

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



LANDMINE THREAT

Myanmar's landmine problem ranked top in world

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrant for Myanmar junta chief

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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.

UNHELPFUL CHINA POLICY ON MYANMAR

China's interference in Myanmar is doing little to help the country's resistance forces in their battle with the illegal military junta. China is balancing its economic and strategic interests against the challenges posed by the junta's weakening control and escalating resistance movements. This has led Beijing to navigate a diplomatic path, engaging with all sides to safeguard its interests while feigning that it is not getting involved in Myanmar's internal conflicts.

As has been seen over the last few weeks, China has been blocking border crossings and putting pressure on ethnic armed organizations (EAO) in the north to stop their attacks on Myanmar junta targets. Many key border regions between Myanmar and China are controlled by EAOs rather than the Myanmar military junta. The military's inability to secure these areas has led to trade disruptions. Groups like the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) have gained significant territory, including strategic trade routes, making it difficult for the junta to guarantee safe passage for goods.

Intensified clashes between the junta and EAOs have further destabilized border regions. Operations by resistance groups, such as the Three Brotherhood Alliance's Operation 1027, have displaced military positions and seized control over border crossings. This instability has led to interruptions in trade and the closure of some routes.

The junta may be using trade restrictions as leverage in negotiations with China and EAOs. For example, Myanmar's military has insisted on controlling key border trade points to maintain sovereignty over customs and trade revenue. However, disputes over revenue-sharing and control have stalled

agreements and prompted blockages.

Myanmar has been pressured by China to address illegal activities such as cyber scams and trafficking that occur in border areas. However, the junta's limited capacity and allegations of complicity have hindered enforcement efforts, causing additional strain on trade relations and leading to border closures.

China is heavily invested in Myanmar, particularly through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of the Belt and Road Initiative. This includes major infrastructure projects such as ports, pipelines, and roads. Trade along their shared border is vital for China's Yunnan province, though disruptions due to conflict and Myanmar's unstable political situation have strained these efforts. The bigger picture involves China facilitating a "back door" through to the Indian Ocean that provides some level of trade and communication safety should normal trade routes get compromised.

Despite international condemnation of Myanmar's military junta, China maintains formal relations with the regime, partly because the junta controls critical state infrastructures like airports and seaports. However, China's engagement is pragmatic rather than openly supportive, reflecting its broader state-centric diplomatic approach. Beijing has also been cautious about fully aligning with the junta due to the regime's limited territorial control and growing instability.

Trade blockages at the China border are driven by a struggle for control, ongoing conflicts, and strained negotiations with both China and local ethnic groups. These closures highlight the challenges of maintaining stability and economic activity in the contested borderlands.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Myanmar mine victim by AFP





Farmer Hla Han lost his leg to a landmine and now finds it hard to work. Photo: AFP

LANDMINE THREAT

MYANMAR'S LANDMINE

PROBLEM RANKED TOP IN

THE WORLD

Landmines and unexploded munitions claimed more victims in Myanmar than in any other country last year, a monitor said on 20 November, warning the true toll could be double or triple its estimate of 1,000 people killed or wounded in 2023.

Decades of sporadic conflict between the military and ethnic rebel groups have left the country littered with deadly landmines and munitions.

But the military's ouster of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021 has turbocharged conflict in the country and birthed dozens of newer People's Defence Forces (PDFs) now battling to topple the military.

Anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war killed or wounded 1,003 people in Myanmar in 2023, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) said on Wednesday last week.

There were 933 landmine casualties in Syria, 651 in Afghanistan and 580 in Ukraine, the ICBL said in its latest Landmine Monitor report.

With conflict and other restrictions in Myanmar making ground surveys impossible, the true casualty figure was likely far higher than reported, said Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan of the ICBL.

"How many more? Double? Triple? Quite possibly... There's no medical surveillance system in the country that can provide official data in any manner or form," he told a press conference in Bangkok.

"No armed group in Myanmar, not the military, not any of the ethnic armed groups, not the PDFs have provided us with any data on the number of casualties they have."

"And we know from anecdotal evidence that it's massive."

Myanmar is not a signatory to the United Nations convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling or development of anti-personnel mines.

The ICBL said there had been a "significant increase" of anti-personnel mines use by the military in recent years, including around infrastructure like mobile phone towers and energy pipelines.

Such infrastructure is often targeted by opponents of the military.

Landmines used 'indiscriminately'

Myanmar's military has been repeatedly accused of atrocities and war crimes during decades of internal conflict.

The ICBL said it had seen evidence of junta troops forcing civilians to walk in front of its units to 'clear' mine-affected areas.

It said it had reviewed photos that indicated supplies of anti-personnel mines manufactured by Myanmar were captured by the military's opponents every month between January 2022 and September



2024, "in virtually every part of the country."

More than three million people have been displaced in Myanmar by the post-coup conflict, according to the United Nations.

All sides in the fighting were using landmines "indiscriminately," the UN children's agency said in April.

Rebel groups have told AFP they also lay mines in some areas under their control.

The ICBL said at least 5,757 people had been casualties of landmines and explosive remnants of war across the world last year, 1,983 of whom were killed.

Civilians made up 84 percent of all recorded casualties, it said.

Last year's figures are considerably higher than 2022, when the ICBL recorded at least 4,710 casualties including 1,661 fatalities.

Human Rights Watch Report

Human Rights Watch has also just released a report on the world landmine threat. Here is their statement issued last week:

The international treaty banning antipersonnel



This man lost a leg and his eyesight to a landmine. Photo: AFP

landmines risks being undermined by new use by countries such as [Russia](#) and [Myanmar](#) that are not parties, Human Rights Watch said today in releasing the Landmine Monitor 2024 report.

The 142-page report will be presented at the Mine Ban Treaty's Fifth Review Conference in Siem Reap, Cambodia, on November 25 to 29, 2024, which approximately 100 countries are expected to attend.

"The Mine Ban Treaty's positive impact can be seen in the drop in the production of antipersonnel mines, the virtual end to transfers of these weapons, and the destruction of more than 55 million stockpiled mines," said [Mark Hiznay](#), associate arms director at Human Rights Watch and an editor of Landmine Monitor 2024. "However, new use of antipersonnel mines by countries that have not joined threatens both civilian lives and the effectiveness of this life-saving treaty."

The 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, which entered into force on March 1, 1999, has made significant progress since it took effect 25 years ago. The treaty comprehensively prohibits antipersonnel mines and requires countries to destroy stockpiles, clear mine-affected areas, and assist victims.

A total of 164 countries have joined the treaty, including all NATO members. The United States is not a member, but in June 2022, President Joe Biden [set the US goal](#) of ultimately joining the treaty and realigned US policy with most of the treaty's core prohibitions. In January 2020, then-president and current President-elect Donald Trump canceled a policy that would have eliminated all antipersonnel mines in the US arsenal.

Antipersonnel mines kill and wound people indiscriminately. They are typically placed by hand, but they can also be scattered by aircraft, rockets, and artillery or dispersed from specialized vehicles. Uncleared landmines pose a danger until cleared and destroyed. Mined land can drive displacement of the civilian population, hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid, and prevent agricultural activities.

Russia has used antipersonnel landmines repeatedly in Ukraine since its full-scale invasion of the country on February 24, 2022, leading to hundreds of casualties and vast tracts of contaminated land. Ukrainian officials are [investigating reports](#) that their forces used PFM antipersonnel mines in and around the city of Izium during 2022, when it was occupied by Russian forces.

The Myanmar junta's armed forces have used antipersonnel landmines continuously since 1999. Myanmar tops the Landmine Monitor's list of countries with the highest number of annual casualties for the

first time, with the report recording that antipersonnel mines killed or wounded 1,003 people in 2023 in the country. Previously, Syria had the highest number of annual casualties for three consecutive years.

Reports indicate that the Iranian government's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and North Korea also used antipersonnel mines during 2023 and the first half of 2024.

Non-state armed groups used mostly improvised antipersonnel mines in at least five countries—Colombia, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Palestine (Gaza)—during 2023 and the first half of 2024, as well as in the Sahel region of Africa. In Gaza, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, has said numerous times that its fighters have used antipersonnel mines since October 7, 2023. The Mine Ban Treaty prohibits all victim-activated explosive devices regardless of whether they were improvised from locally available materials or manufactured in a factory.

There were at least 5,757 new casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war in 53 countries and 2 other areas in 2023, including 1,983 deaths. Civilians made up 84 percent of all recorded casualties in 2023, while children were 37 percent of

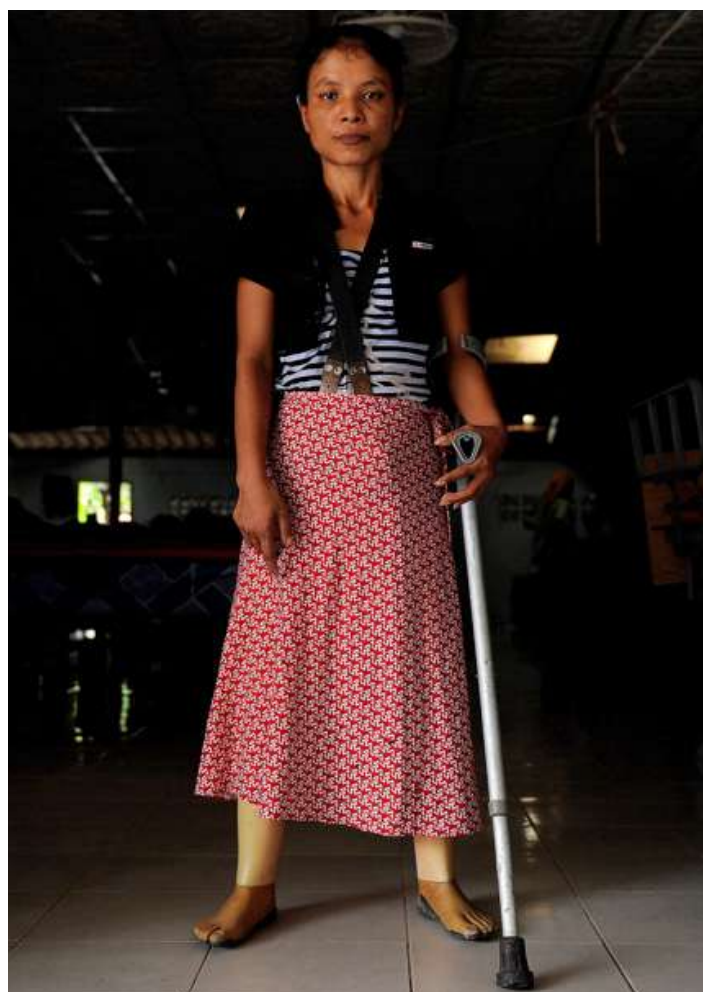
casualties when the age was recorded.

A total of 281.5 kilometers of contaminated land was cleared in 2023, the largest area cleared by states parties since 2019, and 160,566 antipersonnel mines were destroyed. Under the treaty, 33 states have completed the clearance of all antipersonnel mines from their territory since 1999.

Ninety-four states parties have collectively destroyed more than 55 million landmines from their stockpiles. In 2021, Sri Lanka became the last state party to complete the destruction of its stocks. Ukraine and Greece are the only states parties with landmine stocks left to destroy.

In 2023, global support for mine action including mine clearance and victim assistance totaled US\$1.03 billion, the first time that annual funding for mine action has surpassed \$1 billion. The increase largely reflects an influx of donations to Ukraine, which topped the list of recipients in 2023 for the second year in a row, receiving \$308 million.

Reporting: AFP, Human Rights Watch





KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

CHINA PUTS PRESSURE ON MYANMAR EAOS WITH BORDER CLOSURES

China's closure of border trade with Myanmar continues to impact border areas severely, causing fuel shortages and soaring commodity prices. The situation worsened after the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) seized the key border town of Kanpaitee, a major hub for China-Myanmar trade, on November 20.

The seizure of Kanpaitee by the KIA marked a turning point. Despite earlier warnings from China, the KIA captured the town, giving them control over critical mineral resources, including rare earth elements vital to modern industries. In retaliation, China shut down all border trade points in Kachin State, further crippling trade.

China has exerted significant pressure on Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) as they seize towns and military posts from the Myanmar junta and its allied militias. In response, China completely shut down border trade on October 22 but continued to import select goods - such as jade, timber, minerals, and agricultural products - through illegal channels.

The shutdown has led to acute shortages of fuel and basic goods in Myanmar's border regions, as these areas lack access to supplies from both central Myanmar and border trade routes. The junta has also restricted fuel access to areas under EAO control.

In Muse, the main border trade hub between Myanmar and China, prices for fuel and basic commodities, including food and medicine, have skyrocketed. The situation has been exacerbated since November 11, when the Chinese government banned all forms of goods carriers, including lorries, motorbikes, and trolleys. This measure has affected not only large traders but also small-scale local merchants who rely on motorbikes and trolleys for trade. Additionally, over 200 tons of vegetables ordered by Myanmar traders rotted on the Chinese side due to delays and restrictions.

Muse, which has five trade points, is now partially operational. Two gates remain under junta control, while three have been controlled by the Northern Alliance since late 2023. On November 21, China reopened one gate under EAO control but imposed strict limitations, allowing only maize imports, which are crucial for



Civilians flee fighting in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

livestock businesses in China. Other goods remain banned, deepening the economic strain on both sides of the border.

The escalating trade restrictions highlight the fragile state of cross-border relations and the broader impact of ongoing conflict in Myanmar's border regions.

Arakan Army makes gains in Rakhine

The Arakan Army (AA) has made significant territorial gains in Rakhine State following the launch of the combined Operation 1027 on November 13, 2023. The operation, initially launched on October 27 in Northern Shan State, has seen AA systematically seize townships and strategic military posts from the junta.

Out of Rakhine State's 17 townships, AA has fully captured 10 townships and intensified battles in four others. According to an AA spokesperson, the group controls over 90% of the contested areas. The only townships currently unaffected by conflict are:

1. Sittwe, the state capital.
2. Kyaukphyu, home to China's strategic deep-sea port project.

3. Manaung, which remains a war-free zone.

In Ann Township, which hosts the junta's Western Command Headquarters, the AA has seized nine regimental bases as of November 18. To completely capture the Western Command, the AA still needs to take control of another nine regiments and the main headquarters.

Rakhine State is also home to five major military headquarters of the junta:

1. Western Command Headquarters (Ann Township) – Currently under AA attack.
2. Regional Operations Command (Sittwe) – The only major base left untouched.
3. Military Operation Commands (MOCs):
 - o No. 9 (Kyauktaw Township) – Seized by AA.
 - o No. 15 (Buthidaung Township) – Seized by AA.
 - o No. 5 (Taungkok Township) – Under attack by AA.

Junta troops have retreated from suburban positions to downtown areas in an attempt to consolidate



Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing welcomes the Russian Navy to Yangon. Photo: AFP

defenses. However, under sustained AA offensives, many are now relocating from urban positions back to their original regiments or MOC headquarters.

The rapid territorial expansion by the AA marks a significant shift in the conflict dynamics of Rakhine State. The ongoing battles near critical locations, including the Western Command and Kyaukphyu, raise concerns about further escalation and the potential for broader geopolitical implications, that include the impact for China and India.

Russia-Myanmar relationship strengthens

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing hosted Russian Buryatia Governor Alexey Tsydenov on November 15 to discuss expanding ties between Myanmar and Russia's Buryatia State. Tsydenov, sanctioned by the US for forced recruitment in Russia's war with Ukraine, discussed joint initiatives, including setting up factories, expanding direct flights, boosting tourism and education exchanges, and providing technology and services in Myanmar.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Myanmar has emerged as a haven for Russian nationals, particularly young men seeking to avoid conscription. Myanmar has facilitated visas, bank account openings, and other privileges for Russians under the junta's pro-Russia policy.

Despite efforts to attract Russian tourists, arrivals remain modest. In 2023, only about 1,700 Russian tourists visited Myanmar, with numbers rising to just 2,500 by August 2024. A tourism entrepreneur noted that the introduction of one-year visas and direct flights for Russians has resulted in minimal progress, with only a 3% increase in tourist arrivals.

Myanmar's pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has openly sought Russian military assistance. During an interview with Russia's state-owned Sputnik news agency in August, USDP president Khin Yi urged Russia to collaborate with the junta in combating what he described as "terrorism" in Myanmar. He called for greater Russian involvement in providing military aid.

Russian involvement in Myanmar's military operations has grown significantly. Russian technicians are reportedly assisting the junta in drone operations in conflict zones, including southern Shan State and Karenni State. Working alongside the junta's ally, the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) militia, Russian-made drones are used for reconnaissance, bombing, and attacks on civilians.

The PNO has reportedly acquired a significant number of Russian drones, with defecting junta soldiers confirming that Russian technicians are training militia members in drone operations. A military analyst highlighted that Russian technicians, previously stationed at the Pinpat Steel Factory - an industrial site producing materials for the junta's weapons factories - are now directly involved in military activities.

Russia's deepening ties with Myanmar reflect its search for allies amidst global sanctions. However, the growing military cooperation, including the use of Russian drones in offensives targeting civilians, underscores the controversial nature of this partnership. Critics warn that these developments could escalate violence in Myanmar's ongoing civil war.



ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC

ICC PROSECUTOR SEEKS ARREST WARRANT FOR MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor on 27 November asked judges for an arrest warrant for Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing for alleged crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya Muslims.

ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC has put in an arrest warrant concerning the situation in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

His statement is as follows:

Today, my Office is filing an application for a warrant of arrest before Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International

Criminal Court in the Situation in Bangladesh-Myanmar.

Since 14 November 2019, we have been investigating alleged crimes committed during the 2016 and 2017 waves of violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, and the subsequent exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

After an extensive, independent and impartial investigation, my Office has concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Senior General and Acting President Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Defence Services, bears criminal responsibility for the crimes against humanity

of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya, committed in Myanmar, and in part in Bangladesh.

My Office alleges that these crimes were committed between 25 August 2017 and 31 December 2017 by the armed forces of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw, supported by the national police, the border guard police, as well as non-Rohingya civilians.

This is the first application for an arrest warrant against a high-level Myanmar government official that my Office is filing. More will follow.

Today's application draws upon a wide variety of evidence from numerous sources such as witness testimonies, including from a number of insider witnesses, documentary evidence and authenticated scientific, photographic and video materials.

In collecting this evidence, the Office has benefitted from the crucial support of States, civil society partners and international organisations. In particular, the cooperation, the confidence and the steadfast commitment from the Rohingya community, the support of the Government of Bangladesh, and excellent cooperation from the United Nations Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar have been essential to advancing this investigation.

I wish in particular to express my deep, profound gratitude to the Rohingya. More than a million members of their community have been forced to flee violence in Myanmar. We are grateful to all those who provided testimony and support to my Office, those that have shared their stories, those that have given us information and material.

In my visits to the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar over the last three years, including just yesterday, I met with Rohingya women who spoke with

clarity and purpose about the need for accountability. I sat with youth activists who wanted to play their own role in seeking justice. And I spoke with men of all ages including the old and the sick, who were united in demanding to be seen and to have accountability for what befell them. Our work, the work of the International Criminal Court, seeks to vindicate their resilience and their hope in the power of the law.

It is now for the judges of the International Criminal Court to determine whether this application meets the necessary standard for the issuance of an arrest warrant. In the event that the independent judges of the ICC issue the requested warrant, we will coordinate closely with the Registrar of the Court in all efforts to arrest the named individual.

When I first travelled to Bangladesh, I announced that we would seek to accelerate our investigations, and we committed to providing additional resources in that effort. Since then, we have reinvigorated our activities in line with that promise. Today marks a culmination of this renewed focus in relation to this situation.

We will continue this focus in the coming weeks and months as we submit additional applications in this situation.

In doing so, we will be demonstrating, together with all of our partners, that the Rohingya have not been forgotten. That they, like all people around the world, are entitled to the protection of the law.

Reporting: Mizzima



CIVIL WAR ECONOMY HITS MYANMAR GARMENT WORKERS

As civil war pounds Myanmar's economy and drives up prices, garment worker Wai Wai often starts her shift making clothes for international brands on an empty stomach.

The orders she and thousands of others churn out for big names including Adidas, H&M and others bring in billions of dollars in export earnings for Myanmar.

It is a rare bright spot in an economy crippled by the military's 2021 coup and subsequent slide into civil war.

But for 12 hours of sewing clothes for export to China and Europe in a bleak industrial suburb of Yangon, Wai Wai earns just over \$3 a day, which has to cover rent, food and clothes.

It must also stretch to supporting her parents in Rakhine state at the other end of the country, where conflict between the military and ethnic Arakan Army has wrecked the economy and driven food prices up.

With times so hard, Wai Wai "decided to mostly skip breakfast" to save extra money, she told AFP, asking to use a pseudonym.

"Sometimes we just have leftover rice from the

night before and save money, because if we use money for breakfast, there will be less money to transfer to our family."

In a nearby factory, Thin Thin Khine and her two sisters work 12 hours a day sewing uniforms for a Myanmar company and earn a monthly salary of around 350,000 Myanmar kyat.

That's about \$165 according to the official exchange rate set by the junta of just over 2,000 kyat to the dollar.

On the open market, a greenback can fetch around 4,500 kyat.

"All my sisters are working, but there is no extra money at all," she said.

"In the past, we could buy two or three new items of clothing every month, but now we can't afford to buy new clothes, cosmetics or things for our personal care."

Lights out

Since the coup, Zara owner Inditex, Marks and Spencer and others have left Myanmar, citing the difficulties of operating amid the turmoil.

Others such as Adidas, H&M and Danish company Bestseller have stayed, for now.

Adidas told AFP it worked closely with its suppliers in Myanmar to safeguard workers' rights, while H&M said it was gradually phasing out its operations in the country.

Estimates of the apparel industry's export earnings vary.

Myanmar's commerce ministry said exports were worth more than \$3 billion in the past financial year.

But the European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar said export earnings were higher, surging from \$5.7 billion in 2019 to \$7.6 billion in 2022 -- with more than half of exports going to the bloc.

The European body said the rise in Myanmar exports was helped by low labour costs compared to Cambodia and China, along with trade preferences granted by the EU and United States.

Keeping the factories running is a challenge.

In May, the junta said the national electricity grid was meeting about half of the country's daily electricity needs.

To keep the lights on and the machines spinning, factory owners rely on expensive generators -- themselves vulnerable to the regular diesel shortages that plague Yangon.

"The working situation right now is like we invest more money and get less profits," said small factory owner Khin Khin Wai.

Cotton spindles have more than doubled in price from 18 cents to 50 cents, she said.

"Our lives here are not progressing year by year, they are falling apart," she said.

Wai Wai's factory supplies Danish clothing brand Bestseller.

A Bestseller spokesman told AFP that sourcing from Myanmar was "complex" and the company "continuously assessed" the situation, publishing regular reports on its operations in the country.

According to its September report, "on average" workers at Myanmar factories supplying it were paid a daily wage of 10,000-13,000 kyat (\$5-6.50 at the official rate), including bonuses and overtime.

Crackdown

Abuses in the sector have spiked since the military took power, rights groups say.

This month, Swiss-based union federation IndustriALL Global Union said the junta had banned unions and arrested union leaders.

"There are widespread, comprehensive reports on the extensive violations of workers' rights," IndustriALL general secretary Atle Hoie said in a statement.

AFP has sought comment from the junta about conditions in the industry.

The latest concern is a conscription law enforced from February to shore up the military's depleted ranks.

In its most recent report on Myanmar, Bestseller said two workers at factories that supply it had been drafted between March and September of this year.

Women are included in the draft, although the junta has said it will not recruit them for now.

For migrant workers like Wai Wai who do not have the means to pay bribes to avoid any draft, it is a huge worry.

"I am full of fear about how I will face it if I am called up for conscription," Wai Wai said.

AFP



BANKS CLOSED IN KYAUKPHYU AS MYANMAR'S JUNTA MAKES DEFENCE PLAN

All private banks in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State, have been closed as junta troops tighten security in Kyaukphyu and its suburbs. The heightened security in Kyaukphyu comes as the Arakan Army (AA) escalates its offensive in southern Rakhine State.

The AA has already occupied Ramree, Sane and Ma-I in surrounding areas of Kyaukphyu. It has also launched offensives in Toungup and Ann and the war is raging in these areas.

Local residents in Kyaukphyu say that all private banks including Kanbawza (KBZ), Co-operative Bank (CB), Asia Green Development Bank (AGD), Ayeyarwady Bank, and Global Treasure Bank have been closed since 15 November. Cash flow is badly hampered by the closure of these banks in the city as well as the halting of all banking transactions.

The junta has concerns over attacks on the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project and deep-sea port project in Kyaukphyu. Many major Chinese projects are also in Kyaukphyu. In response, security has been tightened at the Danyawady Naval Base in the city.

Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 542 and LIB 543 camps on the outskirts of Kyaukphyu have enhanced

their defence plans by planting more bamboo stakes around their fences and deployed security forces at the Infantry Battalion (IB) 34 camp.

The Kyaukphyu-Zinchaung road, the roadway exit from Kyaukphyu, is under complete AA control. Local residents say junta troops have to rely only on waterways and airplanes for transport.

Local residents also say that many of them are fleeing the town as the fighting closes in on the city.

The China-Myanmar Joint Security Company was formed in early November for protection of the Kyaukphyu SEZ and Chinese investments and special projects. It is led by Navy Maj. Gen. Kyaw Shwe Tun. Chinese security forces and technicians are a part of this security force.

The AA has occupied ten townships out of a total 17 townships in Rakhine State as well as Paletwa Township in Chin State.



Photo: AFP

FORTIFY RIGHTS CALLS FOR BANGLADESH TO STOP THE FORCED RETURN OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES

The Interim Government of Bangladesh must immediately cease the forced return of Rohingya individuals fleeing deadly violence and ongoing genocide in Rakhine State, Myanmar, Fortify Rights stated on 19 November 2024.

A new investigation by Fortify Rights documents how the Bangladesh border guard forces continue to push Rohingya back to Myanmar.

“Bangladesh’s interim government has promised to turn a new page for the country and respect human rights after a decade of brutal abuses under Sheikh Hasina’s government,” said Zaw Win, Human Rights Specialist at Fortify Rights. “The interim government’s commitment to human rights should include protecting the rights of Rohingya who are fleeing genocidal violence in Myanmar. Bangladesh should allow Rohingya to cross safely into Bangladesh and formally recognize their rights as refugees.”

Between August and October 2024, Fortify Rights interviewed 12 Rohingya survivors from Maungdaw

Township who fled ongoing atrocities in Rakhine State, Myanmar. The investigation revealed six separate incidents where Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) forces forcibly returned to Myanmar more than 400 Rohingya refugees since August 2024. The total number of pushbacks is likely much higher.

“We have also made it clear to UNHCR [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]—it is not possible for us [to take more Rohingya],” the interim government’s Foreign Advisor, Mohammad Touhid Hossain—effectively the foreign minister—stated at a September 8, 2024 press conference.

A 25-year-old Rohingya woman was among a group of 100 Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh to escape drone and artillery strikes on August 5 by the Arakan Army (AA)—an ethnic armed group fighting the Myanmar junta. The attack killed more than 100 Rohingya women, men, and children in Myanmar’s Maungdaw Township.

“We boarded the boat after 10 p.m. on August 5”

She told Fortify Rights, describing how she escaped the attack by the AA. "I had to leave my husband behind and flee to Bangladesh as we couldn't stay long due to the bombing."

Continuing, she described being returned to Myanmar by the BGB. She said:

The Bangladesh border guards caught and detained us. After taking the photographs of us, we were taken to the [BGB] camp. On August 7, we were boarded onto a boat to be sent back to Myanmar. We were about 100 people in two boats when we were pushed back to Myanmar. ... We all shouted at them, saying we wouldn't go back to Myanmar. The BGB also told us they would shoot if we came back to Bangladesh again.

Another Rohingya woman, 27, from Maungdaw Township who escaped the same attack on August 5 similarly described the pushback operation by the BGB, saying:

The boat we boarded was big. About 30 of us were on each boat. I saw three boats there [on the river]. Four BGB members accompanied us to the Teknaf jetty... [T]hey told all of us, "There is no place here for you to live, even if you are dying in your country." They didn't let us stay for one day, although we begged them to let us stay because we were injured and exhausted.

In another incident, a pregnant Rohingya woman told Fortify Rights how the BGB turned her and her husband away together with a group of other Rohingya on September 21, 2024, despite her need for medical care. She said: "They forcibly boarded the people onto the boat, even though the people were shouting and crying not to be sent back to Myanmar."

She also described how the BGB threatened them, saying:

[The BGB] hit my husband two or three times on his cheek. I was lying on my husband's lap since I was extremely weak when the BGB hit him. They threatened to shoot at us if we talked back at them. I heard them speaking in the Bangla language. They also told us that they would kill us and throw us into the [Naf] river. ...They insulted us, calling us "Burmese sons of bitches."

The Bangladeshi crew of the boat also robbed the returning refugees of their belongings.

In a more recent incident, an 18-year-old Rohingya refugee described how the BGB transported him and others to the Teknaf jetty and forced them onto boats back to Myanmar. He said:

The vehicle that carried us to the Teknaf jetty was

like a bus. Eight to ten BGB members escorted us. We pleaded many times with the BGB not to push us back, saying, "Sir, we have faced many obstacles and paid a lot of money to come here and survive." However, they were not convinced to release us. We were crying as we had no other way out.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh also described living in fear of being forcibly returned to Myanmar.

"As [my family and I] are not registered in the [refugee] camp, we are afraid to move outside," a 30-year-old Rohingya man who arrived to Bangladesh in September told Fortify Rights. "We fear the police might catch us if they find us outside the camp. ... [O]ur main fear is being sent back to Myanmar. We escaped Myanmar to survive. ... How long can we live in the houses of other people?"

Pushbacks by the BGB are not new to Rohingya refugees. In April 2024, Fortify Rights documented how the BGB under the now-deposed government of Sheikh Hasina forcibly returned Rohingya refugees.

Although the head of the interim government, Chief Advisor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, has acknowledged the severe consequences for Rohingya who are returned, telling the media outlet Deutsche Welle, "Pushing [Rohingya] back means we are pushing them to death," pushbacks continue under his government.

"The Bangladesh government has a responsibility to provide safety and security to Rohingya survivors who are fleeing for their lives and facing mass atrocities in Myanmar," said Zaw Win. "Rohingya have a right to live with dignity and respect as recognized refugees in Bangladesh."

Bangladesh is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which explicitly protects refugees from refoulement or forced return "to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that [they] would be in danger of being subjected to torture." The principle of non-refoulement is legally binding on all states under customary international law.

Bangladesh hosts more than one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. In 2016 and 2017, the Myanmar Army led a genocidal campaign of massacres, mass rape, and mass arson, forcibly deporting more than 700,000 Rohingya men, women, and children to Bangladesh. In addition to ongoing genocidal violence in Myanmar, Rohingya civilians also face indiscriminate attacks and other war crimes committed by both the Myanmar military junta and the AA.



Photo: AFP

MSF CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) on 19 November urged Bangladesh authorities to take urgent action to address overcrowding, malnutrition, and mental health challenges faced by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Rohingya people who have recently fled Rakhine state, Myanmar, face overcrowding and lack of access to essential services, as well as mental stress, according to MSF.

MSF's press release continues below.

Thousands of Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh in recent months after fleeing escalating violence in Myanmar, while others have been pushed back or detained while trying to escape.

They now face immense challenges, including overcrowding, lack of access to essential services, and deteriorating mental health conditions in camps.

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is urging the authorities to ensure unhindered and immediate access to humanitarian assistance, care, and protection for all Rohingya refugees.

Access to food is a challenge in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar. People who were already living in the camps say that they are sharing their food rations and space with newly arrived family members, who don't have access to services like shelter, water, and sanitation. They also lack protection from abuse, exploitation, and neglect, which particularly impacts girls, boys, and women.

Since July, MSF has seen an increase in the

number of children under 5 with moderate and severe malnutrition. Access to food and health care is almost nonexistent in Myanmar, so new arrivals are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. The persistent under-resourcing of the humanitarian response has also severely hampered the availability of essential services, making it difficult for newly arriving Rohingya refugees to access humanitarian services. Our teams are treating newly displaced Rohingya refugees in the camps, including critically ill and war-wounded patients with mortar shell injuries and gunshot wounds.

"People have shared with us that they are afraid to seek assistance as this might put them at risk of being exploited or even returned to Myanmar," says Orla Murphy, MSF country representative in Bangladesh. "Our mental health teams, in particular, see how people are grappling with the violence they witnessed back home and how the lack of access to available humanitarian services has created uncertainty that is further exacerbating their trauma. We are seeing newly arrived Rohingya patients showing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression."

While Bangladeshi authorities have recently committed to addressing the most urgent needs of Rohingya refugees in the camps, more must be done immediately. MSF calls for unhindered access to humanitarian assistance, care and protection for all Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. We also urge all relevant authorities to follow international law and ensure that no one is returned to a place where they face serious harm, including persecution, torture, or other serious human rights abuses.



MYANMAR NATIONALS IN INDIAN JAIL ON HUNGER STRIKE, AWAIT EMBASSY SUPPORT FOR RELEASE

According to families of detainees in Manipur State, India, prison officials have stated that Myanmar nationals detained for illegal entry remain in custody despite completing their prison terms because the Myanmar Embassy has not provided the required documentation.

Prison authorities confirmed that the detainees have been on a hunger strike since 10 November. Primarily Myanmar migrant workers held in Sajiwa Jail in Imphal city, they are demanding their release.

Prison authorities confirmed they are providing medical care to the hunger strikers, who have reportedly become weak and dizzy. While initially 18 detainees participated, one has resumed eating due to health issues, leaving the others to continue their protest.

"The officials advised detainees to end the hunger strike, explaining that they have submitted requests to the Myanmar Embassy but have not received the required documents to authorize the releases," said a family member of one detainee.

Authorities emphasized that embassy support is crucial for the release of the detainees.

Authorities also pointed to a recent case where an Egyptian national was freed after similar embassy intervention. Despite having completed their prison terms, the Myanmar nationals remain detained due to the documentation delay.

Discussions between prison authorities and family representatives are ongoing. Meanwhile detainees' families hope for swift action. Reports indicate that approximately 50 other migrant workers, including women and children, and over 100 refugees fleeing conflict are also held in Sajiwa Jail for illegal entry.

Earlier this year, Indian authorities repatriated 77 Myanmar detainees, including women and children, in May and June 2024.



Venerable Sayadaw Panyajota.
Photo: Facebook

PROMINENT SAFFRON REVOLUTION MONK ARRESTED BY MYANMAR JUNTA

The junta has arrested Venerable Sayadaw Panyajota, a prominent Buddhist monk and leading figure in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, sources close to him confirmed to Mizzima.

The monk, also known as Natzaw, was detained on 13 November near Sawbwar Gyi Kone Bus Terminal in Insein Township, Yangon. Junta officers in plainclothes apprehended him under the guise of conducting an investigation, according to sources familiar with the incident.

“He was arrested at the bus terminal. His visit to Yangon was not political; he came to attend an ordination ceremony at a monastery,” a source close to the monk said.

Panyajota, an American citizen, returned to Myanmar on 5 November to participate in a religious event at a monastery in Mingaladon Township, Yangon. Alongside the monk, two laypeople accompanying him were also detained by the authorities.

“A laywoman, Daw Myint Myint Thein, was arrested on 16 November. Now I’ve heard that her husband has been detained, though this remains unconfirmed,” said Venerable Thavara, another monk involved in the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

The current whereabouts of U Panyajota and the other detainees remain unknown. Sources revealed that the U.S. Embassy in Myanmar has been informed about the arrest.

Efforts to contact the Ministry of Religious Affairs under the military junta for comments went unanswered.

Venerable Sayadaw Panyajota, who had been residing in Buffalo, New York, was a key leader during the Saffron Revolution, which saw Buddhist monks protesting against then State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military regime in 2007.



Tamwe Myot U Pariyatti Seminary. Photo: Supplied

EXPLOSION AT YANGON SEMINARY KILLS ABBOT, CAUSE UNDER INVESTIGATION

A blast at the Tamwe Myot U Pariyatti Seminary in Yangon's Tamwe Township on the morning of 18 November claimed the life of the abbot, U Nyanavamsa, according to sources close to the seminary.

The explosion occurred around 8 am near the room where the 57-year-old presiding monk was staying. The monk reportedly died instantly.

"The blast happened next to the abbot's room, and he died instantly," said a local resident.

U Nyanavamsa served as the chairman of the Metta Nyunt Ward Sangha Nayaka Committee. He had been a monk for 37 years.

Following the incident, junta troops and police arrived at the scene to conduct interrogations.

The junta's information team confirmed the explosion and the monk's death, stating that an investigation is underway. However, the cause of the blast remains unclear.

Efforts to contact the Myot U Pariyatti Seminary for further details were unsuccessful.

Mizzima enquired with members of underground guerrilla groups in Yangon, who responded that they didn't know anything about this explosion.

Members of the Yangon-based underground guerrilla group Operation Flame (OF) denied involvement, stating, "We haven't heard anything about this incident. To be honest, we also want to know why this happened."

Residents in the Metta Nyunt neighbourhood reported that junta troops had taken up residence inside the monastery as of 19 November. They remain unaware of developments within the monastery or funeral arrangements for the abbot.

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED, SEVEN INJURED IN MYANMAR JUNTA DRONE STRIKES IN SAGAING REGION

Two civilians lost their lives, and seven others were injured in drone attacks launched by Myanmar junta forces in Sagaing Region's Kantbalu and Ye U Townships, according to local sources.

In Kantbalu Township, a motorcyclist was killed, and three others were injured during drone strikes on the Mandalay-Myitkyina strategic road near Ngat Pyaw Tine village on the morning of 18 November.

Local residents reported that the attacks occurred at 7:30 am and again at 8:30 am near junta forces and Pyu Saw Htee militias stationed at a sugar factory in Zigon town.

The Kyunhla-Kantbalu Activists Group confirmed the casualties, while a member of the Social Assistance Association of Kantbalu Township states that the deceased motorcyclist and the three injured individuals, two women and one man, were taken to Kantbalu Hospital.

"Both the deceased and injured have been sent to Kantbalu Hospital for treatment," a member said.

Amid the rising violence, the Kantbalu Township People's Defence Force (PDF) has issued a safety advisory, urging residents and travellers to remain cautious due to the likelihood of further drone attacks in areas between Kyunhla, Zigon, and Kantbalu.

"We ask all travellers to prioritize safety and stay alert. The military is intensifying its efforts to dominate

these areas," an information officer from the Kantbalu Township PDF said.

Separately, in Ye U Township, a drone strike targeted by a military column on 17 November killed a woman from Pan Kone village and injured four others.

Local sources reported that the military column, consisting of approximately 180 soldiers, used two drones to drop eight bombs on villages sheltering internally displaced persons (IDPs).

"The junta forces used drones to target villages sheltering internally displaced persons (IDPs). Eight bombs were dropped, hitting shops and killing a woman. Four others sustained serious injuries," a representative from the People's Defence Comrade said.

Following the attack, the military column advanced into northern Ye U Township after moving through Shwe Hlan and Ngadan villages in Taze Township. The column originated from Kaboe Camp in Kantbalu Township.

On the morning of 17 November, junta forces also torched several villages, including Ywar Pu Gyi, Kyothein, Hsiai, Montingpin in Ye U Township, as well as Kalazin and Tathit villages in Taze Township, according to local reports.



MYANMAR FUEL SHORTAGE SPARKS PANIC BUYING AND PRICE HIKES IN KALAY TOWNSHIP

Rumours about Myanmar's junta-controlled Ministry of Electricity and Energy notifying fuel distributors to halt allocations to certain townships, including Kalay in Sagaing Region, sparked a wave of panic buying, resulting in significant fuel price hikes.

On 19 November, residents in Kalay began purchasing large quantities of fuel, filling motorbikes, private cars, tricycles, and containers, drastically increasing demand.

By 20 November, several fuel stations in Kalay, such as Mya Myitta, Kaung Thant, and Shwe Taw Win, had stopped selling fuel entirely.

The price of diesel, which was 31,000 kyats per gallon, surged to 35,000 kyats, with retail prices reaching up to 40,000 kyats, according to locals.

"It was like the panic during COVID. People rushed to buy fuel, and some stations shut down. Prices skyrocketed," a resident said.

Fuel stations attributed the suspension of sales to an overwhelming demand. Meanwhile, some locals

speculated that rumours of fuel shortages might have been deliberately spread by opportunistic traders aiming to drive up prices.

Kalay residents rely heavily on fuel for transportation and for generators due to irregular electricity supplies. The shortage poses a serious threat to communication, daily life, and essential activities in the area.

The junta's fuel transportation ban affects several townships across Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, and Bago Region, and Shan and Chin States. Impacted areas include Myinmu, Chaung U, Budalin, Tabayin, Kalay, Khampat, Tamu, Mawlaik, Bhamo, Katha, Moemit, Paungbyin, Salingyi, Yinmapin, Pale, Wet Latt, Myaung, Pauk, Myingyan, Hteechaite, Minhla, Kanbalu, Kyunhla, Inn Taw, Kawlin, Mogok, Nawngkhio, Lashio, Moigyai, and Yeni.

Fuel allocations are reportedly still permitted for military and government office use in these regions.

An official from the junta's Ministry of Electricity and Energy has not confirmed the fuel transport restrictions. Mizzima is working to verify the claims.



Bomb-damaged house in Bago. Photo: Supplied

JUNTA INTENSIFIES MILITARY OPERATIONS IN EASTERN BAGO REGION, FORCING THOUSANDS TO FLEE

Townships such as Kyaukkyi and Mone in the eastern part of Bago Region have seen an escalation in military activities by junta forces, including frequent artillery shelling and drone attacks targeting civilian areas. According to Saw Doshin, the Information Officer for No. 2 Sub-Military Region under the Southern Military Region, the assaults have increasingly focused on civilian homes and villages.

In November, junta troops from Painzalote-based Infantry Battalion (IB) 264, Shwewa-based Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 307, Kyaukkyi-based LIB 351 and LIB 60, as well as soldiers stationed at Yintikekone and Natthanlwin camps, launched numerous attacks in Nyaunglebin Township.

“The military carries out indiscriminate artillery attacks on villages, destroying homes without engaging in direct combat. Their actions show no regard for the devastating impact on civilians,” said Saw Doshin.

Before launching ground operations, junta forces reportedly conduct artillery strikes, reconnaissance flights, and drone attacks. Civilians remaining in conflict

zones face significant risks from heavy weapons, while revolutionary forces have urged residents to stay vigilant against aerial threats, Saw Doshin said.

On 19 November, a drone attack in Alalsu village, Kyaukkyi Township, damaged a school hall and a religious building, injuring two 10-year-old students. Two days earlier, heavy howitzer fire from LIB 307 struck Ywaryingyi village in Mone Township, killing a 75-year-old man and a 55-year-old man, while two others in their 50s were injured.

Amid the escalating violence, more than 6,000 residents from Kyaukkyi Township’s Ywaryingyi and Nung Gone villages have fled their homes due to ongoing military patrols. Many displaced individuals face dire health and food shortages, according to the Karen National Union (KNU).



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS RAID VILLAGES IN SAGAING REGION, FORCING 2,000 RESIDENTS TO FLEE

Since the morning of 20 November, junta forces have been conducting raids across five villages in Kyunhla Township, Sagaing Region, using drones to drop bombs and displacing approximately 2,000 residents, according to Ko Nay Myo Latt from the Kantbalu Township internally displaced persons (IDP) relief group.

The junta column, consisting of over 200 troops and seven military vehicles, initially arrived at Kan Pauk village and set it ablaze. From there, the troops launched drone attacks on the nearby villages of Ta Gone, Kote Ko Gone, Than Pa Yar Pin Su, and Mya Bone Thar, torching houses and forcing residents to flee.

"Kan Pauk village itself was not heavily damaged, but the drones used from there bombed neighboring villages. Afterward, the junta troops entered the villages and set them on fire. Everyone is fleeing, and our teams are working to evacuate people to safer locations," Ko Nay Myo Latt said.

As of noon on 20 November, the junta column remains in Mya Bone Thar village, where heavy weapons are reportedly being deployed. The full extent of damage and potential casualties in the affected

villages is still unknown, as contact with the areas has been lost.

"We have no updates on the condition of the destroyed villages or whether there have been injuries.

We only know that the troops are fortifying their position in Mya Bone Thar village," Ko Nay Myo Latt said.

IDPs expressed concern over the safety of elderly and ill villagers who were unable or unwilling to leave.

"We were prepared to flee when the junta troops came. But some elders refused to join us. My 76-year-old father stayed behind, feeling uneasy about leaving home. Now I am deeply worried about his safety," said a resident of Than Pa Yar Pin Su village.

In order for relief to be delivered promptly and conveniently, the aid organizations advised the evacuating residents to band together rather than disperse and stay in communication with one another. Additionally, residents in nearby villages were advised to leave because of the raid by the junta column.

SIX FORCIBLY CONSCRIPTED MYANMAR ARMY SOLDIERS DEFECT TO DAWNA COLUMN IN MON STATE

Six individuals forcibly conscripted into the junta's military, have surrendered along with their weapons to the Dawna Column, Strategy 33, operating under Sub-region No. 3 of the Southern Military Region in Ye, Mon State.

A Dawna Column official said, "the defectors hailed from the Ayeyarwady and Yangon Regions. One was misled into joining the junta navy with the false promise of a job on a ship, while the remaining five were conscripts from the first and second batches of military training."

This is the first instance of individuals conscripted under the mandatory military service law defecting to our column, the official stated.

Among the defectors, one surrendered with an MA1 rifle, three boxes of ammunition, and 161 bullets.

Since the military coup, Myanmar's military regime has faced fierce resistance for over three years, resulting in significant casualties among its forces. Many soldiers have defected to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

In an effort to address dwindling manpower and the loss of strategic locations, the junta enacted a mandatory military service law on 10 February 2024. The law aimed to recruit 5,000 soldiers per batch starting in April.

However, this recruitment drive has faced resistance. Many young people are fleeing to avoid conscription, and even those forcibly recruited are defecting when opportunities arise.

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NEARLY 40% OF 3.4 MILLION DISPLACED IN MYANMAR ARE CHILDREN: UN

Children made up nearly 40 percent of the more than 3.4 million people in Myanmar displaced by civil war and climate change-driven extreme weather, the UN agency for children said Thursday last week.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in 2021 and launched a crackdown that sparked an armed uprising against the junta's rule.

The Southeast Asian nation was also battered by Typhoon Yagi in September, triggering major floods that killed more than 400 people and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes.

"The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar is reaching a critical inflexion point, with escalating conflict and climate shocks putting children and families at unprecedented risk," UNICEF deputy executive director Ted Chaiban said in a statement on Thursday.

"Over 3.4 million people have been displaced across the country, nearly 40 percent of whom are children."

The junta is battling widespread armed opposition to its 2021 coup, and its soldiers have been accused of bloody rampages and using air and artillery strikes to punish civilian communities.

The fighting, as well as severe climate events like Typhoon Yagi, have had a "devastating impact"

on children, Chaiban said, leaving them displaced, vulnerable to violence and cut off from health care and education.

He said seven children and two other civilians were killed on November 15 in a strike that hit a Kachin church compound where children were playing football.

Myanmar's northern Kachin state is the homeland of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), one of the various ethnic minority armed groups that hold territory in the north and are battling the junta.

At least 650 children have been killed or wounded in violence in the country this year.

Minors also made up about a third of the more than 1,000 civilian casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war, according to Chaiban.

"The increasing use of deadly weapons in civilian areas, including airstrikes and landmines hitting homes, hospitals, and schools, has severely restricted the already limited safe spaces for children, robbing them of their right to safety and security," he said.

Eleven people were killed last week when a teashop in Myanmar was hit by a military air strike in the town of Naungcho in northern Shan state, a local ethnic armed group said.

AFP



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR MILITARY RECRUITS NEARLY 2,000 CHILD SOLDIERS SINCE 2021 COUP

The Myanmar junta has recruited nearly 2,000 children under the age of 18 since the 2021 coup, according to a United Nations report, Union Minister Naw Susana Hla Hla Soe of the National Unity Government (NUG) said on 20 November, marking the 35th Anniversary of World Children's Day.

In her remarks, Naw Susana highlighted the extensive abuses against children committed by the junta. Over 800 children have reportedly been abducted, tortured, and murdered, with nearly 1,000 killed in daily airstrikes. Additionally, children have suffered from sexual abuse perpetrated by junta forces.

Citing the UN's Special Report on Children and Armed Conflict submitted on 16 August 2024, she emphasized that the NUG has not recruited any child soldiers, earning a "zero-number record." In contrast,

the junta's recruitment of nearly 2,000 child soldiers underscoring its violations of international law.

"The international community must immediately halt the sale of jet fuel to the Military Council to stop the violent killing of children and prevent airstrikes targeting them," Naw Susana urged.

She also appealed for international assistance to restart Myanmar's vaccination program for children, which has been disrupted since the coup. The suspension of this critical program has left children from infants to older babies at risk of preventable diseases.

The NUG continues to call for global action to address the junta's crimes and protect the nation's children from further harm.



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF REAFFIRMS HOLDING GENERAL ELECTIONS TO LEADERS OF MEKONG REGION COUNTRIES

Junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said he told the leaders of neighbouring countries from Thailand, Cambodia and Laos during his visit to China that preparations were being made to hold a free and fair multiparty democratic general election and plans to invite international observation teams to analyse the transparency of the election.

He made the statement during a briefing about his China visit at a State Administration Council (SAC) meeting held in Naypyitaw on 19 November.

He reportedly told the Prime Ministers of Laos, Thailand and Cambodia attending the 8th Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Summit held in Kunming, China, that he was making preparations to hold free and fair elections, and he would invite international observers.

He added that during a meeting with the Chinese Premier, he received a pledge to provide necessary aid for the election as well as enumeration from the population and household census process.

"Larger number of representatives of national races need to join the political platform in order to state the needs of their regions and their national races under the law," he said at the SAC meeting.

The junta chief stressed that a Proportional Representation system is being initiated for state and regional parliaments, and the Amyotha Hluttaws (House of Nationalities or Upper House) in order to ensure wider participation of national races and all strata of people in the Hluttaw (Parliament).

Min Aung Hlaing said he informed the Chinese Premier that the general election scheduled for 2025 would use electronic voting machines and would be implemented in phases due to security issues.

The national census was enumerated from 63% of the total population and the rest would be done by the end of this year, Min Aung Hlaing told the Chinese Premier and Communist Party of China (CPC) leaders. The electoral roll will be compiled from the census data.

The General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB), however, issued a press statement on 12 November saying that the junta's census was not successful and only purpose is to seek a political outlet from the current crises.

The press statement said that people do not trust the census enumeration and did not cooperate with the officials willingly. That the enumeration work was extended for 15 more days until the end of October showed that the census was unsuccessful.

In addition, the war is raging in 233 townships out of a total 330 and over one million people were affected by the flood in September due to Typhoon Yagi, the press statement pointed out.

Junta officials were attacked, arrested, and killed during the census enumeration in Yangon, Sagaing, Mandalay, and Tanintharyi Regions and Chin State.



Junta leader attends the gem fair. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA HOLDS MID-YEAR GEM EMPORIUM TO EARN FOREIGN EXCHANGE

On the morning of 18 November, the Chairman of the State Administration Council (SAC), Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, attended a ceremony to open the 2024 Mid-Year Myanmar Gems Emporium at Maniyadana Jade Hall in Naypyidaw.

The Mid-Year Gems Emporium will sell 280 lots of pearls, 160 lots of gems, and 4,800 lots of jade to local and foreign gems merchants through an open tender system.

The emporium will last from 18 to 27 November.

The gems will be sold in Myanmar Kyat, US Dollars, Euros, Chinese Yuan, Thai Baht, and other foreign currencies accepted by the Central Bank of Myanmar in accordance with the rules laid down, the SAC said.

Domestic gem traders could previously buy in Myanmar Kyat and only foreign buyers could pay in

foreign currencies such as US Dollars, Euros, Chinese Yuan and Thai Baht.

The SAC is under a heavy military spending burden as they have to open military fronts across the country. For this reason more jade lots were added in this Mid-Year emporium than previous years to earn more desperately needed foreign exchange.

After the military coup in 2021, 1,955 jade lots were sold in 2021, 2,150 jade lots in 2022, and 4,025 jade lots in 2023. These figures show they are selling more jade lots year by year.

The government has been holding the Myanmar Gems Emporium since 1964 to sell gems and jade in order to earn foreign currencies for the State and boost the economy for citizens, the SAC claimed.



UK Permanent Representative to the UN
Ms Barbara Woodward

UK PERMANENT SECRETARY TO THE UN ISSUES STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE EMBATTLED MYANMAR PEOPLE

The United Kingdom's Permanent Secretary to the United Nations has expressed support for the Myanmar people and a return to democracy in the country.

On 20 November, the UK took over Presidency of the UN Security Council in New York. They convened a meeting on Myanmar – the sixth time colleagues in the Security Council have met on Myanmar this year. After the closed-door session, the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ms Barbara Woodward, made the following remarks:

Today, the UK is convening the Security Council to discuss Myanmar. We will hear from ASEAN Special Envoy (Alounkeo) Kittikhoun and UN Special Envoy (Julie) Bishop.

Our focus will be on the protection of civilians.

Between August and October, the military attacked Myanmar people with the highest volume of airstrikes

since the coup in February 2021.

They have used more improvised explosive devices, landmines and shelling in the past year than any year since the coup.

We absolutely condemn this.

Over a third of the country's population now needs humanitarian aid to survive.

The UN Development Programme has warned that acute famine is imminent in Rakhine state.

Yet the military blocks aid access while providing no basic services to the people.

Medical supplies, including vaccines, are blocked. As a result, outbreaks of cholera and other preventable diseases are killing people.

The military must be held to account. The time for Council action is far overdue.

In September, we introduced a draft resolution urging all parties to stop their violence against civilians, comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, and stop the supply of weapons and fuel to the military.

Our resolution also calls for the full implementation of ASEAN's Five Point Consensus, and the scaling up of humanitarian assistance.

The majority of the Council wants to do this. And ASEAN themselves have called for strengthened cooperation with the UN.

But a small minority has prevented the Council from acting sooner.

But the suffering of the Myanmar people requires Council action now.

So we will continue to press those outstanding Council members to join us.

For the UK's part, we have led international efforts to cut off the regime's access to weapons and jet fuel imposing sanctions on 25 individuals and 33 businesses involved in the trade.

Since 2021, the UK has provided almost \$200m in emergency and life-saving assistance to the people of Myanmar.

The UK continues to stand with the people of Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

ARE CHINESE PRIVATE ARMIES ENTERING THE FRAY IN MYANMAR?

Between the high-level visits of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Naypyidaw and Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's trip to China, the neighbors struck one piece of business – a deal to allow the deployment of Chinese private military corporations (PMCs) to operate within Myanmar.

The BBC-Burmese Service, which first broke the story, reported that there are already four Chinese private security companies that are operating in Myanmar, doing static security work.

The deployment of mercenary forces is a telling sign of China's unease and of the desperation of the State Administrative Council (SAC), as the junta is formally called.

China is obviously very concerned about the junta's ability to protect Chinese interests in the war-torn country, but a deployment of private Chinese armies is nothing less than a complete humiliation for Min Aung Hlaing.

Despite the military's bravado, over half of Myanmar is now in opposition hands, and junta forces have failed to retake most of the territory they have lost since the Three Brotherhood Alliance commenced Operation 1027 in October 2023.

The Chinese deployment is a stark admission on the part of the February 2021 coup leader that his forces are spread too thin. Despite the monthly induction of 5,000 conscripts, battlefield losses, and defections are cutting into the regime's numerical advantage.

The Irrawaddy reported that on October 22, the junta established a 13-member working committee

composed of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home Affairs and other ministries to draft the memorandum of understanding on the military company's establishment and import of weaponry and communications devices.

The committee would also determine where and how the Chinese PMC could be deployed.

Chinese PMCs

The new PMC has not been established, but chances are it would be a subsidiary of or a joint venture with one of China's large existing PMCs, which have proliferated since the 1990s when a set of laws created the framework for their operation. Those laws were amended in 2009.

Today, there are roughly 20 Chinese PMCs operating in 40 countries, mostly in Africa, to provide security for Belt and Road Initiative projects.

The big players in the market are De Wei Security Group Ltd, Hua Xin China Security, Guan An Security Technology, China Overseas Security Group, and Frontier Services Group.

Chinese PMC do not have the same business model as Russia's Wagner Group, which really is used more as an expeditionary fighting force that gives the Russian government a fig leaf of plausible deniability, in pursuit of the Kremlin's broader foreign policy interests.

Wagner's business model is also based on the extraction of natural resources. Chinese firms, to date, have operated more on a contractual basis and have focused much more on the protection of China's economic interests under the Belt and Road Initiative.

The attempted mutiny by Wagner's CEO, Yevgeny Prigozhin in June 2023 has probably shaped Chinese leadership thinking about PMCs, likely prompting the Communist Party and People's Liberation Army to step up their controls.

The firewall between the PMCs and the People's Liberation Army has always been thin. Much of the corporate leadership as well as rank and file came out of the PLA, People's Armed Police, or other Chinese security ministries.

The regular targeting of Chinese citizens and economic interests along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor by Baluchi militants may be prompting a rethink in how and when Chinese PMCs can use force, and what the rules of engagement are.

Legitimately concerned about Min Aung Hlaing and the military's competence, Beijing will be pushing hard for robust rules of engagement, and the ability to conduct offensive operations around their key economic interests.

Major Chinese interests

China has a wide range of economic interests in Myanmar.

These include their special economic zone and proposed deep-water intermodal container port in Kyaukphyu, the Wanbao copper mines, hydro electric plants in Kachin and northern Shan states, oil and gas pipelines that extend to Kunming in southwestern China, and jade and rare earth mines in Kachin.

But almost all of those projects are in areas that have come under the control of the opposition National Unity Government and its people's defense forces, or allied ethnic resistance organizations.

Indeed, 90% of Myanmar's natural resources are outside junta control, or in contested spaces.

What does that mean for Chinese PMCs?

If they are deployed in contested areas, such as the mines in Mandalay, Magway, or Sagaing, will they be fighting alongside junta forces?

Or will they simply be defending China's economic interest which would free up regime troops?

Will there be intelligence sharing and targeting information, or tactical-level embedded deployments?

Given the close relationship between Chinese PMCs and the PLA, one has to look at this as the de facto deployment of PLA forces into Myanmar.

The Burmese language Khit Thit Media reported that a deal to establish a Chinese PMC in Kyaukphyu

was signed this month between Gen. Kyaw Shwe Htun, the chairman of the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone management sub-committee, and officials from the Chinese CITIC Group Company.

The Arakan Army has surrounded Kyaukphyu, where construction on a special economic zone and port has stalled, but has made no attempt to enter it.

Would Chinese PMCs be allowed to go outside the perimeter? Could they provide intelligence, signals intercepts or targeting information to junta forces?

Punishing the ethnic armies

It's hard to imagine that the ethnic armies will allow the deployment of Chinese PMCs in their territory.

China has already made it clear that it is doubling down on the junta, while the opposition NUG and ethnic armies have repeatedly defied Beijing by continuing to fight the military regime and reject calls for nationwide elections under junta terms.

China has tried to punish the ethnic armies by shutting down border trade, which impacts the local communities that are dependent on the flow of commerce. They have shut down the internet and electric power for many border towns.

The Chinese are now taking their pressure campaign to the next level.

On Nov. 18, Myanmar-Now reported that the Chinese had placed the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) commander, Peng Daxun, under house arrest after summoning him to Kunming for talks.

China later denied Peng was under house arrest, saying he was receiving medical treatment.

This major escalation – coupled with additional support for the junta, including weaponry and drones, and negotiations about the deployment of private armies – should leave no one guessing as to what China's position on Myanmar is.

Zachary Abuza is a professor at the National War College in Washington and an adjunct at Georgetown University. The views expressed here are his own and do not reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Defense, the National War College, Georgetown University or Radio Free Asia.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Wa fighters on parade. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S WA GROUP SAYS HANDS OVER 760 SCAM SUSPECTS TO CHINA

A Myanmar ethnic armed group has arrested more than 760 Chinese citizens suspected of being involved in online scams and handed them over to China, its spokesperson said on 20 November.

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) said it had arrested more than 1,000 people during raids in its territory near the China border, media affiliated to the group reported Tuesday.

Online fraud compounds have flourished in Myanmar's borderlands, staffed by citizens from China and other countries who are often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots.

China has repeatedly told the Myanmar junta and ethnic armed groups on its borders to crack down on the industry, which analysts say is worth billions of dollars a year.

"Among the arrested 762 are from China. We transferred them to China through our border gate yesterday," UWSA spokesperson Nyi Rang told AFP.

The other 300 people are Myanmar nationals and were currently being questioned, he said.

"We will release them after questioning," he added.

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

More than 40,000 people suspected of taking part in cyber scams in Myanmar were handed over to China in 2023, Beijing state media said this year.

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say it also maintains ties with Myanmar ethnic armed groups that hold territory near its border.

Myanmar has been roiled by conflict between the military and various armed groups opposed to its rule since the army ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in February 2021.

Myanmar's junta chief recently made his first visit to China since seizing power and held talks with Premier Li Qiang on the civil war.

Local media in Myanmar reported this week that Chinese authorities had arrested the head of another powerful rebel group the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

Beijing said he had come to China for "medical care".

AFP



MYANMAR'S KACHIN INSURGENTS TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR BORDER WITH CHINA

The most powerful insurgent group in northern Myanmar has captured the last crossing in its region on the border with China in defiance of Chinese efforts to press it and other Myanmar rebel forces to make peace with the junta that seized power in 2021.

The Kachin Independence Army, or KIA, has been fighting for self-determination in Myanmar's northernmost Kachin state on and off for decades and has made significant advances against the military over the past year.

KIA and allied fighters launched a final push for Kan Paik Ti town, 75 kilometers (46 miles) east of the state capital, Myitkyina, early on Wednesday and captured it by around 7 p.m., a resident and a source close to the KIA said.

"The junta soldiers fled to the border fence or to the Chinese side," said a town resident who declined to be identified for safety reasons. "Employees of the junta administration have also been fleeing from the border gate to China."

Junta forces initially sent an aircraft to fire at insurgent positions but the town was quiet on Thursday, the resident said. The source close to the KIA said junta

forces had launched attacks in other areas after the fall of Kan Paik Ti.

Residents had no information about casualties in the latest fighting.

RFA tried to reach Kachin state's junta spokesperson, Moe Min Thein, and the KIA's information officer, Naw Bu, for information, but neither responded by time of the publication.

Rebel success alarms China

The KIA and allied forces in northeastern, western and eastern Myanmar have made stunning gains over the past year, putting the army under the most severe pressure it has faced since shortly after independence from Britain in 1948.

But the insurgents' success has alarmed giant neighbor China, which has extensive economic interests in Myanmar, including energy pipelines running up from the Indian Ocean and mining projects.

China has thrown its support behind the junta, promising to back an election next year that the junta hopes will bolster its legitimacy, and putting pressure on the KIA and other insurgent groups to respond positively to junta offers of talks.

The junta leader, Sen. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, renewed a call to insurgent forces to talk peace while on a visit to China on Nov. 6, telling Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang that stability was crucial for economic development and trade.

But the insurgents have dismissed the junta's offer as a trick and reject the planned election as a sham when Myanmar's most popular politician, Aung San Suu Kyi, and hundreds of other opponents of military rule are in prison.

Over the past year, the KIA has captured jade and rare earth mines that export to China, and both sides have at different times sealed the border, partly to put economic pressure on the other side.

China recently closed the border to civilians seeking shelter from fighting and has also shut off supplies reaching KIA-controlled areas, leading to shortages of fuel and medicine.

The KIA responded by suspending exports of rare earths to China, and the group now controls every border crossing through which the minerals vital to a range of Chinese manufacturing pass.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



BREAKING BURMA

INSIGHT MYANMAR

“ [I]n the Myanmar military, [there] is a culture of recreational sadism,” David Mathieson tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast. “I got in trouble [for saying that]. Some people during the so-called transition, people in Yangon, were like, “Why do you keep saying things like that? The military is changing!” Like, no, they’re not; they’re changing the way they talk to you, to elites, but they’re not changing on the ground. And if you spent as much time speaking to survivors of military violence, you’ll notice that they torture and kill basically for sport. There’s no logic behind it, other than, ‘We can get away with this!’”

David Mathieson, a longtime advocate, activist, and scholar focused on human rights in Myanmar, delves into his analysis of the country’s political situation, focusing in particular on the military’s institutional mindset. His interest in Myanmar began in the early 1990s, driven by the scarcity of informed discussions about the country. This curiosity led him to explore the history and intricacies of Burmese insurgency and military control, including key events such as the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and the military’s consolidation of power thereafter. He reflects on how it has been able to cling to power, despite being widely unpopular and fostering fear, and often even acting against its own self-interests. Mathieson suggests that the 2021 coup is one such example, a counterproductive move that led to economic collapse and increased international isolation.

MILITARY’S SADISM

Mathieson characterizes the military as being driven by arrogance, entitlement, and what he terms above as “recreational sadism”: its obsession with dominance and coercion rather than any attempt to win the support of the population. He points out that the institutional loyalty expected in the military stems from deeply entrenched narratives about nationalism and protecting the state. It holds a deep-seated belief that it alone is essential to the nation’s survival, and soldiers are conditioned into believing that without them, Myanmar would disintegrate into chaos and infighting. Mathieson believes this often blinds followers to the detrimental impacts of their leaders’ actions while fostering a kind of messianic self-image.

Mathieson also addresses the Myanmar military’s inability to evolve in its approach to counterinsurgency and population control. It just relies on brute force in a misguided belief that people can be controlled through fear and violence, despite mounting evidence that this only leads to further instability, reducing prospects for reconciliation and progress. A key example Mathieson provides is the Rohingya crisis of 2017, where the military’s tactics led to international condemnation and accusations of genocide, further isolating Myanmar and deepening internal conflict.

COMPLEX LANDSCAPE

Shifting his focus to the international community's understanding of Myanmar's complex reality, Mathieson critiques international narratives that oversimplify Myanmar's complex socio-political landscape. He emphasizes the need to consult Burmese-led scholarship and understand local perspectives, which he believes will lead to a more empathetic and informed perspective. For example, the military is often portrayed as a monolithic evil and the opposition as pure victims, but he underscores that both the military and ethnic armed organizations are complicated entities, each with their own internal contradictions and motivations, all of which need to be examined in depth to accurately grasp the ongoing conflict. He mentions groups like the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Arakan Army (AA) that have their own political agendas and historical grievances that complicate the landscape of resistance.

FAILURE TO FIND PEACE

Mathieson points to the failures of past attempts at the peace process, which he says are due to the military's insistence on dominance and their inability to understand or address the legitimate grievances of ethnic groups. This lack of willingness to engage meaningfully perpetuates a cycle of mistrust and unrest. He cites as an example the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of 2015, which he argues was deeply flawed from the outset. Despite its promises, the NCA excluded key ethnic armed groups and became little more than a symbolic gesture, as the military continued aggressive operations in ethnic regions. According to Mathieson, the NCA's failure reflected not only

the regime's insincerity, but also the complicity of international supporters who endorsed the agreement, thereby legitimizing a flawed peace process. This dynamic has only further entrenched distrust between the ethnic groups and the military, blocking any path to genuine peace. Yet rather than acknowledging the need to change its approach, the military has remained entrenched in its failed vision, which only deepens divisions and prolongs violence. Ultimately, Mathieson paints a picture of Myanmar as a country caught in the grip of a military that consistently acts irrationally and often self-defeatingly, enacting a reign of fear and division while insisting on national unity.

TACTIC OF WAR

"[The military] has taken a pasting unlike anything in 70 years! There's a belief in their purpose, in their mission, their self-worth, but also increasingly a belief in overwhelming firepower. When they murdered scores of civilians with airstrikes and artillery strikes, I've heard for the past two years that this is the SAC being desperate. I don't think it's desperation at all! I think it's a tactic of war, it's them going, 'If you want to resist us, we'll kill 150 of you, we don't care! Murdering civilians is something we've done for decades, and we'll continue to do it!' One element of their strategy of survival is murdering the way out of it. And that's a deplorable, a disgusting realization. But you see the evidence for it every day."

CATCH THE PODCAST

Listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/10893f61-f288-4b5e-875e-109876c1c6c7>

Photo: AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin says Russia will hit back against US and UK-supplied and guided missiles targeting Russia, suggesting the Russia-Ukraine conflict could go “global”. Photo: AFP

PUTIN HINTS AT STRIKES ON WEST IN ‘GLOBAL’ UKRAINE WAR AS WESTERN MISSILES STRIKE RUSSIA

Russian President Vladimir Putin said 21 November that the conflict in Ukraine had characteristics of a “global” war and did not rule out strikes on Western countries.

The Kremlin strongman spoke out after a day of frayed nerves, with Russia test-firing a new generation intermediate-range missile at Ukraine -- which Putin hinted was capable of unleashing a nuclear payload.

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky branded the strike a major ramping up of the “scale and brutality” of the war by a “crazy neighbour”, while Kyiv’s main backer, the United States, said that Russia was to blame for escalating the conflict “at every turn”.

Intermediate-range missiles typically have a reach of up to 5,500 kilometres (3,400 miles) -- enough to make good on Putin’s threat of striking the West.

In a defiant address to the nation, Russia’s president railed at Ukraine’s allies granting permission for Kyiv to use Western-supplied weapons to strike targets on Russian territory, warning of retaliation.

In recent days Ukraine has fired US and UK-supplied missiles at Russian territory for the first time, escalating already sky-high tensions in the nearly three-year-long conflict.

“We consider ourselves entitled to use our weapons against the military facilities of those countries that allow their weapons to be used against our facilities,” Putin said.

He said the US-sent Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) and British Storm Shadow payloads were shot down by Moscow’s air defences, adding: “The goals that the enemy obviously set were not achieved”.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov did however say Moscow informed Washington of the missile’s launch half an hour before it was fired through an automatic nuclear de-escalation hotline, in remarks cited in state media.

He earlier said Russia was doing everything to avoid an atomic conflict, having updated its nuclear doctrine this week.

White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that Washington saw no need to modify the United States’ own nuclear posture in response.

NATO spokesperson Farah Dakhllallah said Russia’s use of the missile would “neither change the course of the conflict nor deter” the US-led defence alliance from backing Kyiv.

'Reckless behaviour'

Ukraine earlier accused Russia of firing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) for the first time in history -- a claim later downplayed by Washington.

The Ukrainian air force said Moscow had launched the missile as part of a barrage towards Dnipro, where local authorities said an infrastructure facility was hit and two civilians were wounded.

Putin said that Russia had carried out "testing in combat conditions of one of the newest Russian... missile systems" named "Oreshnik".

Criticising the global response to the strike -- "final proof that Russia definitely does not want peace"-- Zelensky warned that other countries could become targets for Putin too.

"It is necessary to urge Russia to a true peace, which is possible only through force," the Ukrainian leader said in his evening address.

"Otherwise, there will be relentless Russian strikes, threats and destabilisation, and not only against Ukraine."

The attack on Dnipro comes just days after several foreign embassies shuttered temporarily in the Ukrainian capital, citing the threat of a large-scale strike.

"It is another example of reckless behaviour from Russia," a spokesman for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told reporters.

The spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Stephane Dujarric, said the new missile's deployment was "another concerning and worrying development," warning the war was "going in the wrong direction".

Yet a US official played down the threat, saying on condition of anonymity that Russia "likely possesses only a handful of these" experimental missiles.

UK 'directly involved'

The head of the Dnipropetrovsk region where the city of Dnipro is located said the Russian aerial bombardment damaged a rehabilitation centre and several homes, as well as an industrial enterprise.

"Two people were wounded -- a 57-year-old man was treated on the scene and a 42-year-old woman was hospitalised," said the official, Sergiy Lysak.

Russia and Ukraine have escalated their use of long-range missiles in recent days since Washington gave Kyiv permission to use its ATACMS against military targets inside Russia -- a long-standing Ukrainian

request.

British media meanwhile reported on Wednesday that Kyiv had launched UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles at targets in Russia after being given the green light from London.

With ranges of 300 and 250 kilometres respectively, both missile systems' reach is far dwarfed by the experimental intermediate-range system fired by Russia.

Russia's envoy to London on Thursday said that meant Britain was "now directly involved" in the Ukraine war, with Andrei Kelin telling Sky News "this firing cannot happen" without UK and NATO support.

But the White House's Jean-Pierre countered that it was Russia who was behind the rising tensions, pointing to the reported deployment of thousands of North Korean troops to help Moscow fight off a Ukrainian offensive in Russia's border Kursk region.

"The escalation at every turn is coming from Russia," Jean-Pierre said, adding that the United States had warned Moscow against involving "another country in another part of the world" -- referring to Pyongyang.

Kyiv in retreat

The defence ministry in Moscow said 21 November its air-defence systems had downed two Storm Shadows, without saying whether they had come down on Russian territory or in occupied Ukraine.

The missile escalation is coming at a critical moment on the ground for Ukraine, as its defences buckle under Russian pressure across the sprawling front line.

Russia claimed deeper advances in the war-battered Donetsk region, announcing on Thursday that its forces had captured another village close to Kurakhove, closing in on the town after months of steady advances.

Moscow's defence ministry said Russian forces had taken the small village of Dalne, five kilometres (three miles) south of Kurakhove.

Lysak, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, said that 26 people had been wounded in another strike on the town of Kryvyi Rig, where Zelensky was born.

AFP



High speed rail lines in China. Photo: AFP

FARE HIKE UNLIKELY TO HELP DEBT-RIDDEN CHINESE HIGH-SPEED RAILWAY; RATHER AGGRAVATES SOCIAL EXCLUSION

SUN LEE

The high-speed railway (HSR) system in China is caught in a debt-trap due to unsustainable loans, low ridership and unmindful expansion. The huge debt now has forced the operator - China State Railway Group - to hike the fare by up to 40 percent. The state-run Xinhua News Agency said the rising costs made it difficult to maintain the previous fares even as operators are struggling to repay loans. However, the fare hike seems unlikely to help.

As per the latest estimates, the loans taken for construction of the high-speed rail has touched US\$859 billion. In 2023, the revenue on operations was RMB 1.2 trillion while the net profit was just RMB 3.3 billion as the number of passengers fell.

"There were passengers when the station first opened, but gradually we stopped seeing them," said a shop owner near Dandong station. Zhao Jian, a professor at Beijing Jiaotong University, has warned that the high-speed rail system could become a "grey rhino" due to unsustainable debt and low ridership.

About 80 percent of loans taken by the Chinese Railway Group (CREC) is consumed by HSR projects. Critics and experts said a debt crisis is waiting to happen as many HSR lines are incapable of repaying the interest on their debt as they were built using unsustainable government subsidies.

Zhao Jian said "China Railways has always depended on financial subsidies and continues to raise new debt to pay off old debt. This will inevitably lead to a railway debt crisis."

Mega borrowings by provincial governments in China to monetise its high-speed railway have created a debt trap, said Dhaval Desai, Senior Fellow at Observer Research Foundation. "China's HSR story has dazzled the world in the past decade. But its growing domestic financial woes have exposed its risky underbelly," he said. The Beijing government cautioned provincial governments against investing in the HSR to avoid a debt-trap. Notably, the debt accumulated for HSR expansion has surpassed the crisis-ridden real estate giant Evergrande Group.

The debt crisis is quite significant even as CREC tried to keep it hidden. The financial data for year 2023 showed the HSR turned profitable thanks to the best operating performance. However, the profit did not take into account the huge debt, said Wang Kuo-chen, an assistant researcher at the Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research. The fare hike will help only in covering general operating expenses but not reduce the debt, he added.

Many high-speed rail stations have turned into ghost stations and the local governments are stuck with debt repayment after the property bubble burst.

Yizhuang is one such ghost station. It was built by the local authorities but has not been yet made operational due to it being now considered commercially unviable. This has added to the financial burden. There are many such stations across China, which are a part of incomplete or stranded infrastructure projects. "The prospect of a build-up of stranded assets may add yet more strains to the finances," said S&P Global.

A big chunk of population in China does not use the HSR as they cannot afford its tickets. According to research led by Xiaohong Ren of Chongqing Jiaotong University, about a quarter of Chinese peoples' reluctance to use HSR was associated with low incomes.

"There has been a continuous debate on whether the development of HSR could potentially lead to social exclusion, particularly among social groups that are low income or have a lower value of time," reads the research. Against such a backdrop, further hikes in the fare could aggravate social exclusion.

The tariff hike in HSR has impact on economic equity since it is financed with public money and bank loans, says research led by Xutao Yang, transport economist at Beijing Jiaotong University. "If HSR is socially exclusive to some groups for economic reasons, especially due to its high tariff, that means the taxes paid by those who cannot travel by HSR are used to subsidise those who are rich enough to use HSR so regularly," reads the research.

Chinese people who are already under pressure due to inflation expressed their anger at the HSR fare hike. They consider it an insult to injury when wages have dropped but daily expenses on essential commodities and services have gone up, said Lynn Ling, a writer from Chengdu.

Sun Lee is the pseudonym of a writer who covers China and Asian affairs.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a war room in Israel. Photo: Supplied

US PRESIDENT BIDEN CALLS INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT WARRANT FOR ISRAELI PM 'OUTRAGEOUS'

US President Joe Biden called the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for top Israeli leaders "outrageous" in a statement 21 November.

"Whatever the ICC might imply, there is no equivalence -- none -- between Israel and Hamas," Biden said after the international tribunal issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defense minister Yoav Gallant on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security," the president added.

In an earlier statement, the White House said it "fundamentally rejects" the calls for arrests.

"We remain deeply concerned by the prosecutor's rush to seek arrest warrants and the troubling process errors that led to this decision. The United States has been clear that the ICC does not have jurisdiction over this matter," a National Security Council spokesperson said.

The statement made no mention of an ICC arrest warrant also issued for Mohammed Deif, the military chief of Hamas.

Mike Waltz, the incoming national security

advisor under US president-elect Donald Trump's administration, defended Israel and promised a "strong response to the antisemitic bias of the ICC & UN come January."

"The ICC has no credibility and these allegations have been refuted by the US government," Waltz said on social media platform X.

His comments reflected a wider outrage among Republicans, with some calling for the US Senate to sanction the ICC, which counts 124 national members who are in theory obliged to arrest individuals subject to warrants.

Neither the United States nor Israel is a member of the ICC and both have rejected its jurisdiction.

The Hague-based court said Thursday that the warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant were issued "for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed from at least 8 October 2023 until at least 20 May 2024."

A warrant was also issued for Deif, whom Israel claimed was killed in an air strike in Gaza in July. Hamas has not confirmed his death.

AFP



THE REVOLUTION WILL BE STEEPED

"The experience of being between identities, between places, being connected to more than one place, makes it very easy for me to feel that the social causes of wherever I am are something that I should advocate for."

Insight Myanmar Podcast guest, Brian Hioe, describes how he came to embrace the life of an activist, and recounts the evolving, transnational solidarity networks across Asia.

Brian's first experiences with activism came in high school, when he led a human rights club. This evolved into participating in movements such as Occupy Wall Street in 2011, Japan's anti-nuclear protests in 2012, and Taiwan's Sunflower Movement in 2014. His unique activist background—alternating between Taiwan and the U.S.—has since allowed him to connect with multiple movements, further shaping his perspective on human rights, social justice, and political advocacy.

Brian's involvement in the Sunflower Movement, a landmark student-led protest in Taiwan, was a pivotal chapter in his activism journey. He was on the front lines and engaged in direct action, which included storming and occupying the legislature. The Sunflower Movement has been seen as a generational awakening for Taiwanese youth, challenging Taiwan's increasing economic dependence on China.

Hoping to sustain the momentum of these events, Brian founded New Bloom Magazine in 2014, a progressive, bilingual platform that explores Taiwan's social and political issues. It was designed, in part, to foster international awareness about Taiwan's youth: what they were thinking about in terms of relations with China and democratic politics in their country.

Brian next addresses the historic and geopolitical connections between Taiwan and Myanmar, which can be traced back to the post-Chinese Civil War era, when many Chinese Nationalist fighters (the Kuomintang, or KMT), retreated to northern Burma after their defeat by the Chinese Communist Party. KMT fighters operated in northern Burma for years; while some eventually relocated to Taiwan, others remained behind, becoming deeply involved in Burma's burgeoning drug trade.

Coincidentally, Brian's family is from Taipei's "Little Burma" district, a vibrant enclave of the Chinese-Burmese diaspora and migrant workers. Following the Myanmar coup, this neighborhood emerged as a hub of political solidarity, with its community organizing significant protests and demonstrations to support Myanmar's democratic aspirations.

Reflecting on these local events, Brian is struck by Taiwan's own nuanced position in Southeast Asia. Taiwan's diplomatic constraints and regional alliances, often shaped by its alignment with U.S. interests, contrast sharply with its desire to foster economic ties in Southeast Asia. Yet, many Southeast Asian nations, including Myanmar, have governments that lean toward China, often complicating Taiwan's ability to deepen regional relationships.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/11/5/episode-282-the-revolution-will-be-steeped>



KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

KIA CAPTURES STRATEGIC JUNTA BORDER TOWN DAYS AFTER JUNTA'S SUPERFICIAL AID CAMPAIGN

The junta's Kachin State Chief Minister Khet Htein Nan led a relief distribution ceremony in Naungchein village-tract, Waingmaw Township, Kachin State, on November 16.

Junta-controlled state media reported that 283 flood-affected households received rice and essential items during the event. The Chief Minister also inspected flood prevention projects, including plans for a sluice gate at Injan Creek and a proposed public park.

However, just three days after these civilian administration activities, the junta's control in the region faced a major setback. On November 19, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied resistance forces captured Kanpaikti, a strategic border town

hosting one of Myanmar's major border trading gates with China. Local sources confirmed that junta troops and affiliated militia fled across the Chinese border as resistance forces secured the town by evening.

The capture of Kanpaikti means the KIA now controls key border towns including Phimaw, Pangwar, Kanpaikti, and Lwegel, effectively establishing authority over the entire China-Myanmar border checkpoints in the area.

Kanpaikti, previously controlled by the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) militia led by Zakhung Ting Ying, represents the third-largest border crossing point in the area.



SOCIAL MEDIA USERS WELCOME ICC ARREST WARRANT FOR MYANMAR'S JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING

Facebook users in Myanmar enthusiastically welcomed the news of the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC requested an arrest warrant for Myanmar junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity against Rohingya people.

Facebook users flooded platforms with positive reactions to the announcement. "Nice news indeed," commented one user, while another expressed eager anticipation, writing "Arrest him quickly, I really want to return to Myanmar" - reflecting the widespread desire among displaced citizens to see justice served.

The ICC's investigation, which began on November 14, 2019, focused on the violence in Rakhine State during 2016 and 2017, including the forced deportation of Rohingya people to Bangladesh. After extensive

investigation, the ICC found reasonable grounds to believe that Min Aung Hlaing is responsible for crimes against humanity, including deportation and persecution of Rohingya people.

While celebrating the development, some users also discussed practical aspects of the warrant. "Whether they can actually arrest him or not is another matter - but now he's officially an international fugitive," noted one user, highlighting the milestone nature of the ICC's move against the junta chief.

The announcement marks a significant legal development internationally, with Myanmar's social media users seeing it as a step toward justice as potential accountability for the junta chief's ongoing violence against civilians across the country after the coup in 2021.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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