

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## BRICS BUILDS UP STEAM

Myanmar junta eager to join growing 'alternative forum'

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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.

# PALACE COUP IN MYANMAR?

The International Crisis Group's periodic "On the Horizon" made several predictions for Myanmar in the next six months until March 2025. One of the more interesting is the potential for a palace coup in Myanmar.

Three years of civil war since the 1 February 2021 coup in Myanmar brought the State Administration Council (SAC) to power and has seen its chairman, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, move from defeat to defeat on the battlefield and economic ruin in what remains of the country under his control.

The logic behind a countercoup is that pro-military elites are growing tired of Min Aung Hlaing's failures and are looking for new leadership. There is, however, no mechanism for impeachment or removal of the commander-in-chief.

There is precedent. In April 1992, Senior General Saw Maung, chairman of the then ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) junta, was quietly removed from power by more hardline senior officers. Ostensibly resigning for health reasons, Saw Maung was replaced by Senior General Than Shwe who would go on to rule Myanmar until March 2011.

ICG lists several factors to watch out for which could indicate a shift in the sands around Min Aung Hlaing.

The first is an increase in public criticism of Min Aung Hlaing. Presumably ICG is referring to publicly voiced criticism by other members of the SAC and senior military, especially Army, leadership. Criticism of the SAC and its leaders has become increasingly dangerous.

Even the son-in-law of former dictator Senior General Than Shwe, Dr. Nay Soe Maung, was not immune. The retired medical doctor and university lecturer was arrested on 23 October

and is reportedly being interrogated by Military Affairs Security (MAS). The former military officer and son of former Deputy Defence Minister, Major General Tin Sein, has been a critic of the junta since the February 2021 coup.

A second sign of a potential coup, according to ICG, is the arrest of senior military figures. This would be particularly telling if these officers are known to be close to Min Aung Hlaing. More likely, however, officers close to Min Aung Hlaing would be removed – either arrested or forced to retire – at the same time as the Min Aung Hlaing himself is deposed.

When the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, was 'permitted to retire' in October 2004 and subsequently arrested as part of a power struggle among senior military and SPDC leadership, the entire intelligence apparatus he headed was dismantled within days and many of its officers imprisoned.

There is a chance, as ICG notes, that mounting battlefield losses may sway the other generals to move against their commander-in-chief. So too might a failed bid at a "democratic" election. Confidence in Min Aung Hlaing is already rumoured to be at a low ebb. It is not clear how reversals can mount against Min Aung Hlaing and the military before they decide to seek new leadership.

And herein lies a major problem with a countercoup. There may be hope in some quarters that an enlightened and progressive group of military officers will seize power and seek negotiations, but the opposite is more likely. The most likely outcome of a countercoup will be that a more hardline clique of generals will take the reins. This could result in an even more intense conflict with greater destruction and higher casualties.

## EDITORIAL

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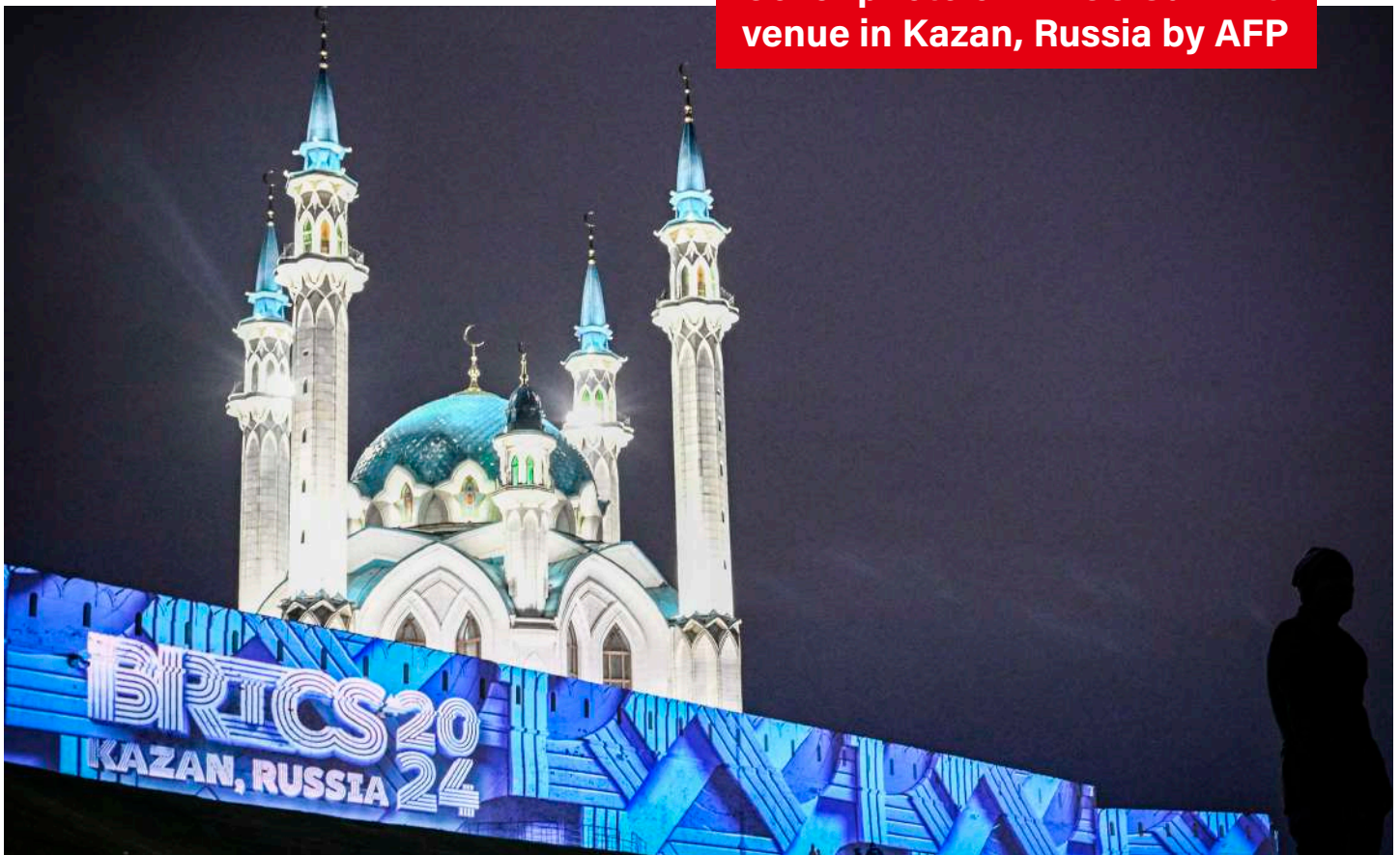
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Cover photo of BRICS Summit venue in Kazan, Russia by AFP





BRICS Summit host and Russian President Vladimir Putin leads Chinese leader Xi Jinping into the meeting in Kazan, Russia. Photo: AFP

# BRICS BUILDS UP STEAM

## MYANMAR JUNTA EAGER TO JOIN GROWING 'ALTERNATIVE FORUM'

## Why does the Myanmar junta want to join BRICS?

**M**yanmar is one of over 30 countries apparently eager to join BRICS, an “alternative forum” made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, plus others, which is finally starting to gain international attention judging by the stories published on the BRICS meeting held last week 22-24 October in Kazan in Russia.

BRICS is typically met with skepticism by the West. But in this time of international crisis with wars raging in the Middle East and Ukraine and economies struggling, the gathering of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and other key players, raises questions about this forum’s rejection of what they view as a unipolar world and an embrace of a multipolar world – including plans to bring in a “rainbow currency” that they believe will challenge the world supremacy of the US dollar.

In the wake of the Myanmar military coup in 2021, the junta has shown interest in becoming a member of the BRICS forum. The desire to join has been questioned by Western analysts, with the South China Morning Post claiming the Myanmar junta’s wish to join was “delusional” – grasping at straws as it comes under international criticism and sanctions for its ditching of democracy and brutal war against its people.

The junta is desperate for international friends and Russia and China have both stepped up to offer support. Naypyidaw sees value in joining this growing international forum that would appear to run counter to its critics in the West.

## COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE WEST

Western analysts are beginning to wake up to the clout of this forum. According to a recent article by the USA-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the BRICS group has become a major political force in the last two decades, building on its desire to create a counterweight to Western influence in global institutions. The group’s expansion in 2023 exemplifies its growing heft, but also brings new disagreements on issues such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russia’s 2024 leadership of the forum could intensify the bloc’s anti-West focus, including attempts to edge out the US dollar—but that will be an uphill battle, experts say.

Last week’s BRICS meeting in Russia was painted by the media as a chance for Putin to “come in from the cold” and demonstrate backing from a number of key international players – not least China and India.

The three-day summit in the city of Kazan was attended by leaders or representatives of 36 countries, highlighting the failure of United States-led efforts to isolate Russia over its actions in Ukraine. Myanmar did not attend.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres met with Putin on the sidelines of the summit after a speech in which Guterres called for a “just peace” in Ukraine. He “reiterated his position that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was in violation of the United Nations Charter and international law,” a readout from the UN chief’s spokesperson said after their meeting, which was criticized by the government in Ukraine.



BRICS-Plus gathering of core BRICS members and additional countries seeking to join. Photo: AFP

## GROWING FORUM

According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), over 30 countries have either formally applied or expressed interest in joining BRICS. These include Southeast Asian states Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam; NATO member Turkey; major oil and gas producers like Algeria; the world's biggest Muslim country, Indonesia; Nigeria, which has the largest population in Africa; and the world's eighth most populous country, Bangladesh.

There are clear economic benefits to joining this burgeoning group of emerging economies. The 10 countries (including Saudi Arabia, who has been invited but now formally accepted) that now make up BRICS represent 45 per cent of the world's population, 28 per cent of the world's economic output and 47 per cent of the global crude oil.

Intra-BRICS trade is one area that the group has found its footing. A joint statement coming out of the June 2024 BRICS foreign minister's meeting encouraged "enhanced use of local currencies in trade and financial transactions" among BRICS members. This was a trend that was already on the upswing between 2017-2022, with a 56 per cent increase in

intra-BRICS trade in that timeframe. Western sanctions on Russia led to a further surge.

"Trade in goods among BRICS economies has considerably outpaced trade between the BRICS and G7 nations, leading to greater intra-BRICS trade intensity," notes a report from the Boston Consulting Group. Those interested in joining BRICS believe membership will lead to increased trade and investment.

Western sanctions and the US dollar's status as the global reserve currency are also part of the story, USIP reports. The dollar's dominance as a reserve currency and in trade for commodities like oil gives Washington immense influence over the global financial system. Countries impacted by US sanctions and export controls — like BRICS leaders Russia and China, new members like Iran and wannabes like Venezuela — want to weaken the dollar's power in order to evade sanctions and tamp down US influence.

When it comes to a BRICS currency to challenge the dollar, skeptics say those ambitions are far from reach, reports CFR. Such a currency would require major political compromises, including a banking union, a fiscal union, and general macroeconomic convergence.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Eastern Economic Forum in Russia in 2022. Photo: AFP



The dollar, long the world's principal reserve currency, is still used in more than 80 per cent of global trade, and many experts doubt that a new BRICS reserve currency would be stable or reliable enough to be widely trusted for global transactions – at least in the short-term.

## IMF QUERIES BRICS

The meeting has prompted questions. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) wants to know more about a cross-border payments system discussed by the BRICS group of countries and aimed at boosting non-dollar transactions, the Fund's managing director said 24 October in a press conference in Washington DC.

At the BRICS summit, Russia secured a joint declaration encouraging the “strengthening of correspondent banking networks within BRICS and enabling settlements in local currencies in line with BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative (BCBPI).”

The system is designed to rival the European-headquartered SWIFT payments system, from which Russia was barred following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking to reporters at the IMF's headquarters in Washington, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said the Fund wanted additional information about the proposed payments system before taking a firm stance on it.

“The idea of having a payments system of a group of countries is not new,” she said.

“What we need to see is more details,” she added. “What is it in this idea? How that may translate into reality? And then we will be able to assess it.”

## KEY PLAYERS CHINA & RUSSIA

Unsurprisingly, China has been at the forefront of this de-dollarization effort, USIP notes. China's Renminbi has overtaken the US dollar as the primary currency for Chinese-Russian trade and Beijing is coordinating with several major Middle East oil producers to ramp up the use of the Yuan to settle oil transactions. Using local currencies for intra-BRICS trade, however, is often viewed as an interim step to a loftier goal, the common

BRICS currency. For now, most analysts see this effort as either unfeasible or a distant prospect – although Putin allegedly flashed a new BRICS banknote in his hand at the conference.

For China and Russia, attenuating US influence over the global financial system is part and parcel with building an alternative to the broader US-led international order. It is no surprise that US adversaries like Russia and China want an alternative international system.

But many Global South countries also believe the current order disadvantages their interests and privileges wealthy Western countries. They saw inequities in the COVID-19 response, and believed rich countries hoarded vaccines. Global South countries have also accused the US of hypocrisy over its positions on the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and suggest that the West only applies international law and norms when it suits their interests, rendering the need for what they perceive as a more fair international order.

While dissatisfaction with the current international order is the dominant narrative surrounding BRICS expansion, there are other prospective members, like Malaysia, and current members, like India, that want to maintain balanced relations across the globe and are looking to cement their strategic autonomy. For these countries, it is not about taking sides. Some countries also believe BRICS membership will give them a greater voice and representation in international politics. It is not all about anti-Western ideology.

## RUSSIA-HOSTED MEETING

The BRICS summit last week covered the deepening of financial cooperation, including the development of alternatives to Western-dominated payment systems, efforts to settle regional conflicts and expansion of the BRICS group of nations – including such countries as Myanmar and Thailand.

The Kremlin touted the summit as “the largest foreign policy event ever held” by Russia.

Speaking at what was dubbed the “BRICS Plus” session, which included countries that are considering joining the bloc, Putin accused the West of trying to stem the growing power of the Global South with “illegal unilateral sanctions, blatant protectionism,

manipulation of currency and stock markets, and relentless foreign influence ostensibly promoting democracy, human rights, and the climate change agenda.”

“Such perverse methods and approaches — to put it bluntly — lead to the emergence of new conflicts and the aggravation of old disagreements,” Putin said. “One example of this is Ukraine, which is being used to create critical threats to Russia’s security, while ignoring our vital interests, our just concerns, and the infringement of the rights of Russian-speaking people.”

Russia has specifically pushed for the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network SWIFT and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners.

## JOINT STATEMENT

In a joint declaration on 23 October, BRICS summit participants voiced concern about “the disruptive effect of unlawful unilateral coercive measures, including illegal sanctions” and reiterated their commitment to enhancing financial cooperation within BRICS, reports AP. They noted the benefits of “faster, low-cost, more efficient, transparent, safe and inclusive cross-border payment instruments built upon the principle of minimizing trade barriers and non-discriminatory access.”

China’s President Xi emphasized the bloc’s role in ensuring global security. Xi noted that China and Brazil have put forward a peace plan for Ukraine and sought to rally broader international support for it. Ukraine has rejected the proposal. All this while Beijing fails to see the irony of their sabre-rattling and threats against Taiwan.

“We should promote the de-escalation of the situation as soon as possible and pave the way for a political settlement,” Xi said during the forum, addressing the Ukraine war.

Putin and Xi had announced a “no-limits” partnership weeks before Russia sent troops into Ukraine in 2022. They already met twice earlier this year, in Beijing in May and at a Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Kazakhstan in July.

Russia’s cooperation with India has also flourished as New Delhi sees Moscow as a time-tested partner since the Cold War despite Russia’s close ties with India’s rival, China. While Western allies want New Delhi to be more active in persuading Moscow to end the fighting in Ukraine, Indian Prime Minister Modi has avoided condemning Russia while emphasizing a peaceful settlement.

Addressing the BRICS Plus session, UN Secretary-General Guterres urged an immediate end to the fighting in Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine and Sudan.

## ‘MASSIVE POLICY COUP’

Not surprisingly, Russia’s Kremlin-controlled media touted the summit as a massive policy coup that left the West fearing the loss of its global clout. State TV shows and news bulletins underscored that BRICS countries account for about half the world’s population comprising the “global majority” and challenging Western “hegemony”.

Russian TV hosts elaborately quoted Western media reports saying that the summit highlighted the failure to isolate Moscow. “The West, the US, Washington, Brussels, London ended up isolating themselves,” said Yevgeny Popov, host of a popular political talk show on state channel Rossiya 1.

Russian President Putin closed the BRICS summit on 24 October, praising its role as a counterbalance to what he called the West’s “perverse methods.”

As for Myanmar, the military junta were not invited, but they wait on the sidelines for an appropriate point when they hope they will be allowed to join. Not surprisingly, the BRICS summit organizers clearly thought a Myanmar military junta delegation at this high-profile meeting might tarnish the gathering.

*Reporting: Mizzima, USIP, CFR, AFP and AP*

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On the Myanmar-Thailand border.  
Photo: AFP

# UPTICK IN KAREN STATE FIGHTING AS RESISTANCE BATTLES FOR CONTROL

In a significant development, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied resistance forces captured a major junta military base in Hpapun Township, Karen State, on October 30. The resistance forces initiated their assault on October 29 and successfully seized the base the following day. The outpost, housing around 120 junta soldiers, saw many flee, leaving behind captured prisoners of war, weaponry, and the bodies of fallen troops. With this victory, the junta's strategic stronghold in the area is now reduced to just one primary base, with the remaining outposts in Hpapun Township largely diminished in size.

Meanwhile, on October 28, KNLA and allied forces successfully took control of another junta base known as the Aung Zeya column, a unit originally intended to advance on Myawaddy City, a critical trade hub along the Thai-Myanmar border. Initially adopting a defensive

posture, resistance forces shifted strategies, seizing Aung Zeya column bases and effectively cutting off its mobility along the Asia Highway. This tactical move has left the Aung Zeya column unable to advance or retreat, with local military analysts noting that the coming dry season may see intensified resistance efforts to dismantle junta positions further.

## Rakhine State - The Arakan Army advances

The Arakan Army (AA) is intensifying its offensive on Ann City, a strategic location that houses the junta's Western Command military headquarters in Rakhine State. Situated at a critical crossroads, Ann connects southern Rakhine, the state capital of Sittwe, and major eastern islands. After capturing multiple junta bases in the Ann region, the AA is now advancing toward the



A Kachin woman sits amidst the rubble of her burnt home in Kutkai in Kachin State. Photo: AFP

command headquarters.

The capture of the Me Taung base on October 7 marked a turning point in the offensive, though junta forces have responded with reinforcements and airstrikes. Despite resistance, the AA has seized at least five headquarters, including those of Infantry, Engineer, Medical, and Intelligence battalions. Analysts note that capturing Ann City could take time, as the area is the largest in the state and still holds a significant junta presence.

As the fighting escalates, junta forces have reportedly fired artillery shells at civilians trying to escape the conflict zones, resulting in at least ten deaths and many severe injuries. Due to limited medical access in Ann, wounded civilians were transported 120 miles to a hospital in Magway rather than to a closer facility. The long journey led to additional fatalities, as some patients could not survive due to excessive blood loss before reaching medical care.

The conflict took a dramatic turn on October 28 when reports emerged that the AA shot down an MI-17 transport helicopter carrying the junta's Western Command second commander and several officers. If confirmed, this action marks a significant setback for the junta's counter-offensive efforts against the AA's advancing forces.

In southern Rakhine's Gwa Township, the AA has launched a northern assault, forcing junta troops to retreat to Gwa City. The retreating forces, including a strategic commander, have since established a temporary base in Kanthaya, a beach town 23 miles from Gwa. The AA's advance underscores the group's expanding reach as it targets additional strategic points across Rakhine State.

## Developments in Kachin State.

Following the capture of the No. 437 Light Infantry Battalion base in Momouk on August 19, the Kachin



Internally displaced people in Rakhine State.  
Photo: AFP

Independence Army (KIA) and its allies continue to resist junta efforts to reclaim the territory. Shortly after the base fell, junta forces launched an offensive from Bhamo, located about eight miles away, deploying armoured vehicles to regain control. As of October 20, the junta intensified its assault, advancing to within a mile of the base, locally known as 7-Mile Village.

According to a KIA spokesperson, "The junta offensive began again on October 20 with armoured vehicles, and the battle raged for over three days. Drones were deployed as well, but we managed to halt the column, forcing a retreat. Fighting seems to pause but reignites periodically." This ongoing battle highlights the determination of both sides in the struggle for control over this strategic area.

In the eastern part of Kachin State, the KIA and allied forces successfully seized the No. 1003 Border Guard Force base in Kanpaitee, a key town for China-Myanmar border trade. In the wake of the takeover, all junta-aligned militia and Border Guard Force (BGF) troops fled, leaving junta forces isolated in Kanpaitee. To maintain control, the junta has reportedly begun using civilians as human shields, arresting locals and threatening to torch Christian churches if people continue to evacuate the town. Recently reinforced, junta troops in Kanpaitee now number approximately 500 personnel.

Although tensions are high, no additional battles have been reported in the area thus far, with junta forces focusing on fortifying their position in the strategically significant border town.

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Women walk past a junta checkpoint in Mandalay. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR'S WAR APPROACHES MANDALAY A YEAR AFTER OPERATION 1027 OFFENSIVE

**O**n the outskirts of Mandalay, nervous Myanmar soldiers man a checkpoint just kilometres away from resistance forces who have set their sights on the former royal capital of 1.5 million people.

Ethnic minority resistance and People's Defence Forces battling to overturn the junta's 2021 coup are riding the wave of a huge offensive launched a year ago on 27 October in the hills of neighbouring Shan state.

Weeks ago, residents could hear the sounds of clashes along the road that leads out of the country's second city.

"We are afraid of the fighting coming here but we have nowhere to hide," said one man who owns a food shop near the checkpoint and requested anonymity for security reasons.

"Operation 1027", named for its start date, has ejected the junta from around 50,000 square kilometres -- an area roughly the size of Bosnia -- according to

analysts and an AFP tally.

The spoils include a string of towns along a lucrative trade highway to northern neighbour China, along with most of western Rakhine state, home to a proposed Beijing-backed deep-sea port on the Indian Ocean.

Mandalay's capture by the British in 1885 ended the last independent Burmese kingdom and its loss now would be a stunning blow to the junta.

Fighters from the "Mandalay PDF" -- students, teachers and IT workers who fled the city years ago to join the struggle against the junta -- are already in Patheingyi, about five kilometres from the city, according to the group's spokesman Osmond, who uses one name.

"If we can capture Mandalay, we believe that this will make big change in our revolution," he said by phone from an undisclosed location.



Last month, an unidentified group launched a rocket attack on the city, damaging several buildings, and last week, the Chinese consulate was hit by an explosion, drawing a stern protest from Beijing -- a major arms supplier and ally of the junta.

In the city's bustling, dusty downtown there are few soldiers on the streets and police rarely venture out from stations barricaded with concrete and sandbags.

"Mandalay is not well-protected at all," said one former local politician, who also requested anonymity to talk to the media.

"Where can we go if there is war in Mandalay? We just have to die here."

### CHINA CARD

The sustained success of Operation 1027 has buoyed the dozens of PDF groups that sprung up to fight the military, whose coup plunged the country into more than three years of brutal civil war.

But replicating its advances in the central plains around Mandalay will prove a challenge, independent Myanmar analyst David Mathieson told AFP.

The terrain is "prime territory" for the junta to press its advantages in air power and artillery, he said, while fighting in a sprawling, urban area is a complication.

Whether the ethnic rebel alliance that spearheaded Operation 1027 would join any assault on the city, which is far from its bases in the borderlands, remains unclear.

And looming over that question is China.

Beijing maintains ties with the ethnic rebel groups that operate along its border, which it sees as useful as leverage in its relations with the junta.

Analysts say Beijing gave "Operation 1027" a green light on the condition it dismantled any online scam

compounds located in territory it took in Shan state.

Such compounds are typically run by Chinese nationals and staffed by people from China and other countries who were often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots.

### RED LINE

Beijing is now trying to prevent the alliance from making more gains that could further diminish the junta, said Jason Tower of the United States Institute for Peace.

Toppling the military is "a clear red line" for China, he told AFP.

The rebel alliance – made up of the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) – did not respond to AFP requests for comment.

Beijing has closed several of its border crossings that provide revenue to the rebel groups, and cut internet, water and power supplies to enclaves along its border.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is expected to visit China next month, in what would be his first trip to his most important ally since the coup, and Tower said that Beijing had made it clear it wanted the military to prevail.

The Mandalay PDF fighters in the plains outside their home city have their own goals.

"Capturing Mandalay is one of our most strategic military objectives," said spokesman Osmond.

"But we don't plan to reveal when we will do this operation."

*Reporting AFP, Mizzima*



Bombing damage in Lashio.  
Photo: Supplied

## OVER 1,000 CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR IN THREE MONTHS

According to the Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica Research Organization, which monitors armed conflicts in Myanmar, 1,044 civilians were killed and 1,383 injured between July and September.

These casualties were the result of targeted attacks and ongoing clashes between the junta forces and revolutionary groups during the three-month period.

Northern Shan State recorded the highest civilian death toll with over 360 fatalities, followed by the Mandalay Region with more than 220 deaths, Sagaing Region with over 170, and Magway Region with over 20 deaths, the organization reported.

“The military council is increasingly relying on airstrikes and targeting non-military sites, including civilians, as they are unable to conduct effective ground assaults. We condemn their inhumane actions. Our fight against the military, their allied groups, and bureaucrats will continue until they are completely eliminated. We urge the public to remain resolute in the revolution, continue participating actively, and avoid collaborating with the Military Council,” said a member of the People’s Defence Force (PDF) in Magway.

During the three-month period, there were 2,126 military operations and clashes, with 2,006 targeted attacks on the junta by revolutionary forces, according to Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica.

The revolutionary forces also successfully captured 12 towns during these operations in Kachin, northern Shan, and Rakhine States, as well as in the Mandalay Region.

The most intense fighting took place in northern Shan State, Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay Regions. A major military operation in northern Shan State, labelled the 1027 Operation, culminated in the defeat of the Northeast Regional Military Command, marking a high point in the ongoing conflict.

On the revolutionary side, 288 members of the People’s Defence Forces were killed, and 241 were injured during this period, according to Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica.



Red Cross chief Mirjana Spoljaric.  
Photo: AFP

## RESPECT FOR LAWS OF WAR 'URGENTLY NEEDED': RED CROSS CHIEF

**A**mid a proliferation of brutal armed conflicts, Red Cross chief Mirjana Spoljaric decried the disregard shown for the internationally-agreed laws of war, with disastrous consequences on the ground, in an interview with AFP.

"What we see are constant violations of international humanitarian law in a fast-rising number of compiling conflicts," Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, told AFP last week.

"We need to come back to acknowledging that the key to bringing peace is respect for humanity."

But that respect appears to be in short supply amid a record number of armed conflicts - more than 120 raging around the world, the ICRC chief said.

In numerous conflicts, including the crushing civil war in Myanmar, Sudan, Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine, and Israel's escalating wars targeting Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, there seems to be little effort to spare civilians.

"The numbers of civilian casualties that we see today (and) that high and fast rising number of displaced people are unacceptable," Spoljaric said.

"Better compliance with international humanitarian law... is urgently needed."

### Reduce 'senseless suffering'

Known as the laws of war and enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, international humanitarian law (IHL) consists of a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict, protecting civilians and civilian objects and imposing limits on the means and methods of warfare.

This is “a very practical set of norms”, Spoljaric said, including requiring “the respect for medical facilities” and proper treatment of prisoners of war.

“It also requires that when civilian populations are requested to evacuate, that they can do so in safety, (and are) provided with the possibility to go to places where they will find security (and) access to food and water, to shelter and to medical assistance,” she said.

“There are a lot of measures enshrined in the humanitarian treaties that allow for the reduction of unnecessary and senseless suffering of the civilian population in times of armed conflict.”

The ICRC, which is the caretaker of the Geneva Conventions, will next week co-organise an international conference with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, set to focus heavily on how to boost compliance with international law.

### **‘Hollowing out’ international law**

It should be “a no-brainer,” Spoljaric said, pointing out that “all states have ratified the Geneva Conventions, and committed to preserving humanity when things become very complicated.”

“Unfortunately, that is not the reality on the ground.”

In line with the ICRC’s mandate to act as a neutral intermediary between belligerents in a conflict, Spoljaric did not point fingers.

But she voiced serious concern about a growing tendency in conflicts, including in the Middle East, Sudan and Myanmar, where there has been a “collapse of entire health systems”.

“Why is this necessary in achieving military goals?” she asked, stressing that this raises serious questions about how parties are interpreting the “principles of distinction and proportionality in the conduct of military operations”.

She slammed the “undermining and hollowing out (of) international humanitarian law to the extent where it allows you anything in the conduct of hostilities to achieve your military goals”.

One of the biggest challenges at the moment, she said, was “the notion that the enemy has to be completely defeated, and that the enemy can be completely defeated”.

“It’s against the spirit of international humanitarian law to assume that you are allowed to dehumanise the other in the interest of your own safety and security and preserving the safety of your own people,” she insisted.

She pointed out that the Geneva Conventions were adopted in 1949, to help avert a repeat of the brutality witnessed during World War II.

“We don’t want to go back there,” Spoljaric said.

“We don’t want to go back to a situation where you can destroy the other no matter how much it costs.”

AFP



Wai Wai Nu, right.

## WAI WAI NU ADDRESSES UN SECURITY COUNCIL CONCERNING WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

**M**s. Wai Wai Nu, Founder and Executive Director of the Women's Peace Network, made a statement at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 24 October.

The statement is as follows.

President, Excellencies, civil society colleagues,

I am honored to brief you at this year's open debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). I am Wai Wai Nu, the Founder and Executive Director of Women's Peace Network, advocating for peace and equality in Myanmar.

The theme of today's debate is welcome given the dire state of women's rights in conflicts and crises across the world, and unacceptably low levels of women's participation in peace processes, both of which the WPS agenda was meant to address. We are seeing record levels of armed conflict, for instance, in Gaza and Ukraine; the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan; and unprecedented humanitarian crises in Sudan, Syria, Yemen and across conflicts around the world. Women have been disproportionately exposed to conflict-related sexual violence, femicide, gender apartheid, gender persecution and other targeted atrocities. We are today also confronted by an alarming global backlash against gender and women's rights.

All these conditions undermine our collective ability to meaningfully participate in peacemaking and, in doing so, threaten our very hopes for peace.

24 years ago, feminist movements around the world reminded the international community of our potential for ensuring an equal, just and peaceful future. The Council heeded these calls by adopting Resolution 1325 (2000). Yet, today, we are a long way from its promise of equality.

As a human rights defender and former political prisoner, hope for change has long guided my activism. I am not alone. In Myanmar today, women across the country are resisting the Myanmar military and its 2021 attempted coup, and risking their lives to defy all forms of oppression, including patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia. As frontline responders and human rights defenders, we are doing everything in our power not to return to the pre-coup status quo — but to build a new future where we can fully participate regardless of our gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other differences.

But the Myanmar military's nationwide campaign of terror is preventing us from achieving our goal. This is the same military that, according to the UN, has committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Since the attempted coup, the military

has launched air strikes against civilians; targeted homes, schools, hospitals and places of worship; and displaced millions. Gender-based violence has increased dramatically in Myanmar since the attempted coup, primarily by the military, and other armed groups. Further, the military has killed and arbitrarily arrested thousands of women, who face torture, sexual violence and denial of medical care in detention. Since February, the military has forcibly recruited civilians, including young women and internally displaced people (IDPs), to become cannon fodder and human shields. The military has created a humanitarian disaster, and continues to block and weaponize aid to over 18 million people, more than half of whom are women and girls. Hundreds of thousands have fled Myanmar in search of protection in neighboring countries, risking detention and forced deportation.

Excellencies,

Addressing the root causes of conflict is vital for ensuring women's full participation in Myanmar's future. And when the key perpetrators of decades of atrocities remain unpunished — like in Myanmar — impunity is the root cause. Just as in Afghanistan, Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and many other contexts, impunity in Myanmar is contagious: it emboldens perpetrators and shows others that they are free to brutalize groups they deem inferior — especially women. As Resolution 1325 makes clear, accountability and respect for international law are critical for protecting women's rights, not only in Myanmar but in other conflicts across the world. Women cannot meaningfully participate in any sphere of life if they are being attacked, without consequences, on a daily basis.

Nowhere is this impunity more apparent than in Rakhine State, where the military and the Arakan Army (AA) have been targeting the Rohingya with escalating atrocities. Since November 2023, the AA has burned down Rohingya homes and villages, and massacred, abducted, tortured, raped and forcibly displaced the Rohingya. Armed violence, starvation and lack of water, shelter and medical care have forced at least 40,000 to flee to Bangladesh. Almost one million are still living in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar, where violence has worsened in recent months. According to the UN, last year was the deadliest year for Rohingya fleeing over land and sea — with women and girls facing horrific forms of sexual violence. This year will likely be worse, further delaying my community's voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return to their homes in Myanmar.

Excellencies,

Myanmar is an example of both an extreme violation of the key principles of the WPS agenda, and an illustration of why they are so important. I urge you to uphold all pillars of the WPS agenda. Member States should demand women's participation in all peace and security decision-making, and call on the UN to make women's participation a requirement in any peace process it supports. But it is not enough to express support for women's participation if the conditions for their participation do not exist. Conflict prevention, protection of human rights and accountability are essential if women are to take their rightful place at the peace table. I further urge you to support and fund women's organizations and human rights defenders, and take all necessary measures to protect them from attacks and reprisals.

On Myanmar, I urge the Council to hold an emergency, open briefing to discuss the situation, prevent further mass atrocities, especially in Rakhine State, and build on Resolution 2669 (2022) with stronger action, including a new resolution. This Council should demand the military cease all acts of conflict-related sexual violence. I further urge you to end all supplies of arms, ammunition and aviation fuel; impose targeted economic sanctions on the military; enable cross-border aid and unfettered humanitarian access; and reject the military's so-called "census" and efforts to hold sham elections. The Council must refer the situation to the International Criminal Court, or support the creation of an ad-hoc tribunal, and discuss the non-compliance of the provisional measures imposed on Myanmar by the International Court of Justice, which designated the Rohingya as a "protected group." This Council should explicitly call for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in decision-making about our country's future.

Excellencies,

Today, I speak before you as one of the few women from Myanmar to address the Council about the unspeakable suffering of my people. This is despite more than half a century of conflict in my country, the decades-long genocide against the Rohingya, and the determined efforts of my fellow women to end our plight. Women in Myanmar and across the globe are watching today to see if your words will be matched by action.

General N'Ban La. File photo: AFP

## KIO CHAIRMAN REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO UPROOT MYANMAR MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

**G**eneral N'Ban La, chairman of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), pledged ongoing collaboration with revolutionary forces to dismantle the military dictatorship, announcing new initiatives for administrative and law enforcement in KIO-controlled areas.

The KIO's central committee has launched the "Erasing the Root Operation" initiative, known as "Ru Nu Dan Majan Masing," to facilitate administration and rehabilitation efforts. General N'Ban La delivered these remarks during a speech marking the 64th anniversary of the Kachin Independence Organization's founding on 25 October.

In recent days, reports have surfaced that the Chinese government has urged the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) to halt its offensive against Military Council camps. However, the KIA has continued its operations, capturing Panwar, a key town in Kachin State where a Border Guard Force aligned with the Military Council is headquartered.

General N'Ban La stated that the military

dictatorship "must fail" and urged collaboration between the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) to intensify the effort. He emphasized that the revolution is supported by the people at large.

In his address, General N'Ban La also urged junta-affiliated militia groups to unite with the KIO. He addresses that step are underway to facilitate the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and to rehabilitate their communities in some areas.

General N'Ban La expressed his respect and admiration for frontline fighters who have achieved significant milestones in the struggle.

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) was founded on 25 October, 1960, with the mission of pursuing political justice. The Kachin Independence Council (KIC) followed on 15 January, 1961, and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the KIO's military wing, was formally established on 5 February, 1961.



# ARAKAN ARMY REPORTS INTENSE FIGHTING AND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES AMID ONGOING CLASHES IN RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) reports ongoing clashes in four townships of Rakhine State, including Maungdaw and Ann, with daily air and artillery strikes carried out by the junta, resulting in civilian casualties.

In a statement released on the night of 22 October, the AA stated that fighting continues daily in Maungdaw, Ann, and Kyeintali towns, with intermittent clashes occurring near Taungup.

According to military sources in Rakhine State, only Border Guard Police Battalion No. 5 remains stationed in Maungdaw town and is under heavy attack by the AA. In response, the junta has ramped up airstrikes to prevent the battalion's camp from being overrun.

A junta attack on 21 October on Hparwutchaung village in Maungdaw Township claimed the lives of five civilians and left 14 others injured, according to local sources.

In Ann Township, where the Western Regional Military Command is headquartered, heavy fighting has escalated since mid-September.

Clashes have also spread to Kyeintali, located between Thandwe and Gwa townships, with Gwa residents reporting that fighting has reached the outskirts of their town. Meanwhile, in Taungup, while fighting is less severe, frequent airstrikes by the junta have forced residents to flee the area.

Local residents reported that Taungup was bombed three times by junta forces on 4 and 7 October, resulting in the deaths of 19 civilians. In addition to the ongoing clashes in these four townships, the junta continues to bombard civilian areas with heavy artillery and airstrikes from bases in Sittwe, targeting Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Rathedaung townships.

The AA also reported that the junta is indiscriminately firing heavy weapons into non-combat areas, including towns and villages from Kyeintali to Kanthaya. Additionally, warships stationed offshore are launching artillery attacks, while airstrikes persist daily, causing ongoing civilian casualties, according to reports from the conflict zones.

As civilian areas remain under attack, the Arakan Army has issued repeated warnings, urging the public to stay alert to the dangers of airstrikes and artillery.

The AA also claims significant advances, capturing the towns of Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Pauktaw, Minbya, Myebon, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Thandwe, and Ramree.

According to local reports, the AA has gained control of multiple villages surrounding Sittwe, Ann, Taungup, Gwa, Kyeintali, and Kyaukphyu. Meanwhile, residents from Yekyi and Ngathaingchaung report that the junta is deploying a large number of troops from the Ayeyarwady Region via the Ngathaingchaung-Gwa road as the conflict in Rakhine State intensifies.





Myanmar-China border. Photo: AFP

## CHINA CLOSES ALL BORDER TRADE POSTS ON ITS BORDER WITH MYANMAR

**B**order trade merchants on the China-Myanmar border say China has stopped all exports of consumer goods, electrical appliances and equipment, construction materials and home appliances from China to Myanmar.

A border trade merchant said the Yunnan Province Administration notified Chinese merchants and transport services on the border of the ban on all exports from China.

The Yunnan Province government closed the border trade post at Mongla on their side of the Kengtung-Mongla trade route. A Burmese merchant said there would be a meeting between the Yunnan Province government and Chinese traders soon.

China first banned the export of pharmaceuticals to Shan State in August and has now extended this ban order to other items such as electrical goods and consumer goods.

A notification received by merchants from Xishaungbanna Prefecture, Yunnan Province, informed customers of Da Luo Transport Services that under a reformed export control policy, the export of varieties of consumer goods, electrical goods and accessories such as batteries, solar panels, solar batteries, engines, lamps and bulbs, foodstuffs, blankets, cement etc. are temporarily banned to Myanmar. The transport service will be informed of the change in politics and policy in a few days.

The closure of the Kengtung (Mongla-Tarlaw)

border trade point means all border trade posts on the China-Myanmar border have been completely closed. China has already closed all border trade posts captured by Northern Alliance forces including the 105-mile post and Kyinsankyawt border trade posts.

The closure also includes the border trade posts captured by Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) at Chinshwehaw, Laukkaing, Mongko, and Kyukkok (Pangseng).

Local residents say that all border trade posts in the area controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation/ Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) have been closed since midnight on 18 October after the KIA captured Panwa city on the China-Myanmar border. Panwah is where most of the rare earth mining work is being done. China also closed border trade posts at Lweje, Mai Ja Yang, Laiza, and Kharshan in KIA controlled areas immediately after the capture of Panwa. The border trade post at Kampaiti was also closed after the KIA recently captured it in its offensive.

The reasons given for the border trade post closures in the announcement include rebuilding infrastructure and upgrading the inspection system at these posts. The announcement says the closures are only temporary.

The closure announcement of all border trade posts on the China border appeared immediately after the bomb blast at the Chinese consulate in Mandalay on 18 October.



KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

## CPJ URGES KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY TO RELEASE TWO DETAINED MYANMAR JOURNALISTS

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) released a call on 22 October for the release of two local journalists detained by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in northern Myanmar's Kachin State.

The CPJ's statement reads as follows.

Myanmar's Kachin Independence Army (KIA) must account for and release Red News Agency reporter Ta Lin Maung and freelancer Naung Yoe who were arrested by the rebel group's forces on September 29 and 30 respectively, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on 22 October.

"All combatants in Myanmar's civil war have a responsibility to protect, and not target, journalists," said Shawn Crispin, CPJ's senior Southeast Asia representative. "The Kachin Independence Army should not act like Myanmar's junta by detaining journalists for their news reporting. It should free Ta Lin Maung and Naung Yoe now."

As of October 22, the KIA had not responded to requests for information about the status or

whereabouts of the two reporters since they were detained in northern Kachin State's Phakant Township, Win Zaw Naing, editor of the local independent Red News Agency, told CPJ by email.

CPJ's phone calls and text messages to request comment from two KIA spokespeople went unanswered.

Ta Lin Maung and Naung Yoe are the first Myanmar journalists to be detained by an insurgent group since conflict erupted in response to a 2021 military coup.

The KIA is one of the more powerful ethnic armed organizations that have fought for greater autonomy in Myanmar for decades.

Myanmar was the world's second-worst jailer of journalists, with at least 43 journalists behind bars, at the time of CPJ's December 1, 2023, prison census.



KNLA fighters. Photo: KNLA

## DRONE BOMBING OF KNLA HEADQUARTERS BY MYANMAR JUNTA SPARKS INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY ON BOTH SIDES

Following a drone attack on the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) headquarters, both KNLA and junta forces have ramped up military presence and patrols in the region, local sources reported. The KNLA is the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU).

The headquarters, located in the KNLA Brigade 7 area and near the Thai-Myanmar border, was bombed by drones on 22 October around 10:00 am. The bombing targeted the dining area and clinic and slightly injured one individual, according to a source from Brigade 7.

At the same time, two KNLA stations along the Shan Ywar Thit road were also bombed by drones.

"It's believed the headquarters were targeted from Mae Tha Waw, while the villages of Ta Ray Poe Kwee and Pa Ray Kyae Hta were attacked from positions near Shan Ywar Thit," a military source said.

In the aftermath of the drone strike, KNU staff, their families, and locals living near the headquarters began crossing the Thaungyin River (Moei River) into Thailand for safety. Drones and aircraft continued to be spotted

over the KNLA headquarters and nearby villages later that evening, prompting the KNLA to increase security measures.

A local resident near the Thai-Myanmar border described how the village emptied out when planes arrived, with most people fleeing to the other side of the river.

"There's hardly anyone left here. Security has been tightened," the resident said.

Attempts to reach KNU central spokespersons for comments on the drone attack were unsuccessful.

"The ground force commanders are ready and waiting for orders from senior officials," a military source said.

Meanwhile, junta forces are preparing for further conflict. It was reported that military reinforcements were deployed at the Light Infantry Division 22 base in Hpa-An town.



Photo: AFP

## YANGON GOLD ENTREPRENEURS ASSOCIATION WARNS ALL GOLD SHOPS TO BEEF UP SECURITY

The Yangon Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YGEA) warned all gold shops in Yangon on 22 October to beef up their security. The YGEA issued this announcement in the wake of five-viss gold heist in Yangon.

The announcement suggests making systematic preparations for security, to install CCTV cameras in shops and around the premises including parking areas, to install alarm systems, and to install CCTV and GPS systems on cars carrying gold and jewellery.

On 21 October in Hlaing Township, Yangon, six men robbed a car carrying 5 viss of gold (one viss=1.6 kg) and jewellery kept in three trunks. The robbers pointed guns at the owners while they were returning home after closing their shop.

A responsible official from YGEA said that after this heist, authorities led the installation of alarm systems at all gold shops.

The police force is currently trying hard to nab the culprits who committed the 21 October robbery.

In another incident, on 10 September, the Chaung Chaung gold shop owner in Mandalay was robbed at his home. The robbers fled with over ten viss of gold and 100 million kyat in cash. The junta later announced the arrest of these robbers.

Gold shop robbery cases have frequently occurred since the military coup in February 2021, but very few robbers were arrested in these cases. The rule of law has severely deteriorated with a rise in robberies and dacoity. Many gold shops, mobile phone shops, textile shops, and grocery stores have been frequently robbed.



Bombed buildings. Photo: Supplied

## AIRSTRIKES BY MYANMAR JUNTA KILL FIVE CIVILIANS IN TNLA-CONTROLLED NAMHSAN, NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Myanmar's military junta launched airstrikes on Namhsan township, controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in northern Shan State, for two consecutive days, killing at least five civilians, including a 70-year-old woman, and injuring five others, according to TNLA spokeswoman Lway Yay Oo, who spoke to Mizzima.

The first airstrike occurred on 22 October, targeting Ho Main village in Namhsan at around 2:30 am, resulting in five civilian casualties.

"Several civilian houses, including monasteries, were destroyed by the junta's bombs. All victims were civilians," said Lway Yay Oo.

The previous day, on 21 October, the military council carried out an airstrike on Kyauk Phyu Lay village in Namhsan, wounding a local resident and destroying a monastery and a residential building.

TNLA General Secretary Major-General Tar Phone Kyaw took to social media on 22 October, warning that the need for preparing for the revolution's victory has intensified due to the junta's increased aerial assaults on towns and villages inhabited by civilians.

Lway Yay Oo further confirmed that the junta

has carried out airstrikes on several TNLA-controlled areas, including Nawngkhio (Naungcho), Hsipaw, and Namhsan. While battles are ongoing in Nawngkhio and Hsipaw, Namhsan is relatively more stable, but has also seen indiscriminate airstrikes, with the junta's actions documented as war crimes.

"The military junta has started attacking innocent civilians after facing military defeats. They are using destructive bombs and air power. The junta's war crimes are being recorded," Lway Yay Oo said.

On 17 October, during the Thadingyut Full Moon Day, at least four civilians were wounded in an airstrike in Nawngkhio. The TNLA reported further aerial assaults in Nawngkhio on 19 October, where four civilians were killed and three others injured.

In addition, the junta conducted an aerial attack on Ward 12 in Lashio township around midnight on 21 October, injuring a civilian and damaging a home.

Additionally, on the same day, the military junta launched an airstrike on Laukkai, a town controlled by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). These attacks highlight the junta's increasing reliance on air power amidst the ongoing conflict.



## CHINA STRONGLY CONDEMNS BOMB BLAST AT MANDALAY CONSULATE

The Chinese government conveyed its deep shock at a 21 October press conference and strongly condemns the bomb blast at its Mandalay consulate.

At about 5 pm on 18 October local time, an office building of the Chinese Consulate-General in Mandalay close to the street was attacked with an explosive device.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Mr. Lin Jian said at the regular press conference held on 21 October, "China has lodged serious protests to Myanmar and urged the Myanmar side to get to the bottom of the incident, make an all-out effort to hunt down the perpetrators and bring them to justice in accordance with the law, fully strengthen security measures for the Chinese Embassy, Consulate-General, institutions, projects and personnel in Myanmar, and prevent similar incidents from happening again."

Both the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Myanmar junta said on 19 October that there were no casualties, but part of the premise was damaged.

Mr. Lin Jian said, "China is deeply shocked at the attack and strongly condemns it. The Chinese Foreign Ministry and Embassy and Consulate-General in Myanmar activated the emergency response

mechanism right away and quickly started handling the incident."

"The Chinese Consulate-General in Mandalay has recently issued a security alert, urging all Chinese nationals, businesses, and institutions in Myanmar to continue to keep a close eye on the local security situation, strengthen security measures, and take every precaution to keep themselves safe," he said.

No one has claimed responsibility so far for the bomb attack on the Chinese consulate in Mandalay.

A statement from Myanmar's junta on the night of 19 October blamed "terrorists" for the incident, which it said it was investigating in cooperation with consulate officials.

The National Unity Government (NUG), the parallel resistance government of Myanmar, issued a statement dated 19 October saying that they strongly condemn the attack on the Chinese consulate in Mandalay with an explosive device.

The NUG will seek a diplomatic solution with all neighbouring countries even if they have different attitudes and opinions. The NUG always objects and condemns all acts which will cause religious and racial hatred and any act which will undermine the interests of these nations, the NUG statement says.



Burnt out house in Sipar village in Budalin Township. Photo: Supplied

## **NUG DECRIES ATROCITIES BY JUNTA SOLDIERS IN BUDALIN TOWNSHIP, SAGAING REGION**

The National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement on 22 October condemning the brutal actions of junta troops in Budalin Township, Sagaing Region. At least 24 civilians were killed in the area between 11-20 October, including three children and three women.

Particularly horrific was the killing and dismemberment on 17 October of six civilians in Sipar village wherein their heads and body parts were hung from house fences.

The NUG's statement reads as follows.

1. On September 30th, 2024, the Northwest Regional Military Command of the junta's forces suffered significant casualties in a clash with revolutionary forces in a clash near the Sipar village, Budalin Township in Sagaing Region. After the heavy loss, they started employing the tactic of arresting civilians as human shields, raiding nearby villages, killing civilians, and burning civilian houses.

2. A column of more than 100 forces from Northwest Regional Military Command raided 17 wards and villages of Budalin Township between October 11 and October 20. At least 24 civilians were brutally killed during raids, arson attacks, mass killings, and airstrikes. Among those killed were three children, three women, and an elderly person. The most striking killings were dismemberment of six civilians in Sipar village on October 17th, with the bodies hanging on fences of civilian houses. In addition, at least 60 civilians were arrested and taken as human shields throughout their

operation.

3. To add up to the inhumane killings committed by the ground forces, the junta forces launched an aerial bombardment on five villages.

4. The indiscriminate attack was carried out after junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's warning during a meeting of civil servants in Taunggyi City, Shan State, on September 3rd, 2024, that depending on the situation and tip-off, they would attack the city and villages where the revolutionary forces are forcibly residing in to ensure the safety and security of the people. Following the warning, the violence against civilians increased significantly and openly.

5. For years, the terrorist military junta has utilized the tactic of targeting civilians as revenge for losses sustained during armed conflicts against armed resistance forces of different ethnicities. This strategy has already been documented in many different cases across the country. Targeting civilians and carrying out violent killings and arson attacks on the villages in Budalin Township could be seen as part of the military tactic as the junta leader had admitted.

6. If the international community continues to allow the military junta to operate with impunity, such an institution with inhumane strategy, tactics and doctrine will persist and embolden. Therefore, we request the international community to make efforts to hold the military junta accountable for their atrocious crimes.



Photo: Supplied

## REVOLUTIONARY YOUTHS IN YANGON PROTEST CHINESE SUPPORT FOR MYANMAR JUNTA

On 21 October, revolutionary youths in Yangon staged a protest to express their support for Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG), the parallel resistance government in exile, and various revolutionary forces, while condemning China's backing of the military junta.

Protesters displayed banners with slogans such as "China is not our good neighbour," "China, back off from Myanmar," "We stand with NUG, PDF, KIA, MNDAA, TNLA, AA, and EROs," and "China, shame on you." To emphasize their opposition, they also stamped on a Chinese flag during the demonstration.

This protest, named "People's Voices to Chinese Government," was organized by four revolutionary brotherhood groups in Yangon: Kyimyindaing Networks (KMD18), Owl Community, Mayangone Democratic Front (MDF), and Linn Young Ni Youth Association (LYNYA).

One participant said, "We want China to know that every action has a reaction."

Despite heightened military security and the ongoing arrests of anti-regime activists, revolutionary youths continued to defy the junta, holding this demonstration in a secret location in Yangon.

This protest follows a similar campaign on 16 October, where a revolutionary group in Yangon encouraged resistance against the military junta with the slogan "Don't be afraid and fight back."

Between September and October, at least ten young anti-regime activists were arrested by the junta in Yangon. However, anti-junta campaigns and attacks on junta targets continued to persist.



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SAYS ROHINGYA COMMUNITY IN MYANMAR FACING GRAVEST THREATS SINCE 2017

**A**mnesty International released a statement on 24 October highlighting the deteriorating and grave situation facing Rohingya communities amid ongoing clashes between the Arakan Army and junta military forces in Rakhine State.

Facing a situation worse than any since 2017, Amnesty says thousands of new Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are in urgent need of humanitarian support from the international community. The group also calls on Bangladesh to refrain from sending refugees back to indiscriminate airstrikes and killings of civilians in Myanmar.

The press release reads as follows.

Newly arrived Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh require immediate access to food, shelter, and medical care after enduring the worst violence against their communities since the Myanmar military-led campaign in 2017. Amnesty International released a press release on 24 October.

Testimony shows how Rohingya families forced to leave their homes in Myanmar have been caught in the middle of increasingly fierce clashes between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army, one of many armed groups opposing the junta. Hundreds of thousands have been internally displaced and upwards of tens of thousands of Rohingya have crossed the border or are waiting to cross the border to seek refuge in Bangladesh.

“Once again, the Rohingya people are being driven from their homes and dying in scenes tragically reminiscent of the 2017 exodus. We met people who told us they lost parents, siblings, spouses, children and grandchildren as they fled fighting in Myanmar. But this time, they are facing persecution on two fronts, from the rebel Arakan Army and the Myanmar military, which is forcibly conscripting Rohingya men,” Amnesty International’s Secretary General, Agnès Callamard, said.

“Those lucky enough to make it to Bangladesh do not have enough to eat, a proper place to sleep, or even their own clothes.”

The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has had a catastrophic impact on human rights. Myanmar's military has killed more than 5,000 civilians and arrested more than 25,000 people. Since the coup, Amnesty has documented indiscriminate air strikes by the Myanmar military, torture and other ill-treatment in prison, collective punishment and arbitrary arrests.

The recent escalation in Myanmar's Rakhine State started in November 2023 with the launch of a rebel counter-offensive by the Arakan Army and two other armed groups that has posed the biggest threat to military control since the 2021 coup. Myanmar's military has responded by stepping up indiscriminate air strikes that have killed, injured and displaced civilians.

The impact on Rakhine State, where many of the more than 600,000 Rohingya in Myanmar still live, has been severe, with towns transformed into battlegrounds.

In Bangladesh, authorities have been pushing Rohingya fleeing the conflict back into Myanmar, while those who reached the Bangladesh camps told of a desperate shortage of essential supplies and services there.

In September 2024, Amnesty interviewed 22 people in individual and group settings who recently sought refuge in Bangladesh, joining more than one million Rohingya refugees, the majority having arrived in 2017 or earlier.

The new arrivals said the Arakan Army unlawfully killed Rohingya civilians, drove them from their homes and left them vulnerable to attacks, allegations the group denies. These attacks faced by the Rohingya come on top of indiscriminate air strikes by the Myanmar military that have killed both Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine civilians.

Many Rohingya, including children, who were fleeing the violence to Bangladesh drowned while crossing by boat.

## **Bangladesh pushbacks deepen woes of Rohingya**

The people Amnesty International interviewed in Bangladesh had recently fled Maungdaw Township in northern Rakhine State, which the Arakan Army tried to capture from the Myanmar military after it seized Buthidaung Township in May.

Many were survivors of a drone and mortar attack that took place on 5 August on the shores of the Naf River that divides Myanmar and Bangladesh.

All those interviewed stressed that their urgent priority now was access to basic services in the camp, including aid, shelter, money, security, food and healthcare.

They were also terrified of being sent back to Myanmar. But Amnesty International found that Bangladeshi border authorities have forcibly returned Rohingya people fleeing the violence, in violation of the international law principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning or transferring anyone to a country where they are at risk of serious human rights violations.

A 39-year-old Rohingya man told Amnesty International he fled Maungdaw with his family on 5 August 2024. In the early morning of 6 August, their boat was near the Bangladesh shore and started taking on water before tipping over. Residents told him later that Bangladeshi border guards prevented them from helping.

“The border guards were nearby, but they did not help us,” he said.

He said he passed out and woke up on the beach to see dead bodies washed ashore. He later discovered that all his six children, aged between two and 15, had drowned. He said his sister also lost six of her children.

Bangladesh border guards detained him. The next night he and the others with him were sent back to Myanmar, where they found another boat and returned. According to one credible estimate, there have been more than 5,000 cases of refoulement this year, with a spike following the 5 August attacks.

“Sending people back to a country where they are at real risk of being killed is not only a violation of international law; it will also force people to take greater risks while making the journey to avoid detection, such as traveling by night or on longer routes,” Agnès Callamard said.

The Rohingya who made it to the refugee camps are living off the generosity of relatives there. New arrivals in particular expressed concern that they were unable to register with the UN refugee agency for essential support. As a result, many are going without meals, and are afraid to venture out for fear of deportation, even when in need of medical care.

Interviewees also mentioned the deteriorating security situation in the camps, due mainly to the presence of two Rohingya armed groups: the Rohingya Solidarity Organization and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. Myanmar’s shifting conflict dynamics in Rakhine State have meant that some Rohingya militants have aligned with the junta in Myanmar. As a result, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh fear that they or their family members could be snatched and forcibly taken back and conscripted to fight there.

The vast majority hoped for resettlement in a third country.

“We are constantly afraid of moving from one place to another because we don’t have any documents. We are newcomers here, and we have also heard about people being abducted,” a 40-year-old woman said.

“The interim Bangladesh government and humanitarian relief organizations must work together so that people can have access to essential services such as food, adequate shelter and medical care,” Agnès Callamard said.

“Bangladesh must also ensure that it does not forcibly return people to escalating conflict. Meanwhile, the international community needs to step up with funds and assistance for those living in the refugee camps.”

In a meeting with Amnesty International, Bangladesh officials rejected the allegations of

refoulement but said border guards “intercept” people trying to cross the border. They also stressed that the country cannot accommodate any more Rohingya refugees.

### **Arakan Army and Myanmar military abuses**

The Myanmar military has persecuted Rohingya for decades and expelled them en masse in 2017. It is now forcing them to join the army as part of a nationwide military service law. The Myanmar military has also reportedly reached an informal “peace” pact with the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, an older Rohingya armed group that has reemerged as a force in recent months. These complex developments have further inflamed tensions between the Rohingya and the ethnic Rakhine, whom the Arakan Army purports to represent.

The rise in fighting nationwide has also resulted in mounting allegations of abuses by armed groups fighting against the military. Many Rohingya described the fatal consequences of being trapped between the two sides.

“Every time there is a conflict, we get killed,” one Rohingya interviewee told Amnesty.

A 42-year-old shopkeeper said that on 1 August, a munition of unknown origin landed outside his house in Maungdaw, killing his 4-year-old son. On 6 August, the Arakan Army – whose fighters he identified by their badges – entered his village in Maungdaw and relocated all the Hindu and Buddhist families to another area they said was safe, while the Rohingya families were left in place.

“They began causing unrest [using it as a base to launch attacks] in the village, which forced us, the Muslim families, to leave on 7 August. We were the only ethnic group left in the village. It seemed like they did this intentionally,” he said.

When he later took shelter in downtown Maungdaw on 15 August, he said he saw Arakan Army “snipers” shoot two Rohingya civilians. “I witnessed the Arakan Army kill a woman right on the spot with gunfire while

she went to a pond to collect water ... there was another man who was sitting and smoking in front of his house and he too was shot right in his head and killed.”

In response to questions by Amnesty International, the Arakan Army said on 13 October that these allegations were unsubstantiated or not credible. It said it issued warnings for civilians to leave Maungdaw ahead of its operations and helped evacuate people, that it instructs its soldiers to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and that in case of breaches, it takes disciplinary action.

Since late last year, Amnesty International has separately documented Myanmar military air strikes that have killed civilians and destroyed civilian infrastructure in Rakhine State. This year, the impact of the Myanmar military conscripting Rohingya has added to the historical, systemic discrimination and apartheid already experienced by Rohingya.

“I felt really bad that they were involving us in their fight, even though we had nothing to do with it. It felt like they were laying the foundation to get us killed,” a 63-year-old cattle trader said.

### Families wiped out

On 5 August 2024, the intensity of bombardments and gunfights between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army forced scores of people from Maungdaw to seek shelter in sturdier homes near the Naf river border with Bangladesh.

Recalling that day, the Rohingya cattle trader said the Arakan Army was “getting closer to our village, capturing the surrounding villages ... they flew drones in the sky, holding them there for about an hour, and could drop bombs from the drones whenever and wherever they wanted with remote control. They killed so many people.”

That afternoon, many recounted seeing a drone and hearing multiple blasts. The cattle trader said he heard eight to 10 blasts, and that bombs were exploding “before even touching the ground”. He saw a small unmanned aerial device flying near the crowd that looked like a “rounded-shaped drone” with something attached underneath.

He said his wife, daughter, son-in-law, and two of his grandchildren were killed, while the youngest grandchild, aged one, was seriously injured and later had her lower left leg amputated at the knee in Bangladesh.

One 18-year-old woman from Maungdaw said she lost both parents and two of her sisters, aged seven and five, during the blast. At the time of the attack, her father was carrying one of her sisters while her mother carried the other. When they reached the Maungdaw shore in the afternoon in search of boats to cross to Bangladesh, an explosion occurred.

“We quickly hid in the mud, sitting down in the muddy water, and then another bomb exploded, killing my parents, sisters and many others,” she said. “I saw it all with my own eyes – my parents and sisters were killed when the bomb shrapnel hit them.”

While she didn’t see a drone, she said the “big bomb” that killed her family members “came flying”. The sound has haunted her ever since. She said she saw about 200 bodies on the shore, a figure cited independently by another interviewee.

Almost everyone Amnesty spoke to said they lost at least one relative while trying to flee Myanmar. Medical records shared with Amnesty International from the days after the attack show treatment for bomb blast injuries after arriving in Bangladesh. Since August there has been a dramatic increase in treatment of war wounds from those fleeing Myanmar.

In its response to Amnesty International, the Arakan Army said that the Myanmar military or aligned armed groups were likely those most responsible and that eyewitnesses or survivors may be affiliated with militant groups.

“The Arakan Army must allow an independent, impartial and effective investigation into possible violations carried out during their operations. Both the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military must abide by international humanitarian law,” Agnès Callamard said.

“We continue to call on the UN Security Council to refer the entire situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.”



Photo: AFP

## MORE THAN 140 ROHINGYA REFUGEES LAND IN INDONESIA: OFFICIAL

**A**t least 146 Rohingya refugees landed in western Indonesia on Thursday, a local official said, as arrivals of members of the persecuted minority pick up again as sea conditions calm.

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

The boat was carrying 64 men, 62 women and 20 children when it landed in Pantai Labu town in North Sumatra province, local official Muhammad Faisal Nasution told AFP.

The refugees were taken to a temporary shelter at a local district office where they will await transfer.

"Many of the refugees, especially the children, looked hungry and were without proper clothing. The locals gave them clothes. The local community also provided food, like eggs and rice," said Nasution.

He said they were waiting for further instructions from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) on their relocation.

Protection associate for UNHCR in Indonesia

Faisal Rahman said a team was at the site to assist the refugees.

The landing comes as another group of more than 100 Rohingya languish a mile (1.6 kilometres) off the coast of southern Aceh, which borders North Sumatra. UNHCR said their rescue was planned on Thursday.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention and says it cannot be compelled to take in refugees from Myanmar, calling instead on neighbouring countries to share the burden and resettle Rohingya who arrive on its shores.

Many Acehnese, who themselves have memories of decades of bloody conflict, are sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslims.

But others say their patience has been tested, claiming the Rohingya consume scarce resources and occasionally come into conflict with locals.

In December 2023, hundreds of students forced the relocation of more than 100 Rohingya refugees, storming a function hall in Aceh where they were sheltering and kicking their belongings.

AFP



Farmers salvage crops. Photo: AFP

# FARMERS FACE MAJOR LOSSES AS HEAVY RAINS DEVASTATE RICE FIELDS IN YANGON AND AYEYARWADY REGIONS

Rice fields in Yangon and Ayeyarwady Regions suffered extensive damage from recent heavy rainfall and flooding, leaving farmers concerned about the impact on their harvests. From 21 to 23 October, intense rains inundated fields in these regions, leading to substantial losses, according to farmers.

"This is the second time this has happened. We had planned to harvest at least 500 acres of rice next week, but now it looks like every farmer has lost nearly everything," said a rice farmer from Twante Township in Yangon.

Key rice-growing areas in Ayeyarwady, Bago, and Yangon have seen heavy rains during the last rainy season that severely damaged crops. With fields now ripe for harvest, farmers fear the loss in yields will lead to significant financial setbacks.

"The waterlogged fields turned muddy as the floodwaters receded. Harvesting would only yield rice covered in mud," said a rice farmer from Ayeyarwady Region.

Farmers who operate with loans are facing even greater challenges.

"It's unfortunate that some farmers borrowed money with interest to plant their crops. Now, with these losses, they are struggling both physically and emotionally," said a farmer from Pyapon Township in Ayeyarwady Region.

The military regime has been providing loans twice a year for rice planting, offering 150,000 kyats per acre for summer and monsoon paddy. However, farmers report that this amount falls short, forcing many to take out private loans or mortgage their jewelry to cover cultivation costs.

To aid farmers, the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) is working with the Department of Agriculture to distribute fertilizers and rice seeds to areas affected by the floods.

"We're delivering fertilizer and seeds for the Yangon Region now, and preparing to assist Ayeyarwady Region," said an MRF official.

The MRF also plans to support farmers in Htantabin Township and has already provided aid to farmers in three other Yangon townships - Hmawbi, Taikkyi, and Hlegu. However, the exact number of affected acres and the potential impact on rice prices remain undetermined.

The recent downpours were spurred by Cyclone Dana, which formed in the Bay of Bengal. As the storm made landfall on India's coast on 25 October, rainfall in Myanmar decreased. Farmers in Yangon and Ayeyarwady Regions are now working to drain their fields, using both manpower and machinery to salvage the remaining crops.

Since early October, both the National Unity Government's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (MOHADM) and the junta's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology have issued warnings to farmers about potential destructive rains.

MOHADM has advised that an increase in typhoons from the South China Sea and the western Pacific could bring damaging rainfall during harvest time.

Last month, Myanmar also saw severe flooding across Shan State, Mandalay Region, and Naypyidaw, largely due to remnants of the Yagi storm, causing widespread crop damage across the country.



Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR PADDY PRODUCERS MAY INCUR LOSSES THROUGH REFERENCE PRICE SET BY JUNTA

**P**addy farmers criticised the reference price set by the junta under the 'Law on the Protection of Farmer Rights and Enhancement of their Benefits' as it was about two times lower than the actual market price.

This paddy reference price was set by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation under the Law of Protection of Farmer Rights and Enhancement of their Benefits' on 18 October.

The set reference price is 960,000 Kyats per 100 baskets of paddy (one basket = 46 lbs), and it must meet their criteria of permissible impurities content and moisture content of less than 14%. The impurities mean dust, sand, small stones and wizened grains.

This price is designated for monsoon paddy produced in 2024 and summer paddy that will be available in 2025 to have a decent price during the harvest season, the announcement says.

Farmers spent at least one million kyats per acre for farming inputs of seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides etc. so they will incur losses if they must sell their paddy

at this price of 960,000 Kyats per 100 baskets, a farmer said.

Moreover, they must spend on extra costs this paddy cultivation season as the prices of farm inputs and miscellaneous costs were rising. More costs were also incurred during cultivation after the paddy fields were flooded due to heavy rains. Farmers say this meagre reference price should not be set at this amount.

The junta's reference price is about two times below the actual market price. Farmers worry about this price will allow rice merchants to take advantage and exploit them.

The announcement says the transactions must be made at the market price if it exceeds the reference price. If the market price is below the reference price, it must be bought at the reference price. This means the reference price is the minimum price for rice.

Typhoon Yagi and its consequent floods and landslides across the country damaged nearly 800,000 acres of paddy fields in the 2024 monsoon paddy season. Farmers had to spend more money to regrow their crops.

Pre-cyclonic storms brought strong winds and heavy rains on 19 October and damaged paddy fields while most of them were being harvested. Farmers were hard hit in this 2024 monsoon paddy season and the paddy procurement reference price is so low that they will incur losses for their farm produce. Money raised at this price will not cover even their farm input costs let alone yield profits.

Those farmers who have difficulty in selling rice at the reference price can contact township representatives of the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) or dial its contact numbers: 01 2301128, 01 2301129, and 01 218266, the announcement says.

The junta usually says the reference price is the floor price and producers may sell their produce at market prices freely but in early July this year, many rice and paddy merchants were arrested and imprisoned for alleged profiteering and hoarding. Subsequently the junta controls the market and market prices of rice. Finally, they issued this paddy reference price for 2024 monsoon paddy season and 2025 summer paddy season, which does not even cover production costs.

Myanmar has nearly 15 million acres of monsoon paddy acreage and can produce nearly 14 million tonnes of rice annually. However, the junta's official announcements say that heavy rain and landslides across the country damaged over 700,000 acres of paddy this season.



Iranian man walks past a painting of the Iranian flag in Tehran. Photo: AFP

## ON THE BRINK OF A WIDER WAR: IRAN WARNS WILL DEFEND ITSELF AFTER ISRAELI STRIKES

Iran warned last Saturday it would defend itself after Israeli air strikes killed at least four soldiers and further stoked fears of a full-scale war in the Middle East.

Israel warned Iran would “pay a heavy price” if it responded to the strikes, and the United States, Germany and Britain demanded Tehran not escalate the conflict further.

US President Joe Biden said he hoped “this is the end” after the pre-dawn Israeli strikes, noting that “it looks like they didn’t hit anything other than military targets”.

Biden had urged Israel to spare nuclear and oil facilities in its retaliatory strikes and the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that no nuclear sites were hit.

The European Union called for all parties to exercise utmost restraint to avoid an “uncontrollable escalation”.

Other countries, including many of Iran’s neighbours, condemned Israel’s strikes and some, such as Russia, urged both sides to show restraint and avoid what Moscow dubbed a “catastrophic scenario”.

Iran insisted it had the “right and the duty” to defend itself, while its Lebanese ally Hezbollah said it had already launched rocket salvos targeting five residential areas in northern Israel.

The Israeli army said 80 projectiles were fired across the border on Saturday.

Hezbollah later issued evacuation warnings for more than a dozen named locations in Israel, while the Israeli army made similar warnings for two neighbourhoods in southern Beirut.

Lebanon’s official National News Agency reported early Sunday that Israel had carried out a fresh raid in Beirut’s southern suburbs.

### ‘Limited damage’

Confirming its own strikes after explosions and anti-aircraft fire echoed around Tehran, the Israeli military said it had hit Iranian missile factories and military facilities in several provinces.

The “retaliatory strike has been completed and the mission was fulfilled”, and Israeli aircraft “returned safely”, a military spokesman said.



Iran confirmed Israel had targeted military sites around the capital and in other provinces, saying the raids caused “limited damage” but killed four soldiers.

Iran’s armed forces general staff said only radar systems were damaged in the strikes and held back from any threat of immediate retaliation.

“While reserving its legal and legitimate right to respond at the appropriate moment, Iran is prioritising the establishment of a lasting ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon,” it said.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held telephone talks with his Egyptian, Qatari and Syrian counterparts.

Qatar’s Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, a key mediator in Gaza truce efforts, voiced “deep concern over the serious repercussions that may result from this escalation,” his ministry said.

**Direct attack**

Israel had vowed to retaliate after October 1, when Iran fired around 200 missiles in only the second ever direct attack against its arch-foe. Most of those missiles were intercepted but one person was killed.

The Israeli retaliation drew condemnation from Iraq, Pakistan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, which warned against further escalation. Jordan said Israeli jets had not used its airspace.

Turkey was one of the most outspoken critics, calling for an end to “terror created by Israel”.

Israel is already engaged in combat on two fronts.

Since last month, it has been fighting a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, including strikes that have killed the group’s senior leadership and ground incursions seeking to destroy missile sites.

And, for more than a year since Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack, Israel has been fighting a war in Gaza that has caused mass civilian casualties in the densely populated Palestinian territory.

The United Nations has warned the “darkest moment” of that conflict was unfolding, with Palestinians facing a dire humanitarian crisis and daily Israeli bombing.

**‘True ally’**

A defence official said there was “no US involvement” in the strikes on Iran, but afterwards Israeli President Isaac Herzog paid tribute to “our great friend the USA for being a true ally, and for the overt and covert cooperation”. He did not elaborate.

US National Security Council spokesman Sean Savett said Israel’s response was “an exercise in self-

defence”.

He urged Iran to “cease its attacks on Israel so that this cycle of fighting can end without further escalation”.

The Israeli military has blamed “Iran and its proxies” in the region for “relentlessly attacking Israel since October 7”, when Hamas attacked Israel, triggering the Gaza war.

That attack resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Dozens of hostages seized on that day are still held by militants in Gaza.

Israel’s retaliatory bombardment and ground war in Gaza has killed 42,924 people, the majority civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory’s health ministry which the United Nations considers reliable.

In late September, Israel turned its focus to Lebanon, hitting Hezbollah targets and leaders and then sending in ground troops.

Israel says the aim is to make the north of its country safe for tens of thousands of displaced civilians to return.

At least 1,615 people have been killed in Lebanon since September 23, according to an AFP tally of Lebanese health ministry figures.

In April, in its first-ever direct assault against Israeli territory, Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles.

Tehran said the barrage was retaliation for a strike on Iran’s consular annexe in Damascus that killed commanders of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Explosions later in April shook Iran’s Isfahan province in what US officials, cited by American media, said was Israeli retaliation.

Iran said its October 1 missile attack on Israel was retaliation for an Israeli air raid that killed Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, as well as the assassination in Tehran of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh.

On Friday, Gaza’s health ministry accused Israeli forces of storming the last functioning hospital in the territory’s north in a raid it said left two children dead.

The Israeli military says it is seeking to destroy operational capabilities Hamas is trying to rebuild in the north.

AFP

Photo: Pedro Lastra

# MEXICO JOINS THE ANTI-CHINA TRADE PUSH: A SHIFT IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

SUN LEE

In recent years, geopolitical tensions and shifting economic policies have driven a global rethinking of trade relationships, especially with China.

Countries around the world, particularly those aligned with Western economies, have been re-evaluating their dependence on China for manufacturing, raw materials, and technology.

Mexico, a close ally of the United States and a significant player in global trade, has now joined this anti-China trade push, marking a pivotal moment in the global reconfiguration of supply chains.

The global trade landscape has been changing rapidly, influenced by factors such as the US-China trade war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing concerns about supply chain vulnerabilities.

For decades, China has been the world's manufacturing powerhouse, supplying goods to markets across the globe.

However, tensions between China and other nations—particularly the United States—have led to a growing movement toward diversifying supply chains away from China.

The US-China trade war, initiated in 2018 under the Trump administration, brought to light the vulnerabilities of relying heavily on China for critical goods, especially in sectors like electronics, textiles, and medical supplies.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these concerns, with global supply chains severely disrupted due to factory shutdowns in China and the international logistics gridlock.

As a result, many nations, including Mexico, have begun to explore ways to reduce their reliance on Chinese imports and foster trade relationships that are more aligned with their strategic interests.

Mexico has long been a key player in global trade, particularly as a manufacturing hub for North America.

Under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), Mexico has deepened its economic integration with the United States and Canada, making it a critical partner in North American supply chains.

Mexico's proximity to the US market, its lower labour costs compared to the US and Canada, and its existing industrial infrastructure make it an attractive alternative for companies looking to relocate production from China.

In recent years, Mexico has seen an increase in investment from multinational corporations seeking to "nearshore" production.

Nearshoring refers to the practice of relocating supply chains closer to home markets to reduce logistical complexities and risks.

With growing trade friction between the US and China, as well as the push for greater regionalization, Mexico stands to benefit from this global realignment of supply chains.

## Why Mexico is shifting away from China

Several factors are driving Mexico's shift toward reducing its trade dependence on China, aligning it more closely with the anti-China trade stance being taken by many Western nations.

**US pressure and geopolitical alignment:** As a close ally and neighbour of the United States, Mexico is naturally influenced by US trade policy.

Washington has made it clear that it seeks to reduce its dependence on China, particularly in critical

sectors such as technology, pharmaceuticals, and industrial goods.

By aligning with the US on trade policies, Mexico not only strengthens its relationship with its largest trading partner but also positions itself as a preferred alternative for US companies looking to shift production out of China.

The Biden administration has continued the strategic push to reduce reliance on Chinese imports, while encouraging domestic and regional manufacturing capabilities.

Mexico's alignment with the US on trade policy is a logical step given its economic dependence on the US market.

**Economic opportunity through nearshoring:** Mexico's geographic proximity to the US makes it an ideal location for companies seeking to nearshore their operations.

Nearshoring offers significant advantages, including shorter supply chains, lower transportation costs, and quicker delivery times.

The US-Mexico border is one of the most active trade corridors in the world, and the ongoing efforts to modernize border infrastructure further enhance Mexico's appeal as a nearshoring destination.

In recent years, Mexico has experienced a surge in foreign direct investment (FDI) from companies in various sectors, including automotive, electronics, and aerospace, as they look to relocate production closer to the North American market.

By positioning itself as a nearshoring alternative to China, Mexico stands to gain significantly from the growing trend of supply chain diversification.

**Supply chain resilience:** The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of global supply chains, particularly those heavily reliant on China.

For many countries, the pandemic underscored the risks of concentrating production in one region.

Mexico, with its established manufacturing base and strong trade agreements with the US and Canada, offers a more resilient alternative for companies looking to mitigate these risks.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of building more flexible and resilient supply chains, and Mexico is poised to play a key role in this effort.

By reducing its reliance on Chinese imports and attracting foreign investment, Mexico can enhance its supply chain resilience and become a key player in the global shift toward regionalization.

**Strengthening domestic industries:** By reducing its dependence on Chinese imports, Mexico can also focus on strengthening its domestic industries.

The Mexican government has been promoting policies aimed at boosting local manufacturing, particularly in high-tech sectors such as electronics, automotive, and renewable energy.

This shift allows Mexico to develop its own industrial base while reducing vulnerabilities associated with foreign dependence.

Additionally, the Mexican government is offering incentives for foreign companies to set up production facilities in Mexico, including tax breaks, streamlined regulatory processes, and infrastructure improvements.

These efforts aim to attract investment and foster innovation in key industries, further positioning Mexico as a competitive player in global trade.

**Potential challenges:** While Mexico's move toward reducing its trade dependence on China offers significant opportunities, it also presents challenges.

According to analysts, China remains a critical player in global supply chains, particularly in sectors such as electronics and manufacturing, and completely

decoupling from China would be difficult and could lead to higher production costs and supply chain disruptions.

Moreover, Mexico must address internal challenges, such as improving infrastructure, reducing crime, and enhancing labour rights, to fully capitalize on the nearshoring trend, analysts explained, adding that strengthening these areas will be essential for Mexico to remain competitive in attracting foreign investment.

### The road ahead: Mexico's role in global trade

Mexico's alignment with the anti-China trade push reflects a broader trend of supply chain diversification and regionalization.

As companies and countries seek to reduce their dependence on Chinese manufacturing, Mexico is well-positioned to benefit from this shift.

Its strategic location, established trade agreements, and growing industrial base make it an attractive destination for companies looking to nearshore production.

As the anti-China trade push gains momentum, Mexico's evolving role in global trade will be closely watched by policymakers, businesses, and investors alike.

The country's ability to adapt to these changes and seize the opportunities presented by supply chain diversification will determine its future position in the global economic landscape, as per experts.

*Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia.*



# THE LONGYI REVOLUTION AND BEYOND

“Every woman I’ve talked to has told me that we have to do the revolution twice. It means that not only revolution against the military junta, but also against the patriarchy within the resistance groups. We are in the middle of severe armed conflict and also grave human rights violations. We always say that we as activists should not act like a dictator while we are fighting against a dictator.”

Born and raised in Myanmar, Nyein Chan May tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast that she left shortly before the coup to study political science and sociology in Germany, where she still lives, with a focus on intersectional feminism, a subject unavailable at Myanmar universities. Following the coup, she co-founded the group, German Solidarity Myanmar, to support the democracy movement through political education, public relations, and advocacy. She also launched a podcast, Ahtetsin (named after the decorative or embroidered band on the lower border of a women’s longyi), which endeavors to disseminate feminist theories to a wide, Burmese audience.

“When we think about Myanmar, it is a complex tapestry of ethnicities, identities ... and discriminations!” she explains. “Without considering the intersectionality of these discrimination patterns, any attempt to find solutions would be ineffective.” In other words, social and cultural challenges faced by diverse groups in Myanmar cannot really be addressed without a deep understanding of how the various forms of oppression

within the country intersect. “[Individuals] may confront barriers not only due to their gender but also because of their ethnic background or other identities,” she says. “This results in a complex web of oppression that requires nuanced and intersectional approaches to address effectively.”

Focusing specifically on gender issues, Nyein Chan May describes how, even during this revolutionary period, women in the resistance are fighting not only against the military junta, but also the patriarchy in their resistance groups. The “Longyi Revolution” is a poignant example of this challenge. In brief, it was a form of protest by women early on in the post coup resistance, using their traditional garments to embarrass and spook soldiers. They would hang their longyi across streets, from balconies, and draped over statues, which forced the soldiers to walk under them when on patrol or in response to protests. The effectiveness of this form of protest was based on the fact that some men—particularly soldiers—have a deep-seated superstition about walking under women’s clothing (particularly those associated with menstruation); they believe it strips them of their power (pon), and portends bad luck. So these acts of the “Longyi Revolution” created a visual and psychological barrier against the military. “Our longyi [is] our flag,” she says. “I’ve talked with the people who have led this movement. And for me, it is always clear that, as women of Myanmar, if we fight against the patriarchy, if we fight against the military dictatorship, we will have our own flag. And this flag is our longyi! This resonates with the women who led this movement.”

The military, with its hyper-masculine and superstitious culture, found itself paralyzed by this simple yet potent symbol of feminine defiance. The soldiers, deeply afraid of the supposed curse they might incur by walking under the longyis, often resorted to cutting down the wires and lines from which they were hung, delaying the soldiers’ advances.

## CHECK OUT THE PODCAST

Check out the story and the podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/10/13/episode-275-the-longyi-revolution-and-beyond>



A policeman on duty in Yangon. Photo: AFP

# JUNTA POLICE FORCE: A TOOL OF MILITARY REPRESSION SINCE 2021 COUP

**W**hile Myanmar’s junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing claimed the police force maintains “internal security,” rights organizations and local observers paint a starkly different picture of law enforcement in post-coup Myanmar.

Since the February 2021 military coup, the Myanmar Police Force has been widely documented working in tandem with military units to suppress pro-democracy protests, often employing excessive force against civilians. Former police officers who defected to the civil disobedience movement report that the force has been fully militarized, functioning more as an extension of the army than a civilian law enforcement agency.

A former police officer said that the police are no longer serving the people - they’re serving the generals.

While the junta promotes regional police cooperation through forums like ASEANPOL, Myanmar’s police force has faced international criticism for its role in arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, and violent crackdowns on dissent.

The transformation of Myanmar’s police force reflects broader challenges in the country, where the military coup has dismantled years of democratic reforms. While neighboring ASEAN states maintain official police cooperation with the Myanmar regime, several member countries have privately expressed concern over the junta force’s human rights record.



## OMAR KINTEH DOMINATES MYANMAR FIGHTER EH MWI IN TECHNICAL SHOWCASE AT ONE FRIDAY FIGHTS 84

In a compelling flyweight Muay Thai contest at the Lumpinee Boxing Stadium in Bangkok on October 25, Omar Kinteh secured a decisive unanimous decision victory over Myanmar's Eh Mwi, according to martial art Facebook pages

The bout, which was Eh Mwi's second appearance in ONE Championship following his previous knockout bonus victory, saw Kinteh demonstrate superior technical prowess throughout all three rounds.

The first round featured intense exchanges with both fighters applying pressure, but it was Kinteh who began to assert his dominance. In the second round, Kinteh's precise elbow strikes and punches found their mark repeatedly, clearly winning the frame with his technical superiority.

The third round saw Kinteh maintain control with a diverse array of techniques, including effective knee strikes, elbows, and punches, while Eh Mwi showed visible signs of fatigue. Kinteh's tactical approach and varied offensive arsenal proved too much for his Myanmar opponent.

The judges' scorecards unanimously favored Kinteh, who showcased a masterful display of technical Muay Thai.

A Facebook user wrote, "Eh Mwi's fighting style is too basic. He seems to lack effective fighting techniques and strategies. There's quite a gap [in skill level]. His opponent's fighting style is diverse and precise, with an excellent tactical approach."

## DRAMA AT MISS GRAND INTERNATIONAL AS MYANMAR BEAUTY QUEEN TAKES 2ND RUNNER-UP

In a dramatic turn of events at the 12th Miss Grand International pageant held in Bangkok, Myanmar's Thae Su Nyeim secured the 2nd Runner-up position, following India's Rachel Gupta who won the crown and Philippines' Christine Julian Opiaza who placed as 1st Runner-up, according to social media pages.

The celebration, however, turned controversial when Thae Su Nyeim's crown was removed by the National Director of Miss Grand Myanmar in front of the stage. Thai media outlets and pageant pages reported that she left the venue in tears amid chaotic scenes.

Throughout the pageant, which promotes the message "Stop The War and Violence," Thae Su Nyeim faced criticism for maintaining silence about Myanmar's ongoing crisis, including Myanmar junta's violence against civilians and the plight of displaced persons.

This stands in contrast to previous two Myanmar beauty queens who spoke out after the 2021 military coup. Both Han Lay who represented Myanmar at the Miss Grand International 2020 pageant, and Thuzar Wint Lwin who represented Myanmar at Miss Universe 2020, were subsequently barred from returning to Myanmar and now live abroad.

The incident has reignited debate about the responsibilities of beauty pageant contestants in representing their countries during times of crisis.

A Facebook user wrote, "Given the pageant's theme of peace, I had hoped she would speak up for Myanmar's innocent civilians. While I understand her silence due to fear of the junta and concerns about being banned from returning home, her self-preservation went too far. Additionally, her emotional breakdown and undignified exit after not winning first place showed she couldn't accept defeat gracefully. In any competition, there will always be winners and losers."

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