tourists.

"If you inquire whether success can be achieved, the answer is negative," one of the tour operators said.

Most people have already determined that a



Burmese dancers entertain arriving Chinese tourism reps at an airport in Myanmar. Photo: Supplied

leisurely visit to Myanmar's most popular tourism sites would be "impossible" due to the situation on the ground, he said, referring to the armed conflict in much of the country between various anti-junta forces and the military.

There continue to be frequent shortages of electricity – something that has already forced some hotels to close, the second tour operator said.

"Over the past four years, the tourism industry has suffered irreparable damage," he said. "Unless the underlying issues are addressed, inviting guests won't attract visitors. After all, why would Chinese tourists risk their safety in an insecure destination?"

MORE VISITORS, MORE CURRENCY

International flights resumed to Myanmar in April 2022, more than a year after the coup. Since then, junta officials have attempted a number of tourism promotion strategies, and in 2023, the number of foreign visitors was recorded as 1.28 million.

Junta-controlled newspapers reported last month that Myanmar received 350,000 foreign tourists between January and March 2024, with China being the largest source, followed by Thailand.

But those numbers may simply reflect the type of visas people select when traveling to Myanmar

for business or other purposes, several tour guides and travel agencies officials told RFA. It's easier to enter Myanmar on a tourism visa than with other visa categories, they said.

The increase in visitors – for whatever purpose – brings in much needed foreign currency, a Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism spokesman said.

"The recent surge in tourist arrivals has significantly boosted revenue," he said. "During the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism came to a standstill due to travel restrictions. But the situation has improved, and visitors are gradually returning."

The junta has also made efforts to attract Indian and Russian visitors. Last September, it announced direct flights from Yangon and Mandalay to Russia's third most populous city, Novosibirsk.

Translated by Kalyar Lwin. Edited by Matt Reed and Malcolm Foster.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

THREE ROHINGYA KILLED IN BANGLADESH REFUGEE CAMP TURF WAR BETWEEN MILITANT GROUPS

At least three Rohingya refugees were killed and seven others were injured after a clash between rival militant groups vying for control over relief camps in Bangladesh, police said Tuesday last week.

Bangladesh is home to one million members of the stateless and persecuted Muslim minority, most of whom arrived after a brutal 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

Nearly all live in sprawling and squalid camps, where skirmishes between armed groups have risen this year after the forcible recruitment of refugees to fight in Myanmar's civil war.

Police said at least 100 members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on Monday attacked a group of refugees conducting a security patrol in a camp in Cox's Bazar district.

"They cut barbed-wire fence surrounding the camp and launched the attack on Rohingyas who were protecting the camp," said Mohammad Iqbal, a commanding officer of the Armed Police Battalion, which is tasked with maintaining security in the camps.

"Three Rohingyas were killed and seven were injured. When police came to the spot, ARSA members also attacked police," he told AFP, adding that the victims had been variously shot and attacked with knives.

A Rohingya community leader in the camps, speaking on condition of anonymity, has said the three slain men were members of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO).

"Murders and gunfights are occurring every day and night in the camp. ARSA killed three RSOs

yesterday. No Rohingya are safe here. ARSA and RSO have made the camps hell for the Rohingya refugees," he said.

Security in the camps has deteriorated since April after rival Rohingya groups launched drives to forcibly recruit young Rohingya men and teenage boys to fight in Myanmar.

Around 1,500 Rohingya have been dragooned from the camps to join the conflict, according to a confidential report circulated among UN agencies last month and seen by AFP.

Anxious parents and Rohingya civic leaders have set up patrol groups in the camps to thwart recruitment raids.

At least 20 Rohingya have been killed in camp clashes between rival militant groups this year, national daily Prothom Alo reported.

Rival Rohingya armed groups are waging individual campaigns to furnish troops for Myanmar's military, responsible for their violent expulsion from the country in 2017.

These groups say the Rohingya need to ally with old enemies in the Myanmar army to face a new threat.

The recruits have been sent across the border to fight the Arakan Army, which says it wants greater autonomy in Myanmar's Rakhine state, also home to around 600,000 Rohingya.

AFP



Arakan Army fighters help Rohingya villagers move to safety. Photo: AA

EUROPEAN ROHINGYA COUNCIL CALLS ON AA AND JUNTA TO STOP TARGETING ROHINGYA

The European Rohingya Council (ERC) released a statement on 9 June calling on the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar junta army to stop persecuting Rohingya and putting them in danger.

It details incidents where it claims the AA used Rohingya as human shields and abducted Rohingya. Mizzima has been unable to confirm the incidents mentioned in the press release.

The European Rohingya Council (ERC) is deeply saddened and outraged by the crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya people by the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military alike.

On 9 June, two Rohingya families in Habi Village (Hainr Fara), Maungdaw North, were attacked with drones by the Burmese Military Council. The AA militant group had deliberately positioned themselves in the village, in order to use the Rohingya civilians as human shields. The ruthless and heinous act of positioning led to a military drone strike, causing fatalities and casualties among innocent Rohingya families.

We have also received reports that the militant group abducted 27 Rohingyas from Taik Pet Taung Village in Buthidaung on 5 and 6 June, as well as two more from Sein Hnyin Pya village on 6 June. The Arakan Army is reportedly searching for more youths to abduct from these villages, further exacerbating the sufferings of the Rohingya community. In most of the cases abductees were either killed or forced-disappeared.

We, ERC, strongly condemn these abhorrent actions and demand the following:

Immediate withdrawal of the Arakan Army: The Arakan Army militant group must immediately cease

using Rohingya villages as its strategic positions and stop the abduction of Rohingya youths. The use of innocent civilians as human shields is a gross violation of human rights and must be stopped at once.

Cease bombing by Myanmar Military: The Burmese military must halt all bombings and drone attacks on Rohingya villages. Targeting areas with known civilian populations is unacceptable and must end immediately to prevent further loss of innocent lives.

International Intervention: We call upon the international community to take decisive action to stop the ongoing killings and violence against the Rohingya people. It is imperative that the global leaders and organizations intervene to ensure the safety and protection of the Rohingya population in the Arakan [Rakhine] region.

The continuous targeting of the Rohingya community is an affront to humanity and must be addressed with urgency. The ERC urges all parties to respect human rights and the international humanitarian law that guarantees the safety and dignity of the Rohingya people.

The European Rohingya Council (ERC) is a group of prominent Rohingya scholars, activists and concerned individuals living in Europe. Its mission is to serve the Rohingya people and to take every possible measure to stop Myanmar's destruction of the Rohingya ethnic people of Myanmar. It wants to see Rohingya people live in peace and harmony with other ethnic minorities in their own ancestral land of Arakan [Rakhine State], in Myanmar.

NUG PROTESTS MYANMAR JUNTA'S INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement last week criticising the Myanmar junta for internet shutdowns and outages.

Below is the 8 June statement in full:

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.

The National Unity Government strongly condemns the actions of the terrorist military council that limit and block the basic human rights of the people and will continue to endeavour to build an independent internet network in places free from the control of the terrorist military council. The National Unity Government calls the international community to provide a stronger support to the revolution to defeat the military dictatorship, which plays a fundamental role to restore the civil rights of the people, freedom of speech and expression and the right to information.

JUNTA ARTILLERY ATTACKS IN SOUTHEAST MYANMAR CONTINUE TO CAUSE SUFFERING

In the first week of June, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) reported that artillery and airstrikes by the military troops in Bilin and Thaton townships, Mon State, destroyed 12 houses, including a monastery.

This information was reported by the Karen National Union (KNU) Central Committee on 6 June. In addition, at least fifteen residents were arrested in Kyike Hto Township from 31 May to 5 June 2024.

More than five artillery shells were fired by the 310th Artillery Battalion, causing further damage. Although civilians had to flee their homes, no injuries were reported, according to HURFOM.

It said that on 3 June, the 9th Light Infantry Battalion, based in Thaton, fired artillery shells into Yay Wai Village, destroying two religious buildings within the village monastery.

Since 2 June, the presence of troops near villages has led to the displacement of approximately 300 households from Sein Bone, Ma Yan Chaung, Thayar Mon, and Kin Pone Chaung, according to those assisting the displaced and residents.

A resident from 60 Miles village said, "The junta troops raided Ma Yan Chaung, Thayar Mon, Yar Phu (New Village), Pyar Thone Su, Sein Bone, and Nat Gyi Sin villages. People had to prepare in advance and flee when the troops raided."

With the onset of the rainy season, the displaced need additional shelter and medicines, according to a local man assisting them. He added, "They are not fleeing to established refugee camps; they are fleeing to avoid conflict."

In Kanet Thiri and Kywel Min Kone villages of Tha Yet Chaung Township, Dawei, where recent clashes occurred, approximately 13 bodies were discovered, and several residents are reported missing. Additionally, over 50 houses were burned down.

Arbitrary arrests also remain on the rise, according to HURFOM. Five members of the Lamine Youth Charity Group (Ye Township, Mon State), including Charity's Chairman U Win Aung, have been detained by the junta for eight days, causing significant difficulties for emergency patients. They are being interrogated in junta custody.

Surveillance is an ongoing issue for civilians travelling across the country. Based on reports from travellers and town residents, the Mawrawaddy Navy has increased security and tightened inspections at the Kalain Aung Bridge gate in Yebyu Township since 3 June.

Following the arrival of Mawrawaddy Navy troops, nightly patrols have been conducted within Kalain Aung. Additionally, on the Kalain Aung-Kan Bauk Road, there have been increased inspections at three or more locations since June 5, according to local reports.

HURFOM says that these incidents reflect an ongoing concern about the various injustices faced by the people on the ground in Myanmar. An improved effort must reflect the urgency of the situation for civilians forced to suffer.



AIRSTRIKE TARGETS INSURGENT MEETING IN MYANMAR, 16 KILLED

A Myanmar military airstrike on a meeting of anti-junta activists in a monastery in central Myanmar killed 16 people, including two monks, and wounded 22 people last week, witnesses told Radio Free Asia.

The bloody raid in Let Pan Tan village was the latest in the central region of Sagaing, which has been rocked by violence since the military overthrew an elected government in 2021 triggering an insurgency by members of the majority Burman community in Myanmar's heartland.

Activists taking up arms against military rule have formed militias called People's Defense Forces, linking up with ethnic minority insurgent groups that have been battling for self-determination for decades in remote borderlands.

One witness close to a People's Defense Force said the military must have received a tip-off that the meeting was taking place on Saturday.

"The bombardment was carried out while the people were in the meeting due to leaked information. How would they know from so far away?" said the source who declined to be identified for security reasons.

"So it's clear we should consider that there are spies and informers in the village or near the village, who are secretly collecting information about us."

RFA was not able to contact People's Defense Force groups in the region. Sagaing's junta spokesperson, Nyunt Win Aung, did not answer telephone calls seeking comment.

While junta troops have been pushed back in several parts of the country since allied anti-junta fighters went on the offensive late last year, the military can unleash devastating force in seconds with its jets.

Anti-junta forces have no air power with the exception of drones, and little in the way of anti-aircraft weapon systems to face the threat.

On June 3, a junta airstrike on a wedding in Sagaing's Mingin township killed 33 people and wounded 64.

RFA has not been able to verify whether the civilians were among the casualties in Let Pan Tan, where numerous buildings, including a second monastery, were damaged, the witnesses said.

MILITARY SWOOP FOR SUSPECTS

Nine people at the meeting were killed on the spot and seven died later of their wounds, residents said.

It was impossible to identify some of the victims, another witness, who also declined to be identified, told RFA.

"The bodies were badly damaged and disfigured," said the witness, adding that several victims were decapitated. "There are quite a lot of people who got severely hurt and had their arms or legs severed (in the blast). There isn't enough medicine for everyone."

Early on Sunday, a convoy of junta troops raided Let Pan Tan village and arrested about 10 people, including women, the witness said. RFA was not able to verify that information.

According to compiled data by the RFA, junta attacks have killed 662 civilians and injured 1,492 more nationwide from January to May 2024.

Translated by RFA Burmese. Edited by Kiana Duncan.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Khine Thinzar Aye. Photo: Radio Free Asia

MYANMAR LABOR LEADER TO FIGHT DICTATORSHIP AFTER PRISON RELEASE

A Myanmar trade union leader has fled from the surveillance of the military after release from more than two years in prison, to a region controlled by forces opposed to the junta, traumatized but unbowed and determined to fight on, she told Radio Free Asia.

Khine Thinzar Aye, who joined the Myanmar trade movement at the age of 19, was arrested in April 2022 during a strike against the military regime that took power in 2021. After a military truck hit a taxi she was in, soldiers arrested her and two other Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) members. The CTUM has more than 65,000 members nationwide.

As head of the union's communications department, the now 29-year-old says she was subjected to intense questioning because of her position in the organization. During interrogations, Khine Thinzar Aye was told to kneel on the ground while soldiers beat her and forced her to confess to protesting in exchange for 30,000 kyat (US\$11).

After being moved to the Shwepyithar Interrogation Center, she was checked for life-threatening injuries before being tortured for another seven days. Soldiers told her that they could kill her at any time, she said.

"When we arrived at the interrogation, we were blindfolded and handcuffed, then drunken men surrounded us and beat us and brutally cut our legs with knives," Khine Thinzar Aye said, adding that they sexually assaulted her. "They put lit cigarettes on our faces and asked us to reveal the location of our trade union leaders' homes."

After a week of interrogation, she was sent to Yangon's infamous Insein Prison to await trial. That December, she was sentenced to three years in prison with hard labor under the notorious provision 505A of the penal code, which criminalizes comment that can cause fear or spread fake news.

Insein Prison was so packed it was often impossible for prisoners to sleep, she said.

"It wasn't humane. It was really crowded. One person was forced to stay in about a foot and half of space," she said. "At the time when COVID was happening, if one person slept on their back, the other had to sleep on their side, taking turns."

She was moved to the decrepit Thayarwady Prison in Bago Division for her last year.

"Plaster fell on us from the ceiling, the dormitories in our prison were more than 100 years old," Khine Thinzar Aye said. "All the detainees were worried about when it would collapse."

She was released in April, a few months early under an amnesty.

UNIONS UNDER ATTACK

Trade unions were among the groups that spearheaded protests that swept the country after the military seized power in early 2021, bringing a brutal end to a decade of reforms that had brought hope for change in a country ruled by generals for decades.

Nearly 1,000 trade union members have been arrested since the coup, another labor leader told RFA. However, because people are moved about the prison system so much, it is difficult to track the precise number.

"Thirty percent are released, some workers are sent to prison for life without parole," said the second labor leader who declined to be identified in fear of reprisals. "Some union leaders, we can't find them because we don't know what kind of prison they're in or the place they were arrested. Some were shot on the street and died."

Shortly after the coup, the junta banned 16 unions. Since then, workers have faced increasing challenges fighting for fair wages and freedom of association.

The military has become increasingly concerned about union funding, the second labor leader said, adding that they were constantly being questioned

about connections to the shadow civilian National Unity Government and People's Defense Force militias fighting the regime.

"Every evening, when the workers are going home from the factory, they check their phones," she said. "If we like or follow some of the PDF or NUG channels, they beat us or arrest the workers."

RETURNING TO WORK

Khine Thinzar Aye said that during her interrogations, soldiers repeatedly asked her about involvement in "terrorist activities", scrutinized the union budget and asked how it spent money.

She was released on April 26 traumatized by her experience.

"I had no peace of mind," she said. "I knew I'd be constantly monitored, and I'd have to go to the police station and report."

Escaping the city of Yangon, she fled to a region under the control of ethnic minority insurgents where she plans to stay and continue her work for the labor movement.

"Our country was on a path, moving toward democracy," she said of the 10 years of tentative reform that the military ended with their coup.

"Our young people, our workers, all of us, will soon actively eradicate this dictatorship and its unjust oppression and illegal coup," she said.

"We can do it if we're united and push together"

Edited by Taejun Kang.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



New military recruits. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR CONSCRIPTION FORCING YOUNG PEOPLE TO FIGHT OR FLEE

Forced Conscription is part of the Myanmar junta's latest wave of deliberate violence against Myanmar's young generations who are courageously resisting its illegal coup attempt, according to campaign group Progressive Voice.

It says that since February 2024, the Myanmar military junta has been violently and remorselessly snatching Myanmar's young people from their families and communities for its forced conscription.

Over the past four months, the junta—blatantly desperate amid major losses of territory and personnel—forcibly conscripted two batches of young adults, abducting, extorting, and terrorizing Myanmar's people at every turn. As a result, countless young people have been forced to flee across international

borders to escape the junta's forced recruitment, but protection remains far from guaranteed.

According to media reports, the junta claims to have sent its first batch of around 5,000 forced conscripts to training on 27 March, and its second batch of around 4,000 on 14 May.

Scrambling to fill its ranks, the junta has wasted no time switching its forced conscription tactics from sending letters and conducting lotteries to abducting young people off the street, says Progressive Voice.

In early May in Aunlan Town, Magwe Region, the junta forcibly recruited individuals at gunpoint after those whose names were listed for conscription fled the town. The junta arrested young men at road checkpoints and sent them away to military training.

Progressive Voice says that it is obvious that “conscription” and “recruitment” are complete misnomers for the junta’s violent capturing of youth for its countrywide campaign of terror against the people.

The junta also continues to ruthlessly target Rohingya for forced conscription.

In late May, in Rakhine State, junta troops in Sittwe ordered more than 10 internment camps for displaced Rohingya to provide around 30 people each for forced conscription. The junta threatened to block international food aid if they refused.

Also of grave concern is Rohingya being abducted from camps in Bangladesh by armed Rohingya gangs and handed over to the junta, which almost immediately forces them to the frontlines—where the junta is losing severely to the Arakan Army—as human shields.

Progressive Voice says seeking international protection by crossing borders is not a crime—it’s a human right.

Any forced return of Myanmar people clearly violates international law, as they will certainly face irreparable harm by the junta upon return. The junta will surely forcibly conscript any returned young adults and send them to the frontlines where they have no choice but to kill their peers—who are fighting against the military junta for a better future—or die.

With regional peace and stability as a top priority, Myanmar’s neighboring countries must end the arbitrary detention, deportations, and pushbacks of Myanmar people fleeing the military’s violence, says Progressive Voice.

It also says that it is imperative that neighboring countries provide legal protection for Myanmar people fleeing the junta’s forced conscription and ongoing mass atrocity crimes. This protection must include legal immigration status, work permits, and access to formal education, healthcare, and other essential services.

In tandem, the UN Security Council must fulfill its mandate for peace and security by coordinating Myanmar’s neighboring countries to expedite protection and humanitarian aid for Myanmar’s people.

For those fleeing the junta’s forced conscription, many have escaped to areas in Myanmar under resistance forces’ control—where the junta has no access.

In such areas, only local groups have the years of experience, knowledge, and trust required to provide the much-needed humanitarian assistance to those who’ve fled the junta’s violence, according to Progressive Voice.

It says that these groups are already supporting those fleeing forced conscription. In turn, Myanmar’s neighbors and the wider international community must support these local, trusted frontline humanitarian responders by allowing cross-border channels for them to deliver emergency aid to Myanmar’s most vulnerable in its border regions, as well as central and upper Myanmar.

Progressive Voice says that legal protection and robust humanitarian aid are necessary to address the grave realities that Myanmar’s young people are facing.

A 23-year-old who fled to Thailand after appearing on a junta conscription list told Radio Free Asia, “We also feel sorry that it is impossible for us to return home at all, but it is absolutely impossible to accept [the draft]...[the junta leader] is sacrificing innocent young people like us.”



Civilians and PDF fighters in Sagaing.
File photo: AFP

MASS EXODUS IN SAGAING REGION AS MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES WOMEN INTO MILITARY SERVICE

Thousands of residents are fleeing their homes in Kyunhla Township, Kanbalu District, Sagaing Region, due to threats and pressure from the military regime forcing women into military service, according to local women and revolutionary forces.

An official from the Kyunhla-Kanbalu Activist Group revealed that the junta, led by Pyu Saw Htee Monk Warsawa and the administrator of Thitywarmyaing in Kyunhla Township, is coercing women to join the military.

“They are forcing women to serve in the military. They claimed that any woman must go. Thus, some entire villages are fleeing,” an official said.

Approximately 10,000 civilians from villages such as Kyaukaing, Tapaung, Hngetpyawtaw, Ngabataing, Thanbo, Bokone, Sanpya, Kyikone, Ywarthi, Zeetaw, and Chaungkway in Kyunhla Township have fled due to this pressure.

“They threatened that if there are no men, women have to go. No one in our village drew the lottery. Since we did not dare to draw, almost the entire village has fled,” a woman from Tapaung village said.

In Kyikone Village, the village administrator and members of the Pyu Saw Htee militia are leading efforts to forcibly recruit locals and have confiscated villagers’ Identification Cards to prevent them from fleeing. Despite this, many have still managed to escape, according to local sources.

Kanbalu and Kyunhla townships are known for

their strong resistance against the military dictatorship and the presence of pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee villages. Currently, military activities by the regime are ongoing in Kanbalu Township.

On the night of 12 June, junta troops and the Pyu Saw Htee militia raided villages in southern Kanbalu Township, including Htankone, Khawthanti, Moekyoe, Okpho, and Ohntaw, apprehending about 40 people under the pretext of military service, according to local sources.

Military soldiers remained stationed in Htankone Village until 13 June, restricting locals from entering and leaving, a resident stated.

Attempts to contact Monk Warsawa for comments were unsuccessful.

Many residents from Kanbalu, Kyunhla, and Taze townships have relocated to major cities like Yangon and Mandalay to escape junta threats. Those facing financial difficulties are reportedly taking refuge on farmland and in nearby villages.

The junta issued the Conscription Law on 10 February, mandating military service for men and women over the age of 18. Since then, young adults from junta-controlled townships have been called up for military training.

Despite reports of forced recruitment due to difficulties in voluntary enlistment, the military regime denies these allegations.

YOUNG MEN FORCIBLY RECRUITED FROM SWIMMING POOL IN SAGAING'S KALAY TOWN

Over 20 young people were detained by junta troops at a hotel swimming pool in Kalay town, Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, on 9 June.

The detentions occurred around 2:00 pm at the Mingyi Hotel swimming pool in Thazin Ward, a popular spot for weekend vacationers.

“On 10 June, at least ten of the detainees were released after their parents pledged that they would serve in the military if the junta summoned them to serve, while the remaining individuals are still being held”, said a local resident.

According to eyewitnesses the young men got into a dispute with three other men at the pool. Following the dispute hotel staff asked the three men to leave. The three men then reported the incident to a nearby military checkpoint. A few hours later, junta troops arrived and detained the young men, taking them to the Kalay Regional Military Command.

Residents believe the detentions were based on a false report that People’s Defence Force (PDF)

members were present at the hotel.

It is not known exactly how many of the young men are still detained and how many have been released.

Currently, junta troops are carrying out random inspections in Kalay Town and there have been reports of forced recruitment of young people from other townships in the area. On 10 June, some young people in Kalay Town’s Chan Myae Aung Si Ward were taken for medical examinations.

There is speculation amongst locals that six people from each ward in Kalay Town will be conscripted.

The National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed groups opposing the junta have condemned the law as illegal and say it is a tactic to incite further conflict.

Despite the junta’s denial of forced conscription, reports of difficulties in recruitment and subsequent forced conscriptions continue to circulate.

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Photo: AFP

JUNTA IMPOSES STRICTER RULES ON PASSPORT-TYPE CONVERSIONS AMID RISING EMIGRATION TENSIONS

PAN PAN

The military regime has imposed stricter rules on traveling abroad for work. On 6 June, the junta banned the conversion of Passport for Job (PJ) to Passport for Visit (PV), according to passport service providers.

Although the restriction is not officially announced on social media and websites, the passport offices no longer accept the conversion, according to those who went to the passport office and the service providers.

The prohibition of men from traveling abroad with Passport for Job (PJ) in May led to a surge in leaving the country by converting into Passport for Visit (PV). This might be the reason for the recent restriction, a passport service broker said.

“Since people could not leave the country with PJ, they converted it into PV to go abroad. They would continue the process after arriving with PV. The number of applications converting passports is extremely high. That might lead to this restriction. The offices no longer process the conversions.”

The duration of this restriction on converting PJ to PV remains unclear. Previously, such conversions were allowed within six months of passport issuance, requiring an online appointment thereafter.

Mizzima tried to contact the passport office in Yangon for detailed information regarding the issue, but in vain.

A man in Yangon attempting to obtain a passport said that the junta might impose stricter regulations on leaving the country, so he is preparing to leave the country as soon as possible.

“I applied for PV since I am doing the passport now, so it is better. I am planning to study in Japan by using the PV first. It is crucial to leave quickly because the regulations might tighten in the future. So, I am paying extra fees to speed up the process. Brokers are charging the price of around three million kyat.”

On May 1, the junta restricted men aged 23 to 31 from going abroad for work. Then, on 6 June, they prohibited those holding Passport for Job from converting to Passport for Visit.

Following the enactment of the Military Conscription Law on 10 February, many men eligible under the law began leaving the country. As a result, the junta is tightening up who is allowed to go abroad.



Palau. Photo: Rene Paulisich

PALAU ACCUSES CHINA OF CYBER ATTACKS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN THE PACIFIC REGION

SUN LEE

Palau has levelled serious allegations against China of cyberattacks, raising speculations about China's efforts to increase its influence in the Pacific region. Palau's President Surangel Whipps Jr. recently confirmed that the Pacific island nation experienced its first major cyberattack. Whipps, who was on his visit to Japan, described the attack as the first major breach of Palauan government records. More than 20,000 documents were stolen, including sensitive information about U.S. radar installations, Japanese Navy crew lists, and details about Palau's diplomatic relationship with Taiwan.

The cyber attack on Palau occurred shortly after the island nation signed a new 20-year economic and security deal with the United States, highlighting its growing importance to Washington's efforts to

counter Beijing's influence in the Indo-Pacific. The attack, which resulted in the theft of thousands of government documents, has been attributed to China by Palauan officials. For China, Palau has become an increasingly critical player due to its strategic location and its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, which China claims as its territory. Beijing has enticed other countries, like Nauru, another Pacific nation, to sever ties with Taipei. Meanwhile, Taiwan has condemned the cyber attack, saying that it was ready to help Palau beef up its digital defenses against "authoritarian infiltration".

Meanwhile, China rejected the accusation, and experts said that Palau has not presented any evidence that implicates Beijing. A ransomware group known as Dragon Force has claimed responsibility, saying it carried out the hack purely for financial gain. The group

has threatened to do more harm to Palau.

Palau's leaders have accused China of orchestrating the hack, suggesting that it was a politically motivated attempt to pressure Palau over its ties with Taiwan. A report in the New York Times quoted a Palauan official stating that the hack was political because Dragon Force had made no effort to negotiate a ransom. Additionally, by using a ransomware group, Beijing reduced the risk of a diplomatic incident with Washington, according to the official, Jay Anson, the chief information security officer at the Palau Ministry of Finance.

"We assessed that they must be getting paid by someone else to make this lucrative," said Anson, whose ministry was the one the documents were stolen from. "It was about politics, not payment." Experts said that Palau could have been targeted by China, but it would be unusual to subcontract out a cyberattack to a ransomware group, stated the US daily.

A senior Palauan leader has accused China of meddling in Palau's domestic affairs. Whipps claimed to have received a phone call from the Chinese ambassador in Micronesia asking him to cut ties with Taiwan if elected; Whipps was a presidential candidate at that time.

In February, Palau accused China of making financial offers. President Whipps had highlighted in a letter to a U.S. senator that China had made financial offers to Palau, including filling every hotel room and providing \$20 million annually for a "call center" to sway Palau away from its relationship with the U.S. and Taiwan.

Ironically, China's efforts to exert influence in Palau are not limited to financial offers and alleged cyberattacks. According to a news report on Abc.net.au, investigations by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) revealed that China had been using political pressure and funding to capture local elites and influence the media in Palau. One notable case was related to Moses Uludong, a prominent Palauan journalist who founded the country's first newspaper. In 2018, Uludong entered into a deal to establish a new media group aimed at increasing Palau's profile in China. However, this initiative was backed by investors with ties to China's police and military.

The media group, which had a launch event in Hong Kong, was intended to serve as a "hub of information" for a Chinese audience. Emails obtained by reporters show that shortly after its launch, the group used Uludong's existing newspaper to publish pro-Chinese content. This effort, though modest, fits into a broader pattern of Chinese influence operations in the Pacific. However, experts believe that China has been using such tactics to exert control over local narratives and sway public opinion in favour of Beijing. The case of the Palau Media Group illustrated how China sought to penetrate local media and other institutions to extend its influence in strategically important regions like the Pacific Islands.

Though China has denied allegations of a cyberattack, the incident highlighted the growing geopolitical contest in the Pacific region. Palau's strategic importance to the United States and its diplomatic ties with Taiwan make it a key battleground in the struggle for influence between Washington and Beijing. The incident underscored the need for enhanced cybersecurity and strategic partnerships to counteract authoritarian influence from China and protect democratic values in the region.

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



Internally displaced people in Myanmar. Photo: Supplied

RECORD 120 MILLION PEOPLE FORCIBLY DISPLACED GLOBALLY: UN

A staggering total of 120 million people are living forcibly displaced by war, violence and persecution, the UN said Thursday, branding the ever-increasing number a “terrible indictment on the state of the world”.

The United Nations’ refugee agency UNHCR said forced displacement globally had once again smashed records, with conflicts in places like Gaza, Sudan and Myanmar forcing even more people to flee their homes.

The global displaced population is now equivalent to that of Japan, it pointed out in a statement.

“Conflict remains a very, very big driver of mass displacement,” UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi told reporters.

At the end of last year, 117.3 million people were displaced, UNHCR said in a report.

And by the end of April, the number had swelled further, with an estimated 120 million people around the world living in displacement.

The number is up from 110 million a year ago, and has been rising for 12 consecutive years -- nearly tripling since 2012 amid a combination of new and mutating crises and a failure to resolve long-standing ones, UNHCR said.

Grandi told AFP he had been shocked at the high displacement figure when he took the job eight years ago.

Since then it has “more than doubled”, he said, describing this as “a terrible indictment on the state of the world”.

FIGURES WILL KEEP RISING

Grandi pointed to a palpable increase in crises, and also highlighted how climate change is impacting population movement and driving conflicts.

UNHCR last year declared 43 emergencies across 29 countries -- more than four times what was common just a few years ago, he told reporters.

In particular, Grandi noted “the way conflicts are conducted ... in complete disregard” of international law, and “often with the specific purpose of terrorising people”.

“This of course is a powerful contributor to more displacement.”

Grandi acknowledged there currently seemed to be little hope of bucking the trend.

“Unless there is a shift in international geopolitics, unfortunately, I actually see the figure continuing to go up,” he said.

Of the 117.3 million displaced at the end of 2023, 68.3 million people were internally displaced within their own country, Thursday’s report showed.

The number of refugees and others in need of international protection meanwhile climbed to 43.4 million, it said.

UNHCR countered the perception that all refugees and other migrants go to wealthy countries.

“The vast majority of refugees are hosted in countries neighbouring their own, with 75 percent residing in low- and middle-income countries that together produce less than 20 percent of the world’s income,” it said.

‘HUMAN TRAGEDIES’

Sudan’s civil war has been a key factor driving up the numbers.

Since the war broke out in April 2023 between rival generals, it has displaced more than nine million more people, leaving nearly 11 million Sudanese uprooted at the end of 2023, UNHCR said.

The numbers were still rising.

Grandi pointed to the many still fleeing to neighbouring Chad, which has received some 600,000 Sudanese in the past 14 months.

“Hundreds and hundreds every day are crossing from one devastated country to one of the poorest countries in the world,” he told AFP.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar, millions more people were also internally displaced last year by vicious fighting.

And in the Gaza Strip, the UN estimates 1.7 million people -- 75 percent of the population -- have been displaced by the war sparked eight months ago by Hamas’s October 7 attack inside Israel.

As for the war raging in Ukraine since Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022, the UN estimated that around 750,000 people became newly displaced inside the country last year, with a total of 3.7 million internally displaced people registered by the end of 2023.

The number of Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers increased by over 275,000 to six million, it said.

Syria remains the world’s largest displacement crisis, with 13.8 million people forcibly displaced inside and outside the country, UNHCR said.

AFP



LEON KENNEDY & BURMESE MEDITATION

"As a rule of thumb, I have always shied away from talking about my family, because I felt like I defamed and shamed [my] family so hard," Leon Kennedy tells Insight Myanmar, referring to a traumatic life during which he was "saved" by Burmese Buddhist meditation.

Leon's grandparents were no ordinary people: his grandfather, Joseph Lowery, founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and then brought Martin Luther King Jr. into that influential organization; his grandmother, Evelyn, was also a civil rights icon in her own right. Leon grew up with luminaries such as Rosa Parks, Abraham Woods, Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Fred Shuttlesworth, Reverend Calvin Woods, and Andrew Young going in and out of his family home.

"When I was a kid coming up, in my mind, they weren't civil rights icons or activists or revolutionaries," he says. "They were aunts and uncles to me, because they were always at the house... these guys weren't superheroes to me. It was just normal." Still, he was raised with a certain ethical standard, instilled from his association with such an august crowd, which he describes in the following way: "Be kind, be honest, don't lie. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Help somebody, make sacrifices, have integrity, all of those core principles and values." And above all else, he notes it was not a mindset that was limited to the advancement of one's own community, but rather, principles that were looking to elevate all of humanity. He remembers conversations that focused not only on overcoming racism in America, but on the experience of oppression happening anywhere in the world as well. "We are all one people," he says, describing the sentiment. "We all don't want to suffer. We want to thrive, we want to be able to see people heal, get medicine, those commonalities. We all need food, we

all need shelter. Those things that never change. We're more alike than we are apart."

But when his parents divorced at a young age, it broke Leon. While his father was a prominent lawyer at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) before following Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, his mother struggled to make ends meet. With no real male role model around the house to reel him in, Leon started to rebel. "I was in neighborhoods and in places where I maybe shouldn't have been," he recalls.

When he was about 12 years old, his mother began to fear he was hearing voices. But when she took him to a psychiatrist, he assured his mother he was only "hearing music." Indeed, Leon grew up in a home which was rich not just in the civil rights leaders who passed through the door, but also musicians—Lou Rawls and Harry Belafonte ("Uncle Harry") were regular visitors. Leon describes how he started performing music for family as a young child, and he sings and writes songs to this day.

Then in 1982, his mother insisted he attend an all-white high school in Birmingham, Alabama. It was tough. "This is the South, and the mindset and the mentality in the South is so oppressive," he recalls. "It was in the South, it wasn't like that elsewhere. In the birthplace of the civil rights movement, it was ugly... I get to this point in my life where I feel a fight in me, even if I don't know what I'm fighting for." Leon would physically confront his white classmates when they called him the N-word.

Yet his wild side did not abate, and during one drunken escapade in Virginia, he shot a man. "He wasn't bothering me," Leon admits. "He was minding his business. He was the epitome of a victim! I was completely wrong. I was so out of my mind, just out of sorts."

The man went in and out of a coma, and eventually they had to amputate his leg. The court was threatening to give Leon four life sentences if the man died; luckily he did not, and what is more, he couldn't identify Leon. Still, Leon was convicted and ended up serving nine years in prison before being released on good behavior. "I don't know anybody up there," he recalls of his time behind bars. "I'm young, I'm homophobic. If you looking at me crazy, I'm swinging, I'm not scared to fight." He also immersed himself in reading and in music, and having been raised in a devout Christian family, it was the first time he learned about other faiths.

CATCH THE FULL STORY

Check out the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/ae6530b1-5cf8-4b9a-b647-56a475c01183>

SECURITY FORCES TARGET VPN USERS IN URBAN CENTRES

In a crackdown on digital communications, military personnel in various Myanmar urban centres have initiated surprise checks on the smartphones of passersby, issuing dire warnings and hefty penalties to anyone found using virtual private networks (VPNs), according to local news reports.

The enforcement measures mark an escalation in state surveillance.

In a move aimed at tightening control over digital communications, Myanmar's junta declared a prohibition on VPN software in late May. The software, instrumental in circumventing junta-imposed restrictions on vital social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, has played a pivotal role in spreading information amid the nation's persistent turmoil and internal conflict.

Subsequently, security forces have started intercepting pedestrians in major urban hubs such as Yangon, Mandalay, Taunggyi, and various townships throughout Myanmar, levying fines on people found using the prohibited software.

Local reports detail instances of people being pressured to unlock their phones with threats of arrest.

The restrictions on VPNs severely limit access to information for the public, further tightening the junta's grip on the flow of information in Myanmar.



Photo: Luis Villasmil

JUNTA'S CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF MEETS INDIAN JOINT DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

The Myanmar junta's Chief of the General Staff (Army, Navy and Air) General Maung Maung Aye received India's Maj-Gen Charanjeet Singh Dewgun, Joint Director-General of Military Intelligence, on June 12 in Naypyidaw, according to a junta-controlled newspaper.

Western governments have imposed sanctions on the general for his role in undermining democracy in Myanmar.

They discussed enhancing relations between their armed forces through increased personnel exchanges and closer collaboration on border stability, security, and law enforcement, according to the newspaper.

Similarly, on June 11, the Myanmar junta's Lt-Gen Ko Ko Oo from Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army), along with other senior Myanmar military officers and Indian delegation led by Maj-Gen Charanjeet Singh Dewgun participated in the Sixth Myanmar-India Army to Army Staff Talks held in Naypyidaw.



Photo: NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La (NUG's official Facebook page)

NUG ACTING PRESIDENT URGES STRENGTHENING REVOLUTIONARY ALLIANCE AMID CRITICISM

The Acting President of the parallel National Unity Government (NUG), Duwa Lashi La, urged NUG officials and ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs) to “try to strengthen the alliance between the revolutionaries,” reported NUG’s official Facebook page.

The Acting President made such remarks at the June 11 meeting of the NUG.

The meeting was attended by Duwal Shila, Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than, as well as NUG Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

“There is a special need for us to build a strong and compact alliance between our National Unity Government and the ethnic armed organizations that go beyond the normal partnership level,” he said.

However, there are some Facebook users who think that NUG’s activities are not enough.

A Facebook user wrote, “NUG has spoken a lot, but so far it has not shown the strength of unity, only words are inflated. Now, can NUG government offices be opened anywhere inside Myanmar in cooperation with ethnic groups, who are said to be allies?”



Photo Caption: Singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein Facebook Page

FAMOUS EXILED SINGER SETS TO RELEASE SONG HONORING AUNG SAN SUU KYI ON HER 79TH BIRTHDAY

Burmese exiled female singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein wrote on her official Facebook page that she plans to release a song about Myanmar’s detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, on her upcoming birthday.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi’s 79th birthday fell on June 19.

Since the Myanmar military seized power in a coup in 2021, Suu Kyi has been under detention. She is currently facing a possible 27-year prison sentence on charges including treason, bribery, and violations of telecommunications law, all of which she denies.

In the comments section, numerous Facebook users shared their excitement about the forthcoming song.

One user commented, “Anticipation is growing for the release of the song. I can’t wait to hear it soon.”

Another user expressed, “I stand in support of Phyu Phyu, a gifted musician advocating for truth.”

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