

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



BLOCKED

Myanmar junta makes it hard to freely access the internet

- **How neighbours and internationals will not end the war in Myanmar - Igor Blazevic**

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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.

THOUSANDS FLOOD SHWEDAGON PAGODA TO PRAY FOR END TO CONFLICT AND FLOODS

What were pilgrims praying for during the latest Thadingyut Festival circulating around the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon?

Typically, the Light Festival of Myanmar, held on the full moon day of the Burmese lunar month of Thadingyut, sees Yangon residents throng Shwedagon. But this year there appeared to be a substantial uptick in people traveling in from across crisis-hit Myanmar.

Working class people and people from a wide spread of Myanmar townships came last week to pay homage and make merit.

As is custom, Thadingyut is held at the end of the Buddhist sabbath or Vassa and is the second most popular festival in Myanmar after Thingyan Festival, the New Year Water Festival. Thadingyut festival is the celebration to welcome the Buddha's descent from the heaven after he preached the Abhidhamma to his mother, Maya, who was reborn in the heaven.

Visiting pilgrims had a lot on their minds, not least the Myanmar civil war that in one form another touches everybody's lives, but also the recent massive flooding that struck many parts of Myanmar this year. While much of the flooding has gone down, the monsoon still appeared to be hanging around with some areas recently hit by further heavy rain.

Anecdotally, it appeared many pilgrims from "out of town" crisis-hit regions sought solace and better luck as the country wallows in man-made and natural problems. Some, it would appear, had never visited Shwedagon – Yangon's

jewel – before. Temple staff noted an increase in devotees this year.

Over three years after the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar is becoming a basket case, a country ruled by a brutal dictator who is rejected by most of the people. The overall crisis is worsening as the junta increasingly targets civilians and seeks to round up thousands of unwilling youth to add to the ranks of their tired soldiers – cannon fodder to be slaughtered.

The Spring Revolution, launched in 2021 against the junta, is picking up momentum, with the fight-back occasionally reverberating on the streets of Yangon, occasional explosions rattling the calm of Myanmar's commercial capital.

Whatever news the devotees are able to pick up makes grim reading and watching, as peacemakers and regional and international players struggle to find a solution to the conflict. The recent ASEAN summit highlighted the Myanmar crisis as a blistering sore in Southeast Asia. But the forum's Five-Point Consensus is in tatters – all hope and little action. Say critics – as regional countries continue to engage with the distasteful junta.

Prayers are indeed needed as the Myanmar people seek an end to their nightmare. But real action is needed from the international community if there is to be any chance of turning the tables on the brutal military junta.

EDITORIAL

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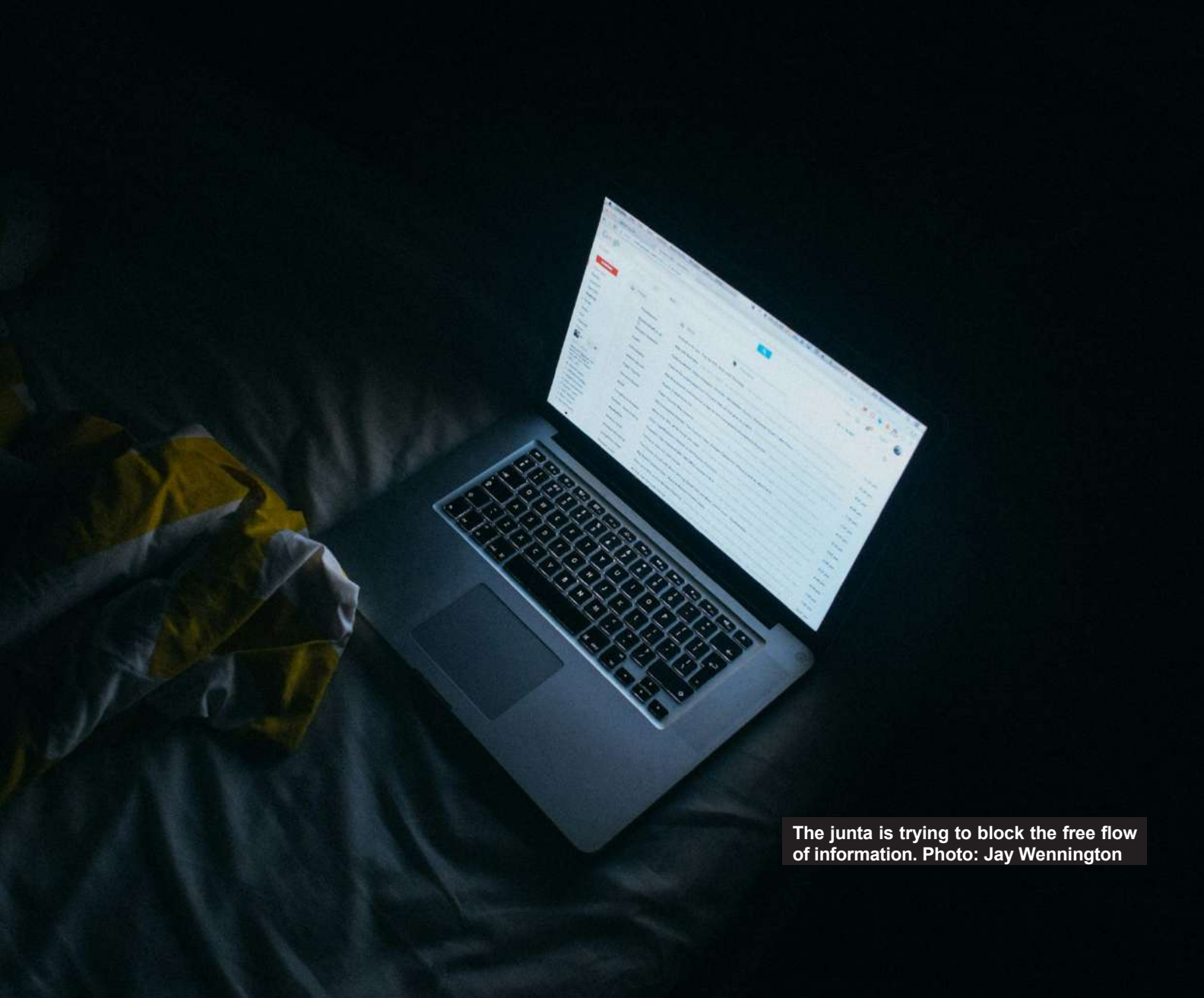
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Cover photo of man using the internet by Awmleer





The junta is trying to block the free flow of information. Photo: Jay Wennington

BLOCKED

**MYANMAR JUNTA MAKES
IT HARD TO FREELY
ACCESS THE INTERNET**

A new report says Myanmar is the world's worst country for digital rights. Internet freedom in Myanmar deteriorated again from 2023 to 2024 and the country is now one of the worst in the world alongside China.

The Freedom House report tracks the key developments from June 1, 2023 to May 31, 2024.

Internet freedom in Myanmar marked a historic low during the coverage period, making Myanmar's information environment dire. The military, which seized control of the state in a February 2021 coup, continued to impose localized internet-access blocks, data price hikes, online trolling, and arbitrary prosecutions resulting in long prison sentences. The military's direct and indirect control over all major service providers has also enabled the enforcement of strict rules on user identity registration, as well as mass censorship and surveillance.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

The authorities frequently enforced short-term, localized restrictions on internet access to prevent the opposition or resistance from organizing or sharing information about atrocities, effectively impacting millions of users.

In May 2024, WhatsApp, X, and Instagram were restricted by the government. Alongside the social media platforms, many popular VPNs, including Psiphon and NordVPN, became inaccessible.

In an effort to bypass platform moderation policies, in 2023, the Ministry of Information launched a local YouTube imitator, MTube, to host videos produced by the state and state-controlled channels.

Scores of internet users were imprisoned for their online activities during the coverage period, with military courts issuing multi-year prison sentences.

In May 2024, the military ramped up its offline crackdown on VPNs, arresting and fining those found to have VPN apps on their mobile devices.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

Though internet penetration in Myanmar has generally expanded in recent years - dramatically growing in the Thein Sein regime period - during the report coverage period, people's access to internet was limited by power shortages, access restrictions, and high costs imposed by the military.



Cracking down on net access:
Photo: Leon Seibert

As of January 2024, internet penetration was 44 percent. Most internet users in Myanmar rely on mobile services, and the mobile penetration rate was 117.4 percent. There were 64.3 million mobile connections in the country as of February 2024, down from 73 million in January 2022. The mobile penetration rate was higher during the first two years following the coup because many users had multiple SIM cards, discarding and replacing them to avoid surveillance and boycott military-controlled service providers.

Telecommunications infrastructure has been damaged as a consequence of the armed conflict between the military and resistance groups. Expansion has similarly been curtailed by physical insecurity. More than 400 cell towers were destroyed in 2021 by resistance groups and an unknown number are not regularly serviced or refueled due to physical risk.

The National Unity Government or NUG stated in February 2023 that it had started providing publicly accessible internet connections in at least 15 townships outside military control, expanding to 60 by the end of 2023. However, efforts to establish small-scale infrastructure have faced obstacles. For

instance, during the previous report coverage period, an improvised tower erected by one group was reportedly destroyed by the military. The military has also threatened satellite internet users and improvised-tower users with imprisonment.

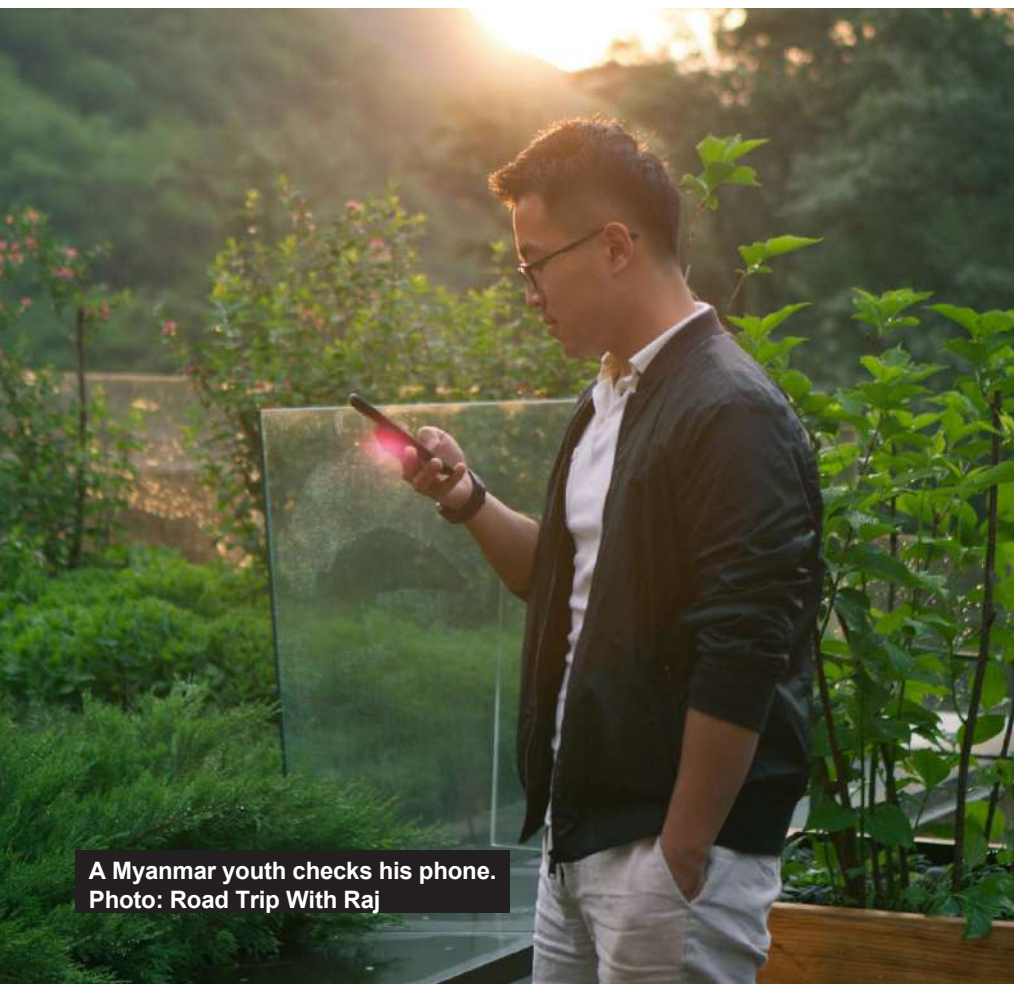
Infrastructure development has also been hampered by flooding, unreliable electricity, an inefficient bureaucracy, fuel hoarding, and corruption in the private and public sectors. The amount of electricity produced in the country has also significantly declined since the coup. Daily power outages throughout the coverage period ranged from 5 to 16 hours in length. In 2022, the Ministry of Power and Energy announced that 24-hour outages could occur in parts of Myanmar due to infrastructure repairs, though other sources claimed that daylong outages were already taking place in Yangon.

BEYOND REACH?

The average cost of internet access dropped from a peak in 2022 but remains more expensive than before the 2021 coup. Price increases imposed by the military - combined with inflationary pressures and increased unemployment - have forced poorer people in Myanmar to reduce their usage or stop it altogether. Some have sold their devices to pay for basic needs.

Previously, in December 2021, the military-controlled Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) ordered all mobile service providers to double their data prices, with 1 GB of nonpackaged mobile data costing 10,000 kyat (\$4.70) at the time. The MoTC also imposed a purchase tax on SIM-card sales in January 2022, tripled telecommunications firms' corporate tax, and created a tax for mandatory registration of international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) numbers.

Mobile service providers that were not at the time affiliated with the military reported that they did



A Myanmar youth checks his phone.
Photo: Road Trip With Raj

not request the increases.

Users in some urban areas can access fixed-line and wireless broadband. As of March 2024, major service providers offer fixed-line connections at rates ranging between 28,000 kyat (\$13.19) to 35,000 kyat (\$16.50) per month. Satellite internet connections are significantly more expensive, costing several hundred dollars per month, and only payable abroad.

Poorer and rural internet users, already lacking devices and struggling with the country's rapid postcoup financial downturn, experienced far greater relative increases in internet-access costs since the 2021 coup than richer urban users. Online media outlets report that rural audiences no longer look at data-heavy audio-visual content, migrating to low data text-based content on Telegram for instance.

Gender disparity in internet access has declined in recent years but still remains. For women, barriers to owning and using a mobile phone to access the internet include perceived lack of relevance, high costs, and insufficient literacy skills.

RESTRICTING CONNECTIVITY

The military has repeatedly shut down telecommunications services since seizing power. In the early hours of February 1, 2021, armed soldiers forcefully entered telecommunications providers' offices and demanded a nationwide cut to internet access. The military also instructed service providers to implement extensive restrictions on specific targets, blocking access to websites, applications, and social media platforms.

The military has since eased the nationwide restrictions, instead replacing it with localized internet restrictions in areas where resistance groups are particularly active. These localized cuts frequently coincide with offline crackdowns by the military.

The MoTC has significant powers to disrupt connectivity without oversight or safeguards, as it controls much of the telecommunications infrastructure via the state-owned MPT. During the coverage period, cuts were reported in Ayeyarwady Region, Bago Region, Chin State, Kachin State, Kayah State, Kayin State, the

Kokang Self-Administered Zone within Shan State, Magway Region, Mon State, Rakhine State, Sagaing Region, Shan State, and the cities of Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw, affecting millions of users. Sagaing Region, a hub of resistance, has faced especially long disruptions. The military has reportedly used portable signal jammers to restrict local communications when raiding villages. Since 2022, fixed-line connections in Yangon and other cities have been throttled and disrupted.

Myanmar has three underwater and four overland internet gateways. Private-sector providers were gradually diversifying ownership of mobile infrastructure and the internet backbone prior to the coup; since the coup, however, such efforts have yet to materialize, as the military seeks to strengthen its grip on Myanmar's internet infrastructure. For instance, in 2023, the military announced that any unlicensed satellite equipment being used to access the internet was illegal and users would be prosecuted.

JUNTA CONTROL

Before the coup, the administration of telecommunications licenses was generally regarded as fair and transparent, and external efforts to influence decisions were largely rebuffed. Now, the military directly controls two of Myanmar's four mobile service providers.

The military-owned Mytel, part of which is indirectly owned by the Vietnamese military, was licensed in 2017. Despite facing an anti-coup consumer boycott in 2021, Mytel had approximately 13 million subscribers in 2023. Following the coup, the military also seized control of state-operated MPT, which is partly owned by Japanese telecommunications companies KDDI and Sumitomo, and, as of early 2024, has 29.6 million subscribers. Mytel and MPT are also the country's leading broadband providers, giving the military significant control over broadband connectivity as well.

The other two mobile service providers, Atom (formerly Telenor), with 18 million subscribers in 2023, and Ooredoo, with 9 million subscribers in 2022, were operated by foreign companies prior to the coup, but are now under the ownership of opaque firms with close links to the military. For instance, in May 2024, Ooredoo completed the sale of its Myanmar operations to Nine

Communications, a Singapore-based subsidiary that is reportedly owned by military-linked individuals but continues to operate under the Ooredoo brand. Similarly, Telenor sold its Myanmar operations in March 2022 to Investcom, a joint venture between M1 Group, a Lebanon-based investing company, and Shwe Byain Phyu, a military-linked local firm. In June 2022, they renamed the provider "Atom".

In February 2024, after Shwe Byain Phyu was sanctioned by the Canadian and US governments (in September 2023 and January 2024 respectively), the firm sold their majority stake in Atom to Myancom Holding. Since the sale, news site Myanmar Now reported on allegations that the newly incorporated Myancom Holding is a shell company with the same beneficiaries as Shwe Byain Phyu.

Foreign companies are also divesting from other parts of the telecommunications infrastructure. In April 2024, Malaysian company Axiata said it was seeking regulatory approval to sell at least 3,000 towers to an unknown local buyer, citing difficulties operating in Myanmar.

Myanmar's regulatory bodies have been under the authority of the military since the 2021 coup. The MoTC's Posts and Telecommunications Department (PTD) is responsible for regulating the telecommunications sector. As a ministerial department run by former military officers, the PTD has no legal or practical safeguards for its regulatory and operational independence, leaving it completely open to political interference.

The military has controlled the PTD's regulation of telecommunications companies and licensing since seizing power. PTD decisions lack any transparency and demonstrate a bias in favour of the military's interests. For instance, when Telenor submitted a request for permission to sell its Myanmar operations in 2022, the PTD required the provider to sell to the military's preferred buyer. The PTD has also publicly threatened its own staff for participating in pro-democracy protests and strikes.

Since the 2021 coup, the military has consolidated two distinct blocking regimes. Mobile service providers must block all websites except those on a list preapproved by the military. All fixed-line and wireless broadband service providers, which serve only a small

portion of the public, allow access by default but block many specific addresses.

BLOCKING POPULAR APPS

In May 2024, the MoTC issued orders to mobile and broadband telecommunications providers to block WhatsApp, X, Instagram, and VPNs; alongside the platforms, many popular VPNs, including Psiphon and NordVPN, became inaccessible soon after. In June 2024, the Associated Press reported that only one VPN it tested still worked, and noted slow connection speeds. However, many experts have stated that it will be difficult to determine the full scope of the new blocks, as accessibility in the country varies daily. Signal, an encrypted messaging service, was restricted in July 2024, after the coverage period.

In June 2024, activist group Justice for Myanmar published a report about the military's use of a new web surveillance and censorship system at the end of May, with potential capabilities "to intercept and decrypt web traffic and block applications and websites, including the widespread use of [VPNs]." Activists believe the technology may be being used to implement the blocks.

The military's attempts to block censorship circumvention tools like VPNs, including via an earlier ban in 2021, have been indiscriminate and led to significant collateral damage. For instance, immediately after VPNs became inaccessible in May 2024, media outlets saw a massive decline in online audience numbers. Blocks have also disrupted content delivery networks like Google and Amazon services, banking, transportation, and - during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic - education and health care. Some businesses and banks have raised concerns about their ability to operate. In addition, the blocks have reportedly undermined networks outside the country.

Previously, in the first year following the coup, the military-controlled MoTC regularly issued secretive blocking orders to service providers - several per week during the most violent periods - with each containing hundreds of thousands of addresses to block. The first such order was issued on February 3, 2021, and targeted Facebook and WhatsApp. Orders to block Instagram and what was then known as Twitter

arrived on February 5, followed later by blocks on most independent media outlets and international sources of information such as Wikipedia. Some blocking orders were reversed in May 2021.

The default blocking on mobile services began on May 25, 2021, when the military ordered providers to obstruct access to all websites and internet protocol (IP) addresses except for 1,200 approved addresses that included a large contingent of banking and financial sites, a small number of entertainment sites like YouTube and Netflix, news sites such as the New York Times and US-based Cable News Network (CNN), and gaming platforms.

The list of approved addresses was updated in 2022 to add business sites, including those of local businesses - it is unclear how many further updates have occurred since then.

Telenor disclosed that MoTC orders issued immediately after the coup in 2021 required telecommunications companies to block access to URLs and IP addresses under Section 77 of the Telecommunications Law, which allows authorities to

issue blocking orders to license holders in "emergency situations." The military cited goals like "preserving stability" and preventing "fake news" from "spreading misunderstanding."

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, service providers did not implement blocking orders consistently, with addresses blocked by some providers but not by others. For example, Facebook was accessible via at least one broadband provider, despite being subject to a blocking order, and for some Mytel subscribers, despite not being on the list of approved sites. It was unclear whether this was due to confusion, technical difficulties, or discretion - some staff at service providers reportedly tried to limit the effects of military orders by interpreting them narrowly or subverting their application.

All in all, the Myanmar junta has sought to control information and news in the country as it seeks to hold on to power. But a significant proportion still tries to stay connected, despite the difficulties.

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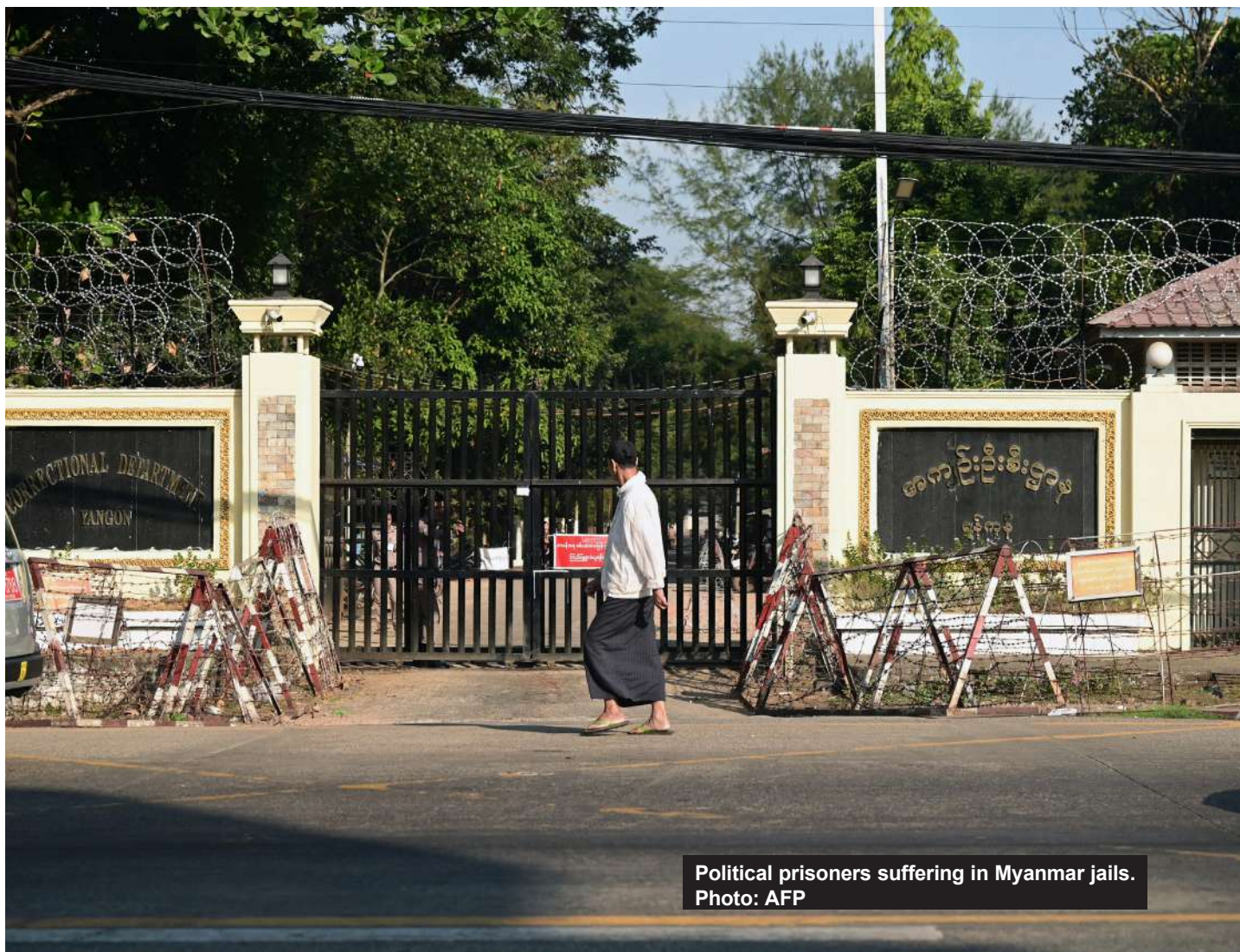
MNDAA AND CHINA RELATIONS - CHINA PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE RESISTANCE FORCES IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Following Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Naypyidaw on August 14, 2024, tensions between China and ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar have escalated. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) issued a statement distancing itself from the National Unity Government (NUG) and its military efforts. The MNDAA declared that it would not pursue independence or separate from Myanmar, nor would it engage with foreign powers opposing Myanmar and China.

In a similar move, on August 29, 2024, the Ruili State Security Committee issued a warning to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), urging them to cease military operations along the Myanmar-China border. The letter threatened that if TNLA continued fighting against Myanmar's military regime, China would take action to "teach them humility".

Adding to the pressure, a leaked document in early October revealed details of a meeting between the Chinese special envoy for Asian Affairs, Deng Xijun, and the Vice-Chair of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Yunnan, China. The meeting disclosed China's stance against the fall of Myanmar's military regime. China reportedly pressured the UWSA not to support the MNDAA, both of which maintain close ties with Beijing. This leaked document, written in Burmese, has led many analysts to speculate that it is an indirect message from China to the resistance forces and other parties opposed to the junta.

In another development, China met with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) Acting President General Gam Shawng in Yingjiang, Yunnan. The Chinese urged the KIA to suspend its military operations against the junta, but the KIA rejected this request. Shortly



Political prisoners suffering in Myanmar jails. Photo: AFP

afterward, the KIA captured the headquarters of the Border Guard Force, a former stronghold of the New Democratic Army (Kachin). In response, China shut down all border gates linked to KIA-controlled areas.

Border closures have severely impacted trade in northern Shan State, particularly in MNDA and TNLA-controlled territories. On July 9, 2024, China shut down these gates, leading to skyrocketing food and drug prices due to disrupted trade. However, border trade continues through Muse, an area still controlled by junta forces.

The challenges and conditions of Myanmar political prisoners in prisons

The conditions for political prisoners in Myanmar have deteriorated significantly, particularly regarding access to medical care, according to the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM). A total of 14 political prisoners, including two women, have died

since the beginning of 2024 due to the lack of medical treatment.

Among the most prominent cases is the death of former Mandalay Region Chief Minister Dr. Zaw Myint Maung, who passed away from leukemia on October 7 after being denied medical treatment during his detention. Just a week later, another political prisoner, Htay Aung Kyaw, died in Thayawaddy Prison. These deaths follow a troubling pattern, with 17 political prisoners reported dead in 2023 under similar circumstances.

In a particularly tragic incident at Thayet Prison, Nyi Nyi, a 39-year-old inmate, died on July 27, 2024, after his blood pressure spiked to 240/140. Despite fellow prisoners' urgent requests for medical attention on the night of July 26, prison authorities responded slowly and refused to transfer him to an external hospital, citing security concerns.



Female political prisoners have also faced alarming mistreatment. At Deik-U Prison, women reported male staff entering the bathing area. In response to a protest by the inmates, prison authorities raided the female quarters the next night, injuring eight women who were subsequently denied medical care.

Since the February 2021 coup, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports that 103 political prisoners have died in Myanmar's prisons, with 63 of these deaths attributed to inadequate medical care.

Update on the opening up of the Asia Highway, from Mae Sot through Myawaddy to inside Myanmar

The Asia Highway, which connects Mae Sot, Thailand, and Myawaddy, Myanmar, providing direct access to Yangon, has been closed by the Karen National Union (KNU) since November 2023. The closure has caused significant disruption for both commuters and trade, forcing travelers to use old and seasonal roads, which has led to a sharp rise in transportation costs.

In response, the junta launched "Operation Aung Zeya" with the aim of recapturing Myawaddy, a key border town with Thailand. As a result of this military campaign, the KNU has reinforced its decision to keep the highway closed. Despite the blockade's impact, Thailand has attempted to mediate the reopening of the route by engaging both the Myanmar military, also known as the State Administration Council (SAC), and Karen armed groups.

However, divisions have emerged among the Karen armed groups regarding the reopening. Peace factions allied with the junta, such as the Border Guard Force (BGF), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), and the Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNLA-PC), are in favour of reopening the highway. In

contrast, the KNU, which continues to fight against the military regime, remains hesitant, citing the need to resist the junta's intensified military operations along the route.

For the junta, reopening the highway is vital to restore border trade with Thailand, as the closure has caused a sharp drop in revenue from taxes and foreign exchange. Militarily, the junta aims to retake key positions it lost in the KNU and People's Defense Force (PDF) offensive, including Light Infantry Battalion bases No. 355, 356, and 357, located in Myawaddy. However, on October 16, the joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA/KNU) and the PDF seized a strategic hilltop that had been surrounded by resistance forces for months, dealing a blow to the junta's efforts.

Negotiations remain ongoing, with the Thai government pressuring the KNU to reopen the highway, while the KNU remains firm amid the escalating conflict.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar junta used drones to attack the headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU), located in the Brigade 7 area of Hpa-an District along the Thailand-Myanmar border on the morning of 22 October, according to reports from local sources.

The attack began around 11:00 am, with drones bombing the central offices of the KNU, known as Thaebaehta and Thawakha. The KNU's top leadership were holding a meeting close to the attack site, but the gathering was abruptly canceled, and attendees dispersed following the assault, sources from KNU's Brigade 7 reported.

This marks the first time the KNU headquarters has been bombed, with the source confirming that no casualties occurred during the attack.



Smoke-bomb and protest in Yangon. Photo: Supplied

YANGON SEES NEW ANTI-JUNTA CAMPAIGN URGING PUBLIC TO 'FIGHT BACK' AMID HEIGHTENED MILITARY CRACKDOWN IN MYANMAR

On the morning of 16 October, a campaign encouraging resistance against Myanmar's military junta, with the slogan "Don't be afraid and fight back," was launched by a revolutionary group in Yangon. This action took place despite increased military security and ongoing arrests of anti-regime activists.

As part of the disobedience movement, a banner bearing the message was displayed, signaling defiance against the military's crackdown on striking forces. The campaign calls for continued resistance, despite the arrests of activists in recent months.

"People must stay committed to the revolution. The sacrifices made by our comrades were not in vain. Even if our comrades in Yangon are arrested, the fight will continue. As long as one of us remains, we will

keep resisting the dictatorship," said Ko AK, an Owl Community ground officer, urging public involvement in the resistance.

This movement was a coordinated effort by four revolutionary groups in Yangon: Mayangone Democratic Front (MDF), Owl Community, Linn Yaung Ni Youth Organization (LYNYO), and Kyimyindaing Networks (KMD18), collectively known as the Four Group of Yangon Resistance Brotherhoods.

Despite the junta's arrest of more than 10 young activists between September and October, strike movements and targeted attacks on military forces continue in Yangon. Revolutionary groups have issued warnings about the junta's intensified crackdown on youth involved in the resistance, urging increased vigilance for security.

SIXTEEN CHIN RESISTANCE FIGHTERS KILLED IN OCTOBER CLASHES WITH MYANMAR JUNTA



Photo: AFP

The Institute of Chin Affairs (ICA) reported on 14 October that 16 members of the Chin Revolutionary Forces were killed in battles with the Myanmar junta between 1 and 13 October. These casualties occurred amidst fierce fighting in Chin State.

According to the ICA, local news sources revealed that airstrikes caused widespread destruction, including burning homes and civilian casualties in Mindat and Thantlang Townships. Falam Township also saw deaths and injuries from similar attacks. The escalating violence highlights the intensifying conflict between Chin revolutionary forces and the junta.

"The death toll began rising from 1 October, largely due to airstrikes carried out by the Military Council," said Salai Van Sui San, Deputy Director of ICA.

Salai Van Sui San further noted that many young Chin fighters, who have deeply invested in Chin State, lost their lives during clashes with military forces.

Salai Van Sui San emphasized the need for reflection on the heavy losses, questioning whether it is an issue of military strategy or insufficient effort. He called for revolutionary leaders and the people to reconsider their approach to reduce casualties and strengthen their resistance.

On 4 October, Chin State forces launched an offensive against junta troops in Thantlang town, sparking intense fighting that lasted until 6:00 pm that day. In response, the junta carried out over 60 Y-12 airstrikes and at least 10 jet fighter assaults.

The ICA's statement also revealed that 16 individuals, including CDF-Thantlang Chief of Staff Salai Ram Zel, were killed, with more than 40 others injured during 13 days of consecutive fighting in Thantlang town.

A CDF-Thantlang official reported that since 22 July, Chin forces have persistently fought to capture Thantlang, despite the junta's fierce resistance and continuous heavy airstrikes. They remain determined to continue their efforts until the town is fully seized.

Mindat town has been under attack since 1 October, with over 30 houses destroyed by military assaults.

From 1 February 2021, to 1 February 2024, following the military coup, a total of 618 people were killed in the conflict in Chin State, according to the ICA. This includes 372 civilians and 246 Chin resistance fighters.



MYANMAR'S NUG ANNOUNCES DESTRUCTION OF NARCOTICS SEIZED IN PINLEBU OPERATION

The NUG announced on 15 October the incineration of drugs seized during the recent operation to liberate Pinlebu in Sagaing Region.

A team led by Union Minister U Yee Mon of the National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Defence and local residents attended a ceremony to incinerate narcotics seized during the Pinlebu liberation operation.

The confiscated narcotics, which were incinerated, included 1,352 containers (locally known as "soap cups") of white opium, 1,285 packs of white opium, and 18 packs of black opium, with each pack of black opium estimated to weigh 1 viss (about 1.63 kilograms).

During the ceremony, U Yee Mon expressed his deep gratitude to the Local residents for their support of the revolutionary forces. He revealed that interrogated prisoners from the military council's troops had admitted to using drugs, and that the seized narcotics provided

clear evidence of the military council's involvement not only in drug use but also in large-scale trafficking and distribution.

The Union Minister emphasized that the NUG is working to establish effective public administration in liberated towns and villages, ensuring that essential public services are available to all residents. He warned that any improper actions by either military or civilian officials would be dealt with appropriately and firmly. U Yee Mon also condemned the military council for its repeated coups, which have caused immense suffering to the people and left Myanmar isolated on the global stage. He stated that the 2021 coup was a clear attempt to consolidate military control, which forced the people to initiate an armed resistance.

The minister declared that, without the resistance, the country's future would have been lost, making it crucial to confront and overthrow the military oppressors with arms.

Photo: Yves Alerie

CHINA CONSULATE IN MYANMAR'S MANDALAY HIT WITH EXPLOSIVE DEVICE: LOCAL MEDIA

China's consulate in Myanmar's Mandalay city was attacked with an explosive device, local media said Saturday, adding that no deaths or injuries were reported.

The blast occurred at the consulate office in central Mandalay, south of the sprawling Royal Palace, around 7 pm local time Friday (1230 GMT Friday), local media said.

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

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military deposed the government of Aung San Suu Kyi and seized power in 2021.

A Myanmar official in Mandalay confirmed to AFP

there had been "an incident at the Chinese consulate office compound in Mandalay late evening yesterday".

"There was no one injured," the official said, without specifying the nature of the incident.

The Irrawaddy outlet reported a grenade had been thrown at the compound, which is usually guarded by members of Myanmar's security forces.

The Voice of Myanmar reported the consulate had been hit by an unidentified "explosion" without giving details.

China's embassy in Yangon did not respond to AFP's queries, and a junta spokesman was unreachable for comment.

AFP



THREE ROHINGYA REFUGEES SUFFOCATE TO DEATH IN THAILAND

Three Rohingya refugees suffocated to death while packed into trucks in Thailand, with two suspected people-smugglers arrested last Friday, police said.

The mainly Muslim Rohingya are heavily persecuted in war-torn western Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia through Thailand.

A passing monk found two dead refugees, along with eight survivors -- seven of them injured -- in a forest in Chumphon province on Thursday, officers said.

One of the injured refugees died on Friday, a hospital staff member told AFP.

The uninjured survivor told police that traffickers had packed 26 people into two vehicles after they had made their way across the Thai-Myanmar border.

"The driver allegedly dumped the Rohingyas there after realising some of them were injured," police said in a statement.

Officers arrested two Thai drivers and confiscated their trucks for further investigation, they said, adding the other 16 Rohingya in the group had escaped.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled Myanmar for neighbouring Bangladesh in 2017 during a crackdown by the military that is now the subject of a United Nations genocide court case.

Myanmar's military seized power in a 2021 coup and three years of war since then have displaced millions of people in the country.

AFP



Photo: AFP

BOAT CARRYING MORE THAN 100 ROHINGYA SIGHTED OFF INDONESIA: OFFICIALS

A boat loaded with more than 100 Rohingya refugees was spotted off Indonesia's westernmost province with at least one dead body seen on board, local officials said Saturday.

The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on long and dangerous sea journeys to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

The Rohingya boat is anchored around three to four miles (five to six kilometres) off the coast of South Aceh district with its engine turned off, community leader Muhammad Jabal told AFP.

He said the boat was first seen on Friday when he and others set off to deliver food and water to the refugees, estimating more than a hundred were on board.

"I saw with my own eyes there was a body. There were many children too aboard the boat," Jabal said.

The day before the sighting of the boat, the body of a Rohingya woman was found at sea.

Local police chief Sabda Man Sobri confirmed she was a member of the ethnic group, but could not comment on whether she was connected to the boat.

Yuhelmi, a South Aceh district spokesperson, confirmed the boat sighting but said locals were waiting for an immigration team from provincial capital Banda Aceh to arrive before deciding the next step for the refugees.

"Whether (the refugees) will be brought on land, that's within the authority of the immigration. For now, there has been no decision," said Yuhelmi, who goes by one name.

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said it had been informed by local authorities about the vessel and hoped the refugees would be rescued immediately.

Many Acehnese are sympathetic to the plight of the Rohingya but some locals have opposed their arrivals, accusing members of anti-social behaviour.

In December 2023, hundreds of students forced the relocation of more than a hundred Rohingya refugees, storming a function hall in Aceh where they were sheltering and kicking their belongings.

AFP



Photo: AFP

FLOOD IN MYANMAR LEAVES 520 PEOPLE DEAD AND MISSING, DEPUTY JUNTA CHIEF SAYS

Deputy junta chairman Vice-Senior General Soe Win said 520 people were dead and missing in the disaster. The recent disaster also killed more than 180,000 animals and damages more than 700,000 acres of paddy and other crops across the nation, he added.

Soe Win made these remarks in a speech delivered at a ceremony to mark the International Day of Disaster Risk Reduction 2024 at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-I in Naypyidaw on 13 October.

The junta announced these casualty figures one month after Typhoon Yagi devastated the country. The deputy chairman said the recent flood affected nine regions and states with about one million people from more than 80,000 families suffering the impacts of flooding.

The country received donations of more than 52 billion Kyats for rescue, relief, emergency response, and rehabilitation measures.

The Vice-Senior General highlighted that bereaved families obtained K1 million per person killed in the natural disaster through the National Disaster Management Fund and region and state funds. The National Disaster Management Fund will also allocate

cash assistance for damaged homes, he added.

Vice-Senior General Soe Win is the Chairman of the National Disaster Management Committee. In his speech, he remarked that the management committee initiated the creation of a hazard map and a risk map through the endeavours of experienced experts.

Vice-Senior General Soe Win disclosed that the government manages the issuance of proper cash assistance, loans without interest, and soft loans with low interest rates for livelihoods while also allocating some amounts from the National Disaster Management Fund.

The state-run daily paper reported that floods are the biggest natural disaster in the country every year. Myanmar ranked 6th in the World Risk Index (WRI) 2023 for disaster risk with its index at 36.26. The World Risk Index (WRI) is a key feature of the World Risk Report (WRR). Myanmar must continue to work for disaster reduction measures, it says.

The National Unity Government (NUG) issued a press statement on 6 October stating that the remnants of Typhoon Yagi devastated the country with floods and landslides which left over one million flood victims and over 600 people dead.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR FACES ECONOMIC HARDSHIP FOLLOWING 2021 COUP, DESPITE JUNTA'S CLAIMS

On 15 October, Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing claimed that his regime has not only stabilized the country's struggling economy amid ongoing domestic and international challenges but also achieved progress in education, healthcare, and agriculture.

Making these claims on the 9th anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), Min Aung Hlaing highlighted the junta's success in driving improvements despite facing various obstacles.

He also accused global powers of attempting to control smaller nations by manipulating key economic sectors crucial for their growth and development. The junta leader further alleged that some foreign actors are deliberately inciting conflicts and crises within Myanmar to destabilize its economy for their own benefit.

With Myanmar's rich reserves of natural resources such as oil, gas, copper, and iron, Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the need to capitalize on the country's resource wealth and agricultural strength to bolster the economy. He also cautioned against external forces

working to hinder the nation's progress.

He underscored the importance of national prosperity through collective efforts, stating that individual success would contribute to the overall economic development of the country.

Myanmar has faced severe economic difficulties since the 2021 military coup, including high inflation, soaring prices, fuel and cooking oil shortages, and frequent medicine scarcity. Despite these challenges, defense expenditures have risen, while allocations for education and healthcare have been cut, according to the junta's financial data reports.

Nonetheless, Min Aung Hlaing continues to assert that his administration's policies have led to economic improvements, a narrative he has reiterated in several speeches.

In contrast, a June 2023 report by the World Bank forecasted that by early 2024, 32% of Myanmar's population would fall into poverty, with an additional one-third at significant risk.



Photo: Stock

MYANMAR'S NUG SAYS JUNTA TROOPS USE AND TRAFFIC NARCOTIC DRUGS

The National Unity Government (NUG) issued a press statement on 15 October claiming junta troops not only abuse narcotic drugs, but they are trafficking them too.

Narcotics seized from junta troops in the Pinlebu battle in Sagaing Region were incinerated by the NUG on 15 October, the press statement says. There were 1,352 soap boxes containing heroin, 1,285 packets of heroin, and 18 packets of opium each weighing one viss (approx. 1.6 Kg).

This narcotic burning ceremony was attended by local people and a NUG team led by the Defence Minister Yee Mon. The NUG statement says that the Defence Minister met the triumphant troops in his field visit to Pinlebu, Sagaing Region.

Junta soldiers captured in the Pinlebu battle reportedly admitted that they used drugs during the fighting and were also engaging in trafficking of these drugs, the statement says.

Resistance forces completely occupied Pinlebu town on 8 October and the Defence Minister subsequently visited the town on 10 October.

The NUG has established an administrative apparatus in the towns and villages they occupied. The NUG statement says they will effectively handle all irregularities and wrongdoings committed by their civilian and military officials.

The junta lost about 70 personnel in the Pinlebu battle and NUG troops captured over 100 prisoners along with a lot of their arms and ammunition.

The People's Defence Force (PDF) claim they found hundreds of landmines planted by junta troops in their area clearance operation.

The PDFs and allied resistance forces jointly launched the Pinlebu offensive on 15 August and were able to completely occupy the town on 8 October, the NUG statement says.



Photo: Supplied

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ONLINE MONEY TRANSFER SERVICES STOPPED IN RAKHINE STATE AS PHONE AND INTERNET CONNECTIONS CUT OFF

The junta previously cut off phone and internet connections in northern Rakhine State and has now done the same in the townships in southern Rakhine State. Local residents say they are facing difficulties in accessing online money transfer services after phone and internet connections were cut off across Rakhine State.

A local resident from Sittwe said that private online money transfer services such as K Pay and Wave Money were stopped after they could not access internet connections. State-owned banks still have access to the internet.

All townships in Rakhine State have been cut off from phone and internet services since 12 October 2024. Only Sittwe, Ann and Gwa which are still under control of the junta troops are still connected.

Some townships in southern Rakhine State previously had intermittent access to phone and internet connections but are now totally cut off.

In northern Rakhine State, MPT phone connections are available in urban areas of Sittwe and Ann but other operators are cut off. In southern Rakhine State, residents in Gwa have access to phone connection in scattered areas but all other townships are cut off from phone and internet connections.

The junta cut off phone and internet connections in almost all townships in Rakhine State since November 2023 after the fighting broke out between Arakan Army (AA) and junta troops in northern Rakhine State.

Phone and internet connections have been cut off for many months in the AA controlled areas of Maungdaw, Buthitaung, Rathetaung, Punnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Pauktaw, Ramree in Rakhine State and Paletwa in Chin State.

There are claims that the junta cut off phone and internet connections in Rakhine State to cover up their human rights violations, but some say disruption of telecommunication services was caused by airstrikes hitting telecom infrastructure in these areas.

People who fled their homes and staying away from their families cannot access information about the military situation in their hometowns due to the cutting off of phone and internet connections in these areas.

The junta has blocked all entry and exit points in Rakhine State and now the townships in southern Rakhine State are cut off from telecommunication services too.

YOUNG STRIKE LEADERS IN YANGON SEVERELY INTERROGATED BY MYANMAR JUNTA

The University Students' Union Alumni Force reported that young leaders of the Yangon strike movement arrested by the Myanmar junta, have been subjected to severe interrogation techniques.

Among those detained on 19 September, were Ko Zaw Lin Htut, also known as Poe Thar, a co-founder of the University Students' Union Alumni Force and freelance photojournalist; Ko Aung Min Khaing, also known as Mae Gyi, leader of the Youth Strike Committee (YSC); and YSC members Ma Mya Myintzu and Ma Hnin Ei Khaing.

According to Ko Nan Linn from the University Students' Union Alumni Force, two of the four young detainees, both men endured harsh interrogations.

"I can confirm that Poe Thar was brutally beaten and tortured during interrogation. His health has deteriorated as a result of the abuse but it is not life threatening," said Ko Nan Linn.

The military regime charged the four youth activists under Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code, and they were transferred to Yangon's Insein Prison on 11 October. They will continue to face trial in a prison court, and efforts are being made to secure necessary healthcare for them, Ko Nan Linn added.

The University Students' Union Alumni Force emphasized that these young leaders were fighting

against the military regime, advocating for human rights, dignity, democracy, and freedom of expression, values that have been eroded in Myanmar.

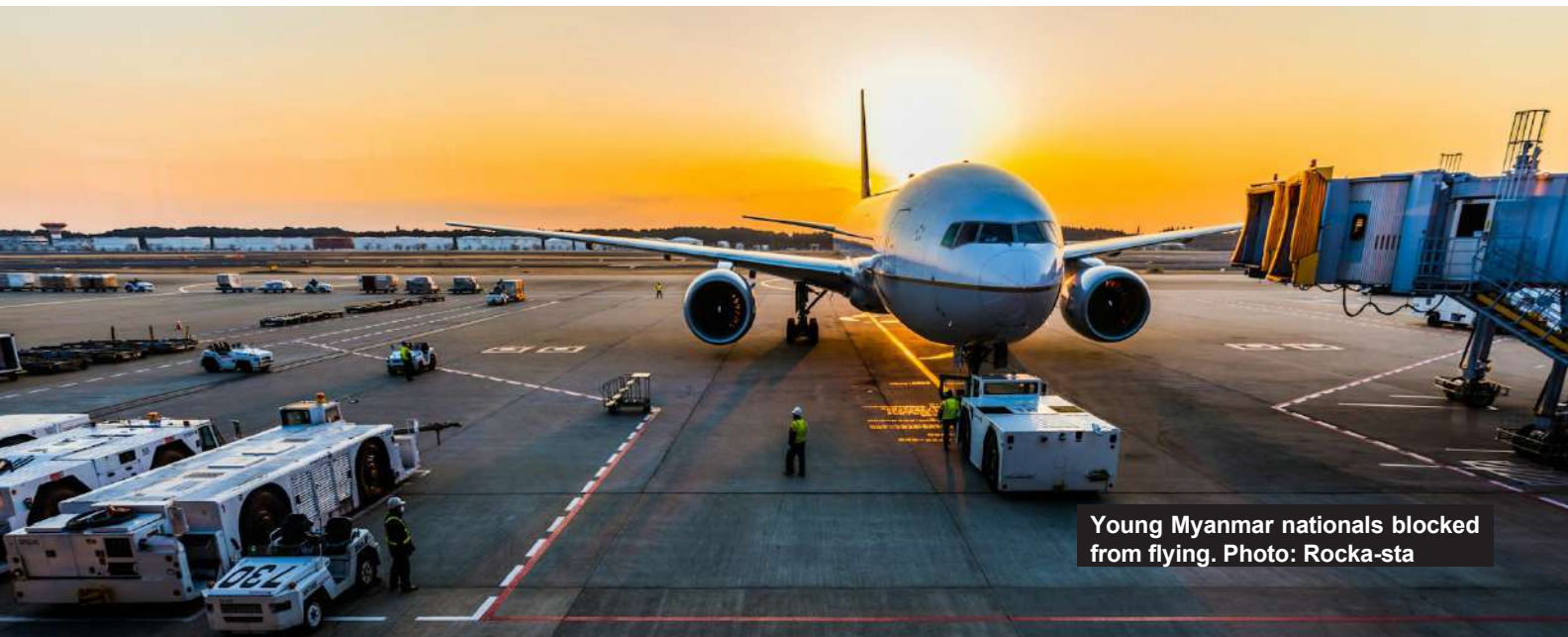
In a related incident, anti-military activists Paing Phyto Min and Ko Shein Wai Aung, along with members of Shein Wai Aung's family, were arrested on 9 October during a midnight guest registration check by the junta in Yangon.

Ko Nan Linn expressed deep concern for the well-being of these detainees, fearing they may face similar brutal interrogations.

"These comrades have been actively leading the public strike movement against military rule in Yangon. I fear they will be tortured until the junta extracts the answers they want," he said.

Over the past month, the military has increased security measures in Yangon as anti-junta activities by strike organizations have gained momentum, leading to a wave of arrests by the junta.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), 27,541 people have been arrested since the military coup in 2021, with 21,044 still in detention. The junta has rejected AAPP's claims.



Young Myanmar nationals blocked from flying. Photo: Rocka-sta

YOUNG TRAVELLERS DENIED BOARDING AT YANGON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT DESPITE VALID DOCUMENTS

An increasing number of young travelers in Myanmar have reported being turned away at Yangon International Airport despite holding valid passports and travel documents for their trips abroad. These individuals were denied boarding without clear explanations from airport authorities.

On 12 October, a 26-year-old man from Yangon shared that he was stopped at the check-in counter and forced to return home without being provided a reason. His experience reflects a growing trend, with around 10 young people reportedly facing similar treatment during the first week of October.

“I was planning to travel with friends to Thailand. None of us have political connections, and we all held PV (Visit Passport) status, yet we were sent back. I had all the necessary documents,” said a young man recently denied boarding while attempting to fly to Bangkok.

The group of friends planned to attend a travel exhibition in Bangkok, but despite having round-trip tickets and confirmed hotel reservations, they were not allowed to board the flight. No reason provided by the authorities.

Another individual planning to visit Thailand shared that travel agencies had informed them about current operations targeting young travelers, suggesting that it has become increasingly difficult for young people to travel abroad.

One woman preparing for an international trip revealed that there is a “VIP service” being offered, which allows travelers to pass through airport procedures without facing questioning by authorities. This service reportedly costs around 3.5 million Myanmar Kyats for trips from Yangon to Bangkok.

A noticeable number of young travelers between the ages of 20 and 30 have been barred from leaving the country at Yangon International Airport since August. Foreign brokers have also confirmed that it has become harder for young people to travel abroad since June. While negotiations were sometimes possible in the past, since the end of August, travelers in this age group have consistently been turned away at the airport, even with proper travel documentation.

The situation has created increased difficulties for youth seeking to travel abroad.

MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF TO TRAVEL TO CHINA NEXT MONTH: SOURCES CLOSE TO MILITARY



Beijing: Photo: Ling Tang

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing will travel to close ally China next month, two sources close to the military told AFP last week, in what would be his first known trip there since he led a coup in 2021.

Min Aung Hlaing "is planning to go China in November... the trip has been planned since Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi visited Myanmar" in August, a source close to the military said.

"He (Min Aung Hlaing) will visit China next month," another source said.

Both sources requested anonymity to talk to the media.

AFP has contacted China's embassy in Yangon for comment.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman said "I currently have no information to provide on your question", when asked about the trip at a regular press briefing on Wednesday.

Beijing is a major ally and arms supplier of the internationally isolated junta that is battling opponents across the country following its coup in 2021.

Analysts say Beijing also maintains ties with Myanmar ethnic armed groups that hold territory near its border.

Some of those groups have seized territory from the junta in northern Shan state, disrupting traffic along a vital trade highway to China.

Shan state borders China's Yunnan province and is a vital piece of Beijing's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative.

Relations between Beijing and Naypyidaw cooled last year over the junta's failure to crack down on online scam compounds in Myanmar's borderlands targeting Chinese citizens.

The compounds were staffed by citizens of China and other countries who were often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions.

Analysts suggest Beijing later gave tacit approval to an offensive by an alliance of ethnic rebel groups across Shan state, which the alliance said was launched partly to root out the scam compounds.

In August, China said it supports the junta's plan to hold fresh elections and return the conflict-torn country to a "democratic transition".

Opponents say the polls will be neither free nor fair, with many opposition parties banned and clashes occurring across much of the country.

Min Aung Hlaing has visited Russia -- another major ally and arms supplier -- several times since the coup, including a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in 2022.

AFP

MYANMAR RICE EXPORT IN SEPTEMBER REACHED OVER 200,000 TONNES, EARNING US\$104 MILLION

Trade figures released by the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) show that Myanmar exported a total of over 200,000 tonnes of rice and broken rice in September and earned US\$104 million from these exports.

A total of 62 companies exported 140,000 tonnes of rice and 75,000 tonnes of broken rice to foreign buyers in September, over two-fold higher than the previous year. The September rice export is the highest in monthly exports this year and it earned US\$104 million.

In the first half of fiscal year 2024-25, rice and broken rice exports earned a total US\$458 million from April to September 2024, the MRF trade figures say.

Out of rice and broken rice exports, 15 foreign countries are major buyers of Myanmar rice of which Indonesia and China are the largest buyers of Myanmar rice. The major buyers of Myanmar broken rice are from 13 countries of which China, Belgium, and Indonesia are the largest buyers.

The El Niño weather condition hampered rice export, the chairperson of the MRF said. The Central Bank of Myanmar's (CBM) monetary policy to control

export earnings also impeded rice exports, hurting exporters financially.

The MRF's export target for rice and broken rice is set at 2.5 million tonnes in the FY 2024-2025, generating expected earnings of over one billion US dollars.

During the last fiscal year, 2023-24, Myanmar was only able to export about 1.7 million tonnes of rice and broken rice.

In the first half of the current financial year 2024-2025 beginning 1 April Myanmar rice and broken rice exports exceeded 930,000 tonnes, with an estimated value of \$458 million. This is more than two times the trade value of the corresponding period in the last fiscal year.

Rising rice export is constructive for the Myanmar export sector but the people are worrying about food security in the country as a recent devastating typhoon damaged much of the paddy acreage across the country.



Photo: Naveed Ahmed

MYANMAR JUNTA SIGNS \$250,000 DEVELOPMENT DEAL WITH INDIA AMID CRITICISM

On 14 October, Myanmar's military junta signed five Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with India in Naypyidaw, agreeing to jointly develop projects worth US\$250,000.

According to the junta-controlled Mirror newspaper, India is contributing US\$50,000 per project under the "Quick Impact Projects (QIP)" agreement, as part of their ongoing cooperation.

The QIP initiative was originally signed in 2020 during President U Win Myint's goodwill visit to India under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government. It was one of ten agreements made at the time, and the military council has continued the project since seizing power in 2021.

These projects are aimed at developing areas in need, but concerns have been raised about their viability given the current political climate. Salai Dokhar, from the India for Myanmar organization, emphasized the importance of monitoring the implementation to ensure they are practical under present conditions.

"My stance is that we cannot fully trust India's current position. What I hope to see is for India to stop cooperating with the Military Council," Salai Dokhar said.

He also added that India appears to be following the junta's directives to protect its interests in Myanmar, and warned that India's approach might eventually align more closely with China's stance on Myanmar.

The projects signed between the junta and India focus on the agricultural sector, including the installation of a drying machine, the development of an Advanced Agricultural Research and Education Center, and the establishment of a Knowledge Bank. A weaving and vocational education project in Amarapura Township, Mandalay Region, is also part of the agreement. Other initiatives include building a training center for girls in Mandalay Region and creating an emergency operations center (EOC) in Yangon Region.

Three similar projects were implemented in 2023, and ongoing negotiations with India are expected to lead to further projects under the QIP initiative.

In June, Justice for Myanmar reported that India has maintained ties with the junta, supplying military equipment, infrastructure, and training since the coup. In September, 268 Myanmar civil society groups sent an open letter urging the Indian government to halt its military sales and cooperation with the junta, stressing that such actions provide legitimacy to the regime and encourage further economic collaboration.



Igor Blazevic, right.

HOW NEIGHBOURS AND INTERNATIONALS WILL NOT END THE WAR IN MYANMAR

IGOR BLAZEVIC

On the Myanmar panel at the Forum 2000 Conference in Prague this week, the key focus was on strategies that the international community can employ to end the military violence.

Panel moderator, Maiko Ichihara from Hitotsubashi University in Japan, asked two guiding questions - what is the current state of the conflict in Myanmar and what are the ways to increase the possibility for the Myanmar people to take back the country from the military?

To respond on those two questions, I started by explaining that it is misleading to label what is going on in Myanmar with the simplistic notion of "conflict". What we have in Myanmar is on one side, a war of aggression and a war of terror by the military junta against the whole nation. On the other side, we have the self-defensive and liberation war of the people against the military junta.

This is much more precise description of what is going on in Myanmar.

OVERVIEW

In order to understand the current situation, it is useful to quickly review the few stages in how the Myanmar military's war against the people and the people's self-defensive war evolved since the February 2021 coup.

At first, the military's Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing tried to stage a coup. The coup attempt failed. It triggered nation-wide, large scale, very broad-based, mass, and peaceful, non-violent protests. The scale and intensity of protests and civil disobedience have shown almost total societal rejection of the attempted coup.

At that point of time, expectation from neighbours, other outside actors, diplomats, analysts, internationals based in Myanmar has been - the military junta will stage a crackdown and they will quickly consolidate control. Neighbours and internationals decided to sit-and-wait for the junta to consolidate control so that they can continue business as usual, economic and diplomatic cooperation and different developmental and humanitarian projects.

This is the 1st phase.

BRUTAL CRACKDOWN

In the second phase, the military indeed applied brutal crackdown. Nonviolent protesters started to be killed on the streets with live ammunition. In one case over 100 people were killed in one day. In a very short period of time over 20,000 people had been arrested and many of them heavily tortured.

However, the crackdown failed and backfired. It did not help the junta consolidate the control. Just the

opposite. The people of Myanmar started determined and stubborn resistance to the coup, which quickly spread across the country. This resistance was multi-dimensional. It was armed, guerilla resistance. But the people's struggle against the coup continued also as civil disobedience and civil resistance, political resistance, information and cultural resistance, and humanitarian resistance.

The expectation from neighbours and internationals at this point was - It will be more ugly, it will last longer, but the military is too strong, the resistance is too weak, so the military will in the end prevail. This is sad, but this is reality, which we need to pragmatically accept. So, neighbours and internationals decided to continue to sit-and-wait until the military finished the dirty job of regaining control through large scale crimes and atrocities.

Nobody (except Putin's Russia) wanted to compromise its own image by aligning himself with junta while it has been burning villages, massacring civilians and torturing prisoners. Everybody preferred to be a bit patient, to wait till the junta remained the only game in town, in order to continue business as usual at that point of time.

This is the 2nd phase.



Zue Padonmar

RESISTANCE INCREASES

Since the end of 2023 and from the beginning of this year, the military found it had lost control over half of the country to determined and increasingly capable liberation forces. The resistance gained control not only over territory. They also gained control over strategic assets: large parts of border with Bangladesh, India, China and Thailand. They gained control over trade and supply routes and over important economic assets. The junta was increasingly weak and it became obvious that it could not regain control over the large territory it had lost.

It even became possible that the junta might collapse under the pressure of the nation-wide resistance and ongoing public rejection and disobedience.

Key neighbouring countries, China, Thailand and India become nervous that the military might collapse. They did not want that to happen because they cannot imagine the Myanmar state without military dominance. They have also invested too much in their long relations with the Myanmar military. They prefer to keep the devil they know, instead of opening the gates to uncertainty with resistance forces prevailing.

So, neighbours started to interfere. China was the first one who made that move and was relatively aggressive in the way it did it. Thailand and India now feel that they need to make a move as well, partly because anti-junta liberation forces now control the borders, partly because the junta cannot guarantee anymore some of their economic assets and trade interests, and partly because they want to balance China's influence.

Still, nobody wants to help the junta to prevail through atrocities and destruction. That is too bloody, too destructive and ugly. It is also questionable if it possible at all. The Myanmar military is indeed seriously weakened and the resistance forces have become much stronger. However, key neighbours do not want the junta to be defeated either. So neighbours and ASEAN will now through a combination of persuasion and pressure try to facilitate a so-called "all-inclusive dialogue" about a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and fake elections.

This is where we are now.

PROLONGED CONFLICT

If neighbors will not try to help the junta to survive, the junta will collapse.

If neighbours pressure the resistance into negotiations with junta and assist junta with preparing sham elections, the consequence will be prolonged conflict, deepening destruction and further suffering of the civilian population.

The fundamental problem with the “negotiated settlement” of the Myanmar crisis and “exit from crisis through elections organized by junta” is that Min Aung Hlaing and the current junta still aim for total victory. For them any talks, any temporary ceasefire somewhere, any humanitarian aid, census, elections, anything and everything is seen just as a continuation of a war by other means.

The junta and the military are very weak in this moment. They are running out of money and they do not have enough troops to fight on multiple fronts across this big country. They also realize that they have obsolete military hardware. They need to upgrade their capacity for drone war. They also need to improve their digital surveillance capacity.

They need a break. They need some time to reconsolidate. They need money. They need to replenish their depleted troops through six more months of forced recruitment. They need any international acceptance and they have found a way how to do it, through China-led regional bodies and thorough Russian and China’s international global bodies. They need time to get more drones from Russia and to learn how to use them. They need ceasefires with some ethnic armies in order to concentrate war against the Bama resistance in the Myanmar lowlands. They need a veneer of normalcy in Naypyidaw, Yangon and Mandalay City, so that they can strike hard and cruel in Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay Region.

They also need more time for household registration, renewing ID cards of citizens under junta control and passports of Myanmar citizens who are abroad, for census and for checking voters lists – in order to connect all the dots and strengthen a China-style all-pervasive digital surveillance system.

A negotiated exit from the Myanmar war which treats the junta or State Administration Council (SAC) as an indispensable part of solution and which seems like the military is the cornerstone of the Myanmar state is not possible because Min Aung Hlaing and the junta aim for nothing less than victory.

A negotiated exit from the Myanmar war which treats the SAC as indispensable part of solution



and which seems military as the cornerstone of the Myanmar state is also not possible because such “negotiated settlement” will mean nothing less than the surrender of the liberation forces to ongoing military dominance over Myanmar politics and state administration and capture of almost all segments of the Myanmar economy.

After they have liberated more than half of the country and are not in a position of weakness, Myanmar liberation forces have little reason to accept a soft surrender through junta controlled and junta manipulated elections.

A negotiated settlement, which Myanmar neighbours and ASEAN would like to facilitate, will just embolden the junta to continue the war of aggression and the war of terror. Resistance forces will have no option but to continue to defend themselves and – to liberate the people of country. They will continue to have support of the people in spite of all the hardship and suffering.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS?

Now we can ask ourselves can regional and international actors do something different and better.

The UN is spectacularly failing the people of Myanmar so far and will continue to do so.

Numerous UN humanitarian and development agencies kept themselves in a hostage situation so they are not even providing humanitarian aid where it is needed but only where junta allows them to do that.

The UN HR special envoy and HR and crimes monitoring mechanisms are collecting evidence while crimes and atrocities are piling up. They are not preventing nor stopping anything, just making documentation.

The US and Western democracies are providing important, but limited assistance to civil society, independent media and civic activism. They pay for most of the humanitarian aid (which is very unevenly distributed). They also pay HR and crimes documentation and assist a little bit with political dialogue among anti-junta stakeholders.

The US, EU, UK and Canada also do a bit of sanctions, but in a piecemeal way, always too little, too late. But because none of the neighbours join in, sanctions have small impact.

At the same time Russia, China, India, Thailand and some other countries are helping the junta get money, planes, weapons, jet fuel and diplomatic cover to wage an extremely brutal war against the civilian population of the country.



Mizzima Founder and Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint speaks at Forum 2000

This is the core of the problem. Democracies (and only some of them and in limited, lukewarm way) are helping anti-junta forces to run civil society and to document crimes, while authoritarians are helping the military junta to run the war.

Whatever new diplomatic initiatives Thailand and ASEAN facilitate for a negotiated, "all-inclusive" exit from the Myanmar crisis will fail just like the Five-Point Consensus has failed so far. Precious time will be lost once again. Lost time means many civilians killed, many people being tortured in jails, many villages being burned, cities bombed, aid denied, suffering and destruction deepened.

Lost time means the junta will continue its war of aggression and its war of terror against the people of Myanmar.

ACTION PLAN

There is however, something what neighbours and outside actors can do, and that is the only thing they can do to help and what they should do.

If Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, US, UK, Japan, and Australia agree to cut the junta off from money, jet fuel, weapons and legitimacy for six months, and I underline, for a maximum of six months, then in six months Min Aung Hlaing will be removed. He will either be dispatched somewhere abroad, or he will be killed, or he will be put in jail like Al Bashir.

Once Min Aung Hlaing is removed, the current junta is gone. In that moment negotiations between the military and liberation forces are possible.

As long as Min Aung Hlaing and the current SAC are part of political equation, there is no end to the military's war of terror against the population and there is no way the people of Myanmar can stop their liberation struggle.

When looking for a solution for the Myanmar war and crisis, it is very important to make a difference between the six dimensions of Myanmar military.

Min Aung Hlaing, the one who launched the failed and disastrous coup that nobody needed except him, is one dimension.

The SAC, the current junta, is another dimension.

Military-as-regime, as dominant and authoritarian political ruler of a centralized Myanmar is the third dimension.

Military-as-general administrative body is the fourth dimension.

Military-as-kleptocratic-economic conglomerate is the fifth dimension.

Military-as-defense institution is the sixth dimension.

To open the possibility for solving the Myanmar crisis, Min Aung Hlaing and SAC must go away. Once that happens, negotiations are possible in which a significantly weakened and completely discredited military will accept abandoning both its political dominance and its centralization dogma.

The military must also abandon its capture of the general administrative system.

A big part of the kleptocratic conglomerate will probably survive.

The military as a defense institution can and will survive through reform.

This is the only exit from the Myanmar crisis.

The surrender of the people through partial ceasefires and completely manipulated sham elections to ongoing military's impunity and dominance is not possible.

This article was written by Igor Blazevic representing the main message of the speech he gave to the Forum 2000 Conference held in Prague.



Kyaw San Han



BREAKING RANKS - THE STORY OF A MYANMAR POLICE OFFICER AND INCARCERATED AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIST SEAN TURNELL

INSIGHT MYANMAR

In the tragic aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008—when over 100,000 people died and he, himself, barely survived—Kyaw San Han knew he had to devote his life to protecting his fellow citizens, he tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast. So, he signed up for the police force, and after going through training, found himself fast-tracked to attend a four-year police course in Thailand. After that, he worked in an anti-trafficking unit Naypyidaw, eventually earning a scholarship to study in Australia; when he returned, he enrolled in a detective training course in Yangon. By 2020, Kyaw San Han had achieved a lot in his chosen profession, in not that long a time.

VOTING FOR NLD

But then politics intervened. Despite warnings from his superiors not to cast a vote for the National League for Democracy (NLD) in that year's elections, intimating that they could check his voting record to see if he complied... Kyaw San Han did so, anyway, choosing to vote his conscience. But then, when the coup interrupted the democratic process, his defiance

turned to dismay. He soon realized he had arrived at a crossroads where his previous actions had already indicated his political leanings and would likely place him in much danger, especially since his colleagues had begun to suspect that he was a “watermelon.” As Helene Kyed explained on a recent Insight Myanmar episode, this term refers to a soldier or policeman who is “green” (the color of their uniform) on the outside, but secretly supports democracy, or “red,” (the color of the NLD) on the inside.

“It is we government officials who love and support democracy, but it is difficult to show it publicly, because of fear to ourselves and to our families. So, to be a ‘watermelon,’ especially in the military or in a police organization, is very dangerous,” he says, adding that the severest punishments are reserved for suspected “watermelons,” whose pro-democracy actions are equated with treason. “But for normal people, they love ‘watermelons,’ because we can take sensitive and confidential document to the media and to the public. So for the people of Myanmar, a ‘watermelon’ is a hero!”

CORRUPT POLICE

Kyaw San Han had known that the police force was corrupt and cruel from the moment he joined. "In police training, we were brainwashed," he admits. "We were trained with fear, to obey the orders from our senior officer, and we couldn't judge or question their orders. So many human rights violations happened in police training school! Then, once we [graduated], these [trainees] became bad policemen, not helping civilians. Instead, they troubled civilians, they took advantage of them." Describing the police force as a tool of the military regime, he likens the training course as a brutal prison in which he and his peers were routinely beaten, kept in locked quarters and hardly fed. But the senior officers weren't content to merely brutalize them, they also extorted them for as much money as they could get, with threats of further abuse if they didn't pay up. "They used punishment as a tool to control us," he says.

Trainees were encouraged to replicate this system when they became police officers, using their positions to oppress civilians. "Some of my friends changed their mindset, so after the police training school, when they had power, they took advantage of the civilians," he recalls. "But for me, I knew that I had to save the civilians! So I cannot change to this evil, which is what they wanted to me to do." Kyaw San Han stayed true to his original aspiration to become a force for good in society, as his entire rationale for donning the uniform was to help reform his country's broken system from the inside.

Tracing back how the police came to be a force that oppressed rather than helped their fellow man, Kyaw San Han describes how in 1988, many police refused to follow orders and instead stood by the democracy activists. In following years, the generals were alarmed that a sense of blind loyalty did not permeate the ranks, and so they arranged to transfer soldiers to police units. Then, they promoted them, so they became the police units' commanding officers... thus more closely aligning the police force with the military in the years to come.

OPPOSITION TO THE COUP

But amazingly, the brutal training regimen that Kyaw San Han and other recruits endured, combined with the close connection to the military, did not completely shape the police force in becoming an automatic instrument of oppression. Kyaw San Han explains that a sizable contingent of police opposed the coup, and were arrested soon after the military takeover, sometimes within hours of making their views known publicly (often on Facebook). But the hunt to expose

more "watermelons" eventually scared and silenced those who would otherwise speak up. Then, when CDM started in earnest, Kyaw San Han and his fellow officers were told in no uncertain terms they would be killed on the spot if they were suspected of joining; indeed, Kyaw San Han says that the punishment meted out to police who refused to follow orders was far worse than even the most strident democracy activist. "Min Aung Hlaing doesn't care how many lives will be lost. He's crazy, he just doesn't want to lose his power," he says. "He makes a lot of people die because of his madness for power." Kyaw San Han describes the coup leader as so determined to stay in power that he even began training and arming family members of soldiers and police officers, so that they could step in if the losses pile up.

Kyaw San Han posits that most of his police force peers did not particularly like Min Aung Hlaing, and were horrified at the egregious violence that was ordered against the civilian population. What is worse, promotions were promised to those applying the most egregious aggression and violence! But Kyaw San Han describes how his colleagues felt trapped in their positions, and did not see a way out, as anyone who refused to follow orders was made an example of in a most brutal way.

In order to respond to the protests that developed after the coup, the generals dressed soldiers in police uniforms to ensure the police complied with their instructions, to train them to handle high risk situations, and to be able to directly monitor and engage with the activists directly. They also calculated that civilians would be less provoked by seeing authorities in police uniforms than soldiers' fatigues, since for the most part, the police were held in higher regard than the military, and in the transition years, they had generally kept a much lower profile.

'DON'T BRUTALIZE THE PUBLIC'

Still, Kyaw San Han pleaded with fellow officers to subtly defy any orders to brutalize the public, such as not following through on arrests or using rubber bullets. But few followed his lead, either out of fear of punishment, greed of expected rewards, or the brainwashing that they were battling an enemy of the state. "That is why right now, after three years, some good policemen try CDM and to speak up for democracy and the people of Myanmar," he says. "But the rest of the policemen, they don't want to take any risks, so they just go along with the junta."

Kyaw San Han also provides especially compelling

commentary on the murder of Ma Htwe Htwe Khaing, a 19-year-old girl who became the first death following the coup; she was shot in the head, a grisly scene that was captured on video and has since been widely circulated.

“To shoot like that, especially using real bullets, was ridiculous!” he exclaims, barely able to mask his fury. “There are many ways to control protest groups peacefully.” As to why the assassin would specifically target such a young, innocent life, Kyaw San Han explains that the junta “ordered the security forces to use fear, and as quickly as possible to destroy the protesters,” because they wanted to suppress images of the people opposing Min Aung Hlaing’s power grab. “The [young policemen] were motivated by the senior police officers to shoot the protesters, or to arrest and torture them, and they don’t get any punishment. Instead, they get promotion!”

At the time of the coup, Kyaw San Han was working in Insein’s CID (Criminal Investigation Office) office, and became a frequent witness to the horrors that awaited activists brought in to be tortured, with their screams echoing the building. Before the coup, CID was charged with investigating national crimes, but they are now the unit charged with going after democratic leaders—with cruelty—and many who are taken in will never leave its confines alive.

‘SAVING PRISONER SEAN TURNELL’

It was there, at the CID offices, that Kyaw San Han first met the Australian economist and NLD advisor, Sean Turnell, who was accused of espionage.

In his own interview with Insight Myanmar, Turnell related his incarceration at CID in terrible, cramped conditions, calling it “The Box”; his whereabouts were withheld even from the Australian Embassy. But although Kyaw San Han was only a junior officer at the time, he bravely stood up to his seniors by insisting they not torture Turnell, otherwise there would be grave consequences from the international community. “I was so shocked! I didn’t expect to see him in that condition.” He continues, “[Turnell] didn’t receive enough good food or have a good toilet. So I managed everything in background in order to save Sean Turnell’s life.”

While the police started putting more extreme pressure on Turnell to reveal information that could bolster a treason charge against Aung San Suu Kyi (and thus justify the bloody coup), Kyaw San Han was very worried that the older professor couldn’t survive those awful conditions and the brutal treatment. Even worse,

CID officers were told to be especially harsh with him, as retribution for Australia’s decision to grant asylum to Burmese who had joined CDM (a topic taken up by Davin Hartanto).

Kyaw San Han says, “[Turnell] is one who I respected, as he contributed so much to our country... so I was thinking, how can I help him?” So even as his superiors were pushing Kyaw San Han to force Turnell to reveal important information—after which they planned to lock him away or even kill him—the young police officer was instead whispering into Turnell’s ear that he must not reveal anything sensitive at all. In no uncertain terms, he told him that his life depended on him giving up nothing to the authorities. He also secretly took a picture of the CCTV image of Turnell, so that if the latter should disappear, Kyaw San Han would have proof of his detention at CID. Needless to say, he knew he was taking a catastrophic risk, with unthinkable consequences if he was caught.

650 DAYS IN JAIL

Turnell spent a total of 650 days in prison, yet despite the risks, Kyaw San Han was determined not to even think about leaving the country until his Australian friend was safe. When Turnell was finally released, Kyaw San Han immediately began plotting his own escape. He felt it was only a matter of time before others confirmed he really was “red” on the inside.

By virtue of the trainings he’d attended in Thailand and Australia—something quite rare for a Burmese police officer, especially one so young—he probably should have been promoted beyond his present rank. Kyaw San Han believes that this didn’t happen because his superiors (rightly) suspected that he harbored pro-democracy and human rights sentiments. So, knowing that the walls were closing in, Kyaw San Han ordered his family to flee from their police housing in Naypyidaw.

“I became an enemy, and my family was also under threat by the military regime,” he says simply. He knew that even Thailand wouldn’t be safe, since he was told that Thai authorities hunted down Burmese defectors taking refuge in their country (a subject that Phil Robertson spoke about in a recent Insight Myanmar episode). To make matters worse, on the messaging app Telegram, pro-military channels freely shared information about the whereabouts of not just CDMers, but also their families. So Kyaw San Han knew he had to find an alternative route for himself and his family.

Unfortunately, police and soldiers are not issued regular passports; they are instead given documents

that require special permission to cross any immigration checkpoint; moreover, even if they do somehow have a passport, they are required to leave it with their superior, so paranoid is the regime about unwarranted travel by any of its security personnel. Kyaw San Han had turned in his passport when he returned from Thailand those years earlier. So now, when he wanted to leave, he needed his passport back. His superiors would not release it just for him to travel. So he applied for, and was accepted to, an ASEAN-sponsored, postgraduate study in Thailand, hoping this would be sufficient reason. Although his superiors were loathe to give permission, they did want to somehow demonstrate to ASEAN that Myanmar could be a cooperative partner, so they allowed it—albeit with grave threats that if he came out for democracy once he crossed the border, he would be arrested and deported.

FLEEING TO THAILAND

Once in Thailand, Kyaw San Han sought refuge through The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but due to restrictions on accepting Myanmar refugees, he was unable to secure their assistance. He would have liked to go to a Western country, but his passport had a “Asia-only” travel restriction, so he applied for a visa to Australia, where he had previously spent time studying. That was denied, but he finally obtained a visa to Japan. Upon arriving in Japan, he found himself in a challenging situation, without contacts or familiar resources, at the same time needing to navigate the process for applying for refugee status. His family managed to get out of Myanmar and are now in Thailand, but like so many refugees, their safety is at the whim of Thai officials. Kyaw San Han fears for them, hoping to somehow get them to Japan.

JAPAN REFUGE

Currently, Kyaw San Han is connected with NUG’s Japan office to continue his advocacy by giving speeches in the Japanese parliament and interviews to the Japanese media. Through these platforms, he explains why the Japanese government should refrain from supporting the Myanmar military, and calls for an end to their training of the Myanmar military and police forces. Kyaw San Han has also been calling on neighboring countries to recognize that CDM police and soldiers are not criminals, but are fleeing from a regime that has inflicted profound suffering upon its people. He paints a grim picture of Myanmar under

military rule, which has turned a once peaceful and prosperous nation into one of extreme poverty and suffering.

Ending the dictatorship, in his view, is synonymous with alleviating the hardships of the Myanmar people. Kyaw San Han wants to bring his reformist agenda to a future, democratic Myanmar by becoming the nation’s Chief of Police. instilling an organizational culture based in democracy and a respect for human rights. His fervent, optimistic belief in the collective power of democratic governments to rescue Myanmar and help restore democracy represents a beacon of hope for a better future for his homeland.

“I would like all of you understand the brutality of the Myanmar junta and Min Aung Hlaing,” he says. “He is using his last strategy to make civilians fight each other! So, please, share my voice and my message to your friends and your family and everyone you know! If there is no dictator Min Aung Hlaing and his brutal regime, Myanmar will be a beautiful a peaceful country as we used to be in the past. Now the people of Myanmar are suffering a lot from the dictator Min Aung Hlaing. But the people of Myanmar, actually, we are kind and we are very friendly. So, now we need help from all of us from all of you.”

Catch the full Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/0b28c3ed-1ed8-4154-b15f-288ab452c208>





Chinese leader Xi Jinping.
Photo: AFP

CHINA'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION CONTINUES AS BEIJING ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE CRITICS IN JAPAN

SUN LEE

China's authoritarian regime under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long been known for suppressing dissent within its borders.

However, in recent years, the CCP has extended this repression beyond its borders, targeting critics and dissidents in foreign countries, including Japan.

This form of "transnational repression" represents a new phase in China's approach to silencing opposition and controlling narratives, even in democratic societies.

Transnational repression refers to a government's use of tactics such as intimidation, surveillance, harassment, or even violence against individuals abroad to stifle criticism.

While this is not a new tactic among authoritarian regimes, China's operations have been particularly widespread, reflecting the CCP's deepening concerns over its image on the global stage and its determination to neutralize dissent, wherever it may arise.

China's efforts to stifle dissent extend beyond traditional media controls.

Increasingly, the CCP has sought to use legal, diplomatic, and technological tools to pressure foreign governments and target critics living abroad.

Japan has become a focal point in this effort, given its close proximity to China and the presence of a large community of Chinese dissidents, human rights activists, and academics who have used the relatively open Japanese society as a platform to raise concerns about China's policies.

According to a recent report by New York-headquartered international human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW), Chinese authorities are increasingly harassing Chinese nationals living in Japan who engage in activities critical of the Chinese government.

This harassment, including targeting individuals from regions like Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, aims to intimidate members of the Chinese diaspora and deter them from participating in protests or events deemed politically sensitive by Beijing.

Additionally, Chinese officials have sought

information from these individuals about others in Japan.

Teppei Kasai, an Asia programme officer at HRW, said, "China seems to have no qualms about silencing its citizens abroad, including in Japan, when they criticize the government's abuses."

"The Japanese government should send a strong message to Beijing that it will not tolerate China's transnational repression on Japanese soil," Kasai noted.

HRW said it had interviewed 25 people, who hail from China and Hong Kong and are currently living in Japan, between June and August 2024.

Many of those interviewed had participated in peaceful activities that challenge China's one-party rule, such as raising awareness of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, promoting Tibetan culture, or discussing politically sensitive books in reading groups.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) considers such activities a threat.

Many interviewees reported that Chinese police contacted them or their family members back home, pressuring them to stop their activism.

Several individuals provided evidence of these threats, including logs of WeChat messages, recordings of video calls, and CCTV footage.

One individual said they stopped engaging in activism after receiving a call from Chinese authorities in 2024.

Another person, initially willing to speak to HRW, later declined out of fear of reprisals.

Ethnic Uyghurs from Xinjiang described how Chinese officials used their families in China as a means of coercion.

Through WeChat, police pressured them to cease their anti-government activities in Japan or demanded that they provide information about the Uyghur community there, including details on members of the Japan Uyghur Association, a local advocacy group.

Similar accounts came from people promoting language rights for Inner Mongolians and peaceful self-determination. Chinese authorities contacted many of these individuals through their relatives in China, urging them to halt their activism, according to the HRW report.

A Tibetan promoting Tibetan culture in Japan recounted how Chinese embassy officials in Tokyo told them to return to Tibet to renew their passport, a request they interpreted as an attempt to lure them back for possible punishment.

Similarly, a Taiwanese activist who had been involved in Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement said the Chinese embassy in Japan repeatedly invited them to collect "important documents," a request they declined, fearing detention.

HRW reported that some of those targeted by Chinese authorities did not approach Japanese police for help, either because they believed the authorities couldn't assist or feared worsening the situation for themselves or their families.

Japan has taken steps in recent years to address China's human rights violations, raising the issue with Chinese officials and passing parliamentary resolutions.

However, HRW urged the Japanese government to do more, including establishing a system for reporting cases of transnational repression.

Such a system should protect the privacy of individuals, enable criminal investigations, and offer protection against deportation or extradition for those at risk.

HRW also emphasized that victims should be made aware of their right to seek asylum or other protections in Japan.

HRW called on Japan to hold the Chinese government accountable for its surveillance and threats against critics living abroad.

Japan, along with 54 other countries, condemned transnational repression at the UN Human Rights Council in June 2024, pledging to bring those

responsible to justice.

HRW's Teppei Kasai said, "Japan should review its policies and create mechanisms to support individuals facing harassment from the Chinese government."

"Establishing a national system to investigate transnational repression with safeguards for privacy is a crucial step forward," Kasai added.

Beijing's methods of transnational repression in Japan, as elsewhere, rely on a mix of both overt and covert tactics.

One of the primary methods is digital surveillance and harassment.

Chinese dissidents and critics living in Japan have reported being the targets of cyberattacks, often attributed to state-sponsored hacking groups, and widespread online harassment campaigns orchestrated by Chinese nationalist netizens.

These online attacks aim to discredit and intimidate dissidents into silence.

In addition to digital harassment, Chinese authorities have reportedly pressured individuals' families back in China, threatening their safety and livelihood unless the overseas dissidents cease their activities.

These forms of coercion are particularly effective, as many Chinese citizens abroad have close familial ties in China, making them vulnerable to Beijing's influence.

More overt actions involve diplomatic pressure.

China has repeatedly leaned on the Japanese government to curb anti-China activities within its borders.

Chinese embassies in Japan have lodged formal complaints or issued warnings when prominent critics or events focused on issues such as human rights abuses in Xinjiang or China's crackdown on Hong Kong gain media attention.

While Japan's democratic system generally protects freedom of speech, such pressure occasionally influences political and business leaders, wary of damaging Japan's critical economic relationship with China.

Japan's relationship with China is marked by both cooperation and tension.

Economically, China is Japan's largest trading partner, creating a complex dynamic in which Tokyo must balance maintaining positive relations with protecting the rights of individuals within its borders.

Japan's government has traditionally avoided taking an overt stance on issues such as Taiwan or human rights abuses in China, but public pressure and activism around these topics continue to grow.

However, China's transnational repression campaign could strain these already delicate ties.

Reports of Chinese interference in Japan, including attempts to silence critics, are likely to provoke concerns in Japan about the broader influence of China on its democratic institutions.

As awareness of China's actions grows, Japan may face increasing calls to take a firmer stand against Beijing's efforts to extend its authoritarian reach.

China's transnational repression in Japan highlights a concerning trend of authoritarian regimes exporting their methods of control to democratic nations.

Beijing's attempts to silence critics abroad represent a significant challenge for countries like Japan, which must now navigate the delicate balance between upholding democratic values and managing crucial geopolitical relationships.

As China's global influence continues to expand, so too will its efforts to suppress dissent beyond its borders, raising critical questions about the limits of its reach and the resilience of democratic societies.

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



The late Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar, left with the Iranian leadership on a visit to Tehran. Photo: AFP

SINWAR KILLING A BLOW TO HAMAS BUT IMPACT ON WAR UNCERTAIN

Israel has inflicted an immense blow on Hamas by killing the Palestinian group's chief Yahya Sinwar, but whether his death will bring the end of the Gaza war any closer is unclear.

Israel had been hunting Sinwar since the October 7, 2023 attacks that he masterminded. Israeli leaders called the 61-year-old a "dead man walking".

Coming soon after the killing attributed to Israel of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Sinwar's death leaves Hamas facing a leadership vacuum and a strategy dilemma.

Sinwar was seen as an intransigent figure who preferred military solutions to political ones.

After hailing Sinwar's death, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu swiftly warned the war "is not over yet" while also offering to spare Hamas militants who lay down their weapons or free October 7 hostages.

David Khalfa, a Middle East expert at the Jean-Jaures Foundation, a Paris think-tank, called the death a "very hard" blow that would have a "psychological" impact on Hamas.

"Sinwar was much feared, including within the movement. He was Tehran's man," said Khalfa, referring to his strong ties with Iran's leaders.

Elliot Abrams, a senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in Washington, said the death "may be a game changer."

"He seems to have been unwilling to negotiate," he said. "We're in for a period of confusion because, who is in charge now?"

'Won't disappear'

The war has already taken an immense toll.

The Hamas October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures that include hostages killed in captivity. Of the 251 people abducted, 97 are still being held in Gaza, and 34 have been declared dead by the Israeli army.

Israel's retaliatory military offensive in Gaza has killed 42,438 people, a majority civilians, according to

the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. The UN says the figures are reliable.

Michael Horowitz, an expert at the Middle East-based security consultancy Le Beck, said Sinwar's demise would feel "personal" for many Israelis as well as Netanyahu who had made killing Sinwar a part of his "total victory" strategy.

But Horowitz warned that Hamas would not "disappear unless it is replaced by an alternative".

"The Israeli government has so far taken no step to help foster an alternative to Hamas."

Eva Koulouriotis, a political analyst specialising in the Middle East, said she expected Hamas to change policy.

"Sinwar was not a politician and did not believe in political solutions," she said.

"His top priority was to develop the militia's military capabilities."

'Pressure to grow'

Analysts believe Sinwar's death could facilitate the resumption of negotiations on a ceasefire and hostage release.

Israel and Hamas have blamed each other for the failure to end the fighting, free hostages and allow vital humanitarian aid into Gaza.

"I think it's more likely that a deal can now be done. The pressure on the Israelis to do a deal would also grow," said Abrams.

Relatives of Israelis held by Hamas, the Hostages Families Forum, urged Netanyahu to leverage "this major achievement into an immediate deal to secure hostages' return."

And US President Joe Biden has more power than other countries to pressure Israel, he said.

"The United States will certainly be engaged in discussions now about, what comes next," he added.

But he added that the next stages are uncertain.

"Who is going to govern Gaza, who is going to provide security in Gaza? If there's a ceasefire, that question becomes more immediate, more insistent"

Critics say Netanyahu, who opposes the creation of a Palestinian state, does not have a post-war strategy.

Khalfa said it was "a credible hypothesis" that Netanyahu could declare Hamas defeated and envisage an end to the war.

"Netanyahu can appease his supporters and his far-right allies by offering them this trophy and selling the narrative of a war won," he added.

But he cautioned that some Netanyahu allies in Israel would like to press ahead with the fighting.

'Seize opportunity'

Horowitz said that Sinwar was seen as a key obstacle to a deal.

"His death may be an opportunity to change the dynamic, as talks have been at an impasse for weeks since the escalation in Lebanon and even before," he said.

"The question is whether the Israeli government will seize this opportunity, and whether Sinwar will be replaced by someone with different views," he added.

But if his brother Mohammed Sinwar, also a militant leader wanted by Israel, replaces him, he may not have different positions, said Horowitz.

AFP



HELLO FROM THE OTHER SIDE

“I was crying every day about [the military crackdown in March 2021]. I hadn’t cried before when I saw it happening in Syria and other places, but I just felt like I did not want to watch that happen! I didn’t want to be in a world where we have to keep watching people struggling for freedom and then getting suppressed and getting their dreams crushed,” says Michael Sladnick, talking to the Insight Myanmar Podcast. “It was mostly women and girls who were participating in the protests, even more than men! I prayed at that time... I’m not religious, but I just wished and prayed for some way to help. And from that point on, after that period of those very emotional few weeks, I felt like a changed person.”

Michael is unusual in his advocacy for Myanmar. He had no personal ties to the country or its people before the coup. As a student in Chicago, he began to connect with the Myanmar expat community in early 2021, and their cause resonated with him deeply, politically and personally, and perhaps it could be said, spiritually as well. From that point on, Michael decided to dedicate himself to doing whatever it took to help their cause. Determined not to be the stereotype of a Western university student protester—all talk and no action—Michael began studying Burmese earnestly, and on his own, with whatever meagre resources he could find. “I had to decide if I’m committed to staying involved in Myanmar and doing as much as possible, then what’s the involvement going to look like?” he said. “By mid-2023, I felt like my Burmese was at a good enough level that I wanted to try to come to the ground, to more directly work with people from here.

So I moved to the Thai-Myanmar border area.” After he’d established himself here, he was contacted by the Dutch journalist, Thomas van Linge, an experienced war correspondent. They had been connected for some time as part of an online community that revolved around van Linge’s Mideast reporting, particularly the events of the Arab Spring and the war in Syria, which moved Michael very much. Thinking that it could be a great opportunity to leverage Michael’s language skills, knowledge and passion, Thomas pitched the idea of taking an extended reporting trip there. Together, they decided to cross into Karenni state.

Karenni (formerly Kayah) is a small, impoverished state on the Thai border (listeners may wish to hear about the early formation of the Karenni resistance, [addressed in a previous episode with Khun Be Du](#)). Neither Michael nor Thomas had ever been to Karenni before, nor could either speak any of its languages. Journalists entering Myanmar usually traveled to the larger and better-known Karen state to the south, or Chin in the country’s west. Karenni had gotten little attention, and this was something that Thomas was keen to rectify. “He was interested in going to Karenni, because that was the area that was closest to being liberated. There’ve been a number of towns and townships within Karenni that have been liberated in the past few months, and there have been big battles going on for major cities like Loikaw. If Loikaw falls to the resistance, that’d be the first state capitol, the first real town that they control!” Michael mentions another factor in their decision to travel to Karenni: the worsening situation in the town of Kawkaik, in Karen State, where the regime had acquired high-altitude Russian drones that the resistance couldn’t shoot down. This resulted in increased bombings and a less stable battlefield compared to just a few months earlier. Consequently, resistance forces there were apprehensive about their ability to ensure the security of foreign journalists; the situation in Karenni State, meanwhile, had somewhat stabilized, with clearer battle lines, making it a safer place to visit.

CHECK OUT THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Myanmar Insight Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/9/27/episode-272>

JUNTA CHIEF VOWS TO CRUSH OPPOSITION IN NCA ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

Myanmar's junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech via video at the ninth anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15, though he and his deputy were absent from the scaled-down event in Nay Pyi Taw.

In his speech, Min Aung Hlaing accused ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) of violating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and supporting opposition groups, claiming this has weakened "peace and stability" in Myanmar.

The general criticized several EAOs for "committing destructive acts" and labeled them opportunists who serve their own interests and seek political gain.

He asserted that resistance groups can't make demands through armed violence.

"I would like to say that we will not compromise on the demands of armed terrorists. According to the motto of our government, "Moving forward to the goal", we must all respect and cooperate with the NCA as we move forward with the spirit of Myanmar," said the junta chief.

The junta chief also pointed fingers at powerful countries for Myanmar's crisis, claiming they are creating instability in Myanmar in their attempt to gain influence over the country due to its geopolitical position.

Emphasizing the military's role, Min Aung Hlaing said, "Tatmadaw regards the duty of safeguarding the country from all dangers befalling it for the long-term interest of the country and people as a responsibility shaped by historical demands."

The event was attended by officials involved in the peace process, as well as representatives from some NCA signatories and political parties.

However, resistance forces have rejected the junta's invitation for dialogue, while the Myanmar military continues airstrikes in resistance-held areas.



JUNTA STAGES CULTURAL EVENT AMID ONGOING REPRESSION

The military junta, led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, recently organized the 25th Anniversary Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions in Nay Pyi Taw. This event, ostensibly aimed at promoting national unity and preserving cultural heritage, stands in stark contrast to the junta's ongoing suppression of Myanmar's diverse ethnic groups and democratic aspirations.

While Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the importance of cultural preservation and national integrity, activists pointed out that such displays are merely a facade to legitimize the military's illegitimate rule. The junta continues to face widespread opposition and international condemnation for its 2021 coup and subsequent human rights abuses.

The competition, featuring traditional music and performances from various ethnic groups, is being presented as a celebration of Myanmar's cultural diversity. However, this narrative of unity rings hollow in light of the military's ongoing conflicts with ethnic armed organizations and its brutal crackdown on dissent and civilians across the country.

Human rights organizations have consistently reported on the junta's violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, airstrikes on civilian targets.

As the junta attempts to portray itself as a protector of Myanmar's cultural heritage, many see this event as a cynical ploy to distract from its oppressive rule and lack of legitimacy.



Photo: Eh Mwi (yellow shorts) and Tun Tun Min

MYANMAR'S EH MWI SET FOR ONE CHAMPIONSHIP BOUT IN THAILAND AS LETHWEI CHAMPION TUN TUN MIN OFFERS SUPPORT

Myanmar's open weight Burmese traditional boxing (Lethwei) champion Tun Tun Min has expressed his support for fellow fighter Eh Mwi ahead of an upcoming bout. On his official Facebook page, Tun Tun Min wrote: "I believe you will win your One Championship match on the 25th, little brother Eh Mwi."

Eh Mwi is scheduled to compete in a Muay Thai flyweight contest against Omar Kinteh on Friday, October 25, at ONE Friday Fights 84 in Bangkok, Thailand. The event will take place at the renowned Lumpinee Stadium.

Fans have also shown their support for Eh Mwi on social media. One Facebook user commented, "I believe

little brother Eh Mwi will knock out his opponent and earn not only the fight purse but also a bonus prize."

Another user offered some constructive feedback, writing, "Wishing success to Brother Eh Mwi. It would be even better if he could improve on his slightly slow punches."

ONE Friday Fights 84 is set to feature 12 matches across three combat sports disciplines: Muay Thai, MMA, and submission grappling. The event will be broadcast live during Asia primetime, showcasing some of the world's most exciting martial artists.



Photo: Eh Mwi, Eh Mwi's Facebook account

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