

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



MAE SOT

An escape route from Myanmar

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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.

CONCERNS ABOUT MYANMAR VOICED IN THE UN

The Myanmar crisis appears to be getting mentioned often in the United Nations over the last few months, though little is being done to take concrete action to rectify the situation. One of the most prominent has been Mr Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, with strong calls to prevent the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State to degenerate into another genocidal situation, mirroring the military's crackdown on the minority Muslim Rohingya community.

Last week, Ambassador Robert Wood of the United States Mission to the UN delivered a joint press statement on the humanitarian situation in Myanmar.

Mr Wood said the US was deeply concerned by the escalation of violence and conflict and credible reports of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law across Myanmar that are deepening the humanitarian crisis. Recent reports indicate the Myanmar regime has taken deliberate steps in Rakhine State to use internally displaced persons (IDP), many of whom are Rohingya, as human shields amid the conflict.

"We are particularly concerned by reports indicating the regime has placed landmines around IDP camps and appears to have taken steps to use these camps as military bases," he told the UN. "There are also credible reports of forced recruitment of persons, including children, belonging to ethnic minorities by the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular and other parties, which risk further fueling inter-communal tensions and aggravating the humanitarian situation."

He noted these concerning developments follow a range of reports of other violations and abuses, particularly by the Myanmar Armed Forces, including indiscriminate aerial bombardments of civilians and civilian objects, burning of civilian homes, attacks on humanitarian

workers and facilities, and restrictions on humanitarian access – adding that these practices are unacceptable.

Mr Wood outlined the overall plight of the country.

Since the regime's violent military coup in February 2021 and attack on the Myanmar population, the number of people in humanitarian need has risen from 1 million to 18.6 million. More than 2.9 million have been newly displaced, including 66,000 people who have sought protection in neighbouring countries, adding to the more than 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled before the coup.

"We highlight the importance of all countries respecting the principle of nonrefoulement. We reiterate our commitment to support safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation when conditions allow. We also reiterate the call for full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need, including women, children, and members of ethnic and other minority populations.

"We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular and all parties concerned in Myanmar to de-escalate violence, respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to protect civilians. We recall our demands for the full implementation of UNSC resolution 2669 (2022). We reiterate our full support for ASEAN's central role and for the appointment of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Julie Bishop. We reiterate calls to engage in constructive and inclusive dialogue to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Myanmar."

Both Mr Woods and Mr Andrews are voicing the right sentiments, but there is a sense of impotence as the Myanmar junta attempts to crack down harder in a desperate bid to hang on to power.

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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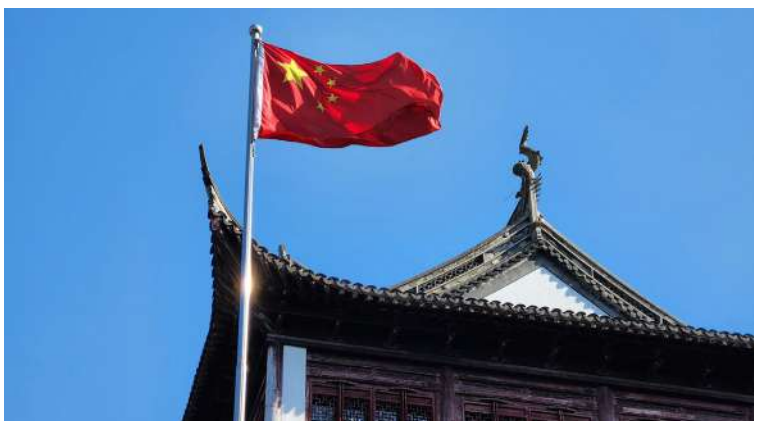
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Cover photo by AFP of Burmese citizens at the immigration checkpoint crossing into Mae Sot





Thai soldiers provide tight security in Mae Sot on the Thailand-Myanmar border. Photo: AFP

MAE SOT

AN ESCAPE ROUTE FROM MYANMAR

NICHOLAS NUGENT

Mae Sot. This once sleepy Thai border town has assumed new significance since General Ming Aung Hlaing's military junta seized control of Myanmar in February 2021. Mae Sot faces the town of Myawaddy, which lies close to the Andaman Sea port of Mawlamyine and the Kayin or Karen State capital Hpa-an.

Bridges connecting Myawaddy and Mae Sot provide a southern exit from Myanmar, an exit route from Yangon five hours away when peace prevails. In recent times the journey from Yangon to Myawaddy can take two days because of fighting and a proliferation of checkpoints.

IMPORTANT HUB

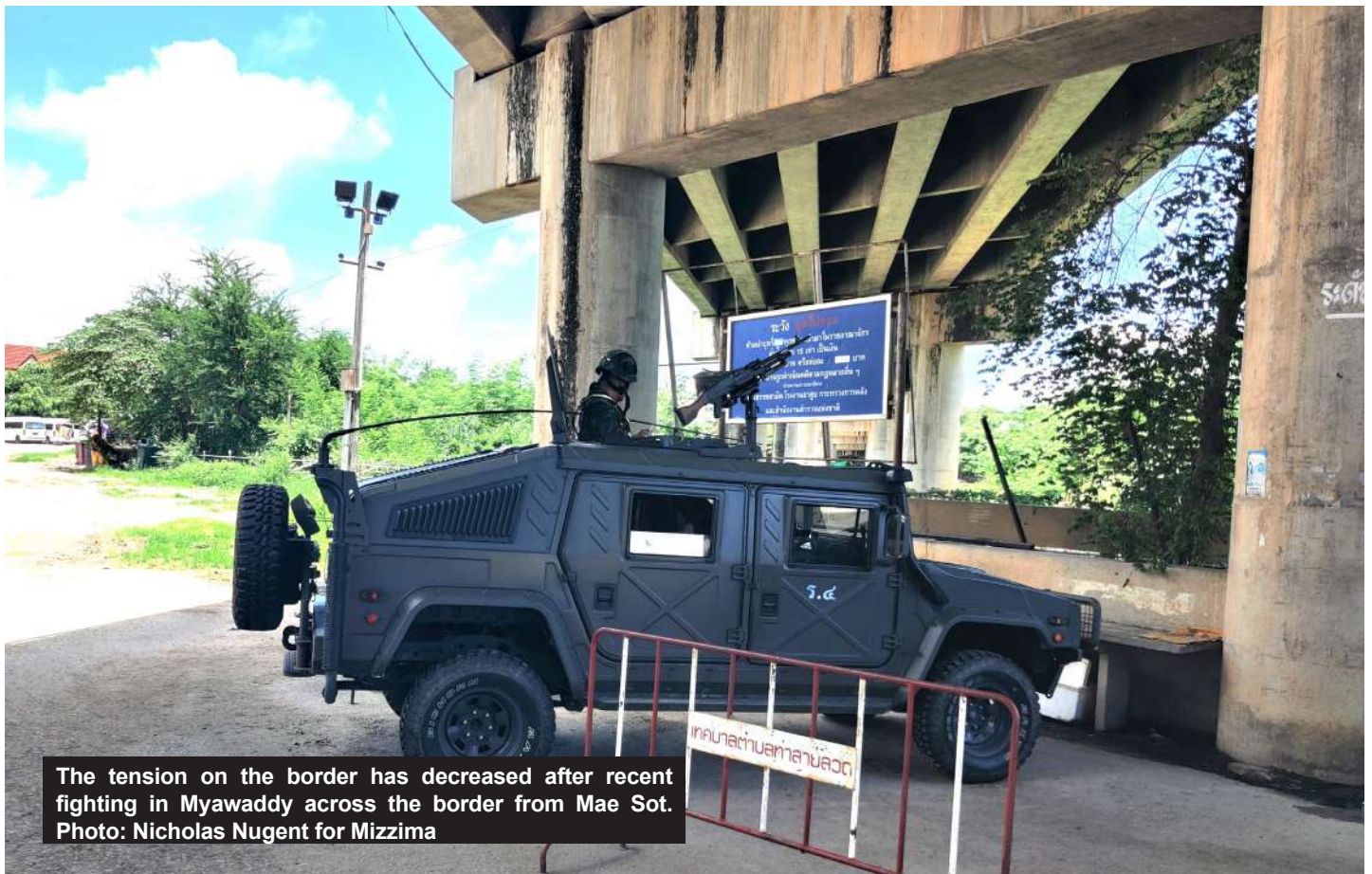
Traditionally Myanmar citizens have sought work across the Moei River in the factories and fields of Thailand, a movement of people that has gone on for decades. The numbers arriving in Mae Sot leaped after the military junta came to power and detained parliamentarians of the government of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Some NLD politicians took refuge in Mae Sot as did citizens from as far north as Meiktila and Mandalay. Myawaddy became a main escape route from military-ruled Myanmar.

I met an NLD assembly member from Yangon who told me how he and fellow NLD supporters had recently celebrated the seventy-ninth birthday of party leader, Aung San Suu Kyi on 19 June. His T-shirt testified to his loyalty. A year ago, the junta – or State Administration Council (SAC) as it is known – announced that Suu Kyi, who ruled as State Counsellor from 2016 to 2021, was being transferred from prison to house arrest.

Her supporters in Mae Sot say that never happened and that she is still imprisoned somewhere in Naypyidaw, the national capital, though they don't know where. The junta may feel her presence provides security against attack by the resistance forces fighting the junta.

EXPANDING RESISTANCE

Those forces have extended the area of the country under their control since October 2023 when the Three Brotherhood Alliance, comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army, gained a series of military successes along Myanmar's border with China. The Arakan Army went on to achieve victories over Myanmar's army, the Tatmadaw, in Rakhine State, close to Myanmar's border with India, including the



The tension on the border has decreased after recent fighting in Myawaddy across the border from Mae Sot. Photo: Nicholas Nugent for Mizzima

formerly popular Ngapali beach resort.

Rebel leaders claim anti-government forces now control as much as 70% of the country though nobody knows for sure and in any case it varies by region, and on the definition of 'control'.

Across Myanmar up to 40 ethnically based armies, or ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), some of which were founded in the 1940s while others were recently formed, are challenging the military government. Since the 2021 coup, the ethnic armies have been joined by regional people's defence forces, or PDFs, many of which owe their loyalty to the National Unity Government or NUG, an underground alternative government comprised partly of former parliamentarians. The PDFs and EAOs are united by their common enemy, the Tatmadaw or national army, though not entirely.

PLAYING BOTH SIDES?

In the south, for example, the Border Guard Force or BGF is happy to be part of the alliance fighting for what Myanmar people refer to as *taw hlan yay* – the revolution.

However, when the Tatmadaw threaten to bomb casinos in the Myawaddy area controlled by the BGF their commitment to revolution weakens in favour of commercial interests. The casinos of Kayin State serve clients from Thailand and China and from within the country. Both Thailand and China restrict gambling and, given a fondness among Chinese people for 'trying their luck', casinos are among the profitable industries of questionable legality along Myanmar's borders, alongside drug production, smuggling of rare animals for medicinal use and online scamming. With a wallet full of money it is easy for gambling 'tourists' to slip across the border.

This explains recent reports suggesting anti-government forces had captured Myawaddy only for them to be contradicted days later when it became clear that the BGF controlled the border opposite Mae Sot.

The main anti-government army in Kayin (formerly Karen) State is the Karen National Union, one of the oldest and strongest EAOs, and its military arm, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). They fight alongside two breakaway groups, the Kawthoolei Army



Myanmar citizens cross the river to escape fighting, taking refuge in Mae Sot. Photo: AFP

(KTLA) and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).

Another breakaway group is the Peace Council which, like the BGF, is a fair-weather friend of the KNU-led alliance: they support them until their own interests are threatened. Both the DKBA and the BGF are Buddhist. They split from the predominantly Christian KNU.

IMPORTANCE OF KNU

The KNU are the most powerful anti-government force in southern or lower Myanmar alongside the smaller Mon National Liberation Force, who hold sway in Mon State. The KNU claim to be the main fighting force in Tanintharyi (once known as Tennaserim), the region of mixed ethnicity which stretches down the peninsula towards Malaysia, south of the Kayin and Mon states.

Here they are in another uneasy alliance with a unit of the PLA-Myanmar, whose name and ideology mirror those of China's Peoples Liberation Army. The PLA Myanmar unit in the south is one of three resurgent communist armies, remnants of the defunct Communist

Party of Burma, others being in central Myanmar and Kachin State in the north.

With armies and alliance parties linked or divided variously by ethnicity, religion and ideology and giving rise to splinter movements, it could seem as if the Myanmar national army, officered by the dominant Buddhist Bamar people, has an upper hand.

A Myanmar-watcher who prefers anonymity explains: "Diverse and divided albeit it with the broad common ultimate objective of resisting the military, but everyone has their own specific immediate objective."

Coordinating the common purpose is the role of the NUG, which supports local PDFs though lacks a centralised command structure as EAOs have.

BORDER REFUGE

Back in Mae Sot, Myanmar émigrés long for the day they can return to the motherland, yet acknowledge the absence of unity among the various fighting forces in their homeland. "With Daw Aung Suu Kyi in detention our revolution lacks a leader, as Ho Chi Minh



Thai soldiers help refugees take shelter on the Thai side of the border. Photo: AFP/Royal Thai Army

was in Vietnam and Sun Yat Sen in China," says one historically learned refugee. "Successful revolutions need a figurehead."

With its Myanmar market and multiple Myanmar restaurants Mae Sot provides a comfortable home from home for the large numbers of refugees settled there. Their number was boosted this year when the SAC introduced compulsory military conscription, requiring men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve at least two years in the armed forces, prompting fear amongst Myanmar's youth. The move suggested the Tatmadaw has suffered heavy losses since civil war intensified three years ago.

Hordes of young people crossed the bridges to Mae Sot, many moving on to become students at Bangkok universities where students from Myanmar dominate the international programmes.

BUSY HOTELS

Mae Sot hotels also benefited from the exodus becoming temporary homes for refugees, some of whom once worked for the United States or Australian governments. In a programme coordinated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, they are being considered for resettlement elsewhere.

The town's economy has thrived with the new inhabitants bringing new business. No one knows how many Myanmar citizens live in Mae Sot and some are transient visitors but it is likely that the total is greater than the number of Thai inhabitants. Myanmar residents are legal and illegal immigrants depending on whether they have the Thai 'green card' or not.

The 'illegals' complain of harassment by the Thai police. "They nickname us 'ATMs'", one told me, "because they extort money." Those without the crucial 'green card' maintain a low profile and try not to get into trouble with the police. Smugglers ply their trade across the river, paying heavily to be ferried across to avoid checkpoints on the bridges.

Mae Sot remains a crucial refuge for many Myanmar citizens running from the military junta or seeking work in the town, most further afield, as the Golden Land's economy remains in the doldrums.

Nicholas Nugent reported from South and Southeast Asia for the BBC World Service. 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.



Young Myanmar citizens at a Thai checkpoint in Mae Sot. Photo: AFP

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The Myanmar junta has stepped up aerial and artillery attacks on positions in Rakhine captured by the Arakan Army. Photo: AFP

JUNTA HITS BEACH HOTELS AS ARAKAN ARMY INTENSIFIES RAKHINE ACTION

Myanmar junta forces in Rakhine State appear to be getting desperate as the Arakan Army steps up its attacks.

On July 14, the Bangladesh Coast Guard intercepted two wooden motor boats attempting to enter Bangladesh from Myanmar. The boats carried approximately 100 Myanmar junta troops and Border Guard Police (BGP) from Myanmar, who were retreating as clashes with the Arakan Army (AA) intensified in Maungdaw. The Dhaka Tribune reported this incident, which was corroborated by video footage showing both Myanmar Army soldiers and BGP personnel on board. The troops were reportedly turned back.

In a significant evacuation effort on the morning of July 14, the junta transported staff from the state bank of Thandwe along with two billion kyat to Yangon via a marine route. This operation included around 400 wounded soldiers and their family members. As the AA advanced towards Thandwe, the cash was initially relocated to the No. (55) Regiment. Following the fall

of the regiment to AA forces, the money was further moved to the Maung Shwele navy headquarters before being shipped out of Yangon.

On the same day, the junta launched artillery and airstrikes targeting hotels and villages along Ngapali Beach, specifically Lintha and Myapyin villages. Several hotels were reported to be on fire due to the bombardment. A local villager provided names of the affected hotels, underscoring the extent of the destruction.

July 15 saw significant advances by the AA. In northern part of the state, the AA captured the Kanyingyaung Special Economic Zone in Maungdaw. Despite resistance from approximately 200 junta troops and pro-junta Rohingya militias, the AA successfully took control of the area. Additionally, the AA seized the Thandwe prison, which had been occupied by junta troops in the southern part of the state. The majority of the junta forces were killed, with the survivors retreating to Zalun village by car. During the retreat, the



Increasing numbers of new military conscripts are being thrown into battlefield frontlines. Photo: AFP

junta conducted airstrikes on Thandwe hospital and civilian wards.

On the morning of July 15, combined junta troops and Rohingya militias entered a Hindu village. Initially, they interrogated villagers about the presence and movements of AA troops. When the villagers denied any AA presence, the junta's Rohingya militias shot several villagers, causing the rest to flee. Four villagers, including two children, were killed. Additionally, some villagers claim they witnessed a Hindu woman raped by soldiers from the column at the Aungbala school.

These developments highlight the escalating violence and the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, as the conflict between the Myanmar junta and the AA continues to intensify.

CONSCRIPTS THROWN INTO THE FRONTLINE

On July 14, two youths from Mawlamyinegyun in the Ayeyarwady region were arrested at their homes by junta troops. The arrests followed a report from the ward administrator, noting their absence from mandatory military service. A local source indicated that authorities have become increasingly strict regarding the conscription law, reflecting heightened enforcement measures. Reports indicate that approximately 900 conscripted soldiers from Batch 1 in the Ayeyarwady region have been sent to the frontlines in Rakhine, where junta troops are experiencing severe defeats. According to RFA Burmese News, the State Administration Council (SAC) began deploying the first batch of conscripted soldiers to conflict zones, including Rakhine, Northern Shan, Karen States, and the Sagaing region, starting in early July. These deployments followed the completion of their training on June 28.

A resident of Yangon also reported that friends from the first batch had been sent to the Northern Shan State frontline and returned with injuries. He noted that many conscripted soldiers had died and that those who survived did not receive their salaries. The conscripts

were initially told they would be stationed in their native or desired locations. However, upon completing their training, they were dispatched to intense battle zones despite lacking experience.

In terms of Rohingya conscripted soldiers, they have been sent to Ann city, where the junta's Western Command headquarters is located. Additionally, they have been deployed to Maungdaw, an area experiencing intensified offensives by the AA.

DESPITE OPERATION 1027 SECOND WAVE CEASEFIRE, CLASHES CONTINUE

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) declared a temporary ceasefire from July 15 to 18 in observance of the Chinese Communist Party Conference. This has since been extended until the end of July.

Despite this announcement, skirmishes between MNDAA and junta troops continued in the Lashio area. Locals reported hearing rifle and artillery fire and seeing junta jet fighters flying over Lashio. Prior to the ceasefire, the junta conducted an airstrike on Laukkai city, the MNDAA headquarters, resulting in one civilian death and at least ten injuries.

In Lashio, the MNDAA successfully captured the junta's No. 11 Military Training Camp and several other posts. On July 19, MNDAA forces entered Lashio, attacking the No. 41 Regiment. Reports from locals indicated that several buildings within the compound were set ablaze. Concurrently, skirmishes occurred around other regiments, including No. 507 and No. 68.

In Kyaukme, intensified clashes between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and junta forces prompted the junta to send reinforcements from Southern Shan State battalions. The fighting in the area has subsequently intensified.

In the Mandalay region, the TNLA and its allies have made significant advances. Having seized the western part of Mogok, they moved to the eastern part of the city, capturing four junta posts. Local media reported that the Mandalay People's Defense Force (PDF) seized Singu town on July 18, though the Mandalay PDF has not yet confirmed this. Junta airstrikes on Singu resulted in the destruction of over 100 houses and several civilian casualties. In Madaya township, the Mandalay PDF reported capturing over 30 junta posts as of July 18.

The second wave of Operation 1027 is ongoing, with significant military action continuing in Northern Shan State and the Mandalay region. The conflict shows no signs of abating, as various ethnic armed groups and the junta engage in fierce battles across multiple fronts.

MOST POPULAR VIDEOS

Here are the most popular Mizzima Burmese videos of the week:

China's Role in Burma's Conflict (Editorial Talk)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40JtKuakjsk>

Are martyr days being neglected?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBlxTT1dZXo>

Mysterious trip to China
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxlueWnVy7E>

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EDITORIAL TALK

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ရှားချိန်
မဇ္ဈိမသတင်းထောက်



TNLA fighters stand on guard in a town in northern Shan State. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S THREE BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE AGREES TO EXTEND CEASEFIRE WITH JUNTA IN SHAN STATE

An alliance of armed groups in Myanmar has agreed to extend a ceasefire with the junta in northern Shan state after "pressure" from China, a leader of one of the groups said on Saturday.

The ceasefire, which was extended to July 31, comes after clashes saw its fighters seize territory from the military along a strategic highway to China.

The area has been rocked by fighting since late last month, when the Three Brotherhood Alliance renewed an offensive against junta troops along the road to China's Yunnan province.

The alliance of ethnic minority armed groups -- made up of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) -- initially agreed to a four-day ceasefire from July 14-18.

A third member of the alliance, the Arakan Army, did not agree to the ceasefire.

"China put a lot of pressure on us to have a ceasefire immediately," the leader from the TNLA, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

"Therefore, we have to do it as we can't avoid it."

But the leader warned that if junta troops launched offensives on the alliance's troops or if they continued to bomb civilians during the ceasefire, they would "attack back".

Fighting broke out in Myanmar after the military's ouster of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in a coup in 2021.

The putsch sparked renewed fighting with ethnic minority armed groups, as well as with pro-democracy "People's Defence Forces".

The clashes in the Shan state since last month shredded a previous Beijing-brokered truce that in January halted an earlier push by the three groups.

The new agreement, however, does not cover the neighbouring Mandalay region, where members of the alliance and other opponents of the military have been battling junta troops in recent weeks.

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say it also maintains ties with armed ethnic groups in Myanmar that hold territory near its border.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to myriad ethnic armed groups who have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Some have given shelter and training to newer People's Defence Forces (PDFs) that have sprung up to battle the military after the coup in 2021.

AFP was unable to reach a junta spokesman for comment.

AFP



US Ambassador Robert Wood.
Photo: AFP

U.S. MISSION TO U.N. CONCERNED ABOUT MYANMAR SITUATION

Ambassador Robert Wood of the United States Mission to the United Nations delivered a joint press statement on the humanitarian situation in Myanmar on 15 July 2024.

Below is the statement in full:

We are deeply concerned by the escalation of violence and conflict and credible reports of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law across Myanmar that are deepening the humanitarian crisis. Recent reports indicate the Myanmar regime has taken deliberate steps in Rakhine State to use internally displaced persons (IDP), many of whom are Rohingya, as human shields amid the conflict. We are particularly concerned by reports indicating the regime has placed landmines around IDP camps and appears to have taken steps to use these camps as military bases. There are also credible reports of forced recruitment of persons, including children, belonging to ethnic minorities by the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular and other parties, which risk further fueling inter-communal tensions and aggravating the humanitarian situation.

These concerning developments follow a range of reports of other violations and abuses, particularly by the Myanmar Armed Forces, including indiscriminate aerial bombardments of civilians and civilian objects, burning of civilian homes, attacks on humanitarian workers and facilities, and restrictions on humanitarian access. These practices are unacceptable.

Since the regime's violent military coup in February 2021 and attack on the Myanmar population, the number of people in humanitarian need has risen from 1 million to 18.6 million. More than 2.9 million have been newly displaced, including 66,000 people who have sought protection in neighbouring countries, adding to the more than 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled before the coup. We highlight the importance of all countries respecting the principle of nonrefoulement. We reiterate our commitment to support safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation when conditions allow. We also reiterate the call for full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need, including women, children, and members of ethnic and other minority populations.

We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular and all parties concerned in Myanmar to de-escalate violence, respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to protect civilians. We recall our demands for the full implementation of UNSC resolution 2669 (2022). We reiterate our full support for ASEAN's central role and for the appointment of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Julie Bishop. We reiterate calls to engage in constructive and inclusive dialogue to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Myanmar.



Photo: Samuel Schroth

ROHINGYA GAP ACT PROPOSED TO U.S. CONGRESS

The Rohingya GAP Act was proposed to the U.S. Congress by U.S. Representatives Gregory Meeks (D-NY) and Michael McCaul (R-TX)

It seeks to provide protection, support, and humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees and internally displaced people. It also promotes accountability and a path out of genocide and crimes against humanity for the Rohingya.

Below is a Factsheet on the Rohingya GAP Act issued by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 11 July 2024:

Lead Sponsor: Rep. Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Republican Co-lead: Rep. Michael McCaul, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Background: Following the U.S. Government's determination of genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya in March 2022, international funding for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has decreased despite growing needs. U.S. support has been limited to humanitarian funding and the opening of a pathway to resettlement for a small number of Rohingya. This support lacks a comprehensive approach to support ethnic Rohingya in overcoming genocide, crimes against humanity, and decades of systemic persecution, marginalization, and military impunity. In prevent the situation from growing more protracted, the Rohingya crisis and the broader

Burma crisis must be addressed simultaneously, not in sequence. H.R. 8936, the bipartisan Rohingya GAP Act, seeks to accomplish just this by establishing a holistic U.S. policy that will support the Rohingya community and create a pathway out of genocide.

Bill Highlights: Authorizes the designation of a Special Coordinator for Rohingya Atrocities Prevention and Response at the State Department to coordinate Rohingya policy;

- Calls for a holistic U.S.

strategy to support Rohingya that includes protection efforts; engagement with the Rohingya community and stakeholders to facilitate safe, voluntary and sustainable repatriation to Burma; developing a comprehensive transitional justice strategy; humanitarian assistance, including basic needs and access to livelihoods; programs to prevent and respond to gender based violence and trafficking; and support for Rohingya civil society organizations.

- Calls on USAID and the Department of State to ensure that Rohingya refugees in camps in Bangladesh receive a ration sufficient to meet the humanitarian minimum standards for food and nutrition.

- Authorizes higher education scholarships for Rohingya refugees through 2030;

- Establishes a new Conflict Observatory for Burma to monitor and report on the ongoing violence in Burma; and

- Authorizes \$10 million per year for 5 years for the Department of State to support atrocity crime investigations, documentation, and casework, transitional justice and accountability mechanisms, witness protection measures, and technical support related to Rohingya.

Outside Support: Several Rohingya and human rights organizations support H.R. 8936.

NINE WORKERS MISSING PRESUMED DEAD AFTER MANDALAY DAM COLLAPSE

Nine workers were missing and assumed drowned after a dam broke at the Amarapura Urban Project construction site in Amarapura Township, Mandalay Region at about 8:00 am on 14 July 2024.

The dam protected the construction site which was on an Ayeyarwady River alluvial plain near YatKanTaw Village.

None of the missing workers had been found by 15 July when a member of a rescue team said: "We have been searching for the missing workers since 14 July but have not found anyone yet. We are focusing on saving lives. When the dam broke waves of water apparently swept the workers away. We are still looking for them."

Fortunately, the escaped water was contained within the construction site and nowhere else was affected, according to the Mandalay Region Fire Department.

A firefighter involved in the search said: "The incident did not occur at the main dam protecting the city's ring road. To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be noted that the dam collapse was of a dam within the construction site. As the water rapidly rose, the dam's structure weakened and broke, causing the water to sweep away the workers."

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Bangladesh authorities turn back boats carrying fleeing Myanmar soldiers. Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH TURNS BACK FLEEING MYANMAR SOLDIERS AT BORDER

Bangladesh stopped dozens of Myanmar security personnel from crossing into its territory to flee advancing rebel forces, a local government official based near their river border said Tuesday last week.

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

Hundreds of Myanmar troops have taken refuge in India and Bangladesh since then, usually staying for days or weeks before being repatriated on junta-organised flights.

But on Sunday at least 66 members of Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP) were sent back immediately while trying to cross the Naf river into Bangladesh.

"The BGP members wanted to enter Teknaf on two boats. The coast guard prevented their entry," Mujibur Rahman, a councillor of Bangladesh's southeastern border town of Teknaf,

There was no immediate comment from either Bangladesh's coast guard or Myanmar junta representatives.

A Teknaf-based journalist who took photographs of the boats said the vessels came close to a pier in the

town but were pushed back towards Myanmar later in the night.

"Some of them were not wearing any shirts," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Months of fierce fighting in Myanmar have seen steady advances by the AA in the western state of Rakhine, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere in the country.

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders last month announced it was halting all activities near the state's border with Bangladesh due to an "extreme escalation of conflict" in the area.

Bangladesh has accepted more than 850 fleeing Myanmar soldiers this year, a senior government official told AFP on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

"We have already handed over 752 of them to Myanmar," he said, adding around 100 border police and troops were waiting to be repatriated.

Bangladesh is home to around one million Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled Rakhine in 2017 after a military crackdown now the subject of a genocide investigation at a UN court.

AFP



နေပြည်တော်(ဧလာ)လေတပ်စခန်းနှင့်အဝန်းဝိုင်းပတ်ဝန်းကျင် (၅) မိုင်အား ပုံဖော်ထားမှုအား ကောင်းကင်မှမြင်ရပုံ

MYANMAR RESISTANCE LAUNCHES ROCKET ATTACK ON NAYPYIDAW AIRPORT

Opponents of Myanmar’s junta launched a rocket attack on an airport in the capital but caused no casualties, security sources told AFP on Wednesday last week, after a rare breach of the military’s seat of power.

Two rockets had targeted Naypyidaw Airport on Tuesday morning 16 July, a security source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Two other security sources said one rocket had been launched at the airport.

All three sources said the rockets had caused no casualties or major damage.

AFP was unable to reach a junta spokesman for comment.

Set amid arid scrubland in the centre of the country, the sprawling military-built city of Naypyidaw is home to the junta’s top brass and civil servants.

With a heavy security presence in the surrounding area, the city has seen relative calm as fighting between the military and its opponents ravages swathes of the country.

In April PDF groups launched more than a dozen drones at targets in Naypyidaw, temporarily closing the airport.

The junta said the attack caused no major damage.

Outgunned and outnumbered, opponents of the junta have increasingly taken drones into their arsenal, with devastating effect.

Many groups operate commercial drones adapted to carry bombs that can be dropped on military positions.

AFP



Captured weapons. Photo: MDY-PDF

MANDALAY PDF CAPTURES TWO JUNTA CAMPS IN MADAYA TOWNSHIP

Mandalay People's Defence force (MDY-PDF) announced that on 16 July 2024 it captured two junta camps in Madaya Township, Mandalay Region, at the Alpha Cement Factory and in Taung Tangnga.

As they retreated the junta soldiers set fire to the Alpha Cement Factory.

According to MDY-PDF this means that it now controls nearly 30 junta camps in Madaya Township.

MDY-PDF photographs show about 20 dead junta soldiers but casualty numbers are currently unknown.

MDY-PDF said that it captured several junta soldiers alive and seized weapons and ammunition. A MDY-PDF member said that the group was now concentrating on taking the junta's Kyauktada Camp in Madaya Township.

MDY-PDF has been conducting operations in Singu and Madaya townships as part of the second phase of Operation 1027.

The junta has not issued any statements regarding the recent fighting near Mandalay, nor had it responded to a four-day ceasefire proposal by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) as of the morning of 17 July.



New recruits. Photo: Supplied

JUNTA AFFILIATED MILITIAS CHARGE MONTHLY FEE TO EXEMPT PEOPLE FROM CONSCRIPTION

Junta-affiliated militias in Tachilek Township, Shan State, have told people that if they pay them fees they will be exempted from conscription into the military.

The militias have been collecting monthly fees from civilians to exempt them from being conscripted into the military, in Tachilek Township, Shan State.

According to reports from Tachilek, which borders Thailand, the militias have been collecting the fees since the second week of July.

Residents in Tachilek Township, particularly in the Golden Triangle area, have been asked to pay between 500 and 2,000 Thai Baht per household each month. The militias claim they will ensure those who pay are not conscripted into the military.

A local who paid a fee on 15 July said to Mizzima that the fees had to be paid at their Ward Administration Office and that the amount to be paid varied from household to household.

They said: "I think they are collecting the monthly fee. The money, which varies from 500 to 2,000 baht each household, is charged at random. They said they would make the necessary arrangements to guarantee the locals' exemption from military service, but the locals must pay a monthly charge for that."

Another resident said: "On 14 July, the ward administrators did not accompany the militias when they came to collect the fees but directed locals to visit Ward Administration Offices to make the payments."

Efforts to obtain a response from the junta were unsuccessful.

The junta is actively conscripting civilians into the army after enacting the Conscription Law in February 2024.

ESSENTIAL DRUGS TO BE SOLD TO PUBLIC AT TRADE PRICES

Due to the increased cost of medication the junta's Ministry of Commerce announced that the public could go to the Pharma fair in Yangon and buy directly from pharmaceutical companies at wholesale prices.

The pharmaceutical companies, led by the Myanmar Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Manufacturer Association (MPMDMA), will sell direct to the public under the guidance of the Ministry of Commerce.

An MPMDMA spokesperson said that the medicines being sold at the Pharma Fair would include essential drugs for chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiac diseases and also the over-the-counter household drugs.

The Fair will be held at the Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization's office located on the corner of Merchant Road and 30th Street in Yangon. It will start on 17 July 2024 and will remain open until further notice.

Medicines will be sold direct to the public between the hours of 9:00 am to 4:00 pm from Monday to Saturday, excluding public holidays.

The prices of many essential drugs such as pain killers, gastric medication and muscle pain ointments have risen three-fold since the coup. The prices for medicines to treat chronic diseases such as cardiac disease, hypertension and diabetes are also rising steeply.

Pharmaceutical companies have said that the steep rise in pharmaceutical prices is because importing pharmaceuticals has become more expensive due to the junta's tight controls on foreign currency exchange and medicine imports.

A Pharmacy shop owner said their prices had increased by three to five times more than before because conflict at borders and along trade routes from the border had caused disruptions leading to higher transport costs, delays and non deliveries.

Last year junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said that Burma Pharmaceutical Industry (BPI), Myanmar's biggest pharmaceutical manufacturer could not produce enough medicine to supply the country and the state was having to spend a lot of foreign currency to import medicines. He urged the relevant ministries to instead import the raw materials needed to produce the medicines and then manufacture those medicines inside Myanmar.

Currently in Myanmar, over 80 per cent of medication is imported and the remaining 20 per cent is domestically produced.



Photo: Dominic Kurniawan

JUNTA-SUPPORTING TELEGRAM CHANNELS SAY CHINA IS INVOLVED IN PROXY WAR IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Myanmar junta supporting Telegram channels have been posting that the second phase of the 1027 offensive in northern Shan State is a proxy war and not a civil war.

A proxy war is where a nation state supports a non-state actor involved in conflict, usually with another nation state.

In what seemed to be a coordinated action, multiple junta supporting channels put up posts saying that China is responsible for the second phase of the 1027 offensive which has now reached Lashio, home to the junta's Northeastern Command Military Headquarters.

On 16 July, the the junta-aligned Ye' Ba Nyein Telegram channel claimed that China was behind the attack on Lashio. Other junta-aligned Telegram channels, including Mai Wei, Sergeant Po Si, Ko Thet, and Thazin Oo, echoed this sentiment.

They alleged that China is supporting the Three Brotherhood Alliance of ethnic armed organisations involved in the 1027 offensive in northern Shan State because it is upset that the Myanmar junta refused to re-open a border gate under terms agreed by China.

Dr. Hla Kyaw Zaw, a China-based analyst of China-

Myanmar relations, argued that the junta is spreading this anti-China propaganda to divert criticism and animosity aimed at it due to its battlefield losses.

He said: "The Military Council lobbyists now criticize China because it [The Military Council] has lost many battles. The MNDAA [the Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army] is not a creation of China; it originated from the Communist Party of Burma. Weapons are not provided by China; they are simply more accessible."

He added that China's primary concern is to prevent the conflict from spreading over into Chinese territory.

When the first phase of Operation 1027 began in October 2023, the junta's spokesperson described it as an act of aggression involving China, prompting widespread anti-China protests among junta supporters.

In early January 2024, a temporary ceasefire for northern Shan State, known as the Haigeng Agreement, was mediated by China. However, this was broken on 25 June 2024, which led to the second phase of the 1027 offensive.

Since the ceasefire broke down there has been intense fighting in the northern Shan townships of Nawngkhio, Kyaukme, Mogok, Madaya and Lashio. Within a month of the offensive recommencing junta troops had to abandon several of their camps, including in Nawngkhio Town.

National Unity Government (NUG) led people's defence forces (PDFs) are also attacking junta military camps in Mandalay Region's Madaya and Singu townships.

U Maung Maung Swe, the Deputy Secretary of the NUG's Ministry of Defense said: "The common goal of the ethnic alliances and our National Unity Government is clear: we will accept any help and work together to defeat the military dictatorship. The Military Council's propaganda, through their lobbyists, reflects their loss of trust."

The MNDAA, a member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, announced a four-day unilateral ceasefire at China's request, from 14 to 18 July whilst the third plenary session of the ruling China Communist Party is taking place in Beijing.

MANY MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICERS TRANSFERRING TO CIVIL SERVICE

There has been a significant increase in junta military officers being appointed to jobs in civilian ministries with about 330 moving into civil service jobs in the last year.

Since the coup, there has been a notable increase in transfers from the military to civilian positions across almost all civil service departments, including the Union Civil Service Board, and junta-controlled entities like the Central Bank, and the Myanmar Economic Corporation.

The Myanmar Gazette reported that over 280 military officers moved into civil service posts between January and December 2023, with an additional 50 transfers from January 2024 to May 2024. These officers ranged in rank from lieutenant to colonel. It included retired majors, Air Force colonels, and Navy lieutenant colonels.

They took jobs normally taken by civilians in ministries that oversee the economy, health, transport and communication, amongst others. They have also taken union-level administrative jobs and positions.

At least 80 of those junta military officers transferred to departments under the Ministry of Home Affairs from January 2023 to May 2024. Their new jobs included roles within the police force, the Corrections Department, and the General Administration Department, according to the Myanmar Gazette.

Observers and political analysts view this influx as a strategic move by the military junta to maintain control because they distrust civilian governance.

Captain Kaung Thu Win, a member of the Civil Disobedience Movement said that under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government there were far fewer soldiers moving into the civil service but since the junta had come to power far more have moved into the civil service.

He said: "These former military officers get official titles when they transfer and often come with a hierarchical mindset that can clash with civilian protocols."



Adelina Kamal

ASEAN'S INCONVENIENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

INSIGHT MYANMAR

"I have always been passionate about ASEAN. People always associated me with ASEAN," says Adelina Kamal. "So they were kind of shocked when they found out not long after I left, I wrote an article and it got published by the Jakarta Post. I was really critical about ASEAN's approach to the Myanmar crisis."

Affiliated with ASEAN for 27 years, Adelina co-drafted its agreement on disaster management and emergency response (AADMER). This document played a pivotal role for ASEAN in establishing their AHA Centre AHA Centre in 2011. Adelina was ultimately

appointed its executive director, a position for which she had to be personally approved by all 10 ASEAN member states.

After nearly three decades of service, Adelina decided the time was right to take a break, and she left the AHA center and ASEAN in August of 2021. Despite her considerable contributions, she felt that ASEAN had given her as much as she has given ASEAN: "Basically, I grew up together with ASEAN, and I have become the person I am right now partly because of ASEAN. ASEAN has shaped me as an individual." Yet, at the same time, as the introductory quote shows, she harbored a few misgivings about some of ASEAN's policies, in particular towards Myanmar, though she did not share them publicly.

ADDRESSING THE MYANMAR CRISIS

She initially planned to take some well-earned rest and move on from the politics and stress of her ASEAN work. However, she thought about the ongoing crisis in Myanmar and what role she could play as an informed and now independent ally in raising awareness and driving change within the ASEAN infrastructure. She thought, "What should I do? I'm given this platform and I'm now independent. I have my own thoughts. What should I do? Right?"

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Indonesia asked her to write an article on ASEAN's approach to the Myanmar crisis. This would tap into her feelings about this subject, and largely be critical, and she agonized over the decision. But she took strength from her Muslim faith, and encouragement from her trusted friends and colleagues. "I really had had to muster my courage," Adelina admits. "I had a conversation with one of my good friends. I consider her as a mentor, and she's also humanitarian ... I always look up to her and I asked her, 'What should I do?! I'm given this platform, and I'm now independent. I have my own thoughts. What should I do?!' She didn't lecture me. I didn't also give her details. But she just said, 'Adelina, only fear Allah. Only fear God.'" And so Adelina made a fateful decision: she not only wrote the article for CSIS, but also penned an additional op-ed in the Jakarta Post, criticizing ASEAN's humanitarian response to the devolving situation in Myanmar.

SHOCK RESPONSE

It was like kicking a hornets' nest! "Basically, I questioned the issue of the AHA center being tasked to facilitate assistance to the crisis-affected people," she says. "I questioned the issue of trust of the people, and then I really grilled whether ASEAN has to work with an outfit that killed their own people! So these were actually the questions and the dilemmas that I had during my last year with ASEAN."

While many of her former colleagues called her out for turning her back on ASEAN, Adelina insists that her only intention is to use her voice to improve and strengthen the regional bloc. "I'm not actually 'exposing the dirt' of ASEAN! I do it because I love ASEAN, and I think that ASEAN can be better. But since I'm no longer inside the system, I continue to contribute to ASEAN, by becoming that 'loving critic and critical lover,'" she says. "To be a loving critic and a critical lover of ASEAN is important, because otherwise ASEAN will languish, if our lovers are uncritical and our critics are unloving."

CRITICAL LOVER

Adelina's commitment to being a "loving critic and critical lover" is inspired by Professor Tommy Koh his 2019 article in the Straits Times about how the next Prime Minister could help improve Singapore after its elections that year. In this spirit, Adelina to put pressure on the ASEAN to take serious action on Myanmar, in large part by changing its attitude towards humanitarian aid. On this latter point, Adelina notes that "when the when the coup happened in February 2021, and when the decision [was made] to assign the [AHA] center to facilitate humanitarian assistance as part of the Five Point Consensus, I was not consulted. The Governing Board was also not consulted," she says. "We have our own standard operating procedure and our own Disaster Management Agreement, and political crisis, war, conflict, like what's happening in Myanmar: genocide, crimes against humanity, you name it; these are not under the ASEAN agreement on disaster management and emergency response. These are not under the agreement on the establishment of our center. These are not under our standard operating procedure!"

Yet due to the complexity of the situation, Adelina understands why the AHA Centre is a politically appealing option for the ASEAN leadership. As she explains, "When it comes to the Myanmar crisis, any negotiation and any political debate, it's always difficult, right? It's dynamic, you have to basically negotiate on the spot, and things are moving [fast]! Sometimes you just have to put it on the table. Humanitarian assistance, often in political crises or political debate, like what's happening in Myanmar, is so often used as the bargaining chip, as a tool, because it's the most acceptable, non-contentious [item]."

When that happens, the consequences can be disastrous. While the AHA Centre was founded with the best of intentions with the lessons of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 in mind—that structured and coordinated efforts are essential for humanitarian aid to be most impactful—Adelina has also seen the unfortunate intersection of humanitarianism and political interest enacted in ASEAN's policies. Simply put, ASEAN has relied on the AHA Centre and the blueprint of disaster management, even in conflict situations. Adelina's point is that in the case of Myanmar, that approach is like trying to force a square peg into a round hole, and doing more harm than good. She explains that humanitarian operations run out of AHA were designed based on the assumption that domestic bodies, including the respective government in question, were determined to oversee relief efforts to the best of their abilities, in good faith, and in line with the humanitarian mission's objectives. But in Myanmar, the leading military authority is unwilling or unable to carry out missions in key areas of their country. Although this is not an entirely new issue for the AHA Centre, the problem that post-coup Myanmar represents is front and center like never before. So Adelina stresses the need for ASEAN to recognize this problem and set clear guidelines and establish bodies to deal with such crises.

"You cannot expect a rambutan tree to produce a durian fruit, meaning that you cannot use a disaster management agreement to provide humanitarian assistance for a conflict setting like the Myanmar crisis," she says. "In a situation like the Rohingya [genocide] or the coup, the so-called 'government' is unwilling to help their own people! So that has to be differentiated."

Second, what is needed in ASEAN is not to over-rely on the disaster management agreement and [the AHA Centre].”

CODE OF CONDUCT

What Adelina emphasizes instead is the need for ASEAN leaders to establish a principle or code of conduct regarding its humanitarian missions, because for the time being, the AHA Centre can't act independently of the political context ... and so the result is a lackluster and mismanaged response to urgent needs on the ground.

She notes that one key roadblock comes from ASEAN members who don't understand the fundamental complexities of humanitarian operations in conflict zones. In the case of Myanmar, it means they are hoping to squeeze easy solutions out of politically neutral bodies such as the AHA Centre. Otherwise, they would have to confront the deeper realities of the 2021 coup, which would require a commitment to bold decisions. “Some people within the member states actually asked me, ‘Adelina, why can't you just move in and just drop the boxes!?’ No! Cannot! ... Is the objective of our mission is just to drop boxes at the airport? Easy! ... When I was still with the center, the AHA Centre already responded to catastrophic disasters—not only one, right, but more than thirty!” she explains. “So we had that experience of facilitating



Protestors in Australia calling on ASEAN to take action against the Myanmar junta. Photo: AFP

ASEAN's response, and not only that, facilitating 'One ASEAN, One Response.' So I think we are the 'good news' in ASEAN, but the political leaders cannot use this good news, right?"

Essentially, Adelina is getting at the fact that the AHA Centre's successful track record in disaster response represents a significant achievement for ASEAN, demonstrating the organization's ability to bring regional solidarity into action. However, she laments that ASEAN political leaders are unable to leverage this success in addressing the Myanmar crisis. They ignore the complexities and political sensitivities of the coup and just try to apply the same approach they'd used in previous natural disaster scenarios. But in such a complex situation, where the supposed humanitarian aid partner is the one that has caused (and continues to cause) the harm in the first place, expecting positive results of any kind is simply unrealistic.

COUP WAS ILLEGITIMATE

Adelina believes that ASEAN must begin by stating unequivocally that the 2021 coup was illegitimate, and that the military regime is an illegitimate regime guilty of crimes against its people. Because if ASEAN continues to avoid calling out the military as a bad actor, the very principles on which the AHA Centre was founded become an impediment to providing humanitarian aid to those affected. In particular, Adelina points to the AHA Centre's agreement on disaster management and emergency response, which stipulates that the affected country must not only consent to the assistance but also direct and control how it is provided. So calls by ASEAN members for the AHA Centre to engage in Myanmar may make for good political messaging, but the unfortunate and brutal reality is that their supposed Myanmar counterpart is not a good faith partner.

"You cannot just send your troops, your tools on the ground, without telling them what we want to achieve out of this. Are we just dropping boxes? Again, easy! But if we really want to elevate the suffering of the people, and if we really want to make our assistance effective, not just performative, but effective, then we have to question the things that I question: whether it is the right focal point? Are we allowing our assistance

to be manipulated by the ones who bombed and who killed their own people? Can we allow the assistance to be directed [by the military]?" To Adelina, this also includes deciding who receives the aid and how it should be distributed. She illustrates this point by saying that one can't just enter a country during a disaster with a tourist visa and start offering help independently; proper consent and coordination with the government are required. "You have to have the consent," she states. "But if the so-called 'government' [in Myanmar]—which is not a government, right; it is illegal and illegitimate, and is killing their own people—why should we actually rely on them for their consent?! So the issue of consent is very critical, right? And then the disaster management agreement cannot be used. It's an abuse of the humanitarian system. Therefore, I was so angry that the AHA Center was used by our political leaders."

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE?

Adelina passionately points out that while ASEAN consults the military on humanitarian projects, the actual voices of the Burmese people have been largely left out of the conversation. "The Myanmar people say, 'We cannot trust the military because they want to kill us. We want to get assistance from those who we trust; they're most effective.' Then that brought me to the other analysis, if you really want to have our humanitarian assistance effective, then try to find those who can do the work better, and those who can be trusted," she says. "It is a human right for those affected by the crisis to get assistance. Now, should we actually [have to] get approval or consent from the one who killed people?! I mean it just doesn't make sense, for God's sake! So that was the dilemma that I had."

For humanitarian missions to achieve their stated goals, they must be above politics. States and governments are not the arbiters of consent or morality, those derive directly from the people. Adelina points to the very foundational principles of ASEAN: "The ASEAN charter starts with 'We the People of ASEAN.' So, ASEAN needs to transform itself from being an elite, regional grouping dominated by states to a truly people-centered ASEAN, whereby the people [have] the ultimate power. So, shift to a people-centered

organization that places people as the ultimate sovereign of that country of the organization, because that's what the ASEAN charter is all about. But right now, it's dominated by states, and many of them are not aware that their power is given by the people."

This gets at the core of the dilemma: a people-centered government, indeed even the notion of democracy, is a contentious point within ASEAN. Many of the member states are either dictatorships, or democracies in name only. Even Indonesia, one of the world's biggest democracies and often considered "the de-facto leader of ASEAN," has seen recent cracks in the foundations of its democracy. An Indonesian herself, Adelina stresses the role that her country must take within ASEAN to push the bloc collectively toward a more democratic future. "If Indonesia engages and is pushing strongly for ASEAN to thrive, then ASEAN would thrive," she says simply. "But if Indonesia is regressing in its democracy path, then ASEAN is going to wither. Generally, what's happening in Indonesia is showing that our democracy is not progressing, it is regressing. So I think we have come to the dark age, both for Indonesia as well as for ASEAN, because the largest democracy in ASEAN is experiencing regress."

ASEAN'S PATH FORWARD?

Finally, Adelina arrives at the crucial question: what can ASEAN realistically do regarding Myanmar? The Five Point Consensus has largely been seen as a failure, and the junta has repeatedly made a mockery of the ASEAN institution; for example, it has refused to engage in meaningful discussions with ASEAN envoys, and continues to wreak violence on its own people. Adelina is encouraged by the fact that ASEAN has moved to exclude the SAC from its meetings and summits, while simultaneously opening both discreet and public channels with the NUG; at the same time, she emphasizes the need for ASEAN to distance itself from more traditionally "Western" approaches to the conflict, such as sanctions. This partially because ASEAN has no punitive sanction mechanism and partially because ASEAN as an organization is pointedly non-colonial; indeed, ASEAN's non-interference policy is in many ways a deliberate rejection of more traditionally Western approaches. However, the concept of non-interference

is murkily defined for ASEAN nations, basically meaning "hands off," regardless of the circumstances. Even if some change were made to the meaning of non-interference for ASEAN states to better address the Myanmar situation, any such change would apply to all ASEAN member states ... which makes the prospect politically unpalatable for many, a fact that the Myanmar military uses to its advantage. Adelina explains, "Some ASEAN countries also have skeletons in their closets. The Myanmar junta also knows this and the way non-interference is practiced in ASEAN right now is the traditional way of defining non-interference. What we can do is 'dynamic interference': you intervene when you have to." Adding to this, Adelina implores the West to become more actively involved in the Myanmar crisis while also letting ASEAN take the lead. Ideally, she believes the entire international community, ASEAN included, should work together to leverage every option to find a solution to the crisis.

And the Myanmar crisis is more than just a domestic issue. Despite the many formidable challenges inherent in effecting institutional change, ASEAN must either adapt proactively and creatively to the current crisis and push decisively for a resolution, or risk falling into irrelevance and powerlessness. "It is the existential crisis of ASEAN!" she says in closing. "It is not only a Myanmar crisis, but ASEAN is in crisis too. I hope that ASEAN will exist in decades to come because really, the relevance of ASEAN is being questioned here. With what's happening on the ground [in Myanmar], and with the nature of the Spring Revolution, which is really teaching us a lot of things; for this older generation, it is really the time for us and for ASEAN to do so; if we want to make ASEAN matter to the people."

Listen to the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/cf49bade-48e3-4c5c-87e6-4080d790725f>



Delegates at the recent meeting.
Photo: EU/ASEAN

EU'S GLOBAL GATEWAY INITIATIVE UNLOCKS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN ASEAN

In a landmark discussion hosted by the Ambassador of the European Union (EU), Sujiro Seam, the EU, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and leading scholars from both regions came together to enhance cooperation in education and research, according to a recent press release.

The Partners' Dialogue focused on the transformative impact of the Global Gateway strategy in ASEAN, emphasising innovation, research collaboration, sustainable development, and the exchange of student and academics between Europe and Southeast Asia.

Launched in 2021, the Global Gateway strategy aims to tackle the most pressing global challenges, from fighting climate change to improving health systems and boosting the competitiveness and security of global supply chains. Between 2021 and 2027, the EU and its Member States, together as Team Europe, committed to mobilise at least €10 billion of investments for sustainable and high-quality projects in the ASEAN region, taking into account the needs of partner countries and ensuring lasting benefits for local communities.

"People-to-people connectivity and investment in education and research are key components of the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership," Sujiro Seam, EU Ambassador to ASEAN, said. "Today in our Partners' Dialogue, we celebrated the EU-ASEAN cooperation on education and research and explored avenues to further develop this cooperation in the context of the EU Global Gateway Strategy, working with partners for the betterment of our regions and their people," he added.

The EU-funded Erasmus Programme and Horizon Europe are just two examples of successful collaboration in the field of higher education and research. Students, scholars, and universities in ASEAN benefited from the Erasmus programme through student and scholar exchanges, postgraduate scholarships, and support for university partnerships. In the field of research, Horizon Europe is the world's biggest publicly funded multilateral research and innovation programme. It offers researchers and innovators outside Europe the opportunity to participate in EU-funded collaborative research and innovation actions. It aims to tackle global challenges, including building green, digital, healthy and resilient societies.

The European Union (EU) is the economic and political union of 27 Member States. Together, the EU has built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development while maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedom. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the goals of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. The EU is the world's largest trading bloc, and the world's largest source and destination of foreign direct investment. Collectively, the EU and its Member States are the largest donors of Official Development Assistance (ODA), providing more than half of ODA globally.

The 27 Member States of the EU (in protocol order) are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.



Photo: AFP

CHINA'S GLOBAL SOUTH TRADE DRIVE HITS ROAD BLOCK IN INDONESIA

SUN LEE

Indonesia's plan to impose a 100-200% tariff on China's labour-intensive goods disrupts Beijing's strategy to diversify trade with the Global South. This move challenges China's shift from the increasingly closed Western markets. Concurrently, Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, is drafting regulations for anti-dumping duties and safeguard measures on cheap Chinese products, including textiles, footwear, electronics, ceramics, and bags. This development signifies a significant shift in trade dynamics.

On June 27, Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani-Indrawati announced a collaboration with the trade and industry ministers to draft regulations for anti-dumping duties and safeguard measures on Chinese goods. These steps, as Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan stated on June 28, aim to cushion Indonesia from the China-US trade war repercussions. The implementation of these China-specific tariffs will commence upon the issuance of the relevant regulation.

Echoing the US, Indonesia may impose tariffs on imported ceramics and clothes to bolster its small manufacturers, coinciding with China's Global South

strategy. This strategy relies on emerging markets in Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America to absorb Chinese goods facing US trade barriers amidst the Sino-US trade war. Budi Santoso, Director-General of Foreign Trade, announced on Monday that local textile associations have sought government intervention due to the influx of cheap products affecting their businesses. The Indonesian Trade Safeguards Committee is investigating the issue.

Ristadi, the Confederation of Indonesian Workers' Unions (KSPN) President, revealed last month that an influx of imported goods led to local textile factories' closure, resulting in at least 13,800 layoffs this year, with potential figures reaching up to 50,000. He attributed the closures to a regulatory change earlier this year, easing import restrictions on ready-made clothing.

Simultaneously, He Wenping, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of West-Asian and African Studies (IWAAS), criticized Indonesia in a recent article. He argued it was unfair for Indonesia to alter its import regulations to import more goods while criticizing China's alleged "overcapacity".

She emphasized that China won't tolerate any actions that defame its products under the guise of "overcapacity". She suggested that if Indonesia seeks China's assistance in enhancing its tourism sector, it should reconsider its trade policy. As per Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency, the bilateral trade between the Southeast Asian nation and China dropped by 14.7% to \$127.1 billion in 2023, down from \$149.1 billion in 2022. Concurrently, China's exports to Indonesia decreased by 12.8% to \$62.2 billion, and its imports from Indonesia fell by 16.5% to \$64.9 billion.

Last year, Indonesia's trade surplus with China shrank to \$2.7 billion, down from \$6.4 billion in 2022. Indonesia's exports to China encompass raw materials like awaruite, lignite, coal, and palm oil. Conversely, China's exports to Indonesia consist of items such as broadcasting equipment, telephones, computers, construction trucks, iron bars, and electrical appliances. In the previous year, China exported toys, footwear, textile products, and ceramic products worth \$500 million, \$1 billion, \$2.5 billion, and \$430 million respectively to Indonesia, accounting for about 7% of China's total exports to Indonesia.

Didi Sumedi, the Director General for National Export Development at Indonesia's Ministry of Trade, stated in early 2024 that Indonesia is targeting to elevate its exports to China to approximately \$65-70 billion this year. However, a Sichuan-based columnist, Xiaoying, questioned the rationale behind Indonesia's decision to impose a 200% tariff on Chinese goods in a recent article, asking if the new tariffs could genuinely address Indonesia's root issues.

The anonymous author contended that the strain on Indonesian businesses is not due to Chinese goods, but the evolving global trade landscape. As China sustains its competitive edge through industrial upgrades, Indonesia should also identify its unique strengths, the author suggested. Xiaoying cautioned in their writing, "Indiscriminately levying tariffs on China could undermine the Sino-Indonesian relationship's foundation and exacerbate Indonesian trade issues." They expressed optimism that Indonesia wouldn't sever ties with China, given the extensive cooperation potential between the two nations.

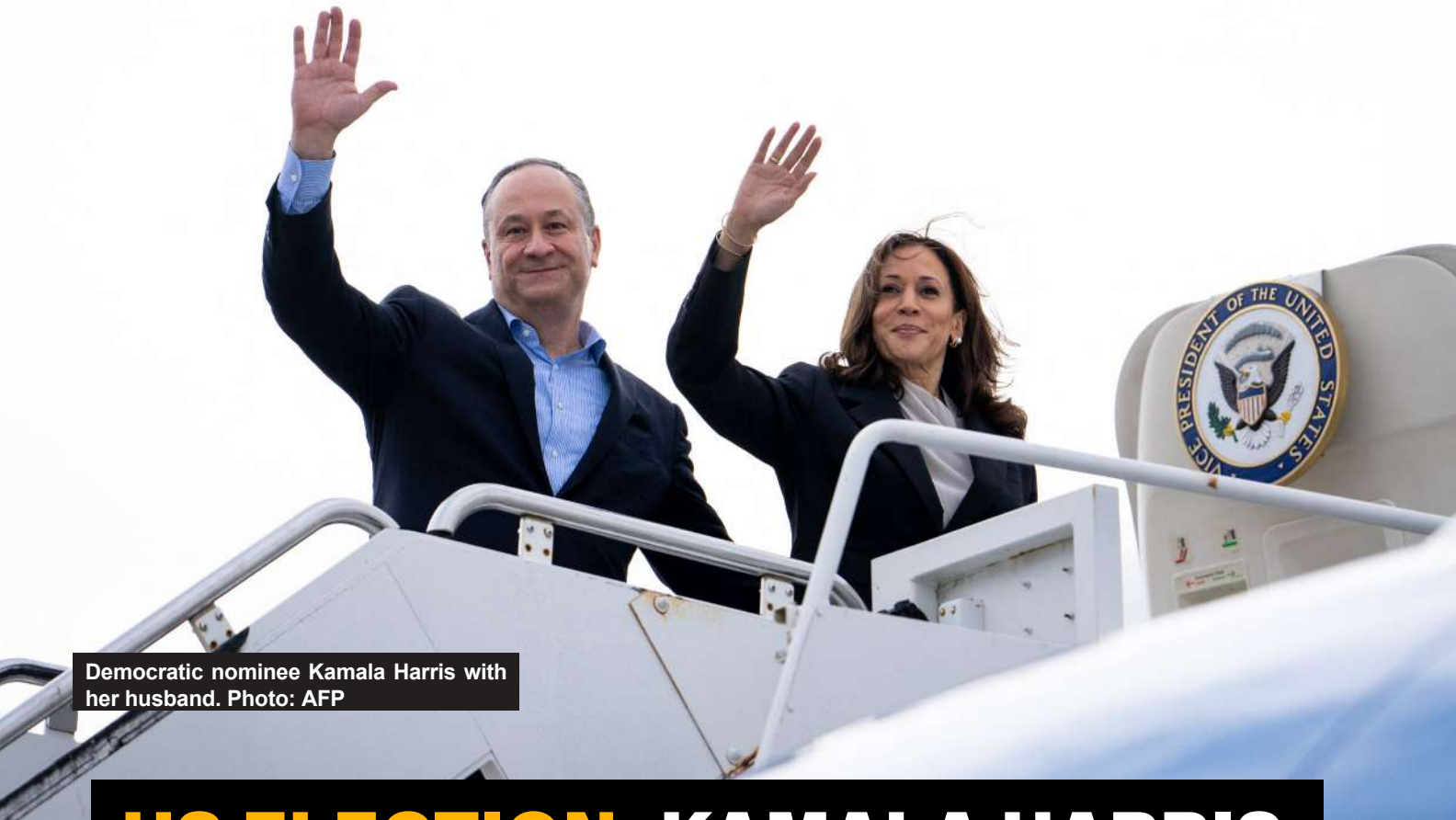
Other Chinese analysts have pointed out that India's recent contemplation of levying tariffs on Chinese steel imports is indicative of a growing trend of protectionism in Asia. They further opined that the ripple effects of the Sino-US trade war are likely to influence not just regional economic collaboration, but also the broader landscape of international relations.

In a recent speech at the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence conference, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged developing nations to unite as a peace-promoting force and play a role in global conflict resolution. He emphasized that the Five Principles, initiated by China, aim to shield the interests of smaller, weaker nations from the influence of power politics.

China's supreme leader emphasized that the principles firmly reject imperialism, colonialism, and hegemonism, establishing a crucial intellectual basis for a fairer global order. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, first proposed by then-Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953 during Tibet border discussions with India, have been a cornerstone of Beijing's policy. Notably, Tibet had been referred to as Xizang by Beijing since the previous year.

In June 1954, Zhou made diplomatic visits to India and Myanmar, where he issued joint declarations with the leaders of these nations, endorsing the five principles as the foundation of their relationships. The Asian-African Conference in Indonesia in 1955 further reinforced the significance of these principles, giving rise to the Non-Aligned Movement. Interestingly, despite the looming 100-200% tariffs, Indonesia advocated this movement to enhance the negotiating power of the Global South with developed countries.

Sun Lee is the pseudonym of a writer who covers Asia.



Democratic nominee Kamala Harris with her husband. Photo: AFP

US ELECTION: KAMALA HARRIS SNAGS US DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION

US Vice President Kamala Harris clinched her party's presidential nomination after receiving support from enough Democratic delegates Monday, as she launched a blistering campaign against Donald Trump.

The formal nomination process for a US presidential candidate occurs when delegates from across the United States gather to officially anoint a nominee chosen by voters during the primaries.

But when President Joe Biden dropped out of the race on Sunday, the fate of those delegates, who had been slated to vote for him, came into question.

With the support of a slew of Democratic heavyweights, including Biden himself, and massive voter donations, Harris quickly closed in as the Democratic party's heir apparent, and delegates began falling in line to pledge their support.

"Tonight, I am proud to have secured the broad support needed to become our party's nominee," Harris wrote in a statement, after US media reported she had sailed past the number of delegates needed -- 1,976 out of nearly 4,000 -- in order to decisively secure the Democratic presidential nomination during voting in the coming weeks.

The news came after Harris, in her first speech to campaign workers since Biden's announcement, lashed out at Republican nominee Trump on Monday at campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware.

Telling the crowd of workers she had come to address them personally after the "rollercoaster" of the last few days, she reminded them that in her past role as California's chief prosecutor, she "took on perpetrators of all kinds."

"Predators who abused women. Fraudsters who

ripped off consumers. Cheaters who broke the rules for their own gain. So hear me when I say I know Donald Trump's type," she said to applause.

"We are going to win in November," a smiling Harris told the workers.

She also pledged to focus on the politically explosive issue of abortion, after Trump praised the Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn the long-held federal right to the procedure.

Biden, 81, meanwhile made his first public remarks in nearly a week as he recovered from a bout of Covid.

He called in to the campaign meeting to say that dropping out -- after mounting party and voter concerns over his health and mental acuity -- had been the "right thing to do" and he praised Harris as "the best".

On Tuesday Harris takes her fight against Trump to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where she will hold a rally hoping to bolster her following in the critical swing state.

'LIMITLESS OPTIMISM'

Biden dropped out and endorsed Harris after three weeks of intensifying pressure, triggered by a disastrous debate performance against Trump.

Aiming to become the first woman president in US history, the 59-year-old Harris won the backing of a seemingly unassailable number of Democrats.

Notably among them was powerful former US House speaker Nancy Pelosi, who said she endorsed Harris "with immense pride and limitless optimism."

Donors have also rallied behind Harris, pouring a record \$81 million into her campaign in the 24 hours after Biden stood aside.

The campaign claimed the haul was the largest one-day sum in presidential history -- and that, among

the 888,000 grassroots donors, some 60 percent were making their first 2024 contribution.

Meanwhile, an aide to Harris said she would meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week during his Washington visit -- separate from Biden's own planned sit-down.

And in a strikingly symbolic moment, Harris hosted a ceremony for college athletes at the White House, with Biden scheduled to return Tuesday from Delaware where he has been isolating with Covid.

'THREAT TO DEMOCRACY'

Biden's stunning withdrawal has completely upended the 2024 race, transforming a long slog between two unpopular elderly men into one of the most compelling races in modern US history.

The move has jolted a demoralized party that Harris could now unify, and could give America its first female president.

It has also hit Republicans hard, with former president Trump, 78 -- now the oldest presidential nominee in US history -- having to completely retool a strategy that had been built around attacking Biden over his age and physical frailty.

Harris's entry not only flips the age issue, but puts Trump -- a convicted felon also found liable of sexual assault -- up against a woman and former prosecutor.

And Trump has seemingly found it hard to move on from Biden.

He launched a series of invective-filled social media posts after Biden quit, mocking the president's age and saying he and Harris posed a "threat to democracy."

AFP



A SACRED STRUGGLE

"There's really not that much attention on the history and the lives of Christian communities in Myanmar," says Alexandra Kaloyanides, addressing her recent book, *Baptizing Burma: Religious Change in the Last Buddhist Kingdom*, in an interview with Insight Myanmar.

Kaloyanides actually took a rather circuitous route in arriving at this subject. While in college, she enrolled in the Antioch Buddhist Studies abroad program, in Bodhgaya, India. There she lived at the Burmese vihara and practiced meditation under Munindra. Later, she spent a month in Myanmar, learning about gender issues within the Sa...gha. This led to her becoming an editor at Tricycle for six years, where she focused on the American Buddhist experience. Finally, as she began exploring grad school options, she decided to go in a somewhat different direction, choosing to look into Christian communities in Myanmar. "I became fascinated with this idea of these young evangelical Americans who ended up sort of by accident in Burma," she says. "I wanted to tell that story, because of the way that I had come about as a young American who ended up in Burma, and then thinking about this longer history of Western fascination and confusion and conflict regarding Buddhism."

Back during her first visit to Myanmar, she had also visited a few churches. "I was focused exclusively on Buddhism, but I visited a few Catholic churches and said some prayers for my Catholic mom," she recalls. But after returning to the States, she couldn't find many serious books or academic articles describing Christian communities there. What little she did find was quite critical, either presenting a rather one-dimensional picture of manipulative missionaries tricking the gullible natives into conversion, or shrewd locals feigning an

interest in the faith in order to gain material benefits. For this reason, part of the approach she wanted to take involved cultivating an appreciation for the agency of those ethnic peoples who did decide to take on that new faith, as well as immersing herself in the culture of American Baptist communities, to better understand their background and rationale. At the same time, she felt it important to address the pervasive chauvinism found throughout the missionaries' writings. "Even the most sensitive missionary reports back to the States, they still present Buddhism as inferior to Christianity, even when they're celebrating Buddhism and saying how wonderful [those] teachings are," she notes.

Describing the backdrop to those initial missionary efforts in the East, Kaloyanides contextualizes it within the pervading Orientalist perspective of the time. She notes that the origins of missionary interest in Asia can be traced to early 19th century theories that ancient Sanskrit manuscripts told of a Jesus-like figure, leading some to suspect that the messiah had actually traveled to Asia, but in the ensuing centuries, his teachings had been lost there. "Therefore, [their thinking went], this place is so ripe for Christians to come and reintroduce the teachings of Christ," she says. "The early missionaries and their sense of 'this land of darkness' that they could bring light to that was very different from their own, this did support a larger, imaginary binary that then ended up supporting colonialism. However, there was also a self-romanticization, thinking about ancient Christianity in these exotic ways and reimagining their own paths and futures."

In any case, based on these theories, a group of earnest American missionaries set out for India. But because this was only a few decades after America's own rebellion against British rule, not surprisingly, there weren't exactly cordial relations between these American missionaries and the British colonial authorities ruling the subcontinent, so much so that they did not even permit them into the country. So it was that that first batch of American Baptists, led by Adoniram Judson, boarded an outgoing ship and found themselves in Rangoon. This accidental voyage marked the start of the Christian mission in Burma, in 1813. Interestingly, this predates the era of British colonial rule there; more often, in other parts of the world, Christian missions followed in the wake of colonial conquest.

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Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

JUNTA CHIEF ASSUMES **ACTING** **PRESIDENCY** **DUTIES**

In a sudden turn of events, Myanmar's military leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has taken on the role of Acting President, state media announced on Monday. This move comes as the current Acting President, Myint Swe, faces health issues that have rendered him unable to fulfill his duties.

The transition of power occurs at a critical juncture, just days before the scheduled renewal of the state of emergency, which has been in place since the military's seizure of power from the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

According to state-media, Min Aung Hlaing received official authorization from the Acting President's office to assume the responsibilities of the role. This transfer of authority is particularly significant as it allows Min Aung Hlaing to manage matters related to the National Defense and Security Council in Myint Swe's absence.

The Council, while nominally a constitutional body led by the president, is effectively under military control. It plays a crucial role in the six-monthly renewal of the state of emergency, which grants the military extensive powers beyond the constitution.

Observers said that this development further consolidates power in the hands of Min Aung Hlaing, who now holds both the top military position and the highest civilian office in Myanmar's current governance structure.

INDIAN AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH MYANMAR JUNTA NO.3 AMID ONGOING HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

In a controversial diplomatic engagement, Indian Ambassador to Myanmar, Abhay Thakur, met with junta No 3 General Maung Maung Aye in Nay Pyi Taw on July 16.

The meeting, which focused on bilateral relations between Myanmar and Indian armed forces, has raised eyebrows among human rights organizations and pro-democracy advocates.

Sources report that discussions included cooperation on border stability, defense activities, and military training programs. However, there was no mention of addressing the ongoing human rights violations in Myanmar under military rule.

The engagement comes at a time when many countries and international bodies have imposed sanctions on Myanmar's military leadership and limited diplomatic relations in response to the junta's actions.

The meeting was also attended by other senior military officials from both countries, including Indian Defence Attaché Colonel Jaswinder Singh Gill.



PDF CAPTURES FIRST TOWN IN MANDALAY REGION

The Mandalay People's Defense Force (MDY-PDF) announced on July 20 that they have captured Singu Town in Mandalay Region, making it the first town within Mandalay Region to be seized by the PDF, according to social media pages.

MDY-PDF said that they completely seized all the junta army camps in Singu Township including the town of Singu on July 17.

MDY-PDF, along with the Brotherhood Alliance, is attacking military junta camps in northern Shan State and Mandalay Region as part of the second phase of Operation 1027.

In early July, MDY-PDF announced that they had captured numerous junta army camps, including the junta's Air Defence Battalion 1014 in Ingyin Myaing Village in Madaya Township.

In the current Operation Singu, junta troops were captured as prisoners of war, and a large amount of weapons and ammunition were seized from them.

Numerous social media users have raised concerns about potential retaliation by the military regime. They warn that in response to losing control of the township, the junta might launch indiscriminate airstrikes targeting civilian areas.

Photo: MDY-PDF fighters at the entrance to Singu Town (Photo: MDY-PDF)



NUG ACTING PRESIDENT LAUDS PDFS' PROGRESS

Duwa Lashi La, the Acting President of the shadow National Unity Government (NUG), said that its People's Defense Forces (PDFs) have effectively learned and studied armed revolutionary experiences of the major Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), according to NUG's official Facebook page.

He made the remark in the NUG's cabinet meeting.

"We've seen both political and military success in the involvement of the Mandalay People's Defense Force (MDY-PDF) in the second phase of Operation 1027," he said.

"For this, I'd like to express heartfelt gratitude to the Brotherhood Alliance," he said.

"The current battles for town captures have become a ray of hope for our people. Here, one crucial point that all members of our government should be mindful of is that military success isn't just about winning battles for capturing outposts or towns. It's not complete until we can not only capture towns but also maintain long-term control over them," he said.

The Acting President of the NUG also expressed his belief that military foresight and political preparation are extremely important in this resistance war.

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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.