

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

PLAYING GAMES

Skepticism as Myanmar junta chief invites
armed groups to stop fighting, start talks



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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

MYANMAR: BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

As the Myanmar junta puts out feelers for talks with their opponents, an important perception held by some analysts hangs in the air. They argue that without the military in power, Myanmar risks collapsing into a failed state or, at best, becoming deeply fragmented. Hence the drive in some political and international NGO circles that the Myanmar military will – unfortunately – have to be part of the solution to the Myanmar crisis.

But Myanmar is not about to become a “fractured” state, claims Miemie Winn Byrd, a well-known US-based Myanmar analyst, writing in *The Diplomat* last week.

Miemie takes issue with these particular analysts who overlook the novel political linkages between the country's resistance groups, and their determination to build a federal democracy.

As the military junta in Myanmar continues to face mounting losses on the ground, the dominant narrative has shifted from “the military is too big to fail” to fears of Myanmar becoming a “failed” or “fractured” state, Miemie writes.

Recently, many analysts, mostly from outside Myanmar, have painted a grim picture of the country's post-conflict future. These views often cite examples like Libya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Egypt as evidence that Myanmar is unlikely to transition into a cohesive democratic state after the fall of its military regime.

Miemie takes issue with this. And she is worth listening to.

As our lead story this week in *Mizzima Weekly* indicates, the Myanmar junta appears to be playing games as it seeks to hang on to power. While the Myanmar resistance, including the National Unity Government (NUG), looks for a political future with the current military out of the picture, the generals in Naypyidaw are maneuvering with a new variation of their original version of what they called a “disciplined democracy” under the 2008 military-written constitution. This involves holding out what appears to be an olive

branch to the resistance and also seeking a national – if rather limited – election. It also involves trying to co-opt ASEAN and other international bodies into supporting a “negotiated solution” that includes the “men-in-green”.

But, as Miemie points out in her article in *The Diplomat*, the vast majority of the Myanmar population, despite the regime's ongoing brutality, continues to reject military rule and remains more determined than ever to remove the junta. “This success is a testament to the unprecedented collaboration among all resistance forces, which marks a profound shift in Myanmar's political landscape. The junta's long-standing strategy of exploiting ethnic and religious divisions is being actively dismantled by a common resistance front. This diverse coalition, forged through shared struggle, is paving the way for a more inclusive, federal, and democratic Myanmar. The resilience of the resistance demonstrates the people's determination to overcome old divisions and build a democratic future,” she claims.

Enough is enough. That is the message from the Myanmar people having endured the recent brutality and decades under military rule. This is not 1988 or 2007 where physical opposition to the military petered out. The last three years have seen a revolution take hold and there is no place for the existing military, despite their efforts to stay in the picture.

Let's leave the last words to Miemie. “The military junta itself is responsible for the current crisis, having initiated unnecessary and violent actions that triggered the resistance. This is fundamentally different from the Arab Spring countries, where uprisings were more spontaneous. While the challenges facing Myanmar and its people are immense, there are strong reasons to believe that the country has the potential to emerge as a new, federal, and democratic nation.”

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing by AFP





Min Aung Hlaing is offering a carrot and a stick as he plays games with the Myanmar people. Photo: AFP

PLAYING GAMES

SKEPTICISM AS MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF INVITES ARMED GROUPS TO STOP FIGHTING, START TALKS

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is adept at playing games. Literally hours after he offered an unprecedented invitation to his enemies for talks on the country's civil war, his forces were bombing the opposition-held town of Lashio.

Last Thursday's surprise call by the junta for discussions was likely a sop to main ally China and a nudge towards controversial fresh elections, analysts said, and two prominent armed groups swiftly dismissed it.

As well as battling determined resistance to its rule, the junta is also struggling with the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi, which triggered major flooding that has left more than 400 dead and hundreds of thousands in need of help.

"We invite ethnic armed groups, terrorist insurgent groups, and terrorist PDF groups which are fighting against the state to give up terrorist fighting and

communicate with us to solve political problems politically," the junta said in a statement, reflecting the message from coup leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Armed groups should follow "the path of party politics and elections in order to bring about lasting peace and development", the statement said.

"The country's human resources, basic infrastructure and many people's lives have been lost, and the country's stability and development have been blocked" by the conflict, the junta said, seemingly without a sense of irony.

BATTLEFIELD SETBACKS

The offer came with the junta reeling from battlefield reverses to ethnic minority armed groups and pro-democracy People's Defence Forces that rose up to oppose the military's seizure of power in 2021.



Myanmar junta bombs Lashio hours after suggesting talks to the resistance. Photo: AFP

The groups have seized several lucrative border crossings and last month took Lashio, a city of 150,000 people in northern Shan State - the biggest urban centre to fall to rebels since 1962.

The call to put down arms and come to the negotiating table was "the first time that the regime has expressed a willingness to have a dialogue with the post-coup resistance forces", said Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has long spoken of "annihilating" the groups, he pointed out.

BOMBING

Hours after the offer, military jets bombed Lashio, in northern Shan state, now in the hands of fighters from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

"I heard two explosions," a resident told AFP, asking for anonymity for security reasons. "I heard five people were killed and a lot of people were wounded."

One Yangon-based diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said of the junta's offer: "So far I haven't seen the inclination towards serious reconciliation."

RESISTANCE DEMANDS

The Karen National Union, which has fought for decades for autonomy along the Thai border, said talks were only possible if the military agreed to "common political objectives".

That included the military staying out of politics, accepting a new, federal constitution, and being held accountable for "war crimes and crimes against humanity", spokesman Padoh Saw Taw Nee said.

"If they don't agree with it, then nothing will happen... We will keep putting pressure on them politically, militarily," he told AFP.

Min Aung Hlaing and his generals are highly unlikely to agree to such terms.

A spokesperson for the Mandalay PDF, which has seized territory in the hills around second city Mandalay, also dismissed the offer.

"This invitation won't make any changes to our way," said Osmond, who goes by a pseudonym. "We will keep doing what we have to do."

MESSAGING

But even if nothing comes of the invitation, just issuing it could still have value for the regime, said Horsey.

"It would allow them to portray themselves - for example to China, which is pushing for a deal - as wanting peace, even while they continue with their campaign of indiscriminate airstrikes."

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the isolated junta and its sprawling Belt and Road Initiative includes key projects in Myanmar.

Last month Beijing's foreign minister said it supported the junta's plan to hold fresh polls and return the conflict-torn country to a "democratic transition".

"China hopes that all relevant parties will stop fighting and hold talks," a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson told a regular press briefing in Beijing on Friday.

DESCALATION?

Independent analyst David Mathieson said that in addition to Beijing, the offer was likely aimed at neighbouring countries and some western diplomats who may see elections as a “vehicle to reduce violence and pursue a process of de-escalation”, despite their inevitable flaws.

The military, which justified its coup with unsubstantiated allegations of fraud in the 2020 elections won by Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, has long pledged to hold fresh polls when conditions permit. But it has since dissolved Suu Kyi’s popular National League for Democracy (NLD) and introduced tough new rules governing political parties, effectively rigging the system in the military’s favour. In addition, the election would be held under the rules of the military-written 2008 Constitution that cements a strong hold over whatever government is brought in.

Census takers are due to start collecting data in early October in preparation for possible polls in 2025, but analysts say any vote would be a sham and would likely be targeted by the military’s opponents.

“Hovering above all of this is the Myanmar military’s tried and tested divide-and-rule strategy,” said Mathieson, adding it “may be soiled and strained but still effective”.

While the Myanmar coup leader may appear out of touch with reality at times, his “olive branch” may serve some purpose in the game for the military to hang onto power.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP





Rescue vehicles prepare to help victims of the flooding. Photo: AFP

GOOD AND BAD NEWS ABOUT JUNTA EFFORTS TO HELP FLOOD VICTIMS

The State Administration Council (SAC) has announced compensation for those who died in the floods that struck Myanmar in mid-September. According to the regime, families of the deceased will receive 800,000 kyats from the National Disaster Management Committee and 300,000 kyats from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement. However, no specific details were provided regarding compensation for property damage. Many charity organizations are concerned the compensation will not be given to the victims correctly.

SAC leader Min Aung Hlaing met with flood victims from Pyinmana Township, where he promised aid for property losses but did not disclose the exact amount. On September 21, he attended a donation ceremony aimed at supporting rescue and rehabilitation efforts. The ceremony saw over 31 billion kyats (approximately US\$6 million) in donations, mostly from business elites linked to the military regime. The regime leader admitted that he had only expected donations totaling two to three billion kyats, highlighting the financial burden the disaster has placed on the state budget.

Despite the nationwide devastation, Min Aung Hlaing has only visited areas close to his base in Naypyidaw and Bagan, sparking criticism. Many

other flood-hit regions are left relying on local charity organizations for aid, as effective government assistance has been limited. The SAC announced it would distribute over 1,200 tonnes of rice from the ASEAN+3 Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) to flood victims while the South Korean government sent 2,500 tonnes of rice to Myanmar flood victims.

At the same time, the regime has been restricting humanitarian aid deliveries to areas controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). In Taungoo District, SAC authorities have banned access to the east side of the Sittaung River, citing security concerns in areas controlled by People's Defense Forces (PDFs). One charity volunteer remarked, "We cannot conduct rescue operations in the east side of the Sittaung River," adding that four humanitarian aid boats had been seized by SAC troops.

The SAC reported that 384 people have died and 89 remain missing as a result of the floods. There are indications the figures are higher. Additionally, over 270,000 hectares of arable land and more than 100,000 agricultural animals have been destroyed. The SAC claims that around 150,000 people were affected by the disaster, though UN estimates place the number closer to 890,000.



Reports have been coming in that the junta has been blocking local and international aid in some areas of Myanmar. Photo: AFP

The regime's handling of disaster preparedness has also come under scrutiny. A volunteer in Naypyidaw, where the SAC is based, criticized the lack of warning and preparation, saying, "When the rescue process needed to start, there was no preparation. The only thing we were able to do was search for dead bodies."

IS INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL AID GETTING TO THE FLOOD VICTIMS?

A range of international support has been extended to Myanmar as the country grapples with the aftermath of devastating floods. South Korea has donated 2,500 tonnes of rice, with 100 tonnes allocated specifically for victims in southern Shan State. Singapore Armed Forces contributed essential supplies on September 18, including blankets, personal hygiene products, purified water machines, and dried foods.

India has also stepped forward, delivering 32 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Naypyidaw Airport and an additional 17 tonnes to Thilawa Seaport on September 17. Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) announced its readiness to provide 1.2 million euros for flood relief efforts, while Norway contributed 500,000 euros in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Norway's donation includes tarpaulins, food, purified water, basic medicines, cash, and ready-to-eat meals.

The US Embassy in Yangon stated that aid would be provided through USAID, urging the State Administration Council (SAC) to ensure a smooth flow of relief to those in urgent need. The UK Embassy similarly pledged financial and humanitarian support, while Canada also contributed through partner organizations, calling for unimpeded delivery of aid to affected communities.

Australia is working with its partner organizations to provide assistance to flood victims as well. Additionally, the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has committed to distributing basic food supplies, including rice, nutritious biscuits, and other vital nourishment, to support the victims for at least one month.

International donors have emphasized the importance of ensuring aid reaches the most vulnerable populations, as restrictions and logistical challenges in the country continue to pose obstacles to effective relief distribution.

BATTLES CONTINUE IN RAKHINE

On September 21, the Myanmar junta air force launched airstrikes on villages near Sittway, the capital of Rakhine State, intensifying violence in the region. This was followed by a drone attack in Gwa Township on September 20, which targeted Gantgaw village, killing a column commander of the regime's No. (563) Light Infantry Battalion, based in Gwa town.

The violence escalated further on September 26, when junta airstrikes targeted the Thandwe region, a stronghold of the Arakan Army (AA), resulting in the deaths of 14 internally displaced persons (IDPs), including children and elderly. An additional 25 individuals sustained injuries, with the death toll likely to rise, according to AA spokesperson Khine Thukha, due to the severity of the injuries. The victims were seeking shelter in the City Hall and the former Environmental Conservation Office when the airstrike occurred.

In another attack on September 25, the junta air force bombed Myaybon Township, killing an 11-year-old girl and a man, while seven others, including children and elderly, were severely injured. A similar strike occurred on September 24 in Taungkok Township, claiming the lives of two civilians. In total, at least 17 civilians have been killed and 34 seriously injured in junta airstrikes over the span of three days.

In Manaung Town (Cheduba Island), the SAC has been reinforcing defenses, setting landmines, and building fences since mid-September, with restrictions on fishing boats entering or leaving the town. Despite rumours of an impending AA offensive, no AA movements have been reported in the area.

On September 26, the AA successfully ambushed a junta column from No. (373) Light Infantry Battalion in Ann Township, near the Me Valley—a critical route connecting Rakhine State to central Myanmar. A military source from Ann reported that about 50 junta soldiers were killed or wounded, with casualties transported to Ann City. As a result of the battle, the junta mobilized around 500 troops in Ann City.

The surge in violence highlights the ongoing tensions between the AA and the junta, with civilians bearing the brunt of the escalating conflict.

MYANMAR BRICS MEMBERSHIP ON THE CARDS?

Myanmar would like to participate in BRICS as an observer country, Minister for Information Maung Maung Ohn told TASS on the sidelines of the BRICS Media Summit.

“We are poised for cooperation with the integration as an observer country, without full membership,” he told TASS

The minister said that in the future, Myanmar would like to apply for full membership of BRICS.

BRICS is made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and operates as an alternative to western groupings. Typically, western media shows little interest in the meetings and developments.

The seventh BRICS Media Summit was held in Moscow on September 13-17, with heads and leading specialists of over 60 media outlets from 45 countries participating in it. The summit was hosted by Russian state news agency TASS, which celebrated its 120th anniversary on September 1.

The BRICS Media Forum was founded in 2015 on Xinhua’s initiative and has since been organized annually by the country that holds the rotating BRICS presidency. Russia assumed the presidency on January 1, 2024. All BRICS events in Russia are organized by the Roscongress Foundation, TASS reports.

TOP MIZZIMA BURMESE VIDEOS

Please find the top Mizzima Burmese videos of last week:

Can Lashio be waived by MNDAA?

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

Why is Taung-kham fiercely protected by the Military Council?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4vkp9ND72c>

Why did MNDAA stop fighting before the goal of Operation 1027, the eradication of the military dictatorship, was realized?

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





MYANMAR'S CHALLENGES AS THE COUNTRY MARKS INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Woe betide a Myanmar citizen caught by police with a link to a Myanmar story from independent media on their phone. That could well spell arrest, torture and a jail term.

Today, there is no doubt that Myanmar's military junta is trying to run a "Big Brother" state that the late George Orwell warned about in his famous novel, "1984".

As the global community marks the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) on 28 September, this occasion serves as a reminder for all press freedom stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to upholding the right to access

information – access that is being gradually eroded around the world.

While this is only the fourth time IDUAI will be commemorated in Myanmar, its significance cannot be overstated given the ongoing challenges related to freedom of expression and access to information amid the country's escalating political crisis following the 2021 military coup.

The global theme for 2024, "Mainstreaming Access to Information and Participation in the Public Sector," is relevant to the ongoing fight for freedom, democracy and human rights in Myanmar as the junta tightens the screws and plays games with a call for the resistance to

stop fighting and approach the negotiating table. The junta's surprise "offer" came on 26 September.

Myanmar citizens recognize how tricky access to information and the media is. "Free and fair" news and information is crucially important for an active citizenry. But ever since the coup, freedom of expression and access to information have been stamped on – at least the freedom and ideas that the junta wants to restrict.

The authorities have deliberately targeted independent media and journalists, while allowing "approved" media outlets – particularly those owned by junta-connected cronies – to operate but with an eye to self-censorship and toeing the "party line". Dozens of independent media houses operating in Myanmar were forced to close down operations – most of them fleeing into exile. Many journalists and media people were arrested, tortured and jailed. A number were killed in pursuit of their profession.

The junta has targeted those seeking to obtain impartial news and information on their smartphones, particularly through social media. There have been clampdowns on the internet, the use of VPNs or Virtual Private Networks, and regular police checks of phones. On occasions, the junta has cut off telecom networks, shutting down a telephone line whenever they want to lock down information in their target state or region. For example, when the war became intense in northern Rakhine State at the end of 2023, phone lines became hard to use. This weakness of communication led local people to face many challenges regarding information on basic needs, prices, weather information, health, and transportation.

Little surprise then that US-based Freedom House ranks Myanmar poorly when it comes to freedom of expression and information. Hundreds of people have been arrested and prosecuted for speech-related offenses under the revised legal code, with most cases involving comments made online - hundreds of others have been forced into hiding or exile to avoid arrest. In May 2023, rapper Byu Har was arrested after releasing

a song on social media that was critical of the junta. In August he received a 20-year prison sentence.

Despite sanctions and international damnation, the Myanmar military junta appears to be stepping up its restrictions and repression. Members of the public have to be careful if they seek to access "free" information from independent media and NGOs. And journalists operating undercover in the country have to be extremely careful with their communications.

UNESCO says the universal right to information is essential for societies to function democratically and for the well-being of each individual. Freedom of information or the right to information is an integral part of the fundamental right to freedom of expression. It is established as a right in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which stipulates that the fundamental right to freedom of expression encompasses the freedom "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

Given the current difficulties and considering the restrictions on engagement with the military authorities in Myanmar, this year's commemoration in the country will deviate from the global theme to focus on the urgent need to underscore access to information as a cornerstone of a free and democratic society. The event holds meaning as Myanmar continues to experience increasing media repression and a clamp down on people speaking their mind.

The International Day for Universal Access to Information is an important reminder of the crucial role access to reliable information plays in these difficult times for Myanmar in terms of supporting the damaged democratic process and upholding human rights.



IIMM SAYS THE MILITARY COUNCIL'S SECRETIVE EXECUTIONS AMOUNT TO GRAVE INTERNATIONAL CRIMES

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) issued a statement on 23 September, declaring that military council's imposition of the death penalty through private court proceedings, without adhering to the fundamental principles of fair trials, constitutes a serious international crime.

The IIMM indicated that it is closely monitoring these executions.

According to their statement, information received suggested that the military council conducted a closed-door hearing in Insein Prison in 2023, where death sentences were imminent for certain inmates.

Furthermore, the IIMM asserted that the military council's application of the death penalty based on grievances represents a crime against humanity. The organization emphasized that executions should be conducted transparently and in public. It raised

concerns over the military council's adherence to legal standards and respect for judicial guarantees.

Reports have emerged in the past week that seven inmates sentenced to death at Yangon's Insein Prison will be executed on 24 September.

Among those facing execution, five were arrested for the allegedly shooting of military council members aboard the Yangon circular train on 14 August 2021. The other two were detained in connection with a parcel bomb explosion at the Insein Prison parcel receiving area on 19 October 2022. All seven individuals received death sentences from the military junta's prison court and district court.

Ko Thaik Htun Oo, a leading member of the Political Prisoners Network of Myanmar (PPNM), expressed grave concerns regarding the situation.

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

“In frontline battlefields, even captured prisoners of war are protected under human rights laws and should be detained as prisoners, not executed. However, in Myanmar, even those unjustly arrested have faced execution by hanging. It is evident that human rights in Myanmar have completely collapsed,” he said in an interview with Mizzima.

He added that the news of these death sentences has profoundly impacted the families of the political prisoners.

“We are extremely worried and saddened by the news, particularly for the political prisoners facing execution and their families,” he said.

An Insein Prison staff member, when contacted, disputed the circulating reports, stating they were inaccurate and merely rumors. The Naypyidaw Correction Department also confirmed they had no knowledge of the situation. Additionally, military council spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun told BBC Burmese he had not received any information regarding the death sentence reports from Insein Prison.

In July 2022, the military council executed four individuals – U Phyo Zeya Thaw, U Jimmy, U Aung Thura Zaw, and U Hla Myo Aung – who were sentenced to death by junta courts. They were hanging inside Insein Prison.

The military council's media outlets reported that the executions were conducted “in accordance with prison procedures,” although they did not specify the exact dates of these actions. In the days leading up to the executions, widespread rumors of impending death sentences had circulated, despite Major General Zaw Min Tun claiming ignorance of such plans.

According to daily records from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), since the military coup in 2021, the military council has sentenced 167 individuals to death across the country, with 123 receiving sentences while in prison and 44 sentenced in absentia.

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Photo: Irrawaddy No. 3 Battalion

MILITARY COUNCIL TARGETS FLOOD RELIEF EFFORTS IN BAGO REGION WITH DRONES AND ARTILLERY, ONE VILLAGER INJURED

On 22 September morning, as the People's Defense Force (PDF) and charitable organizations provided critical flood relief in Lay Eain Su village, Htantabin Township, Bago Region, the military council launched an aggressive attack using drones and artillery, according to a local PDF official.

The attack injured one villager and intensified an already dire situation in the flood-affected region. Communities struggling to recover from the disaster are now facing additional threats as the military council continues its drone strikes and artillery shelling in villages already hit by the floods.

Despite the attacks, members of the revolutionary forces have vowed not to back down. They remain committed to resisting the military council's assaults and defending the vulnerable, particularly those without shelter or refuge.

"We are concerned that the military might cut off food supplies to flood-affected areas in retaliation for our efforts. That's why we are being cautious in

responding to the attacks. Since 14 September, we've been engaged in flood relief," said J Gyi, the head of news and information for Ayeyarwady PDF Battalion No. 3.

Mizzima has reached out to charity organizations involved in the relief efforts but has not yet received a response.

Heavy rains and flooding in September caused widespread damage across Myanmar. Taungoo District in Bago Region is one of the worst-hit areas. Over 100 villages were severely affected, and more than 50,000 people have been displaced.

In PDF controlled areas, over 25 villages have been inundated, leaving more than 500 residents grappling with both flood devastation and the ongoing conflict.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR MILITARY RAIDS IN BUDALIN TOWNSHIP LEAVE FOUR DEAD, CIVILIANS AND PDF MEMBERS AMONG VICTIMS

Over two consecutive days, the military council launched deadly raids on Katoe and Kywaltaychaung villages in Budalin Township, Sagaing Region, resulting in the deaths of two civilians and two People's Defense Force (PDF) members, according to local residents.

In Katoe village, the military killed two members of the local security force and a 70-year-old man before setting fire to several homes on the evening of 22 September.

"When we looked at the village after the junta column left the next morning, we saw the bodies of two People's Defense Forces. Nineteen houses were burned, and they set up landmines in the village," a local villager said.

The soldiers also looted food and valuable items from the homes of Katoe villagers during the raid, further terrorizing the local community.

The military column responsible for these attacks is said to include over 100 soldiers, with reinforcements arriving from the Northwestern Regional Military Command in Monywa city to Kutaw police station in Kutaw village, Budalin Township, according to locals.

Kywaltaychaung village also suffered a raid on the morning of 21 September. Military forces on their way to reinforce Kutaw police station killed a civilian and stole almsgiving donations from the village monastery.

On 20 September, PDF forces launched an assault on the Kutaw police station. In response, the military defended itself using jets and attack helicopters, killing two PDF fighters and injuring several others.

By 24 September, the military column had reached Kutaw village and was moving toward an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp located north of the village, residents reported.



Photo: Supplied

QUAD JOINT STATEMENT URGES STATES TO PREVENT THE FLOW OF JET FUEL AND ARMS TO MYANMAR'S MILITARY

In a joint statement, the leaders of India, Japan, Australia, and the US restated their appeal to all states to prevent the flow of arms, dual-use material, and jet fuel.

The Wilmington Joint Statement issued on 21 September by the White House says, "We remain deeply concerned by the worsening political, security and humanitarian situation in Myanmar."

This joint statement was issued after a summit meeting attended by leaders of four countries, PM Modi from India, PM Fumio Kishida from Japan, PM Albanese from Australia and President Biden from US, known as the Quad.

The joint statement says, "We remain deeply concerned by the worsening political, security and humanitarian situation in Myanmar, including in Rakhine State, and again call for an immediate cessation of violence, the release of all those unjustly and arbitrarily detained, safe and unhindered humanitarian access."

The statement reaffirmed strong support by the four leaders for ASEAN-led efforts, including the work of the ASEAN Chair and the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar.

The four leaders remain resolute in their support for the people of Myanmar and committed to continuing to work with all stakeholders in a pragmatic and constructive way, to find a sustainable solution to the crisis in a process which is led by the people of Myanmar, and returns Myanmar to the path of democracy.

The leaders point out in this statement that the ongoing conflict and instability have serious implications for the region, including increases in transnational crime such as cybercrime, the illegal drug trade, and human trafficking.

The joint statement states that the four leaders remain resolute in their support for the people of Myanmar and commit to continuing to work with all stakeholders in a pragmatic and constructive way.

Quad is a diplomatic network for delivering real, positive, and enduring impacts for the Indo-Pacific region.

Every Quad summit meeting has discussed the Myanmar issue since the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar.

ပြင်ဆင်: လွင်

Photo: Screenshot

COUP LEADER MIN AUNG HLAING ORDERS ENHANCED SECURITY AND CONTROL MEASURES IN PYIN OO LWIN AMID REGIONAL CLASHES

On 23 September, coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, emphasized the need for stringent security and stability in Pyin Oo Lwin Township, Mandalay Region, home to key military universities. The directive was reported by The Mirror Daily, a military-controlled publication, in its 25 September edition.

Min Aung Hlaing conducted inspections over two consecutive days, 23 and 24 September, to assess security measures within the Pyin Oo Lwin's military compound area. During his visit, he instructed officials to implement organizing and enforcement activities in the township, signaling a renewed effort to tighten control in the region.

The military leader underscored the importance of junta members being well-informed about local conditions and stressed the need to unite with local residents.

Pyin Oo Lwin Township, situated within the Mandalay Region, shares borders with Madaya and Patheingyi Townships, as well as Nawngkhio Township in northern Shan State. These areas have been the scene of intense fighting.

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and its allies captured Nawngkhio town during the second phase of Operation 1027, which began on 25 June.

On 22 September, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) reported that a battle erupted between joint revolutionary forces and the junta in Tawngkam village, Nawngkhio Township, near Pyin Oo Lwin City.



JUNTA INVITES CHINA AND ASEAN TO INVEST IN MYANMAR

Myanmar ambassador to China, Tin Maung Swe, invited China and ASEAN countries to invest in the country's agriculture, livestock and other sectors, at the 21st China-ASEAN Expo, held in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, from 24 to 28 September.

Despite challenges in this era, ASEAN and China were still Myanmar's largest trade partners, he said.

Myanmar expected uninterrupted global supply chains, more market opportunities for the country, and invited investments and cooperation from China and ASEAN countries in agriculture, livestock, transport,

information technology, communications, energy, infrastructure development, manufacturing and industry sectors, he said.

The spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Lin Jian, said that ASEAN was a crucial region for the Belt and Road Initiative project and had priority in diplomatic affairs.

Foreign investment in Myanmar has fallen drastically since the military coup as the country deteriorated on many fronts. Many investors exited the country and some suspended their operations.

Photo: AFP



MYANMAR CIVIL SOCIETY URGES ASEAN TO CEASE DEALING WITH THE MILITARY JUNTA

Myanmar civil society organisations issued a statement on 25 September, urging ASEAN to go beyond the Five-Point Consensus and cease all dealings with the illegal military junta.

The statement follows last week's ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) held in East Timor.

The text of the statement is contained below.

Ahead of the 44th and 45th Summits of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Vientiane, Laos, the Myanmar National Organizing Committee (Myanmar NOC) for ACSC/APF, comprising 15 civil society organizations, as well as partner organizations and network, participated in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2024 held on 19 - 21 September 2024 in Dili, Timor-Leste. This year, the delegation of Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network was most inclusive than ever before, with the participation of Rohingya and LGBTQIA+ representatives.

The conference, hosted by the Timor-Leste National Organizing Committee for ACSC/APF and Forum ONG Timor-Leste (FONGTIL), was attended by over 500 delegates and participants from civil society and people's movements from across Southeast Asia. Four plenary sessions, 24 convergence space workshops and 11 side events were held.

On 19 September, during the opening session, the Myanmar NOC reported to the conference the dire human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar caused and exacerbated by the military junta, as well as the people's resolute resistance against the military and building of a new federal democratic Myanmar from the bottom up, despite the junta's widespread and systematic attacks.

Myanmar in the Plenaries

On 19 September, Yasmin Ullah, Executive Director of Rohingya Māyafuñor Collaborative Network (RMCN), a member organization of the Myanmar NOC, spoke on Plenary II: Critical Overview for ASEAN

Mechanism. She discussed the failure of ASEAN, especially to protect vulnerable minority communities including the Rohingya, and ASEAN's ongoing red-carpet treatment of the Myanmar military junta. She further highlighted ASEAN's failure to coordinate sanctions against the supply chain of aviation fuel, which has continued to embolden the military junta to conduct frequent targeted airstrikes and massacring of civilians.

On 20 September, Zue Padonmar, Secretary 1 of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC), and Nurhayati Ali, Director of Health and Human Services at RMCN, spoke on Plenary IV: People and Planet First: Toward a Liberating Southeast Asia. Zue Padonmar discussed the building of bottom-up federal democracy in Karenni State, including the establishment of the people-led Karenni Interim Government, its provision of public services, and its ongoing efforts to encourage public participation in its governance structures. Nurhayati Ali discussed the struggle of the Rohingya, emphasizing that "there will be no liberation in Southeast Asia without the liberation of Rohingya." She also described the efforts of the Rohingya to reclaim their belonging in their ancestral homeland of Myanmar and in ASEAN, including by reengaging with Rohingya culture and sharing their traditions with the international community.

Myanmar in the Convergence Spaces

On 19 September, Myanmar NOC representatives from Women's League of Burma (WLB) and Women Advocacy Coalition - Myanmar (WAC-M) convened a workshop entitled An Arduous but Yearning Endeavor: Access to Justice for the Survivors of Conflict-Related Gender-Based Crimes. This workshop was co-organized with Initiatives for International Dialogue and the People's Empowerment Foundation. Panelists included a representative of WLB and Owen of WAC-M. During the workshop, the Myanmar NOC representatives emphasized that the Myanmar military is the main root cause of conflict-related gender-based crime in Myanmar, and that the existing regional and

international Women, Peace, and Security frameworks are insufficient to address the ongoing sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar.

Also on 19 September, Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of the Myanmar NOC member Progressive Voice, joined the Grassroots Democracy and People's Vision for Alternative Regionalism workshop as a panelist. She highlighted the Myanmar people's tireless efforts and sacrifices to build new, inclusive, democratic governance structures, sharply contrasting the people's incredible successes with ASEAN's complete failure to address Myanmar's multi-faceted crisis.

On 20 September, the Myanmar NOC convened the Triumph over Military Tyranny: ASEAN's Role in Rebuilding Myanmar workshop under the theme of State Violence, Militarism, National Liberation, and Democracy. This workshop was co-organized with International Peace Bureau - Philippines, Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma, ALTSEAN-Burma, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA).

During the workshop, representatives of the Myanmar NOC discussed the ongoing progress of the Myanmar people's revolution, ASEAN's role in fueling the military junta's false legitimacy, and the regional bloc's need to recognize the people's revolution and their efforts to build a new Myanmar. The democratic principles driving the Spring Revolution, particularly inclusion and equality—as well as the invaluable role of the Civil Disobedience Movement, students, youth, women, the LGBTQIA+ community at the revolution's forefront—were highlighted. The workshop also highlighted the Rohingya people's historical involvement in and contributions to Myanmar's democratic movements, including the 8888 nationwide pro-democracy uprising and the present Spring Revolution.

The workshop emphasized that the Myanmar military junta has shown blatant disregard for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC), only escalating its

violence against civilians countrywide. ASEAN's disjointed approach to Myanmar's crisis has not only completely failed, but has also lent false legitimacy to the illegal, illegitimate junta and further emboldened it to intensify atrocity crimes.

Also on 20 September, Myanmar NOC members Blood Money Campaign (BMC), Generations' Solidarity Coalition of Nationalities, Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma, and Equality Myanmar convened a workshop entitled People to People for Justice: Challenging the Norms of Human Security, Peace, Gender Equality, and Accountability in ASEAN. This workshop was co-organized with Stop the War Coalition Philippines and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development Foundation.

The workshop included Mulan, a human rights defender from BMC; Ma Aye Saung, Adviser at WAC-M; and a representative of Justice and Equality Focus (JEF). They emphasized the Myanmar military's decades-long impunity and ASEAN's complete lack of political will to address the Myanmar crisis. The workshop, with a panelist from Indonesia, also highlighted the importance of people-to-people solidarity across ASEAN in ensuring human security and peace.

Also on 20 September, Yasmin Ullah of RMCN spoke as a panelist during a workshop entitled When Hate Speech Leads to Genocide: The Rohingya Case and What We Must Do to Resist. She highlighted how misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech against the Rohingya are tools to further divide the ASEAN region to become oblivious to the plight of Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State as well as to foster a culture of impunity where victims are blamed. She underlined the urgent need to hold the Myanmar military and other actors complicit in the hate speech against Rohingya accountable including those in the ASEAN region.

Separately, on 19 September, the Alliance Against CRSV-Myanmar co-organized a workshop entitled Strategies to Address CRSV in the Region. Moderated

by Zin of WAC-M, a member of the Myanmar NOC, the workshop included Yasmin Ullah of RMCN and two members of the Alliance who highlighted the severity of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women and girls from different ethnic communities as well as the LGBTQIA+ community.

Myanmar Side Events

Throughout the ACSC/APF, the Myanmar NOC hosted the Burma/Myanmar Revolution Corner – a side event with photo exhibitions and film screening about the situation of internally displaced persons and airstrikes, and handicrafts by the Spring Revolution. RMCN also hosted an artwork and history exhibition to share Rohingya stories and culture. The Alliance Against CRSV-Myanmar further organized an exhibition and photo booth in support of CRSV survivors of Myanmar, where solidarity photos were collected for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign later this year. All side events received tremendous support and solidarity from the ACSC/APF participants.

Reflections and aspirations of the Myanmar NOC

The Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the people and the Government of Timor-Leste for their wholehearted and overwhelming support for and solidarity with Myanmar people and our revolution. The liberation, freedom, and democracy that the people of Timor-Leste have as an independent sovereign nation is something Myanmar people are longing for, are fighting for, and are determined to achieve soon.

The Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network would also like to sincerely thank the ACSC/APF 2024, the Timor-Leste National Organizing Committee for ACSC/APF, regional solidarity networks, and all participants for their steadfast support of the Myanmar people's revolution and aspirations for inclusive federal democracy and human rights for all.

The Myanmar NOC, with our platform of convening independent civil society organizations and networks, stand firm on non-discrimination and other human rights and democratic principles. As such, the Myanmar NOC will continue to do our part to ensure the ACSC/APF remains a people's space protected based on these principles.

Recommendations to ASEAN

Once again, ASEAN's complete silence on the Myanmar military junta's latest airstrikes over the past week in northern Shan State proves its utter failure to address the dire human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. It is clear that ASEAN's approach, including the failed 5PC, is not working in any capacity. Thus, ASEAN must change course immediately.

We demand ASEAN to respond to and take concrete actions in accordance with the following recommendations at the upcoming ASEAN Summits:

1. ASEAN must end all engagement with the Myanmar military junta, including all business ties with the junta and any support for the military junta's sham election plan.

2. ASEAN must exclude all representatives of the military junta, both political and non-political, from its platforms at all levels.

3. ASEAN must engage with and provide political support to the Myanmar people's legitimate representatives and governance bodies, including the National Unity Government, the National Unity Consultative Council, and ethnic resistance organizations.

4. ASEAN must collaborate with locally led civil society and community-based organizations, including networks of Civil Disobedience Movement professionals, and people-led governance structures.

5. ASEAN and its Member States must end the involvement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and any channels involving the military junta or its proxies, and instead cooperate with revolutionary groups to facilitate humanitarian aid through border channels.

6. ASEAN must support Myanmar people's efforts for transitional justice process and coordinate with existing justice mechanisms to hold the Myanmar military accountable for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In particular, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children must take immediate action to hold the military junta accountable for sexual and gender-based crimes.



Photo: Facebook

OVER 200 MYANMAR REFUGEES ENTER INDIA'S MIZORAM STATE, BRINGING TOTAL TO NEARLY 34,000

A total of 205 Myanmar refugees crossed into India's Mizoram State last week, according to a report by All India Radio on 23 September. The new arrivals entered Mizoram's Khawzawl District, as confirmed by the state's Home Department.

Including these new refugees, Mizoram now hosts 33,961 Myanmar nationals spread across 11 districts. Relief camps have been established in seven of these districts, while refugees in the remaining four are staying in rented homes or with relatives. Some have also found work in local farms or agricultural fields.

The current refugee population in Mizoram includes 10,228 men, 10,856 women, and 12,877 children under the age of 18, as reported by All India Radio.

"We are unsure from which towns they came, but the Mizoram government has reportedly arranged accommodations for them," said Nezu Pu Zo Wa, who is assisting the refugees.

Despite the large number of refugees, regular support from the Mizoram government is limited. The refugees largely depend on aid from well-wishers, volunteer organizations, and sporadic daily wage jobs.

On 14 August, the central Indian government announced plans to deliver over 1,300 metric tons of rice to those affected by natural disasters, including Myanmar refugees. However, according to aid providers, this aid has yet to be distributed.

The influx of Myanmar refugees began in March 2021, following the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021. Some have since returned home, but many remain. In addition to Mizoram, Myanmar refugees have also sought refuge in Manipur, Nagaland, and India's capital, New Delhi.



Traders in Rakhine. Photo: AFP

TRADERS IN RAKHINE STATE URGE AA TO EASE TAXATION AMID ESCALATING CONFLICT AND SKYROCKETING PRICES

Traders and residents in Rakhine State are calling for the Arakan Army (AA) to reduce taxes on essential goods, as they struggle to meet basic needs amidst soaring prices and declining incomes.

With the ongoing conflict exacerbating the economic situation, traders from Rakhine State have requested a temporary tax exemption on vital items such as medicine, food, and stationery.

“Currently, we face double taxation, once at the junta’s gate and again at the AA’s gate, with varying percentages collected by AA. The increased taxes have driven up prices, and many have lost their goods due to arrests by the military,” a trader said.

Reports indicate a lack of consistency in tax rates at AA checkpoints, with traders paying between three to five percent at each stop, often without receiving official receipts. The situation has led traders to urge for a transparent tax policy and improved ground-level verification.

Given the additional burdens of war, floods, and a blockade that restricts access to mainland Myanmar, some merchants have suggested that taxes should only be collected once transportation conditions improve.

The junta’s renewed use of a four-cut strategy has resulted in significant losses for traders attempting to keep goods flowing into Rakhine State.

The situation in Rakhine State is further worsened by a lack of electricity, sporadic phone and internet access, and insufficient healthcare facilities, putting

further pressure on a local population already grappling with skyrocketing prices.

The price of goods increased 10 to 20 times in Mrauk U, Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, and Ponnagyun townships where transportation is more difficult than other AA-controlled areas, according to Mrauk U local residents.

“In Mrauk U town, medicine has gone up. Since we rely heavily on the mainland, we don’t want taxes on essential food items,” a Mrauk U resident said.

In towns like Mrauk U, Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, and Ponnagyun, where transportation is particularly challenging, the prices of basic goods have surged 10 to 20 times. For instance, green chili costs 65,000 kyats per viss [about 1.6 kgs], betel nut 100,000 kyats per viss, and an egg is 900 kyats. The price of common medicines, such as Enervon-C, has risen to 3,000 kyats per tablet, and stationery items like pencils and pens now cost between 1,500 and 2,500 kyats each.

Despite attempts to contact AA spokesperson, U Khaing Thukha, for comment on the tax issue, no response was received.

Rakhine State’s trade routes include connections to Bangladesh and India, as well as routes from mainland Myanmar through the Yangon-Sittwe Road, Ayeyarwady Ngathaingchaung-Gwa Road, and the Ann-Minbu and Ann-Padang highways.

The blockade and ongoing conflict have severely impacted the flow of goods, adding to the difficulties faced by local traders and residents.

REVOLUTIONIZING RELIEF



Relief supplies for flood victims. Photo: AFP

Adelina Kamal, formerly of the AHA Centre, returns to the Insight Myanmar podcast to pick up where she left off in her initial interview, which discussed ASEAN's shortfalls and mistakes in addressing Myanmar's humanitarian crisis. Here, she tackles the problem of politicization in the humanitarian aid sector, and critiques its current well-meaning but ineffective, top-down approach that overlooks the needs and desires of aid recipients.

"The default approach of the international humanitarian community [towards] the crisis has been a mismatch. It fails to understand the context," she says, adding an exasperated laugh. "And why? Because they fail to listen effectively to the voices of the people! Or perhaps they listen, but they don't do [anything]. The humanitarian system—not only the approach, but the system itself— has been a misfit, because it has been done in such a vertical, top-down approach, including ASEAN; and very segmented, differentiating between human rights and humanitarian, and the peace and the development sector." She sharply calls out the politicization of humanitarian assistance that has resulted from this approach.

However, Adelina stresses that this is not the only issue that plagues the field. Another actually stems from the very principles that humanitarians such as Henry Dunant, who founded the International Committee of the Red Cross, established for this kind

of aid: namely, the importance of providing aid without regard to political, religious, or ideological affiliations. Adelina recounts that while traveling through various capitals of the world, to raise funds for people in Myanmar, she frequently heard remarks like, "Well, I really know what you're doing is basically asking for support for the pro-democracy movement! That is for another stream of funding, not for humanitarian. When it comes to humanitarian (aid), we have to follow the human principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence." However, Adelina emphasizes that these principles are ill-suited to a contentious climate like contemporary Myanmar, and how a rigid adherence to even those otherwise praiseworthy principles can sometimes impede the support for populations suffering under oppressive regimes. She goes so far as to call neutrality a "right" and a "privilege," and one that is flatly being denied to the Burmese people today.

Instead, Adelina champions what is called "humanitarian resistance," a term coined by Hugo Slim, as an alternative approach. Paraphrasing Slim, she notes how "you can be humanitarian, though you are not neutral. We call it the 'humanitarian resistance approach,' because neutrality is not for everyone. We're taking sides, [but] it doesn't mean that you're not doing humanitarian work." Slim cites numerous successful historical examples of non-neutral humanitarian work, notably humanitarians and diplomats who conspired in

and before WWII to save civilians from concentration camps; that is, taking sides against the Nazis to serve the greater good.

Reflecting the voices of people inside Myanmar, it is clear to Adelina that this approach is not only moral, but indeed a pragmatic necessity, because resistance and humanitarian groups in Myanmar refuse to work with organizations that do not reject the junta outright. "I was invited by the local actors to go to the field," she says, "I went to the Thai-Myanmar border, and also talked to those operating in the India-Myanmar border. I talked to the front-liners, the women and all that, and they told me: 'Basically the number one principle, Adelina: no junta at all! But also not working with anyone working with the junta and not receiving money from anyone working with the junta, not receiving money with anyone who got registered with the junta,' whatever it is, so it's like a complete disengagement with the junta!"

It was after this experience that Adelina read Slim's article on humanitarian resistance, which fundamentally changed the way she approached this conflict. "This has been practiced in Myanmar. This is exactly what I saw on the ground!" With that in mind, Adelina set out to write an article clearly laying out the best approach for supporting the Myanmar people, both more effectively and more ethically. Adelina wrote that when considering all options, it is more ethical for humanitarians to abandon Myanmar entirely than it is to only engage with the junta. In short, if "humanitarian neutrality" is an unshakeable principle, then non-engagement is the only moral course of action. "Leaving the country and dropping your operation is still better and [more] ethical than continuing to work through the junta," she says simply.

This of course raises the question: why do so many organizations continue to remain in the country, forcing them to stay engaged with the junta even though it compromises the effectiveness of their aid program—and in the process, helps prop up a murderous regime? "The only reason for INGOs to remain engaged is money!" she exclaims. "Sorry, I had to say [it]!" In other words, her experience has been that within the international community, it's not a case of doing good so much as being seen to be doing good, and that many in the INGO world are uninterested in humanitarian work that doesn't bring them prestige and lucrative funding opportunities.

She continues, "[The humanitarian sector] has become very much professionalized! It has become

an industry, and I think it has lost its soul. If you asked those who worked for the humanitarian sector in the beginning, like in the 1970s, when these people before were really like pure-hearted missionaries, yeah, they did good things. But right now, the humanitarian system is filled not only by the good and light-hearted missionaries, but also mercenaries and misfits .. Right now, it has become such a big industry, that is more of 'survival of the fittest,' and trying to make sure to prove to the donors that they can deliver. It is more donor-centric than affected-population-centric! It's not based on the needs of the population, but on what the donors want." To Adelina, it is fundamentally untrue that INGOs couldn't still play an important role if they rejected an association with the military, and moved their operations out of Myanmar. There are many ways they could continue to meet local humanitarian needs from across the border, perhaps most critically, by supporting local aid groups that official, military channels for humanitarian aid currently prevent access to!

In addition, although major INGOs bring in a lot of money from major donors, many have large operational costs. Moreover, because they are forced to work with the junta, they also lose significant dollars through what Adelina plainly describes as "fraud." So they tend to be significantly less effective in the long run than local actors. For this reason, Adelina again points to the importance of supporting local organizations, and emphasizes the importance of diaspora groups in sending funds to affected regions. Yet because these major but less effective players are all vying for the attention of the biggest donors, they end up sucking most of the air out of fundraising, making it even harder for the smaller, more effective organizations to raise the money they need.

Returning to the core issue of why effective and decisive action is not taken in Myanmar, Adelina distills a complex issue down to its essence. "To me, the Western governments' support to the Myanmar people is more of a token, because after all, aid is a political tool." In other words, if the international community really wanted to more effectively support the Burmese people, they would. "At the end of the day," she concludes, "it's about political will."

Check out the Insight Myanmar Podcast with Adelina Kamal here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/e0deeab2-b686-4805-8596-8a94c394f981>

MYANMAR RICE FEDERATION SAYS FOOD SUFFICIENCY NOT A CONCERN DESPITE RICE FIELDS DAMAGED BY FLOODS

The Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) said that country had no concerns over food security as they had enough rice stocks in hand despite about 5,000 acres of rice farmlands damaged by flood water.

Myanmar experienced heavy rainfall across the country caused by the remnants of Typhoon Yagi resulting in flooding in some areas. Rice mills and warehouses were also flooded and nearly 5,000 acres of rice fields were reportedly damaged by floods.

The Junta announced that over 750,000 acres of farmland across the country were flooded and damaged by Typhoon Yagi.

Moreover, in July this year at least 20 townships were flooded and over 100,000 acres of farmlands were

damaged by flood water. The crops, including rice, were regrown on these damaged farmlands.

The MRF said they have about four million tonnes of rice stock in their hand and no need to worry about rice shortage caused by floods.

On the other hand, the Junta restricted the domestic rice market by various means to control the price. Rice traders said the Junta exported over 200,000 tonnes of rice in August while the rice price rose to over 100,000 Kyats per bag (approx. 50 Kg) of superior quality rice in the domestic market.

Traders said this was the largest trade volume in the last five months since April this year. The trade data collected by the MRF shows they earned US\$ 97 million from this export.



Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

HRW CALLS FOR PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID FOR NEW ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

Human Rights Watch issued a press release on 26 September calling on the Bangladeshi government to provide protections and humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees fleeing conflict in Rakhine State. The release requests Bangladesh authorities end pushbacks of refugees, register new arrivals, allow access to medical care, and permit humanitarian assistance.

The text of the press release is as follows.

Bangladeshi authorities should allow Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar to obtain protection and humanitarian assistance, Human Rights Watch said today. An estimated 18,000 Rohingya have arrived in Bangladesh in recent months to escape abuses amid the surging fighting between Myanmar's military junta and the ethnic Arakan Army, while another 10,000 are reportedly waiting at the border.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) forces have pushed back thousands of Rohingya since early August 2024.

On September 23, Bangladeshi security forces arrested an estimated 100 Rohingya refugees in a raid on shelters where new arrivals were staying, as well as about 30 who were crossing the Naf River. They forcibly returned the refugees to Myanmar the following day, saying they were acting under orders.

"Bangladeshi authorities need to allow Rohingya fleeing renewed attacks in Myanmar to enter the country and ensure that they receive protection and aid," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The recent arrivals are in urgent need of food and medicine but are afraid that seeking assistance will put them at risk of being forcibly returned to Myanmar."

Human Rights Watch in August and September 2024 interviewed 10 Rohingya who recently entered Bangladesh, as well as humanitarian workers and Bangladeshi border authorities. Refugees described being denied entry by border guard officers, forcing them to turn to smugglers to escape threats to their lives and safety in Myanmar's western Rakhine State.

Bangladesh has not registered any new arrivals, leaving them without access to food rations and health care and at constant risk of being forcibly returned to Myanmar. Bangladeshi authorities should urgently collaborate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to register new Rohingya refugees.

In recent months, the Myanmar military and Arakan Army have committed mass killings, arson, and unlawful recruitment against Rohingya in Rakhine State. About 630,000 Rohingya remain in Myanmar under a system of apartheid that leaves them especially vulnerable to renewed fighting. The conflict has displaced more than 320,000 people in Rakhine State and southern Chin State since hostilities resumed in November 2023. Dozens of Rohingya have drowned while fleeing as overcrowded boats capsized. On September 23, most of the 18 passengers on a boat reportedly drowned after it capsized in the Naf River.

Bangladesh already hosts about one million Rohingya refugees and authorities say that the country is not able to accept any more. Muhammad Yunus, who is leading the interim government, has called on donors and international partners to fast-track third-country settlement and increase humanitarian assistance.

While Yunus has acknowledged that sending Rohingya back to Myanmar means "pushing them to death," the BGB has ramped up forced returns since the escalation of fighting in Rakhine State's Maungdaw township in early August. The border guards have set up at least one new site in the Teknaf border region

to detain refugees slated for return. A Bangladeshi border guard official told Human Rights Watch they had pushed back 6,000 Rohingya since August 5.

Border guard forces have also reportedly detained unaccompanied children and returned them to Myanmar. Bangladesh should engage the UNHCR to assist in the urgent identification and reunification of families, Human Rights Watch said.

Bangladesh is obligated to respect the international law principle of nonrefoulement, which prohibits countries from returning anyone to a place where they would face a real risk of persecution, torture, or other serious ill-treatment, or a threat to life. This principle is codified in the UN Convention against Torture, to which Bangladesh is a party, and in customary international law.

Rohingya refugees told Human Rights Watch that smugglers demanded everything in their possession, even spare clothing, as payment to take them to Bangladesh. A refugee from Maungdaw said that in August, Bangladeshi border guards provided him and four family members with food and water but refused their boat entry. He paid Bangladeshi smugglers with his wife's gold jewelry, who then brought them across the border by bribing the border guards. "It's a business for them," he said. "When we are living in between death and life." There were also reports of smugglers, after being paid, abandoning Rohingya before reaching Bangladesh's mainland.

Many recent arrivals are sheltering with relatives, often hiding out due to fear of forced return or harassment at checkpoints. "We are hiding and unable to leave the shelter," said a 28-year-old Rohingya man who entered Bangladesh in July along with six family members. "Security forces have already set up multiple checkpoints and have said that no new Rohingya refugees will be allowed in the camps. We are hungry and desperate because the UN agencies have not

included us in their database or provided food rations.”

A Bangladeshi foreign ministry official told Reuters that the government had not decided whether to register recent arrivals: “If we decide to register them, it could open the floodgates, and that’s something we can’t afford. But at the same time, how long can we ignore this issue?”

A humanitarian worker said that some newly arrived Rohingya have been denied access to health services due to lack of documentation, despite aid agencies’ policies that all refugees should be granted access to medical care, regardless of registration status.

Unregistered refugees said that they were too fearful to seek health care for illnesses or injuries. A man who arrived in early August said that when his 6-month-old son became sick, the family was unable to obtain adequate medical care “because we are not registered, and instead had to go to a quack doctor.” A 53-year-old Rohingya woman said that she had to consult an expensive private physician when she was ill. “I didn’t try to go to the NGO-run hospitals because I heard that they don’t allow anyone without a refugee medical record book, which I don’t have,” she said.

New arrivals also expressed fear that armed groups or criminal gangs would abduct or extort them. Violence in the camps has surged, with groups like the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) carrying out killings, kidnappings, forced recruitment, and robberies.

A 24-year-old Rohingya man said: “We faced a lot of trouble and difficulties in Myanmar due to the fighting among the Arakan Army, military, RSO, ARSA, and the Arakan Rohingya Army, which eventually forced us to flee to Bangladesh. But there are turf wars between Rohingya armed groups inside the camp, so we still have to worry about our safety and live in constant fear of being recruited by these armed groups.”

Humanitarian workers said that as the Arakan Army has been expanding its control over Rakhine State, the Rohingya armed groups that had backed the Myanmar military are returning to the refugee camps, where they are fighting for control.

Bangladeshi authorities should work with the UNHCR to register new refugees so they can safely access medical care, food rations, and protection services, Human Rights Watch said. Critical health services should be provided to all new arrivals without any documentation requirements. Donors, including the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, and Australia, should increase funding to meet the massive needs of the refugee population to help Bangladesh support the Rohingya and host communities.

The UN Security Council should adopt measures to prevent further atrocities in Rakhine State and make progress toward durable solutions for the Rohingya, Human Rights Watch said. The council should end its inaction in the face of anticipated vetoes by China and Russia and negotiate a resolution to institute a global arms embargo on Myanmar, refer the situation to the International Criminal Court, and impose targeted sanctions on the junta and military-owned conglomerates.

“International will to press for a rights-respecting government in Myanmar is crucial for a lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis,” Ganguly said. “Instead of quiet diplomacy that achieves little, governments need to coordinate and adopt strong measures to place real pressure on the junta to end its abuses.”

CONVICTED FOR WEARING PROTEST T-SHIRT: THE CURIOUS CASE OF CHINA-CONTROLLED HONG KONG'S NEW NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

SUN LEE

Hong Kong. Photo: AFP

In a landmark ruling, an activist became the first individual convicted under China-ruled Hong Kong's national security law, marking a pivotal moment in the legislation's enforcement.

The jailed activist, Chu Kai-pong, 27, a prominent figure in the pro-democracy movement, was found guilty of charges related to secession and subversion—a serious offense under the law that was enacted by Beijing in 2020.

According to a report by Hong Kong Free Press, Chu pled guilty to sedition on September 16 for wearing a T-shirt with a protest slogan.

He pled guilty to one count of “doing with a seditious intention an act” under Hong Kong's new security law, known as Article 23, as per the report.

The national security law, which aims to address activities deemed threatening to China's sovereignty, was introduced amid widespread pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

The law has been criticized by international observers and human rights organizations for its potential to curtail freedoms and judicial independence in the region.

Earlier on June 12, Chu was detained at a train station for wearing a T-shirt with the slogan “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times,” which Hong Kong authorities view as inciting secession.

He was also wearing a mask with the letters “FDNOL,” which stands for “five demands, not one less.” Both slogans were prominently featured during the mass protests of 2019.

Chu told the police that he wore the T-shirt to commemorate the 2019 protests, which had erupted in response to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s extradition law, perceived as a threat to Hong Kong's human rights and judicial independence.

Chu's trial, conducted in a specialized national security court, concluded with him receiving an eight-year prison sentence.

The court's decision is significant as it sets a precedent for future cases under this controversial legislation.

Chief Magistrate Victor So set the sentencing for September 19, reports The Epoch Times.

Hong Kong's Chief Secretary for Administration, John Lee, emphasized the conviction as evidence of the law's effectiveness.

“Chu Kai-pong’s conviction demonstrates our commitment to enforcing the national security law and ensuring public order,” Lee stated.

In contrast, human rights advocates and critics argue that the national security law is being used to suppress dissent and undermine the region’s freedoms.

Amnesty International and other organizations have condemned the trial, suggesting that the broad definitions within the law allow for excessive government control and suppression of political opposition.

International reactions have been mixed, with several countries and international bodies expressing concern over the implications of the national security law for Hong Kong’s autonomy and human rights.

The United States and the European Union, among others, have called for the preservation of freedoms and judicial independence in the territory.

In November of last year, Chu had been arrested from a Hong Kong airport for wearing the same T-shirt and carrying a flag with the same protest slogan.

Earlier this year, he was sentenced to three months in prison.

Chu’s latest conviction is a critical development in the ongoing debate over the balance between national security and civil liberties in Hong Kong.

The case highlights the growing tension between the region’s pro-democracy advocates and the Chinese government’s efforts to assert control, reflecting broader concerns about the erosion of freedoms under the national security framework.

Article 23, which was enacted by Hong Kong’s Legislative Council in March, encompasses five offenses: treason, insurrection, theft of state secrets and espionage, activities that threaten national security, and external interference.

The new security law has significantly raised the maximum prison sentence for sedition from two years to seven years, and it could extend to 10 years

if collusion with external forces is proven, according to Amnesty International.

The US government has expressed concerns over the broad and ambiguous definitions in the Hong Kong government’s legislation, particularly regarding terms like “state secrets” and “external interference.”

Such vagueness, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller warned in February, could be used to suppress dissent through the threat of arrest and detention.

Article 23 is the second major security law introduced since 2020, when Beijing implemented a national security law in Hong Kong that targets secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign entities, with penalties ranging up to life imprisonment.

Since the implementation of these stringent laws, Hong Kong, once a beacon of political and civil freedoms in Asia, has experienced a rapid shift towards authoritarianism.

Most pro-democracy politicians are either imprisoned or in exile, numerous civil society organizations have disbanded, and many international businesses have departed the city, according to reports.

The majority of the global human rights organizations have criticized Hong Kong’s national security law, highlighting its potential to undermine fundamental freedoms and human rights.

They argue that the law, which includes broad and vague definitions of offenses such as “state secrets” and “external interference,” could be used to stifle dissent and limit free expression.

Critics warn that the law’s severe penalties and expansive scope create an environment of fear and repression, potentially leading to widespread abuses and curtailment of civil liberties.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asian and global affairs.



Photo: Jon Tyson

'BROKEN' NEWS INDUSTRY FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE

From disinformation campaigns to soaring scepticism, plummeting trust and economic slumps, the global media landscape has been hit with blow after blow.

World News Day, which took place on Saturday with the support of hundreds of organisations including AFP, aims to raise awareness about the challenges endangering the hard-pressed industry.

'Broken business model'

In 2022, UNESCO warned that "the business model of the news media is broken".

Advertising revenue - the lifeline of news publications - has dried up in recent years, with Internet giants such as Google and Facebook owner Meta soaking up half of that spending, the report said.

Meta, Amazon and Google's parent company Alphabet alone account for 44 percent of global ad spend, while only 25 percent goes to traditional media organisations, according to a study by the World Advertising Research Center.

Platforms like Facebook "are now explicitly deprioritising news and political content", the Reuters Institute's 2024 Digital News Report pointed out.

Traffic from social to news sites has sharply declined as a result, causing a drop in revenue.

Few are keen to pay for news. Only 17 percent of people polled across 20 wealthy countries said they had online news subscriptions in 2023.

Such trends, leading to rising costs, have resulted in "layoffs, closures, and other cuts" in media organisations around the world, the study found.

Eroding trust

Public trust in the media has increasingly eroded in recent years.

Only four in 10 respondents said they trusted news most of the time, the Reuters Institute reported.

Meanwhile, young people are relying more on influencers and content creators than newspapers to stay informed.

For them, video is king, with the study citing the influence of TikTok and YouTube stars such as American Vitus Spehar and Frenchman Hugo Travers, known for his channel HugoDecrypte.

Growing disinformation

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has renewed concerns about disinformation - rife on social platforms - as the tool can generate convincing text and images.

In the United States, partisan websites masquerading as media outlets now outnumber American newspaper sites, the research group NewsGuard, which tracks misinformation, said in June.

"Pink slime" outlets - politically motivated websites that present themselves as independent local news outlets - are largely powered by AI. This appears to be an effort to sway political beliefs ahead of the US election.

As part of a national crackdown on disinformation, Brazil's Supreme Court suspended access to Elon Musk's X, formerly known as Twitter.

The court accused the social media platform of refusing to remove accounts charged with spreading fake news, and flouting other judicial rulings.

"Eradicating disinformation seems impossible, but things can be implemented," Reporters Without Borders (RSF) editorial director Anne Bocande told AFP.

Platforms can bolster regulation and create news reliability indicators, like RSF's Journalism Trust Initiative, Bocande said.

Alarming new player

AI has pushed news media into uncharted territory.

US streaming platform Peacock introduced AI-generated custom match reports during the Paris Olympics this year, read with the voice of sports

commentator Al Michaels - fuelling fears AI could replace journalists.

Despite these concerns, German media giant Axel Springer has decided to bet on AI while refocusing on its core news activities.

At its roster, which includes Politico, the Bild tabloid, Business Insider and Die Welt daily, AI will focus on menial production tasks so journalists can dedicate their time to reporting and securing scoops.

In a bid to profit from the technology's rise, the German publisher as well as The Associated Press and The Financial Times signed content partnerships with start-up OpenAI.

But the Microsoft-backed firm is also caught in a major lawsuit with The New York Times over copyright violations.

'Quiet repression'

With journalists frequently jailed, killed and attacked worldwide, "repression is a major issue," said RSF's Bocande.

A total of 584 journalists are languishing behind bars because of their work - with China, Belarus and Myanmar the world's most prolific jailers of reporters.

The war in Gaza sparked by Palestinian militant group Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel has already left a "terrible" mark on press freedom, Bocande added.

More than 130 journalists have been killed by Israeli airstrikes since October 7, 2023, including 32 while "in the exercise of their duties"

She said a "quiet repression" campaign is underway in countries around the world, including in democracies - with investigative journalism hampered by fresh laws on national security.

AFP



The Middle East is teetering on the brink of an all-out war, which could have dramatic effects worldwide. Photo: AFP

MIDDLE EAST ON BRINK OF 'ALL-OUT WAR' AS US URGENTLY TRIES TO SHAPE ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO IRAN

"Everything right now hinges on Israel's response, whether it escalates in a regional war," Toossi said, while adding that both Netanyahu and Iran were "taking huge gambles."

The United States knows Israel will retaliate after Iran's major missile attack, and even says it supports such a move, but is trying to influence the nature of the response, warning against targeting Tehran's nuclear facilities.

US President Joe Biden, who consulted with his G7 counterparts on Wednesday after the Islamic republic fired off about 200 ballistic missiles, set a clear red line for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"All seven of us agree that they have a right to respond, but they should respond in proportion," Biden said, without going into detail about what such a response might look like.

All sides are aware that any retaliatory strike against Iran's nuclear or oil installations would send the Middle East spiralling even more towards chaos, but Israel seems not to have made a decision yet.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken conferred with his French, British, German and Italian counterparts to convey that message, the State Department said.

In Washington and elsewhere, a sinking feeling of dread is prevailing as officials wait to see if Netanyahu, under pressure at home to act, will be tempted to strike hard and deeper into Iran, taking the fight to his country's sworn enemy.

After dealing the Iran-backed Hezbollah a serious blow in Lebanon by assassinating its leader last week, and after subduing Hamas in the Gaza Strip, will Netanyahu see this as a unique opportunity to go big? It's the million-dollar question.

On Wednesday, former Israeli premier Naftali Bennett called for a decisive strike to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities and thus "fatally cripple this terrorist regime."

Avoid all-out war

On Wednesday, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Washington has "made clear for some time that we do not want to see a full-blown regional escalation."

"Israel has a right to respond... and we are going to continue to discuss with them what that response might look like, but we don't want to see any action that would lead to a full-blown regional war," he told reporters.

Miller refuted any notion that Washington no longer had influence over its ally.

When Iran first struck Israel in April, a move that Tehran basically telegraphed to the world, Israel responded with limited strikes, thanks in part to US pressure, says Sina Toossi, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy in Washington.

"I do see this concerted effort by US officials and Israeli officials to downplay this in a sense," Toossi said, while acknowledging that Iran's action this time was stronger.

In April, Biden made a concerted effort to demonstrate Washington's support for Israel, quickly calling Netanyahu.

This time, the White House has thus far made no such outreach, with Biden on Wednesday visiting southeastern states hit hard by Hurricane Helene.

When asked when he might speak to Netanyahu, Biden replied, using his nickname: "We've been talking to Bibi' people the whole time. And it's not necessary to talk to Bibi. I'll probably be talking to him relatively soon."

Nevertheless, after nearly a year of war in Gaza with Hamas, Israel is certainly dictating the moves, and Washington, its primary diplomatic and military ally, is in crisis management mode, and has thus far refused to play the military aid card to bring Israel in line.

"Everything right now hinges on Israel's response, whether it escalates in a regional war," Toossi said, while adding that both Netanyahu and Iran were "taking huge gambles."

AFP



WHY DID ASHIN SARANA DISROBE?

"Oh, I'm going to disrobe!" And all of my body would be shaking. There were times when I was like, "Am I really going to do this?! No, that's not possible!!"

Jansen Stovicek was born in the Czech Republic. He became a Buddhist monk and lived for many years in Myanmar, where he was known as Ashin Sarana. His spiritual journey began as an early fascination with magic, eventually leading to a Zen monastery, to taking novice robes in Sri Lanka, and finally culminating in full bhikkhu ordination in Myanmar, where he gained some fame and a large Facebook following (a story that can be heard in full in an earlier Insight Myanmar Podcast). Now a student of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at a university in the United States, Jansen shares his thoughts and feelings about the journey that led him to his life-changing decision to disrobe.

His story is one of profound commitment to the monastic path, deep internal conflict, and the challenges of maintaining a strict, Buddhist monk's lifestyle in the West. His fateful decision was set in motion by the military coup in Myanmar in 2021. At that time, Ashin Sarana was not shy about speaking out against the military's aggression, and did so at length in an extended podcast discussion. After that was published, he learned he had been placed on a secret surveillance list by the Burmese military, making it unsafe for him to continue his monastic life in Myanmar, and so he was forced to leave the country. He spent three months in Vietnam, practicing and teaching Dhamma while searching for a place to establish a monastery. Despite his efforts, he was unable to find a suitable location.

Eventually, U Sarana settled in the US to pursue his

studies. But he faced many challenges as a monk who strictly adhered to the "91,805,036,000 rules of ancient Buddhist commentaries and Burmese traditions" that governed nearly every action and decision in life. And without the required personal and material support, it became nearly impossible to continue to stay in robes. Firstly, he could not find a monastery in the U.S. that would accommodate his adherence to all the rules. "I wasn't allowed [by those rules] to stay in a Buddhist monastery if a monk bought it with his own money, or if a monk repaired it with his own money. This removes basically 95% of monasteries in the U.S.," Jansen explains.

In addition to the problem of where to stay, he faced social complications within the Burmese diaspora. His popularity as a monk, and the support he received from lay Burmese, had apparently created tensions with some senior monks who, he explains, were concerned that their authority might be challenged. Despite his efforts to resolve these issues, the combination of financial burdens, social pressures, and the lack of a suitable monastery ultimately led him to the difficult decision to disrobe. Beyond these challenges, his decision caused an emotional upheaval not just because of the personal and spiritual implications, but also because some lay followers who had supported him throughout his monastic life were very critical of his decision, and in a public way.

Jansen acknowledges that his path might have been different if the coup had not occurred, as he had originally planned to continue his journey to enlightenment at the monastery of Sayadaw U Yewata at Pa Auk Monastery in northeastern Myanmar. But in spite of that, he does not blame the coup for his decision. "If there was no coup in Myanmar, I would still be a monk. But... I do not like to search for causes this way, because we can always find somebody's fault. I think it's better to go back to ourselves. So it's me; I have made my own decision to disrobe. I am fully responsible for that, whatever the reasons, and again, I told you just a few of them, not all of them. I want to maintain my privacy. But whatever were those reasons, I disrobed because I wanted to, and nobody else should ever be found guilty!"

CATCH THE PODCAST

Check out the full text and Myanmar Insight Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/9/19/episode-269-why-did-ashin-sarana-disrobe>

MYANMAR JUNTA DELEGATION ATTENDS ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL MEETING

A Myanmar junta's delegation, led by Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Nu Mra Zan, departed for Vientiane, Laos on September 24, 2024, to participate in the 32nd ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting, according to the junta-controlled newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The meeting, scheduled from September 25 to 27, is being hosted by Laos as the current rotating ASEAN Chair.

The delegation's participation comes at a time when Myanmar's socio-cultural landscape is under intense scrutiny. Since the military coup in 2021, there have been growing concerns about the preservation of Myanmar's rich cultural heritage, particularly its ancient religious sites.

Recent reports from Radio Free Asia (RFA) have highlighted a dire situation in Bagan, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its ancient Buddhist temples.

Heavy rains and flooding during the recent rainy season have caused damage to approximately 1,900 pagodas in the area, with many now at risk of collapse, RFA reported citing an archaeologist.

Compounding this natural disaster, the 2021 military coup and subsequent armed clashes in the region have left the Bagan Archaeological Zone severely understaffed.

This lack of personnel has significantly hampered conservation and restoration efforts, leaving the ancient sites even more vulnerable to environmental and human-caused damages.



JUNTA'S DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MEETS WITH THINK TANK AMID ONGOING CRISIS IN MYANMAR

Myanmar junta's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Swe met with members of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) on September 23, according to state-run media.

The closed-door meeting, held at the MISIS conference room, reportedly focused on international relations, Myanmar's current situation, and future directions for the think tank.

While official sources claim a cordial exchange of views on global, regional, and domestic affairs, independent analysts note the meeting occurs against a backdrop of ongoing turmoil in Myanmar.

Since the military coup in February 2021, the country has been embroiled in widespread civil unrest and armed conflict.

The United Nations has reported that over 1.5 million people have been displaced in Myanmar due to armed clashes, with thousands more seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

Human rights organizations and independent media have reported ongoing junta army's operations against civilian populations, including allegations of widespread arson attacks on villages, particularly in the Sagaing and Magway regions.

These reports claimed that junta forces have burned thousands of homes, displacing tens of thousands of civilians.

Additionally, the junta has been accused of conducting airstrikes in areas held by ethnic or resistance forces, resulting in civilian casualties.



FANS REACT ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO BURMESE LETHWEI FIGHTERS' RESULTS IN THAILAND

Following the ONE Friday Fights event in Bangkok, Thailand, Burmese martial arts fans took to social media to express their thoughts on the performances of Burmese Lethwei fighters Thant Zin and Soe Lin Oo.

In a gripping flyweight kickboxing match at ONE Friday Fights in Bangkok, Burmese Lethwei fighter Thant Zin faced off against Japanese kickboxer Takeru on September 27.

Round 1 saw intense close-range exchanges. Thant Zin struck first, flooring Takeru with a powerful leaping left hook.

Takeru came back aggressively in Round 2. He pushed Thant Zin onto the defensive, targeting both body and head. A devastating front kick to Zin's midsection set up Takeru's revenge, as he quickly scored two knockdowns.

The bout ended with Takeru knocking out Zin in an electrifying contest.

Despite Zin's defeat, Burmese fans showed their support on social media, particularly Facebook. Many expressed satisfaction with his performance.

A Burmese Facebook user remarked, "Even though Thant Zin lost, I'm satisfied. Why? Because he was able to trip a world-class kickboxer, causing him to fall. I saw Thant Zin looking upset after the match, but no matter what, you did your best. We all believe you'll come back in your best form for the next fights. Don't be discouraged. We're always supporting you. Keep fighting, my man!"

On the same day and location, another highly anticipated match took place. Burmese Lethwei fighter Soe Lin Oo faced Thai-Algerian Muay Thai boxer Nabil Anane in a ONE Lumpinee Full Fight Muay Thai match.

This bout, featuring a 9-inch height difference, captured the attention of both Myanmar and Thais.

In the early rounds, Soe Lin Oo attempted to close the distance, while the taller Nabil used his reach advantage to land punches and knee strikes from afar. Both fighters stuck to their pre-planned strategies.

Soe Lin Oo struggled to overcome Nabil's effective distance management, leading to a challenging fight. By the end of the third round, unable to get close to Nabil, Soe Lin Oo lost the match by decision.

Another Burmese Facebook user offered a critical perspective on Soe Lin Oo's performance.

"He lacked a proper gameplan. He couldn't even get close enough for body shots. With Nabil controlling the reach, Soe Lin Oo was just punching air. When Nabil tried to force his way in, only Soe's toughness saved him from being knocked out by Nabil's knee strikes. An average person would have been knocked out already. This weakness in technique is becoming a traditional problem for our Lethwei fighters."

MYANMAR JUNTA OFFERS PEACE TALKS; GENERAL PUBLIC SKEPTICAL

On September 26, the junta issued a statement offering ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and People's Defense Forces (PDFs) resisting it to abandon their armed struggle and resolve political issues through political means.

The public widely criticized this offer as untrustworthy, noting that the junta continues to bomb even civilian areas indiscriminately.

The junta's statement stated that to achieve lasting peace and development, it invites "ethnic armed organizations, terrorist insurgent groups, and terrorist PDF groups opposing the state" to abandon their armed struggle and engage in resolving political issues through political party channels or the election process."

A social media user commented, "These tactics are similar to those used by the SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] under Than Shwe in post-1988. The difference now is that the NUG [the shadow National Unity Government], EAOs, and PDFs are growing stronger in spirit, principle, and force. Min Aung Hlaing's group's brutal actions against civilians nationwide have become increasingly apparent, and no one can accept them anymore."

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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.