

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

**BRUTALITY
INCREASES**

**Myanmar
junta war
crimes logged
by NGO**

● **Junta denies rumours of a coup**

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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.

IS THE US WAKING UP TO CHINA'S INFLUENCE OVER MYANMAR?

The United States on Friday last week promised to keep supporting Myanmar's democratic opposition, after China publicly endorsed the transition plans of the ruling military junta.

Two senior US officials met virtually with the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) - which consists mostly of lawmakers ousted in a 2021 coup - as well as key ethnic rebel groups including the Karen National Union (KNU). The US officials "commended the groups on their collaborative efforts to work on establishing a path toward an inclusive federal democratic Burma," the US State Department said.

The meeting came at a time when China appears to be upping its engagement with the Myanmar junta, partly as a result of the threats posed to its investments and the strategically important China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of their global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi met in Naypyidaw with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing earlier in the week - in the first meeting with the junta leader since the coup - offering support, and backing for the junta's supposed plan for national elections.

The US officials meanwhile "reiterated that the United States will continue to expand direct support and assistance to pro-democracy actors" including to "develop concrete steps towards a full transition to civilian governance that

respects the will of the people of Burma," it said. The US officials in the meeting were Tom Sullivan, who is a senior advisor to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Michael Schiffer, the top official for Asia at the US Agency for International Development.

An online meeting was better than no meeting. But America appears to have dropped the ball to some extent following a flurry of interest during the 10-year experiment in democracy, that saw engagement by US President Barack Obama and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as Aung San Suu Kyi rose to power during a brief window. A change of government in the USA, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the February 2021 Myanmar military coup appear to have upset the engagement with democratic players.

Myanmar is a crucially and strategically-placed player in South East Asia and it is clear that the US and China are stepping up the ante over the crisis-hit country.

An important element is likely to be how more engaged the USA will be with Myanmar's opposition movement and the NUG in the coming weeks and months, during this US election year. The Myanmar people will be hoping for deeper US engagement as the fighting and humanitarian crisis grow more intense.

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CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

3 EDITORIAL

6 BRUTALITY INCREASES
Myanmar junta war crimes
logged by NGO

10 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR
Analysis & Insight

14 CHINESE INTERESTS
Chinese Foreign Minister demands
Military Council protect Chinese
interests in Myanmar

15 Career diplomat appointed as new
Chinese ambassador to Myanmar

16 China supports Myanmar junta
plan for fresh elections: FM

17 CORE DEVELOPMENTS
Junta denies rumours of a coup

18 Indian government provides over
1,379 tons of rice to Myanmar
refugees and disaster victims in
Mizoram

19 Mandalay People's Defence Force
seizes Zayat Kwin military camp in
Thabeikkyin Township

20 Monywa People's Strike Committee
calls for public vigilance, citing risk
of severe abuses against political
prisoners

21 TNLA appoints 22 judges and
lawyers in seized townships during
Operation 1027



22 Arakan Army seizes control of Kyeintali town in Rakhine State, Myanmar

23 Myanmar civil society organisations send felicitations of support to Bangladesh movement

24 Overseas employment agencies warned not to recruit workers through touts and brokers

25 Rebels evacuate 13,000 Rohingyas amid battle for Myanmar's Maungdaw

27 JUNTA ACTIONS
Myanmar central bank to pump \$100 million into easing fuel shortage

28 Junta announces new minimum wage at 6,800 Kyats per day

29 Japan confirms executive convicted, freed by Myanmar

30 Singapore power plant suspension may leave more of Myanmar in the dark

32 ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
How China's investments in Kalimantan exploit Indonesia's resources

34 Hamas rejects 'new' Gaza truce conditions as Biden says deal closer than ever

37 COLUMNS
INSIGHT MYANMAR – Dr Jenny Ko Gyi and her experience with Monle Sayadaw

38 JUNTA WATCH

39 SOCIAL WATCH



Cover photo of Myanmar soldiers by AFP



Myanmar junta forces on the street.
Photo: AFP

BRUTALITY INCREASES

MYANMAR JUNTA WAR CRIMES LOGGED BY NGO

There is substantial evidence that brutal war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar military have escalated at an alarming rate across the country, according to information collected and analysed by the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (Mechanism) and detailed in its Annual Report released by 13 August 2024.

The Report focuses on the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 - a time when armed conflicts increased across Myanmar as the challenges to military rule intensified.

During this time, the Mechanism collected significant evidence of additional intensive and violent war crimes. This includes aerial attacks on schools, religious buildings and hospitals where there was no apparent military target, and physical mutilations against people detained during the armed conflicts, including beheadings and public displays of disfigured and sexually mutilated bodies.

“We have collected substantial evidence showing horrific levels of brutality and inhumanity across Myanmar. Many crimes have been committed with an intent to punish and induce terror in the civilian population,” said Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Mechanism.

The Mechanism is also investigating the unlawful imprisonment – including arbitrary detention and manifestly unfair trials – of perceived opponents of the military junta. Thousands of people have been arrested and many tortured or killed in detention. There is abundant evidence of systematic torture, including severe physical and mental abuse such as beatings, electric shocks, strangulations and sleep deprivation. There is also evidence of gang rape, the burning of sexual body parts, and other violent sexual and gender-based crimes committed in detention. The victims include people of all genders and ages, including children.



Civilians have been heavily targeted by the junta.
Photo: AFP

“No one has been held accountable for any crimes, which emboldens perpetrators and deepens the culture of impunity in the country. We are trying to break this cycle. I believe the Mechanism has made considerable progress in building criminal cases against those most responsible for these crimes,” said Koumjian.

The findings in the report are based on information and evidence collected from more than 900 sources, including more than 400 eyewitness testimonies. Additional evidence includes photographs, videos, audio material, documents, maps, geospatial imagery, social media posts, and forensic evidence.

While the vast majority of information collected by the Mechanism concerns crimes committed by the Myanmar security forces, there is also credible evidence of crimes committed by armed groups which are fighting against the military. This includes summary executions of civilians suspected of being military informers or collaborators.

While the Mechanism is working hard to investigate the high volume of crimes committed since the military takeover in February 2021, it also maintains its commitment to the investigation of earlier crimes committed against the Rohingya during the Myanmar military's 2016 and 2017 clearance operations.

In particular, the Mechanism has analysed the movements of military units, the resettlement practices and policies intended to attract the migration of non-Rohingya people to Rakhine State, and the quantities and qualities of weapons possessed by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army at the time of the clearance operations.

The Mechanism has shared these analyses, along with a vast volume of evidence, with authorities working on ongoing cases concerning the Rohingya at the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and in Argentina. The Mechanism is proactively sharing evidence that may be relevant to the proceedings and is also responding to targeted requests from these authorities for specific information and analysis.

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM or Mechanism) was created by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes and other violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011. It aims to facilitate justice and accountability by preserving and organizing this evidence and preparing case files that can be used by authorities to prosecute individuals in national, regional and international courts.



Devastation in the wake of a junta attack.
Photo: AFP

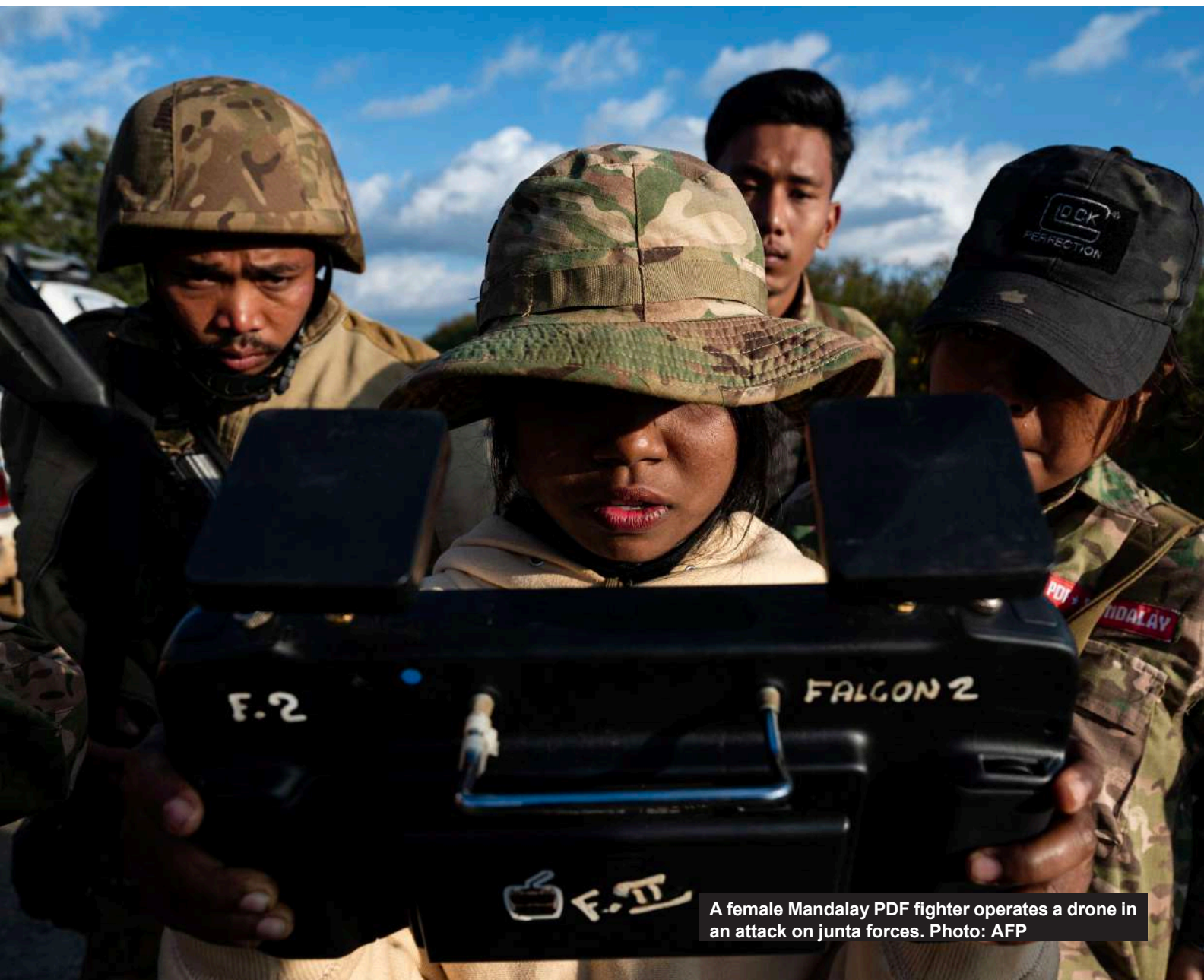
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A female Mandalay PDF fighter operates a drone in an attack on junta forces. Photo: AFP

PDF OPERATION TIGHTENS GRIP ON MANDALAY REGION

In a significant escalation, People's Defense Forces (PDF) from Myingyan District launched coordinated attacks across three townships—Myingyan, Taungtha, and Natogyi—on August 10, marking a shift as these operations were led independently by the PDF without the management or support of Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs).

The Myingyan District Special Operation began in the early hours of August 10, with simultaneous strikes in Myingyan, Taungtha, and Natogyi towns. In Natogyi, PDF forces targeted key junta positions, including the police station and the general administration office, forcing the junta troops to retreat after sustaining severe injuries. The intense fighting resulted in the destruction and burning of private businesses and state department offices. With no ground reinforcements available, the junta relied solely on airstrikes to counter the attack.

A spokesperson for the Myingyan PDF reported that they successfully seized control of four junta posts in Natogyi.

The operation continued on the morning of August 12, when PDF forces attacked the Taungtha police station, a military threads mill (No. 10), and a gas pipeline. However, facing heavy artillery and airstrikes from junta forces, the revolutionary forces eventually

retreated by the afternoon. Despite the setback, they managed to seize a militia village known as Phayarhla, located near an electric station.

Mandalay, located in central Myanmar and comprising 30 townships, remains a hotspot for armed conflict, with ongoing clashes reported in Tagaung, Tabeikkyin, Singu, Madaya, Mogok, Patheingyi, Myingyan, Taungtha, and Natogyi.

HOTELS BOMBARDED IN NGAPALI BEACH RESORT

Ngapali Beach, one of Myanmar's top tourist destinations, has witnessed significant destruction as clashes between junta forces and the Arakan Army (AA) continue in Rakhine State. The beach, known for its luxurious hotels predominantly owned by Myanmar's former authoritarian figures and their business associates, has suffered extensive damage due to the ongoing conflict.

According to the junta's Hotel and Travel Ministry, Ngapali Beach is home to 65 hotels, offering over 2,000 rooms, most of which are rated 4-star and 5-star, with a minimum standard of 3-star quality. The total investment in these hotels is estimated to be in the multi-billion-dollar range.



A Myanmar Border Guard on the border with Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

International hotel chains, including the Hilton Hotel, have partnered with Myanmar's cronies to operate at the beach.

Ngapali Beach is strategically important, with Mazi Airport and two military battalions (No. 55 Regiment and No. 566 LIB) stationed nearby. In early June, the AA launched an offensive against these military bases. In response, the junta employed heavy airstrikes and naval artillery, resulting in widespread damage to the area. Numerous hotels caught fire as a result of the bombardment.

A local resident reported, "Due to the aerial bombing, many hotels were burning down. Although civilian houses were not directly hit, the beach and nearby pagodas were."

Another resident expressed concern over the junta's tactics, stating, "As they face the loss of Ngapali Beach, they don't want to leave it in good condition for the AA to control. They will hold on as long as they can, and when they can't, they'll bomb everything without regard for the destruction."

Among the significant hotels damaged are the Jasmine Ngapali Resort, which was partially burned, and the Amara Hotel, which also suffered damage. The

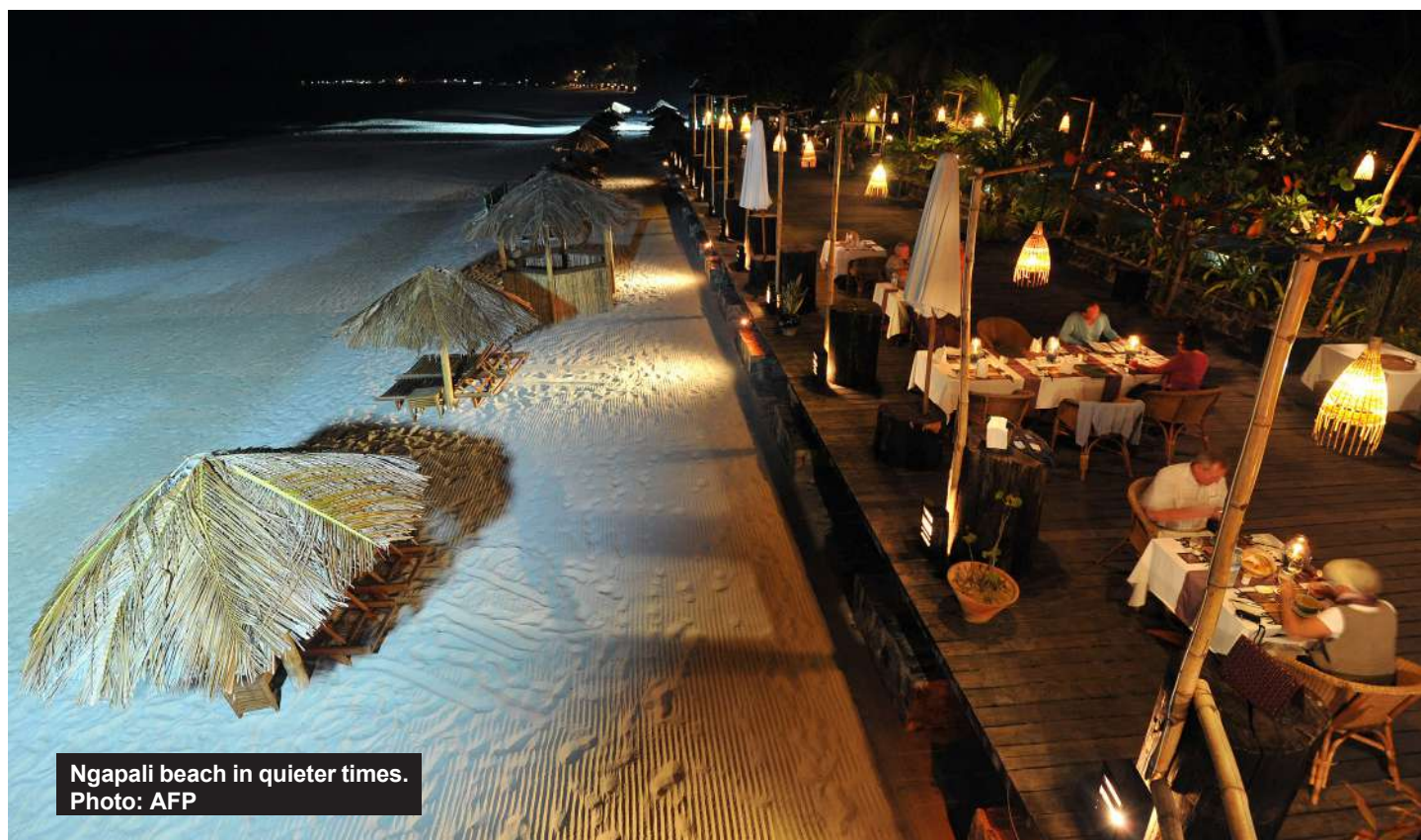
Jasmine Ngapali Resort, owned by top crony Aung Ko Win, previously hosted the 8th Myanmar-Thai high-ranking officials meeting. The Amara Hotel is owned by the son of a former powerful minister.

By July 11, the AA had successfully seized all the military bases in the area, marking a significant shift in control over Ngapali Beach.

ROHINGYA COMMUNITY UNDER THREAT IN NORTHERN RAKHINE

As the Arakan Army (AA) intensifies its campaign to capture Maungdaw, the predominantly Rohingya population in the city is facing an increasingly desperate situation. The ongoing urban battles between AA and junta forces have trapped thousands of civilians from various ethnic groups, with the Rohingya community bearing the brunt of the escalating violence.

Caught in the crossfire, the Rohingya have suffered significant casualties, with many falling victim to the relentless conflict. The AA has accused junta forces of preventing civilians from leaving Maungdaw, allegedly using them as human shields. Despite these challenges, the AA has managed to evacuate around 20,000 people, including Rohingya locals and staff from international organizations and their families.



Ngapali beach in quieter times.
Photo: AFP

As the situation deteriorates, the AA has admitted that it cannot provide adequate medical care to those still trapped, particularly the Rohingya community, who remain most at risk. The AA has urged all residents to leave Maungdaw as their offensive advances, advising them to avoid areas near junta troops.

However, the National Unity Government's (NUG) Deputy Minister of Human Rights reported that about 70,000 Rohingya remain trapped in the conflict zone, with no clear path to safety.

Tragically, on 5 August 2024 around 200 Rohingya were reportedly killed by bombs dropped from drones as they attempted to flee the violence, joining thousands of others gathered at the Naf River in hopes of crossing into Bangladesh and reaching refugee camps. However, Bangladesh authorities recently announced that they can no longer accept Rohingya refugees, leaving those attempting the crossing in an increasingly perilous situation.

Human rights activist Ro Nay San Lwin has accused the AA of launching drone attacks on the fleeing civilians, noting that the drones originated from AA-controlled areas, and junta troops do not use such equipment. However, the AA has denied any involvement in these attacks.

With the conflict in Maungdaw showing no signs of abating, the Rohingya community remains in grave danger, caught between the advancing AA forces and the entrenched junta troops, with limited options for escape or safety.

TOP MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

Please find the most popular Mizzima Burmese videos of the last week.

“Since the Regional Military Headquarters has fallen, Pyin Oo Lwin and Mandalay’s salaries will also fall” (Editorial Talk)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGd_HkEhE3Y

Did the military leader Min Aung Hlaing tell the truth? - Common Ground (Episode - 54)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym8f3lknKRM>

Is the end of the war council near?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pIZvUZy5eE>





Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, centre, at recent SE Asia meeting. Photo: AFP

CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER DEMANDS MILITARY COUNCIL PROTECT CHINESE INTERESTS IN MYANMAR

Chinese Foreign Minister Mr. Wang Yi told coup leader Min Aung Hlaing to firmly protect Chinese interests and investments in Myanmar at a meeting held in Naypyidaw on 14 August.

Mr. Wang Yi told Min Aung Hlaing that Myanmar needs to firmly protect mutual interests as a friendly neighbour, according to Chinese media citing a diplomatic message from the Foreign Ministry.

Chinese Communist Party Politburo committee member and Foreign Minister, Mr. Wang Yi, said that as a friend and neighbor of Myanmar, China strictly follows the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, and supports Myanmar's efforts to uphold stability, grow the economy, and improve the people's livelihoods, and would respect the path to development chosen by Myanmar.

Mr. Wang Yi also said China would like to deepen cooperation with Myanmar in all sectors, safeguard and maintain the operation of gas and oil pipelines between the two countries, work for the betterment of people's livelihoods, and to build a shared future for the Chinese and Myanmar community.

The Military Council's state-run media reported the Myanmar side talked about how Myanmar does not accept in any way any actions harming the interests of China through Myanmar. Myanmar places a special emphasis on peace and stability, development, and security measures related to China.

Necessary technological assistance would be provided by China for Myanmar to conduct the upcoming census-taking process. Moreover, essential aid would be given for the election with China calling for Myanmar to hold an all-inclusive election, the Chinese

side responded.

Chinese Foreign Minister Mr. Wang Yi and his delegation also met separately with Myanmar Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Than Swe in Naypyitaw in the evening on 14 August. The Chinese foreign minister discussed with his Myanmar counterpart smooth and safe operation of oil and gas pipelines, stability in building economic corridors, enhanced cooperation in security, and cooperation in the agricultural sector. Wang and top officials exchanged views on bilateral relations, stability of the border region, and cooperation in eliminating cybercrime and other illegal activities.

During his visit to Myanmar, the Chinese foreign minister also met separately in Naypyidaw with former Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Senior General Than Shwe.

In this meeting, Than Shwe requested Mr. Wang Yi continue providing assistance to restore stability in the country and to counter foreign interference.

Myanmar state television, MRTV, reported Wang told Min Aung Hlaing that China is cooperating seriously for stability and peace in Myanmar, and that it opposes attacks by ethnic militias on army-controlled areas in northern Shan State. Chinese media, however, did not mention this.

The Chinese embassy in Myanmar issued a statement on Mr. Wang Yi's visit which says that China supports Myanmar's efforts to uphold stability, grow the economy and improve people's livelihoods, and provides constructive help for parties in Myanmar to properly address differences through political consultation within the framework of the constitution and other laws.

中华人民共和国驻印度大使馆
Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of India

Ms. Ma Jia, the new Chinese ambassador to Myanmar. Photo: Supplied

CAREER DIPLOMAT APPOINTED AS NEW CHINESE AMBASSADOR TO MYANMAR

The state-run daily newspaper reported on 12 August 2024 that the Military Council agreed to the appointment of Ms. Ma Jia as new Chinese ambassador to Myanmar.

The previous Chinese ambassador, Mr. Chen Hai, recently completed his diplomatic tour serving as ambassador to Myanmar since 2019 while the NLD-led government was still in power. He met the junta chief in July this year before leaving for China.

According to the state-run daily paper, New Light of Myanmar, Ms. Ma Jia served as the third secretary at the Chinese embassy in Yangon, Myanmar, from 1995 to 1998.

She returned to China and later became the second secretary in the Chinese Foreign Ministry. She joined the Chinese Communist Party in 2001.

She then served at Chinese embassies in Pakistan, Japan and Singapore. She was promoted to first secretary in 2004 while she was serving in the Chinese embassy in Singapore.

Ms. Ma Jia became the Deputy Director of the Asian Affairs Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry when she returned to China from Singapore. During a diplomatic tour in Europe, she was the consul in the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2013.

She was sent to India as a consul in 2020. She is regarded as an expert in Asian affairs.

It will be interesting to see how the new Chinese ambassador will handle Sino-Myanmar relations in the context of intense fighting raging along the Sino-Myanmar border between junta forces and an alliance

of ethnic armed groups and the halting of businesses at all border trade posts along the border with China.

Junta chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, received Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry Special Envoy for Asian Affairs, Mr. Deng Xijun, in Napyitaw last week. The junta's state-run media reported the appointment of a new Chinese ambassador to Myanmar a few days after this meeting.

The state-run daily reporting on this meeting with the special envoy claimed they discussed stability in the border region, internal peace, eradication of online gambling and scams, and the conduct of general elections in the Myanmar.

Relations between China and the Military Council have been closer since the military coup in Myanmar.

At a regular press briefing held on 9 August, the spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry, Ms. Mao Ning, replied to a reporter's question by saying, "As a friendly neighbor of Myanmar, China has been closely following the developments in the country, including northern Myanmar. We do not want to see wars and turbulence in Myanmar and sincerely hope that stability will be restored soon in the country, including northern Myanmar. We have been committed to, in our own way, encouraging and urging relevant parties in Myanmar to stop the fighting."

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) occupied and took full control of the Northeast Military Regional Command of the Military Council in Lashio, northern Shan State on 3 August 2024.



16 August 2021 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Chinese FM Wang Yi at a meeting in Chiang Mai. Photo: AFP

CHINA SUPPORTS MYANMAR JUNTA PLAN FOR FRESH ELECTIONS: FM

China supports a plan by Myanmar's junta to hold fresh elections and return the conflict-torn country to a "democratic transition", Beijing's foreign minister said Friday last week.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the military deposed the government of Aung San Suu Kyi and seized power in 2021.

The coup upended a ten-year experiment with democracy and a subsequent military crackdown has sparked fighting with established ethnic minority armed groups and newer pro-democracy "People's Defence Forces."

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say it also maintains ties with ethnic groups fighting the military in Myanmar's northern Shan state.

"We support Myanmar in achieving domestic political reconciliation within the framework of its constitution... and restarting the process of democratic transition through elections," Wang Yi said at a regional meeting in Thailand's Chiang Mai.

The junta has promised to hold fresh elections but has repeatedly delayed a timetable for polls as it struggles to crush opposition to its coup across the country.

Earlier this week Wang met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw and "discussed and exchanged views openly regarding... free and fair multi-party

general elections," according to the junta.

Myanmar is deeply divided by conflict, with civilians caught up in near-daily bomb blasts, targeted killings and clashes between the military and opponents of its coup.

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

It has said it will hold polls next year after conducting a nation-wide census.

Last year the junta banned Suu Kyi's widely popular National League for Democracy party that won a landslide in 2020 elections, trouncing its military-backed rival.

The junta has cited unsubstantiated claims of massive fraud during those polls as the reason for its coup.

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

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

AFP



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

JUNTA DENIES RUMOURS OF A COUP

Myanmar's military on Wednesday last week said rumours top generals had detained the embattled junta chief in a new coup were "propaganda" spread by "traitors" ahead of a visit by China's foreign minister.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has faced public criticism from military supporters in recent weeks as government troops lose territory to ethnic minority armed groups and other opponents battling to overturn its 2021 coup.

On Tuesday last week several social media posts claimed that top generals had detained Min Aung Hlaing in the capital Naypyidaw in a bid to change the junta's top leadership.

The claims were "propaganda... with the aim of disrupting the country's peace and stability," the junta said in a statement, accusing those sharing the news of being "traitors".

"The head of state and authorities are fulfilling their national responsibility together," it said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Myanmar on Wednesday last week for talks with Min Aung Hlaing.

The visit was "aimed at deepening bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields," an unnamed Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said.

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

In recent weeks an alliance of ethnic armed groups has seized territory from the junta in northern Shan state, which borders China's Yunnan province.

Territory captured includes the military's northeastern command in the Shan state town of Lashio, home to about 150,000 people.

The capture of the regional command - the first by opponents of the junta since the military's 2021 coup-sparked rare public criticism of the top generals by its supporters.

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

The last top Chinese official to visit the isolated junta was former foreign minister Qin Gang, who held talks with Min Aung Hlaing in May last year.

According to a senior Myanmar military official Wang Yi was not to meet Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained by the military since it seized power.

AFP



Photo: AFP

INDIAN GOVERNMENT PROVIDES OVER 1,379 TONS OF RICE TO MYANMAR REFUGEES AND DISASTER VICTIMS IN MIZORAM

The Indian central government has provided 1,379.34 tons of rice to support refugees and victims of natural disasters in Mizoram state.

The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) party announced that they received rice worth 50 million rupees, which will be distributed free of charge to approximately 45,000 refugees fleeing from neighboring countries and local residents who lost their properties due to heavy rains and landslides.

"I have learned that rice will be distributed. I don't know how they will share it or how much we will receive, but I'm glad. We are very grateful for this kind of support," said a representative from the Sihhmui Myanmar refugee camp in Aizawl District.

The rice will be distributed through the Mizoram state government, with allocations also sent to the Young Mizo Association (YMA), a volunteer group involved in relief efforts. The distribution will be proportionate to the population, with 90 households in the camp receiving their share.

The refugees in the camp lack regular employment, so often rely on daily wage jobs or foraging for bamboo shoots and vegetables in nearby forests to sustain their livelihoods, according to a camp representative.

The ZPM party stated the distribution was initiated

by the state's Department of Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs after the Mizoram state chief minister informed the central government of the rising demand for rice due to the influx of refugees and the impact of natural disasters.

The rice can be collected from the state's Department of Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs within 60 days of the central government's notification.

This marks the second time the Indian central government has provided such support, following an earlier provision of rice worth 30 million rupees, as reported by social aid organizations.

Since the military coup in Myanmar, more than 35,000 Members of Parliament, Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) participants, and refugees have sought refuge in Mizoram state, according to documents from the state Immigration Department.

Additionally, around 10,000 refugees fleeing ethnic conflict in Manipur state and over 1,000 refugees from Bangladesh have also taken shelter in Mizoram.

India has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol.



MANDALAY PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FORCE SEIZES ZAYAT KWIN MILITARY CAMP IN THABEIKKYIN TOWNSHIP

The Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF) announced on 11 August that they successfully attacked and captured the Zayat Kwin military camp in Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Region.

This marks the ninth army camp taken by the MDY-PDF in the township.

The MDY-PDF stated that it remains committed to targeting military positions in Thabeikkyin Township.

In addition to the recent capture, the MDY-PDF took full control of Singu township in July while attempting to seize regime camps in Singu, Madaya, and Thabeikkyin townships in Mandalay Region.

They also seized multiple military camps in the villages of Kwin, Letpanpyamt, Hpokone, Wetthay, Hpetshey, Kyaukphyu, Leikkya, Zayat Kwin, and the camp of Infantry Battalion 148 during their operations in the Mandalay Region.

Mandalay PDF has been cooperating in Operation 1027 with the Brotherhood Alliance since late June, attacking regime targets in Kyaukme, Nawngkhio and Mongmit townships in northern Shan State and Madaya, Singu and Mogoke townships in Mandalay Region.



MONYWA PEOPLE'S STRIKE COMMITTEE CALLS FOR PUBLIC VIGILANCE, CITING RISK OF SEVERE ABUSES AGAINST POLITICAL PRISONERS

Ko Shin Thant, a member of the leading committee of the Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee, has reported that authorities at Monywa Prison in the Sagaing Region are intentionally creating discord among inmates to foster disunity.

In his address concerning the 2023 Monywa prison protest, Ko Shin Thant noted that while some participants in the protest were not prosecuted, certain non-participants faced legal action.

"We've grown accustomed to these tactics, where prison authorities deliberately sow discord between political prisoners and other inmates, as well as among the political prisoners themselves. Such actions appear to be a standard procedure for the prison authorities," said Ko Shin Thant.

On 8 September 2023, various departments in Monywa Prison conducted a special search operation, during which they confiscated inmates' belongings, including blankets, clothes, food, bread, and books.

According to a source within the prison, as reported by Ko Shin Thant, only three pieces of clothing and two blankets were returned to the inmates.

In response, the political prisoners initiated a hunger strike, which the prison authorities ignored. This led the prisoners to stage a demonstration in the open space within the prison grounds.

The protest lasted from 8 to 11 September 2023. Nine individuals who participated in the hunger strike, including Ko Wai Moe Naing, the leader of the Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee, were sentenced to one year in prison without the possibility of parole. Meanwhile, 17 other political activists were charged with illegal gathering.

Interestingly, some inmates who did not participate in the protest were prosecuted, while two political members who were actively involved were omitted from the charges. The leading committee of the Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee has since announced that the two excluded individuals have requested the prison warden, Zaw Myint Oo, to provide direct testimony before the court on 8 August.

Ko Shin Thant said, "These actions are deliberately designed to create discord among inmates. Those who are uninvolved are also suffering, which only worsens tensions between them. This behavior is both mean-spirited and crude."

Additionally, 29 political prisoners in Monywa Prison have sent a letter to the prison authorities and the court, requesting that those who did not participate in the protest be spared prosecution, while only those who took part should be held accountable.

The Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee has urged the public to closely monitor and support the political prisoners, warning that the prison authorities are capable of committing severe abuses against them.



TNLA APPOINTS 22 JUDGES AND LAWYERS IN SEIZED TOWNSHIPS DURING OPERATION 1027

Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) announced that 22 people were appointed as judges and lawyers in the townships seized during Operation 1027.

first and second phases of Operation 1027 including Namhsan, Mongton, Namhkam, Kutkai, Namtu, Minengwe, Minglon, Kyaukme, Nawngkhio, Mogok, Moemit, and Hsipaw.

The three central judges, four district judges, eight township judges and seven lawyers were appointed to strengthen the judicial system, to ensure the rule of law, and to carry out justice work in those townships.

The event was attended by a total of 29 participants including TNLA General Secretary Major General Tar Bone Kyaw, Brigadier General Tar Gu Jar, Lieutenant Colonel Tar Aik Kyaw, the central and district judges, township judges, lawyers. The ceremony also recognized the functions of the central court, district courts, township courts, and the law offices in these areas.

Ceremonies held in controlled areas within the seized townships officially conferred the positions and responsibilities to the appointed judges and lawyers.

According to the statement, these judicial officers have been assigned to 12 townships taken during the



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

ARAKAN ARMY SEIZES CONTROL OF KYEINTALI TOWN IN RAKHINE STATE, MYANMAR

The Arakan Army (AA) has captured Kyeintali town in Gwa Township, Rakhine State, according to sources close to the AA and local residents. The town, located around 30 miles south of Thandwe, fell under AA control following a series of attacks that began on 10 August.

The AA gained significant control over Kyeintali by 12 August, and the group had fully secured the town by 14 August.

“We occupied Kyeintali from a military standpoint and we will now commence administration step by step,” a source close to the AA said.

Local residents reported the junta’s forces were unable to withstand the AA’s rapid offensive and were forced to retreat, allowing the AA to swiftly capture the town. Junta navy troops allegedly targeted civilian areas, including homes, with artillery fire during the fighting.

“The junta army has been targeting Kyeintali and now Gwa Town. In Gwa, junta troops were firing mortar rounds. Many people in Gwa have fled since the fighting in Kyeintali,” a Gwa resident said.

Following the fall of Kyeintali, the military council shifted its focus to defending Gwa. Local residents and hospital staff began evacuating to safer areas as the conflict escalates.

The military council bolstered defenses in Gwa since mid-July in response to the AA’s rapid advance. It used landmines to destroy key bridges linking Gwa and Kyeintali. On 24 July, the junta’s army destroyed the Chin Kwing bridge near Kyeintali on the Thandwe-Gwa road and the Thayetpin Kwin bridge south of Thandwe township.

To date, the Arakan Army has captured control of at least 10 towns in Rakhine State, further intensifying the conflict in the region.



Bangladeshi protestors in Dhaka.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SEND FELICITATIONS OF SUPPORT TO BANGLADESH MOVEMENT

A group of 255 Myanmar civil society and revolutionary organisations sent a joint letter of support to the Bangladesh movement wishing it success in its efforts.

The letter commended the efforts of students and youth groups together with the broader community in Bangladesh for their revolutionary movement's advocacy for democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, and civil liberties. It went on to note the crucial role their dedication and activism played in addressing these issues which ultimately culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The grouping extended their best wishes to the interim government of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace laureate. They also expressed hope the interim government will be successful in addressing the significant responsibilities they have undertaken.

The Myanmar group urged the interim government of Bangladesh to collaborate with the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar and the ethnic

resistance organisations to support their own democratic and human rights movements.

The letter ended with a statement of commitment by the signature organisations "to end military and all forms of autocratic or dictatorial regimes, combat chauvinism and patriarchy, ensuring accountability for perpetrators, and seeking justice for victims."

They further expressed a desire to join forces with Bangladeshi students, youth, labourers, farmers, and the public in this struggle. Ending with an extension of congratulations and admiration "for the achievements of the students and people of Bangladesh.

The joint felicitation letter was signed by 255 Myanmar revolutionary and civil society organisations.

Of these organisations, 178 are listed and another 77 chose to remain anonymous due to the poor security situation and ongoing violence in Myanmar.



Myanmar migrant workers.
Photo: Mizzima

OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES WARNED NOT TO RECRUIT WORKERS THROUGH TOUTS AND BROKERS

The Ministry of Labour gave warning to overseas employment agencies that action would be taken if they were found recruiting workers through touts and brokers.

The warning includes a refund of fees paid by workers to agencies if they fail to send the workers abroad within the stipulated period after signing an employment contract with the workers. The agencies must also pay a penalty of 400,000 Kyats per worker to the Ministry.

The Ministry also warned the agencies that all the fees collected from the workers must be repaid to these workers if the agencies were found recruiting workers through unauthorized and unlicensed companies, local agents not authorized by the licensed companies and not permitted by the Ministry.

The notification issued on 13 August 2024 presents a list of potential violations of the Ministry's rules and regulations and the penalties for overseas employment agencies which fail to abide by their rules.

Violations include failure to send workers to their workplaces for various reasons after receiving an appointment letter and collecting fees from the workers; failure to resolve disputes after receiving complaints

against them; failure to send workers abroad under various reasons after more than three months from signing an employment contract; and failure to send workers abroad after their recruitment and payment of fees. These agencies must pay back collected fees to the recruited workers and they must pay 400,000 Kyats per worker to the Ministry as a penalty.

Agencies must also pay a penalty to the Ministry if they are found presenting fake appointment letters knowingly, sending workers to workplaces mentioned in the employment contract but without approval from the Labour Department under the Ministry, failure to verify if the appointment letter is fake or genuine. They must also pay back all fees collected from the workers.

The next violation is failure to submit necessary spreadsheets, documents and supporting documents as required by the directive issued by the Department of Labour. The agencies shall pay a penalty for that violation at 100,000 Kyats for the first offence, 200,000 Kyats for the second offence and 300,000 Kyats for a third offence and so on during their license period.

Failures to pay such penalties will be dealt with by actions taken under Section 29 of the Overseas Employment Act and their licenses will be revoked.



Photo: AA Info Desk

REBELS EVACUATE 13,000 ROHINGYAS AMID BATTLE FOR MYANMAR'S MAUNGDAW

More than 13,000 Rohingya Muslims and hundreds of other inhabitants of western Myanmar's Maungdaw township have fled their homes in recent days amid intensifying conflict between the military and ethnic rebels in Rakhine state, residents said Monday.

The rebel Arakan Army, or AA, is fighting for control of Maungdaw – the latest push in its goal to take over Rakhine state and part of a wider civil conflict that has consumed much of Myanmar since a 2021 military coup.

The AA has evacuated more than 15,000 people – including over 13,000 Rohingyas and hundreds of ethnic Rakhines and Hindus – from Maungdaw since Aug. 7, when it seized two-thirds control of the township seat, said a resident who, like others interviewed for this report, spoke on condition of anonymity due to security concerns.

The newly displaced Rohingyas join some 6,500 who have fled to neighboring Bangladesh or were waiting to cross border via the Naf River since the start of last week, the resident said, adding that around

5,000 others have been unable to leave the township.

“[As many as] 20,000 Rohingyas have been evacuated so far,” he told RFA Burmese on Monday. “Most of the downtown areas are under the control of the AA ... Some Muslims are trapped in areas controlled by the junta troops and in conflict zones.”

Other residents of Maungdaw said that most of the evacuated Rohingyas are staying in shelters provided by the AA, while others are preparing to leave for Bangladesh with their families.

About 1 million stateless Rohingya refugees live in tightly packed border camps in Bangladesh. Most fled there in 2017 to escape violent crackdowns in Rakhine state that were blamed on the Myanmar military.

But more Rohingya have been seeking refuge in Bangladesh lately as security has deteriorated in Rakhine state.

Last week, homemade rockets, artillery and drones were fired at Rohingyas as they waited on a Myanmar riverbank for motorboats to carry them to Bangladesh,

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

leaving dozens of people dead. Witnesses who spoke to RFA put the death toll as high as 200, although RFA was unable to verify those estimates.

Several Rohingya told RFA that the AA was responsible for the attack, but the rebel group denied in a statement that their troops fired the weapons.

PROVIDING AID

A volunteer assisting the Rohingya, identified as Mamud Saulain, told RFA that the AA needs to assume responsibility for the well-being of the ethnic community.

"It is crucial to provide them with food and shelter," he said. "Security measures should be in place to protect them from [military] airstrikes, attacks from naval bases, and heavy weapons fire."

Saulain also called on armed groups to allow those trapped in Maungdaw to leave for safer areas.

Veteran Rakhine politician Pe Than said the welfare of civilians in the area is "of the utmost concern."

"They will be taken to liberated areas that include many Muslim and Rakhine villages," he said. "They [Rakhine authorities] are prepared to provide them with humanitarian assistance."

AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha, told RFA that the displaced had been "sent to safer places."

"The junta forces are not allowing Maungdaw residents to leave the town while the fighting intensifies" he said. "The AA has rescued as many civilians as possible. They have now been sent to safer places, and we are providing them with food, accommodation, and healthcare services as well."

Khaing Thu Kha said the AA had rescued people who were "being used as human shields [by the military] to protect Maungdaw township."

Attempts by RFA to contact Attorney General Hla Thein, the junta's spokesperson for Rakhine state, about the situation in Maungdaw went unanswered as of 12 August.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

mizzima WEEKLY

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Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR CENTRAL BANK TO PUMP \$100 MILLION INTO EASING FUEL SHORTAGE

Myanmar's junta-controlled central bank has said it will release \$100 million to help struggling importers purchase fuel and oil.

The local kyat currency has plunged against the dollar since the military seized power in 2021, hitting importers' ability to pay for fuel shipments.

In recent days some residents in commercial hub Yangon have been queueing overnight outside petrol stations in the hope of obtaining fuel for vehicles.

The shortage also affects businesses and hospitals that rely on generators for power during frequent electricity blackouts in the city of some eight million.

"The Central Bank of Myanmar has arranged to provide US\$100 million towards the fuel oil sector in the foreign currency market," it said in a statement on Wednesday.

It did not give details on when the funds would be released or what the exchange rate would be for the dollar.

The junta's official exchange rate is 2,100 kyat to the dollar but on the black market a greenback fetches around 6,500 kyat.

Myanmar's economy has tanked since the coup, which sparked huge pro-democracy protests that were crushed by a military crackdown.

Last December the junta launched a crackdown on fuel hoarding, with authorities threatening to jail anyone found with more than 180 litres of petrol without a licence.

The price of cooking oil, rice and staples has spiked as the kyat plummets.

Last month the central bank injected more than \$16 million into the foreign exchange market "with a view to... stopping the currency devaluation," state media reported.

Inflation was expected to be around 15.5 percent for the fiscal year to next March, the Asian Development Bank said earlier this year.

AFP

JUNTA ANNOUNCES NEW MINIMUM WAGE AT 6,800 KYATS PER DAY

The Military Council announced on 9 August that the new minimum wage would be 6,800 Kyats per day.

Starting from 1 August 2024, workers will receive an allowance of K1,000 in addition to the current K1,000 allowance, according to an announcement made by the National Committee for Setting Minimum Wage. The wage hike was announced while the value of Myanmar currency Kyat is nose diving continuously and commodity prices are skyrocketing.

In July this year, the Military Council announced they would pay an additional allowance of 30,000 Kyats per month to government employees, but it did not include daily wage earners in the public and private sectors.

The previous minimum wage, set at K4,800 for an eight-hour workday (K600 per hour), was established by the National Committee on 14 May 2018 by Notification 2/2018, with approval from the Union Government under the pre-coup National League for Democracy-led government.

The existing wage rate of K4,800 for an eight-hour workday was supplemented by an additional allowance of K1,000 approved by Notification 2/2023, dated 9 October 2023. This latest notification is for 1,000 Kyats more as a further additional allowance currently totaling 6,800 Kyats per diem.

This notification for the new minimum wage took effect from 1 August 2024.

Starting from 1 August 2024, workers will receive an additional allowance of K1,000 in addition to the current K1,000 allowance, applicable on working days, public holidays, and paid leave under the 1951 Leave and Holidays Act. This adjustment, however, does not apply to small businesses with fewer than ten workers, family-run companies, and similar entities, according to the notification.

Commodity prices have been rising sharply since the military coup in February 2021 but the wages of workers did not increase resulting in workers facing many difficulties in their living and socio-economic life.

The Military Council granted an additional allowance of 30,000 Kyats per month to all government employees in October 2023. It then granted a similar additional allowance of 30,000 Kyats per month in August 2024 but at that time it did not include factory workers and workers in the private sector who are demanding to increase their wage. This notification of a new minimum wage gave them an additional allowance of 1,000 Kyats per day.

A garment worker noted that this meagre increase of their wage could not cover the expenses for rising commodity prices, and it could not resolve the difficulties being faced in their daily lives.

In US dollar terms, this new minimum wage will be just over one dollar as the current dollar exchange rate is about 6,100 Kyats against the dollar.



Photo: Supplied

JAPAN CONFIRMS EXECUTIVE CONVICTED, FREED BY MYANMAR

A Japanese supermarket executive behind bars in Myanmar since June has been convicted over high rice prices but released, Tokyo confirmed on Tuesday last week.

State media blame the El Nino weather phenomenon and market hoarders for soaring rice prices in Myanmar, but analysts say civil unrest and economic turmoil since the 2021 military coup are the main factors.

Hiroshi Kasamatsu, director of Aeon Orange, which runs several supermarkets in commercial hub Yangon, was detained in late June following an investigation by junta authorities into rice mills and supermarkets.

On Monday junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said Kasamatsu had “been released,” without giving details if he had been convicted of any crime or if he would be deported.

Japan’s foreign ministry said he had been “convicted and sentenced to one year in prison... for violation of the law on daily necessities and services”.

“We are aware that he has been released and that there are no particular problems with his health,” the ministry said in a statement emailed to AFP.

It was unclear if Kasamatsu was still in Myanmar or returning to Japan.

Japanese retail giant Aeon also confirmed his release but declined to comment further.

Kasamatsu and three Myanmar nationals were detained on suspicion of breaching the reference price under the Essential Supplies And Services Law and “selling rice at higher price with the aim to make economic chaos”, the junta said at the time.

The three Myanmar nationals detained with Kasamatsu worked for local retail companies. The junta spokesman did not say whether they had also been released.

Since the military seized power, the junta authorities have introduced more requirements for export and import licenses, and tightened regulations on fuel imports.

A US dollar on the open market fetches more than double the central bank’s fixed rate, adding to pressure on businesses.

AFP



SINGAPORE POWER PLANT SUSPENSION MAY LEAVE MORE OF MYANMAR IN THE DARK

Singapore's Sembcorp Industries has suspended operations at its 225 MW power plant in central Myanmar's Mandalay region because of "escalating civil unrest" after pro-democracy insurgents opened up a new front in their war against junta forces in the area.

"Sembcorp's priority is to ensure the safety of its employees," the company said in a statement on Monday, adding that it had informed Myanmar's Energy Ministry of the suspension of operations at the plant in Myingyan.

"Security measures are in place to safeguard the plant in the meantime and relevant stakeholders are being notified," it said. "Sembcorp will look to resume operations at the plant as soon as reasonably practicable once conditions are safe."

The gas-fired Myingyan Independent Power Plant is about 100 km (62 miles) southwest of Mandalay city.

On Saturday, militias operating under the civilian shadow National Unity Government, which opposes Myanmar's junta, launched operations in three new townships in Mandalay region, including Myingyan.

The groups, called People's Defense Forces, or PDFs, have captured dozens of junta positions, including major towns like Singu and Mogoke, across the region in partnership with larger ethnic minority insurgent forces.

Sembcorp Industries is backed by the Singapore government-owned investment firm Temasek. Its US\$300 million Myingyan operation is one of the largest independent gas-fired plants in Myanmar, employing

more than 70 workers and supplying electricity to five million people.

The plant, built under an agreement with the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, began supplying electricity in 2018.

The Sembcorp Myingyan Power Company agreed to run the plant for 22 years, before transferring it to the Myanmar government, with Sembcorp saying it would “help to play a key role in meeting the country’s growing demand for electricity.”

Sembcorp announced it was shuttering the plant after PDF forces launched attacks in the Taungtha Natogyi and Myingyan townships on Saturday, including an attack on a junta base only about six kilometers (four miles) from the power plant.

MORE POWER CUTS EXPECTED

The company did not say exactly when it suspended operations but the Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation said Sembcorp’s plant and another nearby one ceased operations at around noon on Tuesday. It warned of reduced power supplies.

Radio Free Asia called Mandalay region’s junta spokesperson Thein Htay for more information, but he did not answer by the time of publication.

A former Myingyan member of parliament for the ousted National League for Democracy told RFA that power cuts could be expected.

“Now that Sembcorp has been suspended, the amount of power supplied nationwide will be significantly reduced,” said Aung Myo Lat.

“There may be more power cuts than before and the electricity may decrease a lot. That’s just something else we’ll have to deal with.”

Myanmar’s economy has been in crisis since the military overthrew an elected government in 2021, with electricity and petrol shortages among the problems the population is grappling with.

While ethnic minority insurgents have promised to protect Chinese investments, the fighting in the Mandalay region this week has been near a natural gas and oil pipeline running from Myanmar’s coast across the country into China.

PDF forces are battling the military in Madaya, Thabeikkyin, Patheingyi, Myingyan, Taungtha and Natogyi townships in the Mandalay region, according to the PDF groups.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Mining operations in Kalimantan, Indonesia.
Photo: AFP

HOW CHINA'S INVESTMENTS IN KALIMANTAN EXPLOIT INDONESIA'S RESOURCES

SUN LEE

Indonesia's most ambitious project, the Kalimantan Industrial Park Indonesia (KIPI), has a darker side of Chinese investment in it. While the project is touted as a beacon of green industrial development in Southeast Asia, symbolizing Indonesia's commitment to sustainable growth, it has also raised significant concerns among locals, environmentalists, and experts. Despite Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) hailing KIPI as "the largest green industrial area in the world," a complex narrative of resource exploitation, environmental degradation, and social upheaval, largely driven by Chinese investments, is unfolding.

KIPI is seen as a key project for Chinese-Indonesian relations, and it was specifically mentioned in a joint statement on deepening comprehensive strategic cooperation following Widodo's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last year. China's involvement in KIPI is part of a broader strategy to secure access to Indonesia's rich natural resources, particularly within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Chinese companies, including Tsingshan Holding

Group and Taikun Petrochemical, have heavily invested in the project, providing the financial muscle needed to push it forward. However, this influx of Chinese capital has led to growing concerns about economic domination and the erosion of local sovereignty.

According to a report by the South China Morning Post (SCMP), resentment has grown among locals due to the increasing influence of Chinese interests over their own. Many locals have complained that the project and its workers are being prioritized over their rights. The Nugal Institute, a think tank that has been collecting data on the project, confirmed that Tsingshan Holding Group and Taikun Petrochemical are involved in KIPI, along with two Chinese contractors, China State Construction Engineering Corporation and China Railway Engineering Consulting Group. MerahJohansyah, a coordinator of research and management at Nugal, stated that KIPI needed to be audited due to a lack of transparency. He cited several workers' rights issues, including the absence of proper contracts, leaving local laborers vulnerable

to underpayment and summary layoffs. The institute has called for an audit to explain how Chinese workers can freely enter Indonesia and receive higher pay, while local laborers lack formal contracts. Although there is no official data on the number of Chinese workers at KIPI, locals estimate that there are already hundreds on-site.

The situation is further exacerbated by the opaque and coercive practices employed by many of the Chinese companies involved in KIPI. Local residents have reported instances of illegal land seizures, with some being forced to sell their land at prices far below market value under the threat of legal action. Activists from the Sustainable Forest Circle Association have documented cases where companies placed spies in communities to intimidate and silence dissent. These practices highlight the darker side of Chinese investments in Indonesia, where economic gain is pursued at the expense of human rights and environmental integrity.

Yosran Efendi, campaign manager at the Sustainable Forest Circle Association, noted that locals who refused to give up their land were too afraid to approach the police or courts due to intimidation from the companies. Reports from Indonesia indicate that the government has received numerous accusations of human rights violations related to National Strategic Projects like KIPI. In June, Komnas HAM documented at least 1,675 cases of human rights abuses over the past three years, mainly involving land disputes and environmental damage.

There is also widespread resentment among locals over what they perceive as preferential treatment for Chinese workers. For instance, a former fisherman expressed frustration that locals are being forced to learn Chinese, rather than the Chinese learning the local language in Indonesia. This sentiment reflects a broader unease among Indonesians about the growing influence of Chinese workers and companies in their country.

Despite being marketed as a green initiative, KIPI is heavily dependent on coal - a fossil fuel notorious for its environmental impact. Surprisingly, China has remained silent on this issue, likely because it still

relies heavily on coal for its own power needs. This silence speaks volumes about where China's interests lie; it appears to be less concerned about the global environment and more focused on securing resources. As reported by Bloomberg, a 1.06-gigawatt coal-fired power plant is being constructed to power the \$2 billion Adaro Minerals Indonesia aluminium smelter within KIPI, which is set to begin operations in 2025. This reliance on coal contradicts the very essence of a "green" industrial park and exposes the project as a prime example of greenwashing, where environmental benefits are grossly overstated to cover up underlying ecological harm.

The environmental impact of KIPI extends beyond its dependency on coal. According to a report by JATAM and WRM, the project will consume a staggering 39,450,560 cubic meters of water annually, primarily sourced from local rivers such as Pindada and Mangkupadi. This is equivalent to 1.5 times the annual water consumption of North Kalimantan's 700,000 inhabitants. Moreover, KIPI is expected to discharge 248,440 cubic meters of wastewater every four hours into these rivers, threatening aquatic ecosystems and the livelihoods of communities that depend on them.

China's involvement in KIPI, through substantial investments and influence, underscores the geopolitical and economic dimensions of resource exploitation in Indonesia. It is crucial for the global community to raise concerns with the Indonesian government about the implications of the China factor.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia and geopolitical developments.



Photo: AFP

HAMAS REJECTS 'NEW' GAZA TRUCE CONDITIONS AS BIDEN SAYS DEAL CLOSER THAN EVER

Hamas said Friday it rejected "new conditions" in a Gaza ceasefire proposal that US-led mediators presented during two days of talks in Qatar.

Diplomatic efforts have so far failed to alleviate the suffering endured over more than 10 months of war, but US President Joe Biden insisted after the latest round of talks that "we are closer than we have ever been".

He is sending US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Israel this weekend to push the latest proposal, the State Department said.

Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators have been seeking to finalise details of a framework initially outlined by Biden in May, which he said Israel had proposed.

In a joint statement, the mediators said they had presented both sides with a proposal that "bridges remaining gaps" and will continue working in the coming days to hash out the specifics on humanitarian provisions and the hostage-prisoners swap.

Talks aiming to secure a rapid deal are set to resume in Cairo "before the end of next week".

Hamas, which did not attend the Doha talks, swiftly announced its opposition to what it called "new conditions" from Israel in the latest plan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on mediators to "pressure" Hamas to accept Biden's framework.

Threats by Iran and its proxies to attack Israel have added renewed urgency to the efforts to hammer out a Gaza ceasefire, with mediators seeking a deal in the hopes of dousing a wider regional conflict.

"No one in the region should take actions to undermine this process," Biden warned, later telling reporters, "There's just a couple more issues, I think we've got a shot."

'CATACLYSMIC' CONSEQUENCES

An informed source told AFP Hamas had objected to conditions about keeping Israeli troops on Gaza's border with Egypt and terms related to the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages.

Western ally Jordan, however, put the blame squarely on Netanyahu for blocking a deal, with Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi urging pressure “by everyone who wishes to see this through to completion”.

British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and his French counterpart Stephane Sejourne held talks in Israel on Friday to press the deal.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told his visiting counterparts he expects foreign support if Iran seeks to avenge the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Sejourne replied that it would be “inappropriate” to discuss responding to any attack while diplomacy to stop it from happening is in high gear.

A senior US official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, said Iran would face “cataclysmic” consequences if it strikes Israel.

A deadly attack by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank late Thursday drew international condemnation and calls for sanctions, including against government ministers, over the surge in settler violence against Palestinians since the Gaza war began.

The Israeli military said “dozens of Israeli civilians, some of them masked”, entered the village of Jit and “set fire to vehicles and structures in the area, hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails”. A Palestinian man was shot dead.

The West Bank-based Palestinian foreign ministry described the attack as “organised state terrorism”.

The European Union’s top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said he would propose sanctions against Israeli government “enablers” of Jewish settler violence.

Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a proponent of West Bank settlements, was quick to join other Israeli leaders in condemning Thursday’s attack by “criminals”.

FIRST POLIO CASE RECORDED

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

Militants also seized 251 hostages, 111 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 39 the military says are dead. More than 100 were freed during a one-week truce in November.

On Thursday, the toll from Israel’s retaliatory military campaign topped 40,000, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, which does not provide a breakdown of civilian and militant casualties.

The war has devastated the besieged territory’s healthcare infrastructure, prompting repeated warnings from the World Health Organization about the risk of preventable diseases.

On Friday, the Palestinian health ministry reported an unvaccinated 10-month-old child in Gaza had been diagnosed with polio, the territory’s first case in 25 years, according to the WHO.

The announcement came hours after UN chief Antonio Guterres called for two seven-day breaks in the Gaza war to vaccinate more than 640,000 children against type 2 poliovirus, which was first detected in the territory’s wastewater in June.

As truce talks were underway, thousands of civilians were on the move again inside the Palestinian territory after the Israeli military issued fresh evacuation orders ahead of imminent military action.

The UN estimated the orders affect more than 170,000 people, forcing them to pack into the shrinking remnants of an area declared a humanitarian safe zone.

The area where people have been told to relocate to makes up just 11 percent of Gaza, according to the UN.

“During each round of negotiations, they exert pressure by forcing evacuations and committing massacres,” Issa Murad, a Palestinian displaced to Deir al-Balah, said of the Israeli forces.

AFP

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.

A photograph of Dr. Jenny Ko Gyi, a woman with short dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt with the text 'LOOKIN GOOD FEELIN GREAT' and a dark scarf. She is standing outdoors in front of some greenery. The photo is part of a podcast cover graphic with an orange and black background.

Dr. Jenny Ko Gyi

The professor, translator, and mediator describes her experiences with Monle Sayadaw

A circular logo for Insight Myanmar, featuring a silhouette of a person walking through a forest.

LONGFORM INTERVIEW

DR JENNY KO GYI AND HER EXPERIENCE WITH MONLE SAYADAW

When Dr. Jenny Ko Gyi followed her military husband to a remote posting in rural Gangaw, she had no idea how profoundly the experience would affect not only her own spiritual life, but also go on to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of meditators across the country.

Several decades ago, Jenny's husband was transferred to a station in a small village surrounded by forests just at the edge of the Chin Hills. He was now the commander of the 58th Burma Regiment, and would occasionally be called on to venture out to the front lines when conflict developed; Jenny was charged with running the household and raising their children. The rural setting was pleasing to them, and although Jenny's family was Buddhist and most of the local community was Christian, they quickly developed strong friendships there. Her husband even developed a somewhat of a following, as he was a musician, and many villagers came to hear him play his guitar.

"We enjoyed everything," Jenny recalls. "We loved all the people. We loved every day, every moment.... the people, the place, the winters, the cherries, the pine trees, the oranges, the apples. But in the end, it was the people. I loved the people."

Then one afternoon, someone told Jenny about a meditation retreat that she had attended deep in the forest. There were just a handful of local villagers, mainly Chin Buddhists who had likely been there since precolonial times and had resisted the attempts by a previous generation of American missionaries to convert them. The monk taught sporadically, as residents were only able to attend after the rains, following the period when the rice paddies had to be harvested. Rarely were there more than a dozen attendees at any given time.

Jenny was keen to visit, although it was not an easy trek to the monastery; in fact, she might have been the first outsider to ever set foot there. "In those days, we didn't have a bridge, so we had to whistle for the boat to come pick us up. And then we crossed the sesamum fields, went up a small hill, and then beyond that, we walked through the paddy fields, and then only then we got to the Monle hillock."

Jenny eventually managed to visit Monle Sayadaw, so-named after that small piece of geography and soon made plans to return for his next meditation course. Yet the initial results were not exactly what she had hoped.

"When I concentrated on inbreath-outbreath, the most I could do was five times, and then my mind would start wandering. On the about the fifth or the sixth day, I decided, okay, I can't concentrate at the nasal tip." That very night, Monle Sayadaw gave Jenny a Dhamma talk about temperaments, and said that people who are unable to focus on this subtle reality should instead switch to the "contemplation of feelings."

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/8/1/episode-259-dr-jenny-ko-gyi>



MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES CONSCRIPTION OF REPATRIATED NATIONALS

In a desperate bid to bolster its dwindling ranks, Myanmar's military junta has forcibly recruited nearly 70 nationals recently repatriated from Thailand, Radio Free Asia reported citing family members.

The conscriptions follow the implementation of a new law in April, requiring men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve a minimum of two years in the military. This move has led to a mass exodus of young people, many fleeing to Thailand.

On July 30 and August 7, Thai authorities deported over 270 Myanmar nationals from Ranong Prison. Upon their return to Kawthoung in Tanintharyi Region, junta authorities arrested at least 71 people for conscription.

Reports suggest a system of bribery has emerged, with some detainees released after paying substantial sums. Those unable to pay were reportedly taken to military bases for training.

The Myanmar Social Welfare Association in Ranong expressed concern over the situation, noting their inability to guarantee the safety of released prisoners.

Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) has condemned these actions as a "grave violation of human rights," urging Thai authorities to handle such cases with caution.

JUNTA'S YOUTH DAY PROMISES CLASH WITH REALITY OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION AND EDUCATIONAL DECLINE

As Myanmar marks International Youth Day on August 12, 2024, the military junta's leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, announced plans for youth forums and eight new Polytechnic Universities, according to state media.

However, these initiatives starkly contrast with the harsh realities faced by Myanmar's youth since the 2021 coup, including a recent mandatory conscription law.

While the junta claims to focus on digital transformation and sustainable development, the coup has severely disrupted Myanmar's education system and technology sector.

Many schools and universities have to operate under strict junta control, while internet restrictions and a mass exodus of skilled professionals hinder progress.

The regime's celebration of youth achievements rings hollow in light of the recently-implemented mandatory conscription law, which forces young people into military service.

This law, coupled with widespread human rights abuses, has led many youths to abandon their studies or careers, with some joining resistance groups or fleeing the country.

The junta's youth policies stand in stark opposition to the aspirations of Myanmar's young population.

INCREASING CRITICISM OF MIN AUNG HLAING FROM HIS OWN SUPPORTERS AS MYANMAR-CHINA RELATIONS STRAIN

On social media pages, even some of those who previously supported Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing are now expressing doubts about his competence. A pro-junta Facebook blogger wrote that China and the United States might be engaging in a proxy war-like situation in Myanmar while pro-junta Facebook users have been criticizing Min Aung Hlaing's incompetence in military strategy, diplomacy, and administration.

The blogger and these users can be identified as pro-junta because they express opposition to the PDF (People's Defense Force), Ethnic Armed Organizations, and the opposition NUG (shadow National Unity Government), while hoping for the junta's military to prevail.

This criticism from his own supporters highlights the growing dissatisfaction with Min Aung Hlaing's leadership, even among those who generally back the military regime.

This internal criticism could potentially weaken the junta's position and unity, as it indicates that even loyal supporters are becoming disillusioned with the current military leadership.

In response to these significant territorial losses, the junta leadership leveled accusations against the Three Brotherhood Alliance. They claimed that the alliance was employing sophisticated China-manufactured drones to conduct precision strikes on junta positions. Furthermore, the junta alleged that foreign technical experts were providing crucial assistance to the alliance forces in operating this advanced equipment.

Min Aung Hlaing indirectly accused China of supporting the Three Brotherhood Alliance. Political analysts note that relations between China and the Myanmar junta have been strained, despite China's traditionally good relationship with the Myanmar military. This tension is partly due to money scams run by Chinese criminals in Myanmar.

Analysts also suggested that China has been providing support to the Wa and Kokang forces, which have close ties to China.

Following Min Aung Hlaing's accusations, the deterioration of China-Myanmar junta relations became evident.

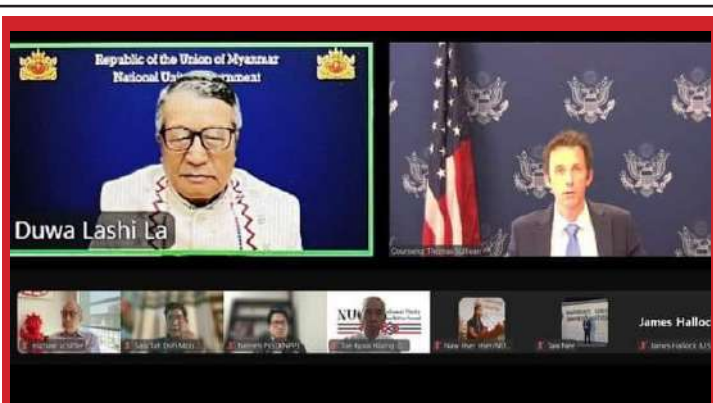
However, in a recent development, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Myanmar and met with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, potentially signaling efforts to address the strained relationship.

The Chinese diplomat also said that Beijing would not tolerate any rhetoric aimed at damaging the

relationship between the two nations or tarnishing China's reputation.

A pro-junta Facebook user commented, "The incompetence of Myanmar's military leaders is truly remarkable. If they were to lean completely towards the West, they might end up like Taiwan. At the very least, they would be able to defeat China-backed rebel groups. If they decide to align fully with China, they will be able to effectively suppress Western-backed Karen rebels."

Another user wrote, "They (the junta) couldn't even effectively deal with various domestic rebels and PDFs. Myanmar has become a battleground due to geopolitics. The domestic economy is in turmoil on all fronts. It seems things can only get worse from here."



US OFFICIALS CONVENE VIRTUAL MEETING WITH MYANMAR OPPOSITION LEADERS

Representatives of the Myanmar opposition National Unity Government (NUG) led by NUG's Acting President Duwa Lashi La, and Myanmar's pro-democracy groups participated in a virtual meeting with U.S. State Department Counselor Tom Sullivan and U.S. Agency for International Development Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer, according to NUG's official Facebook page.

Acting President Duwa Lashi La expressed gratitude to the United States for its commitment to increasing direct support and assistance to help the people and improve humanitarian aid.

He thanked the U.S. for its efforts to enhance aid delivery and its pledge to provide more substantial support to those in need.

U.S. officials Sullivan and Schiffer praised the groups for their joint efforts in working towards an inclusive, federal democratic Myanmar. They reaffirmed the United States' commitment to expanding support for pro-democracy actors, aiming to enhance their unity, improve their ability to provide essential services and humanitarian aid, and develop concrete steps for transitioning to civilian rule that respects the will of Myanmar's people.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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