

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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FLASHBACK - Julie Bishop with Aung San Suu Kyi in 2014

'HORRIFYING'

UN envoy Julie Bishop shocked by
brutality of Myanmar junta



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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.

DECAPITATED HEADS AND THE BRUTALITY OF THE MYANMAR MILITARY

The United Nations building in New York is a long way from the "badlands" of Myanmar and it is hard at times for the Myanmar Ambassador to the United Nations Kyaw Moe Tun to truly convey the depth of horror taking place in his country.

But last week, Kyaw Moe Tun had shockingly important information to convey.

Speaking at the United Nations Security Council Annual Open Debate on "Women, Peace and Security: Women Building Peace in a Changing Environment" on 25 October, the ambassador highlighted the major uptick in atrocities being committed against civilians in Myanmar, particularly in resistance-held areas.

"The military junta's atrocities against civilians including women and girls have reached at alarming level. The junta forces committed many massacres. The recent case in point is the heinous killing of civilians including women on 19 October. Some are mentally disabled. The civilians were decapitated.

Their heads were hung on fences. Their body parts were dismembered and scattered apart. It is horrendous even to mention it here," he said.

The Myanmar junta media has dismissed the claims at "fake news". But it is impossible to dismiss the photos that have been published by independent media that show horrific scenes of heads and body parts hung on fences and strewn around Sipa village in Budalin Township, Sagaing Region.

Residents in the village have reported to Mizzima that a junta military column committed brutal killings, including the rape and murder of women, during their operations in the area. The 100-strong column, deployed by the Northwestern Regional Military has been attacking

villages in the township since early October.

On 17 October, the column entered Sipa village and stayed for three days. During this time, they killed six villagers, beheading them and burning down over 300 homes, according to local sources and the People's Defense Forces (PDF). Villagers described horrific scenes where bodies were mutilated, heads were hung on walls, and individuals were dismembered. Some were even burned alive, according to the Budalin Township People's Administration.

Locals decry the violence as "targeted brutality against civilians".

"They didn't come to fight; they came to murder civilians in the most horrific way," a Budalin resident said.

The violence extended beyond Sipa village, with at least 20 people killed across several other villages, including a seven-year-old child. Both women and men were subjected to extreme violence. Latest reports indicate the troops have gone on to take dozens of people hostage.

The Myanmar Ambassador to the UN Kyaw Moe Tun is right to highlight the brutality of the Myanmar military junta that is deliberately targeting civilians in various areas of the country. The Sipa village case is yet one more atrocity to mark up on the scoreboard of the junta's war against the people of Myanmar.

The Myanmar military is at war with the people. And the results are horrifying to see.

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CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

3 EDITORIAL

6 'HORRIFYING' UN envoy Julie Bishop shocked by brutality of Myanmar junta

10 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR
Analysis & Insight

14 CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Human Rights Myanmar report describes the "Great Firewall" of Myanmar

15 Second airstrike by junta on Mandalay PDF prison, leaves four prisoners dead

16 Myanmar junta's retaking of police station triggers mass displacement, renewed clashes in Ngazun Township

17 NUG transfers bodies of Meitei rebels and captive to Indian authorities following Sagaing Region clash

18 Family of Kani township NUG education officer brutally killed, including 3-month-old daughter

19 Myanmar ethnic armed group UWSA sentences man to death at public trial

20 Ninety Rohingya left 'stranded' on Indonesia beach

21 NUG urges China to reconsider hosting Myanmar junta leader amid rising concerns



- 22** Thailand urged to rescue over 100 human trafficking victims trapped in Myanmar
- 23** WFP calls attention to alarming levels of food insecurity in Myanmar
- 24 CATHOLIC CHURCH**
Hundreds in Myanmar observe All Saints' Day
- 25** Church in village of Myanmar's Catholic leader bombed in junta raid
- 27 SANCTIONS**
UK, EU and Canada impose new sanctions targeting Myanmar military regime and its associates
- 28** EU sanctions Myanmar military over scam operations and human rights abuses
- 29** UN Myanmar Investigator Nicholas Koumjian calls for global action on Myanmar war crimes
- 31 MYANMAR'S ECONOMY**
No money, Mo' problems – Sean Turnell
- 34** Myanmar strives to achieve full electricity coverage by 2030, Union Minister says
- 35** Myanmar plans to send workers to Laos under MOU
- 36 POLISH SUPPORT**
Poland's National Day celebration reminder of country's engagement with Thailand and Myanmar
- 37 US ELECTION & BURMA**
America Decides: How the US election could reshape Burma policy
- 40** Trump claims victory over Harris in US presidential election
- 42 ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**
Iran leader vows response to Israel after attacks prompting fears of a wider war
- 45 COLUMNS**
INSIGHT MYANMAR – Cracking the code
- 46 JUNTA WATCH**
- 47 SOCIAL WATCH**

Cover photo of Julie Bishop with Aung San Suu Kyi in 2014 by AFP





UN Envoy Julie Bishop. Photo: AFP

'HORRIFYING'

UN ENVOY JULIE BISHOP SHOCKED BY BRUTALITY OF MYANMAR JUNTA

Ms. Julie Bishop, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar reminded the world at the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee meeting on 29 October of the dire conditions in Myanmar.

Ms Bishop, a former Australian foreign minister, took up the post of UN envoy on Myanmar in April, a post that was earlier held by Noeleen Heyzer of Singapore who was heavily criticized by NGOs for her engagement with the Myanmar junta.

According to the UN, Ms. Bishop brings extensive political, legal, management and senior leadership experience to the role. She has held several high-level positions in the Australian Government, serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2013-2018), Cabinet Minister for Education, Science and Training, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues and Minister for Ageing. She was a member of the Australian Parliament (1998-2019), following a 20-year legal career.

Throughout her career, Ms. Bishop has strengthened engagement with regional partners and led international negotiation efforts, including the first ever United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea conciliation. Ms. Bishop is currently the Chancellor of the Australian National University. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Adelaide, Australia.

In her role as Australian foreign Minister, she met with Aung San Suu Kyi prior to her National League for Democracy party winning the 2015 election.

During the UN General Assembly Third Committee meeting in New York, she made the following statement:

The Myanmar conflict risks becoming a forgotten crisis. The people of Myanmar having suffered so much deserve better.

I believe Myanmar presents an opportunity for the UN to demonstrate its commitment to the New Agenda for Peace by responding collectively to this increasingly complex and fast deteriorating political, humanitarian, socio-economic, security and human rights emergency.

At the recent ASEAN-UN Summit, the Secretary-General underlined support for strengthened cooperation between the UN Special Envoy and the ASEAN Chair on innovative ways to promote a Myanmar-led process, including through an effective implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, and beyond.

I have engaged the current, previous and incoming ASEAN Chairs in Vientiane, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur and have visited bordering nations including China and Thailand. I will soon visit India and Bangladesh, continuing to urge neighboring countries to leverage their influence.

I have engaged with a range of Myanmar stakeholders to build trust for the UN. I aim to understand the different and often conflicting perspectives so that through my role I can encourage greater coordination with regional and global efforts to facilitate an agreed solution.



FLASHBACK - Julie Bishop with Aung San Suu Kyi in 2014. Photo: AFP

Myanmar actors must move beyond the current zero-sum mentality. There can be little progress on addressing the needs of the people while armed conflict continues across the country.

Any pathway to reconciliation requires an end to violence, accountability and unfettered access for the UN and its partners to address vulnerabilities among the marginalised, including Rohingya, ethnic communities and particularly women and children.

This General Assembly and the Security Council have called for these and other key measures, including the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Our assistance must be aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people. Recently, some of you heard from Myanmar women and youth about the disproportionate impact of this crisis, including in consultations my Office arranged in partnership with UN Women during High-Level Week.

The crisis is taking an enormous toll on young people who feel overwhelmed by hopelessness for their future, and in the immediate term, by abhorrent issues like forced recruitment.

All Myanmar actors agree that the human suffering has reached unprecedented levels. The statistics set out in the Secretary-General's recent report are horrifying.

While remaining impartial in my engagement with all stakeholders, I am guided in my work by the values and principles of the United Nations.

I have visited Nay Pyi Taw and met with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and I will return.

I have engaged with representatives of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), ethnic armed organisations, civil society, women's organisations, human rights defenders, along with representatives from numerous UN member states.

My engagement with various Rohingya representatives has focused on their safety, wellbeing and living conditions in Rakhine and elsewhere, increased burden sharing with Bangladesh, and the need for greater international support for efforts to create conditions conducive for their voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return.



UN Envoy Julie Bishop. Photo: AFP

I have consulted international financial institutions on how they might support Myanmar's infrastructure needs and help stabilise the ailing economy. The violence must end for such assistance to be forthcoming.

Adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, including civilian protection, is paramount as civilian casualties caused by airstrikes as well as land mines and artillery fire have risen dramatically.

I join with those who condemn violence in all its forms in this escalating conflict.

The rule of law has been so severely undermined that transnational crime emanating from Myanmar is proliferating. The sheer scale of arms production and trade, human trafficking, drug manufacture and trafficking, and scam centres means Myanmar now ranks highest among all member states for organised crime. The criminal networks are out of control.

There are now an estimated 3.4 million internally displaced persons, many seeking asylum across borders or by dangerous sea journeys. I have urged

neighboring countries to provide access to safety for those fleeing persecution.

The regional implications of this crisis are evident, but the global impact can no longer be ignored.

The Secretary-General has underscored the urgency of forging a path towards a democratic transition with a return to civilian rule. I share his concern regarding the military's stated intention to hold elections amid intensifying conflict and human rights violations.

A home-grown inclusive and sustainable peace must be our goal but as yet there is no agreement on how this can be achieved. This strategic objective remains central to my efforts. We must continue to find common ground amid the chaos so a peace process can begin.

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Myanmar-China border. Photo: AFP

CHINA BLOCKS

BORDER TRADE WITH MYANMAR AS A RESPONSE TO ETHNIC ARMED GROUP ACTION IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

China has imposed a border trade blockade along the China-Myanmar frontier, causing fuel and essential goods shortages in Kachin and Shan states. This unilateral trade restriction is seen as an effort by China to pressure ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs) operating near its border to cease hostilities against the Myanmar military regime.

Despite China's demands, ethnic groups like the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) continue their resistance, intensifying clashes with junta forces along the China-Myanmar border in Kachin and Northern Shan States. The blockade began on July 9, soon after the resumption of the second phase of Myanmar's "Operation 1027" and the breakdown of a ceasefire agreement between the Three Brotherhood Alliance and Myanmar's military.

On the anniversary of the launch of Operation 1027, China expanded its trade blockade, shutting down numerous trade points in areas controlled by

groups including the KIA, TNLA, United Wa State Army (UWSA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA). These areas host over 15 trade points, with more than half closed by Chinese authorities and the remainder heavily restricted.

The Muse border trade zone, the largest China-Myanmar trade point, is particularly affected. China currently allows only food and clothing through this gateway, severely restricting other goods, including fuel. According to local sources, "No goods lorries are heading to inner Myanmar from Muse. It has been closed for three days," while another local remarked, "Food supplies are stable for now, but with travel restrictions, vehicle stoppages seem imminent."

In UWSA-controlled areas, China has fully blocked trade at four major border points. Immigration and vegetable sales are permitted, but other goods remain barred. This disruption has sent prices soaring, with



Burnt down Sagaing village. Photo: Mizzima

locals struggling to afford basic commodities. “The current high prices are unmanageable; people cannot afford essential items,” said a representative from the Ta’ang Women Organization.

In Kachin State, China allows imports limited to natural resources such as jade, timber, iron ore, and charcoal, while consumer goods are restricted. Although Chinese products like chemical fertilizers, cement, and construction supplies still enter Myanmar, food imports are restricted. The border trade closure tightened on October 18 after the KIA rejected China’s demand to halt its military operations against the junta on October 17.

In MNDA-controlled Kokang, China has imposed some of the harshest restrictions, cutting off electricity, water, internet, fuel, medicine, and food, as well as blocking immigration channels. These stringent

measures signify a drastic escalation in China’s effort to curb armed resistance along its border.

China’s blockade continues to place severe strain on communities in Myanmar’s northern regions, exacerbating economic hardships and limiting access to essential supplies.

Troops brutalize villagers and cut off people’s heads and limbs

As Mizzima reported earlier, on October 17 troops from Myanmar’s State Administration Council (SAC) launched a violent assault on Sipar village in Budalin Township, committing a crime against humanity. The troops, departing from the Northwestern Command in Monywa, reportedly killed six villagers in a brutal attack, mutilating bodies by dismembering limbs, decapitating victims, and removing internal organs. Disturbingly, soldiers then hung the severed heads



on village fences, just 20 miles from the Northwestern Command's headquarters.

The junta's attack on Sipar village appears to be a reprisal for the People's Defense Force (PDF) operation on September 20, where resistance fighters defeated an SAC column of approximately 100 soldiers near Kudaw village in Budalin Township.

The junta's "area clearance" operations have forced thousands of residents to flee their homes in Budalin Township. Around the same time, PDF forces launched drone strikes targeting the Northwestern Command headquarters, while SAC's Vice Senior General Soe Win was in the area. A villager reported, "The column has brutally killed 14 civilians over the last three weeks and set hundreds of houses ablaze." These atrocities reportedly extend beyond Sipar village to surrounding areas, including the suburbs of Budalin and neighbouring villages.

According to local accounts, junta forces committed further war crimes in other areas, killing six people in Budalin's outskirts. Among these were five family members and a waitress at a family restaurant. Charity volunteers documented a total of 22 deaths across Budalin Township, counting six from Budalin town, seven from Myaukkyi village, six from Sipar village, one from Sewa village, and two from Tayawtaw village.

In addition to civilian killings, the SAC troops detained around 60 villagers, predominantly women, to use as human shields, forcing them to accompany the column. This has raised concerns among locals who are questioning the PDF's capacity to protect civilians, even with the significant PDF presence in the Sagaing region. The National Unity Government (NUG) responded that if the international community continues to allow impunity for the junta's brutal military

strategies, the junta's mechanisms of oppression will endure.

The Budalin Township massacre highlights the escalating violence and brutality, and the growing humanitarian crisis as Myanmar's junta continues its brutal campaign against opposition forces and local populations.

Mopping up after the flooding

The World Food Programme (WFP) announced on October 31 that the European Union (EU) has provided \$1.3 million in aid through its European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) to support flood relief efforts in Myanmar. This funding will allow WFP to deliver essential food supplies to the country's flood-affected populations. According to WFP, Myanmar is grappling with severe food insecurity, with 13.3 million people at risk and 2.7 million facing critical conditions. Recent flooding has compounded these challenges, damaging one million acres of agricultural land and displacing nearly one million people.

Earlier, on October 25, the US Embassy in Myanmar announced an additional \$3 million in flood relief through USAID. This assistance will be distributed to flood victims via partner organizations and UN agencies, covering emergency food supplies, healthcare, rescue items, shelter, clean water, and hygiene products.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that the floods have impacted over 70 out of Myanmar's 330 townships, underscoring the urgent need for international assistance to alleviate the crisis.

HUMAN RIGHTS MYANMAR REPORT DESCRIBES THE “GREAT FIREWALL” OF MYANMAR

Human Rights Myanmar (HRM) released a new report on 31 October detailing the Myanmar junta’s use of virtual private network (VPN) blocker to create a “Great Firewall” similar to that used by China to curb dissent. The VPN block, says HRM is “Myanmar’s largest ever act of censorship.”

Many people in Myanmar use VPNs to bypass junta-imposed internet controls.

Combined with a previous Facebook ban, the VPN block has resulted in a massive reduction in access to information in the country. MRN says 300 of the important Facebook pages have seen an average decline of 30% in public interactions on the platform and an estimated loss of 53 million interactions.

Media outlets have been severely affected by the VPN block with access to information for health services, educational institutions, markets, and awareness raising activities by CSOs also blocked. Many sites have lost between 30-60% of their previous audience.

Myanmar’s previously flourishing online economy is also threatened. According to HRM, thousands of small, medium, and large businesses nationwide have seen a 59% decline in the number of online customers.

Myanmar has a long history of censorship and repression, but the combined VPN block and Facebook ban is likely the largest act of censorship ever in the country. In the last three months, according to HRM, “nearly 4 million posts, shares, and comments are effectively missing, each representing an individual act of expression censored.”

The junta is using the same Deep Packet Inspection technology to implement the VPN block as that used by China’s Great Firewall. The technology allows the junta to conduct advanced mass surveillance never before seen in Myanmar.

HRM notes that the block will “exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and exclusion of rural communities, low-income groups, ethnic minorities, and women.” The effect is also highly likely to harm public mental health.

HRM’s report builds on the recent Freedom House report on worldwide internet freedom that described Myanmar and China as the world’s worst for internet freedom. The Freedom House report pointed to the VPN block imposed in May as a major reason for Myanmar’s fall to rival China at the bottommost spot for internet freedom.



Mandalay PDF prison hit twice by bombing. Photo: Mandalay PDF

SECOND AIRSTRIKE BY JUNTA ON MANDALAY PDF PRISON, LEAVES FOUR PRISONERS DEAD

A second airstrike by junta forces targeted a prison holding detained soldiers established by the Mandalay People's Defence Forces (MDY-PDF), resulting in the deaths of four prisoners, including a major, and injuring another. The airstrike hit the prison at 1:00 am on 30 October, according to MDY-PDF's statement.

The deceased listed by the MDY-PDF include Major Ne Win (43), Corporal Ko Ko Aung (49), Sergeant Clerk Aung Lwin (49), and Pyusawhtee member, Johnny Aung (54). Photos released show significant damage to at least two buildings, although the full extent of the destruction remains unclear.

This marks the second attack in two days on the prison, following a previous airstrike on 28 October which reportedly killed 12 prisoners including men from the junta's Ogre Column and wounded 60 others.

Due to security concerns, MDY-PDF did not disclose the exact location of the targeted prison.

"In the two days of air attacks, a total of 16 people have been killed, 12 of whom were prisoners of war, and four are under ongoing investigation," said Ko Osmond, the MDY-PDF information officer.

MDY-PDF is also administering medical care to those wounded in the assault.

The Mandalay People's Defence Forces maintain that prisoners of war held during operations are treated lawfully, while accusing the junta military of deliberately targeting its detained soldiers in these recent attacks.

MYANMAR JUNTA'S RETAKING OF POLICE STATION TRIGGERS MASS DISPLACEMENT, RENEWED CLASHES IN NGAZUN TOWNSHIP

Following the recent recapture of Nga Myar Gyi village and a police station in Ngazun Township, Mandalay Region by junta forces, over 5,000 residents from eight villages fled their homes amid rising tensions.

The military reclaimed Nga Myar Gyi and the police post on 21 October, reversing a People's Defence Forces (PDFs) hold on the village since 19 August.

Since retaking the area, junta columns have conducted raids around Nga Myar Gyi, sparking clashes with PDF forces.

"Neighbouring villages have seen a significant exodus due to the junta's airstrikes and ground raids. Residents have taken refuge in nearby villages and forests, and we are providing support as best as we can," said a member of the Myingyan District Battalion No. 6.

He added that the displaced urgently need assistance.

Local residents from eight villages including Moe Htaung, Nat Kyi, Myae Ni, Kone Lae, and Tha Phan Thar have been forced to seek refuge in surrounding villages and forests, according to military sources.

The National Unity Government's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (MOHADM) has been assisting, yet significant additional support is required to meet basic food and shelter needs.

On 27 October, PDF forces launched an ambush against junta troops raiding near Nga Myar Gyi village. According to Ko Thet Gyi, leader of the Myingyan District Battalion No. 7, the Zero Guerrilla Force targeted a junta unit of approximately 30 troops east of the village, resulting in two soldiers killed by a sniper.

Following the ambush, junta forces retreated to Nga Myar Gyi. Mizzima could not independently verify these casualties.

Currently, an estimated 100 junta troops are stationed within Nga Myar Gyi. PDF forces have reportedly launched counterattacks to prevent the junta from securing full control of the area.

Nga Myar Gyi's location along the Ayeyarwady River in western Ngazun Township makes it strategically significant, with the Si Mee Khon port situated just to the south.



NUG TRANSFERS BODIES OF MEITEI REBELS AND CAPTIVE TO INDIAN AUTHORITIES FOLLOWING SAGAING REGION CLASH

The National Unity Government (NUG) transferred the bodies of three Meitei rebels killed in a clash in Tamu Township, Sagaing Region, and one captured individual to Indian authorities, according to the Sagaing People’s Defence Force (PDF) on 29 October.

A Tamu Township People’s Administration official told Mizzima that the Indian government coordinated with the NUG regarding the handover.

“The Government of India mad a request to the NUG, which led to ground forces handing over the remains and the captive to the Indian Army at the border,” he said.

The PDF’s statement revealed that around 6 am on 23 October, its Battalions No. 1 and No. 4 clashed with a force of around 90, comprising junta Infantry Battalion 228, Pyu Saw Htee militia, and anti-India Meitei militants supported by the Myanmar military. On 24 October, the bodies of the Meitei rebels and a captive were returned to India; reports indicated they were in junta uniforms.

The Tamu PDF Battalion No. 4 announced that the clash on 23 October led to the loss of three PDF members, with one additional fighter injured.

An official from the Tamu Township People’s Administration added that weapons, including three AK-47s and a Self-Loading Rifle (SLR), were confiscated from the Meitei militants. Among the deceased was a captain, while a sergeant was taken captive.

He also expressed that India, as the world’s largest democracy, should have formally recognized the NUG, which advocates for democracy in Myanmar. The recent request to repatriate Indian rebels has not signified official recognition of the NUG.

“India has engaged with us when needed, and we appreciate this, but we hope for more consistent acknowledgment of our cause,” he said.

Despite India’s close relationship with the Myanmar junta and its repatriation of forces entering Indian territory, reports indicate India has also made contact with anti-junta forces. India has even invited the NUG and other ethnic armed groups for discussions scheduled for November.

According to Tamu Township People’s Administration, Meitei armed groups are stationed in Myanmar and reportedly receive support from the Myanmar military. Meitei armed groups are advocating for Manipur’s independence from India.

Revolutionary sources claim that Meitei militants are engaging in joint operations against local resistance forces alongside the Myanmar junta.



Win Htay, the National Unity Government (NUG) Education Officer. Photo: Facebook

FAMILY OF KANI TOWNSHIP NUG EDUCATION OFFICER BRUTALLY KILLED, INCLUDING 3-MONTH-OLD DAUGHTER

In a tragic incident in Sagaing Region's Kani Township, Win Htay, the National Unity Government (NUG) Education Officer, along with his wife, Chaing Chaing Thae, and their 3-month-old daughter, Shwe Wuttyihlwar, were found dead in their home in Tapong Village on the night of 4 November.

The Kani Township Public Administration confirmed the news to Mizzima.

According to reports from the Kani Township People's Defense Force, the family was discovered with multiple stab wounds.

"They were found with severe injuries from stab wounds, with no part spared. It was a brutal killing," a member for the Kani Township People's Defense Force said.

The exact details of the attack remain unclear, and the defense force has stated that they are working to uncover more information about the incident.

The People's Defense Force reported they have notified the district administration, which has subsequently instructed township police to investigate further.

"We have informed the district administration, and they are pursuing all efforts to uncover the truth behind this incident," the member said.

The NUG's education system has been in place in Kani Township since 2022, with over 150 schools successfully opened in the region.

This latest tragedy follows another recent violent incident in the township, where a 32-year-old woman was killed in Chaungma (West) Village on 19 October, with authorities still searching for the perpetrator.



UWSA troops. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR ETHNIC ARMED GROUP UWSA SENTENCES MAN TO DEATH AT PUBLIC TRIAL

A Myanmar ethnic armed group sentenced a man to death for murder following a public trial in a town recently captured from the junta, media affiliated to the group reported.

Officials from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) sentenced the man for murdering an eight-year-old girl, Wa News Land said on Wednesday.

The girl was killed in August during a robbery at a grocery shop in the town of Hopang, in Shan state, and the authorities arrested the man two months later, the post said.

The UWSA is the best-equipped of Myanmar's dozen or so ethnic armed groups and has close ties to China, which analysts say supplies much of its weaponry.

It runs a semi-autonomous enclave on the border with China's Yunnan province which uses China's yuan currency and gets its electricity and internet from Chinese providers.

The group took control of Hopang in January after an allied ethnic armed group captured the territory from the military and handed it over.

At the public trial in a "cultural park" in the town six others were sentenced to life imprisonment or lengthy jail terms, Wa News Land said without specifying their crimes.

"The death penalty is imposed but we would not execute him in public," a judicial official told the outlet.

Many of Myanmar's ethnic armed groups run parallel legal systems in territory they hold along the country's borders.

In April, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) executed three of its personnel for murder and for selling weapons and ammunition stolen from the group.

AFP



Photo: AFP

NINETY ROHINGYA LEFT 'STRANDED' ON INDONESIA BEACH

Human traffickers left dozens of Rohingya refugees, including children, stranded on a shoreline in westernmost Indonesia on Thursday, while six dead bodies were found nearby, local officials said.

Members of the persecuted minority risk their lives each year on long and dangerous sea journeys, often crowding into rickety boats in the hopes of reaching Malaysia or Indonesia.

The refugees were abandoned before dawn on Thursday around 100 metres off a beach in Aceh Province, Saiful Anwar, a village official in East Aceh, told AFP.

The group included 46 women, 37 men and seven children, he said, while locals found two bodies on the shore and four floating in the sea.

"According to information from residents, these people were stranded at around 4 am (2100 GMT). It seems like there was a boat that brought them," Saiful said.

Eight sick refugees were taken for medical treatment, he said.

East Aceh acting district head Amrullah M. Ridha told reporters the refugees would be kept in tents on the beach until authorities sheltered them.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said it knew about the arrivals but could offer no further information.

Acting Aceh Governor Safrizal, who goes by one name, told reporters "human trafficking mafia activity" was to blame for the latest arrivals.

It is the third group of arrivals in western Indonesia this month, with more than 150 refugees landing in Aceh and another 140 arriving in North Sumatra province.

According to UNHCR, 2,500 Rohingya arrived by boat in Aceh between January 2023 and March 2024, as many as had arrived in Indonesia in the previous eight years.

The mostly Muslim ethnic group faces persecution in Myanmar, and many have fled military crackdowns, seeking shelter in sprawling refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh.

Every year, thousands of Rohingya attempt the perilous 4,000-kilometre journey (2,500 miles) from Bangladesh to Malaysia, fuelling a multi-million-dollar human-smuggling operation that often involves stopovers in Indonesia.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention and says it cannot be compelled to take in the refugees, calling instead on neighbouring countries to share the burden.

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 by the annual arrivals.

AFP



NUG URGES CHINA TO RECONSIDER HOSTING MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER AMID RISING CONCERNS

Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) in exile, has urged the Chinese government to reconsider its reported decision to host Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, head of Myanmar's military junta. According to Kyaw Zaw, media reports suggest that Min Aung Hlaing is expected to attend the upcoming Greater Mekong Subregion meeting in China this November.

"We are deeply concerned and disappointed by China's reception of the junta leader. If it's true that China is inviting Min Aung Hlaing, responsible for violence, killings, and instability in Myanmar, Chinese authorities should reassess this decision," Kyaw Zaw said in a public communication.

Highlighting the Myanmar people's desire for peace and development, Kyaw Zaw expressed that the junta leader's oppressive actions contradict these

aspirations. He further warned that China's engagement with the junta could spark negative sentiments toward China among Myanmar's people, potentially leading to misunderstandings or resentment.

The visit would mark Min Aung Hlaing's first trip to China since his 2021 coup. China has recently increased diplomatic engagement with the junta, including a visit by former President Thein Sein in June and meetings between Chinese officials and junta representatives. While some view this outreach as strategic, there is also frustration within China over the junta's failure to curb scam syndicates along the border and uphold a ceasefire brokered by Chinese mediators in January, threatening further instability in the region.



THAILAND URGED TO RESCUE OVER 100 HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS TRAPPED IN MYANMAR

On 24 October, Krittiya J., a coordinator for the Civil Society Network for Victim Assistance in Human Trafficking, submitted an urgent letter to Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, appealing for immediate action to save 110 human trafficking victims from 9 nations. These individuals are reportedly held in areas of Myanmar controlled by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF).

According to the letter, 73 victims are confined in DKBA-controlled zones, while 37 are in BGF territories. These victims include 19 from Laos, 7 from Pakistan, 13 from Bangladesh, 3 from Kenya, 10 from Ethiopia, one from Uzbekistan, one from Kazakhstan, 55 from the Philippines, and one from Morocco.

The letter alleges that a transnational criminal organization deceived these individuals by luring them with promises of high-paying jobs in Thailand. Exploiting social media for recruitment, the syndicate arranged travel and covered related costs. However, on arrival, victims were trafficked, smuggled illegally into Myanmar via Mae Sot District in Tak Province, and subjected to severe mistreatment, including debt bondage, forced labour, and physical abuse. Many have since contacted their families and embassies for help, seeking intervention through the Civil Society Network.

The letter further implicates Chinese criminal syndicates for using Mae Sot District as a passage for trafficking operations, exploiting the proximity of the Moei River border. Local reports indicate that the area, primarily governed by ethnic armed groups BGF and DKBA, presents significant challenges for rescue efforts.

A DKBA official, requesting anonymity, said, "There are limitations within the DKBA-controlled region. Alleged criminal groups, particularly Chinese, dominate certain territories, preventing even DKBA forces from accessing the areas where trafficked individuals are held. The majority of the individuals who appear there are Chinese."

Local sources from Myawaddy confirm that casinos, frequently associated with these trafficking cases, operate in villages such as Kyauk Khat, Min Lat Pan, Hpalu, and Waw Lay under DKBA control.

"A few days ago, I witnessed someone kindly bringing four Chinese individuals to the Myittar Mon clinic for medical treatment. They had endured severe torture, with large welts visible across their hips, a situation sadly common among trafficking victims. Chinese nationals were even torturing their own people. These tragic incidents usually happen," said a local resident from Myawaddy.

While efforts to verify details from the letter are ongoing, Mizzima has yet to receive a response from BGF officials.

A local source clarified that no DKBA-owned casinos are based in Myawaddy's urban areas; instead, they are in surrounding villages, with one newly established casino reportedly owned by DKBA's Bo Tha Khwar Thee.

"There is no casino owned by DKBA in the Myawaddy Township's urban areas. The casinos in question are located in the villages of Kyauk Khat and Min Lat Pan. BGF is in the township's urban areas. There is a new casino owned by DKBA's Bo Tha Khwar Thee in Min Lat Pan village. Also, there is a casino in Kyauk Khat village," said a local source from Myawaddy Township.

The letter references a May 2024 report by the United States Institute of Peace, estimating that criminal syndicates in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar generate roughly \$43.8 billion annually from illicit activities, posing threats to economic security and human rights worldwide.

The Civil Society Network calls for Thailand, recently elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for 2025-2027, to demonstrate leadership in tackling human trafficking along the Thai-Myanmar border.



World Food Programme

WFP CALLS ATTENTION TO ALARMING LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN MYANMAR

The World Food Programme (WFP) released a statement on 31 October announcing an increase in funding by the European Union (EU) to address alarming levels of food insecurity in Myanmar. The WFP statement reads as follows.

The European Union (EU) has contributed an additional EUR 1.2 million (USD 1.3 million) to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to strengthen its efforts to address food insecurity in Myanmar driven by ongoing armed conflict, climate change and rising inflation.

The funding secured through the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) will provide emergency food assistance for people affected by the devastating floods which have impacted nearly one million people and damaged one million acres of farmland.

Currently, one in four – 13.3 million people – are food insecure, with 2.7 million of these facing emergency levels of food insecurity. Additionally, the cost of food staples has increased by 50 per cent compared to last year. Meanwhile, about 3.4 million people are internally displaced in Myanmar, up from 300,000 just three years ago.

“The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is alarming. The ongoing conflict continues to impact new areas, and is compounded by recurrent natural hazards

that put an additional strain on the civilian population, whose coping capacities are already stretched to breaking point. A quarter of the population in Myanmar don't have enough food. The European Union remains committed to supporting the most vulnerable people and communities in this increasingly dire situation,” said Mr. Luc Verna, who oversees EU humanitarian programmes in Myanmar.

“Food insecurity has never been this severe in Myanmar's recent history with more and more people facing multiple shocks,” said Mr. Paolo Mattei, WFP representative in Myanmar. “We count on support from the international community, such as the generous contributions from the European Union, to alleviate the suffering of millions of people.”

This contribution brings the total funding from the European Union this year to EUR 7.2 million (USD 8 million). The support is aimed at helping WFP reach up to two million people across the country with lifesaving food and nutrition assistance.

WFP will work with communities and local non-governmental organizations in delivering the EU's support ensuring that this lifesaving assistance directly reaches people in most need.



Catholic devotees pray on All Saints' Day. Photo: AFP

HUNDREDS IN MYANMAR OBSERVE ALL SAINTS' DAY

Hundreds of Catholic devotees walked solemnly among candlelit white tombs at an All Saints' Day ceremony in Myanmar on Saturday, a rare religious gathering since the military takeover.

This year has seen the biggest attendance to the annual Christian tradition in the small southwestern town of Wakema since the Covid-19 pandemic and a military coup in 2021 that saw the number of worshippers drop.

"(Our) lives have been hard during this time. Even though some people may want to come, they may be afraid because of the bad situation," said 66-year-old U Kan Kaung who prayed at his parents' tombs.

Gatherings marking religious events have been rare in the three years of war since Myanmar's military seized power.

Catholics number around 700,000 in Myanmar, a tiny fraction of the country's 54 million population -- most of whom are Buddhists.

Seeded in Myanmar by Portuguese missionaries in the 1500s, Catholicism took root in remote hill-tribe villages far from the reach of the Buddhist-dominated state.

Many hail from remote border areas where decades-long wars between ethnic minority rebels and Myanmar troops rumble on far from international attention.

Sixty-year-old U Aung Hla told AFP he felt a sense of duty to join this year's All Saints' ceremony, which he has attended since he was a young boy.

"The festival allows us to remember our family members who died before. We have a duty to pray for them at the festival."

In their 500-year history in Myanmar, Catholics have generally enjoyed good relations with the Buddhist majority.

In 2021, the country's top Catholic, Cardinal Charles Bo, sparked outrage after photos emerged of him cutting a Christmas cake with the country's junta chief, who has overseen a bloody crackdown on dissent and clashes in Christian-majority areas.

"As Christians, we pray for (everyone) and help them to have good lives," a local shopkeeper told AFP.

AFP



The damaged church. Citizen's photo.

CHURCH IN VILLAGE OF MYANMAR'S CATHOLIC LEADER BOMBED IN JUNTA RAID

Junta forces damaged a church in the home village of Myanmar's most prominent Christian, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, one of several religious buildings destroyed in fighting between the military and pro-democracy forces, residents told Radio Free Asia on Thursday last week.

Bo, Myanmar's Roman Catholic leader, lives in the main city of Yangon and was not in Mon Hla village, in the central Sagaing region, when a junta drone bombed St. Michael's Church on Wednesday night.

"They've destroyed an entire side of the church, the whole right side," said one woman in the village, who declined to be identified in fear of reprisals.

The church's bell tower and nave were also damaged, she said.

Opponents of the junta have accused the military of targeting Christian and Muslim places of worship, destroying hundreds of them in its campaign against insurgent forces and their suspected civilian supporters.

Bo has in the past called for attacks on places of worship to end and in 2022, he called for dialogue after a raid by junta forces on his home village.

The junta's spokesman in the Sagaing region said he "didn't know the details of the situation yet."

About a third of Mon Hla's population are Roman Catholic, rare for a community in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar's central heartlands. Its residents trace their origins back to Portuguese adventurers who arrived before British colonial rule.

Sagaing attacks

Residents said it was not clear why the military attacked the village as there was no fighting with anti-junta forces there at the time. Thirteen people were wounded in two previous attacks on the village in October, they said.

There were no reports of casualties in the Wednesday night attack on Mon Hla. Many villagers

fled from their homes the next day when drones reappeared in the sky, the woman said.

“We had to flee yesterday. Then today, the drones retreated so we could return. Now, we’ve fled again,” she said.

The Sagaing region has seen some of the worst of the violence that has swept Myanmar since the military overthrew an elected government in early 2021.

Insurgent groups set up by pro-democracy activists are waging a guerrilla campaign in many parts of Sagaing, harassing junta forces with attacks on their posts and ambushes of their convoys. The military has responded with extensive airstrikes, artillery shelling and, increasingly, drone attacks.

In Kanbalu township, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the north of Mon Hla, junta forces attacked two villages, Kyi Su and Kyauk Taing, torching about 400 homes including two Buddhist monasteries and two mosques, residents there told RFA.

“Our people had to run from the bombs dropped by drones,” said one resident of Kyi Su. “But for those who ran, their homes were raided and burned.”

“Two monasteries are in ashes and two of our Muslim mosques are unusable.”

Residents said many of the destroyed homes were simple thatch huts, put up to replace homes destroyed in earlier fighting.

Atrocities discussed at UN

On Tuesday, Myanmar’s ambassador to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun, presented evidence of atrocities committed by junta forces in Si Par village of Budalin township between Oct. 11 and Oct. 20.

Speaking at a committee meeting at U.N. headquarters in New York, Kyaw Moe Tun held up two photos that appeared to show body parts displayed on top of a wooden fence.

“The most recent incident which occurred in Budalin township in this month serves as another solid illustration to prove the junta’s brutality. Some victims were decapitated,” he told the committee.

“Their body parts were dismembered and scattered apart,” he said. “Their heads and body parts were hung on fences of civilian houses.”

He added that, in some cases, the individuals were burned alive.

Kyaw Moe Tun was appointed before the 2021 military coup and has been a key critic of the military junta. His role as Myanmar’s permanent representative to the U.N. is subject to annual review.

The alleged atrocities followed an attack on a column of junta forces in Budalin township on Sept. 30 that left 33 junta soldiers dead.

Junta troops carried out retaliatory attacks in the area in the weeks that followed, according to the shadow National Unity Government.

Some 400 homes in 10 villages, including Si Par, were burned down in October, forcing about thousands of civilians to flee Budalin township, residents told RFA.

At least 24 local residents have been killed due to arson and airstrikes of the junta troops in recent weeks, the NUG said in a statement issued on Oct. 22.

Attacks by junta troops have been getting more brutal, according to Moe Thaut, an officer for the People’s Defense Force in Si Par village. He confirmed that junta soldiers dismembered body parts belonging to village residents.

The junta denied on Oct. 21 that their soldiers were responsible for the recent deaths of six people in Si Par village.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia

UK, EU AND CANADA IMPOSE NEW SANCTIONS TARGETING MYANMAR MILITARY REGIME AND ITS ASSOCIATES

The UK, EU and Canada have announced a further round of sanctions to increase pressure on the Myanmar military regime and its associates, according to a press release issued 29 October.

UK sanctions target entities supplying aviation fuel and equipment to the Myanmar military. August 2024 saw the highest number of airstrikes on record by the Myanmar military, killing dozens of civilians.

The UK, EU and Canada have announced further sanctions targeting the Myanmar military's access to military materiel, equipment and funds.

According to the UK government, the UK action will help to constrain the Myanmar military's ability to conduct airstrikes on civilians, which amount to gross human rights violations.

The latest round of UK sanctions is against six entities involved either in providing aviation fuel to the Myanmar military or in the supply of restricted goods, including aircraft parts. The announcement bolsters previous sanctions against suppliers of aviation fuel to the military in February and March 2023 and arms dealers in October 2023.

The UK will continue to work with partners to restrict the sale and transfer of arms and finance to the Myanmar military. Since the coup, the UK has provided more than £150 million for life-saving humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education and support for civil society and local communities in Myanmar.

The UK's Minister for the Indo-Pacific, Catherine West said: "The human rights violations taking place across Myanmar, including airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, by the Myanmar military is unacceptable and the impact on innocent civilians is intolerable.

"That is why today the UK is announcing fresh sanctions targeting the suppliers of equipment and aviation fuel to the Myanmar military. Alongside the EU and Canada, we are today further constraining the military's access to funds, equipment and resources.

"These sanctions will increase pressure on the Myanmar military. The UK remains steadfast in our support for the Myanmar people and their aspirations for a peaceful and democratic future."

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military overthrew the democratically elected government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and installed a military regime.

Since then, they have used violence and atrocities to maintain power and suppress any opposition voices. Increasingly brutal tactics have been implemented as the military continue to cling on to power, leading to the highest number of airstrikes on record by the Myanmar military this August (2024), killing dozens of civilians.

Over 3.4 million people are now displaced from their homes due to the fighting, over 18 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, and Myanmar is now seeing a proliferation in serious and organised crime.

Since the coup, the UK has designated 25 individuals and 33 entities under the Myanmar Sanctions Regime. The UK continues to lead international efforts to undermine the regime's credibility and constrain their access to revenue and arms.

According to the press release, the UK has sanctioned:

1. Asia Sun Group Company Limited - for being owned or controlled by Zaw Min Tun a Myanmar businessman previously sanctioned by the UK in 2023 for making available economic resources, namely aviation fuel, directly or indirectly to or for the benefit of the Myanmar security forces.

2. Swan Energy Company Limited - for being associated with Asia Sun Trading Company Limited and by for making available economic resources (aviation fuel) directly or indirectly to or for the benefit of the Myanmar security forces.

3. Myan-Oil Company Limited - for being associated with Asia Sun Trading Company Limited.

4. Rich Ray Trading Company Limited - for being associated with Asia Sun Trading Company Limited and by making available economic resources (aviation fuel) directly or indirectly to or for the benefit of the Myanmar security forces.

5. Progress Technology Support Company (a.k.a Royal Shune Lei Co) - for being involved in the supply to Myanmar of restricted goods or restricted technology or of material related to such goods or technology.

6. King Royal Technologies Company Limited- for being involved in the supply to Myanmar of goods or technology which could contribute to a serious human rights violation or abuse.



EU SANCTIONS MYANMAR MILITARY OVER SCAM OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

On 29 October, the Council of the European Union announced new sanctions against individuals and entities linked to Myanmar's military junta and human rights abuses. The text of the sanctions announcement reads as follows.

The Council today approved additional restrictive measures against three persons and one entity associated with the Myanmar military junta, and responsible for scam operations based in the country, which are targeting both the Myanmar population and citizens from other countries in the region.

The EU is listing Chit Linn Myaing Group (CLM) and its founder and former chairman Colonel Saw Chit Thu. CLM is a group of companies that is involved with and profits financially from activities in scam compounds in the area of Myawaddy township on the Thai-Myanmar border, including the city of Shwe Kokko. The latter is a hub for transnational crime, including online fraud, drug and human trafficking, and is experiencing massive human rights violations, including forced labour and torture. Furthermore, CLM is closely associated with the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces), with whom it collaborates, for example by informing the Tatmadaw

about opponents of the government and by forcefully recruiting soldiers.

Together with Saw Chit Thu, Lieutenant Colonel Mote Thun, and Major Tin Win are also listed today.

Lieutenant Colonel Mote Thun is a founding member and the Deputy Secretary General of the Karen/Kayin Border Guard Forces (BGF)/Karen National Army (KNA), an armed group affiliated with the Tatmadaw, which is particularly powerful in the South of Myawaddy, where numerous scam centres are located. Major Tin Win is a direct subordinate to Colonel Saw Chit and, under his direct command, he has supported and benefited from scam compounds near Myawaddy, such as Shwe Kokko, the KK Park Project, and the Huanya Project.

Today's decision shows the EU's determination to address the growing threat of scam operations in Myanmar, which entail serious human rights violations and are increasingly threatening the peace, security and stability in the country and the region.

With these new listings, a total of 106 people and 22 entities are now subject to an asset freeze and the

provision of funds or economic resources, directly or indirectly, to them or for their benefit, is prohibited. In addition, a travel ban to the EU applies to the natural persons listed.

These restrictive measures come in addition to the withholding of EU financial assistance going directly to the government and the freezing of all EU assistance that may be seen as legitimising the junta.

The EU remains deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence in Myanmar and the evolution towards a protracted conflict with regional implications. The EU condemns the continuing grave human rights violations by the Tatmadaw, including torture, sexual and gender-based violence, the persecution of civil society actors, human rights defenders and journalists, and attacks on the civilian population, including ethnic and religious minorities.

The relevant legal acts have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

Background

In February 2021, the Council adopted conclusions condemning in the strongest terms the military coup carried out in Myanmar.

On 31 January 2023, the High Representative issued a declaration on behalf of the EU strongly condemning the overthrow of Myanmar's democratically elected government by the Tatmadaw in blatant violation of the will of the people as expressed in the general election of 8 November 2020. This illegitimate act reversed the country's democratic transition and led to disastrous humanitarian, social, security, economic and human rights consequences.

The Council has imposed restrictive measures against those responsible for the military coup staged in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, and the subsequent military and police repression against peaceful demonstrators in March, April and June 2021, February and November 2022, February, July and December 2023.

Other EU restrictive measures remain in place: the embargo on arms and equipment, as well as the export restrictions on equipment for monitoring communications, which might be used for internal repression, the export ban on dual-use goods for use by the military and border guard police, and the prohibition of military training and cooperation with the Tatmadaw.

Today, the UK and Canada have also announced new sanctions on the Myanmar military and their associates.

UN MYANMAR INVESTIGATOR NICHOLAS KOUMJIAN CALLS FOR GLOBAL ACTION ON MYANMAR WAR CRIMES

On 29 October, Mr. Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), delivered a statement at the 79th Session of the Third Committee of the General Assembly. Mr. Koumjian called for global action to end war crimes in Myanmar.

The statement is as follows.

Excellencies, distinguished representatives,

It is an honour to update you on the progress of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

Since I appeared before this Committee a year ago, I regret to report that the frequency and brutality of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Myanmar has only increased.

Aerial attacks by the Myanmar military have intensified, killing hundreds of civilians. In just the past few weeks, the Mechanism has collected evidence of air strikes on an IDP camp in Mandalay and Kayah State; markets, schools and a temple in Northern Shan State; a wedding reception in Sagaing; and a number of villages in Rakhine State.

Arrests of people perceived to be opponents of the military are also increasingly frequent. The Mechanism is making important progress in its investigations into unlawful detention and crimes committed against those detained. We have collected harrowing testimonies from victims and witnesses recounting torture, including gang rape and other sexual assaults against people of different genders and ages.

The Mechanism is collecting evidence of very brutal war crimes committed by a number of armed groups, not just the Myanmar military. In all cases, the Mechanism is working to identify those most responsible – no matter their political affiliation, beliefs or ethnicity.

We have opened new investigations in Magway and Sagaing regions and Kachin and Shan States. In Rakhine State, civilians of all ethnicities are suffering

from effects of battles between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military. We have received reports of horrific crimes including torture, rapes and mass killings. The Rohingya in Rakhine State are particularly vulnerable. They have been both victims of collateral damage and directly targeted. Tens of thousands have fled their homes.

The suffering in Rakhine and elsewhere in the country is the result of decades of impunity, and this cycle of atrocities is likely to continue until perpetrators of crimes face justice.

The Mechanism was created to break this cycle. For this purpose, we have accelerated the volume of information and analysis we are sharing with the authorities at the International Criminal Court, Argentina Federal District Court and the International Court of Justice.

Mr. Chair,

The progress we have made has been in the face of significant headwinds. We have been forced to limit several key activities due to budget restrictions resulting from the ongoing liquidity crisis. We have no access to Myanmar, and securely communicating with sources within the country is increasingly difficult. We also have no access to a number of Member States represented in this room. The Mechanism needs the cooperation of all States in order to access the information and witnesses located on your territories.

In response to these challenges, we have found

new ways to harness technology to support our investigations, including using innovative tools to verify and analyse vast quantities of social media posts, photos, videos, geospatial imagery and other digital information. This is cross-checked against evidence received from more than 1,000 sources, including over 450 accounts from victims and witnesses.

I am grateful to the many individuals who are risking their lives and liberty to share information with the Mechanism. We are doing all we can to keep their interactions with us as safe as possible, and to ensure that the risks they take are not in vain.

The Mechanism does not have the authority to carry out arrests or prosecutions. Rather we are mandated to assist those with the legal authority to do so. Therefore, there is a need for the international community – the Member States represented in this room – to take action to hold those responsible for these atrocities to account. The Mechanism stands ready to work with your judicial or prosecutorial authorities to build cases in national or international courts.

The people of Myanmar yearn for some measure of justice. But it is not only for them that our work is important. Any success in holding accountable those responsible for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide would have implications far beyond Myanmar. It would send a powerful message that those who commit the most serious international crimes – regardless of their positions or power – can be brought to justice.



Mr. Nicholas Koumjian. Photo: AFP



Sean Turnell

A look into the regime's desperate quest for hard currency as they preside over a broken economy

NO MONEY, MO' PROBLEMS

SEAN TURNELL

"There was an early recognition, and unfortunately time has validated this, that the fight against military rule was not going to get much in the way of international support," explains Sean Turnell, the author turned economic advisor turned political prisoner talking on the Insight Myanmar Podcast recently.

This is his third time on the podcast; the first time he discussed the transition economy, and on his second visit he shared his personal story – including his 650 days spent in Myanmar jails. In this interview, he offers his analysis of how things have been developing financially since the coup, which can be summarized succinctly: poorly, very poorly.

Turnell points to "a great struggle for control of the economy, but in particular, a great struggle for hard currency." The military is trying to acquire as many resources as they can get their hands on, which usually ends up either in the coffers of individual generals, or is directed towards the purchase of yet more weapons to use on their own people. Although Russia provides the regime with much of their military needs, they, too, are demanding hard currency as payment, further exacerbating the need to find yet more sources of wealth. But Turnell notes that in essence, the junta has no real economic policy to speak of. "Their policy framework really touches on nothing else," he says. "There's no education policy to speak of, or health or anything to encourage foreign direct investment or improvements and transformation in agriculture. It really boils down to a big question, and I think Min Aung Hlaing wakes up to every morning to it, of, 'Where can you get more US dollars today?'"

This is also where the role of US sanctions comes in, potentially limiting access to additional funds for the junta. "It just tightens the screws that little bit further, and sends a signal to reputable banks all around the world that you really shouldn't be dealing with these guys, and ultimately pushing them into the position of making a decision: Do we want to play the game in the US? Or do we want to play with Myanmar generals?" But Turnell adds that even though U.S. financial institutions, themselves, are likely to comply with these sanctions, banks in other countries can choose to use their own US dollar reserves to conduct transactions on behalf of these generals, a point that Michael Haack similarly brought up in a recent podcast. This would circumvent the need to go through the U.S. financial system, thereby avoiding detection and facilitating the evasion of sanctions. Still, the penalties for doing so would be severe, so the profit margins would need to be quite high to make it a viable option.

While foreign investment has plummeted, extractive operations (ie, mining and drilling), especially those not requiring a domestic labor force, continue. However, Turnell points out that some foreign firms that had been involved in these industries have left the region because of grassroots activism and the looming fear of bad publicity. Some observers had expected China to fill in the gap, given their lesser concern for human rights issues, but Turnell says that this really hasn't come to pass, likely due to China's predominant concern about

the country's stability.

As for how the Burmese people are faring since the coup, Turnell doesn't mince words. "Just a disaster, basically," he says, "One has to be careful of hyperbole, but if we look at Myanmar, those are the only sort of words that you can use: a disaster, catastrophe, etc. Because for the average citizen, things are awful!" For example, he cites the cost of food, up 130% even as the average income has fallen dramatically, and military spending that is up a whopping 60% while health and education sector funding (which were already very, very low) has fallen 15%. Another issue is that approximately 70% of the budget deficient has been monetized, driving up inflation, which Turnell suspects is even worse than the numbers indicate: much of economic activity has retreated into the "informal economy," where transactions are made but are not recorded, and in that space the cost of goods is anecdotally much higher than in the past. Moreover, many goods are simply not available, which is not reflected in the inflation data. Another sign of the worsening situation is that the Central Bank of Myanmar has abandoned its fixed exchange rate of 2,100 kyat to the dollar even for preferred customers (eg, fuel importers), and has made it illegal for any foreign exchange activity to occur outside its auspices. "The central point is that they're desperate for foreign currency, and they're trying to work out how can they do this. Do they put the restrictions ever tighter, but that then sees more people try and flee the net, or do they try and loosen the net a little bit in the in the hope of gathering more funds in aggregate? I would imagine it's a real dilemma for them."

Other decisions the regime has made are simply confounding. For example, Turnell is shocked that the military is now encouraging people who operate in the private sector to not pay their debts. "The regime is urging its own private sector to default on debt!" he exclaims. "This then undermines the real fundamentals of capitalism, which at its heart, is property rights. I mean, there's nothing in capitalism as important as that!" This desperate, short-term attempt at keeping the shrinking money supply circulating is resulting in the breakdown of the entire system, something for which it's hard for Turnell to find any precedent. The regime functions only to support its own needs, without almost any consideration to the state that it purportedly rules over! "There certainly is no long-term vision, but there doesn't seem to be any medium term vision either. It just seems to be this need to scramble right at this

moment for as much foreign exchange as possible."

As to why they would be engaged in such a disastrous set of policies, Turnell can hardly even surmise, aside from presuming that Min Aung Hlaing's background as a military leader leaves him grossly ignorant as to how economic mismanagement places the stability of an entire society at risk. He adds that the general has a mindset fixated on establishing a military command economy. This strategy, rooted in military discipline and characterized by a lack of understanding of a basic market economy, property rights, and individual incentives, demands immediate obedience and orchestrates resource allocation by fiat, rather than through consensual trade. It leads to economic decisions that are illogical from a standard economic management perspective, even while that they may make sense within the political dynamics of the Myanmar military. "It behooves us to try and understand their mindset a bit," he says, "It's the thinking of the barracks, the order of the barracks. I'm sure for a lot of them, they genuinely don't understand... It really is a command-and-control system, and they are probably just perplexed that it could [possibly] be anything else." Just as the economy opened up to some degree during the transition period, Turnell explains that a cadre of military-affiliated cronies sees the present moment as the opportunity of a lifetime to make a killing in a market that's largely been cleared of competitors due to the instability, mismanagement and corruption.

For Turnell, the one silver lining is that, should a democratically elected government resume control, they may be able to quickly reverse course; he surmises that in possibly as short as a single year's time, they could get back to 2019 levels. "The policies of the regime have been so bad, that as soon as they stop, there'll be a natural bounce back really quickly." The one concern he highlights is the return of foreign investment. He asks, "How on earth do you convince big entities to put at risk billions of dollars, the sort of dollars that you need to reinvigorate its telecom sector, its energy sector, etc.?" This is also why he feels it's so important that the resistance forces achieve a total victory, as even during the transition period, military interference was always just around the corner, and so nothing short of complete reform will instill trust in foreign investors. "The biggest step would be the military's complete removal, and if that were the case, then all the other reforms become much more credible." In that case, he envisions an instant release of resources from around the world, with over one billion dollars coming from

the IMF and even more in the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. This would give a new government time to put funds into areas that require immediate attention, serving as a buffer period where they could gradually attract the much-needed foreign investment.

Turning his attention to how the NUG's financial strategies try to circumvent military control, he notes, "We've seen a bunch of things, some of it extremely innovative and borderline cheeky, which makes people around the world sit up to attention." He cites examples ranging from selling war bonds internationally, to crypto currency transactions, to virtual banks, to auctioning off the homes of senior military figures... even as they are still living in them, a rather haunting indication of what they are going to lose.

Turnell also points out that back in 2021, an IMF fund earmarked for COVID relief in Myanmar was suspended by the US following the coup, and remains in the US Federal Reserve, because American officials worried that the fund would be misappropriated by the new military leaders. While democratic forces have been calling for this money to be released to them, Turnell explains that it is a tricky situation. "Transferring the money to the NUG or to the opposition more broadly is a little bit more difficult, because we get into the issues of who speaks for Myanmar." Although many view the NUG as more legitimate, he notes that other factors, such as international law and legal precedents, need to be taken into consideration... and so the money stays frozen.

As for the various resistance groups, Turnell says that no one really has any idea how much money might have raised for them over the years. This is partly due to the need for confidentiality, and partly because a wide range of organizations have been raising money in a variety of ways. "Certainly, the numbers seem quite impressive, and I'm particularly impressed at the Myanmar diaspora around the world, in its willingness to tax itself, in a sense, which is really quite extraordinary."

However, there is a fundamental logistical question that needs to be resolved as to how those monies can be transferred; how can it be done so that the funds neither fall into the hands of the military, nor get enmeshed in anti-money laundering or anti-terrorism policies. Compounding this conundrum is that transparency for people on both sides of a transaction could well put them in danger. The possibility of using

crypto is a potential game-changer, although so far it's mainly been an exercise of trial and error.

"We've got a real, live, practical experiment underway, which is fascinating to watch," he remarks. "But it seems to be highly trusted, given the amount of money that that people are willing to put to it. And it's voluntary, and that's in complete juxtaposition to what's going on in Myanmar where so much in the monetary sphere is due to compulsion, forced repatriation, forced transfers of funds, all the old shenanigans of a military-command economy."

In the end, Turnell returns to his confidence that things can get back on track once the military is defeated once and for all. "This just allows me to get back onto my hobby horse, which is just how impressive some of the young policymakers in Myanmar are, who are scattered all over the world now, but they'd be the sort of people who would return much quicker than the money will return," he says in closing. "They know what to do! That's why my confidence in getting back to at least 2019 level of economic is founded on, more than just about any anything else, because they know what to do. They can do it and I think they will do it."

CATCH THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST HERE:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/cb179c21-063c-4c2c-a3fd-b7ed706ae035>

MYANMAR STRIVES TO ACHIEVE FULL ELECTRICITY COVERAGE BY 2030, UNION MINISTER SAYS

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Myanmar Union Minister for Electric Power, Nyan Tun, said at the 3rd Belt and Road Energy Ministerial Conference held in Qingdao, Shandong Province in China, that Myanmar strives to achieve full electricity access by 2030.

The Union Minister said at this energy ministerial conference held on 23 October that they were emphasizing energy cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative to share progress and innovations in the international energy landscape with China, Laos, India and Thailand by building transnational power grids with these countries.

The Myanmar delegation highlighted the numerous opportunities for building Green Growth Models and Energy Storage Systems (ESS) in ongoing renewable energy projects in Myanmar.

As of December 2022, natural gas accounted for 50% of Myanmar's total installed capacity, with hydropower accounting for 45%, ground-mounted solar for 3%, and coal for 2%.

The announcement made by the Ministry of Electric Power on 27 October says that peak generation for that day is 2,576.1 MW and total power generation for that day is 58,975.3 MWh.

Currently the junta cannot provide full electricity coverage even to the commercial hub Yangon.

Load shedding and frequent power outages are rampant in other cities and towns yet electricity tariffs were hiked recently.



Myanmar migrant workers in Laos. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR PLANS TO SEND WORKERS TO LAOS UNDER MOU

Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies say that the Myanmar junta plans to send workers to Laos under an MOU after signing an agreement with Laos for cooperation in labour affairs.

One agency said that they charged one million Kyat as a service charge to each Myanmar worker, and they would be sent to landlocked Laos soon.

Very few people went to Laos previously but now many people are leaving for Laos as job opportunities in Myanmar are scarce for workers. Most of these workers went to Laos through illegal channels.

Factory workers in Laos can receive a minimum salary of around one million Kyat for unskilled workers and are entitled to other benefits including

overtime. Myanmar workers are employed mostly by construction companies and factories, some with Chinese investments.

Many Myanmar workers have already gone to Laos by crossing the Mekong River. Tens of thousands are in the country.

The Laos government said in April this year, "The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is implementing new measures to facilitate the issuance of visas for illegal foreign workers and the renewal of work permits for legal foreign workers. This initiative aims to regulate and streamline the process for foreign workers in Laos."



POLAND'S NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION REMINDER OF COUNTRY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THAILAND AND MYANMAR

The Embassy of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Investment and Trade Agency in Thailand held a celebration of Poland's National Day at the Shangri-La Hotel in Bangkok on 31 October.

Poland's National Independence Day is celebrated on 11 November each year, marking the anniversary of the country's independence regained in 1918 after 123 years of partitions by Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia.

The National Day, a celebration of independence and freedom, is also a reminder of Poland's interest in supporting Myanmar's democracy movement and independent media, as part of its engagement with the countries of South East Asia.

This year's celebration in Bangkok featured the showcasing of a luxury yacht from Poland, exemplifying the strong ties between Poland and Thailand.

The luxury yacht, manufactured in Poland and imported to Thailand by Flow Yacht Club was prominently displayed at the event, symbolizing Poland's rich maritime heritage and excellence in craftsmanship. Poland ranks as the fifth-largest producer of yachts

globally, with a particular specialization in motor yachts measuring 6 to 9 meters, making it the first manufacturer in this category in Europe and second worldwide.

Governor of Bangkok, Mr. Chadchart Sittipunt joined representatives from the Embassy of Poland, Polish Investment and Trade Agency and Flow Yacht Club for a scenic cruise along the Chao Phraya River aboard the Polish yacht, celebrating 106 years of Poland's independence.

Poland is actively engaged with the countries of South East Asia and has demonstrated support for Myanmar's democracy movement in the wake of the 2021 military coup.

The Polish Embassy in Thailand provided financial support last year for capacity-building of Myanmar journalists. The funding helped cover the costs of a fourth batch of training for Myanmar journalists at the Mizzima Media Training Institute (MMTI) in 2023. Since then, the sixth batch of training commenced in July 2024 and culminated in October 2024, comprising two months of in-person training at MMTI and two months of online coaching.

Myanmar's independent media, including Mizzima, were declared illegal shortly after the 2021 coup. Myanmar ranks badly at 173rd out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index for 2023, having been ranked 139th prior to the coup.

MMTI is a unique resource for Myanmar's independent media and journalists. Established in August 2022, the facility situated in a "safe area" of Myanmar provides trainees from throughout Myanmar with instruction across several journalistic disciplines given by noted Burmese professionals as well as distinguished foreign guests, including democracy activist Igor Blazevic.

Mizzima, in identifying prospective trainees, aims to achieve geographic diversity. And the sixth and latest batch of training was no exception. Trainees came from Mon State, Kachin State, Kayah State, Bago Region, Shan State, Nagaland (Myanmar), Yangon Region, and Sagaing Region in Myanmar, as well as the border towns of Mae Sot and Mae Salit in Thailand.

Journalism training for young journalists from Myanmar MMTI has received financial contributions by the government of Luxembourg, Irish Aid (through Ireland's embassy in Bangkok) and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), besides Poland.

AMERICA DECIDES: HOW THE US ELECTION COULD RESHAPE BURMA POLICY

INSIGHT MYANMAR

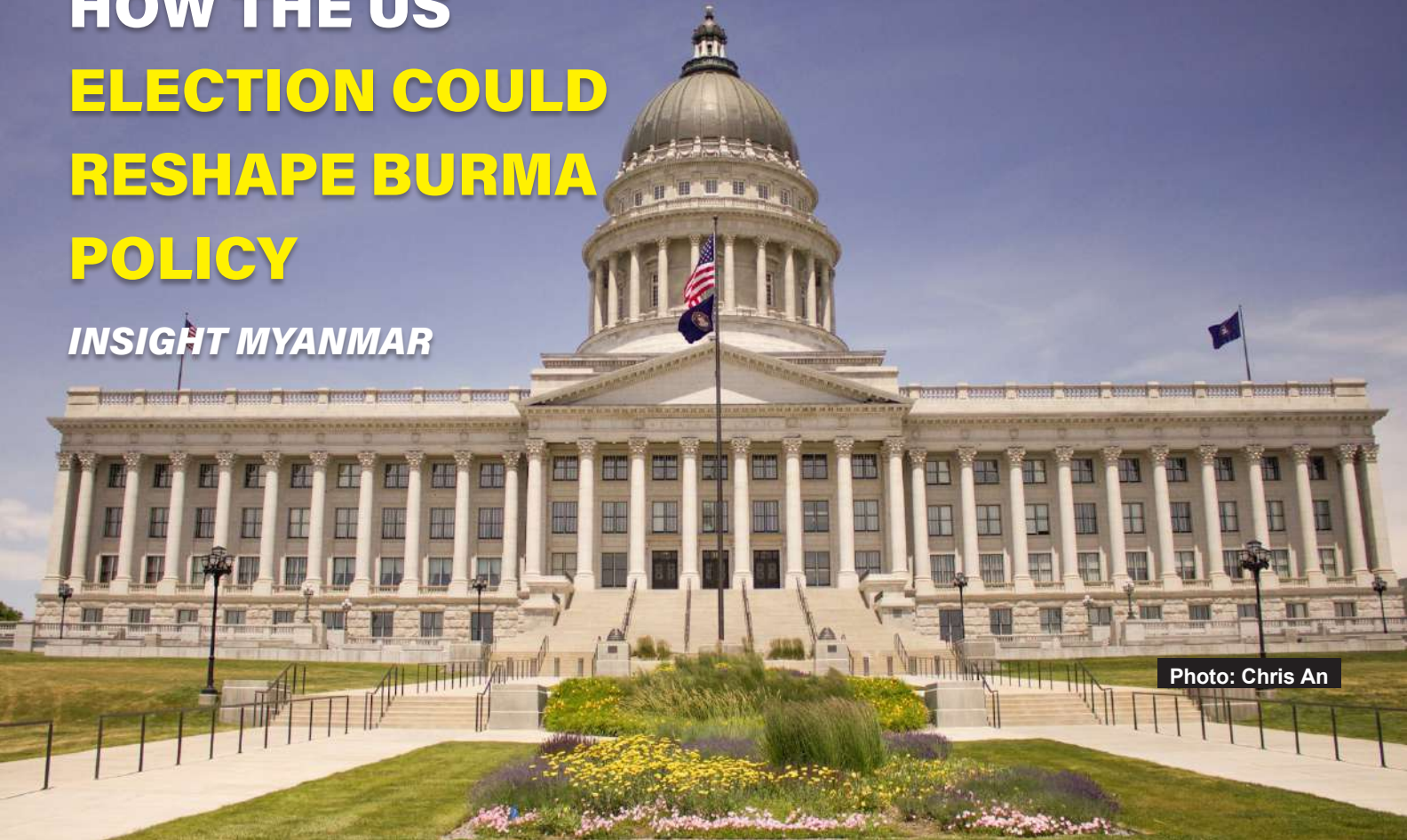


Photo: Chris An

We welcome you to Insight Myanmar's recent panel discussion, titled "America Decides: How the US Election Could Reshape Burma Policy."

The 2024 U.S. election holds significant implications for American foreign policy. The decisions made by U.S. voters could shape the future of diplomatic relations, sanctions, humanitarian aid, and the support for democracy movements in Burma.

The stakes for Myanmar are very high. Given the two candidates' different perspectives on international involvement, the transition to a new US administration will directly affect the way the country helps shape global responses to authoritarianism and human rights abuses, particularly in Myanmar.

This panel explores potential changes in policy depending on the election outcome, considering how either a Harris or Trump administration might respond to Myanmar's political, economic, and humanitarian challenges. The discussion focuses on how U.S. leadership might engage with Myanmar's struggle for freedom and democracy in the post-election period.

We welcome four panelists:

- **Scot Marciel**, a seasoned U.S. diplomat, was the U.S. ambassador to Myanmar from 2016 to 2020. He now works with Stanford University and Asia-based initiatives, focusing on regional diplomacy and policy. Marciel has advocated for inclusive diplomacy and dialogue with Myanmar's ethnic armed groups, the National Unity Government (NUG), and civil society. In this discussion, he explains that a Harris administration would likely continue the current Biden administration's focus on democracy and human rights, maintaining engagement with the NUG and ethnic groups. In contrast, he feels that a Trump administration, known for its unpredictable foreign policy, might show less interest in these issues, leaving much of the decision-making to lower-level officials. "I think a [military] defeat, whether it's on the battlefield or a political defeat of the military, would create an opportunity for a leadership role for the U.S. Not in terms of shaping the future of

Myanmar, but in organizing a major international effort on humanitarian relief, helping to rebuild the economy. That's much more likely to happen under a Harris administration... than under a Trump administration, where it'll be a 'what's in it for us' kind of situation."

- **Michael Haack** has spent years advocating for stronger U.S. policy towards Myanmar, including leading efforts to pass the Burma Act and secure funding for aid. Currently, he is involved in grassroots political work with the Harris campaign. Haack explains that a Harris administration would likely continue the Biden administration's targeted sanctions approach, aiming to pressure the military without harming Myanmar's civilian population. On the other hand, a Trump administration might pursue a more erratic strategy, possibly undermining international cooperation on sanctions. Haack's comments emphasized the importance of Congress in shaping U.S. policy toward Myanmar. "I think Congress does play an outsized role in this. They're often calling people from the State Department in front of them, both publicly and privately, to ask, "How is Burma going? What are you doing? Are you implementing what we told you to do?" And I think that will continue no matter what administration it is."

- **Yun Sun** is the Director of the China program at the Stimson Center, and an expert on China-Myanmar relations. She has closely monitored the geopolitical dynamics between China and Myanmar since 2008, focusing on border security and China's influence in Myanmar. Yun Sun emphasizes that China's priorities in Myanmar—border security, connectivity, and limiting Western influence—are relatively stable and unlikely to shift drastically regardless of who wins the U.S. election. However, a Harris administration might continue to challenge China's growing influence in the region through diplomatic channels and by supporting democratic movements, while a Trump administration, with its transactional approach to foreign policy, might deprioritize Myanmar unless it becomes part of a broader deal with China. This exploration of China's strategy in Myanmar shed light on the complex geopolitical dynamics at play, with China maintaining significant leverage over Myanmar's military and ethnic armed groups, especially those near its borders. "The Myanmar problem, as everyone on this panel understands very well, is so complicated [that] it defies any singular solution. Problems overlap with problems, and they are intricate, interconnected, and intertwined. There are ethnic grievances, historical grievances, emotional factors, and territorial issues. So, I don't think there's a simple solution as saying there will be a

military defeat of the Burmese military."

- **Jack Myint** is a non-resident fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He has worked extensively on economic affairs, navigating the complexities of Myanmar's business landscape and international engagement, especially post-coup. Myint discusses how sanctions, security concerns, and the broader political crisis have severely impacted international business engagement in Myanmar. Under a Harris administration, he sees sanctions remaining as a key policy, but her approach will likely be more targeted, to avoid harming ordinary citizens. A Trump administration, however, might be more indifferent to Myanmar's business climate, especially given Trump's transactional focus. Myint also highlights the massive exodus of Burmese youth, which has resulted in a loss of human capital and further complications for Myanmar's future economic recovery. "The people on the ground in Myanmar are going to determine their future, not those outside. And the people on the ground will do what they need based on their needs for survival, their needs for continuity, and the future that they want themselves and their children to live in."

In the roundtable portion of the discussion, the panelists addressed the possibility of a sham election under the military junta. Marciel expressed that a Harris administration would likely approach any election orchestrated by the military with deep skepticism, recognizing that it would lack credibility and legitimacy. He noted that the Biden administration's focus on democracy and human rights would likely continue under Harris, meaning the U.S. would not support an election that does not include meaningful participation from Myanmar's opposition groups, including the NUG. In contrast, Marciel and other panelists raised concerns that a Trump administration might be less inclined to denounce the election, depending on how it fits into broader U.S. strategic interests in the region. However, the unpredictability of a Trump administration leaves much uncertainty around how such a scenario would be handled.

Myint added that the junta is likely to seek support from regional players, particularly China and ASEAN, to legitimize the election, which could further complicate U.S. responses. Yun Sun elaborated on how China might play a key role in shaping regional perceptions of the election, noting that if China can convince ASEAN member states to accept the results, this could pressure other countries, including the U.S., to follow suit. However, Haack emphasizes that the real determinant of the election's impact would be how

the people of Myanmar react. If the election is widely rejected by the public and resistance forces continue to fight the military regime, external validation from China or ASEAN is unlikely to stabilize the situation. In this scenario, the U.S. response, especially under a Harris administration, would likely involve continued support for the resistance and the rejection of the junta's efforts to consolidate power through a fraudulent electoral process.

The panel next explored the growing influence of Russia in Myanmar, particularly in terms of military and economic cooperation. Yun Sun points out that Russia's increasing engagement with Myanmar is part of a broader strategy to develop leverage over Western nations by supporting pariah states. She notes that Russia has been supplying arms and building military ties with the junta, especially since the 2021 coup, positioning itself as a key ally. At the same time, Sen adds that Russia's influence in Myanmar is more opportunistic than strategic, as it seeks to counterbalance its own isolation from the West, particularly following the invasion of Ukraine. For Haack and Marcel, while Russia's involvement in Myanmar is certainly concerning, they feel that it is unlikely to become a primary focus for U.S. policymakers, who are more concentrated on countering China's influence in the region.

Considering the implications of the upcoming US election, the panelists were in agreement that a Harris administration would likely continue working with allies to limit Russia's influence through diplomatic channels and by supporting Myanmar's democratic movements, keeping in line with current U.S. foreign policy priorities. Conversely, a Trump administration could deprioritize Myanmar, especially considering Trump's past positive statements about Russia and his administration's unpredictable foreign policy strategies. The panelists agreed that while Russia's presence in Myanmar complicates the geopolitical landscape, U.S. engagement with Myanmar remains more centered on its strategic relationship with China, with Russia playing a secondary role in influencing Myanmar's future.

Finally, the panelists explored the potential implications of a scenario in which Myanmar's military is decisively defeated by the resistance forces. Marciel suggests that such a development could present an opportunity for the U.S. to play a leading role in coordinating international efforts for humanitarian relief and economic reconstruction. He emphasizes that a Harris administration would likely respond by mobilizing resources to support a transition toward

democratic governance, working with the NUG and ethnic armed groups to help stabilize the country. Marciel also points out that while a post-military scenario could bring short-term instability, it would likely be more conducive to long-term regional stability, as the current military regime has been a source of continued unrest and violence.

However, for Myint and Haack, it is not so straightforward. Myint believes that it's unclear how a "military defeat by resistance forces" would be defined. In other words, to what degree would the military need to be degraded? Moreover, the term "resistance" can be misleading since it is not a monolithic entity, and includes ethnic armed groups with differing political and military agendas. He warns that even if the Myanmar military were defeated, internal conflicts among ethnic groups and factions could lead to further instability. Haack echoes these concerns, noting that the U.S. would face significant challenges in navigating this fragmented landscape, particularly if different regions or ethnic groups assert their own authority. He added that while a military defeat could open the door for U.S. engagement, the nature of the post-military power structure would heavily influence how the U.S. and the international community would interact with the new leadership.

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Check the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/a23bb74e-7cd9-448d-9998-6c95a573403a>



US presidential contender Donald Trump. Photo: AFP

TRUMP CLAIMS VICTORY OVER HARRIS IN US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Donald Trump claimed victory and pledged to “heal” the country Wednesday as results put him on the verge of beating Kamala Harris in a stunning White House comeback.

His exuberant speech came despite the fact that only Fox News had declared him the winner, with no other US networks having made the call so far.

As jubilant supporters cheered and chanted “USA”, Trump took to the stage at his campaign headquarters in Florida along with his wife Melania and several of his children.

“We are going to help our country heal,” the Republican former president said.

“It’s a political victory that our country has never seen before.”

US networks have called the swing states of Pennsylvania, Georgia and North Carolina for the 78-year-old, and he led the Democratic vice president in the others although they have not been called yet.

Gloom swiftly descended on Harris’s camp.

“You won’t hear from the vice president tonight but you will hear from her tomorrow,” Cedric Richmond, Harris campaign co-chair, told a watch party in Washington as supporters left.

In a further blow to Democrats, Trump's Republican Party also seized control of the Senate, flipping two seats to overturn a narrow Democratic majority.

A Trump victory threatens to cause shockwaves around the world, as US allies in Europe and Asia fear a return of his nationalist policies and his praise of autocrats like Russia's Vladimir Putin.

But the US dollar surged and bitcoin hit a record high while most equity markets advanced as traders bet on a victory for Trump as the results rolled in.

Mood shift

Polls for weeks had shown a knife-edge race between Harris and Trump, who would be the oldest ever president at the time of inauguration, the first felon president and only the second in history to serve non-consecutive terms.

Trump also faces sentencing in a criminal case over hush money payments on November 26, while the controversy over his denial of his 2020 election defeat by Joe Biden still persists.

But in the end victory came surprisingly quickly.

The mood shifted sharply at Harris's watch party in Howard University - her former college and a historically Black university in Washington - as the results came in.

"I am scared," said Charlyn Anderson. "I am anxious now. I am leaving, my legs can barely move."

In contrast, the celebrations intensified at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida and the watch party nearby.

Tech tycoon Elon Musk, who has backed Trump and stands to lead a government efficiency commission under him, posted a picture of himself with the Republican.

"Game, set and match," Musk said on X, the social media network he owns along with the Tesla electric vehicle firm and the Space X company.

Millions of Americans had lined up throughout Election Day -- and millions more voted early -- in a race with momentous consequences for the United States and the world.

They were deciding whether to either hand a historic comeback to Trump or make Harris the first woman in the world's most powerful job.

In a stark reminder of the tension - and fears of outright violence - dozens of bomb threats were made against polling stations in Georgia and Pennsylvania.

The FBI said the threats appeared to originate in Russia, which is accused by Washington of trying to meddle in the election. The threats were all hoaxes but succeeded in disrupting proceedings.

Dark rhetoric

Harris, 60, had aiming to be only the second Black and first person of South Asian descent to be president.

She made a dramatic entrance into the race when Biden dropped out in July, while Trump -- twice impeached while president -- has since ridden out two assassination attempts and a criminal conviction.

She hammered home her message that Trump was a threat to democracy and her opposition to Trump-backed abortion bans.

Trump has vowed an unprecedented deportation campaign of millions of undocumented immigrants, in a campaign full of dark rhetoric.

The election is being watched closely around the world including in the war zones of Ukraine and the Middle East. Trump has indicated he will cut aid to Kyiv's battle against the Russian invasion.

AFP



Iran leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.
Photo: AFP

IRAN LEADER VOWS RESPONSE TO ISRAEL AFTER ATTACKS PROMPTING FEARS OF A WIDER WAR

Iran's supreme leader vowed retaliation on Saturday for attacks by Israel, as an Israeli military official confirmed naval commandos seized a suspected Hezbollah operative in a Lebanon raid.

The World Health Organization said four children were among six people wounded in a strike on a polio vaccination centre in north Gaza, where UN agencies have spoken of "apocalyptic" conditions in the face of a blistering Israeli assault.

Days before the presidential election in the United States -- Israel's main military supplier -- Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iran's response would cover attacks on both the Islamic republic and its allies.

"The enemies, both the USA and the Zionist regime, should know that they will definitely receive a tooth-breaking response," Khamenei said, referring to Iran-aligned groups including those in Yemen and Syria.

On October 26, Israel bombed military sites in Iran, killing four servicemen, in response to an October 1 barrage of about 200 missiles that Tehran called a reprisal.

Israel has warned Iran against responding to the October 26 attack.

Analysts say Israel inflicted severe damage on Iranian air defences and missile capacities and could yet launch more wide-scale action against the Islamic republic.

The US military said Saturday its B-52 bombers have arrived in the Middle East, a day after Washington announced their deployment in a warning to Tehran.

Gaza 'darkest periods'

Since late September Israel has been engaged in full-scale war against Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon while fighting continues against the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which triggered the Gaza war by attacking Israel on October 7 last year.

Israeli forces have carried out a major air and ground assault since October 6 in north Gaza, centred on the Jabalia area, vowing to stop Hamas from regrouping.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agency had received "an extremely concerning report" about a strike on the Sheikh Radwan health centre.

The facility “was struck today while parents were bringing their children to the life-saving polio vaccination” drive, he said.

Tedros did not specify who carried out the strike, but a source in Gaza’s civil defence agency told AFP that it was “an Israeli quadcopter that fired two missiles which hit the wall of Sheikh Radwan clinic”.

The Israeli military denied striking near the clinic at the time.

The UN children’s agency said “the attacks on Jabalia, the vaccination clinic and the UNICEF staff member are yet further examples of the grave consequences of the indiscriminate strikes on civilians in the Gaza Strip.”

UNICEF chief Catherine Russell said 50 children had been reported killed over 48 hours in Jabalia.

“Taken alongside the horrific level of child deaths in North Gaza from other attacks, these most recent events combine to write yet another dark chapter in one of the darkest periods of this terrible war,” she said in a Saturday statement.

Israel’s military said dozens of militants were killed around Jabalia “in aerial and ground activity”.

Two rockets were fired into Israel from the area on Saturday, the military said, the first such attack in weeks.

Medics and Gaza’s civil defence agency reported three people killed in a strike on Nuseirat, in central Gaza.

“We came out and there were planes and gunfire above us,” said Ashraf Abdullah, describing the victims as “all torn to pieces”.

Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel’s retaliatory military campaign has killed 43,314 people in Gaza, most of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory’s health ministry which the UN considers reliable.

The Israeli military said two soldiers were killed in Gaza on Saturday, bringing its losses to 370 since the start of the ground offensive on October 27 last year.

No heating, warm clothes

After nearly a year of tit-for-tat exchanges across Israel’s northern border, Israel escalated its bombing campaign against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon on September 23 and later sent in ground troops.

Hezbollah has since fired more deeply into Israel.

On Friday, Israeli naval commandos seized a trainee mariner a military official described as a “senior operative” of Hezbollah in a raid in northern Lebanon and brought him to Israel.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati instructed the foreign ministry to submit a complaint to the UN Security Council over the raid in coastal town of Batroun, his office said.

The Lebanese military and UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL are both conducting investigations into the raid, Mikati’s office said, adding that he had called for “expedited” results.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency said an “unidentified military force” carried out a “sea landing” on the shore of Batroun at dawn Friday.

An acquaintance of the abductee identified him as a student at the city’s state-run Maritime Sciences and Technology Institute (MARSATI), Lebanon’s primary training college for the shipping industry.

Israel’s broader strikes across Lebanon have displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

“There’s no heating. We don’t have warm clothes,” said Fatima, 17, who now camps out with her family at a school near Deir al-Ahmar, in Lebanon’s eastern Baalbek area.

The bombardment has killed at least 1,930 people in Lebanon since the war escalated, according to an AFP tally of health ministry figures.

Israel’s military says 38 soldiers have been killed in Lebanon since it began ground operations on September 30.

Israeli strikes against Hezbollah’s south Beirut stronghold on Saturday killed one person and wounded 15, the health ministry said.

AFP

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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



CRACKING THE CODE

Bradley grew up in Myanmar, witnessing firsthand the country's rapid transformation from an isolated, internet-deprived nation to a modern, hyper-connected society dominated by a generation of digital natives. Since the early 2010s, the internet has been a critical battleground between the people and a regime determined to control them. In the wake of the coup, this fight over digital space has become fiercer and more consequential than ever. Bradley's organization, [Myanmar Internet Project](#), is dedicated to monitoring and exposing the regime's abuses of digital power, particularly their frequent internet shutdowns aimed at concealing their crimes against civilian populations. At the same time, Bradley works to educate and empower Myanmar's citizens, spreading digital literacy and demonstrating how technology and the internet can be wielded as powerful tools for freedom and democracy.

Before the pseudo-democratic reforms of Thein Sein, telephones in Myanmar were a luxury reserved for the wealthy and, more notably, those with governmental connections. As Toe Zaw Latt explained in a recent episode of Insight Myanmar podcast, having a telephone in the home was a clear symbol of privilege and power. SIM cards were technically available, but their prohibitive cost—up to \$5,000—meant they were out of reach for most people, confined to the affluent and well-connected. Internet access was equally limited, with internet cafes serving as the primary, though expensive, gateways to the online world. Yet these were not cheap, as Bradley recalls that it cost around 1,000 Kyat for just one hour, a price that was far beyond what ordinary people could afford.

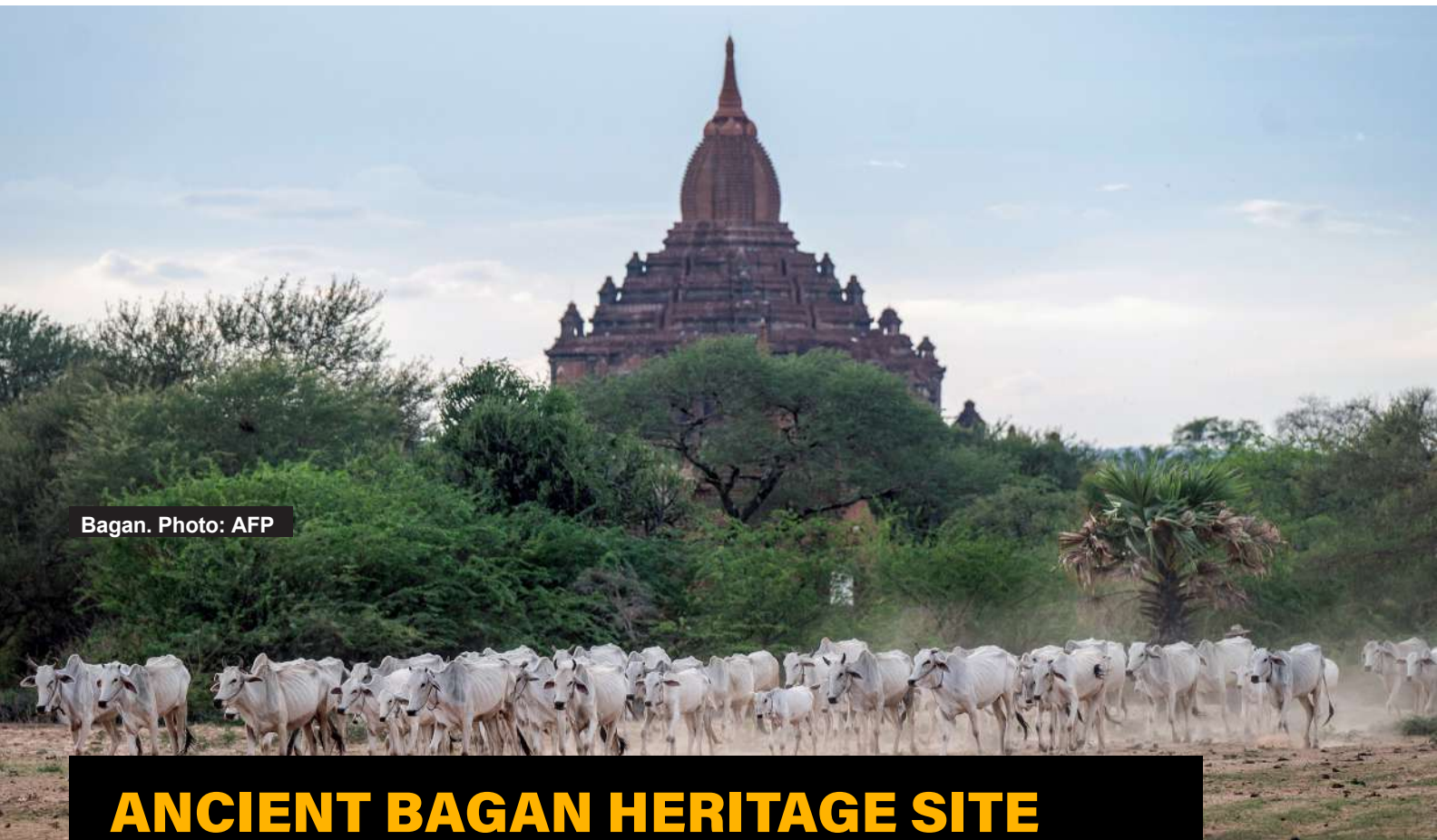
For the middle class, who could occasionally afford internet cafes, they were far from being an entryway to global connectivity and freedom: because of how few Burmese used them, it was easy for the government to control and regulate online activities. Censorship was rampant, and websites critical of the junta, such as CNN and the BBC, were routinely blocked. Even more troubling, the cafes were required to monitor and report their customers' online activities to the authorities. Government spies frequently loitered there, keeping a close watch on what people were searching for and posting. Internet access was not only expensive, but came with a significant risk—rather than offering freedom of information and expression, it placed Myanmar's netizens in the government's crosshairs.

The real turning point came in 2012, in what Bradley refers to as the "telecom revolution." The government opened up Myanmar's telecom market to international companies, allowing firms like Ooredoo and Telenor to enter alongside the state-run MPT and Mytel (the latter a joint venture between the Myanmar regime and Vietnam's military). This transformed the market, with the cost of SIM cards and mobile data plans plummeting, causing phones and internet access to rapidly spread—Myanmar transitioned from virtually no phone or internet access to a smartphone-saturated society almost overnight! What made this transformation so unique was the leapfrogging of technological stages: Myanmar bypassed the typical progression from personal computer-based internet browsing and SMS texting straight to smartphones. This dealt a significant blow to the regime's control over information. As the number of users skyrocketed, regulating and monitoring online activities became far more challenging, allowing for even more freedom of information and expression. Even so, "difficult" does not mean "impossible"; censorship and surveillance still persisted to some degree well after the advent of affordable smartphones.

CATCH THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST

Check out more of the story and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/10/23/episode-279-cracking-the-code>



Bagan. Photo: AFP

ANCIENT BAGAN HERITAGE SITE FACES PRESERVATION CHALLENGES AMID NATURAL THREATS

Myanmar’s iconic Bagan Archaeological Zone, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is experiencing both preservation efforts and significant challenges.

While the junta reported ongoing maintenance of ancient water systems, the site faces serious threats from recent weather events and staffing issues.

The junta’s Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development claims progress in dredging eight ancient lakes, part of a 900-year-old water storage system.

According to ministry reports, the work follows UNESCO guidelines and incorporates recommendations from international experts, including Italian water management specialist Dr. Massimo Sarti.

The renovation reportedly prioritizes cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection

using careful assessment methods.

However, the site faces mounting challenges, according to a report of Radio Free Asia (RFA) in late November. Recent heavy rains and flooding have damaged approximately 1,900 pagodas, many dating from the 10th to 13th centuries, with some now at risk of collapse, RFA reported citing an archeologist.

The situation is complicated by staffing shortages at the Bagan Archaeological Department following the 2021 military coup and subsequent regional conflicts.

The site’s preservation history has been problematic. Following a devastating 1975 earthquake that damaged over half the area’s structures, Than Shwe led then-junta restoration work in the 1990s, drew international criticism for using modern materials and failing to maintain historical authenticity.



MYANMAR'S SHADOW GOVERNMENT NUG DEMANDS JUSTICE FOR SLAIN JOURNALISTS AS PRESS FREEDOM CRISIS DEEPENS UNDER JUNTA

PENROSE THITSA

Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists with a powerful call for global action, highlighting the dire situation facing media workers in the conflict-torn Myanmar, according to the official Facebook page of the NUG.

Since the military staged the coup in 2021, Myanmar has witnessed an unprecedented crackdown on press freedom. Seven journalists have been killed, with three deaths recorded in 2024 alone. NUG's statement indicates at least 150 journalists have faced arrest and torture, while 64 remain behind bars under severe conditions as of October 30, 2024.

"The military's systematic campaign of violence, harassment, and intimidation has turned journalism into an occupation fraught with peril. Today, we call attention not only to these crimes but also to the wider impact of the military's assault on freedom of expression. By silencing journalists, the terrorist military council seeks to suppress the truth, restrict the people's awareness, and stifle calls for accountability," said the statement.

Despite facing grave risks, Myanmar's journalists continue their critical work of documenting the ongoing crisis. The NUG emphasized their commitment to establishing a federal democratic system where press freedom would be protected as a fundamental right.

The NUG is actively working with international partners to document and expose human rights violations, including crimes against journalists. They

stressed the importance of global cooperation in ending the culture of impunity that has allowed the military to operate without consequences.

The NUG's statement outlined specific calls to action, urging governments and media organizations worldwide to amplify Myanmar journalists' stories and support their work through concrete measures.

The NUG's commemoration of this day comes amid growing concerns about press freedom globally, with Myanmar representing one of the most challenging environments for journalists in Southeast Asia.



FILM CRITIC DETAINED AFTER REVIEW OF CONTROVERSIAL FILM

A Hindu critic who disapproved of the Myanmar film "Have You Ever Ridden a Jeep?" for allegedly mocking Hindu traditions has been detained by the military junta, as announced on October 30.

Shein Htet Aung, owner of the "Het Sal Yon" Facebook account, was arrested after posting a criticism against the film that garnered over 6,000 shares. According to the junta's statement, he faces charges at Hlaing Township Police Station for allegedly "inciting unrest and spreading propaganda on social media."

The critic was detained after visiting a blind school in Mayangone Township in Yangon on October 26, where he had gone to read books for an audio donation project. His post on October 24 criticized the film's portrayal of Hindu cultural practices and traditions.

The Myanmar Hindu Association had also issued a strong statement condemning the film for its allegedly disrespectful comedic portrayal of Hindu customs and costumes.

The case has sparked concern among social media users, with one commenting that Myanmar has "become the most dangerous country" where "people are being arrested just for criticizing a film poster."

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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