

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



CIVILIAN BLITZKRIEG

Myanmar junta targets
the vulnerable

Junta calls for international flooding aid

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

JUNTA CHIEF SURPRISES IN CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL FLOODING AID

International diplomats raised their eyebrows on the weekend on hearing the Myanmar junta call for international help to deal with the flooding crisis in the Golden Land.

The call was made by Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, his call published by the Global New Light of Myanmar.

Myanmar is suffering from heavy flooding in the wake of Typhoon Yagi and low pressure that swept across Asia from the Pacific Ocean last week. Tens of thousands of people are in need. The effects have been felt in Vietnam, Thailand and southern China.

“Officials from the government need to contact foreign countries to receive rescue and relief aid to be provided to the victims,” junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said on Friday last week. “It is necessary to manage rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures as quickly as possible.”

Min Aung Hlaing’s call was a surprise – though the seriousness of the flooding cannot be disputed. The Myanmar’s military has previously blocked or frustrated humanitarian assistance from abroad.

Last year it suspended travel authorisations for aid groups trying to reach around a million victims of powerful Cyclone Mocha that hit the west of the country, primarily Rakhine State. At the time the United Nations slammed that decision as “unfathomable”.

After Cyclone Nargis killed at least 138,000 people in Myanmar in 2008, the then-junta was accused of blocking emergency aid and initially refusing to

grant access to humanitarian workers and supplies.

The reasons for Min Aung Hlaing making the call are unclear – apart from the fact that the Myanmar authorities are out of their depth in being able to effectively deal with the problem, though local rescue teams have been out helping people. However, the junta has shown it is devious when dealing with international aid players. “Engagement” is part of a junta plan to increase their legitimacy, including a desire for planned elections to be accepted by the international community and for it to be welcomed back into the ASEAN forum.

The Myanmar people need help on a number of levels – not least due to the recent flooding.

The question is: how will the international community respond to Min Aung Hlaing’s call for help?

Sources: Mizzima, AFP

EDITORIAL

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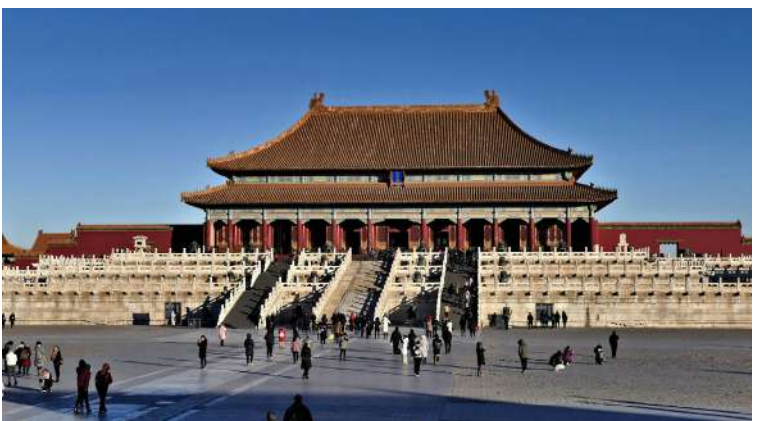
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Cover photo of bombed IDP camp in Myanmar by AFP.





CIVILIAN BLITZKRIEG

Myanmar junta targets the vulnerable

Battlefield losses are rattling Min Aung Hlaing's cage. The Myanmar junta leader is pulling out the stops of his "fear campaign" involving deliberate attacks on civilians, scooping up men for his military conscription drive, and tightening the screws on people who deviate from his autocratic rules.

What is particularly frightening is Min Aung Hlaing's push to wage war on Myanmar's people, deliberately threatening civilians with air and artillery strikes – a modern-day Blitzkrieg.

The junta leader is waking up late to the recognition that he has long lost his perceived battle for the "hearts and minds" of the Myanmar people, his rhetoric hinting at the danger for innocent people who might get caught in the crossfire or be deliberately targeted.

TWO-WEEK TOUR

The Myanmar junta has intensified airstrikes in ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)-controlled areas after a two-week military tour by leader Min Aung Hlaing, from August 23 to September 5. During this trip, the junta chief visited military commands in Bago, Mandalay, and Taunggyi, meeting with area and air base commanders to instruct operations.

Upon his return to safety in Naypyidaw, Min Aung Hlaing's speech, published in a junta-controlled newspaper, warned of impending military action – including a warning to civilians.

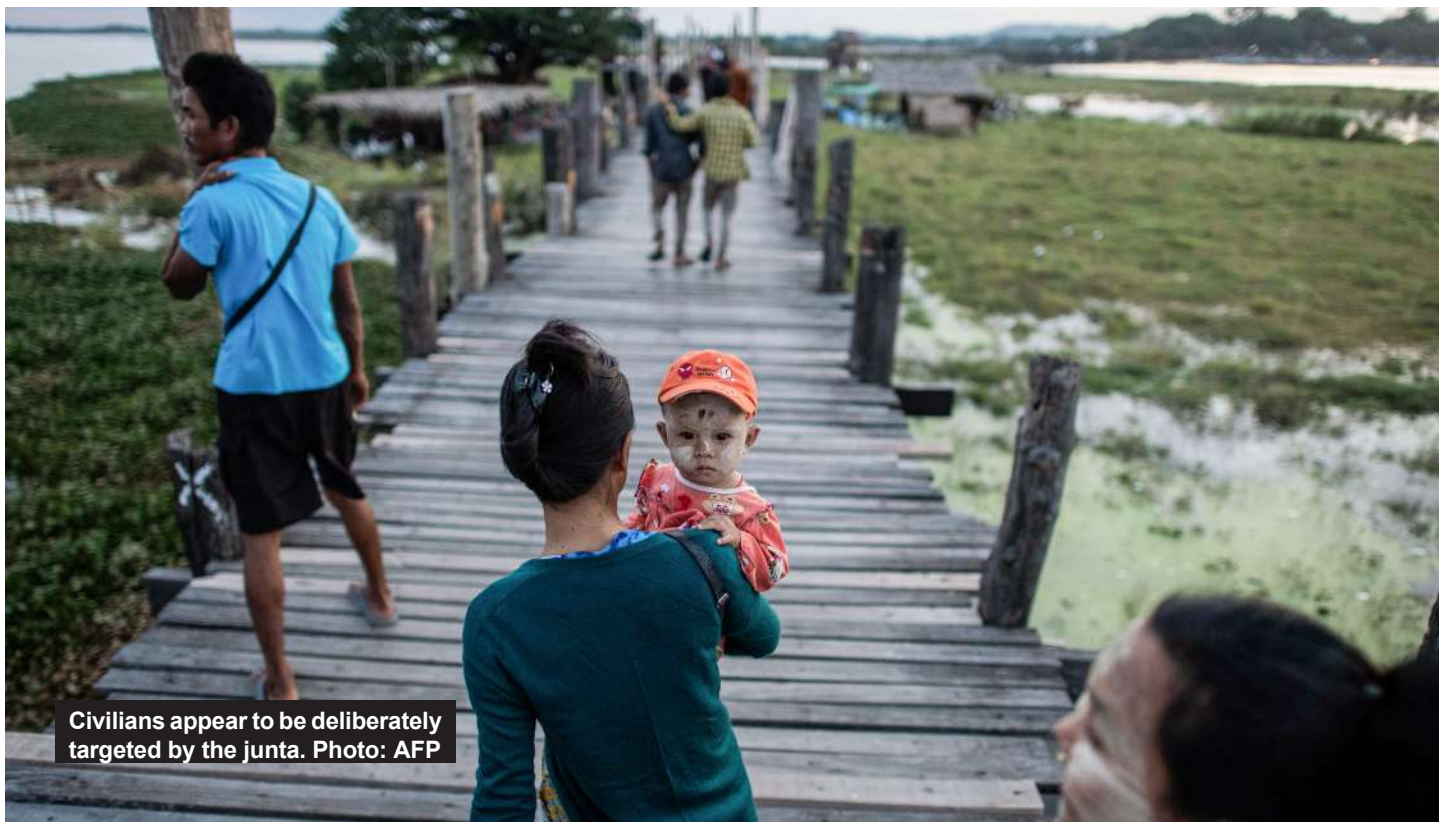
"The Tatmadaw (military) will protect the sovereignty of the country and launch counterattacks depending on the tip-off and situation regarding these terrorist groups. Therefore, the people residing in towns and villages where the terrorists unlawfully occupied should be aware of security so as not to face exploitation," he said.

While framed as a warning, this rhetoric has raised fears among civilians in both EAO-held and resistance-held territories, interpreted as a direct threat to the people given the subsequent attacks.

ATTACKS ESCALATE

Junta airstrikes have since escalated in key conflict areas, including Namhkam, Nan Mae Khone, Lashio and Maungdaw.

In Lashio, in northern Shan State, residents who had recently returned after the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) captured the town



Civilians appear to be deliberately targeted by the junta. Photo: AFP

are now fleeing again as junta bombing raids become increasingly intense.

The military launched airstrikes in Lashio Township for two consecutive days following the junta leader's statement. The MNDA has established civil administrative structures in Lashio Township. A resident of Lashio commented that the junta's actions would only incur public anger.

During two consecutive days of airstrikes on Lashio Township on 8 and 9 September, at least 12 civilians were injured, and vehicles and buildings were damaged, according to the MNDA.

"If they [the Military Council] continue acting without regard [for the people], they will only face the people's curse, as the public has never supported the junta," said the Lashio resident.

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), which has set up an administrative system in Nawngkhio Township, and the Mandalay People's Defense Force

(MDY-PDF) distributed leaflets warning locals about the risk of airstrikes. The leaflet distribution is due to the disruptions in telecommunications.

Though no airstrikes have occurred in Nawngkhio Township thus far, people remain on alert.

"Some homes have bomb shelters, while others don't. I see flyers informing people about the risk of airstrikes, but with the internet and phone lines down, it's hard for people to get news," said a resident of Nawngkhio Township.

Two military airstrikes targeted TNLA-controlled Namhkam on 6 September, killing 11 civilians, including a pregnant woman and two children.

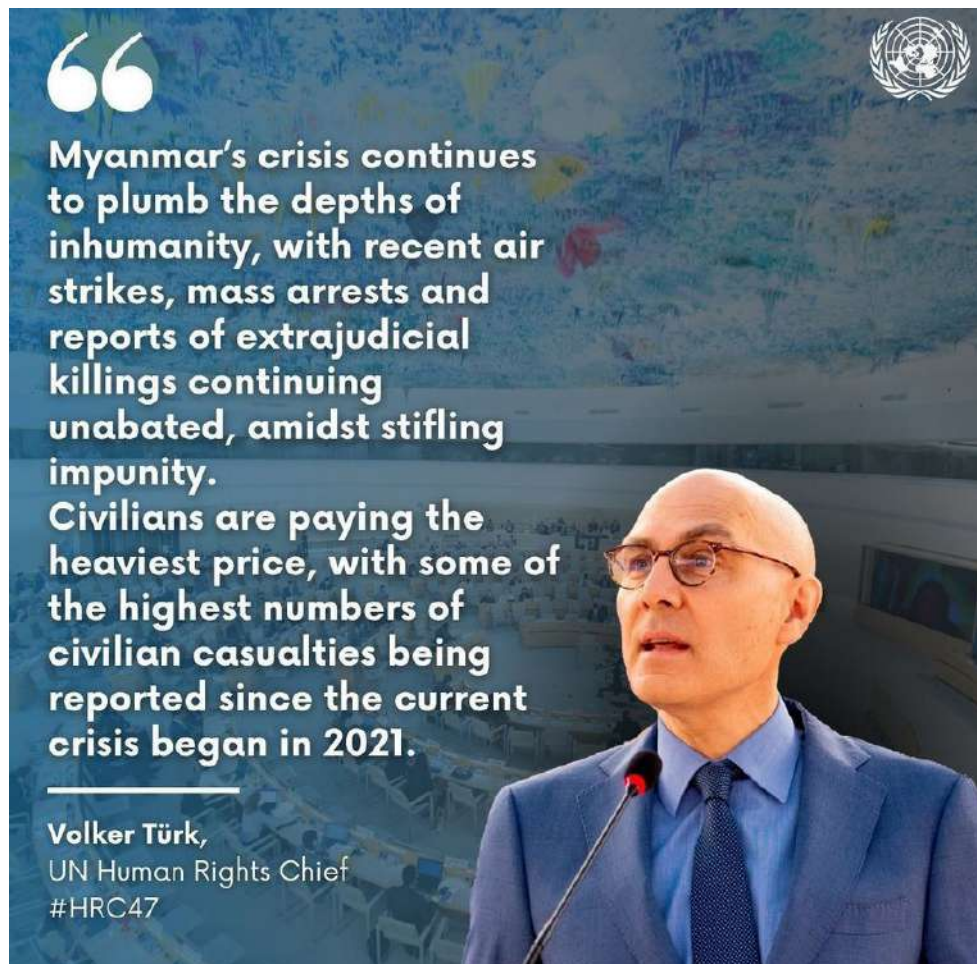
CHILDREN KILLED

In Karenni State, the junta's air force bombed an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the night of 5 September, killing nine civilians, including six children. The camp housed mostly women, children, and the elderly, with six of the victims coming from a

single family. Schools in the region have closed due to the heightened threat of further airstrikes.

On 8 September, an airstrike targeted a medical centre operated by the Arakan Army (AA) in Pawktaw in Rakhine State, resulting in 17 deaths and at least 10 injuries. Among the deceased were prisoners of war (POWs), civilians, and medics, with reports indicating that the facility was providing medical care to both POWs and locals.

"The centre was intended for civilians and prisoners of war. The casualties include junta POWs, prisoners, children seeking medical treatment, and medical staff," said a source familiar with the attack.



NUG SPEAKS OUT

The National Unity Government (NUG) condemned the junta, accusing it of committing daily war crimes by targeting civilians with heavy artillery and airstrikes. It stated that these acts are clear violations of human rights and international wartime laws, and the junta should be held accountable and prosecuted in international courts.

Additionally, on 5 September, the NUG called on ASEAN nations, the United Nations, and Myanmar's neighbouring countries to take strong action against the junta to end the ongoing violence.

The relentless bombardments have left civilians living in fear, prompting further displacement and deepening the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's conflict zones.



A bomb crater at an internally displaced people's camp in Pekon in Shan State. Photo: AFP



Men aged 35 to 60 are now being drafted by the Myanmar military. Photo: Facebook

NO COUNTRY FOR OLDER MEN - CONSCRIPTION EXPANDED

The Myanmar junta has begun conscripting older men, aged 35 to 60, under a new initiative called the “People’s Security System” to bolster its dwindling military and administrative manpower.

The junta aims to form it with 10 individuals per ward or village. This move follows the enactment of the People’s Military Service Law in February 2024, which focuses on recruiting men aged 18 to 35 for military service.

According to sources from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in Naypyidaw, the decision to target older citizens was driven by senior party leaders, including current president Khin Ye. Party members between 35 and 60 have been asked to enlist, with the official justification being that they would serve as watchmen to ensure the security of their wards or villages.

However, reports suggest that the junta’s expectations extend beyond mere local defense. These older recruits are also being tasked with acting as informers for the military and may be armed to assist in fighting alongside the junta troops.

In Pinoolwin, junta forces are actively pursuing men in this age bracket, as the town faces the threat of an attack by the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), which has been advancing through neighbouring Naungkhio Township. To secure local support, the junta has offered recruits uniforms, salaries, food, and even weapons. One local resident revealed that the conscripts are being provided with arms and handcuffs, further emphasizing the militarized nature of the so-called People’s Security Force.

The junta’s conscription of older men under this new system has raised concerns, as it signals an



A new batch of conscripts are now in training.
Photo: AFP

intensification of efforts to control vulnerable regions while grappling with manpower shortages.

FIFTH BATCH OF MYANMAR CONSCRIPTS BEGINS TRAINING

Myanmar's junta is hoping to reverse its battlefield losses with the latest batch of conscripts beginning training, according to AFP. A military source the fifth batch followed around 15,000 other conscripts who had already completed their training.

The conscription law allows the military to summon all men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve in the armed forces for at least two years.

"Eligible citizens" from the fifth batch arrived at the "respective military training depots" on Monday, last week, according to the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar, without saying how many were involved. Previous batches of conscripts who have completed their training "are serving duties in their respective regiments and units", the newspaper said, without specifying where or in what capacity.

Three batches of around 5,000 men had completed their three-month training so far, a military source said, noting 15,000 trainees have concluded the training so far and are serving their duty around the country. A video uploaded by a pro-military vlogger last week purported to show scores of new conscripts arriving at a camp in Taungoo in central Myanmar to begin training.

Rights groups estimate tens of thousands of young people have fled Myanmar to avoid being called up to the deeply unpopular military. Local media have reported cases of young men being pulled off the streets

in Yangon and other cities and taken away to undergo military training. The junta has denied the reports.

Meanwhile, 29 young men who were repatriated by Thailand to Myanmar and conscripted by the junta for military service escaped captivity while being transferred to a training centre, an ethnic rebel official told RFA on Wednesday last week. Most of them – 22 to be exact – have decided to join armed insurgent groups fighting the junta, while five will return home, the official said. The whereabouts of two are unknown.

The 29 men were first arrested in Thailand before being repatriated to Myanmar, said Padoh Saw El Nar, an official with the Karen National Union in Tanintharyi's Myeik district.

ARAKAN ARMY MAKES GAINS IN RAKHINE

The Arakan Army (AA) made significant gains in Rakhine State, seizing key junta positions, including the Maung Shwelay Navy headquarters, marking the complete takeover of Thandwe Township, home to the famous Ngapali Beach. The AA's capture of the naval base occurred on the evening of 5 September, following a month-long offensive that began on 7 August.

The Maung Shwelay Navy headquarters, which had been used to train new Navy SEALs and divers, became a stronghold for junta soldiers retreating from earlier battles. Despite attempts to resist the AA's offensive, the junta forces were overwhelmed. The AA claimed over 400 junta soldiers were killed, and many military personnel were captured during the battle.

Meanwhile, in Maungdaw, in the north of Rakhine, the AA continued its advances, seizing two key posts of the No. (5) Border Guard Police (BGP) battalion

on the morning of 8 September. The posts, located at the Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement office and a nearby Buddhist monastery, had been the last strongholds for the junta forces in the area. These outposts, manned by retreating soldiers and Muslim militias, were responsible for protecting the No. (5) BGP battalion, the final base under junta control in Maungdaw.

Following the loss of these positions, the junta responded with airstrikes near the captured bases. Despite their efforts, the AA commando troops successfully took control of the posts. With No. (5) BGP now encircled by the AA, the junta has been forced to resupply the battalion via parachute drops of food and ammunition.

On the night of 9 September, around 9:30 pm, the junta launched another airstrike on the AA-controlled No. (2) BGP base, which the AA had been using as a makeshift prison for prisoners of war (POWs) captured during the Maungdaw offensive. The airstrike resulted

in over 50 POWs and detainees being killed, with many others sustaining critical injuries.

The AA's recent victories have solidified its control over significant portions of Rakhine State, dealing heavy blows to the junta troops and increasing its control in northern Rakhine State.

TOP MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

Please find the top Mizzima Burmese videos of last week:

The Military Council that came close to giving up Rakhine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dp1YCNXfiQ>

Who is terrorizing the people?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQQxrahVrl4>

The military leader is not obligated to be cruel, nor is he obligated to play North Korea

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-UhcMYWsyI>





Many civilians have been badly affected by the flooding. Photo: AFP

STORM AND FLOODING DEATH TOLL IN MYANMAR RISES

War-weary Myanmar villagers salvaged crops from flooded fields Tuesday as the country's death toll in the wake of Typhoon Yagi doubled to 226 and the UN warned as many as 630,000 people could need assistance.

Yagi swept across northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar more than a week ago with powerful winds and an enormous amount of rain, triggering floods and landslides that have killed more than 500 people, according to official figures.

State TV in junta-ruled Myanmar confirmed 226 fatalities late on Monday, with 77 people missing, doubling the previous toll of 113.

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 told AFP.

"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.

The junta has begun relief efforts, opening more than 400 camps according to state media, and appealed for international aid.

But in Loikaw district, Chit Thein said the people of Phayaphyu village were still waiting for help.

"There are many things we have lost. We lost houses, clothes in the wars, and now floods have hit our house so we have nothing left," he said.

"We are sheltering at a monastery. But there is not much food for us and no donations, and no-one has come to help us."

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 on Monday 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.

The junta issued a rare appeal for foreign aid at the weekend, with neighbour India 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.

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.

Even before the latest floods, people in Myanmar were grappling with the effects of three years of war between the junta and armed groups opposed to its rule, with millions forced from their homes by the conflict.

Reporting: AFP, Mizzima



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA MAKES RARE REQUEST FOR FOREIGN AID TO COPE WITH DEADLY FLOODS

Myanmar's junta chief made a rare request Saturday for foreign aid to cope with deadly floods that have displaced hundreds of thousands of people who have already endured three years of war.

Floods and landslides have killed almost 300 people in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, and a low-pressure front, which dumped a colossal deluge of rain when it hit the region last weekend.

In Myanmar, more than 235,000 people have been forced from their homes by floods, the junta said Friday, piling further misery on the country where war has raged since the military seized power in 2021.

In Taungoo -- around an hour south of the capital Naypyidaw -- residents paddled makeshift rafts on floodwaters lapping around a Buddhist pagoda.

Rescuers drove a speedboat through the waters, lifting sagging electricity lines and broken tree branches with a long pole.

"I lost my rice, chickens, and ducks," said farmer Naung Tun, who had brought his three cows to higher ground near Taungoo after floodwaters inundated his village.

"I don't care about the other belongings. Nothing else is more important than the lives of people and animals," he told AFP.

Flee by any means

The rains in the wake of typhoon Yagi sent people across Southeast Asia fleeing by any means necessary, including by elephant in Myanmar and jetski in Thailand.

"Officials from the government need to contact foreign countries to receive rescue and relief aid to be provided to the victims," junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said last Friday, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

"It is necessary to manage rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures as quickly as possible," he was quoted as saying.

Myanmar's military has previously blocked or frustrated humanitarian assistance from abroad.

Last year it suspended travel authorisations for aid groups trying to reach around a million victims of powerful Cyclone Mocha that hit the west of the country.

At the time the United Nations slammed that decision as "unfathomable."

After Cyclone Nargis killed at least 138,000 people in Myanmar in 2008, the then-junta was accused of blocking emergency aid and initially refusing to grant access to humanitarian workers and supplies.

'Terrible experience'

The junta gave a death toll on Friday of 33, while earlier in the day the country's fire department said rescuers had recovered 36 bodies.

A military spokesman said it had lost contact with some areas of the country and was investigating reports that dozens had been buried in landslides in a gold-mining area in central Mandalay region.

Military trucks carried small rescue boats to flood-hit areas around the military-built capital Naypyidaw on Saturday, AFP reporters said.

"Yesterday we had only one meal," Naung Tun said from near Taungoo.

"It is terrible to experience flooding because we cannot live our lives well when it happens."

"It can be okay for people who have money. But for the people who have to work day to day for their meals, it is not okay at all."

More than 2.7 million people were already displaced in Myanmar by conflict triggered by the junta's 2021 coup.

Vietnam authorities said Saturday that 262 people were dead and 83 missing.

Images from Laos capital Vientiane, meanwhile, showed houses and buildings inundated by the Mekong river.

AFP



Vietnamese people were badly affected by Typhoon Yagi. Photo: AFP

MILLIONS IN SE ASIA BATTLE FLOODS, DEATH TOLL PASSES 500

Millions of people across Southeast Asia struggled over the last 10 days with flooded homes, power cuts and wrecked infrastructure after Typhoon Yagi swept through the region, as the death toll passed 500.

In worst-hit Vietnam, the fatalities rose to 197, with nine confirmed dead in northern Thailand - where one district is suffering its worst floods in 80 years.

Myanmar's national fire service confirmed the country's first Yagi-related deaths after 17 bodies were recovered from flooded villages in the Mandalay region, while more than 50,000 people have been forced from their homes.

Yagi brought a colossal deluge of rain that has inundated a swathe of northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, triggering deadly landslides and widespread river flooding.

One farmer on the edge of Hanoi told AFP his entire 1,800 square metre peach blossom plantation was submerged, destroying all 400 of his trees.

"It will be so hard for me to recover from this loss - I think I will lose up to \$40,000 this season," said the farmer, who gave his name only as Tu.

"I really don't know what to do now, I'm just waiting for the water to recede."

The United Nations children's agency (UNICEF) said the typhoon had damaged more than 140,000 homes across 26 provinces in Vietnam.

Communications cut off

The high waters have devastated more than 250,000 hectares of crops and huge numbers of livestock, Vietnam's agriculture ministry said, with farmland around Hanoi hit hard.

Commuters in parts of the Vietnamese capital trudged to work through shin-deep brown floodwaters, though officials said river levels in the city are slowly falling after hitting a 20-year high on Wednesday.

Thousands have been forced to evacuate their homes, while others are struggling with power cuts.

In the deadliest single incident, a landslide in Lao Cai province annihilated an entire village of 37 houses, killing at least 42 people with 53 still unaccounted for.

Rescue teams pulled victims from the mud on Thursday, carrying them on stretchers to makeshift shelters where neighbours and relatives carefully washed the bodies in readiness for burial.

Survivors picked through the mud and wreckage to retrieve what family heirlooms and possessions they could find.

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Fifteen bodies have been recovered in Cao Bang province after a landslide on Monday pushed a bus, along with several cars and motorbikes, into a stream, state media said Thursday last week.

Myanmar camps

Myanmar's junta government has set up around 50 camps to help people affected by the floods, Lay Shwe Zin Oo, director of the social welfare, relief and resettlement ministry told AFP.

The Global New Light of Myanmar, the state-run newspaper, said train services on the main line between Yangon and Mandalay were suspended because some sections were flooded.

The Mekong River Commission, the international body overseeing the crucial waterway, issued a flood warning on Thursday for the historic Laotian city of Luang Prabang.

The Mekong is expected to hit flood levels in the coming days in Luang Prabang, a UNESCO world heritage site, the commission said in a bulletin.

In Thailand the death toll has risen to nine, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said, including six killed in landslides in Chiang Mai province.

All flights have been suspended to the airport in Chiang Rai, some 145 kilometres (90 miles) northeast of Chiang Mai, aviation authorities said.

Further north, Mae Sai district on the border with Myanmar is suffering its worst floods in 80 years, Suttipong Juljarern, a senior interior ministry official said in a statement.

The Jet Ski Association of Thailand has sent 16 jet skis to help with relief efforts, Dechnarong Suticharnbancha, the body's president told AFP.

Some of the currents in the floodwaters are too strong for normal boats but jet skis are able to navigate them because of their powerful engines.

A video showing champion jet skier Kasidit Teeraprateep rescuing an old woman from a torrent of murky water circulated on Thai social media.

Heavy monsoon rains lash Southeast Asia every year, but cycles fluctuate from year to year.

AFP

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NUG WELCOMES IIMM REPORT HIGHLIGHTING MYANMAR JUNTA'S WAR CRIMES

On September 10, 2024, the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar welcomed a statement from the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) highlighting the Junta's war crimes and calling for justice at international courts.

The statement is as follows.

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, as represented by the National Unity Government, welcomes the interactive dialogue with the Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, Mr. Nicholas Koumjian, as well as the Mechanism's latest report to the Human Rights Council.

Confirming another year of "increasingly frequent and brutal war crimes and crimes against humanity" in Myanmar, Mr. Koumjian told the Council that "civilians are not just collateral damage but rather the target of attacks, which appear intended to create terror."

As the IIMM reports, this terror is evident in the military junta's widespread airstrikes against civilians in Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Kayin and Shan States, and its torture of detainees, including through beatings, electric shocks, strangulations, the pulling out of fingernails with pliers, and violent sexual and gender-based crimes.

In his presentation, Mr. Koumjian also addressed the situation in Rakhine State and reports of killings, torture, rape and the burning of villages. To Mr. Koumjian, while all ethnicities in Rakhine State have suffered, the Rohingya population remains "in a particularly precarious situation".

The situation in Rakhine State and across Myanmar is one that Mr. Koumjian attributes to "decades of impunity". Myanmar, as represented by the National Unity Government, supports the Mechanism's commitment to accountability and its acceleration of contributions to ongoing proceedings at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and in Argentina.

We will also continue to partner with the Mechanism by identifying witnesses who can provide testimony in safe and secure ways, and by exploring the Mechanism's access to Myanmar.

In closing, Myanmar repeats its gratitude to Mr. Koumjian and to the full Mechanism team for their dedicated efforts to secure justice for the people of Myanmar.



THREE BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE STATEMENT DENOUNCES JUNTA AIRSTRIKES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The Three Brotherhood Alliance issued a statement on 10 September 2024 condemning the Military Council for its use of airstrikes in northern Shan State as crimes against humanity. The alliance is composed of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Arakan Army (AA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). The statement reads as follows.

The terrorist junta, which is facing defeat across Myanmar, continues to suffer heavy losses in many cities and villages under their control, including battalions, military bases, SAC (State Administration Council) headquarters, regional commands and divisions, police battalions, and training schools. As a result, they have escalated daily airstrikes-day and night-against areas populated by innocent civilians, resistance-controlled towns and villages, densely populated areas, and former bases they were forced to abandon.

These relentless aerial attacks across Myanmar have resulted in daily casualties among innocent civilians, including children, the elderly, pregnant

women, monks, and others, as well as the junta's own troops and their families who are being held as captives by our forces.

We express deep condolences to the families and relatives of those who have died or been injured in these airstrikes. The terrorist junta, which is on the brink of losing power, is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. We will document these atrocities and report them to neighbouring countries and international organizations that oppose terrorism.

We urge the pilots who are involved in these attacks under the orders of the junta leaders to cease their participation in these violent operations. Furthermore, we call on the people of Myanmar to remain vigilant against the junta's aerial threats and closely monitor the fascist terrorist junta's actions.

This news release is issued to inform the public about the ongoing daily airstrikes by the terrorist junta, which are war crimes and crimes against humanity.



US Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council Michele Taylor. Photo: Supplied

US AMBASSADOR MICHELE TAYLOR URGES REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR MYANMAR AMIDST ESCALATING WAR CRIMES AND ATROCITIES

US Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council, Michele Taylor, presented a statement at the Interactive Dialogue with the head of the Interactive Dialogue with the Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) on 9 September.

The Ambassador's statement is as follows.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Thank you for your report, Mr. Koumjian. The situation in Myanmar remains tragic; we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent.

We remain grateful for the work of the IIMM and commend you on the information and evidence collected and documented in the report, which covers a period of escalation in the conflict in Myanmar.

We are deeply concerned about the incidents documented by the IIMM, which could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We denounce aerial attacks on non-military targets, such as schools, religious buildings, and hospitals, as well as the torture and sexual violence that the IIMM found have been committed during the armed conflict.

We are alarmed that, in addition to the human rights violations by the military, the IIMM also found evidence of crimes committed by armed groups fighting against the military.

The continuing atrocities underscore the IIMM's important role to promote accountability and justice and to foster deterrence. We understand that the IIMM has shared its previous findings with the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

Mr. Koumjian, what actions can regional actors, particularly Myanmar's neighbors, take to support those affected by the atrocities that the IIMM documented?



Thantlang, Chin State. Photo: AFP

CHIN ORGANIZATIONS ACCUSE MYANMAR HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SHIELDING MILITARY'S WAR CRIMES

Chin organizations criticized the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC), accusing it of failing to fulfill its responsibilities and instead serving as a cover for the military council's war crimes.

On 7 September, the military council appointed three new members to the commission: U Win Hlaing Oo (also known as Khan Za Sung, a trustee member of the Saint Mary Catholic Church), U Than Win (a trustee member of Pinnaygone Jaame Mosque), and U Tin Koko (a central executive member of the All Myanmar Tamil Hindu Foundation).

"The military council wants to give the impression that the Myanmar Human Rights Commission includes members from different religious backgrounds," said Salai Mang Hre Lian, project officer of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO).

He added that the appointments are not about promoting human rights but rather about selecting individuals who are loyal to the regime.

Salai Mang Hre Lian further stated that the MNHRC not only fails to meet international standards but was also created to protect the military council's human rights violations. He expressed concerns that the inclusion of a Chin national might lead to that individual being pressured to defend the military's war crimes and abuses in Chin State.

Salai Dokhar, founder of the India For Myanmar group said, "I believe the military council is using these appointments to deflect criticism from major religious groups, international human rights organizations, and other entities."

Currently chaired by U Paw Lwin Sein, a former military officer and diplomat, the MNHRC has faced criticism for providing human rights training to employees of the military council, which has been widely accused of committing human rights violations and war crimes across the country.



Captured alleged drug traffickers. Photo: Supplied

ENORMOUS NUMBER OF DRUGS SMUGGLED FROM MYANMAR SEIZED IN INDIA'S MIZORAM OVER EIGHT MONTHS

A total of 1,270 kilograms of various drugs smuggled from Myanmar have been seized in India's Mizoram state within an eight-month period, amid an increase in drug trafficking following Myanmar's military takeover, according to a report by All India Radio (AIR).

On 8 September, Mizoram's Police Force and the Excise & Narcotics Department released a detailed report covering drug seizures from January to August 2024.

The report highlights that 1,270 kg of drugs were confiscated, including 93 kg of heroin, 409 kg of methamphetamine, and 732 kg of cannabis. Except for the cannabis, most of the other drugs were smuggled from Myanmar.

The Mizoram Police Force also reported arresting 331 individuals and filing 247 cases in connection with these drug seizures. However, the number of Myanmar nationals arrested remains unknown.

In 2023, Mizoram Police Force reported 273 drug-related cases, with 385 arrests, including 55 Myanmar nationals.

AIR mentioned that Mizoram state authorities have attributed the rise in drug smuggling to the increased flow of drugs from Myanmar following the military coup.

Mizoram, which shares a border with Myanmar's Chin State, is home to a significant number of Myanmar refugees. Concerns have grown among them regarding the ongoing drug smuggling activities.

"The lack of proper governance is partly responsible for the drug trade. Despite numerous checkpoints, drugs continue to be trafficked from Kalay Township, Sagaing Region to the Mizoram border," a Myanmar national living along the India-Myanmar border said.

He also urged local People's Defense Forces to tighten their inspections to combat drug trafficking.

While Mizoram authorities claim there are over 30,000 Myanmar refugees in the state, aid organizations estimate the number to be around 50,000. Drug use is prohibited in Mizoram, and both police and social groups are actively fighting the issue.



Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger

ICRC PRESIDENT MEETS MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing received a delegation led by Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at the Office of the State Administration Council Chairman in Naypyidaw in the morning of 9 September.

They cordially exchanged views on the undertakings of the ICRC to provide humanitarian aid in Myanmar. The ICRC President reaffirmed the organization's commitment to addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs in the country. The ongoing violence has forced thousands of families to flee their homes, she said.

Communities in conflict-affected areas face severe challenges accessing health care, sanitation, clean water, food, and shelter. The breakdown of healthcare services is leading to a rise in preventable diseases, while a lack of medical supplies is worsening the suffering of the wounded and chronically ill. The ongoing violence has forced thousands of families to flee their homes, often with nothing but the clothes on their backs, the ICRC press release dated 10 September 2024 says.

The ICRC President visited Myanmar from 5 to 9 September. At the end of her visit, she appealed for greater humanitarian access to civilians in need across the country. She visited Rakhine State to witness firsthand the dire humanitarian needs.

The regular use of high impact, explosive weapons has been observed in many populated areas, leading to a worrying increase in civilian casualties.

In addition, restrictions on the movement of people and goods limit access to essential services for many communities in a shrinking humanitarian space, the ICRC press release says.

During her meeting with the SAC Chairman, Ms. Spoljaric spoke about the ICRC's intention and ability to increase humanitarian assistance as she advocated for greater access to conflict-affected areas. She also underscored the ICRC's neutral role and goal of reaching populations most in need, the ICRC press release says.

Despite the difficult challenges, ICRC teams remain committed to reaching and supporting the most vulnerable communities, particularly in Shan, Kachin, Rakhine, central Myanmar, and conflict-affected areas in Chin, Kayah, and Kayin States.

The ICRC President said, "We are engaging in a bilateral and confidential dialogue with all actors to the conflict to remind them of their obligation to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the safety of civilians and humanitarian actors."

The state-run daily paper reported that the SAC Chairman said all measures were being taken by the Myanmar's military in accord with the Geneva Convention.

The Geneva Convention protects civilians, medical staff and relief workers.

According to the statements released by ethnic armed organizations and National Unity Government (NUG), the airstrikes launched by the SAC killed over 100 people in September 2024 and most of them were civilians.

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JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL OVER 50 WAR CAPTIVES AND DETAINEES IN MAUNGDAW, RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) announced on 10 September that more than 50 war captives and civilian prisoners captured during the Maungdaw battle in Rakhine State were killed in airstrikes carried out by junta forces.

According to the AA, the junta bombed Maungdaw town twice around 9:30 pm on 9 September using fighter jets. Many of those killed and injured were being temporarily held in the No.2 Border Guard Police Commanding Office in Maungdaw township.

The victims reportedly included war captives, members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rakhine Solidarity Organization (RSO), individuals who had completed junta military training, junta informants, and others being interrogated on various suspicions.

The AA took full control of the junta's No.2 Border Guard Police Commanding Office on 6 July.

In a separate incident, the AA stated that the military council attacked a UN building in Vaishali village, Maungdaw, at around 8:20 pm on 10 September.

The AA stated that the Military Council has intensified aerial bombardments, targeting heavily populated areas, including hospitals, schools, markets, monasteries, and Christian churches. AA also urged civilians to remain cautious, avoid crowded areas, and be mindful of the dangers posed by airstrikes and landmines.



Mon Unity Party on the election campaign trail in 2020. Photo: AFP

MON UNITY PARTY GRANTED OFFICIAL REGISTRATION BY MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTION COMMISSION

The Mon Unity Party (MUP), aligned with Myanmar's Military Council, has been officially registered as a political party by the junta-led Union Election Commission (UEC).

The approval, reported by state-run newspapers on 10 September, follows a lengthy application process. The MUP initially submitted its registration on 15 March 2023, after a decision was reached during a party central committee meeting on 11 February.

Both Nai Layi Tama, the party's joint secretary and Economic Minister in the Mon State Government, and Dr. Banyar Aung Moe, a central executive committee member who also serves on the Military Council's Central Advisory Body, hold influential positions within the MUP. Their close ties to the Military Council have been a source of controversy.

The Mon Unity Party, now officially registered as a political party, plans to organize at the state level in Mon State.

Established in 2019 through the merger of the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) and the Mon National Party (MNP), the MUP won 12 seats in the 2020 general election, including for ethnic affairs ministries in Mon and Karen states. However, its alignment with the Military Council after the 2021 coup led to several members resigning and increasing public criticism from the Mon community.

The Military Council's new Political Parties Registration Law, enacted on 26 January 2023, allows parties like the MUP to formally register. As of now, 52 political parties have been registered under this law.

Meanwhile, the junta chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has promised elections for 2025, with preparations underway. He announced that data from a nationwide census in October 2024 would be used to guide the election process.



Photo: Martin Jernberg

PASSAGE TO INDIA

INSIGHT MYANMAR

“I strongly believe that between India and Myanmar there can be a lot of conversations taking place,” says Sanjay Valentine Gathia, speaking in an Insight Myanmar Podcast. “The real challenge is to find quality people, and that’s where my own initiative is focused on ... finding quality people who can make an impact, not just for holding the sake of holding discussion ... The idea of engagement is to bring about certain changes.”

Gathia spearheads the innovative program, *Borders in Broader Conversations*. This initiative is “a curated ‘third space’ for Indian, Myanmar, and Thai people” that has the goal of helping forge more knowledgeable and understanding relationships between them, in particular by helping close the information gaps that exist.

INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS

This episode of this Insight Myanmar Podcast addresses India-Myanmar relations in particular. Gathia points out that it is somewhat strange that the

two countries would not be more closely aligned, given the long period of colonial rule that had bound them so closely together. He explains that the genesis of their divergent paths began with their independence from Britain. Then, following Burma’s 1962 military coup, generally speaking, the predominant foreign policy attitude towards Burma remained one of disinterest. “Once the [Burmese] military took control, Indian policymakers felt that, ‘Ok, this is a country that is now left to its own destiny, and therefore, there is not much we can do,’” he says. “So we should just focus more on our own [self-interests].” Therefore, India was more concentrated on its own nation-building processes.” But a bit of suspicion also crept in, as the Burmese military acted aggressively against Indians then living in Burma.

By the same token, Gathia surmises that the Burmese military began to view Indians with equal suspicion around that time as well, regarding them as the instrument that the British had used to subjugate Burma during the long period of colonial rule. Then a notable shift has occurred as India attempted rapprochement with Myanmar during its transition to

pseudo-democracy. However, that was short-circuited by the 2021 coup, which unfortunately, India responded to by becoming more closely aligned with the current military regime than with pro-democracy forces, in spite of the military's brutal crackdown—perhaps an ironic turn of events, given the suspicion with which the Indian government had viewed the Burmese military since 1962. And the irony deepens, with many countries now recognizing the inevitable untenability of the military's position ... while New Delhi doubles down on that relationship.

INDIA'S CHOICE

In Gathia's view, India is practically choosing to be on the wrong side of history by continuing to back an entity that is so overwhelmingly unpopular. "We have to keep in mind that the people of Burma have actually spoken out through their actions, especially when the military took the coup in 2021," he says.

"They don't want [to] go back into a military rule, where the military is again subjugating the people and violating their rights! They had a taste of freedom, they had a taste of what they could become or aspire to be." He continues, "The [Indian] military has developed a strong military-to-military relationship, and that is what has become dominant, because it has got linked with India's security parameters."

Gathia elaborates on this latter issue, explaining that India's north-east border is teeming with armed groups hostile to the Indian central authority. They move back and forth over the Myanmar-India border with impunity, and in Myanmar are not only shielded from Indian retribution, but, he says, even have "patronage or support by Myanmar's military, [so] they are still able to operate against India. And so India is still looking at the whole situation from that particular aspect." Because India so desperately wants the Burmese military's support in fighting against the insurgents, Gathia believes that security concerns are blinding it to the growing, new reality in Myanmar: "The dilemma is that [the Indian military] has not been able to properly read the changed landscape of Myanmar right now, and that landscape is completely a new one, not just for the Bamar people, but also for a lot of different ethnic groups," he says. "We in India still have to read the room properly, and there is a huge need

for Myanmar, which is moving towards a more federal, democratic structure. Why is there a demand for this? We still haven't understood it properly, because we still look at Myanmar from a security lens."

'WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY'

To some, India's steadfast backing of a brutal, military dictatorship may seem out of character, given India's much lauded and cherished moniker of "the world's largest democracy." But Gathia is not surprised. "India has changed significantly, and its structures have also changed internally," he says. "The way we envision India is very different from when the '88 revolution took place, and right now, the internal landscape of India has changed so much that democracy and democratic principles are also being questioned, as to what extent that they are actually catering to the aspirations of Indian people. And if they are, in what manner they are being utilized?" And even if India was still holding to those admirable values, it would not be interested in spreading them beyond its borders. "I think what we are looking at is an India that has changed a lot over the last decade, and that India has put a lot of policies in place, which it's trying to look at it from its own pragmatic purposes. And that pragmatism is more about putting its security interests first, its national interests first. And from that lens, it is looking at the region as well."

Moreover, Sanjay believes that even if India has gained some advantages through its strategic partnership with the Burmese military, on balance, the reality is negative and becoming ever more so. The unfolding crisis has brought a major conflict to India's doorstep, along with an influx of refugees who, as is often the case in times of crisis, are being painted by many in India as a threat to the nation. So why does the Indian government fail to acknowledge the significant security threat posed by the Burmese military and its destabilizing violence? Gathia says bluntly, "It boggles my mind, and I have no words to explain that right now."

Gathia turns next to the role of the broader media establishment as contributing to the problem. "We are unable to have open discussions about Myanmar in India," he says simply. "We are not able to look at it from a proper lens of where these different layers are taking place; what are the contours, what are the different stakeholders at present moment that have come on

the scene.” He notes that only in the last few years has more substantial coverage of Myanmar emerged within India, but overall, interest is still not great. Gathia explains that language also compounds the challenge. “The information that is coming out is kind of locked into the English [speaking] readers,” he says, adding that media in Hindi and other languages do not usually include robust discussions about Myanmar. Gathia feels that there is a pressing need to change this dynamic. “Unless we understand these different aspects that are emerging out of the country, and where there is intersectionality of these aspects with India’s security policy, with India’s own national interests, with India’s economic interests, and specifically with India’s Act East Policy, and Neighborhood First Policy, we in India will be still groping in the dark. We will still continue to use a narrative that is dominated by the Myanmar military.”

ROLE OF GLOBAL POWERS

Reflecting on the geopolitical dimension of Myanmar-India relations, Gathia expands on the role of global powers, particularly China, in shaping Myanmar’s political landscape. While he is clear-eyed about China’s strategic maneuvering in southeast Asia, he believes India needs to adopt a comprehensive policy that is not centered in simply countering Chinese influence. “I don’t think that’s the right approach. How can India improve its game of engagement with different stakeholders in Myanmar across the board?” Instead of just using them to stay on top of China’s activities in Myanmar, he thinks that India should instead focus on engaging in a more comprehensive relationship, with the goal of working together in building a better Myanmar.

Gathia also highlights the present urgent humanitarian needs, pointing out the challenges faced by refugees from Myanmar in India, particularly in states like Mizoram and Manipur, neither of which are equipped to deal with the influx. He says that not only are these resource-poor states, but the federal government has not stepped forward to support them in providing humanitarian support. “So the people, themselves, are coming forward and trying to take care of the refugee communities or the Burmese community that is crossing over into its side.” It is a huge strain on all involved, and the Indian government is also missing

out on opportunities to build political bridges for the future with these refugee communities, who will be returning to Myanmar once the junta is overthrown.

REEVALUATION NEEDED

In sum, Gathia advocates for a comprehensive reevaluation of India’s role and strategy in Myanmar, urging a move towards a more engaged, informed, and compassionate approach. By doing so, he believes India can contribute positively to Myanmar’s journey towards democracy and stability, while also safeguarding its own strategic interests. However, the question remains of how best to effect this policy change. He recommends a multi-layered approach, one that includes lobbying at both state and central government levels, and engaging with think tanks and other influential groups. He believes that a concerted effort to improve understanding and foster dialogue can only lead to better policies that support both India’s and Myanmar’s interests.

“The lobbying can be done at different levels,” he says in closing. “It can be done directly with the Indian government, it can be done with different agencies that are there, it can also be done with different Indian think tanks who are also influential. If their understanding and their knowledge is improved, I think that’s what would lead to a better understanding and analysis and thereby a better policy implementation.”

Check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/1d7caff3-afdb-4c70-aa35-4ad2b0b26c19>



Photo: AFP

INDIAN POLICE ARREST 33 AFTER VIOLENCE IN TROUBLED MANIPUR

Indian police have arrested 33 people after a surge in ethnic violence in Manipur state, where a curfew and an internet blackout have been imposed, officers said Thursday last week.

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, fresh fighting erupted this month.

At least 11 people have been killed, including in what police called a “significant escalation” of violence, with insurgents firing rockets and dropping bombs with drones.

“In the follow up to the violent protests in the past few days, Manipur Police has arrested 33 people and apprehended seven juveniles,” a police statement read.

It urged people “to cooperate with law enforcing agencies in the maintenance of peace and normalcy”.

Authorities have imposed an internet shutdown in several areas, repeating a blackout that last year lasted for months.

Police have also ordered a curfew, but hundreds in the state capital Imphal defied the order.

Meitei protesters marched through Imphal on Tuesday to demand security forces take action against Kuki insurgent groups, whom they blame for the latest spate of attacks.

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.

Fighting last year forced around 60,000 people from their homes, according to government figures. Many have been unable to return home.

AFP

ASPECTS OF CHINA'S GLOBAL ECONOMIC COERCION STRATEGY

SUN LEE



Beijing. Photo: Zibik

The US has adopted a two-pronged strategy towards China. One, is pursuing the path of dialogue, the other is confrontation. Both go hand in hand as can be seen by recent developments. While Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State travelled to Beijing for talks, back home administration officials criticised China for its coercive behaviour worldwide.

The nature of Chinese coercion is evident on all fronts and its ramifications across several fronts including economic, defence and other areas, is also a focus area for the Biden administration. Such actions are normally visible as Beijing uses tools like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Global Security Initiative to penetrate and pressurize nations. Just one recent example of the heft China carries can be cited, this time in a cultural context. In Paris at a cultural event on China, the French Museum which hosted the event was 'forced' to title Tibet as 'Xizang', the latest effort by China to show that Tibet has always been a part of China. Thus, the world should be aware of various aspects of China's coercive tactics.

China's military coercion has been very visible in the South China Sea and its current actions clearly threaten the security of the Philippines. Nicholas Burns, the US Ambassador to China, recently pointed that the "very ill-advised efforts by the government of China to intimidate the Philippines at Second Thomas Shoal, at Sabina Shoal, in an incident at Scarborough Shoal, just to name three incidents over the last month or so." Diplomatic messaging is certainly one way to signal intent and the US has been consistently doing it. Apart from the Ambassador in Beijing, Secretary Antony Blinken has conveyed US concerns to China as did US NSA Jake Sullivan, who told the Chinese leadership "very directly" that Washington had an ironclad commitment to defend the Philippines.

Some officials in the US administration understand China's strategy very well. One of them is Jose Fernandez, the State Department's Undersecretary for economic growth, energy and the environment, who recently noted while speaking at the Asia Society that China is facing greater scrutiny and resistance globally

as it is wielding its sizeable trade and geo-political leverage to coerce smaller countries economically. Fernandez said at a public event that Washington had created a playbook to help countries that came under pressure. He added that China is a "great practitioner of this economic-coercion strategy" adding that "The threat of coercion is often enough to stop countries from making sovereign decisions that may upset [China] in the first place." This raises the question of whether China has overplayed its hand with economic coercion. The pushback that China has experienced in recent years indicates a certain disillusionment that countries have with Beijing and its policies.

With elections round the corner in the US, the future of the anti-coercion unit in the State Department is under question. However, this unit has done important and significant work. The US recognises the scale and intensity of Chinese economic coercion worldwide. It is also being done in a myriad of ways and many nations recognise that it is difficult not to land in the cross hairs of Beijing due to its enormous economic clout. Fernandez said the challenge with China lay in responding to it. While many are able to diagnose the problem, addressing it is far more difficult, Fernandez said. The difference between the US and China is that while the former engages in routine tit-for-tat trade wars, the Chinese go one step ahead and punish countries that have a history of taking positions opposed to Beijing. There are several examples of this type of behaviour.

In 2010, China imposed an unofficial export embargo of rare earth minerals to Japan following a territorial dispute over the Senkaku islands. In the same year, China also acted against Norway when the Nobel Prize was awarded to Liu Xiaobo, a Chinese human rights activist. A decade later Australia was in the cross-hairs for calling for an independent inquiry into the origins of COVID-19. In 2021, Lithuania was targeted for its allowing opening of the Taiwan representative office. Philippines is thus the latest in the series of actions that China has taken against those who speak out and oppose the Chinese line on major international issues. For the US, its network of friendly allies allows it to offer support in many ways including through supply-chain diversion strategies and looking for new markets when China targets such countries. China relies on "plausible deniability" and uses customs glitches,

consumer preference and abruptly-added health and safety standards to justify punitive trade slowdowns. More importantly, Fernandez says China has made it a habit to deny any link to political issues when targeting a nation economically.

The practice of economic coercion by China is essentially weaponisation of trade networks. The intention is to compel the target state to withhold actions that are deemed contrary to Chinese interests. As seen from an overview of Chinese actions in the recent past, financial capital is used by Beijing to exercise influence through the BRI. Chinese capital is used to fund the construction of infrastructure such as seaports, railways, and other projects in developing economies. Hambantota in Sri Lanka and the railway line in Nigeria are two such examples. This way China captures the loyalty of the political elite in the host country to ensure that their interests are safe guarded. Alongside this, China engages in a propaganda drive to ensure that the narrative (be it in Africa, South Asia, South East Asia or the Pacific islands) is built in their favour. In developed countries, China takes a different approach and weaponises trade dependence to achieve its goals. This would entail sudden stoppages of imports, reducing the flow of Chinese tourists to target states, organising consumer boycotts, and embargoes on exports.

The US-China competition is thus at its peak. The outcome of the US elections in November will determine the future course of this competition. While a possible shift in US strategy could be forecast, China is likely to continue its economic coercion to ensure that its national security goals are met. The persistence of this trend will require individual nations to find ways to counter Chinese hegemony. The United States is there and will provide the support, but the extent of this support will depend on the political dispensation and economic ability of Washington to assist and aid.

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



CHINA'S XI TO ATTEND BRICS SUMMIT IN RUSSIA: FOREIGN MINISTER

Chinese President Xi Jinping will attend the BRICS summit in Russia next month, China's foreign minister announced on Thursday last week.

The summit of emerging economies will be held from October 22 to 24 in the southwestern Russian city of Kazan, in what the Kremlin hopes will be a chance to expand its influence and forge closer economic alliances, especially with Beijing.

"President Xi is very happy to accept your invitation, and arrive in Kazan as scheduled", Wang Yi told Russian President Vladimir Putin at a meeting in Saint Petersburg.

"The two heads of state will have further strategic discussions", Wang said.

He also heralded the "strong mutual trust and deep friendship" between Putin and Xi.

The BRICS group, an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, represents almost half the world's population and has since expanded to include other major emerging economies including the United Arab Emirates and Iran.

Putin has looked to China for support since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with the allies boosting trade to record highs as Moscow faces heavy economic sanctions from the West.

Last month, Putin said Russia's economic and trade links with China were "yielding results" as he welcomed Chinese Premier Li Qiang to the Kremlin.

AFP



Marc Batac on his activism journey, the rise of the Milk Tea Alliance, and their role in post-coup Myanmar

READING THE TEA LEAVES

“Working hard is not enough. You have to build power with those around you who have the same experience, and really hold the government to account with those structures and policies that keep us down, without access to what should be a right for all.”

Growing up in the eastern Philippines, Marc Batac experienced political dysfunction, poverty, and armed conflict, which planted the seeds of an emerging political consciousness. This led to his critical involvement in the development of the Milk Tea Alliance (MTA), which, in turn, connected him with Myanmar’s resistance movement against the military regime following the 2021 coup.

During his college years at a university in Manila, Marc was enmeshed in a vibrant community of activists, scholars, and human rights defenders. His budding activism there was expressed through a passion for political art. “I was surrounded by political patronage, political dynasties, corruption, and all that. I found politics figuring in my art, and that spurred the interest... for me to pursue it in university,” he says. “That’s when I wanted to understand more in-depth analysis.” Political science became his chosen field so he could better understand the dysfunctional political system he had grown up under.

A watershed moment occurred when the university administration announced they were going to close his dormitory, ostensibly for renovations, but without a backup plan for housing the students that would be displaced. Subsidized by the university, the dormitory

housed students from provincial and working-class backgrounds (like Marc), so the administration’s decision felt like a direct attack on students with fewer resources. “These things were so just theoretical, conceptual to me; I just studied that,” he says. “I felt it was unfair, and it needed collective action, so I joined the protests of my dormitory mates. That also made me realize my working-class background, my coming from the province, and the lack of privilege that we had. These are things that I’d just been reading up in university; but now experiencing it, and within my own experience, it made me realize that I could not escape from this.” Significantly, this was Marc’s first real-life experience with collective action.

Marc admits that he had initially been hesitant to join the protest movement out of familial pressure. “My parents said that I need to focus on classes. Being an activist is frowned upon as well, because there was this thinking that if you get recruited, then you become a rebel, and I was afraid of that.” This combined with more general, social pressures within his community to perform well at school as a means of escaping the cycle of poverty that plagued it—indeed, Marc was the first person in his hometown to attend the University of Philippines in Manila! So while all these factors played a role in Marc’s initial hesitation, he still realized that he found his path.

After university, Marc joined a national coalition working on issues like the colonial debt and neoliberal policies that strip away social services from marginalized communities. This work reinforced his belief in the power of collective action and the need to hold governments accountable. Then events in Asia broadened Marc’s horizons even further: the early 2010s were marked by significant regional movements, such as the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan.

Those protests, coupled with local actions against corruption in the Philippines, signaled a broader awakening among Filipino millennials.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or catch the full Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/8/26/episode-265-reading-the-tea-leaves>

MYANMAR DELEGATION ATTENDS EASTERN ECONOMIC FORUM IN RUSSIA

A delegation from Myanmar, led by the junta's Deputy Prime Minister General Mya Tun Oo, attended the 9th Eastern Economic Forum in Russia from September 4-6, according to the state-run newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The junta-appointed officials met with various Russian entities, including Fund RC-Investments and Rosatom Renewable Energy, to discuss potential cooperation in areas such as power generation, steel production, and pharmaceuticals.

The Myanmar delegation participated in several forums, including the Russia-ASEAN Business Dialogue and the Main Forum-Plenary Session, where Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a keynote speech on regional development and international logistics.

However, independent economists and international observers paint a starkly different picture of Myanmar's economic reality since the military coup in February 2021. The country's economy has been in freefall. Foreign investment has plummeted, and international sanctions have severely limited Myanmar's access to global markets and financial systems.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that nearly half of Myanmar's population could be living in poverty by early 2022, effectively erasing a decade of economic progress.

While the junta seeks international partnerships, particularly with nations like Russia that have shown willingness to engage despite widespread condemnation of the coup, Myanmar's economic crisis continues to deepen.



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF SURVEYS FLOOD DAMAGE AS TYPHOON YAGI WREAKS HAVOC

Heavy rains triggered by Typhoon Yagi and a depression in the Bay of Bengal have led to severe flooding across Myanmar since September 10 and rising water levels in creeks and rivers have caused flash floods in multiple townships, including areas of Nay Pyi Taw.

Myanmar junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his entourage inspected rescue and relief efforts in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area on September 13, according to state media.

He emphasized the need for swift repairs to damaged bridges, including the Thaikchaung Bridge, to maintain transportation links. The Senior General also called for systematic reconstruction to ensure long-term resilience against future disasters.

In a rare move, the junta chief also has requested foreign aid to cope with the deadly floods, which have displaced over 235,000 people across the country, exacerbating the hardships faced by a population already enduring over three years of conflict.

However, locals reported that the junta is hindering relief efforts in some areas including Bago Region, where junta checkpoints have been established to control the flow of aid to flood-affected villages east of the Sittaung River.



MYANMAR SINGER-ARTIST KYAR PAUK AUCTIONS PAINTING FOR FLOOD AND CONFLICT VICTIMS

Renowned Myanmar singer and artist Kyar Pauk has partnered with social media influencer Pencilo to auction a painting in support of flood victims and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar. The online auction is being conducted on Pencilo's Facebook page.

The auction, set to run for five days, features Kyar Pauk's painting titled "Mother Nature (II)", an acrylic and ink work on a 100x73cm canvas.

Social influencers Pencilo and Maung Maung Aye have assisted in organizing the event. The auction will start with a base price of US\$1,000, with all proceeds going directly to aid those affected by floods and conflict in Myanmar.

This marks Kyar Pauk's second charity auction. His previous event, featuring a doodle art on a ukulele, sold for US\$28,500.

MYANMAR'S OPPOSITION NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT COORDINATES FLOOD RESPONSE EFFORTS

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) took decisive action to address the severe flooding caused by Typhoon Yagi, according to NUG's official Facebook page.

The Emergency Operation Coordination Committee (EOCC) of the NUG convened a crucial online meeting at 10 am Myanmar local time on September 14 to discuss and coordinate response efforts to the ongoing disaster.

The meeting, which brought together various task forces and departments of NUG, focused on addressing the immediate needs of those affected by the floods and planning for future challenges. Participants reviewed current relief operations and outlined strategies for upcoming tasks. A key priority was the dissemination of early warning information to help communities prepare for and mitigate potential dangers.

The EOCC emphasized the importance of effective rescue operations to minimize loss of life in affected areas.

Recent independent reports indicated that Typhoon Yagi's impact had been even more severe than initially thought, with at least 74 confirmed deaths, 89 people missing, and over 450 villages affected, underscoring the urgent need for the coordinated response efforts.

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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.