

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

CHINA IN A QUANDRY

Junta vs rebel
choice as China
investments in
Myanmar face
threats



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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.

MYANMAR JUNTA TIGHTENS THE SCREWS IN CONSCRIPTION DRIVE

Yangon International Airport has become a nightmare for young people seeking to exit Myanmar seeking work abroad – many seeking to avoid compulsory military conscription.

A number of Myanmar youths have not been allowed to depart from the country at the airport since 1 August because of having “inadequate documents”. Media reports said about 40 people who were holding “Passport for Job” (PJ) passports were denied boarding their flights on 1 August and sent back home from the airport.

Some overseas employment agencies said that those with PJ passports who were entitled to work overseas in the age group of 23-32 were especially restricted to leave the country at Yangon International Airport if they could not produce adequate documents. On 1 August, only male workers were stopped from boarding their flights but on 2 August some female workers were also blocked from boarding.

A Yangon resident said that the authorities thoroughly checked the documents and asked questions to “Passport for Visit” (PV) holders too at the airport on 3 August and some of them who could not answer their questions properly and produce the required documents were denied boarding. Most of these people who were sent back home from the airport were planning to go to Singapore, Japan and Thailand but the exact number of these people are not yet known.

Some of them worked overseas under an MOU signed with these host countries and they came back home for renewal of

their expired passports and planned to leave the country again for work.

Since the Myanmar junta enacted a military conscription law in February, many young people – primarily males – have sought to escape the authorities’ clutches, either by heading for “free areas” in the ethnic regions, crossing the border into Thailand, or flying out of Yangon airport.

The new measure is one of various methods used by the ruling military council to control the number of citizens leaving for employment opportunities abroad because of the civil war, economic downturn and military conscription. Men ages 18 to 35 years and women ages 18 to 27 must serve a minimum of two years in the military under Myanmar’s conscription law.

Information about the airport restrictions spread fast on social media, adding to the growing level of fear for young people in Myanmar. The junta claimed there are no restrictions or denials of departure, but it is clear Naypyidaw is tightening the screws.

Increasing numbers of news stories indicate that the conscription is proving a fast funnel that sees poorly trained conscripts sent to the junta battle frontlines, a significant percentage losing their lives. Distraught families fear for their children, some being informed of their deaths, though few if any are delivered the bodies.

As the Myanmar junta grows increasingly desperate, more of the country’s youth are being turned into cannon fodder.

EDITORIAL

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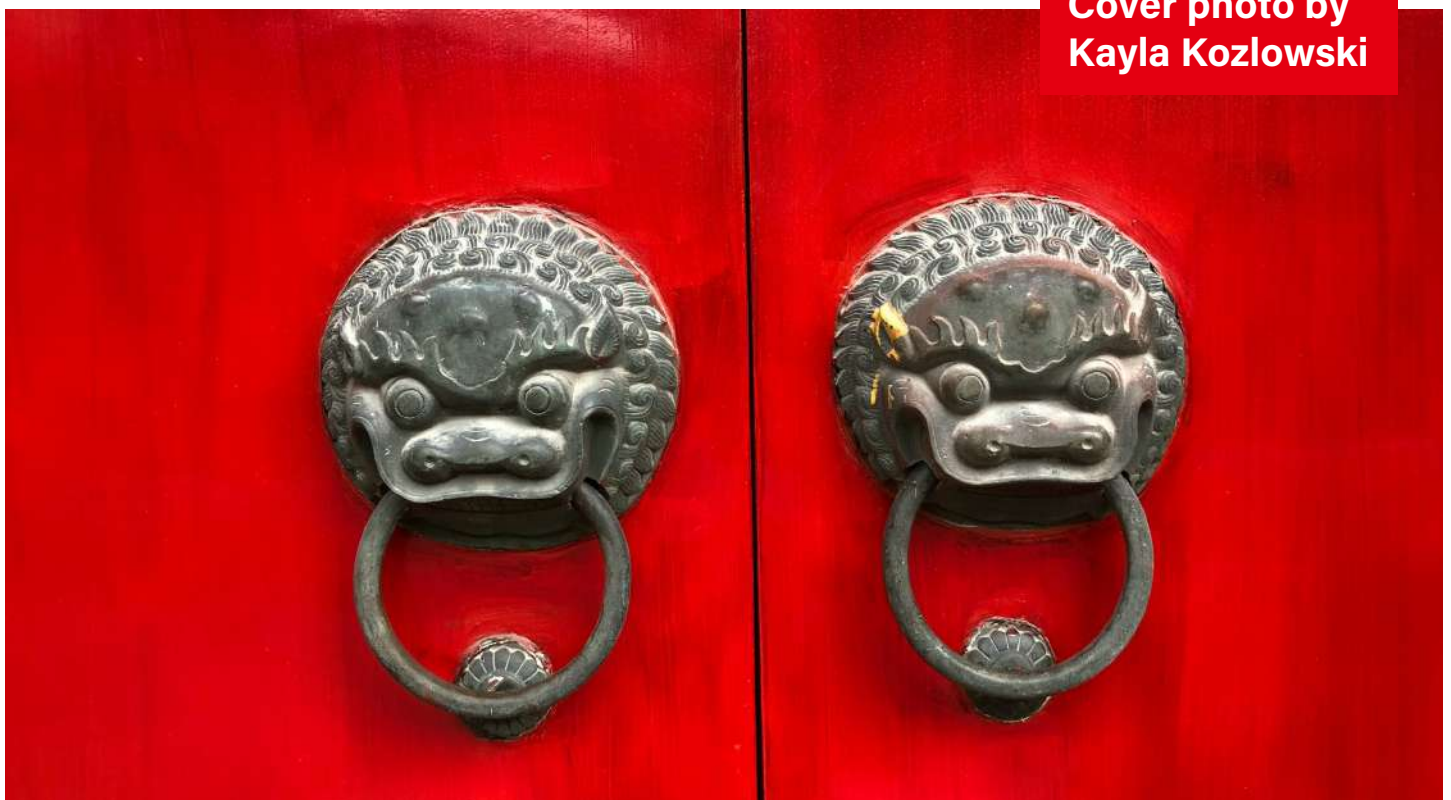




Photo: Ayrton Tang

CHINA IN A QUANDRY

JUNTA VS REBEL CHOICE

AS CHINA INVESTMENTS IN

MYANMAR FACE THREATS

China is struggling to maintain a grip on Myanmar as the country's junta suffers military defeats at the hands of resistance forces. Since October 2023 and the subsequent Three Brotherhood Alliance's successes in grabbing junta positions in northern Shan State, the progress of the Arakan Army in Rakhine State, and the expansion of control by the Mandalay People's Defence Forces, Beijing has had to adopt a more pragmatic stance to maintain its strategic and economic footprint in the country.

China has a lot at stake in its relationship with Myanmar, most notably the trade, transport and communications of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor – under the Belt and Road Initiative – and a range of joint-venture investments, including copper and nickel mines, and other rare earth mining projects. China's backdoor corridor that links Yunnan Province to the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean is crucially important to the country's security.

PLAYING 'BOTH SIDES'

And so it has been with dismay that China has been attempting to deal with the threats to its stake in the country and the unrest on the ground. Given the circumstances, Beijing appears to recognize it needs to deal with resistance groups as well as the military junta – and stress the urgency of protecting its interests.

On the 8 August, China's special envoy flew in to meet Myanmar's junta chief for talks on "peace and stability" along their shared border, Myanmar state media reported last Friday, days after ethnic rebels seized a regional junta military command.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing discussed "internal peace processes in Myanmar, peace and stability measures in the border region" with China's Deng Xijun in the capital Naypyidaw, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar. The junta chief "explained the implementation of objectives and a five-point roadmap in order to ensure peace, stability," the state-run newspaper said.

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, and in Rakhine State where Chinese joint ventures are at stake, most notably the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and oils and gas terminal.

Various resistance groups have been making significant military advances in areas of northern Myanmar where China has interests. At the beginning of August, an alliance of ethnic rebel groups captured the military's northeastern command in the town of Lashio, home to about 150,000 people, dealing a severe physical and psychological blow to the embattled Myanmar junta. This was the latest move under the



Chinese-run Alpha Cement plant in Mandalay. Photo: Alpha Cement

umbrella of the Three Brotherhood Alliance's Operation 1027, now in its "Second Wave".

PDF ADVANCES

Elsewhere, Chinese investment projects are also under threat.

In July, two People's Defence Force units seized two Chinese-invested joint ventures in two regions of Myanmar amid fighting between junta soldiers and resistance forces, throwing the future of these operations into uncertainty.

Two separate PDF groups took control of the Alpha Cement factory in Mandalay region and the Tagaung Taung nickel mine in Sagaing region.

Junta troops attacked the cement factory, about 30 kilometres north of the junta's Central Command, and tried to burn down buildings inside the compound while fleeing a successful assault by the Mandalay People's Defense Force militia or MDY-PDF, Myanmar Now reported. The military has conducted daily airstrikes on the cement plant, owned by Myanmar's Myint Investment Group and China's Anhui Conch Cement Co., since militia forces capturing it, the report said.

A People's Defense Force in northwestern Myanmar's Sagaing region took over a major Chinese-backed nickel-production plant from junta forces in July without a fight on the border between Mandalay region's Thabeikkyin township and Sagaing region's Tigyaying township, Myanmar Now said in another report.

NUG INVOLVEMENT

About 60 junta soldiers and police abandoned 64 weapons and ammunition at the Tagaung Taung mine compound and left, Nay Phone Latt, spokesman of the Prime Minister's Office of the opposition National Unity Government, or NUG, told Radio Free Asia. The NUG is now responsible for the safety of the factory and its employees, he said.

The seizure of the cement factory and nickel mine comes as the junta continues to lose ground to People's Defense Forces, or PDFs, loyal to the NUG and allied ethnic armed groups — almost four years into a civil war that shows no sign of abating.

The incidents also indicate that the junta cannot fully safeguard Chinese-invested projects in Myanmar and that increased discussions between Beijing and the NUG may be forthcoming, political analyst Than Soe Naing told RFA. "China will need to decide whether to rely on the military council or the PDFs and ethnic armed forces to protect its interests in Myanmar."

The NUG has not issued instructions for the two factories to cease operations, and they are able to continue normal operations, despite the fighting, said Nay Phone Latt.

The Chinese Embassy in Myanmar said it may investigate the situation of the factories seized by the PDFs. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular press conference in Beijing on July 25 that conflicts in Myanmar should not interfere with domestic Chinese projects, businesses or the security



of Chinese citizens.

According to the NUG, they will not recognize businesses established under contracts signed with the State Administration Council (SAC), but will accept those that operated under contracts signed by previous governments, Nay Phone Latt told RFA. International companies operating in Myanmar must pay taxes to the NUG instead of to the Military Council, he added. The NUG said its policy is to protect all legal foreign investments in Myanmar, not just those from China.

PROTECTION

Meanwhile, a member of the northern Myanmar rebel alliance fighting military rule has promised to protect Chinese interests in northern Myanmar.

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) pledged to protect Chinese nationals and investments as the battle for the major Shan State town of Lashio intensified, the group announced on 6 August. The group said it would consult allied organizations and “prevent actions that may harm Chinese investment and Chinese employees.”

Political analyst Than Soe Naing told RFA that groups involved in fighting the junta, which include the allied Ta’ang National Liberation Army and Arakan Army, are already obligated to protect Chinese interests under an earlier agreement. The renewed declaration may be the result of a warning from China to be more cautious during battles, he said.

“China’s interests in northern Shan state are to keep its trade routes convenient and smooth and to maintain stability on the border region. Its interests are also to clean up online scamming,” he said. “Therefore, China has put its trust in the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) to ensure that its interests are not affected.”

The committee is an alliance of seven ethnic minority forces established in 2017. In 2023, it called on China to help solve the crisis triggered by a military coup two years earlier.

The MNDAA said it would urge its allies to assist injured Chinese citizens trapped by fighting as well as those who have businesses affected by the war.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a recent briefing China’s borders and the security of people living there, as well as its projects and businesses in Myanmar, should not be compromised. China has called on Myanmar’s rivals to end their fighting and resolve differences peacefully and said it would push for ceasefires and talks.

Reporting: Mizzima, Radio Free Asia, AFP



China-Myanmar cooperation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Photo: Supplied



On the lookout for new military conscripts. Photo: AFP

JUNTA STEPS UP FORCED CONSCRIPTION

Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) has escalated its forced recruitment efforts, targeting both Rohingya and Burmese youths as the conflict intensifies.

Authorities in Rakhine's Maungdaw town have issued demands for each ward to supply 30 young men to join militias, sparking fear and resistance within the community. A ward elder revealed, "They (authorities) demanded we gather 30 youths per ward for military training, threatening arrest or even execution if we refused. The youths are reluctant to join, and their families strongly oppose it. As a result, many young men are fleeing to Bangladesh."

The SAC's efforts to bolster its ranks come as its troops face setbacks in Maungdaw. In response, both the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) have begun recruiting Rohingya youths, offering short military courses to defend the town.

In a parallel development, recruits from the SAC's second batch of People's Military Service were

dispatched to battalions in Karen State, where conflicts have sharply escalated.

These recruits underwent basic military training at No. (4) Military Training Center in Thanphyu Zayat Township. A relative of one of the recruits commented, "My nephew from Mudon Township excelled during the training, but he was still sent to one of the Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) in Myawaddy Township."

Since August 1, the SAC has also tightened restrictions on young men attempting to leave the country via Yangon International Airport. Police officials are specifically targeting men aged 23 to 32 who hold a job or visit category passports, as this age group aligns with conscription laws.

On August 1, more than 40 workers were prevented from boarding their flights and were sent back from the airport. An agent observed, "It seems the junta suspects these young men are trying to evade conscription, which is why they are being so strict about young men leaving the country."

ROHINGYA CAUGHT UP IN RAKHINE FIGHTING

In response to the escalating conflict in the southern part of the Rakhine State, Myanmar, the AA has imposed an emergency ban on marine routes near Thandwe and Gwa towns, as the Myanmar military (SAC) deploys reinforcements via these channels.

Simultaneously, SAC authorities have imposed a ban on fishing in the state, severely impacting the livelihoods of communities dependent on the fishery industry.

In the ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, violence has escalated with tragic consequences for civilians. On July 31, seven internally displaced persons (IDPs) were attacked by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) while seeking shelter in Gantgaw Myaing village, Buthidaung Township. The group was en route to Kyeinchyaung village in Maungdaw Township to purchase supplies when ARSA gunmen opened fire, killing five and injuring two, who narrowly escaped.

A resident from Shwezar village remarked, "ARSA frequently kidnaps and kills, even within the Muslim community." On August 2, the Arakan Army (AA) reported a clash with ARSA fighters, reportedly accused of committing the above crime, in Ngakhuya village, resulting in multiple ARSA casualties and the capture of nine ARSA members.

The dire consequences became worse on the evening of August 5, when dozens of Rohingya people were killed by unidentified mortar shells as they waited to cross the Naf River into Bangladesh. The exact

number of casualties remains uncertain, with reports suggesting the death toll could rise to 200, including women, children, and infants.

Survivors have given conflicting accounts, with some claiming the shells were fired by the AA and others accusing junta forces. The SAC has officially blamed the AA for the attack. The AA stated that they only learned about the incident through social media, as the area is not under their control. They expressed sorrow for the victims and committed to conducting an investigation.

A Rohingya resident from Maungdaw expressed deep concern, stating, "Rohingyas in Maungdaw are in serious trouble. The junta manipulates us, and the AA does not trust us. We are trapped in this conflict, unable to flee as both sides block our escape, while ARSA and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) attempt to recruit us as militias."

ULA CLAIMS MUSLIM MILITANTS WORKING WITH JUNTA

The three Muslim armed groups, RSO, ARSA, and ARA, along with Muslim militants, trained and armed by the military junta, some small extremist terrorist groups, and criminal Muslim gangs involved in kidnapping, murder, robbery, and looting, are operating in the Buthidaung and Maungdaw areas, and near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in the Arakan region, claims the United League of Arakan (ULA) in a statement on 7 August.

Initially, these groups were active near the military



TNLA fighters stand guard in Kyaukme. Photo: AFP

camps of the junta, but they have recently started to cohabit with the junta's soldiers, the group says.

After the junta activated the military conscription law and the Arakan Army took full control of Buthidaung town, the armed Muslim groups trained by the junta have been committing acts of murder, looting, armed robbery, kidnapping, extortion, arson, and destruction of private and public properties as well as bridges in areas within Maungdaw town, some places controlled by the junta in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships, and areas not yet under the control of the Arakan People's Authority. They have also been planting mines, spreading racial and religious hatred, distributing leaflets, and murdering Muslim police officers, administrators, and civil servants serving in the ULA/Arakan Army (AA).

These groups have been engaging in these activities both independently and in cooperation with the junta. Additionally, these groups have been threatening and attacking security forces patrolling the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and destroying border fences.

The junta has been recruiting Muslims from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Sittwe, and Kyaukpyu areas and providing terrorist training. Similarly, RSO, ARSA, and ARA have been recruiting Muslims from Bangladeshi refugee camps and providing terrorist military training, the ULA claims. The junta uses these trained Muslims not only in battles but also to carry out terrorist activities. During the battles in Buthidaung and Maungdaw, junta soldiers and border guard policemen fleeing their camps have been transported to the Bangladeshi side in boats owned by these Muslims, carrying military weapons, supplies, and personnel to support their operations.

Although the Arakan Army has taken full control of all junta camps in Buthidaung town, there remain only two military positions - Na-Kha-Kha (5) and other fortified defensive posts under the junta's control in Maungdaw town. The junta forces are also preventing people trapped in the urban centre from leaving as they intend to use them as human shields, and are taking positions in people's homes in preparation for defense.

In this precarious situation where the junta is about to lose Maungdaw town completely, it has been cooperating with these extremist Muslim groups to commit the aforementioned terrorist acts with the intention of inciting racial and religious conflicts, the ULA says.

The junta-trained armed extremist Muslims and the junta-supported Islamist extremists have been continuously committing various terrorist acts as if they

have a license to do so. These terrorist incidents mainly occur in Maungdaw town and areas not yet under the control of the ULA/AA.

In particular, not just the ethno-religious minority groups such as the Khami, Mro, and Hindu, who are not Muslims but also the Muslims who want to live in peaceful coexistence in Arakan face increasing threats to their lives and greater dangers of violent murder by these extremist Muslims. Additionally, they are being forced to leave these areas through various means, and mass killings by terrorist groups are increasing. At the same time, extremist Muslims are also campaigning for non-Muslims and people of different religions to stop trading with, interacting with, and ostracizing them, and posting hateful notices in public places.

The threat posed by Muslim terrorist groups such as the RSO, ARSA, ARA, and junta-trained armed Muslims continues to endanger the lives, homes, and possessions of the minority communities and the entire local population in the Buthidaung and Maungdaw regions. The number of victims of terrorist attacks is also rising. This situation is viewed as the military council's intentional attempt to trap the ULA/AA and the entire Arakan population in ethnic, religious, and political conflicts.

"The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) will collaborate with the local population to implement effective security responses to fully protect the mental and physical security of every resident of the Arakan region. In addition, it has been announced that there will be continued offensives to completely seize all remaining Military Council camps in the Maungdaw region. Furthermore, all terrorist groups and extremists will be eradicated to prevent the rise of religious and ethnic extremism," ULA says.

OPERATION 1027 SECOND WAVE CHALKS UP ANOTHER VICTORY

In a significant victory for the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and its allied forces, Lashio City, the capital of Northern Shan State and a key hub on the China-Myanmar border trade route, was seized on August 3.

The capture followed the successful takeover of the junta's Northeast Command, the third most prominent military command, at 12:20 pm. The operation began on August 1, with revolutionary forces penetrating the Northeast Command. During the takeover, the forces arrested three high-ranking generals, including the former Commander of the Northeast Command, the

commander of the No. (1) Military Operation Command, and a Brigadier General from Northeast Command. This victory marks the most significant achievement for the revolutionary forces since the conflict began.

On August 6, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and allied forces captured Kyaukme City, the fourth city to fall in the second phase of Operation 1027. The capture was completed by seizing the junta's last two battalions, No. (501) and (502) of the Light Infantry Battalions, located two miles outside the city.

Before retreating, the junta attempted to defend the city using airstrikes and reinforcements, but ultimately, over one hundred soldiers were forced to retreat southward. TNLA had already begun establishing control over Kyaukme in early July.

The three Northern Alliance Brotherhood groups issued a joint statement condemning the State Administration Council's (SAC) airstrikes that have targeted civilians. The statement also called for assistance from China and the international community to stop the junta's war crimes.

As Operation 1027 Second Wave intensified, junta troops took up positions at Yadanabon Cyber City Technology University in Pyin Oo Lwin town to defend Mandalay city on 7 August, forcing professors and students to vacate the campus.

Meanwhile, Pyin Oo Lwin is experiencing a mass exodus of residents amid rumours that TNLA may launch an attack on the city on August 8. Families of junta troops are particularly anxious, with many withdrawing their children from schools and taking

long-term leaves.

An Education Department staff member reported, "Many students from military families are applying for transfer forms and leave."

In response to these defeats, SAC leader Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech on August 5, blaming neighbouring countries for providing technological, weaponry, and food support to the revolutionary forces. Although he did not mention specific countries by name, he emphasized that the advanced technology required for drones and missiles is beyond the capabilities of the resistance.

TOP MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

The following are the most popular Burmese language videos of the wee.

Min Aung Hlaing and the Military Council are close to falling - Professor Miemie Winn Byrd | Exclusive Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYF9hwUacXg>

Meeting with U Ne Myo Zin, who is about to join the CDM soldiers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUE06h_tt5U

China-Myanmar affairs analyst's opinion on the speech of the leader of the military council

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyVTIHmkGS4>





TNLA fighters on the march.
Photo: AFP

TNLA SEIZES TOTAL CONTROL OF KYAUKME TOWN IN SHAN STATE

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has taken full control of Kyaukme town in northern Shan State after defeating the last junta forces on 6 August, TNLA sources report.

The TNLA completed the takeover by capturing the remaining junta forces stationed around the town, including the headquarters of Light Infantry Battalions 501 and 502, and Military Operations Command (1), according to a source close to the TNLA who spoke to Mizzima.

"The battalion headquarters were overtaken despite bombing from jet fighters until 2 am on 6 August. The TNLA has begun administrative operations in the town," the source said.

In the aftermath, the TNLA conducted clearance operations and seized a large cache of junta ammunition, the same source added.

Since the junta lost its final battalions, Kyaukme has become a "junta-free area" with the TNLA firmly in

control, sources confirmed.

In the third week of July, as the TNLA tightened its grip on Kyaukme, the junta deployed 300 soldiers from southern Shan State in a reinforcement effort. However, these reinforcements were completely wiped out, TNLA sources revealed.

Kyaukme district, which houses the Military Council's district office, comprises six townships. Of these, Kyaukme, Naung Cho, Namtu, Monglon, and Minengaw are now under TNLA control, with Hsipaw being the only remaining township yet to be captured.

The TNLA has not released any official statements regarding the current situation, and their spokesperson, Lway Ye Oo, is currently unreachable as of this report.

In the Operation 1027 Second Round, TNLA and the joint forces have seized several towns, with Kyaukme being the 11th town for TNLA.



Photo: Supplied

FIFTEEN CHINESE NATIONAL WORKERS ALLOWED TO RETURN HOME FROM CONFLICT ZONE IN SINGU TOWNSHIP, MANDALAY

Fifteen Chinese nationals working at a private gold mining site in Singu Township, now under the control of revolutionary forces, have been permitted to return to China at their own request, according to the MDY-PDF resistance group.

“These Chinese workers were caught in the clashes while working for a private gold mining company in Singu. Their return was not coordinated with the Chinese government, but they were allowed to return home after discussions with them,” said MDY-PDF Information Officer Ko Osmond.

The MDY-PDF confirmed that the Chinese workers were safely escorted to the boundary of the area controlled by the MDY-PDF on 4 August, enabling their return journey.

Local residents of Singu reported that the northern part of the town is known for its gold production, with Chinese workers having been present in these mines for many years. Ko Osmond confirmed that there are currently no Chinese nationals remaining in Singu.

Singu was captured by allied Myanmar resistance forces on 19 July, during which the PDF claimed to have detained at least 50 members of the junta army, including some officers, as well as members of the Pyu Saw Htee militia.



Phone snapshot after aerial bombing. Photo: Supplied

AIRSTRIKES IN MANDALAY'S SINGU TOWNSHIP RESULT IN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

A woman was killed and another injured in an early morning airstrike on Letpanhla village by the Military Council on August 6, local residents report.

At approximately 2:30 am, a bomb dropped by the Military Council exploded in the Nyeinchanaung ward of Letpanhla village in Mandalay's Singu Township, according to the Singu Township true news information team.

"The airstrike was launched around 2:30 am, and the bomb fell on Nyeinchanaung ward. One woman was killed and another was injured," said an official from the news team.

This follows a previous airstrike on the evening of 5 August, which targeted Letpanhla village and caused an explosion in Pyisoaung ward. Although there were

no casualties, the blast caused significant damage to buildings, including a school, Thitsar Hospital, and local shops, according to the same official.

The People's Defense Force-Mandalay (PDF) has accused the Military Council of committing war crimes through targeted airstrikes and heavy weapons fire on civilian areas since 17 July, ahead of and following the capture of Singu by allied resistance forces on 19 July.

On 4 August, junta airstrikes on Kantaung and Ngweyone villages in Singu Township resulted in the deaths of 13 civilians and injuries to 19 others.

Over a three-day period from 4 to 6 August, the Military Council conducted four airstrikes on villages in Singu Township, killing 14 civilians and injuring 20 more.



Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF ALLEGES FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE CONFLICTS

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing accused the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and their allied forces of operating under the influence of foreign nations in a national security address on 5 August.

Following the shock capture of the Northeastern Military Command Headquarters in Lashio on 3 August, Min Aung Hlaing asserted that these insurgent groups are being manipulated by external countries.

"The insurgent groups, MNDAA, TNLA, and the internal and external scumbags supporting them are spreading propaganda to undermine the morale of the Myanmar people," he stated, looking rattled, according to one media analyst.

Min Aung Hlaing alleged that foreign nations are providing these groups with financial support, supplies, and advanced weaponry.

"Certain countries are enabling armed insurgents and terrorists to receive money, food, medicine, weapons, ammunition, technology, and administrative support and those countries are also providing assistance to media outlets in conducting psychological

warfare," he said.

Min Aung Hlaing also claimed that weapons factories have been established in ethnic armed organization (EAO) territories along the China-Myanmar border. He highlighted the difficulty in setting up such factories and emphasized the need to investigate their sources of technical and financial backing.

Further accusations included the smuggling of weapons into southern Myanmar through the Thailand-Myanmar border and the use of advanced weaponry by the MNDAA and TNLA, allegedly developed with the assistance of foreign experts. However, Min Aung Hlaing did not specify which nations these experts are from.

On 3 August, Than Lwin Tun, a former head of VOA, echoed these sentiments on social media, claiming that the situation is a military conflict threatening Myanmar's sovereignty rather than a political issue.

The capture of the northeastern military command by the MNDAA and its allies marks a significant blow to the junta, with Major General Zaw Min Tun confirming the detention of several senior military officers from the command through junta-controlled media.

MYANMAR MILITARY CLAIMS IT WITHDREW 'FOR SAFETY OF PEOPLE'

Myanmar's military withdrew from some positions close to China's border to prioritise the "safety of people", the junta chief said last week, days after an alliance of ethnic armed groups said they had routed state troops in the area.

Shan State in eastern Myanmar has been rocked by fighting since late June when the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) renewed an offensive against the military along a major trade highway to China.

"With regard to the situation of Shan State, security forces withdrew their positions by considering the security of current areas and safety of people," Min Aung Hlaing said in a speech on state television on Monday night.

"The government will continually strive to ensure peace and stability -- not only in Shan State, but the entire nation," he added.

His comments came days after the MNDAA said it had captured a regional military command after weeks of clashes, in a major blow to the junta.

Alliance fighters "fully captured the headquarters of the northeast military command" in Lashio, the group said in a statement Saturday.

Junta spokesman Major-General Zaw Min Tun admitted Monday that the military had lost contact with senior officers from the command after intense fighting.

"Got last contact with the senior officers at 6:30 pm on August 3, and we lost contact with them till now," he

said in a statement.

"According to reports that are still being confirmed, it is known that terrorist insurgents arrested some senior officers."

Dozens of civilians have been killed or wounded in the recent fighting, according to the junta and local rescue groups.

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" that have sprung up to battle the military after its ouster of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in a 2021 coup.

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.

Min Aung Hlaing said Monday the alliance was receiving weapons, including drones and short-range missiles, from "foreign" sources, which he did not identify.

"It is necessary to analyse the sources of monetary and technological power," the military leader said.

AFP

MNDAA fighters in Lashio.
Photo: MNDAA



MYANMAR JUNTA SUPPORTERS CONDEMN MNDAA RAID ON LASHIO MILITARY HOSPITAL

Supporters of Myanmar's military junta have condemned the Kokang Army or Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) for its raid on the military hospital at the Northeastern Military Command Headquarters in Lashio, Northern Shan State.

In a statement, 25 political parties supporting the junta, along with more than 10 associations including the Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwife Association, expressed their protest against the MNDAA's attack on the 100-bed military hospital in Lashio.

On 2 August, MNDAA forces attacked the junta soldiers stationed at the military hospital using short-range rockets, drones, and small arms, resulting in the deaths of patients, healthcare workers, and military personnel, according to the statement.

The statement further condemned the arrest of pregnant women during the raid, labeling it as inhumane violence and a violation of basic human rights and the International Declaration of Human Rights. It asserted that such actions constitute war crimes.

The statement also called for the MNDAA, along with its allies such as the Arakan Army (AA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), to be designated as terrorist armed groups and sanctioned by the international community.

Pro-junta channels on the Telegram social network echoed these strong condemnations. As of now, the MNDAA has not responded to the accusations made by junta supporters.

The MNDAA and allied forces launched an attack on junta camps in Lashio on 3 July, and within a month, they succeeded in capturing the Northeastern Regional Military Command Headquarters on 3 August.

During the first part of Operation 1027, 14 towns in northern Shan State were captured by the Three Brotherhood Alliance and their allies. The second part of the operation – dubbed Operation 1027 Second Wave – saw the capture of Nawngkhio and Mogmit in northern Shan, as well as Singu and Mogoke in the Mandalay region.



NEWLY-APPOINTED MYANMAR MAJOR-GENERAL SOE HLAING UNABLE TO ASSUME COMMAND DUE TO MNDAA SEIZURE

Major-General Soe Hlaing, recently appointed as the commander of the Northeastern Military Command based in Lashio, northern Shan State, has been unable to assume his new role due to the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) seizing control of the command.

As a result, he remains in Muse town, according to Captain Zin Yaw, a participant in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), who cited sources from the junta army.

“We received information that Major-General Soe Hlaing, the newly appointed commander of the Northeastern Command, remained in Muse until 4:00 pm on 4 August,” CDM Captain Zin Yaw told Mizzima.

Fierce fighting erupted in Lashio, and on 18 July, following the defeat of junta forces, the junta army replaced the commander of the Northeastern Command, Major-General Soe Tint, with Brigadier

General Soe Hlaing, the commander of the 99th Light Infantry Division based in Meiktila. At the time of his appointment, Brigadier General Soe Hlaing and his 99th Light Infantry Division were stationed in Muse, northern Shan State.

Firstly, Brigadier General Soe Hlaing was appointed as a commander of the 99th Light Infantry Division on 10 December, 2023, after the former commander, Brigadier General Aung Kyaw Lwin, was killed in the Monekoe battle during the first phase of Three Brotherhood Alliance’s Operation 1027. They retreated to Muse via Monekoe town when Monekoe fell during Operation 1027, according to local reports. Upon his promotion, Brigadier General Soe Hlaing was elevated to the rank of Major-General.

“The situation regarding Major-General Soe Hlaing’s position is complex. The Military Office of the junta army issued a letter indicating his appointment as the commander of Northeastern Military Command. Brigadier General Soe Hlaing became commander of Northeastern Military Command but he is staying in his original position LID (99) in Muse,” Captain Zin Yaw said.

He further noted that Major-General Soe Hlaing is unlikely to be removed from his current position.

“Although he may retain his new title, it is unfortunate that the Northeastern Command fell shortly after he assumed commander title. The situation is indeed precarious,” CDM Captain Zin Yaw said.

On 3 August, the MNDAA announced that they had taken control of the junta army’s Northeastern Military Command at approximately 12:20 pm. This marked a significant moment, as the Northeastern Military Command was the first military command to be captured by revolutionary forces out of the 14 regional military commands across the country.

General Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the Military Council, reported that the Northeastern Military Command in Lashio had lost contact with its officers and soldiers since 6:30 pm on 3 August and that they had been arrested by revolutionary forces. Myawaddy TV aired the junta army’s spokesman addressing the situation in northern Shan State.

The MNDAA also arrested several high-ranking officers, including the former commander of the Northeastern Military Command, Major-General Soe Tint; Regional Chief of Staff Brigadier General Thant Htin Soe, and Brigadier General Myo Min Htwe of No. 1 Military Operation Command (MOC).



Muse border crossing.
Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICERS FLEE TO CHINA AS MUSE BRACES FOR CONFLICT

Senior officers of the Myanmar junta, including Major-General Soe Hlaing, the commander of the Northeastern Military Command currently stationed in Muse, missed the opportunity to assume his new position in Lashio, northern Shan State, after the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) took control of the military base.

As a result, the junta officers have rented houses in Ruili and Kyalgaung in China's Yunnan Province to conduct their duties in Muse, according to local sources.

On 18 July, Major-General Soe Tint, the previous commander of the Northeastern Military Command,

was replaced by Brigadier General Soe Hlaing, the commander of the 99th Light Infantry Division from Meiktila town in the Mandalay region, who was then promoted to Major-General.

Following Major-General Soe Hlaing's appointment as commander, the MNDAA and allied resistance forces took over the command at around 12:20 pm on 3 August. Commander Major-General Soe Hlaing missed the chance to take up his new post, military sources said.

Currently, military junta officers in Muse are using this border pass to travel back and forth between China and Myanmar.

People can cross the Myanmar-China border at the Siphayu Gate in Muse and the Nandaw Gate (middle gate) and are permitted to stay for one week with a border pass or Red Book.

“If you have this Red Book, you can stay for six nights-seven days in those towns. You can have your book stamped to exit and re-enter. Most people use the Nandaw Gate,” a local source said.

A resident of Muse said, “The commander of the Northeastern Military Command doesn’t live in Muse; he spends most of his time in Ruili. The family of the Muse District Administrator also resides on the Chinese side of the border, along with senior officers of Myanmar’s immigration department who have rented rooms in Kyalgaung. They cross the border to carry out their duties in Muse.”

On the evening of 8 August, around 8:30 pm, junta forces from Muse township’s industrial zone fired artillery near Namhkum village for about half an hour. By 9 August, the situation had returned to normal, according to residents who spoke to Mizzima.

While there is no active fighting in Muse yet, the Three Brotherhood Alliance and allied resistance forces have reportedly positioned themselves around the town, said Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) Captain Zin Yaw, who is monitoring junta activities.

“There hasn’t been any combat yet, but the resistance forces are likely already in position. The junta troops are firing out of fear of losing control. The alliance has also been negotiating with Commander Major-General Soe Hlaing, who missed the chance to take up his new post, to surrender,” Captain Zin Yaw said.

The Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has taken control of Namhkam and Kutkai near Muse, including Lashio, while the MNDAA now controls Monekoe and Kyu Koke (Pang Hseng) towns in Shan State.

Meanwhile, the Arakan Army (AA) has captured a 105-mile-long strip of territory in Muse during the first phase of Operation 1027 and remains based there, according to local sources.

Due to the current situation, the junta is unable to send reinforcements to Muse and is effectively trapped, with no retreat options other than China.

Muse is home to numerous militia groups in addition to junta forces, and there are unconfirmed reports that the junta may surrender if the Three Brotherhood Alliance attacks.

“I heard they might raise a white flag if they are attacked. They can’t use the alternative public routes; they can only travel by helicopters. All roads are now blocked, leaving them with the only option of fleeing to China,” another resident said.

Despite some reports suggesting that after the MNDAA captured the Northeastern Military Command in Lashio they might advance on Muse, most residents believe the junta will have no choice but to surrender if the Three Brotherhood Alliance attacks, given Muse’s proximity to China, which could heavily impact the town.

Although the situation in Muse has normalized, some residents have moved closer to the Chinese border for easier escape in case of conflict.

The junta army is currently stationed at the Ruili Guest House in Muse, alongside militia groups. Due to weak law enforcement, Muse is rife with kidnappings and lootings, causing most residents to stay indoors for fear of burglary.



Photo: Mizzima

SEVERE FLOODING DEVASTATES MYANMAR'S RAKHINE, SUBMERGING ROADS AND RICE FIELDS

The Rakhine State townships of Minbya, Kyauktaw, and the culturally rich Mrauk-U have been hit hard by severe floods, causing extensive damage to plantations and submerging roads since 2 August.

“The water from the Lemro River has overflowed onto the roads and fields. People can’t drive around. All the plantations are destroyed, and the rice fields are flooded,” said Mrat Tun, director of the Arakan Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Association.

Local residents said that the road from Paungtoke village in Mrauk-U to Minbya is heavily flooded, making it impassable for motorcycles, bicycles, and cars. Among the affected towns, Mrauk-U faces the most severe conditions.

“The low-lying houses are completely submerged, and people are fleeing to higher ground. In some areas, the water reaches above shoulder level. It has been raining heavily until this morning,” said a Mrauk-U local.

In Mrauk-U Township, floodwaters have surrounded ancient stupas and submerged homes along the riverbank. Residents are urgently calling for assistance and rescue efforts to mitigate the rising water’s impact.

The heavy rains, which began on 2 August and continued until 4 August, caused the Lemro River to overflow, leading to significant flooding in Mrauk-U, Minbya, and Kyauktaw. These areas are under the

control of the Arakan Army (AA), which has been actively assisting and rescuing those affected by the floods, as reported on social media.

Despite the AA’s efforts, there is still an urgent need for widespread aid and relief. A member of a social assistance and relief association, speaking anonymously, informed Mizzima that travel between townships is hindered by a Military Council blockade, complicating the delivery of necessary support.

“The military is inspecting and closing gates, restricting access to areas controlled by the Arakan Army. Simultaneously, the AA is also scrutinizing social assistance groups, limiting aid to only those locations that can be reached,” the member said.

Residents of Mrauk-U report severe shortages of food, medicine, and shelter due to the ongoing floods.

Meteorologist Win Naing advised that all regions along the Rakhine coast, from the northern boundary with Bangladesh to the southern cities near the Ayeyarwady, should remain on high alert.

He warned that coastal and delta areas are expected to experience heavy rains and potentially large waves, with significant rainfall anticipated throughout August.

While last week’s floods have receded slightly in Thandwe, Taungup, and Gwa townships, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, and Minbya remain significantly inundated.



SEVEN INMATES KILLED DURING PRISONER EVACUATION OPERATION AT RAKHINE'S THANDWE

The Arakan Army (AA) reported that seven out of 372 inmates at Thandwe Prison in Rakhine State were killed during a prisoner evacuation operation on 16 July. The casualties occurred when the inmates were struck by heavy artillery fire from the Military Council as it fought over control of the town.

Among the inmates were 43 political prisoners, two of whom lost their lives in the artillery strike. Of the remaining 41 political prisoners, 17 individuals who were ill, injured, or in urgent need of medical attention received comprehensive healthcare, the AA said.

The AA returned these political prisoners to their families and homes on 6 August.

The AA also reported that the rest of the inmates, serving sentences for crimes such as theft, robbery, murder, and drug offenses, remain in custody. The AA assured that their cases are under re-examination and that legal process will be followed to address their crimes.

By 5:30 pm on 16 July, the AA had successfully captured all Military Council outposts in Thandwe, including Ngapali (Mazin Airport), the Thandwe hotel zone, and most surrounding areas.



Photo: Mizzima

ROHINGYA IN RAKHINE'S MAUNGDAW NEED PROTECTION, SAYS NGO

The Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is asking the international community to help and protect the minority Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State's northern Maungdaw Township, according to a statement 5 August.

BHRN claims Rohingya villagers are still stuck in the fighting between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar junta.

There are reports that the war is intensifying as the junta is losing control of the township, and photos showing Rohingya believed to have been killed in the crossfire have been circulating on social media in recent days.

Civilians trapped in this area have all been subject to heavy artillery, warplane bombings, and drones that many civilians say the AA is using. As a result, some Rohingya are fleeing to Bangladesh, including one refugee who BHRN spoke with.

"The Rohingya in Maungdaw are in desperate need of protection and support from the world. The civilian toll of this war is almost completely ignored by the international community, who seem too preoccupied with other conflicts. We are asking them to take action to protect the Rohingya under fire in Maungdaw, those suffering without aid from Buthidaung, and to make preparations to help the Rohingya and other civilians

who will soon live under intense fighting in Sittwe, where the junta will desperately try to hold the state capital," BHRN's Executive Director Kyaw Win Said.

BHRN spoke with one man who fled to Bangladesh to escape the fighting in Maungdaw. He told us, "When I was in our village, I heard the sounds of large weapons and saw drone attacks targeting the remaining Rohingya villages in the downtown area constantly. It felt like living under continuous gunfire. The Arakan Army (AA) had controlled all the villages except for three to four in the downtown area. The AA surrounded the Handa Para Burmese military station, which has a lot of advanced weapons, but they haven't used them yet. The AA sends drones towards the military station, but the military easily destroys them. When these drones are destroyed, they fall near Rohingya houses, causing serious injuries and later deaths without any treatment. The AA also sends drones to target individual Rohingya houses in the remaining villages. On July 8th, a drone fell on my rooftop, seriously injuring all my family members. One of my sons died without receiving any treatment in Maungdaw, and we are all still seriously injured."

The man said he could identify the drone because it was launched in the daytime, and his neighbours saw it coming and yelled for them to flee the house. He said they could see the drone's camera equipment in the wreckage. He told BHRN he knows the Arakan Army launched the drone because the junta doesn't use them. He went on to describe a lack of aid in the Rohingya villages and said he feared worsening food shortages if the war continued.

"I would request you to support the people in Maungdaw as much as you can. They are waiting for emergency support," he told BHRN.

BHRN calls on the international community to make every effort to protect and support the civilians trapped in conflict zones throughout Burma. The international community must also make clear to the Arakan Army that civilians must be protected and given all rights under international law. The Arakan Army must also provide a safe passage to Rohingya fleeing the conflict and cannot hold anyone in place against their will or deprive them of life-sustaining aid. The world should also be taking serious steps in preparation for the subsequent phases of fighting in Rakhine State, which have the potential to be the deadliest yet as the junta will make greater efforts to hold onto the capital. The vast population may need access to food, medicine, and shelter. Finally, the international community must consider taking steps to pressure the junta to surrender to spare the country further destruction for a war they no longer seem capable of winning.



A Rohingya woman stares at some of the bodies of those who drowned. Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH RECOVERS 34 BODIES OF REFUGEES FLEEING WAR-TORN MYANMAR

The bodies of 34 Rohingya refugees, who fled war-torn Myanmar only to drown when their overcrowded boat sank while crossing a river to Bangladesh, have been recovered, a top local government official said Thursday last week.

Other refugees fleeing the bitter conflict described grim scenes of “bloodshed” as thousands tried to escape.

The boat sank on Tuesday, when the bodies of 10 people - including young children - were initially recovered.

But more have since washed ashore, taking the total killed to 34.

Police said the group had fled their villages in Myanmar’s Rakhine state and their small craft sank in the Naf river, near Bangladesh’s Shahpari Island.

Adnan Chowdhury, the government administrator of Bangladesh’s Teknaf border town, said the boat was carrying Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar.

Local councillor Abdus Salam said the bodies were being buried.

“The Rohingya people were fleeing with their lives from Myanmar,” he said.

At least 1,000 Rohingya have fled the war in Myanmar’s Rakhine state to Bangladesh in the past few

weeks, Chowdhury said.

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

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 United Nations court.

Abdul Kalam, 35, a Rohingya refugee, arrived on a different boat on Wednesday after fleeing the Rakhine town of Maungdaw and said thousands were trying to escape.

“Arakan Army were killing us... they want to kick us out of Rakhine,” he said. “I saw much bloodshed. They are killing Rohingya.”

Chowdhury said the recovery of the bodies had been delayed by unrest in Bangladesh after weeks of student-led protests ousted the prime minister on Monday.

“We could not send our security officers to the accident spot, as they were busy containing political clashes,” Chowdhury told AFP.

AFP



**Joint Statement of Cooperation on Independent Media Policies
by Independent Press Council Myanmar (IPCM) and
Karen National Union (KNU)**

7 August 2024

Senior representatives of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar (IPCM) and the Karen National Union (KNU) met to discuss independent media policies at the KNU Headquarters on 6 August 2024.

The meeting was led by the KNU's vice chairman, Joint secretary #2, and spokesperson, together with the Public Relation and Information Dissemination (PRID) team. IPCM's executive council team was led by the chairperson, secretary, and joint secretary.

IPCM AND KNU ISSUE STATEMENT ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA PROTOCOLS IN MYANMAR

Senior representatives of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar (IPCM) and the Karen National Union (KNU) met to discuss independent media policies at the KNU Headquarters in Myanmar's Karen State on 6 August.

The meeting was led by the KNU's vice chairman, Joint secretary #2, and spokesperson, together with the Public Relation and Information Dissemination (PRID) team. IPCM's executive council team was led by the chairperson, secretary, and joint secretary.

The following is the text of what was agreed:

1) Both parties acknowledged KNU regulations concerning interaction with independent media houses and IPCM's code of conduct (COC).

2) The KNU explained that their recently announced media regulations were not intended to exert influence

or control over media but to facilitate interaction in a proper way.

3) KNU emphasised that the organisation will follow with responsibility international practices as outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR Article 19) concerning freedom of expression and access to information.

4) Both parties agreed to respect KNU security concerns and media houses safety and independent role.

5) KNU and IPCM agreed to settle any media-related disputes should they arise in any KNU-controlled area through negotiation and cooperation.

6) They agreed to promote media development, and media and information literacy (MIL) in KNU-controlled areas to enhance future cooperation.



Casualty of war. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK VOICES CONCERN OVER PLIGHT OF ROHINGYA

The Women's Peace Network (WPN) has renewed its call for immediate action to protect Rohingya civilians in Rakhine State, Myanmar, according to a statement on 7 August.

The WPN fears a deadly catastrophe with devastating implications for the survival of the ethnic and religious minority group as a whole, peace and coexistence of Arakan (Rakhine), inclusive federal democracy of Myanmar, and security and stability of the wider South and Southeast Asian region.

As the NGO notes, on August 6, 2024, in Maungdaw township, the Arakan Army (AA) launched drone attacks near the Naf River, killing at least 200 Rohingya civilians – most of whom were women and children. The civilians had been forcibly displaced from downtown Maungdaw on August 5, to escape the AA's drone attacks in the area.

A surge of rapidly intensifying atrocities targeted at Rohingya civilians had already been taking place in Maungdaw township prior to the August 6 attack. These atrocities include the AA's mass arrests of Rohingya civilians; takeover of Rohingya homes and villages; looting of Rohingya properties; forced transfer of Rohingya civilians from their homes and villages; and the launch of heavy weapons and further drone strikes. Access to humanitarian aid, including food, water, shelter, and medical care, continues to be lacking in the area, disproportionately leaving Rohingya civilians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), to die from starvation and other preventable conditions. WPN has also been informed of the Burmese military launching heavy weapons on Rohingya homes and villages, including those forcibly entered by AA members; abducting Rohingya youth for forced labor, forced recruitment, and other heinous purposes; and forcing its allegedly collaborating militant groups – none of which represent Rohingya as a community –

into physically obstructing displaced Rohingya from fleeing for their lives.

“A second wave of genocide,” “another genocide,” and “worse than 2016 and 2017” are now among the terms used by many in WPN’s network to describe the catastrophe unfolding in Maungdaw township. A pattern of atrocities observed across northern Rakhine State for nearly eight months reinforce the applicability of such a harrowing language to this context. In January 2024, AA members forcibly entered Hpon Nyo Leik village, Buthidaung township, positioning themselves in the Rohingya village and effectively inviting the Burmese military’s lethal attacks on its inhabitants. In February, the Burmese military began forcibly recruiting the country’s civilians, including thousands of Rohingya and IDPs in Sittwe township. In the subsequent months, while coercing Rohingya to launch divisive protests in the area, the Burmese military intensified its airstrikes on civilians, including in Rohingya villages; and, allegedly with its collaborating groups, attacked ethnic Rakhine-majority areas in Buthidaung township. Such divisive conditions rapidly aggravated in May, when AA members torched downtown Buthidaung, burned down its surrounding Rohingya villages, looted their properties, expelled their nearly 200,000 Rohingya residents, abducted Rohingya youth for purposes including forced recruitment, and tortured and massacred hundreds of Rohingya civilians. Reports have also emerged of sexual and gender-based violence being committed against Rohingya women.

A humanitarian catastrophe is also worsening in Rakhine State. Rohingya are now facing famine and other preventable conditions in the area, at least in part due to their humanitarian access being directly and indirectly impeded by the armed conflict, the sudden evacuation of United Nations (UN) and international non-governmental personnel from the area, the Burmese military’s weaponization of aid after Cyclone Mocha’s devastation, and the continued closure of the Myanmar-Bangladesh border.

The few Rohingya who were able to reach Bangladesh now join its nearly one million Rohingya refugees as the country approaches an uncertain future. Widespread internet and communication blackouts in Bangladesh have increasingly challenged WPN’s sustained attempts to closely monitor, document, and verify the situation of Rohingya. It is important to note

that the years-long internet shutdown in Rakhine State, combined with the exacerbating armed conflict, has effectively forced the majority of Rohingya in the region to long rely on Bangladeshi mobile network operators for communication purposes.

Amid such a volatile context, relying on Rohingya in Rakhine State to seek protection through precarious land and sea crossings is far from an effective and sustainable solution to the decades-long crisis. Such an avenue will only endanger Rohingya with dangerous conditions that will further delay their safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return to their homes in Myanmar: human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, child and forced marriage, forced labor and servitude, Islamophobic and anti-Rohingya hate speech and disinformation, abductions and forced recruitment, arrest and detention, torture and mob attacks, and even death.

Continued inaction on Myanmar is what enabled the AA’s lethal drone attack on Rohingya civilians, on August 6, and wider crisis in Rakhine State. Nearly seven years after the Burmese military’s genocidal attacks, decades into its mass atrocities against ethnic and religious minorities, and over three years since its attempted coup, the failures of the past must no longer dictate the country’s future.

Therefore, WPN calls upon the UN, the UN Security Council, and the international community to act for the immediate protection of Rohingya civilians remaining in Rakhine State. Human rights observers and independent international investigations must be urgently deployed to the region to monitor and verify emerging developments. Cross-border aid, including emergency humanitarian assistance and medical care, must be enabled between the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, specifically to Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships and other areas in Rakhine State with Rohingya civilians and IDPs. Justice must continue to guide all actions for civilians in Rakhine State and across the country: all perpetrators of atrocities – including the Burmese military and members of the Arakan Army – must be held accountable under international law.



WFP LAUNCHES EMERGENCY FOOD AID FOR FLOOD-HIT PEOPLE IN MYANMAR

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has launched an emergency relief response to assist more than a hundred thousand people affected by ongoing floods in five states and regions in Myanmar, according to a statement made on 7 August.

Driven by intense monsoon rains since late June, severe flooding has impacted over 200,000 people in Myanmar, with many temporarily displaced. Satellite data from WFP Advanced Disaster Analysis & Mapping estimates that around 855,000 people are living in areas exposed to flooding as of 6 August.

"This flood comes at a time when food insecurity in Myanmar is at an emergency level," said WFP Myanmar's Representative Paolo Mattei. "With more than 13 million people across the country grappling

with food insecurity, the floods only exacerbate their vulnerability."

WFP teams are now on the ground delivering lifesaving assistance to at least 120,000 flood-affected people in Bago, Kachin, Kayin, Magway and Sagaing. WFP support includes cash, rice, special nutritious foods and fortified biscuits.

WFP efforts are designed to complement the initial support provided by local charity organizations addressing the most basic needs. As flooding continues in different parts of the country, WFP continues to monitor the situation and prepares to further expand its flood response as needed.



Photo: AFP

RELIGIOUS GROUPS CALL ON MYANMAR'S NUG TO BUILD ALLIED COALITION

On 8 August, to mark the 36th anniversary of the 8888 Uprising, various religious organizations called on the National Unity Government (NUG) to prioritize the creation of a strategic coalition and to build unity based on principles aimed at winning the ongoing conflict.

The joint statement, issued by the Spring Revolution Interfaith Network (SRIN), Spring Revolution Sangha Network (SRSN), Sangha Union (Mandalay), Spring Revolution Myanmar Muslim Network (SRMMN), Myanmar Muslim Revolutionary Force (MMRF), and Myanmar Hindu Union (MHU), emphasized the importance of pragmatic responsibility and accountability.

The statement also urged the NUG to take swift action in establishing a transitional constitution, which they deemed crucial for the success of the Spring Revolution. Additionally, the organizations demanded the immediate release of individuals who have been sentenced to death during the revolution, as well as all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint.

The religious groups further called on the NUG, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the National League for Democracy (NLD), political parties, ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs), and other allied revolutionary forces to maintain unity in their struggle to ensure that the sacrifices of the people and revolutionaries are not in vain.

Moreover, the organizations appealed to the international community, including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to recognize the NUG, which they claim has the overwhelming support of the Myanmar people, and to provide both material and moral support without delay.

In commemoration of the 36th anniversary of the 8888 Uprising, the organizations and groups held various events and issued statements on 8 August.



View over the peace park.
Photo: Supplied

SALWEEN PEACE PARK HIGHLIGHTS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Salween Peace Park's Governing Committee is urging a "Fight for Our Future" as various NGOs marked International Day of The World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August.

The following is their statement:

On International Day of The World's Indigenous Peoples (IDWIP), Salween Peace Park's Governing Committee, KNUMutraw District's leadership, customary leaders, Karen Community-Based Organizations, and local Indigenous communities of the Salween Peace Park (SPP), come together across Mutraw District, Kawthoolei to celebrate this significant day in showing their unique biocultural knowledge, traditional way of life, culture, and biodiversity that sustain their ancestral territories, and to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities all over the world in our shared and distinct struggles against repression, imperialism, and ecological exploitation. Today, we join our voices in unison to assert our unconditional rights to self-determination and territorial governance.

The theme of this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is "Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial

Contact." The Salween Peace Park stands in solidarity with Indigenous groups in voluntary isolation facing existential threats. We recognize that where collective rights to lands and territories are protected, forests and societies thrive together. Indigenous Peoples, exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government, as enshrined in Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Thanks to the unwavering efforts of the Indigenous Karen of the SPP, 295 Kaw Customary Lands, 6 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 9 Reserved Forests, and 43 Community Forests have been documented and are under the effective protection and stewardship of over 100,000 Indigenous Karen people. This has been enabled by the SPP's inclusive, bottom-up approach to environmental governance which is based upon, and continually informed by Karen traditional self-governance systems. The custodianship and autonomy of the Indigenous Karen people in the SPP play an instrumental role in addressing global ecological crises, particularly biodiversity loss and climate change.

Indigenous Karen communities have faced decades of military oppression and ethnic chauvinism,

displacement, land grabbing, and threats from extractivist development projects. Since the military coup in 2021, the State Administration Council (SAC) has conducted ongoing attacks intentionally targeting civilians, including indiscriminate aerial attacks in the SPP. Despite these challenges, people across Burma are striving for peace, the end of dictatorship, and the creation of a genuine federal democracy from below. We assert our right to live peacefully and govern our own territories.

We will continue to move towards actualizing the SPP's goals of peace and self-determination, ecological integrity, and cultural survival. In the SPP, our reciprocal coexistence with our lands and forests enables us to endure and persist. We will continue to safeguard and preserve our ancestral territory, culture, and biodiverse natural resources for future generations of Indigenous Karen peoples and for the well-being and sustainability of our shared planetary ecosystem.

On IDWIP, the Governing Committee of the SPP firmly state our demands as below:

(1) Immediate Cessation of Discrimination and Violence: End all social, cultural, and political discrimination, injustice, and systematic violence against Indigenous Peoples in Kawthoolei, Burma, and worldwide.

(2) End Military Dictatorship and Aggression: Cease military dictatorship and ethnic chauvinism in Burma. End the State Administration Council (SAC) military aggression and completely withdraw its troops from our ancestral territories.

(3) Recognize Self-Determination Rights: Fully recognize and realize the collective self-determination rights of Indigenous Peoples over their ancestral lands and natural resources at local, national, and global levels.

(4) Support Indigenous Environmental Governance: Unconditionally recognize and support Indigenous Peoples' environmental management and governance. Respect their unique biocultural knowledge, practices, and approaches in addressing global environmental crises.

PADOH MAHN SHA YOUNG LEADER AWARD GOES TO KAREN POLITICAL ACTIVIST, SAW ALBERT CHO

The Phan Foundation says it is pleased to announce that Saw Albert Cho is the recipient of the 2023 Padoh Mahn Sha Young Leader Award, with the award handed over in person on 12 August.

Saw Albert Cho is a remarkable young Karen leader who has played an important role for Karen youth society through his various political activities, says the foundation in a press release.

Born in Ayeyarwaddy Delta under the authoritarian rule of the Burmese governments, Saw Albert Cho experienced discrimination, inequality and mistreatment of his people by the Burmese authorities. Later on, he started reading about Karen history and became involved in social and political activities as a student activist focusing on the rights of Karen people. While in university, he took part in the Karen Youth Network as a spokesperson. In 2019, Saw Albert Cho, alongside his two other colleagues, was arrested and detained in Insein Prison for 17 days, under the National League for Democracy- led government, for organising a peaceful Karen Martyrs Day event in Yangon, and for speaking to the audience at the event.

Saw Albert Cho then joined a political party, the United Nationalities Democratic Party (UNDP) and contested in the 2020 General Election. When the Burmese military seized power in 2021, he joined the General Strike Committee of Nationalities (GSCN), an anti-coup alliance of ethnic nationalities across Burma. Saw Albert Cho is also involved with the Karen Youth Organization as a member of the Karen Youth Research Team.

"This Padoh Mahn Sha Young Leader Award is a great encouragement for me. This award is not just for me, but a recognition of my work for freedom and national equality. This award also inspires me to be brave and courageous to stand up and fight for the Karen nation," said Saw Albert Cho, winner of 2023 Padoh Mahn Sha Young Leader award.

In his supporting letter for Saw Albert Cho, Saw Learner, Chairperson of Karen Youth Organisation, wrote- "Saw Albert Cho never hesitated to help serve his people. He is a selfless person. As an educated young man, he works professionally and does his best in our struggle. I believe he is a role model for young Karen and for the generations to come. Our struggle needs many young people who can lead our movement to free our people from oppression. I believe Saw Albert Cho can mobilise many young educated Karen to join our struggle."

Padoh Saw Hla Htun, Joint Secretary (2) of the Karen National Union wrote- "I believe Saw Albert Cho is a strong youth leader for Karen future and for Karen freedom. He puts his people first, very courageous and committed for the Karen struggle. He deserves to be recognised for Padoh Mahn Sha Young Leader Award."

Nant Bwa Bwa Phan, Director at Phan Foundation said: "we are thrilled to be able to recognise and support Saw Albert Cho's work through the Padoh Mahn Sha Young Leader Award. Like Saw Albert Cho, there are many remarkable young Karen leaders who have made amazing contributions to our society. We value their fantastic work the same way our father Padoh Mahn Sha valued young people."

The Phan Foundation was established in 2008 in memory of Padoh Mahn Sha and Nant Kyin Shwe. The foundation supports Karen people, focusing in four areas, such as education, poverty alleviation, promotion of human rights and protection of Karen culture. The foundation also created this Padoh Mahn Sha Young leader award to recognise the work of young Karen leaders, with the financial support of \$4,000 for their valuable work.

The award was given to Saw Albert Cho in person at the commemoration of 74th Karen Martyrs Day in Kawthoolei on 12 August.



Saw Albert Cho. Photo: Facebook



Interim leader Muhammad Yunus visits slain student's family. Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH'S YUNUS HAILS SLAIN STUDENT IN APPEAL FOR UNITY

Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus appealed for religious unity Saturday after embracing the weeping mother of a student shot dead by police, a flashpoint in mass protests that ended Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule.

Nobel laureate Yunus, 84, returned from Europe this week to helm a temporary administration facing the monumental challenge of ending disorder and enacting democratic reforms.

"Our responsibility is to build a new Bangladesh," he told reporters.

Several reprisal attacks against the country's Hindu minority since autocratic ex-premier Hasina's toppling have caused alarm in neighbouring India as well as fear at home.

Yunus called for calm during a visit to the northern city of Rangpur by invoking the memory of Abu Sayeed, the first student slain during last month's unrest.

"Don't differentiate by religion," he said.

"Abu Sayeed is now in every home. The way he stood, we have to do the same," he added. "There are no differences in Abu Sayeed's Bangladesh."

Sayeed, 25, was shot dead by police at close range on July 16 at the start of a police crackdown on student-led protests against Hasina's government.

His mother sobbed as she clung to a visibly emotional Yunus, who had come to pay his respects alongside members of the "advisory" cabinet now administering the country.

Fellow cabinet member Nahid Islam, a 26-year-old sociology graduate who led the protests that culminated in Hasina's ouster, wept by the leader's side.

ALLIES PURGED

Hasina, 76, fled by helicopter to neighbouring India on Monday as protesters flooded Dhaka's streets in a dramatic end to her iron-fisted rule.

Her government was accused of widespread

human rights abuses including the extrajudicial killing of thousands of her political opponents.

Cabinet ministers left blindsided by her sudden fall have gone to ground, while several top appointees have been forced out of office -- including the national police chief and the central bank governor.

The chief justice of the Supreme Court became on Saturday the latest to announce his departure.

"It's not possible anymore for me to perform the duty," Obaidul Hassan said in a statement. "Therefore, I have decided to resign."

Appointed last year, Hassan earlier oversaw a much-criticised war crimes tribunal that ordered the execution of Hasina's opponents, and his brother was her longtime secretary.

His announcement came after hundreds of protesters gathered outside the court to demand he and other judges step down by the early afternoon.

"No one should do anything that pits the Supreme Court against the mass uprising of the students and the people," Asif Nazrul, a student protest leader now serving in Yunus' government, told reporters.

'SAFETY AND PROTECTION'

In the immediate aftermath of Hasina's fall, some businesses and homes owned by Hindus were attacked, a group seen by some in Muslim-majority Bangladesh as having been her supporters.

Bangladeshi Hindus account for around eight percent of the country's population.

Hundreds have since arrived on India's border, asking to cross.

Hasina's flight has heightened rancour towards India, which played a decisive military role in securing Bangladesh's independence, but also backed her to the hilt.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged "safety and protection of Hindus and all other minority communities".

More than 450 people were killed in the unrest leading up to Hasina's departure, including dozens of police officers killed during clampdowns on demonstrations.

The caretaker administration Yunus helms has said that restoration of law and order is its "first priority".

Complicating its efforts is a strike declared Tuesday by the police union, saying its members would not return to work until their safety was assured.

Bangladesh's police force said more than half of the country's police stations had since reopened.

They are being guarded by soldiers from the army, an institution held in higher public regard than the police for opting not to forcibly quell the protests.

"We are happy that police are returning to their duty," university pupil Umar Faruk, 22, told AFP.

"Police are needed to maintain law and order. But it's also a matter of concern for us whether the police can gain the trust of the people."

Two attempted jailbreaks were staged at prisons north of the capital Dhaka this week, with more than 200 inmates fleeing one facility.

Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his pioneering work in microfinance, credited with helping millions of Bangladeshis out of grinding poverty.

He took office Thursday as "chief advisor" to a caretaker administration, comprised of fellow civilians bar one retired brigadier-general, and has said he wants to hold elections "within a few months".

AFP



Protest in Israel against the ongoing war. Photo: AFP

ISRAEL FACES ANGER OVER GAZA SCHOOL STRIKE RESCUERS SAY KILLED 93

Rescuers in Gaza said an Israeli air strike on a school housing displaced Palestinians killed 93 people on Saturday, sparking international condemnation despite Israel's insistence that it was targeting militants.

AFP could not independently verify the toll which, if confirmed, would be one of the largest from a single strike during 10 months of war between Israel and Palestinian militants since Hamas's October 7 attack.

The bombardment of Al-Tabieen religious school and mosque drew criticism from across the Middle East and beyond alongside calls for a ceasefire, after international mediators invited the warring sides to resume talks towards a long-sought truce and hostage-release deal.

Civil defence rescuers in the Hamas-ruled territory said three Israeli missiles hit the complex in Gaza City while people were performing dawn prayers. The

military confirmed it had used "three precise munitions"

Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency, said 11 children and six women were among the 93 who died at the school shelter, "and there are many unidentified body parts".

"They dropped a missile on them while they were just praying," said one woman, mourning over a dead child shrouded in a plastic body bag.

Israel's military said it had "precisely struck" Al-Tabieen, later adding that intelligence suggested "at least 19 Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists were eliminated".

Hamas denounced it as a "dangerous escalation", while the Palestinian group's Lebanese ally Hezbollah called it a "horrific massacre".

Iran, which backs both militant groups and had accused Israel of wanting to spread war in the Middle East following high-profile killings in Tehran and Beirut,

condemned what it called a “barbaric attack”.

“Those who were inside the mosque were all killed,” said local resident Abu Wassim. “Even the floor above, where women and children were sleeping, was completely burned.”

With nearly all of the Gaza Strip’s 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war, many have sought refuge in school buildings, which have been hit at least 14 times since July 6, according to an AFP tally.

‘INTOLERABLE’ TOLL

Israel has made similar accusations of armed activities after strikes on school shelters, while Hamas has denied using civilian facilities for military aims.

US National Security Council spokesman Sean Savett said Hamas has been operating out of schools, “but we have also said repeatedly and consistently that Israel must take measures to minimise civilian harm”.

Jordan’s foreign ministry said the timing was an indication of Israel’s efforts to “obstruct and thwart” the latest mediation effort.

One of the mediators, Qatar, called for an “urgent international investigation”, while Turkey claimed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted “to sabotage ceasefire negotiations”.

Hamas’s October 7 attack that sparked the war resulted in the deaths of 1,198 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Palestinian militants seized 251 hostages, 111 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 39 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel’s retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,790 people, according to Gaza’s health ministry, which does not give details of civilian and militant deaths.

The European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the school strike left him “horrified”.

France said “Israel must respect international humanitarian law”.

“For several weeks, school buildings have been repeatedly targeted, with an intolerable number of civilian victims,” the French foreign ministry said.

MEASURED RESPONSE

Netanyahu’s office on Thursday said Israel would send negotiators “to conclude the details of implementing a deal”, after the joint invitation from the United States, Egypt and Qatar. Hamas has yet to formally respond.

Hamas officials, some analysts and critics in Israel have said Netanyahu has sought to prolong the fighting for political gain.

Anti-government protesters rallied again on Saturday in Israel’s commercial hub of Tel Aviv and in the northern city of Haifa to pressure their leaders to secure the release of the remaining hostages.

Savett, the US spokesman, said the Gaza City strike “underscores the urgency of a ceasefire and hostage deal”.

The mediators invited the warring parties to resume talks on August 15, after intense diplomacy aimed at averting a region-wide conflagration in recent days.

The Gaza conflict has already drawn in Iran-aligned groups around the region, but fears of a broader war have surged following the killings of two senior militants, including Hamas’s political leader.

Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and others have vowed retaliation, although they have yet to take action.

Asked what his message was to Iran, US President Joe Biden responded: “Don’t”, as he walked out of Saturday evening mass in Delaware.

Hezbollah, which has traded near-daily fire with Israeli forces throughout the war, on Saturday said it had fired “squadrons of explosive-laden drones” at an army base in retaliation for the killing of a Hamas commander in south Lebanon on Friday.

The killing on July 31 of Hamas’s Ismail Haniyeh during a visit to Tehran had sidelined truce talks. Iran and Hamas blamed Israel, which has not directly commented.

Iran’s mission to the United Nations on Saturday said the Islamic republic has “the legitimate right to self-defence” after its sovereignty was “violated”.

“However, we hope that our response will be timed and conducted in a manner not to the detriment of the potential ceasefire,” it said.

AFP



Taliban fighters on guard in Kabul. Photo: AFP

THREE YEARS AFTER TALIBAN RETURN, ECONOMIC WOES LOOM LARGE

Despite three years of improved security following the end of the Taliban’s insurgency, Afghanistan’s economy remains stagnant and its population is in the grips of a worsening humanitarian crisis.

A third of Afghanistan’s roughly 40 million people live on bread and tea, according to the United Nations, there is massive unemployment, and the World Bank warns of zero growth over the next three years.

But there have been some positive changes since the Taliban takeover in 2021 -- even if their government remains unrecognised by any other country.

The currency has been resilient, corruption is no longer ubiquitous, and tax collection has improved.

Authorities have also built “economic, commercial, transit and investment” ties in the region, according to Ahmad Zahid, deputy commerce and industry minister.

Afghanistan has great mineral and agricultural potential, which the Taliban government is attempting to exploit, but they are impeded by poor infrastructure and a lack of domestic and foreign expertise and capital.

Though Afghans welcome the improved security in their lives, many are just trying to make ends meet.

AFP spoke to four people from different parts of the country ahead of the anniversary of the fall of Kabul this week:

THE OPTIMISTIC BUSINESSMAN

For 54-year-old Azizullah Rehmati, business is booming -- his saffron company in the western province of Herat is set to double production this year.

Until 2021, his “Red Gold Saffron Company” hired armed guards to escort the valuable spice from the

factory to the airport, but the improved security climate has done away with the need for such overt protection.

"Now there is no problem," said Rehmati, who exports to 27 countries.

At his processing facility, women sort the red stigmas of the precious saffron spice with tongs.

Taliban government restrictions on women have slashed their participation in the workforce, but Rehmati's company is among the 50 percent of Afghan employers who still hire women.

Still, a key challenge for Rehmati -- and Afghanistan as a whole -- is the crippled banking sector.

"It is so important that we have the banking channels reopened," said Sulaiman Bin Shah, deputy trade minister under the previous government.

The sector has been blocked by international sanctions and the freezing of central bank assets.

Rehmati's bank can't send money abroad -- or receive transfers -- meaning he has to resort to more expensive private money changers in Dubai.

Getting visas for foreign trips is also a major problem.

Many foreign nations shuttered their embassies in the wake of the Taliban takeover and Afghan passports are rated the worst in the world by the Henley Index, which tracks global ease of travel.

"We will fall back from the world market," Rehmati said.

THE OUT-OF-WORK MUSICIAN

Wahid Nekzai Logari played in Afghanistan's national orchestra and performed concerts on the sarinda, a traditional stringed instrument, as well as the harmonium.

"I supported my whole family. We had a good life," said the 46-year-old in his modest home in a Kabul suburb.

But the Taliban government has prohibited public performances of music, deeming it un-Islamic, leaving thousands involved in the industry destitute.

"Now I'm unemployed," Logari said.

To feed his family of seven he sometimes drives a cab -- earning just 5,000 afghanis a month (\$70), a fifth of what he used to earn from his concerts.

"Nobody told us, 'you can't play music anymore, but we'll find you a way to feed your family,'" he said.

THE INSURGENT-TURNED-BUREAUCRAT

Abdul Wali Shaheen wanted to "die a martyr's death" in the Taliban ranks, but after their victory he swapped his rocket launcher for a computer at the Department of Information and Culture in Ghazni province.

"I wasn't as stressed (then) as I am today," the 31-year-old said wryly.

"All we did was wage jihad, now it's harder. I have more responsibilities in regards to the people."

Still, Shaheen's monthly salary of 10,000 afghanis is enough to feed his family of five, and he is happy with the direction the country is going.

"I give the Emirate a 10/10 for these three years," he said.

"Everything is going well and we have hope for the future."

THE HIDDEN BEAUTICIAN

The order to close beauty salons last year "broke her heart," but Sayeda -- not her real name -- reopened in secret four months ago elsewhere in Kabul.

"We found this place to rent, with the condition that customers come very discreetly and that some of our employees sleep here so that neighbours think a family lives here," said the 21-year-old manager.

"Before, we had 30 to 40 customers a day, now it's six or seven," said Sayeda, who has nevertheless kept her 25 employees so that "everyone has an income".

Sayeda's salary has dropped from 25,000 afghanis per month to between 8,000 and 12,000.

"We're working in hiding and we don't know for how much longer," she said, noting the risk of being shut down by the police.

When they've "found some (underground) salons, they broke the equipment, mistreated the staff" and imposed fines, she said.

AFP

PODCAST #254

A Diplomatic Deadlock

Kitti Prasirtsuk on the Gordian knot of the Myanmar crisis as seen from neighboring Thailand


Bonus Shorts

A DIPLOMATIC DEADLOCK

"At least we should make an attempt in our efforts to help solve the issues, because the situation has changed. Three years have passed [and the military] is not as strong as before! So it is more likely that they would like to negotiate."

The Insight Myanmar Podcast guest is Kitti Prasirtsuk, a professor of international relations at the Faculty of Political Science from Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. His expertise lies in international relations within the Indo-Pacific region, and ASEAN issues, including its alliance with America and relationship with Thailand.

In the podcast, Kitti begins by reviewing ASEAN's tepid attempt to resolve the crisis through the Five-Point Consensus, and how its ability to enforce its own resolutions and mediate effectively has been hindered by both an absence of a cohesive strategy, and a lack of unity among its member states. Echoing the words of former AHA Executive Director Adelina Kamal, he finds that ASEAN's attempt at intervention and even humanitarian assistance has been largely ineffective.

Kitti explains Thailand's reluctance to constructively influence the Myanmar military as primarily driven by economic interests. This hesitation is compounded by the uncomfortable reality that Thailand's own previous Prime Minister rose to power through a military coup. For these reasons, he feels they prefer a cautious approach which safeguards their investments while

maintaining good military-to-military relations.

Here Kitti reflects on the profound loss of Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, a former Thai diplomat whose recent passing has left a significant void in the region's diplomatic efforts. Dr. Pitsuwan was seen as a beacon of hope for resolving complex conflicts in the region, and Kitti believes that his leadership and experience would have been instrumental in mediating between the conflicting parties in Myanmar, leveraging his credibility and influence to foster dialogue and cooperation. "We do not have that kind of caliber of a person in our Thai political community [now]," he adds sadly.

Last year, Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai, after claiming he had secretly met with Aung San Suu Kyi in prison on a recent visit to Myanmar, initiated a meeting in Pattaya, inviting Myanmar's military junta and other factions to discuss the crisis. This move was seen as controversial because it was conducted without prior consultation with ASEAN, leading to frustration among member states. The meeting was also criticized for potentially legitimizing the military junta and for its inability to make substantial progress due to the Thai government's interim status at the time. Kitti notes how the Pattaya meeting echoed Thailand's attempts to mediate the Cambodian conflict in the 1980s, but this similar approach failed to achieve meaningful resolution for Myanmar's current conflict. "[Don Pramudwinai] is a businessman, and he's very fast moving," he says. "I think he would like to do that again, but he did not make good progress in the Myanmar crisis."

Still, Kitti believes that a democratic victory in Myanmar would also bring significant, positive changes for Thailand. "Many people in Thailand would be heartened [if] they managed to win out over the tyranny of that dictatorial regime," he says. Kitti believes that most Thais would be concerned about the potential spillover of instability across the border. However, he adds, "It doesn't mean that we prefer stability at all cost," adding that a democratic Myanmar could well lead to stronger regional cooperation and stability, benefiting ASEAN as a whole.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/7/19/episode-254-a-diplomatic-deadlock>

MYANMAR ACCEPTS CHINA'S MA JIA AS NEW AMBASSADOR AMIDST ONGOING CONFLICTS

The Myanmar junta has officially agreed to the appointment of Ma Jia as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China, according to recent reports. This diplomatic move comes at a critical time for both nations, as they navigate complex regional dynamics, according to regional news outlets.

Ma Jia, born in November 1967 in Yongji, Shanxi Province, joined China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1991 and has since served in various capacities both at China and abroad.

Her diplomatic career includes postings in Pakistan, Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and India.

She is no stranger to Myanmar, having served as Third Secretary at the Chinese Embassy in Yangon from 1995 to 1998, during the rule of dictator Than Shwe.

Ma Jia's appointment coincides with recent high-level diplomatic engagements, including a visit by Chinese special envoy Deng Xijun to Myanmar's capital, Nay Pyi Taw. During this visit, Deng met with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing to discuss peace processes and border stability—issues that have become increasingly pressing in recent months.

In her new role, Ma Jia faces significant challenges, particularly in mediating talks between the Myanmar junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance—a coalition comprising the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

The urgency of these negotiations has been highlighted by recent events, including the collapse of a China-mediated ceasefire in late June and subsequent territorial gains by ethnic armed forces.

As border trade between Myanmar and China remains suspended following a large-scale offensive by the Three Brotherhood Alliance in October, all eyes may be on Ma Jia to see how she will leverage her extensive diplomatic experience to advance China's interests while addressing the pressing issues facing Myanmar.



JUNTA CHIEF TOUTS AGRICULTURAL REFORM AS COOKING OIL SCARCITY PERSISTS

In an address to the junta's agriculture and livestock coordination meeting on August 6, junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the potential benefits of a robust manufacturing industry centered around cooking oil crops and cotton, according to the stature-run newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The nation possesses the resources to thrive, he declared, highlighting the abundance of groundnut, sesame, and oil palm in Myanmar.

However, the general's optimistic rhetoric stands in stark contrast to the bitter reality faced by Myanmar's citizens. Despite the junta's claims of agricultural prosperity, cooking oil has become an increasingly scarce commodity in the country, with prices soaring to unprecedented levels.

The junta's recent blacklisting of eight major cooking oil importers, including Ayeyar Hinthar Trading owned by prominent businessman Zaw Win Shein, has only exacerbated the crisis. This move, aimed at curbing "misconduct" and enforcing regulations, has instead triggered fears of further shortages and price hikes.

The junta's attempts to control the market have backfired spectacularly. Since the 2021 coup, cooking oil prices have skyrocketed by 75 percent, with a viss (1.6 kg) now fetching up to 16,000 kyat – nearly triple the regime's mandated price cap of 5,700 kyat.

The regime's vision of agricultural self-sufficiency remains a distant dream, while ordinary citizens struggle to afford this basic necessity.



MYANMAR'S SHADOW GOVERNMENT NUG COMMEMORATES 36TH ANNIVERSARY OF 8888 UPRISING

Myanmar's opposition shadow National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement on its official Facebook page, commemorating the 36th anniversary of the 8888 Uprising, a pivotal moment in the country's struggle for democracy.

The 8888 Uprising, which began on August 8, 1988, was a series of nationwide protests against the oppressive rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. The movement, led by students, monks, and civilians, called for an end to military dictatorship and the establishment of a democratic system.

In its statement, the NUG praised the uprising as a "beacon in Myanmar's democratic history" and honored the sacrifices made by those who participated. The NUG emphasized that the 8888 Uprising not only laid the foundation for democracy and human rights in Myanmar but also symbolized unity among the country's diverse ethnic groups.

The NUG drew parallels between the 1988 protests and the ongoing resistance against the current military junta, which seized power in a coup on February 1, 2021.

The statement highlighted a series of pro-democracy movements throughout Myanmar's history, including the current Spring Revolution.

The shadow government pledged to continue the fight against military rule, citing progress in political, military, financial, and diplomatic fronts. It also expressed determination to bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice.

The NUG was formed in April 2021 by elected lawmakers, members of ethnic minority groups, and anti-coup figures in response to the military takeover. It presents itself as the legitimate government of Myanmar and has gained support from pro-democracy activists both within the country and internationally.

SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZES AS MYANMAR'S RESISTANCE FORCES GAIN GROUND

In a significant turn of events, Myanmar's ethnic and resistance forces have reportedly captured 75 towns, including the strategically important Northeastern Regional Military Command in northern Shan State capital Lashio.

This development has sparked a flurry of reactions on social media, with many expressing optimism about the Spring Revolution's progress.

In a recent online talkshow, Duwa Lashi La, Acting President of the shadow National Unity Government (NUG), stressed the importance of maintaining unity against the junta's unyielding stance. He pointed out that even as the junta faces collapse on diplomatic, economic, and military fronts, its leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, continues to show unwavering stubbornness.

Duwa Lashi La remarked that despite it being time for Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to admit his mistakes and return power to the people, he remains obstinate due to his delusions. The Acting President urged for continued resistance through unity.

He further said that the military junta has completely collapsed, asserting that they have no morale left and no longer possess the power to wage war or any strength. He emphasized the resistance forces' unexpected success against what was once considered a formidable military, highlighting the dramatic shift in power dynamics within the country.

The news has galvanized support on social media platforms. One Facebook user commented, "The revolutionaries are about to win. The military dictatorship's roots are no longer firm, so the big tree is slowly becoming easier to fell."

Another user pointedly remarked on the junta leader's state of mind: "Is Min Aung Hlaing stubborn because he's crazy, or crazy because he's stubborn? What's certain is that he's facing a major defeat."

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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