

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



OVERWHELM

**Junta and people
struggle with massive
flooding**

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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.

THE TROUBLE WITH ELECTIONS

A report just out raises questions about elections and the democratic process around the world.

The annual report by Stockholm-based intergovernmental organisation International IDEA says disputed elections have become a global phenomenon, with voter turnout diminishing around the world and the results of elections increasingly questioned.

A large number of countries – including the United States and Myanmar – have faced problems as a result of a number of causes, including direct interference in the electoral process and problematic disputes. In the United States, the Republican Party disputed the results of the 2020 election, and in Myanmar the military questioned the results of the 2020 election and used this dispute as an “excuse” to execute a coup in February 2021. Now, the Myanmar military junta claims to be preparing for a new national election - but without the popular National League for Democracy party and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in what critics say will be a “sham poll”.

As the IDEA report says, between 2008 and 2023, global voter turnout fell by 10 percentage points, from 65.2 to 55.5 percent. The problems that affect “young democracies” are also affecting “remarkably very old and consolidated democracies” in Europe and America, Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary General of IDEA International, said in an interview with AFP.

Of the 173 countries covered by the IDEA think-tank, nearly half of them also show “a very severe decline in at least one absolutely crucial element of democracy,” such as the ability to hold credible elections or freedom of the press, Casas-Zamora added.

In the United States, three indicators are down since 2015: credible elections, civil liberties and political equality, according to the report. In addition, less than half the US population (47 percent)

believes that the 2020 elections were “free and fair,” according to a study published by IDEA earlier in April - before the July assassination attempt against US former president and presidential candidate Donald Trump.

As for Myanmar, it is caught up in a conundrum. While the majority of its citizens want the junta ousted and call for free-and-fair elections, the Myanmar junta has stifled the democratic process and any poll carried while the junta remains in power will be boycotted by the electorate.

Around the world, electorates are questioning the electoral process and losing faith in it. But it is important not to throw the baby out with the bath water – ditching the democratic process.

Pressure is building worldwide in individual countries for a revamp of the process, with growing calls for systems run “for the people, by the people”. Many are questioning the prevalent “two-party system” with increasing calls for some form of proportional representation.

When it comes to Myanmar, nobody can take the junta’s election promise seriously. But down the road, when the junta is eventually ousted from power, careful consideration will need to be given to Myanmar’s electoral process under what proponents say will be a “federal system”.

The world’s democracies are in trouble. It would be wise, therefore, for Myanmar to keep an eye on how the wind is blowing globally when it comes to considering rebuilding its democratic process.

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Cover photo of flooding victims being helped to move to safety in the Naypyidaw region by AFP





Escaping the flooding in Naypyidaw region. Photo: AFP

JUNTA AND PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH MASSIVE FLOODING

Myanmar has been struggling to cope after two weeks of heavy rain and storms caused record-breaking flooding.

Myanmar is grappling with its recovery efforts in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, with the State Administration Council (SAC) being accused of a slow and inadequate response.

A total of 384 people were dead and 89 were missing as of Saturday, the junta's information team said.

The SAC's spokesperson claimed that the junta is actively managing the crisis, with leaders visiting affected areas. However, the regime also accused independent and exile media of spreading false rumours, citing a story that over 700 people from Thabyaybin village in Yamethin Township had drowned. In contrast, an independent media outlet, quoting a local charity worker, reported that fewer than 100 were missing. "Some villages lost 30 to 50 people, with the most affected losing over 100," the charity worker stated. A rescue volunteer confirmed that over 100 bodies were recovered in Yamethin, with more than half from Thabyaybin village.

CALL FOR AID

Meanwhile, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing made a rare appeal for international assistance—a stark contrast to the regime's refusal of aid following Cyclone Mocha, which devastated Rakhine State.

At a natural disaster management meeting, Min Aung Hlaing admitted that the SAC had not anticipated the magnitude of Typhoon Yagi's impact. Complaints have surfaced from victims, who criticized the junta's inadequate early warning system. "We heard the authorities announcing something over loudspeakers, but we couldn't understand what was being said," one survivor explained.

The junta has also drawn criticism for its emphasis on rushing flood victims back home before the national census begins on October 1. Political analysts noted that this hasty push for resettlement echoes the military regime's actions following Cyclone Nargis in 2008, when the focus was on holding a constitutional referendum rather than providing aid.



Junta soldier helps family evacuate due to the flooding in Naypyidaw and elsewhere in Myanmar. Photo: AFP

'POOR DISASTER RESPONSE'

NGOs and analysts have condemned the junta's poor disaster response. "They're more focused on attacking opposition-controlled areas than rescuing flood victims," said one politician, adding that the SAC's response pales in comparison to neighbouring Thailand's efforts, which assisted not only its own citizens but also Myanmar victims along the border.

The SAC has also been criticized for repeatedly issuing conflicting casualty numbers. A volunteer involved in the relief efforts remarked, "The junta's inconsistent death toll reports—30 one day, 79 the next—make it difficult to coordinate recovery efforts. Based on our work on the ground, we know the death toll exceeds 100 in just Yamethin, Kalaw, and parts of Karenni State."

The crisis has only deepened people's miseries in Myanmar, where millions have suffered through more than three years of war since the military seized power in 2021.

In Loikaw district in eastern Kayah state - which has seen fierce fighting between junta forces and armed groups opposed to its rule - villagers rued their latest trial.

"We have already faced wars and fled from villages many times," local Chit Thein said. "We have many troubles and now it's floods again - so much suffering in our lives."

In nearby fields, farmers laboured to save a rice crop completely submerged in paddies by the floodwaters.

More than 150,000 homes have been flooded and nearly 260,000 hectares (640,000 acres) of rice paddies and other crops destroyed, according to Myanmar state media.

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

In a speech delivered at the National Disaster Management Committee meeting at the Office of the State Administration Council (SAC) Chairman in Naypyidaw on 17 September, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing instructed that crops in damaged fields need to be systematically grown again. Arrangements must be

made to provide agricultural cash assistance and loans to farmers for regrowing the crops.

The True News Information Committee of the SAC said that floods across the country inundated nearly 650,000 acres of farmlands in 56 townships, some of them were completely destroyed. A total of 105,388 animals perished in the floods, the state-run media Global New Light of Myanmar reported on 17 September.

The junta's Union Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation said that they would provide technological assistance for replanting crops and crop substitution in fields damaged by the floods. The ministry is meeting with farmers who lost their crops and were now planning to recultivate the damaged lands, he said.

The Union Price Stability Committee Chairman, Union Minister of Planning and Finance Win Shein, said at a committee meeting held on 11 September that compensation of about 12.265 billion Kyat will be provided in Yangon, Mandalay, Ayeyawady, and Bago Regions and Mon State. The compensation for flood-affected paddy fields is under the weather index-based crop insurance in the 2024-2025 financial year. A public awareness campaign for farmers will be made about weather index-based insurance.

The minister also urged all officials at that meeting, including the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF), to work together to provide paddy seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals to prevent a decrease in paddy yield due to heavy rain.

The Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) announced on 26 July 2024 that it will provide necessary seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals to rain-fed paddy farms damaged by floods this year. Its affiliated associations and member companies will provide fertilizers and chemicals at affordable prices.

A responsible official from the MRF said that nearly one million acres of monsoon paddy fields are submerged and damaged by floods across the country.

The junta chief said that according to experience, Shan State usually received rain showers two days after storms make landfall in Vietnam, but he did not expect such an extensive catastrophic impact of losses and damages this time.

He said that during his helicopter tour to assess the damage and losses caused by the floods, Min Aung Hlaing expressed sadness over the loss of life and property. He saw landslides, marks of erosion on the ground from landslides, silting on roads, debris and rubble left by floods, and entire villages destroyed and washed away by flood water.

The junta leader also said that it is necessary to categorize prioritized levels in rescue and relief measures depending on the volume of losses and waste, and all measures must be taken within six months.

UN CONCERN

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said an estimated 631,000 people had been affected by flooding across Myanmar.

Food, drinking water, shelter and clothes are all urgently needed, UNOCHA said, warning blocked roads and damaged bridges were all severely hampering relief efforts.

The UN's World Food Programme said the floods were the worst in Myanmar's recent history, without giving precise details.

Severe flooding hit the country in 2011 and 2015, with more than 100 deaths reported on both occasions, while in 2008 Cyclone Nargis left more than 138,000 people dead or missing.

Neighbour India is so far the only country to respond, sending 10 tonnes of materials, including dry rations, clothing and medicine.

UNOCHA said more resources are urgently needed.

But anecdotal reports are coming in that the junta authorities are blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid to areas that are not under their control.

In recent years Myanmar's military has blocked or frustrated humanitarian assistance from abroad, including after powerful Cyclone Mocha last year when it suspended travel authorisations for aid groups trying to reach around a million people.

Amid growing frustration, it remains to be seen how the SAC will address the ongoing crisis and the broader criticisms of its disaster management.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP



Bogged down in Bago as flooding continues.
Photo: AFP



HAS THE FLOODING DAMPENED FIGHTING IN MYANMAR?

Myanmar continues to face widespread devastation as extreme floods, triggered by Typhoon Yagi, sweep through the country, particularly affecting the central lowlands. Despite the severe flooding, which has impacted hundreds of thousands of people, the ongoing armed conflict between the military regime and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and resistance forces has shown no signs of slowing.

The Myanmar Air Force has intensified its airstrikes on territories controlled by EAOs and resistance forces, launching attacks from various airbases across the country. According to a former military insider now aligned with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the regime's aircraft conducted airstrikes from Tada-U and Shante airbases on the night of 12 September. The following night, junta forces bombed Lashio Township, killing five villagers and leaving three others critically injured. On 15 September, airstrikes targeted Lashio, Madaya, Pinlebu, and Thabeikkyin townships.

Further reports confirmed that military transport planes from Shante airbase carried out bombings in Nahtoeyi Township, while three fighter jets struck

Thabeikkyin. Air raids from Myeik and Patheingyi airbases hit the southern regions and Rakhine State, respectively. Despite these military operations, there has been no sight of junta helicopters conducting humanitarian relief efforts for flood-affected areas.

The attacks in Lashio on 14 September were particularly severe, with two fighter jets bombing the region, followed by artillery shelling. The area is under the control of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). Meanwhile, local resistance forces ambushed a junta convoy en route to Monywa, leaving several soldiers injured, though the exact number remains unclear.

In southern Myanmar, clashes between junta troops and local resistance groups have been ongoing since 4 September, continuing until at least 11 September. Intense fighting also broke out in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, during the flood period. Junta forces patrolling Seng Tawng Village clashed with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied People's Defense Force Kachin Region (KPDF) from 6 to 13 September.

Meanwhile, the military's crackdown on civilians

has persisted despite the flood crisis. In Salingyi Township, regime soldiers detained 15 villagers from Magyitahtong Village. The ongoing violence and humanitarian neglect highlight the increasingly dire situation facing Myanmar's population.

WHAT AREAS ARE BADLY AFFECTED BY FLOODING?

The floods, which have compounded the country's humanitarian crisis, have affected over 600,000 people, according to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The central Mandalay and Magway regions were hit hardest, with more than 300,000 people from 16 townships affected. In Mandalay, over 26,700 homes and 40,000 acres of farmland were destroyed.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in southern Shan State, who had already fled armed conflict, now face further hardship due to the floods. Areas such as eastern Shan State, Karen, and Karenni states, as well as the Bago region, have also experienced extreme flooding.

Casualty figures remain uncertain, with the UN reporting "hundreds" dead and many more missing. The Pa'O Youth Organization (PYO), a local group, reported 140 deaths in southern Shan State alone.

NUG ASSESSMENT OF JUNTA STRIKES AND FLOODING RESPONSE

Aung Myo Min, Union Minister of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (NUG) offered a diplomatic briefing on 19 September at the United Nations in Geneva, commenting on the actions of the Myanmar junta and the response to the devastating

flooding.

The following is a slightly abridged version of the briefing.

Since my last human rights briefing in March, the situation in Myanmar has changed dramatically. The illegal military junta is a diminishing force. It is on the backfoot – losing territory, troops and morale.

Revolutionary forces are growing in strength, unity, reach and sophistication. As we collectively claim more territory, we are deepening our coordination. Our top priority is to ensure that all communities in desperate need have access to food, shelter, safety and medicine. But in this coordination are also the seeds of the future federal democratic Myanmar that will give equal voice and equal vote to all communities, regardless of ethnicity, identity and religion.

OHCHR report

Earlier this week, OHCHR published its latest report on Myanmar. These are some of the staggering figures it contained on the junta's crimes: At least 5,350 civilians have been murdered; more than 3.3 million people have been displaced; more than half of Myanmar's population now lives below the poverty line; at least 1,853 people have died in custody, including 88 children and 125 women; there has been a 739 percent increase in civilian deaths from junta airstrikes, compared to the previous 15 months.

At the same time, the junta continues to forcibly recruit Myanmar youth to fight in its illegal war against its own people. This forms part of the junta's deliberate destruction of an entire generation of young people – killing them in the street, driving them from their



homes, denying them education and opportunity. It must be viewed as a crime against humanity.

I will use the remainder of my briefing today to address three significant current issues:

Cyclone Yagi, the situation in Rakhine State, and accountability.

Cyclone Yagi

First, Cyclone Yagi. Myanmar is grappling with a natural disaster in the form of Cyclone Yagi, which has triggered floods and landslides and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, adding to the millions of civilians already driven from their homes by repeated waves of military violence. This is a crisis upon a crisis.

The NUG and its ethnic partners – including the Karen National Union, the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Chin National Front – are providing food, shelter and medical supplies to affected communities, but much more assistance is urgently needed. The collapse of communications lines, power cuts, rising waters, flash floods and continuing junta airstrikes against civilians have frustrated and severely impacted our rescue and relief efforts.

We therefore issue an urgent appeal to our neighbours, UN agencies, humanitarian organizations and to the international community at large to launch a collective humanitarian response to help alleviate the suffering of our people and to reach all affected communities.

The NUG and its partners stand ready to expand our delivery and our reach, including through established cross-border channels and in coordination with donors and local actors.

At the same time, we caution the international community against cooperating with the military junta, which continues to manipulate and withhold humanitarian aid as a tactic of war.

In May last year, the junta blocked humanitarian access to Rakhine State after Cyclone Mocha left a trail of death and destruction that devastated local communities. This followed Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which claimed 138,000 lives and became a textbook example for the activation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle after the military blocked international emergency and aid workers from accessing Myanmar.

Rakhine State

Next, the situation in Rakhine State. The NUG is gravely concerned by the horrific reports and images emerging from northern Rakhine State, including Maungdaw township. This includes reports that civilians – predominantly Rohingya – have been killed

during clashes and in direct attacks. Other Rohingya reportedly drowned in the Naf River while desperately seeking safety.

The NUG supports calls for an independent investigation. Investigators should be granted full access to Maungdaw and surrounding areas and provided with security to enable them to conduct an effective investigation that clarifies events, identifies perpetrators and supports accountability.

Furthermore, urgent measures must be taken to protect the Rohingya and all other civilians in northern Rakhine State, and to ensure their immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian aid and medical assistance.

The situation in Maungdaw raises the alarm about potential new atrocities against the Rohingya, the Rakhine, and other minority communities in Myanmar. The NUG is fully committed to preventing these crimes and to ensuring that shameful past failures in Myanmar are never repeated.

Accountability

Third, accountability. In OHCHR's new report, the High Commissioner calls on all UN Member States to demand accountability for human rights violations and other violations of international law perpetrated by the military and other actors.

In response, I would encourage UN Member States, particularly Members of this Council, to be creative in exploring accountability options. This could include the possible creation of an ad hoc court or tribunal in Myanmar to prosecute atrocity crimes. An ad hoc court would put the IIMM's case files to direct use. It would also get around the ICC's current inability to expand its jurisdiction to all of Myanmar's territory. The pervasive, decades-long impunity in Myanmar has permitted and fuelled today's atrocities. Accountability is the answer.

For our own part, the NUG wholly accepts the High Commissioner's call on the NUG and ethnic groups to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights, including by holding perpetrators of violations accountable, in accordance with international standards.

As we have made clear through our military Code of Conduct, we hold ourselves to this standard and expect the same of all actors and forces in Myanmar.

MNDAA SAYS IT WILL NOT COOPERATE WITH THE NUG

On 18 September, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) officially announced they will not collaborate with the National

Unity Government (NUG) in military or political matters, nor will they expand battlefields or attack Mandalay and Taunggyi Townships.

Despite this stance, the MNDAAs affirmed their commitment to upholding the right to self-defense. In their statement, the MNDAAs also emphasized that they would refrain from aligning with foreign entities opposing China and Myanmar, and instead seek to actively cooperate with China to find a political solution for Myanmar through dialogue.

“We urge China to mediate and resolve Myanmar’s worsening crisis,” the MNDAAs statement said.

MNDAAs clarified that they will maintain their political goal of true autonomy without seeking state power or forming a new state.

Political observers speculate that the MNDAAs’s position reflects increasing pressure from China.

The MNDAAs captured Lashio town, the headquarters of the Military Council’s Northeastern Regional Military Command, as well as other towns and junta bases during Operation 1027 in northern Shan State.

Additionally, the MNDAAs, Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) met with Chinese officials in late August. Although the MNDAAs and TNLA did not give any confirmation for that meeting, it was confirmed by KIA spokesperson Col Naw Bu.

A spokesperson for the TNLA told Mizzima that China had sent a warning letter to immediately stop fighting in Northern Shan State and the China-Myanmar border region, and that they were facing pressure from China regarding the fighting.

TOP MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

Please find the top Mizzima Burmese videos of the week.

Who is most responsible for the lives lost due to floods (Editorial Talk)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97T_p5DwFaE

Weekend News Roundup | 21 September 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhW74sHnv6Y>

Where Disaster Funds Go (Article)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4RHhN1ADZ8>





Flooding near Inle Lake area. Photo: AFP

UN OCHA 'ACTIVELY FUNDRAISING' TO PROVIDE AID TO MYANMAR FLOODING VICTIMS

UN OCHA says it is working to fund and support the thousands of victims of flash flooding in Myanmar in the wake of a deep depression that swept over the country with Typhoon Yagi, according to a report released 20 September.

Ten days after the extensive flash flooding, emerging reports of impact indicate that an estimated 887,000 people, including displaced people, have been affected in 65 townships across Bago, Kayah, Kayin, Magway, Mandalay, Mon, Nay Pyi Taw, Rakhine, Sagaing and eastern and southern Shan regions and states.

So far, more than 300 fatalities and nearly 100 injuries have been reported. The most severely affected areas remain in devastation, with widespread destruction to homes, household assets, water sources, and electricity infrastructure. Roads, bridges, communication networks, schools, public service facilities, religious sites, and crops and farmlands have been severely damaged or completely collapsed.

Amid severe underfunding of the response – the 2024 Humanitarian Needs & Response Plan remains 27 per cent funded – OCHA and the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) a.i. are actively fundraising to mobilize additional resources to quickly scale-up ongoing flood response efforts.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator, a.i. has provisionally approved a CERF allocation of up to US\$4 million to help kick-start emergency relief efforts.

UN OCHA says rapid response efforts continue in the affected townships, delivering critical support to impacted communities. Urgent needs include drinking water, food, essential medicine, household kits, clothing, shelter, and lifesaving equipment for emergency preparedness. Funding and unrestricted access to affected areas are crucial for humanitarian organisations to effectively respond to the needs of impacted communities.

Situation Overview

Ten days after the onset of pervasive flash flooding, reports of the impact from affected areas continue to surface. Floodwaters have receded in most regions, allowing communities to begin cleanup efforts. The most severely affected areas remain devastated, with widespread damage to homes, household assets, water sources, and electricity connections.

In addition, critical infrastructure and public properties, including roads, bridges, communication networks, schools, public service facilities, religious sites, and crops and farmlands, have been collapsed and damaged.

Latest reports indicate that an estimated 887,000 people, including those displaced by the conflict, have been affected by flooding across 65 townships in Bago, Kayah, Kayin, Magway, Mandalay, Mon, Nay Pyi Taw, Rakhine, Sagaing, and eastern and southern Shan regions-states. The most affected areas so far, in

order, are Mandalay Region, southern Shan, eastern Bago, Kayin State, and Nay Pyi Taw. Many have been evacuated to safer locations based on the severity of the situation in their areas. Rapid response efforts are ongoing in the affected townships, providing critical support to impacted communities. The initial requests for emergency support have highlighted the urgent need for drinking water, food, basic medicine, household kits, clothing, and shelter.

In Mandalay Region, one of the hardest hit areas, water levels in most of the flooded villages have receded as of 18 September, and communities have begun cleaning up. However, returning to their homes, particularly in submerged villages, remains a challenge. There are growing health concerns due to the lack of accessible clean water. More than 230 people from 15 affected villages have been reported dead, and 50 individuals have been hospitalized at Yamethin Hospital. Many flood victims in Myitthar Township reside in highland areas, living in temporary makeshift shelters and pagodas.

Emergency assistance and rescue efforts have been challenging to reach them, and there is an urgent need for food and healthcare services.

In eastern and southern Shan, flooding and landslides have affected 26 townships, resulting in at least 78 reported fatalities and 47 individuals sustaining injuries.

In Bago Region, one of the hardest-hit areas, more than 100,000 people have been severely affected across Bago, Htantabin, Oktwin, Phyu, Taungoo, and Yedashe townships. This includes thousands of individuals in conflict-affected areas that require humanitarian assistance. Villages along the Sittaung River remain flooded and hazardous, while other areas have seen the floodwaters recede.

Mon and Kayin states have also been impacted by flooding and landslides. Nearly 90,000 people across four townships in Kayin and 11,950 people in three townships in Mon have been affected. Several relief centers remain in Kayin, where many people have begun returning home.

In Nay Pyi Taw, more than 72,000 people in Pyinmana, Poke Ba Thi Ri, Tatkon and Zay Yar Thi Ri townships have been affected by flooding.

In Chin State, strong winds and torrential rains have destroyed 180 acres of farmlands and damaged water pipelines. Due to floodwaters and landslides, transportation routes between Falam and Kale and

Mindat and Matupi townships remain disrupted.

In the Sagaing Region, agricultural lands in Chaung-U, Myaung, and Myinmu townships were flooded, damaging some crops.

In the Magway Region, reports show that more than 26,000 houses were damaged or washed away, and an estimated 50,000 acres of agricultural lands were flooded. Several bridges and road sections were damaged or destroyed, affecting access to impacted communities and complicating response efforts.

In Kayah State, more than 6,500 people have been affected in Demoso, Hpruso, and Shadaw townships. Flooding and landslides have caused significant destruction to livestock, farmland, and civilian properties. Over 48,000 acres of paddy and other crops have been submerged, with an estimated 5,000 paddy fields damaged across the state. In Rakhine State, more than 40,000 people, including those displaced by the conflict, have been affected by flooding in Minbya, Mrauk-U, and Toungup townships.

UN OCHA called for a number of responses concerning specific sectors including health, food, water and education.

Key Challenges and Gaps

Rescue teams faced inadequate resources, particularly boats, lifesaving equipment, and protective gear, both during the peak of the flooding and in emergency preparation for potential future flooding.

Telecommunications and internet services are unstable, frequently interrupting humanitarian communications and operations.

Response efforts are impacted by physical constraints such as road blockages, damaged bridges, and ongoing clashes.

Existing resources among the actors are too limited to address the needs of the entire affected population.

Funding remains a significant challenge for the flood response, with additional difficulties anticipated as many areas remain inaccessible to local responders and humanitarian partners. Moreover, local procurement is hindered by access restrictions and shortages of goods within communities.

Humanitarian response efforts in Myanmar remain hindered by severe underfunding, with only 27 per cent of the required funding for the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan received in 2024. More resources are urgently needed to sustain the delivery of emergency assistance.



WFP workers provide assistance.
Photo: WFP

WFP LAUNCHES FLOOD RESPONSE IN MYANMAR TO ASSIST PEOPLE AFFECTED BY TYPHOON YAGI

The World Food Programme (WFP) announced last week a rapid response program in Myanmar to assist people affected by flooding in the wake of Super Typhoon Yagi. The large-scale food assistance program will extend WFP’s flood relief efforts begun in July.

The announcement for this stepped-up programme is contained in the text below.

The WFP is gearing up to launch a rapid flood response this week in Myanmar to provide emergency food assistance to people in areas submerged by floods following the passage of Super Typhoon Yagi over the past few days. This response is a major scale-up in WFP flood relief efforts ongoing since July.

Bago, Kayah, Kayin, Magway, Mandalay, Mon, Naypyidaw and Shan states have been facing heavy rains, severe flooding and landslides caused by the Super Typhoon that hit Myanmar on September 11. The floods have so far caused several hundred deaths and affected at least 631,000 people across the country.

“Super Typhoon Yagi has caused the most severe floods in Myanmar’s recent history. Much of the country is submerged and some areas are witnessing their first floods in decades,” said Sheela Matthew, WFP Myanmar Representative. “The impact on food security will be nothing less than devastating. More than 13 million people were already facing food insecurity in August before the floods hit. Our teams are working around the clock to respond to the growing needs,” she added.

WFP will provide a one-month ration of emergency food, including rice, fortified biscuits, and nutrition products to up to half a million flood-affected people, ensuring immediate food needs are met. Meanwhile, WFP teams are working with partner organisations to assess the impact on crops, livelihoods, and people’s ability to access food.

Prior to Typhoon Yagi, WFP had already reached 185,000 flood-affected people in Myanmar with emergency assistance in July and August in response to floods that inundated hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland.



Photo: AFP

INTERNATIONAL CROSS-BORDER RESPONSE TO TYPHOON YAGI URGENTLY NEEDED IN MYANMAR

In a statement released on 17 September, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) urged neighbouring states to set aside political differences and open their borders to facilitate the delivery of international humanitarian aid to the people of Myanmar through resistance authority and civil society networks. The call comes as the death toll rises in Myanmar and flooding continues to impact a population already struggling with an ongoing armed conflict and impending economic collapse.

Typhoon Yagi hit northern Myanmar on 10 September causing severe flooding, landslides and widespread destruction across the country. Low-lying townships surrounding Naypyitaw and Mandalay have been inundated, while areas of Bago, and Magwe regions, as well as eastern and southern Shan, Karen, Karenni and Mon states have also been impacted. At least 113 people are known to have been killed and 325,000 people internally displaced by the storm, Myanmar military junta-controlled media reported on Sunday. The actual figures are likely to be far higher.

Myanmar was already facing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, devastated by almost four years of revolutionary war against the military junta.

During this time, the military has increasingly relied on heavy aerial and artillery bombardment of populated areas, causing massive loss of civilian life and destruction of homes and infrastructure. An estimated 3 million people are internally displaced across the country, many living without basic food, shelter and sanitation. The military has consistently prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching those in need.

The full extent of the damage caused by typhoon Yagi in such circumstances is difficult to ascertain, but it is certain to have significantly exacerbated the crisis. An international humanitarian response to Yagi is urgently needed.

It is essential that international humanitarian actors engage with Myanmar resistance authorities and civil society to support their relief efforts. Resistance actors have greater control in more of the country than the military and, along with civil society, have experience in administering humanitarian assistance to people in their areas and beyond.

The Myanmar military junta is not the legitimate or de facto government of Myanmar, nor does it have the will or capacity to ensure aid is delivered to the majority of those in dire need. The military created Myanmar's pre-existing humanitarian crisis and will seek to use engagement with international actors on humanitarian grounds to advance its own military and political agenda at the expense of the Myanmar people. It has done this for decades, most recently in response to Cyclone Mocha in 2023.

Donors must be especially careful to ensure aid is provided in a way that reaches the people most in need and is not instrumentalised by the military junta. The military junta's lack of de facto and de jure legitimacy means international actors are not legally bound by the arbitrary restrictions it has sought, and will continue to seek, to impose on humanitarian access to and around Myanmar.

The onus now is on Myanmar's neighbouring States – China, India, Thailand, Laos and Bangladesh – to open their borders and allow international aid to cross into Myanmar and be distributed to people in need in coordination with Myanmar resistance authorities and civil society.

Myanmar's neighbours and the wider international community must act in solidarity with the people of Myanmar and not allow Min Aung Hlaing to exploit this latest disaster to further deepen Myanmar's suffering.



UK HAS PROVIDED

**\$2.5 MILLION USD OF
SUPPORT**

TO FLOOD AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

IN MYANMAR SINCE JUNE 2024.

UK PROVIDES \$2.5 MILLION IN FLOODING AID FOR MYANMAR

The UK government says it is continuing to support the people of Myanmar, who now face devastating flooding on top of the impact of intense conflict in many areas, according to a press release on 19 September.

“Our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones and their homes,” the statement says.

The UK has contributed \$2.5 million since June to support those affected by flooding, including \$1.7 million for communities affected by the recent floods. This vital emergency assistance includes food, clean water, and hygiene kits for those displaced.

The funding will go directly to local and international organisations who are already on the ground delivering lifesaving support.

Myanmar has been badly hit over the last three weeks by serious flooding as a result of the low-pressure system that came in over Southeast Asia with Typhoon Yagi.



Damaged houses following flooding.
Photo: Supplied

PA-O YOUTH ORGANIZATION REPORTS 140 DEATHS FROM SOUTHERN SHAN FLOODS IN MYANMAR

The Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO) reported that 140 people have died and another 100 are missing following severe flooding in Loilen and Taunggyi districts of southern Shan State last week.

PYO official, Khun Oo, confirmed that this figure represents preliminary data gathered as of 17 September. Efforts are ongoing to verify and update the numbers. The organization warned that the actual toll could be higher.

The flooding has impacted at least 150 villages across Taunggyi and Loilen districts, damaging 13 bridges and 1,081 residential buildings.

The statement also indicated significant agricultural losses, with crops in about 90 percent of the flooded areas being destroyed.

Rescue operations have been severely hampered due to infrastructure damage. The road connecting Loilen and Taunggyi is collapsing. Internet and phone communications are down across most affected areas, with intermittent service in Taunggyi town.

The Namlat Social Assistance Association reported that, as of 15 September, the water levels have receded in Kalaw town, revealing extensive destruction to approximately 1,000 homes.

The Inlay region, a popular tourist destination, is also experiencing severe flooding. Traditional weaving activities have been suspended, and crops have been submerged.

The floods, exacerbated by remnants of Typhoon Yagi and a low-pressure area, have affected various regions, including Shan State, Mandalay Region, Nay Pyi Taw, Karenni State, Bago Region, Karen State, and Mon State.

Immediate needs in the flood-affected areas include food, clothing, and healthcare. Health experts are also warning of potential outbreaks of water-borne diseases such as diarrhea, as well as malaria and dengue fever.

SOME COMMODITY PRICES IN MYANMAR SURGING IN THE WAKE OF TYPHOON

Floods and landslides triggered by typhoon Yagi in Myanmar caused surges in some commodity prices, including vegetables, as well as transport disruptions.

Vegetable traders said the vegetable supply to markets plummeted sharply after incessant and heavy rain across the country which flooded many vegetable plots. Transport disruptions were also caused by flooded roads in many areas. These factors cause a surge in the price of vegetables.

Vegetable cultivators said that water receded in some places but many roads and bridges were damaged in the floods and landslides disrupting the vegetable supply and causing a sharp rise in the prices of vegetables.

Vegetables currently being traded in the wholesale markets are old stocks that arrived in previous days. The prices of vegetables would rise sharply in a few days, the traders said.

In the Yangon retail market, the price of cabbage is between 7,000-10,000 Kyats per piece, the tomato price is 6,000 Kyats per viss (approx. 1.6 Kg), the potato price is 8,000 Kyats per viss, and a bundle of watercress is up to 1,000 Kyats.

Some vegetables cultivated in Shan State cannot be transported because of floods and landslides along the road. Food vendors said that vegetables from Shan State barely entered the Yangon market.

Local residents in Tachilek, eastern Shan State, said that the prices of basic foodstuffs including vegetables rose by about 50% after the unprecedented floods and landslides in the region.

Commodity prices have been rising in the market along with the rising US dollar exchange rate and were exacerbated by the floods and landslides in the country so will rise further.

In an official press statement issued by the Military Council, 84 townships across the country are inundated and saw flash floods.

Flood waters coming down from upper Myanmar are currently starting to create floods in lower Myanmar. Plantations and fields are now inundated in some townships of lower Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

SIX MILLION CHILDREN IN SE ASIA AFFECTED BY YAGI DISASTER: UNICEF

Deadly floods and landslides triggered by Typhoon Yagi have affected nearly six million children across Southeast Asia, the UN said Wednesday, as the death toll from the disaster rose.

Typhoon Yagi brought powerful winds and torrential rainfall to Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar when it swept across the region almost two weeks ago.

Thailand reported three more deaths on Wednesday, taking the toll in the kingdom to 18, with a total of 537 fatalities now confirmed across the region.

Six million children have been affected by Yagi, United Nations children's agency UNICEF said in a statement, with access to clean water, education, healthcare, food and shelter all compromised.

"The most vulnerable children and families are facing the most devastating consequences of the destruction left behind by Typhoon Yagi," said June Kunugi, UNICEF regional director for East Asia and Pacific.

In Vietnam, about three million people are facing the risk of disease due to a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation, UNICEF said.

Almost 400,000 people have been forced from their homes by floods in Myanmar, piling misery on a population already struggling with more than three

years of war between the military and armed groups opposed to its rule.

Yagi worsened an "already dire humanitarian situation" in Myanmar, said UNICEF, and "pushed... already marginalised communities into deeper crisis".

More than 100 flood victims near the capital Naypyidaw needed hospital treatment for food poisoning after eating donated meals on Tuesday, the junta said.

The UN's World Food Programme said Wednesday it would launch an emergency response in Myanmar this week, distributing a one-month ration of emergency food to up to half a million people.

Climate change and warming oceans, driven by human activities, are making extreme weather events like Typhoon Yagi more frequent and severe.

Overlapping climate and humanitarian hazards disproportionately affect children in East Asia and the Pacific, where they are six times more likely than their grandparents to be affected, according to UNICEF.

AFP

Junta bombing lights up Lashio on 24 September.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR FIGHTERS BATTLE TO HOLD PRIZED CITY OF LASHIO

Red flags flutter over bullet-scarred buildings in the strategic Myanmar city of Lashio, which the ethnic minority armed group Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) linked to China seized from the military in its biggest defeat for decades.

Lashio is the largest urban centre to fall to any of Myanmar's myriad ethnic minority armed groups - who have been fighting the central authorities on and off for decades -- since the military first seized power in 1962.

But analysts say the MNDAA will struggle to govern Lashio, in northern Shan State, which straddles a key trade route to China and normally has a population of 150,000.

Most fled the weeks of fighting that culminated in the city's capture last month, and those who remain fear a return to the bloody violence.

Residents and rescue groups say dozens of civilians were killed or wounded as the military pounded the town with air strikes and both sides launched rockets and shells at each other.

While the fighting has eased since August, junta planes are still flying sorties and conducting air strikes, including on Monday and Tuesday night.

"We cannot say Lashio is back to normal but everyone is trying to act like it's normal," real estate agent Soe Soe, 30, told AFP.

She fled in July but returned after the MNDAA took over and said she will stay, even as smaller clashes continue in the vicinity.

"The situation is uncertain right now," she added. "Everyone is afraid."

'No experience'

The MNDAA was part of a trio of ethnic armed groups that launched a coordinated offensive against the junta - which ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in 2021 - a year ago, taking it by surprise and seizing swathes of Shan state.

Junta jets are still pounding the city and targets have included hospitals and administrative buildings,

according to the US Institute of Peace's Myanmar programme chief Jason Tower.

They "seem to be focused on preventing the MNDAAs from advancing post-conflict reconstruction and returning the city to normal under its governance", he said.

Running Lashio will stretch the MNDAAs' manpower and capacity, he told AFP.

"It is now trying to govern a much larger territory and faces a wide range of challenges it has no experience dealing with."

'Everyone is afraid'

Lucrative lead, silver and zinc mines lie near Lashio, while hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of trade passes along the highway that snakes northeast to China through the jungle-clad Shan hills each year, according to the junta's commerce ministry.

Reaching the city is difficult due to fighting along the road.

Within it, rifle-toting MNDAAs policemen in black uniforms patrol the streets as the group - which analysts say maintains close ties with Beijing - works to convince former residents and businesses to return.

Vendors marked out new plots at a market damaged during the fighting, but schools were shuttered and traffic was thin on the usually busy highway.

As the group tries to restore normality, MNDAAs-affiliated media have released regular updates about new administrative measures, from reorganising the main market to distributing rice and supplies to needy families.

But many who fled the fighting are yet to return.

"Everyone is afraid because the fighting only just finished," said Mae Gyi, 28, a vendor.

Junta air strikes have killed and wounded several civilians, according to the MNDAAs.

And the ethnically Chinese MNDAAs are an unknown quantity for Lashio's diverse population of Bamar, Shan, and other groups.

In areas controlled by the group in its Kokang homeland along the border with China's Yunnan province, the language of administration, the currency and internet providers are all Chinese.

It has other echoes with the People's Republic: in April the MNDAAs executed three of its members in the border city of Laukkai for murder and selling stolen weapons, following a public trial in which each of the accused wore a placard detailing their crimes in Chinese.

Nowhere to go

The approach has alarmed some Lashio residents, with one former inhabitant - speaking on condition of anonymity - telling AFP they would not return until the MNDAAs left.

"Only our parents went back to Lashio," the former resident said.

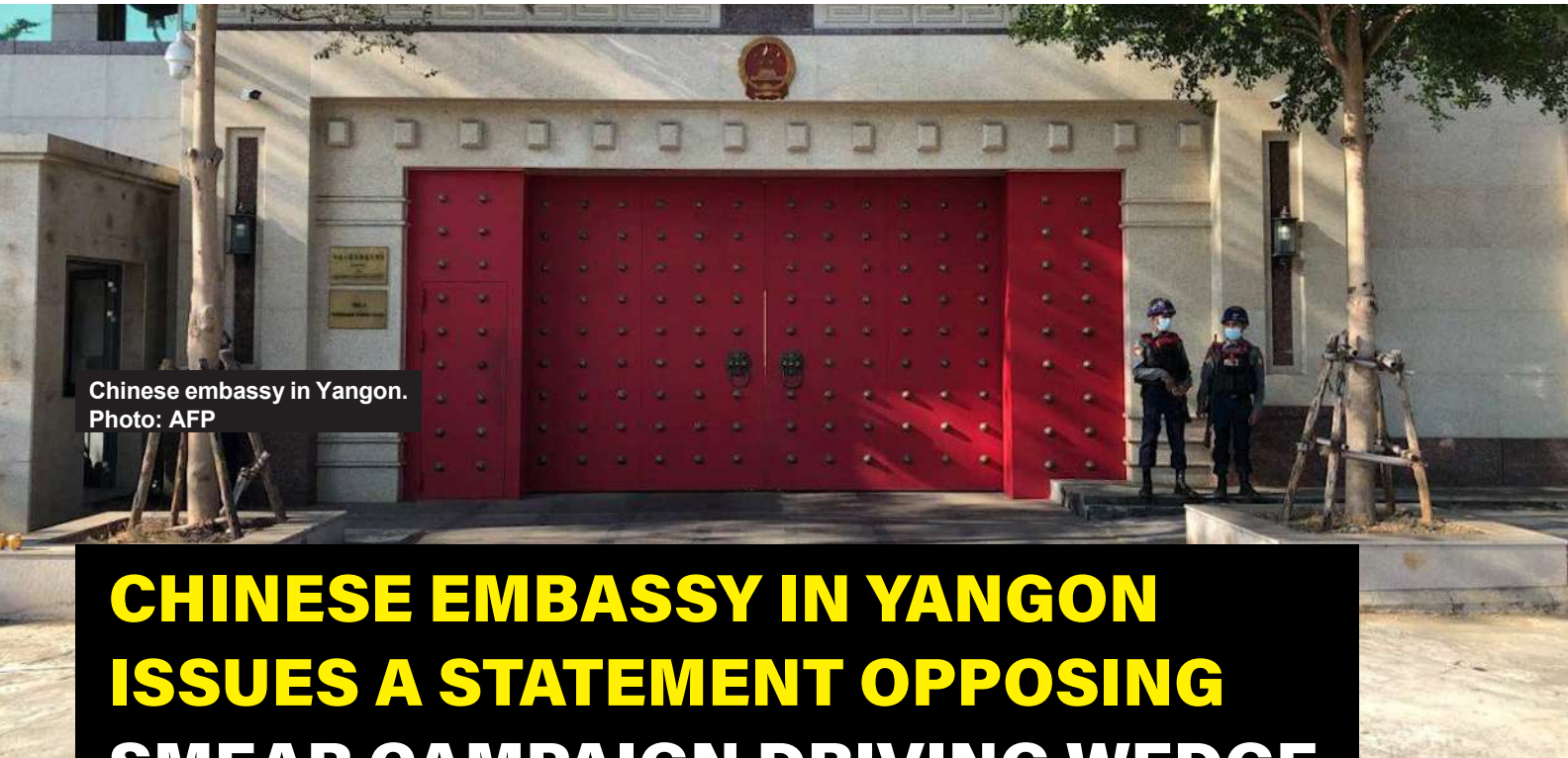
But others have welcomed the tough approach.

"The MNDAAs have cleaned the town, and they have been helping the people... They helped to prevent prices from becoming too high," said another former resident, whose family have returned.

Only "around 20-30 percent" of the town's population had returned, said Soe Soe, but she was determined not to flee again despite the continuing low-level fighting.

"We don't have anywhere else to go," she said. "So, I came back to Lashio and am trying my best to stay here."

Reporting: AFP, Mizzima



Chinese embassy in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

CHINESE EMBASSY IN YANGON ISSUES A STATEMENT OPPOSING SMEAR CAMPAIGN DRIVING WEDGE IN SINO-MYANMAR RELATIONS

The Chinese embassy in Yangon issued a press statement on 14 September announcing that China opposes external forces interfering in Myanmar's internal affairs and opposes any words and deeds that attempt to sow discord in China-Myanmar relations.

A spokesperson for the embassy made the remarks in response to recent accusations by some media and individuals that China is interfering in Myanmar's internal affairs.

China firmly supports Myanmar in safeguarding independence, sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity, insists on non-interference in internal affairs, and adheres to a peace process owned and led by the Myanmar people, the spokesperson said.

China's friendly policy towards Myanmar is for all the people of Myanmar, the spokesperson said, adding that China hopes that relevant parties in Myanmar will achieve a ceasefire and settle disputes in a peaceful manner. China would facilitate the stabilization and de-escalation of the situation in northern Myanmar and the country as a whole.

Many Myanmar activists staged a protest demonstration in Washington D.C. in the US on 14 September in front of the Chinese embassy. They demanded China prove its non-interference policy in Myanmar affairs through its actions.

In practice, China is supporting the Myanmar junta chief's plan to conduct elections, putting pressure on the Northern Alliance to deescalate their offensives, giving financial assistance to the junta's Home Ministry under the pretext of a crackdown on online scams known as the Jia Pian, and protecting the Myanmar junta through manipulation in debates and resolutions of UN Security Council.

Myanmar activists also demanded China stop deterring and obstructing the military offensives being launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance.

Additionally, the General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB) issued a press statement strongly condemned China for supporting the junta's plan to hold general elections opposed by the Myanmar people and for protecting and standing with the Military Council providing legitimacy to the junta.



INDIA PLANS TO PROVIDE ELECTRICITY TO MYANMAR'S CHIN AND RAKHINE STATES

Mizoram's Commerce and Industries Minister F. Rodingliana met with the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs (Bangladesh and Myanmar) on 13 September to discuss various bilateral projects between India and Myanmar. The meeting took place in the minister's office chamber, where key regional infrastructure projects and cooperation plans were discussed.

According to a statement from Mizoram's Government News and Information Department, the Joint Secretary informed the minister about India's central government plan to provide electricity from Paletwa township in Myanmar's Chin State to Sittwe township in Rakhine State. The Mizoram state government expressed its full cooperation in assisting with this energy project, which aligns with India's broader initiatives with neighboring countries.

Minister F. Rodingliana confirmed that Mizoram would support the central government's development efforts, especially those involving cooperation with Myanmar, as outlined in the statement.

In addition, the possibility of establishing a customs office or joint checkpoint near Sisuri village in Mamit District, Mizoram, was also discussed, highlighting efforts to improve trade and border security.

The officials also reviewed the status of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), which aims to connect India's Kolkata Port to Myanmar's

Sittwe Port, and then to Mizoram via Paletwa in Chin State through waterways along the Kaladan River. They explored challenges the project has faced and potential solutions for its timely completion.

On 12 September, the Joint Secretary also met with leaders of the Central Young Lai Association (CYLA) in southern Mizoram, according to the Lawngtlai Post.

CYLA leaders expressed their support for India's Eastern policy and discussed the possibility of enhancing regular trade, as well as establishing border fences and checkpoint gates for better management of cross-border movement.

CYLA, which holds significant influence in Lawngtlai District, Mizoram, has enforced a ban on importing fuel and medicines to Paletwa and Rakhine State, allowing only food shipments. This move has impacted the region, especially in light of the ongoing development of the KMMTTP.

India's plan to support electricity supply is considered a crucial step in addressing energy shortages, particularly in Myanmar's Rakhine and Chin States, as part of the larger development framework associated with the Kaladan project.



Injured civilian. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS FIVE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING A CHILD, IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Five civilians, including a mother and her child, were killed in an airstrike carried out by the Myanmar Military Council in Nampong village, Lashio township, northern Shan State, early on 13 September. The area is controlled by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), which actively opposes the junta.

In addition to the five fatalities, eight others were wounded, with three reported to be in critical condition. Local sources confirmed that the victims were caught in the airstrike.

"The airstrike took the lives of five people, including a mother and a child," a resident from the village said.

This attack follows a series of bombings in northern Shan State, where the junta has targeted civilian areas. In a separate strike on 13 September, the junta dropped 13 bombs on Nawngkhio town, Shan State which is controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), as confirmed by TNLA.

On 10 September, the Namma coal mine near Nampong village was also bombed, though no casualties were reported. On the same day, another airstrike on Lashio's General Administration Office left over 13 civilians injured and destroyed several buildings, according to the Reconstruction of Lashio Organization.

The junta had previously launched air raids on Lashio city on 30 August and 8 September, causing significant damage to a school, market, and residential homes.

While Myanmar and neighboring countries are dealing with widespread flooding, the military continues to prioritize airstrikes over relief efforts. Military sources have criticized the junta for neglecting rescue operations, in contrast to regional countries using helicopters for flood relief.

Photo: Facebook



KANI TOWNSHIP PEOPLE'S ADMINISTRATION ISSUES RESTRICTIONS ON VESSEL MOVEMENT AS JUNTA WARSHIPS HEAD DOWNSTREAM ON THE CHINDWIN RIVER

The Kani Township People's Administration issued a warning on 15 September, restricting vessel movement on the Chindwin River in Sagaing Region. The warning came as a fleet of junta warships was reported heading downstream from the upper reaches of the river.

By 16 September, nine junta warships transporting valuable jade from the upper Uyu River section of the Chindwin River, have reached Kalewa Township and continued their journey downstream. The jade was transported from the Uyu River to Homalin Township, where it was transferred to the warships.

"A fleet of ships is carrying precious jade and gemstones, and due to the high value of the cargo, the junta's Air Force may be providing security. Local residents along the riverbank should stay alert," said a member of the People's Defense Force (PDF) from Kani Township.

The People's Defense Forces have also cautioned residents living along the Chindwin River banks about the risk of being shot by the passing junta vessels. For

the safety of local communities, the Kani Township People's Administration has temporarily suspended vessel operations on the river until the situation is deemed safe.

After departing from Kalewa, the junta fleet will pass through Mawlaik, Mingin, Kani, Yinmabin, and Salingyi Townships. Residents along the riverbanks are preparing to flee their homes in anticipation of potential conflict or danger from the military vessels.

The junta heavily relies on the Chindwin and Ayeyarwady Rivers for transporting supplies, weapons, rations, and goods.

In August, a fleet of junta warships moving upstream on the Ayeyarwady River was attacked by People's Defense Forces in Tigyaying, Katha, and Shwegu Townships, leading to retaliatory airstrikes by the military. During these strikes, three civilians from Katha Township were killed.



Photo: AFP

UN DECRIES 'HORRIFIC' TORTURE AS MYANMAR SINKS INTO RIGHTS 'ABYSS'

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) released a new report on 17 September on the human rights situation in Myanmar for the period from 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2024. The report documents patterns of human rights violations in conflict areas as well as focusing on issues including arrest and detentions, use of torture, deaths in custody and enforced disappearances, and sexual violence in detention.

A statement announcing the report by Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and James Rodehaver, UN Human Rights Head of the Myanmar Team reads as follows.

This morning our Office published its latest report on the human rights situation in Myanmar, detailing a range of serious violations that continue to underscore the deepening crisis and lack of rule of law throughout the country. Since the coup on 1 February 2021, at least 5,350 civilians have been killed, more than 3.3 million displaced, and over half the population is living below the poverty line, primarily due to military violence, according to the report.

The report looks at the devastating impact of the violence, destruction, and deprivation on people's mental health, as well as the regression in economic and social rights, which is precipitating further economic decline. At the same time young people, who provide the key to Myanmar's future, are fleeing abroad to escape being forced to serve in or fight for the military.

It also documents the vast scope of detentions undertaken by the military. Nearly 27,400 individuals have been arrested since the coup, with arrests on the rise since the military's implementation of mandatory conscription in February 2024. Credible sources indicate that at least 1,853 people have died in custody, including 88 children and 125 women. Many of these individuals have been verified as dying after being subjected to abusive interrogation, other ill-treatment in detention, or denial of access to adequate healthcare.

Torture and ill-treatment in military custody are pervasive. Detainees interviewed by our Office described methods, such as being suspended

from the ceiling without food or water; being forced to kneel or crawl on hard or sharp objects; use of snakes and insects to instill fear; beatings with iron poles, bamboo sticks, batons, rifle butts, leather strips, electric wires and motorcycle chains; asphyxiation, mock executions; electrocution and burning with tasers, lighters, cigarettes, and boiling water; spraying of methylated substances on open wounds; cutting of body parts and pulling of fingernails. There were also disturbing reports of sexual violence.

All those responsible for gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. The lack of any form of accountability for perpetrators is an enabler for the repetition of violations, abuses and crimes. It is essential that such behaviour be clearly identified and deterred. Accountability for such violations must apply to all perpetrators.

The enormity of challenges Myanmar is facing and will face in the years ahead to ensure respect for the rule of law and functional justice institutions is daunting.

In light of the above findings, High Commissioner Volker Türk renews his recommendation, among others, to the UN Security Council to refer the full scope of the current situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. He reiterates his calls for an end to the violence and for the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained. Equally important for the future of Myanmar and its people are the grassroots efforts of civil society and community-based organizations to provide essential services, including mental health care. These should also be specifically supported.

To read the full report, please click here:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5756-situation-human-rights-myanmar-report-united-nations-high>

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Junta checkpoint on road in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

OVER 600 WOMEN ARRESTED FOR CRITICIZING MYANMAR'S MILITARY COUNCIL

More than three years after the coup, over 600 women have been arrested for voicing their criticism of the military council and expressing support for revolutionary forces on social media platforms.

Between 1 February 2021 and 31 July 2024, a total of 1,691 individuals were arrested and prosecuted for posting and communicating online in opposition to the military council on social media, according to a report by the research group Data For Myanmar, announced on 16 September.

According to reports, the military council arrested 613 women and 1,078 men from 220 townships across the country. During the coup period, 56 people were arrested each month on average, with the highest number of arrests occurring in the Yangon and Mandalay Regions.

The report indicates that while there were numerous arrests in 2022 and 2023, the number of arrests decreased in 2024. However, in July 2024 alone, 33 people were arrested across 24 townships.

According to the report, the majority of those arrested were monitored and detained through their activities on the Facebook social network, as well as other online platforms such as TikTok, Telegram, and Viber.

The report also reveals that arrests were not only made through online surveillance but also through phone checks at checkpoints and tip-offs received via Telegram channels that support the military council.

Data for Myanmar's report states that those arrested by the military council were prosecuted under Section 52 (a) of the Anti-Terrorism Act, as well as Sections 124 (a) and 505 (a) of the Penal Code. These legal provisions are frequently used to criminalize dissent and punish individuals for their online activities opposing the regime.

The latest status of the detainees and specific details regarding each case, however, remain unknown.

Data For Myanmar recommends that users of social networking platforms remain vigilant about the safety of their personal information online and implement strong information security measures.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RESIDENTS TO EVACUATE FROM TWO VILLAGES IN SITTWE

Residents of Shwe Pyi Thar and Kyay Taw villages near Sittwe city, Rakhine State were told to leave by the military council which then deployed artillery in the village and set up a defensive position.

Residents of Shwe Pyi Thar village were forced to move starting from 13 September. The residents of the adjacent Kyay Taw village were warned on 8 September and were expelled by 15 September, a source from Sittwe told Mizzima.

“Now they are all in Sittwe [city]. Not even a single monk was left. All of them were kicked out. All, including children and adults are not allowed to stay in that village,” the resident said.

Shwe Pyi Thar and Kyay Taw villages are located on the opposite bank of the Sat Yoe Kya Creek from Sittwe city.

It is reported that the evicted residents are temporarily taking refuge in monasteries in Sittwe. These monasteries also have IDPs from the previous fighting and new arrivals must live in temporary tents near the monasteries.

A resident also related that the military council has been firing artillery wildly into Sittwe for the past few days. They are also increasing security forces and preparing for defensive operations.

“The artillery regiment has prepared heavy weapons. They fired a lot yesterday. I don’t know where they were firing at. If they see someone on the street, they arrested them for questioning. They even go up to the houses and catch people,” a resident of Shwe Pyi Thar said.

According to U Pe Than, a veteran Rakhine politician, the military council planted landmines in some places and placed snipers in high-rise buildings. As a type of defensive action to protect themselves they are using the people living in Sittwe as human shields.

In addition, the military council is conducting overnight guest list inspections every night in Sittwe. And residents are being arrested for various reasons, residents said.

The military council has also put up a fence along the waterfront of Sittwe to prevent the AA from entering the waterway and to prevent residents from entering or leaving.

Since the beginning of June, local people from villages as far as 10 miles away from Sittwe including Byai Phyu, Aung Tine, Yay Chan Pyin, Tangar Pyin, Parda Lake, Kwi Te, PiteSate Gyi, Pyar Le Chaung, Palin Pyin, Ohn Yay Phaw, and Kyat Taw Pyin were forced to move by the military council to Sittwe’s Min Gan ward.

On 29 August, a battle broke out between the military council’s army and the Arakan Army (AA) at Wabo village and A Myint Kyun village, four miles away from the Military Operation Command in Sittwe.

While the military situation is currently calm, the military council is preparing for a defensive operation, the residents of Sittwe said.



US Ambassador Scot Marciel meets Aung San Suu Kyi at her house in Yangon in 2009. Photo: AFP

THE ART OF WAR

A conversation with former US Ambassador Scot Marciel

Insight Myanmar

“It became even clearer that these people were uncompromising, not interested at all in changing their behavior! They wanted the legitimacy that came with international recognition and better relations for Myanmar, but they weren’t willing to change their behavior. And that became very clear, with the Rohingya crisis making it crystal clear! Plus the fact of the coup itself, and the brutality of the military in the aftermath of the coup. For me, there’s no dealing with these people. They’re beyond the pale.”

The former US ambassador to Myanmar, Scot Marciel, does not mince words as he discusses the role that diplomacy can—and cannot—play in international crises, in particular the Myanmar conflict. In his first appearance on this platform, he discussed his book, *Imperfect Partners*, and provided an overview of the consequential years he spent in Yangon. Here, he speaks about the challenges that diplomats face when confronted with situations for which there are no easy, textbook answers, a category that the current crisis in Myanmar certainly falls into.

“Since the coup in 2021, you have seen multiple times, the occurrence of this tendency of international states, men and women, to think that the best way to resolve this is through some kind of dialogue, and leading to compromise,” he says. “That’s a failure on the part of lot of diplomats and statesmen and - women to understand the real situation.” This is not to say that Marciel is opposed to dialogue—far from it, in fact, as he is quite keen to point out how often the US pushed for peaceful resolutions and dialogue between parties in the past in Myanmar. But for Marciel, diplomacy is “just one tool out of many,” and should not be used if all the parties involved are not trustworthy and open to compromise.

And quite frankly, being a good-faith and trustworthy partner are not traits that the junta has a good track record of having demonstrated. Marciel points out that the military leadership has historically been uninterested in compromise, and even when they do sign agreements, they are then unwilling to be bound by the very terms they signed onto. “The coup reminded everybody that as long as the military is unaccountable to civilian control, they can step in whenever they want,” he says. “So there was no deal to be had, and you see this regularly now: ‘Well, I’ll go in and talk to the generals, and we can have a political dialogue and agree to a compromise.’ Well, what will a compromise be?! Presumably, a compromise would allow the military to continue to hold a fair amount of political power, and the resistance would get maybe

some prisoners released or some promise of badly-run elections in the future or what have you. So there’s not a viable compromise to be had at this point! And that’s why it’s so frustrating to see people trying to push for something when the conditions just aren’t there.”

Sadly, this has not stopped many voices within ASEAN and the broader international community from making the same, standard appeals for negotiations and de-escalation, which Marciel attributes to a combination of good intentions with a poor understanding of the real nature of the Myanmar crisis. “I think it’s a fundamental misreading of the situation inside Myanmar, that some of the people who have been involved in this, really, with all due respect, just don’t know very much about Myanmar!” he exclaims, and goes on to describe the stereotypical thinking about this kind of situation. “From their perspective, it’s a political disagreement, and it’s really hard for one side to get 100% of what it wants. So the smart thing to do, or the appropriate thing to do, [they think] is bring people together to hammer out a compromise and solve the problem.” The result of this approach is futile attempts at urging compromise, when one side is not a good faith partner and the other side knows it.

“There is the tendency for people and governments to want to show that they’re doing something, and the Five Point Consensus is a perfect example that,” he says. “The intentions behind it, by some of the ASEAN leaders, were pretty good. But ... the notion that the junta would stop using political violence, and that there could be some kind of a political dialogue to resolve this, was wildly optimistic and unrealistic.” Marciel feels that ASEAN remains divided on how to address the situation. Consequently, despite recognizing that the Five Point Consensus would be ineffective at its inception, many ASEAN governments nonetheless continue to endorse it. “This gives them the ability to show that they are supporting something, perhaps because they don’t have better ideas, or they just aren’t willing to put the time and effort into it.”

Marciel believes that ASEAN and Myanmar’s neighbors do not really know what to do at this point since typical diplomatic approaches have failed, but they still want to at least look like they’re trying. This echoes the words of Timothy McLaughlin, who on a recent podcast said that the situation is disappointing and wholly undesirable for parties on all sides. “There is also a tendency to say, ‘Well, it’s bad, but the military is going to win. They’ve got all the guns, and so there’s not much point in supporting this resistance.’” Marciel notes that in spite of the fact that many now recognize

that the situation on the ground has changed—the resistance’s gains are now undeniable—the notion that the military is invincible continues to be used as a justification for a lack of bold new approach. And Marciel adds a couple of other knee-jerk assumptions held by many international actors that influence their thinking about whether or not to support the resistance: that the resistance is incapable of long-term, stable governance, and that if they win, the country may fracture and fall prey to so-called “Balkanization.”

Marciel describes another factor that inhibits the motivation to engage with Myanmar. “At least in the West, you don’t have a lot of public pressure to move to act, because it’s not in the media very much. In the United States for example, you don’t have the media, human rights groups, or members of Congress really demanding action. And so in that environment, when you’ve got other major crises in the world that are on the news every single day, it’s unfortunately natural that senior people and governments will focus on those other crises.”

And yet, optimistically, Marciel does not believe it would be difficult to take meaningful action regarding Myanmar, if only the political will were there. He acknowledges that a full-scale military intervention, especially so close to China and following two unpopular and prolonged US deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, would never be seriously considered. However, smaller investments in financial assistance

and similar measures would not be a hard sell. “Most Americans honestly don’t even know where Myanmar is, so I don’t think that would be particularly controversial,” he adds.

The larger issue in Marciel’s mind, at least in the Washington sphere, is more personal. The democratic struggles of the Myanmar people have been in the eye of the West since at least the 1988 Uprising. Following this, many diplomats fought hard to see democracy come to Myanmar which, to some limited extent at least, was beginning to take shape during the transition period. However, the subsequent Rohingya crisis in 2016-17 was a huge blow to the image of a democratic Myanmar, and to the NLD in particular. “There was a feeling from a lot of people in Washington that they got burned for supporting [the NLD],” Marciel explains.

Indeed, the Rohingya crisis (officially termed a genocide, as noted in a recent podcast conversation with Andrea Gittleman) has left an even deeper imprint on the diplomatic world than is widely known, according to Marciel, who was personally involved in the US’s response to the crisis: there was a general loss of faith in both sides—military and civilian government alike—which Marciel believes might well be the genesis of the current lack of enthusiasm in Washington for the Spring Revolution. He explains that diplomatic efforts focused on aid and systemic change within Myanmar, and “ending the institutionalized discrimination against the Rohingya, and making some progress



Scot Marciel retains a strong interest in Myanmar. Photo: AFP

toward implementing those Kofi Annan Commission recommendations. That involved talking to different people in the elected government, in the military, and in the media within Rakhine state itself, other people who might have influence to encourage change." This of course included negotiations with the military. "They were obviously a big part of the problem," Marciel acknowledges. "But if they weren't going to move, it was going to be hard to make much progress. So it was essential to talk to them." With the benefit of hindsight, Marciel acknowledges that those attempts did not yield any real positive results. He concludes, "It was a disaster on multiple levels, for the Rohingya first and foremost, but for the country as a whole, because it led to a significant loss of support."

However, this does not mean that the US views the current crisis in the same light as the Rohingya genocide, where both the military and civilian government shoulder the blame. "Now you have a situation where the military has suddenly grabbed control and engaged in brutality against those who disagree with it, and in effect, there is a national uprising or even revolution against it. It's just a completely different situation." Marciel points specifically both to the Rohingya crisis and the military's violent repressions in Kachin state as watershed moments that undermined any real hopes on the part of Western diplomats that the military would ever be willing to make any concessions or genuinely respect human rights.

Given the grim realities that confront the Burmese people, Marciel suggests that even lethal aid should not be entirely off the table for any international entities that do support the resistance. While concerns naturally arise about an influx of US weapons potentially inflaming China's anxieties, and the serious moral and logistical issues of tracking weapons to ensure they are used as intended, he wonders if the US might be open, at least in principle, to sending some sort of lethal aid to hasten the end of this prolonged conflict. He thinks it is more likely, however, that the US could consider sending non-lethal military materiel such as radios. Nevertheless, Marciel explains that in the Myanmar context, a strong case can be made that weaponry is needed not only to prosecute the war but, more directly and morally defensibly, to protect highly vulnerable civilians from the junta's repeated aerial attacks.

When inevitable comparisons are made to Ukraine, Marciel points out that shipping weapons to Ukraine and formally handing them over to a duly-elected government is fundamentally easier than smuggling

munitions to Myanmar would be, given that its borders and ports are largely militarily controlled, and most of its neighbors leaning pro-junta. And this leads to the complex, underlying issue of "legitimacy".

Marciel explains how the concept is broadly understood in international relations. Most states and supranational organizations adhere to the principle of recognizing states rather than governments. However, the default position is often to consider the government in power, whether good or bad, as representing that state. Officially recognizing a group or entity as a legitimate player without necessarily recognizing it as the official representative of the entire nation—what Marciel calls a "self-declared state"—is inherently challenging, but what may be required given the multifaceted political landscape in the country. In other words, a group may be acknowledged for its role or legitimacy in a certain sphere, but that does not necessarily equate to it being recognized as the official government of that nation. This nuanced perspective can help navigate complex diplomatic situations where full recognition would imply unintended political stances or legitimacy. This difficulty is compounded when choosing between a nominal government in power and an internal movement in conflict with it. This complicated situation is what diplomats face in Myanmar. (A parallel example to consider would be the Kurdish forces in Syria. These groups have been recognized for their role in fighting ISIS and maintaining stability in certain regions, but they haven't been recognized as the official government of Syria. This approach allows countries to support and acknowledge their contributions without fully endorsing them as the official representatives of the state. This method can navigate diplomatic challenges, avoiding the unintended political consequences that might come with full recognition. We invite guests to listen to a previous episode with Azad, an American sniper who is now fighting with the Chin, and had spent 4 years previous in the Rojava Revolution.)

That said, Marciel does not see international conferment of legitimacy as essential; however, he does recognize its advantages. "[Legitimacy] would help," he affirms. "There's a symbolic value to being recognized as the legitimate government. It's very hard when you don't hold the seat of power to be recognized as legitimate government, [but that] doesn't mean people don't think you're a very legitimate player." Marciel notes that most governments have also not recognized the SAC (State Administration Council), because it lacks legitimacy due to its seizure of power and lack

of popular support, despite physically controlling Naypyitaw.

An important perk of being recognized as a legitimate government is the ability to engage in formal, official diplomacy. As Marciel explains from his own experience as a diplomat, he was required to present his credentials to the head of state of the host nation. The effectiveness of official diplomacy exchange is predicated on the tacit acknowledgement that both the ambassador and the head of state represent the authority of their respective nations. "This is why there's been a lot of controversy around the decision of various UN agencies and leaders going to present their credentials to the SAC," he says. "Because to a certain extent, you're basically saying, 'We recognize you as the legitimate representatives of the State.' Now, they might argue, 'Well, look, we're just being practical, we've got to get our work done, and that's the price you pay.' I wasn't privy to these conversations, and I don't know the reasoning. But it's perhaps not a coincidence that the US has chosen not to send a new ambassador to Myanmar, because to be able to play the role of ambassador, even to be able to get a visa, would have to present credentials, presumably to the SAC."

Furthermore, Marciel points out that whatever the justification of a home country, sending an official ambassador to the SAC would doubtless be used for great propaganda value by the military. "In effect, the SAC would try to argue that whether they're presenting credentials or otherwise meeting with us, it shows... legitimacy. That may not be the intention at all of the person who's meeting them, but it will be used that way." And this fear of tacitly legitimizing a military dictatorship has left Myanmar in something of an international political limbo, as it continues to be recognized as a State—just with no universally recognized government. In other words, Myanmar exists, but is in many ways silenced from the world stage, and cut off from many forms of diplomatic, financial, and material support which "legitimate" governments would be able to call upon in times of crisis. Because the country is in a sort of diplomatic limbo, Marciel believes that widespread recognition of the National Unity Government will not happen anytime soon, which he fears will hamper their ability to unify various resistance groups, secure resources, and gain broader support from the international community.

So what can be done to support those seeking a better future in Myanmar? First and foremost, Marciel is

firm in his belief that "80-90% of what happens is going to be determined by Myanmar people." This dovetails with his informed perspective that real political change cannot be not foisted on countries by foreign actors. Still, he believes that international observers have an important role to play, as they must stop calling for compromises with the military, and international entities should withhold international support, money, and legitimacy from the junta. In addition, Marciel believes that the international community must overcome its diplomatic inertia, with countries of different regional and geopolitical interests coordinating together to funnel billions of dollars to Myanmar, while at the same time keeping their fingers out of the pie.

And all this is in addition to the herculean task of helping sustain a vulnerable and traumatized population as the country slowly rebuilds after years of war. He acknowledges that this is far from easy; it almost seems impossible. However, he maintains a cautious optimism, suggesting that where there's a will, there's a way. While the challenges are immense, he believes that with concerted effort and genuine commitment, it can and will happen.

Marciel emphasizes aid and capacity-building as essential for Myanmar's future stability and well-being, but letting the Myanmar people take the lead in rebuilding their country.

"I do think the solution is for the military to be forced to relinquish political power, and to me, that means for the international community to put maximum pressure on that military, [doing] nothing to confer legitimacy on it," Marciel says in closing. "At the same time, of course, you also have to figure out what comes next... but to me, the answer is, rather than to be paralyzed by the risks, what can the international community do now to help the various various elements of the resistance, the Civil Disobedience Movement, civil society, other political actors, and prepare for some kind of transition process?"

Check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/9/14/episode-268-the-art-of-war>

The hills of Manipur. Photo: AFP

INDIAN STATE REOPENS SCHOOLS, RESTORES INTERNET AFTER ETHNIC CLASHES

Schools reopened in India's northeastern state of Manipur on Tuesday last week, more than a week after they shuttered due to deadly ethnic violence and clashes between protesters and police, the local government said.

Fighting broke out in Manipur in May 2023 between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki community, an ethnic conflict that has since killed at least 200 people.

Since then, communities have splintered into rival groups across swaths of the northeastern state, which borders war-torn Myanmar.

After months of relative calm, an uptick in violence again this month saw at least 11 people killed, including by insurgents reportedly firing rockets and dropping bombs with drones.

Subsequent demonstrations by Meitei students against the fighting in the state capital Imphal turned violent, prompting the authorities to issue a curfew and an internet blackout in parts of the state.

The violence has since abated, and a government order said "normal classes will resume for all schools in the state" starting Tuesday, a day after internet services were restored.

"I urge everyone to use the internet responsibly and refrain from sharing or posting any unnecessary or inflammatory content that may disturb the peace and harmony," state chief minister Biren Singh said.

Long-standing tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities revolve around competition for land and public jobs.

Rights activists have accused local leaders of exacerbating ethnic divisions for political gain.

Manipur is ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

AFP

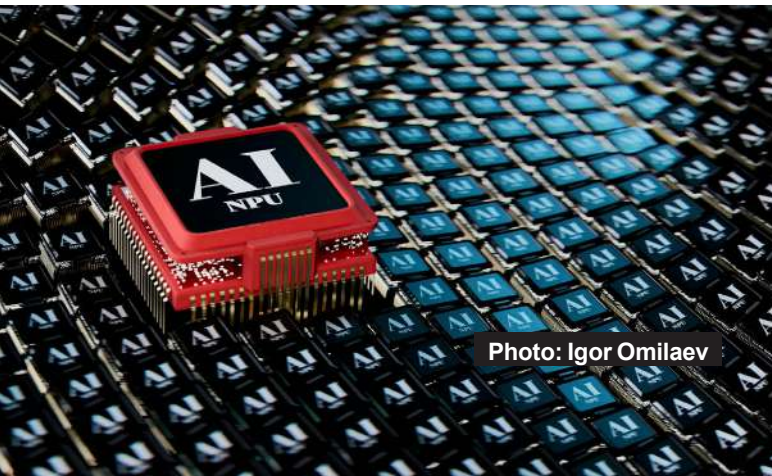


Photo: Igor Omilaev

AI DEVELOPMENT CANNOT BE LEFT TO MARKET WHIM, UN EXPERTS WARN

The development of artificial intelligence should not be guided by market forces alone, UN experts cautioned on Thursday last week, calling for the creation of tools for global cooperation.

But they held back from suggesting the creation of a muscular worldwide governing body to oversee the rollout and evolution of a technology, the proliferation of which has raised fears around biases, misuse and dependence.

The panel of around 40 experts from the fields of technology, law and data protection was established by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October.

Their report, published days before the start of a high-profile "Summit of the Future," raises the alarm over the lack of global governance of AI as well as the effective exclusion of developing countries from debates about the technology's future.

Of the UN's 193 members, just seven are part of the seven major initiatives linked to AI, while 118 are entirely absent - mostly nations of the global south.

"There is, today, a global governance deficit with respect to AI," which by its nature is cross-border, the experts warn in their report.

"AI must serve humanity equitably and safely," Guterres said this week.

"Left unchecked, the dangers posed by artificial intelligence could have serious implications for democracy, peace, and stability."

'Too late'?

To the backdrop of his clarion call, the experts called on UN members to put in place mechanisms to grease the wheels of global cooperation on the issue, as well as to prevent unintended proliferation.

"The development, deployment and use of such a technology cannot be left to the whims of markets alone," the report says.

It called firstly for the creation of a group of scientific experts on AI modeled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forum of experts, whose reports are the last word on the issue of climate change.

The panel would brief the international community on emerging risks, identify research needs as well as how it could be used to alleviate hunger, poverty, and gender inequality, among other goals.

That proposal is included in the draft Global Digital Compact, still under discussion, which is due to be adopted Sunday at the "Summit of the Future."

The report endorses setting up a light-touch "coordination" structure within the UN secretariat.

But it stops short of a fully-fledged international governance body -- like that sought by Guterres -- based on the model of the UN's nuclear watchdog, the IAEA.

"If the risks of AI become more serious, and more concentrated, it might become necessary for Member States to consider a more robust international institution with monitoring, reporting, verification, and enforcement powers," the report said.

The authors acknowledge that owing to the warp speed of change in AI, it would be pointless to attempt to draw up a comprehensive list of dangers presented by the ever-evolving technology.

But they singled out the perils of disinformation for democracy, increasingly realistic deepfakes -- particularly pornographic ones, as well as the evolution of autonomous weapons and AI use by criminal and terrorist groups.

"Given the speed, autonomy and opacity of AI systems, however, waiting for a threat to emerge may mean that any response will come too late," the report said. "Continued scientific assessments and policy dialogue would ensure that the world is not surprised."

AFP



Photo: AFP

WORLD LEADERS AT UN WARN AGAINST 'FULL-SCALE WAR' OVER LEBANON

World leaders lined up at the United Nations on Tuesday this week to call on Israel to refrain from a full-scale war in Lebanon, with the organization's chief warning the situation was on the "brink."

The UN General Assembly, the high point of the international diplomatic calendar, comes after Lebanese authorities said Israeli strikes had killed 558 people - 50 of them children.

"Full-scale war is not in anyone's interest. Even though the situation has escalated, a diplomatic solution is still possible," US President Joe Biden said in his farewell address to the global body.

"In fact, it remains the only path to lasting security to allow the residents from both countries to return to their homes on the border safely," Biden said ahead of an emergency UN Security Council session on Lebanon planned for Wednesday.

Biden's remarks drew disappointment from Lebanon's foreign minister Abdullah Bou Habib who

said they were "not promising" and "would not solve the Lebanese problem," as he estimated that the number of people displaced by Israel's strikes has likely soared to reach half a million.

"We should all be alarmed by the escalation. Lebanon is at the brink," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said when he opened the gathering.

Israel's ambassador to the UN Danny Danon said his country was "not eager" for a ground invasion of Lebanon.

"We don't want to send our boys to fight in a foreign country," he said.

'End this war'

It is unclear what progress can be made to defuse the situation in Lebanon, with efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza - which Israel has relentlessly pounded since October 2023 - coming to nothing.

Biden on Tuesday pushed again for an elusive ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, telling the global body it was time to “end this war.”

Mediator Qatar accused Israel of obstructing Gaza ceasefire talks, with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani saying “there is no Israeli partner for peace” under the government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

But he added: “We will continue our efforts of mediation to resolve the disputes through peaceful means.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of dragging the entire region “into war.”

“Not only children but also the UN system is dying in Gaza,” Erdogan said in a scathing speech.

Guterres cautioned against “the possibility of transforming Lebanon (into) another Gaza,” calling the situation in the Palestinian territory a “non-stop nightmare.”

European Council President Charles Michel said that Israel had the right to exist and defend itself but without inflicting “collective punishment” on civilians living in areas targeted by its military.

President Masoud Pezeshkian of Iran - which backs Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza - condemned “senseless and incomprehensible” inaction by the UN against Israel.

‘Charade of hypocrisy’

British foreign minister David Lammy also sounded the alarm over the escalating violence in Lebanon.

‘I am very worried about the risk of escalation, and this breaking into a wider regional conflict,’ he told AFP as Britain announced it was deploying military units to Cyprus to assist with any evacuation of its citizens from Lebanon.

Responding to criticism of Israel, Danon called the General Assembly debate an “annual charade of hypocrisy.”

Since last year’s annual gathering, when Sudan’s civil war and Russia’s Ukraine invasion dominated, the world has faced an explosion of crises.

The October 7 attack by Palestinian group Hamas on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people and prompted a military response in Gaza that authorities say has killed at least 41,467 people.

Militants also seized 251 hostages, 97 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 33 the Israeli military says are dead.

Violence has raged across multiple fronts in the Middle East since the crisis erupted, with the conflict exposing deep divisions at the UN.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas took his seat alongside the Palestinian delegation, placed in alphabetical order in the General Assembly for the first time on Tuesday after the delegation received upgraded privileges in May.

At the rostrum, Jordan’s King Abdullah II on Tuesday ruled out the forced displacement by Israel of Palestinians to his country, which he said would be a “war crime.”

AFP



NAMASTE TO NOWHERE

“There is a gap that has to be bridged, both on the Indian and Myanmar side as well,” Makepeace Sitthou, an independent Indian journalist who covers the country’s northeastern border region, tells Insight Myanmar.

Northeast India is a geographically isolated region, connected to the rest of the country only by a thin strip strip of territory called the “Siliguri Corridor.” Though geopolitically important, this area is otherwise overlooked, even within India itself. “We’re the Third World part of the Third World,” jokes Makepeace, who adds that a “tyranny of distance” is also at play here. “It really doesn’t help us much to be represented, or to be heard by the power centers.” She adds that, because New Delhi is so far away, the central government is a “weak, regional player” there.

Makepeace highlights that people from this region are often mistaken for foreign nationals from Southeast Asia or East Asia by other Indians—the area is a mosaic of cultures, languages, and dialects, with inhabitants tracing their origins to Tibet, Myanmar, Thailand, and China. “There’s been so much intermingling between ethnicities and races from all of these regions in Southeast Asia, South Asia and Indian mainland,” Makepeace says. “So, it’s a region that does not really have a very well defined, homogenous, ethnic identity.”

Kimi Colney, a Mizoram-born journalist currently working for the Assam-based independent media outlet EastMojo, also joins the episode. “There’s a lot of marginalization of the media in the northeast,” she adds, reinforcing the points made by her colleague.

She has been covering the refugee crisis along the India-Myanmar border since 2016, and has observed, surprisingly, that even well-educated Indians are mostly unaware of the huge impact of the 2021 military coup on that area of their country.

This is felt most profoundly in two northeastern states, Mizoram and Manipur. Touching upon the former first, Kimi describes how Mizoram’s Chief Minister has welcomed Chin refugees fleeing violence; notably, his decision bucked the direct orders of Prime Minister Modi’s administration to expel them. Kimi believes this defiance stems from the close, ethnic ties between the Mizo and Chin peoples. “It’s like you are separating people of the same family,” she says. And while Kimi doubts that Modi would override the local government to forcefully oversee deportations, she does worry about the potential scrapping of the Free Movement Regime (FMR). Discussed in depth during a recent interview with Angshuman Choudhury, this policy allows local communities on both sides of the border to cross it and travel up to 16 kilometers into the neighboring country.

Despite the goodwill, however, life in Mizoram is far from stable for those fleeing conflict. The town is now brimming with over 7,000 refugees, and has little sustainable funding to manage the growing calamity. “It’s really a humanitarian crisis! People literally run out of food. There is little aid from INGOs, much less than in Thailand,” Kimi says. “There were these cold, hard floors, and people of all ages, and a lot of children, [even] nursing mothers, they just put a bedsheet so that they can sleep there.”

Additionally, refugees cannot find employment or attend school, and as Shalini Perumal pointed out in a previous episode, they face added struggles if they try to look for opportunities in other parts of the country. “Our state government is very poor, and it makes me sad,” she says. “I reach out to people through Instagram and raised funds for [the refugees] for maybe another month.”

CATCH THE PODCAST

To read more or check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast click here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/8/26/episode-266-namaste-to-nowhere>

RUMOURS CIRCULATE THAT JUNTA PLANS TO EXECUTE 5 POLITICAL PRISONERS

According to rumours, Myanmar's military junta is reportedly preparing to execute five political prisoners, including a woman, soon for the 2021 murder of a police officer, according to Radio Free Asia (RFA).

Sources close to Yangon's Insein prison confirm preparations are underway, raising alarm among human rights groups.

The junta's special prison court handed death sentences to five activists: Kaung Pyae Sone Oo, Kyaw Win Soe, San Lin Maung, Zayyar Phyo, and Myat Phyo Pwint. Their conviction stems from their alleged fatal shooting of a police officer at Yangon's Ahlone Station on August 14, 2021.

The military regime carried out Myanmar's first executions in decades in July 2022, putting to death four pro-democracy activists. Among those executed were former lawmaker Phyo Zeya Thaw and veteran protest leader Jimmy, who had been accused of committing "terror acts" by the junta.

Since the military coup in 2021, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma has documented that 164 people have received death sentences. However, to date, only four activists have been executed.

The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights organization has called on the military junta to stop carrying out executions.

Military authorities have not provided any official response to speculation about potential upcoming executions.



JUNTA DELEGATION ATTENDS ASEAN ECONOMIC MEETING AMID ONGOING ECONOMIC CRISIS

A delegation from Myanmar junta, led by Dr. Kan Zaw, the Union Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, has departed for Laos to participate in the ASEAN Economic Ministers' (AEM) Meeting in Vientiane, according to the junta-controlled newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The meeting, and side-meetings, scheduled from September 15 to 23, comes at a time when Myanmar faces severe economic challenges following the military coup in February 2021.

Since the coup, Myanmar has experienced a sharp economic downturn. Foreign investment has plummeted, and international sanctions have further isolated the country's economy.

Adding to these woes, Myanmar's currency, the kyat, has seen dramatic depreciation. Before the coup, one US dollar was equivalent to approximately 1,300 kyat. However, by September 2024, the exchange rate has plummeted to 5,000 kyat per dollar. Essential goods, including food and fuel, have seen sharp price increases, severely impacting the everyday lives of Myanmar's citizens.



MYANMAR TRADITIONAL LETHWEI (BOXING) CHAMPION TUN TUN MIN AUCTIONS WORLD LETHWEI TITLE BELT FOR FLOOD VICTIMS

In a historic move for traditional Myanmar traditional Lethwei (boxing), world champion Tun Tun Min has auctioned off one of his old championship belts to raise funds for flood victims.

The auction, believed to be the first of its kind in the history of Myanmar's traditional boxing, took place on Friday, September 20, 2024, at the Thein Phyu Boxing Arena.

An anonymous traditional boxing enthusiast secured the belt with a winning bid of 50 million kyat (about US\$10,000).

The gesture has been widely praised by Myanmar's traditional boxing community as an innovative approach to flood relief fundraising.

Fans took to social media to express their admiration for Tun Tun Min's generosity. One Facebook user commented, "I deeply respect your willingness to part with your hard-earned golden belt to help the public during this difficult time." Another user offered well-wishes, saying, "May Tun Tun Min enjoy good health well into his old age."

Two days after the auction, on September 22, Tun Tun Min competed in an openweight Myanmar traditional boxing match against challenger Kyaw Swar Win. Tun Tun Min secured a knockout win in the fourth round, further cementing his status as a champion.

It's worth noting that the auctioned belt was one of Tun Tun Min's older championship titles.

MYANMAR CITIZENS VOICE FRUSTRATION OVER KOKANG ARMY MNDAA'S NON-COOPERATION STANCE WITH OPPOSITION NUG

The Kokang army Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) has issued a statement declaring that they will not cooperate militarily or politically with the shadow National Unity Government (NUG). This announcement has prompted backlash from anti-junta Burman citizens on social media platforms like Facebook.

MNDAA, a member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, has been a leading force in Operation 1027, which began on October 27, 2023 as an offensive against the military junta led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

The group, which now controls territory from the Myanmar-China border in Kokang area to Lashio, Shan State, has also stated that they will not launch offensives against Mandalay and Taunggyi.

The Three Brotherhood Alliance consists of MNDAA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA). MNDAA and TNLA have captured nearly all towns in northern Shan State as part of Operation 1027.

In late August, the Chinese government announced efforts to end the fighting in northern Myanmar and facilitate peace talks.

Analysts and observers suggest that the Three Brotherhood Alliance member groups, particularly MNDAA, are significantly influenced by the Chinese government. These experts believe MNDAA's recent statement may have been issued under pressure from China.

However, following MNDAA's announcement, the junta reportedly conducted airstrikes on two locations in Lashio on September 21. The extent of casualties is currently unknown.

While MNDAA said they would not expand their military operations, they emphasized their right to self-defense.

This declaration not to cooperate with the NUG has sparked debate among Myanmar citizens, with some expressing disappointment and others calling for unity regardless of individual group statements.

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.