

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

THE ASSAD EFFECT

Syrian leader's rapid exit sparks
hope the Myanmar dictator's
days are numbered

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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.

A CALL FOR MORE SUPPORT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MYANMAR

Last week, 3 December marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations and various governments and NGOs took a moment to stress the importance of empowering and elevating the leadership of persons with disabilities in Myanmar to create an inclusive and sustainable future amid the country's ongoing crises.

As the UN pointed out in a statement, the day was a reminder of the urgent need to empower persons with disabilities. The issue is not a lack of leadership ability, but a systemic failure to create opportunities for leadership experiences.

In Myanmar, an estimated 5.9 million people – 13 per cent of the population – live with disabilities. Among displaced and crisis-affected people, around 15 per cent are persons with disabilities, and around 40 per cent of households in these groups include one or more members with disabilities, the UN statement says.

Progress in advancing disability rights has been severely disrupted by the country's ongoing crises. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has noted, persons with disabilities disproportionately endure the impacts of conflict, climate disasters, poverty, and inequality, exacerbated by persistent stigma, discrimination, and barriers to basic rights. Yet, they are often excluded from contributing to solutions.

Out of the 5.9 million people living with disabilities in Myanmar, nearly 3.5 million are women and girls and they face compounded risks. Women and girls with disabilities are two to four times more likely than other women to experience violence – a risk heightened during crisis. Children with disabilities are also acutely vulnerable, especially in accessing education. Among displaced populations, 60 to 90 per cent of children with disabilities do not attend any type of schooling. Additionally, the widespread use of landmines has tragically increased the number of people, including children, living with disabilities.

While continuing to support and assist all persons with disabilities, the United Nations in Myanmar prioritizes inclusivity for women and girls with disabilities by addressing structural barriers, preventing violence, and expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services. They also focus on children with disabilities by promoting inclusive school meal programmes, providing top-up cash assistance alongside humanitarian assistance for conflict-affected communities, and supporting people, including children, with mine risk prevention and response services, including survivor assistance.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underscores the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and highlights the need to address the intersecting discrimination faced by persons with disabilities.

As the statement notes, the UN in Myanmar is committed to uphold the Convention and promote the meaningful participation and leadership of persons with disabilities and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. They will continue advocating for inclusive participation at all levels of decision-making, ensuring accessible information and communication, and supporting capacity-building and awareness initiatives to challenge discriminatory attitudes. They will also support sustainable, accessible funding to enable our partners to implement action-oriented approaches that support all persons with disabilities.

To build a future where persons with disabilities are recognized not as individuals with "special needs" but as changemakers, peacemakers, and leaders, the UN says people must foster their participation and leadership and prioritise their voices so they can help shape Myanmar's path to recovery and peace.

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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing at a Chinese New Year Festival by AFP



Myanmar junta leader walking in step with his Russian naval counterparts on a visit to Yangon. Photo: AFP

THE ASSAD EFFECT

SYRIAN LEADER'S RAPID EXIT SPARKS MYANMAR HOPE THAT THEIR DICTATOR'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED

ANDREW LANDEN

In the wake of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's flight from his country in the dead of night last weekend, many Myanmar people and analysts raised the hope that Myanmar dictator Min Aung Hlaing might soon make a similar rapid departure as the country's resistance forces step up the pressure.

News of Assad's overthrow by revolutionary forces and his subsequent escape to Russia captured global attention. And social media accounts of Myanmar citizens were abuzz.

One European democracy activist, Igor Blazevic, was quick to question whether something similar could be in store for Myanmar's junta leader.

In Myanmar, the 9 December editions of *The Mirror* and *The New Light of Myanmar*, both operated by the junta, made no mention of Assad's ousting. Instead, the papers focused on topics such as UNESCO's recognition of the Chinese Spring Festival, as well as events in Cambodia, Israel, and Afghanistan.

Assad was forced to flee on 8 December after rebel jihadist forces, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS),

seized Syria's capital, Damascus.

But is Myanmar's Min Aung Hlaing likely to be jumping on a plane to Moscow any time soon?

Expecting a regime collapse like that of Assad in Syria is understandable given the horrific rule of Myanmar's regime and the hopes for an end to the conflict. However, there are key differences between Syria and Myanmar in terms of the internal dynamics, international response and the geopolitical context that come into play when attempting to assess whether such a scenario would play out in Myanmar.

MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

Ever since Myanmar's military arrested the democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint in the early hours of 1 February 2021, questions have hovered over how long Min Aung Hlaing and his generals could stay in power. The question has been tempered by the reality that, bar a decade-long "experiment" with a military-steered democracy, Myanmar has been under the boots of the generals for decades since 1962, with previous



Former Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and his wife arrive in Russia.
Photo: Supplied

uprisings, including those in 1988 and 2007, quashed.

The reign of the generals in Myanmar has been longer than the Assad family dynasty in Syria. Assad is the son of Hafez al-Assad, who was the president from 1971 until his death in 2000, when Bashar al-Assad took power. The Syrian civil war, which began in March 2011 amid widespread protests, lasted nearly 14 years – a conflict between the Syrian military and mostly Islamist jihadists, ironically backed by Western and Israeli players. Throughout this period, Assad's regime received substantial military and political support from Russia and Iran.

The current Myanmar junta is the latest incarnation of military rule, with key allies Russia and China providing significant arms supplies since Myanmar's 2021 coup. In response, the West has imposed sanctions and sought to isolate the junta on the international stage, and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has struggled to persuade the junta to adhere to the agreed but failing Five-Point Consensus peace proposal.

DESERT VS JUNGLE

Assad's sudden departure from Syria "surprised everybody," according to Western analysts. But observers have to be careful not to make simple comparisons when hoping Min Aung Hlaing will shortly head for the door.

Both Syria and Myanmar are a "horror show" when it comes to trying to analyse the various combatants involved in the various conflicts within the two countries. But there is a certain amount of simplicity when assessing the geography and demographics.

Syria is a relatively small desert country with a small population - 71,500 square miles and 25 million inhabitants, according to the official figures, compared with Myanmar at 261,200 square miles with a population of 55 million with a diverse geography.

All this is worth mentioning because it includes one main key to the swift advance of the various jihadist forces in Syria to take the main cities and move



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with Russian President Vladimir Putin at a meeting in Russia. Photo: AFP

on Damascus over the last couple of weeks. Fast-moving pick-ups were used to travel short distances to approach the frontlines – similar to the Taliban tactic to secure victory in Afghanistan in 1996. This compares with combatant travel in Myanmar, which is typically slow, involving slow-moving advances and retreats – even in the western state of Rakhine where the Arakan Army has made substantial progress.

The Syrian military melted away as the jihadists approached – a fast victory that all the players were surprised at. Assad's regime survived for as long as it did largely due to extensive foreign military and financial support, primarily from Russia and Iran, though much of it was a façade with infusions of money allegedly going into the pockets of the corrupt Syrian generals. Analysts claim Assad turned down aid and proposals from Russia and Iran over the last few years, weakening the Syrian military, which proved to be a basket case, with little or no defence made against the jihadist advance. Syrian soldiers were reportedly surviving on a military stipend of a mere \$7 per month.

TATMADAW PRESSURE

The Myanmar junta relies on control of the military or Tatmadaw, a cohesive force, and the coercive measures it uses to suppress dissent. Min Aung Hlaing's rule may be unstable, with ongoing insurgencies and a heavily damaged economy that even the regime leader himself is complaining about. But his military is in far better shape compared with Assad's foot soldiers.

At this stage, despite attrition and some significant losses, the Myanmar military remains relatively strong, though it is increasingly having to rely on its conscription drive to bolster defences on an array of frontlines. It is spread thin, fighting on multiple fronts against EAOs and PDFs, in addition to controlling urban areas.

Myanmar has a diverse opposition united against the junta, including ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), most of the latter claiming loyalty to the opposition National Unity Government (NUG). This creates sustained resistance but also fragmentation. One element of the Myanmar

resistance worthy of note is their general adherence to the rules of war, stressing the importance of the human rights. This contrasts with the jihadists in Syria, many of whom have allegedly tortured, raped and beheaded civilians and Syrian soldiers on a large scale.

According to former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter, speaking in an interview, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, the Islamist leader who headed the offensive that forced Assad out, has personally chopped off the heads of captured soldiers and civilians.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, speaking in a recent interview after Assad's fall, said the Syrian development will lead to "more chaos, more uncertainty and more escalation to world war," with "nothing over with the fall of the Assad government."

The Islamist militia victory in Syria will lead to further chaos in the Middle Eastern region, says Sachs.

This Syrian conflict scenario contrasts significantly with the Myanmar conflict, which is more self-contained – bar the exodus of Rohingya or the flight of individual refugees, largely to Thailand.

CHINESE AND RUSSIAN SUPPORT

Both the Syrian and Myanmar regimes have avoided complete international isolation due to support from key allies. For Myanmar, China and Russia provide significant backing, including arms sales and political shielding at the UN. This makes it difficult for international pressure to fully isolate the junta.

According to Sun Lee, writing for Mizzima, China is now Myanmar's puppet master. "China has literally made Myanmar's military junta kowtow to it. China, which has always maintained that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, has openly supported the junta's planned 2025 elections, thereby exposing its dual approach to Myanmar's ongoing civil war. It would not be wrong to say that China is now a primary driver behind the Tatmadaw's planned elections for 2025."

If we extrapolate from this claim, then it is clear that China is an important supporter of the Myanmar junta, though it has channels that link with a number of EAOs and may be quietly keeping the door open for the opposition NUG. China appears to be willing to “hold its nose” in dealings with the junta because Myanmar is crucial strategically – providing a back door to the Indian Ocean – and in terms of the investments and projects, not least the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port.

As Jason Tower writes on 5 December for the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), since August this year, China has unleashed punitive measures targeting key resistance groups, greenlit military airstrikes across northern Myanmar to push EAOs out of newly captured territories, and showered Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with unprecedented levels of legitimacy.

“Despite this, resistance forces have shown significant resilience to Chinese pressure and defied Beijing by continuing revolutionary activities in both the northern and southern parts of the country. Additional victories in November have brought some of the world’s richest rare earth deposits under the control of resistance forces, creating challenges for China’s dominant position in this market,” Tower writes.

China has stepped up interference. For the first two weeks of August, resistance forces continued to press onward, giving the impression that they would move into Mandalay. Rumours began to spread – even on Chinese-language social media outlets - that a deal had been cut between the MNDAA and the NUG to stand up an NUG office in Lashio and make MNDAA leader Peng Deren the new vice president once the military is defeated. While the MNDAA later dismissed these statements as disinformation, by then, China had already set an unprecedented response in motion.

Tower writes that throughout the remainder of August, China proceeded to cut off all resource flows to resistance forces in northern Shan State. China also closed off border crossings, cut electricity and internet, and even placed pressure on the most powerful northern EAO - the United Wa State Army (UWSA) -

to adopt the same policies in its own dealings with the MNDAA and TNLA.

The extent that China was bullying the EAOs became apparent when leaked details of a 27 August meeting between a Chinese diplomat and two senior UWSA leaders began circulating. The leak revealed that China believed the MNDAA’s capture of Lashio had “deeply damaged China-Myanmar friendship,” and that the resumption of Operation 1027 had undermined Chinese interests. China also blamed the UWSA for failing to completely cut the flow of power, water, internet, basic supplies, and people into MNDAA territory.

China’s bottom line: This “5-cuts policy” should continue to be enforced on the TNLA and MNDAA until they end involvement in revolutionary activity and the latter hands Lashio back to the Myanmar army, adds Tower - with China now showing a stronger hand.

LOSING ITS GRIP

Similar to the Syria scenario prior to Assad’s exit, Min Aung Hlaing’s military is gradually losing its grip on territory – developments that have sparked negative comment from his supporters. The Arakan Army (AA) now controls most of Rakhine State and most likely the rest of the state will fall soon.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is expanding control and is continuing their offensives, not only in Kachin State but also in adjacent states and regions, together with NUG-backed PDFs.

The military is suffering from low moral and fighting capacity – a fact that can be glimpsed in a video of the AA capturing senior military personnel on 8-9 December in Maungdaw in Rakhine State.

Min Aung Hlaing has supporters loudly disproving of his faltering control as seen in a growing number of posts on social media.

All this raises the question of how long he can hold

on to his current post, with these internal and external pressures.

GLOBAL RESPONSE

That said, the global response to Myanmar's resistance has been far weaker than the opposition in Syria. Sanctions and condemnations have been issued against the Myanmar regime, but there is limited coordinated military or financial support for the NUG or EAOs compared to the Syrian opposition groups – receiving heavy Western funding and technical support.

In addition, ASEAN's approach to Myanmar has been inconsistent, and its Five-Point Consensus has made little progress. While some member states, like Malaysia and Indonesia, have criticized the junta, others, such as Thailand, maintain closer ties.

This contrasts with Syria, where regional actors have taken sides more decisively – with the US, Israel, Turkey on the side of the militants, and Russia, Iran and Hezbollah on the side of Assad's regime.

MYANMAR JUNTA COLLAPSE?

It might be easy to think that Min Aung Hlaing's regime could be on the verge of collapse if one was to glimpse the videos shared widely on social media of recent defections by Myanmar soldiers to the opposition in a number of conflict zones. But there is no indication that the senior general is about to flee – at least short term.

Min Aung Hlaing's regime is entrenched but faces significant economic and military pressure from sustained resistance. Economic sanctions, the junta's inability to stabilize the country, and widespread unpopularity weaken its grip. Muddying the waters are a number of EAOs that remain neutral, or signed up to the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) – essentially not in the opposition's court.

That said, the Myanmar people's resistance is robust and has been adapting over time, employing

both peaceful and armed strategies. The PDFs and EAOs have demonstrated their ability to challenge the military's control in many areas. This differs from Syria, where the opposition became fragmented and was often overtaken by extremist factions – until they pulled together for a victory drive.

Myanmar and Western analysts have debated over the last three years what factors could lead to junta collapse and Min Aung Hlaing boarding a plane into exile.

The most prominent is the possibility of a split within the military or defection of key figures that could tip the balance. Widespread desertions or defections are a possibility, but there is little to indicate this is currently on the cards.

Much of what else is cited as possible contributors appear to be largely wishful thinking – including significant outside support for the NUG, PDFs, and ethnic groups, a deepening economic collapse, or a unified ASEAN response or regional actors pressuring China and Russia to reduce their support.

So, what can we learn from Syria?

Assad's rapid departure shocked the world – the loss of a dictator but little to indicate this victory will lead to smooth sailing for the Syrian people.

Min Aung Hlaing continues to sit comfortably in Naypyidaw, attending public events and continuing to mention the words peace, elections and democracy, backed by China and Russia, while the majority of his people continue to suffer and wait.



Photo: AFP

WOMEN CONSCRIPTED IN MYANMAR JUNTA ARMY

The Myanmar military regime has begun enlisting women for conscription under Batch No. (8), with ward authorities in Yangon's North Okkalapa Township collecting names since November 29. Similar efforts have been underway in other suburban Yangon areas since October, according to local sources. In army-dominant areas, such as certain townships in Yangon, the listing reportedly began earlier, with training for women possibly starting with Batch No. (9) in early 2025.

Meanwhile, on December 7, 40 male conscripts from Batch No. (6) fled a training base in Patheingyi Township. While 24 managed to escape, 16 were recaptured in nearby villages. These recruits had completed basic training and were awaiting deployment to frontlines.

Sources close to the junta report that newly conscripted soldiers are being sent to active conflict zones in Rakhine State, including Ann, Gwa, Taungup, and Maungdaw, where the military faces significant losses. Recruits, often given only basic military training, are deployed urgently to bolster faltering frontlines.

In northern Chin State, clashes between junta troops and the Chinland Defense Force (CDF) escalated in late November. The CDF captured four junta outposts and took 30 prisoners of war (POWs), including conscripts drafted under the regime's recruitment laws. Among the captives, one soldier was clarified as a CDMer (Civil Disobedience Movement) after secretly maintaining ties with the CDM.

The Arakan Army (AA) announced victories against junta troops transferred from the Ayeyarwady Region, further highlighting the precarious position of the conscripts. According to a Rakhine-based news outlet, around 800 junta soldiers, many conscripted under the new laws, have defected to the AA, although exact figures remain unclear.

Desertions among conscripts are reportedly increasing. Soldiers drafted for the junta's Aung Zeya operation in Karen State have defected to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), while 120 troops, including conscripts, surrendered to the People's Defense Forces (PDF) when Pinlebu town fell in October.



Myanmar is suffering a labour shortage. Photo: AFP

Families of conscripts express deep concern. A mother from the Ayeyarwady Region shared that her son was forced to join the army in place of someone selected through the junta's lottery system in exchange for 2 million kyats. While the family initially received calls from their son, they have heard nothing for two months.

Amid rising defections and losses, the junta aims to conscript 5,000 individuals monthly, seeking to add 60,000 soldiers within a year. However, the plan faces challenges as morale among conscripts remains low, and resistance forces continue to capitalize on the military's vulnerabilities.

MYANMAR SUFFERS SEVERE LABOUR SHORTAGES

Myanmar is grappling with a severe labour shortage as economic instability and conflict push skilled workers abroad, leaving businesses at home struggling to cope. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing recently acknowledged the workforce drain, attributing it to an "overflow" of workers seeking opportunities overseas. However, workers' unions cite deeper issues,

including the impact of conscription laws, ongoing political and armed conflicts, surging prices, and limited job prospects.

The garment industry, a cornerstone of Myanmar's economy, is feeling the pinch as skilled workers migrate to neighbouring countries like Thailand and China for better wages. A secretary of the garment factories admitted that the shortage of workers could have significant repercussions for Myanmar's GDP.

In Ruili, a Chinese border town, skilled workers earn more than double the wages offered domestically, drawing many from Myanmar. Factory operators are increasingly concerned about sustaining operations amid the exodus.

The agricultural sector, particularly in Rakhine State, faces a dual challenge of labour and resource shortages. Farmers report difficulties finding workers, with at least six needed to harvest an acre of land. A farmer from Mrauk-U described the situation, saying, "Since the war began, fuel shortages and skyrocketing prices have compounded the problem, and spare parts for harvesting machines are almost impossible to find. I don't know how to manage this year."



TNLA fighters. Photo: AFP

Some farmers have turned to mechanized harvesting, despite uncertainties over costs and profitability, as manpower becomes increasingly scarce.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are also under significant strain, particularly in Yangon, where power outages last for most of the day. Without reliable electricity, many businesses are forced to rely on fuel-powered generators, driving up operating costs.

A woman running a photo studio shared her challenges, stating, "Due to the lack of electrical power, we depend on a generator to keep the business running. Fuel prices are so high that we've had to increase product prices, which impacts our customers."

The combination of workforce shortages, fuel and electricity crises, and the political instability has created a grim outlook for Myanmar's economy. With skilled workers leaving in droves and local businesses struggling to survive, the country faces mounting pressure to address its deepening unemployment and economic challenges

ETHNIC GROUPS SEEK END TO HOSTILITIES

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) have separately issued calls for peace, urging an end to hostilities, but have received mixed reactions from the Myanmar junta and the Chinese government.

On November 25, the TNLA extended an offer for peace talks to the junta-led State Administration Council (SAC), citing two primary reasons: pressure from the Chinese government and the junta's intensified airstrikes on civilian areas under TNLA control. Despite the overture, the junta has not responded officially.

Instead, the military has intensified its operations against TNLA-controlled areas. The TNLA was forced to withdraw from Twinng Village, home to a junta military training camp, following a large-scale ground assault. On November 30, the junta conducted airstrikes in Kyaukme, a TNLA-controlled town, killing 10 and wounding 20 civilians.

Although clashes in Naungkhio have decreased since the TNLA's statement, fighting in the Mandalay Region and border areas has escalated.

The MNDAA issued a one-sided ceasefire declaration on December 3, urging the junta to implement a nationwide halt to airstrikes. In its statement, the MNDAA pledged to maintain a stance of self-defense. While the junta has not responded officially, airstrikes on Lashio, which the MNDAA recently seized, have ceased.

The Chinese government welcomed the MNDAA's call for peace, marking a rare positive response to the ongoing conflict.

Despite the peace gestures from both groups, a pro-junta military analyst commented that the offers are unlikely to be accepted. "The army does not want to be seen as the historical culprit of losing national territories. They will try to reclaim these areas at any opportunity. The TNLA and MNDAA offers will not work," the analyst said.

The junta's actions, including continued offensives and airstrikes, align with this stance, as the military seeks to maintain control over contested territories.

The Chinese government's reaction has been mixed. While welcoming the MNDAA's ceasefire statement, it continues to block border trade in northern Shan State. Trade points along the border, many of which are under the control of the MNDAA and TNLA, remain closed, disrupting the flow of essential goods like fuel and food.

While the peace offers from the TNLA and MNDAA mark significant gestures, the junta's lack of official engagement and continued military actions underscore the challenges of achieving a ceasefire. Meanwhile, China's role as both a mediator and economic pressure point adds another layer of complexity to the conflict.



MNDAA CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE AMID ESCALATING CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), has announced an immediate ceasefire in its areas to safeguard civilians and stabilize the China-Myanmar border. The group urged the junta to halt all ground and air assaults across the country to pave the way for political dialogue.

In a statement released on 3 December, the MNDAA reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the civil war through peaceful means. It emphasized the importance of addressing issues, including those in Lashio, through dialogue facilitated by China.

The MNDAA stated that it will dispatch a high-level delegation from its political wing, the Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party (MNTJP), to participate in negotiations. The group reiterated its support for political solutions while maintaining its right to self-defence. It clarified that it does not seek to secede but aims for genuine autonomy within Myanmar.

"The demands for a ceasefire and peace talks by ethnic armed groups align with China's stance, but Min Aung Hlaing is unlikely to accept them. If China intervenes to restrain Min Aung Hlaing, I believe fair negotiations can take place," said U Than Soe Naing, a political and military analyst.

He also urged China to pressure the military junta to cease hostilities, as it has consistently encouraged ethnic armed groups to seek peace. Without such intervention, U Than Soe Naing warned, ongoing

airstrikes could escalate the conflict, derailing prospects for negotiations.

This announcement mirrors a similar statement by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) on 25 November. The TNLA expressed willingness to engage in peace talks while affirming its right to self-defence. The TNLA and MNDAA, along with the Arakan Army (AA), are members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance.

However, on 30 November, just days after the TNLA statement, the junta conducted an airstrike on TNLA-controlled Kyaukme town, killing 10 civilians and injuring 20 others.

Reports of Peng Daxun, the MNDAA leader, being detained in China have circulated widely. On 9 November, the Chinese government clarified that Peng was granted permission to enter China for medical treatment.

Meanwhile, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's recent visit to China from 5 to 10 November was touted as a success by the junta's spokesperson, Gen. Zaw Min Htun. Observers state that China's involvement remains critical to mediating stability in the region and advancing ceasefire efforts.

The MNDAA's call for dialogue underscores the urgency of finding a political solution to Myanmar's ongoing conflict, but the junta's response remains uncertain.

MYANMAR'S MNDAA EXECUTES SIX INDIVIDUALS FOLLOWING CONVICTIONS FOR MURDER AND KIDNAPPING



The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) executed six individuals, including one woman, on 5 December after convicting them of murder and kidnapping in Laukkai, northern Shan State. According to a source close to the group, the executed individuals were part of a group of 21 people tried for serious offenses.

“MNDAA sentenced 15 Myanmar citizens and 6 Chinese nationals. Six of them were executed by shooting,” a source within the MNDAA told Mizzima.

The trial, reportedly conducted publicly on the morning of 5 December, attracted a large crowd and was captured in a video that has since gone viral online. The remaining individuals received lengthy prison sentences, according to the source.

Mizzima has not yet received further details about the executions or the specific charges from an MNDAA spokesperson.

Laukkai, the administrative center of MNDAA-controlled territory, has been under the group's

authority since the initiation of Operation 1027.

This is not the first time the MNDAA has carried out executions. In April, three out of 10 people convicted of murder and extortion were executed publicly near Laukkai's Ton Chein Bridge. Seven of those sentenced were reportedly members of the MNDAA.

In May, the MNDAA issued a statement, written in Chinese, declaring that murder, aggravated murder, and kidnapping would carry the death penalty, life imprisonment, or up to 10 years in prison within their territory. The statement also specified the death penalty for crimes involving trafficking of children, women, and men.

The executions have drawn criticism from international organizations. In April, the European Union (EU) condemned the MNDAA's use of the death penalty, describing it as “inhuman and degrading” and a violation of human dignity.



Ko Pyae Sone Oo

DEATH ROW POLITICAL PRISONER DIES IN MYANMAR'S INSEIN PRISON DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL CARE

Ko Pyae Sone Oo, a political prisoner on death row, passed away in Yangon's Insein Prison on 30 November due to kidney disease, reportedly exacerbated by inadequate medical treatment. He was 34 years old.

According to a close relative, Pyae Sone Oo, also known as Pa Pa, died around 6:30 pm. His body was buried at Hteinpin Cemetery on 2 December.

A former private from the Thanlyin Navy Base, he joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) after the 2021 military coup and was arrested on 27 August 2022. The junta charged him under Sections 37 and 32 of the Defence Services Act for desertion, sentencing him to death on 12 September 2023, the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) reported.

Pyae Sone Oo had been battling kidney disease and pneumonia for approximately six months.

Advocates for political prisoners attribute his deteriorating health to poor prison conditions, including

contaminated drinking water and insufficient medical care.

"In prisons, high lead and chemical levels in drinking water aggravate kidney disease. Combined with the lack of adequate medical supplies, this often leads to preventable deaths," said Ko Thaik Htun Oo, a PPNM member.

PPNM reported that between January and November 2024, at least 20 people, 18 political prisoners and two other inmates died in Myanmar's prisons due to inadequate healthcare.

Pyae Sone Oo's death highlights the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's prisons, with rights groups calling for immediate reforms to address the dire conditions faced by detainees.



Photo: Supplied

ILLEGAL INTERNET CABLES FOUND ON THAI-MYANMAR BRIDGE, REMOVED

Illegal internet cables strung along the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge in Tak Province were cut and removed by Thai authorities.

The large internet cables found illegally installed across the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge were used by call centre gangs, the Bangkok Post reported on 2 December.

The cable link was discovered on Monday on the first Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, which crosses the Moei River at Ban Rim Moei in Mae Sot District opposite Myawaddy town in Myanmar, the Bangkok Post reported.

Thai authorities believe these illegal internet cables were used to provide internet access to online scammers and call centres located along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Thai Pol. Gen. Nathathorn said, "This is our biggest seizure of illegal internet cables. Cutting them has prevented the call centre gangs in this area from accessing the internet."

Apart from the internet cables, Thai authorities also seized over 100,000 mobile phone SIM cards registered in Thailand and other accessories.

Installing illegal internet cable is in violation of Section 67 of the Thai Telecommunications Act and it carries a punishment of a minimum 5-year prison sentence or fine of over one million Baht.

The discovery was part of an ongoing joint investigation by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) and the police Taskforce for Information Technology Crime Suppression (TACTICS) into illegal internet cables, telecom towers, and transmission antennas on the borders with Laos and Myanmar.

National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commissioner Pol. Gen. Nathathorn Prousoontorn told a press briefing that they found illegally installed internet cables at both the Myanmar and Laos borders with Thailand. Illegal internet cables were also recently found on the Friendship Bridge connecting the Thai town of Mukdahan with Laos across the Mekong River, the Thai media reported.

An inspection using specialised equipment found the scam gangs had also installed illegal internet cables several kilometres deep into Myanmar, Thai government authorities said.

"This is our biggest seizure of illegal internet cables. Cutting them has prevented the call centre gangs in this area from accessing the internet," the NBTC commissioner said.

Thai authorities said that they would continue their investigation into the installation of illegal internet cables across Thailand's borders.



Bomb crater. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKE KILLS TEENAGER, INJURES TWO IN SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

The Myanmar military junta conducted an airstrike near Sai Khun village in Pekon Township, southern Shan State, in the early hours of 3 December, killing a teenager and injuring two civilians, the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) reported.

The attack, which occurred around 3:00 am, targeted a farming area near the village. A 14-year-old cowherd living in a hut on the farmland was killed in the attack, according to a KNDF spokesperson and the No. 1007 Battalion of the Pekon People's Defence Force.

The junta dropped nearly 40 bombs, including six aerial attacks using Y12 aircrafts and four times with jet fighters, early on 3 December.

Despite the intensity of the attack, there had been no recent clashes near Sai Khun village, though fighting

continues in neighbouring Moebye Township, a KNDF spokesperson confirmed.

This incident follows another deadly attack on 27 November, when six displaced civilians, including a one-month-old infant and his mother, were killed, and three others injured in an artillery strike on Kone Paw village, also in Pekon Township.

The Karenni Human Rights Group condemned the artillery assault, which targeted civilians seeking refuge from ongoing conflict.

The military junta has yet to comment on either incident. These attacks have raised renewed concerns over the targeting of civilians amid the escalating conflict in Myanmar's southern Shan State.



Photo: Facebook

PROMINENT SAFFRON REVOLUTION MONK ARRESTED BY MYANMAR JUNTA FACES MULTIPLE CHARGES

The junta has detained Venerable Sayadaw Panyajota, a renowned Buddhist monk and leader of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, charging him with multiple offenses. He is currently being held in Yangon's Insein Prison, sources close to the monk informed Mizzima.

Panyajota, 64, was apprehended by plainclothes military officers on 13 November at Sawbwa Gyi Kone bus station in Insein Township, Yangon. The monk, a U.S. citizen, was enroute to a monastery in Mingaladon Township to participate in a ceremony for an ordination hall.

The junta charged him under Section 505-A of the Penal Code, Section 50 (j) of the Anti-Terrorism Act, and Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Act. According to sources, he is scheduled to appear in Mingaladon Court on 5 December.

"He was forced to change into layperson clothing during interrogation," a source close to the monk said.

Concerns about Panyajota's health have grown due to his stage 3 diabetes and age.

"If he doesn't receive proper medical attention, his

condition could worsen," said monk Thavara, another prominent figure of the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

The U.S. embassy has been informed of Panyajota's arrest and is reportedly arranging for necessary medical supplies to be delivered to the prison.

The junta also briefly detained Daw Myint Myint Thein, a donor associated with the monk, on 16 November. She was released after a few days.

Thavara disclosed that the authorities suspect Panyajota of supporting revolutionary forces and examined his bank accounts during interrogation. However, no evidence of physical abuse during custody has been reported.

Despite repeated inquiries, the junta and the Ministry of Religious Affairs have yet to issue a statement or provide further information regarding the arrest.

Panyajota, who has been a monk for 44 years, played a significant role in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, a major protest led by Buddhist monks against a previous military junta. His detention has raised concerns among religious and political groups.



AIRSTRIKES ON VILLAGE IN TAUNGUP KILL TWO CIVILIANS AND INJURE 20 AMID INTENSIFYING RAKHINE CONFLICT

Two civilians were killed, and at least 20 others were injured after the junta launched airstrikes on Khayine village in Taungup District, controlled by the Arakan Army (AA), on 1 December at approximately 3 pm, according to local sources.

Four bombs struck the village, reportedly killing Daw Ma Thein and Ko Kyaw Thet Naing, who had fled ongoing clashes in Taungup town. Elderly residents were among the injured.

A Taungup local said, "A village outside the town was bombed. The intensity of the explosions was massive. The deceased people from Taungup town were reportedly fleeing to the village due to intense fighting between the AA and the Military Council."

Fighting between the AA and the junta has intensified in Taungup since early November, prompting many residents to flee to nearby villages for safety. However, such areas have also come under attack.

The junta has increasingly targeted civilian areas, including internally displaced persons (IDP) shelters, as it faces significant territorial losses in Rakhine State. Drone, artillery, and airstrikes have forced residents to remain on high alert and live in fear.

On 25 November, junta forces reportedly bombed a night market in Taungup, destroying nearby homes and setting the market ablaze.

The AA declared control over Taungup town on 29 November following weeks of fierce fighting. The group stated that the last remaining junta strongholds were being attacked, including the No. 5 Military Operations Command and its subordinate battalions, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 346 and LIB 544.

"The battle for Taungup is nearing its conclusion. The AA now holds the entire town," said a displaced Rakhine resident who fled to Yangon. The resident added that many locals have sought refuge in Yangon and Pyi townships to escape the violence.

Taungup is the 12th town to come under AA control. Meanwhile, clashes persist in other parts of Rakhine State, including Ann, Gwa, and Maungdaw, where the junta's Western Regional Military Command remains active. Fighting has subsided slightly in Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung, where significant Chinese investments are located.

Phone and internet services in Taungup remain disrupted, further complicating efforts to confirm casualty figures and monitor the situation. Mizzima continues to investigate the unfolding crisis as military tensions show no signs of abating.



KIA fighter. Photo: KIA

INTENSIFIED CLASHES IN KACHIN STATE'S BHAMO LEAVE CIVILIANS DEAD AMID ONGOING BATTLE

Fighting between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Military Council has escalated in Bhamo, Kachin State, with clashes entering their third day on 6 December. Local residents and KIA spokespersons reported civilian casualties resulting from artillery strikes by the Military Council.

Battles are raging in Paukkone, Minhla, and Thonemine Wards of Bhamo, with intermittent shooting and airstrikes reported. A resident stated that after a brief pause between 10:00 and 11:00 am, heavy gunfire resumed in the afternoon, accompanied by an aerial assault by the Military Council.

Since the conflict began on 4 December, heavy artillery from the Military Council's Military Operation Command No. 21 and the city police station has struck residential areas, leading to civilian casualties.

A Bhamo resident said, "In Paukkone and Kantawkyi Wards, five people were injured, and one person was killed on 5 December."

Preliminary reports also suggest at least five civilian deaths in Latpantan and Phankhaekone villages, though these claims remain unverified as Mizzima continues to gather details.

The fighting has also extended to eastern parts of Bhamo city, as well as Moemauk and Mansi towns.

KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu said, "The fighting continues. We are not yet in a position to control the entire city of Bhamo." He noted that the KIA managed to gain control of Mansi town only three months ago.

During the battle, the KIA reportedly seized eight villages and several military camps, including those along the routes between Bhamo and Mansi and between Bhamo and Moemauk. Bhamo itself houses at least 17 military installations, including the No. 21 Military Operation Command.

Reports also indicate the Military Council is airlifting ammunition to reinforce its troops amid the clashes. Meanwhile, internet, telephone lines, and electricity services in Bhamo have been disrupted, further isolating the city.

As the second-largest city in Kachin State, Bhamo remains a critical stronghold for the Military Council.

CAPTURED JUNTA SOLDIER REVEALS MAJOR FLED BATTLEFIELD AMID KNDF OFFENSIVE IN KARENNI STATE

A junta soldier captured by the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) has disclosed that a junta major fled the battlefield after ordering his troops not to retreat during a clash near Lin Phon Lay village in Loikaw Township, Karenni State.

In a 2 December statement, the KNDF revealed that five junta soldiers were captured during the 26 November battle. Three of the captives have shared details about the circumstances of the fighting.

"I am dissatisfied with my major. As a leader, he promised to stand by us through any difficulties, but when the KNDF troops arrived, he retreated without anyone knowing, no one knew, the three ran away. Only one captain remained on our side, and he died in the battle," said captured soldier Zaw Lin Phyto.

Zaw Lin Phyto revealed he was forcibly conscripted into the military and deployed to Loikaw Township less than two months before the battle. He recounted how the major gave orders to continue fighting but fled the scene alongside a medic and another soldier, leaving a single captain who was killed in action.

The KNDF announced that the captured soldiers are receiving medical care and have confessed to acts of violence and arson committed during the fighting.

Two prisoners, Private Phoe Htoo and Private Myo Thet Min, admitted to burning homes on orders from their superiors, according to KNDF.

"If the superiors order us to burn, we have to burn. That's it. If it blocks our field of fire, or it is a house, we

have to burn whatever we can. If we find clothes, we have to burn those too," said Private Myo Thet Min.

He also explained he was drafted through a lottery system and had been in Loikaw Township for less than two months. He expressed remorse for his actions and asked the public for forgiveness.

All the captives also revealed widespread drug use within the junta forces, stating they were coerced into consuming drugs on the battlefield to maintain combat readiness.

"Military Council officials actively seek out and buy illicit drugs. It's as if they formed a unit within the army to carry out this task," said captured soldier Phoe Htoo.

All three soldiers belong to the Infantry Battalion 80 of Light Infantry Division 66. They urged fellow junta soldiers to surrender to the revolutionary forces.

The 26 November battle erupted when junta troops, traveling from Loikaw to reinforce the Moby-Pekhon area, were intercepted by the Karenni Revolutionary Joint Forces. According to the KNDF, at least 16 junta soldiers were killed, and five were captured.

The KNDF has warned local residents and displaced persons to remain vigilant due to the ongoing military activity, including the risk of heavy weapons and airstrikes. Fighting in the area is reportedly escalating as reinforcements arrive for the junta forces.



RESISTANCE FORCES INTENSIFY ATTACKS IN MAGWAY REGION, RESIDENTS URGED TO STAY ALERT

On 2 December, Minbu District Battalion 7 under the National Unity Government's No. 1 Military Region issued a public alert following a series of resistance attacks near the Maezali-Sedaw Suspension Bridge in Pwintbyu Township, Magway Region.

On the morning of 27 November, allied People's Defence Forces targeted a junta checkpoint at the suspension bridge, engaging in a fierce attack. The joint forces also ambushed a junta convoy sent to reinforce the troops, employing landmines during the operation.

Minbu District Battalion 7 reported that four junta soldiers were killed in the clashes, and some ammunition was seized.

A local resident said, "The regime troops suffered casualties and lost weapons in the joint forces attack. In retaliation, they launched further assaults on nearby villages, setting them ablaze, which has alarmed the local community. This has raised serious security concerns."

The junta's response has reportedly escalated the situation, with troops entering villages near Sedaw

and increasing the number of soldiers stationed at the checkpoint to 20.

Since then, villages such as Lelma in Pwintbyu Township and Kyaukpon and Khepyit in Sidoktaya Township were burned down, destroying approximately 200 houses and displacing over 4,000 residents.

Military tensions currently remain high between the junta forces and allied resistance groups, including Minbu District Battalion 7, the Yenanthar Column from Magway Region, and the PDF-Pwintbyu. Reports indicate the junta has been conducting airstrikes in the region.

Citing security concerns, a spokesperson for Minbu District Battalion 7 urged local residents to relocate to safer areas and cooperate with security efforts. The battalion also warned against travel along key routes, including the Pathein-Monywa road, the Sanpya-Sedaw road (referred to locally as the southern Myaungbaung road), and the Maezali waterway in Pwintbyu Township.



MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES AIRSTRIKES AMID CLASHES IN FALAM, CHIN STATE

Fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Chinland Defence Forces (CDF) continues in Falam, Chin State, with the junta intensifying its operations through airstrikes and artillery attacks near Falam airfield, according to local sources.

On the morning of 3 December, the junta shelled Zathlir village, located about eight miles from Falam town and near the airfield. A local military source reported damage to several homes in the village, although details remain unclear due to disrupted communication and transportation.

The junta reportedly conducted three airstrikes using jet fighters and launched heavy artillery fire from the Infantry Battalion 268 stationed in downtown Falam.

No casualties were reported as residents had sought refuge in hillside agricultural huts amid ongoing clashes in the town, according to the military source on the ground.

Since 9 November, the Chin Brotherhood and allied forces have launched a coordinated offensive targeting junta bases in an attempt to capture Mindat and Falam townships. Clashes remain fierce, with the junta defending its positions through relentless airstrikes and artillery bombardments, according to Chinland Defence Forces comrades.

The conflict extends beyond Falam, with active fighting reported in Mindat, Thantlang, and Hakha towns. The use of airstrikes has drawn sharp criticism

from human rights groups, which accuse the junta of deliberately targeting civilians.

Salai Mang Hre Lian, a project officer for the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), condemned the airstrikes as intentional attacks on civilians, labelling them violations of international human rights laws and war crimes.

“These attacks are not military in nature but are direct and deliberate actions against civilians. This is a blatant violation of international law,” he said.

The CHRO has been documenting evidence of such strikes and plans to pursue legal action against the perpetrators. Additionally, the organization is working with international governments and organizations to impose sanctions, block the junta’s flights, and cut arms supply routes.

The Institute of Chin Affairs (ICA) reported that between 1 February 2021, and January 2024, 372 Chin civilians and 247 resistance fighters were killed in junta attacks. With Chin State’s population estimated at only 500,000, the ICA highlighted the toll as devastatingly high.

The situation in Chin State remains dire, as the junta escalates its use of airpower to suppress resistance while local forces and human rights organizations continue their efforts to hold the regime accountable.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
National Unity Government



NUG URGES THAILAND TO PROTECT MIGRANT WORKERS FROM JUNTA EXPLOITATION

The Ministry of Labour of the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar released a statement on 04 December, appealing to the Thai Government to help protect migrant workers from exploitation by the junta.

The text of the statement is contained below.

1. Prior to the military junta's coup in Myanmar, there were over 1.2 million registered Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand holding passport, CI and other official documents, approximately 800,000 MOU workers, totaling over 2 million legal workers, alongside over 1.5 million undocumented Myanmar migrant workers. These workers were predominantly employed in industries with a high demand for manual laborers. Following the coup, the military regime has escalated human rights violations against the people of Myanmar, including unlawful suppression, torture, arbitrary detention, and mass killings. Additionally, the junta has imposed oppressive conscription law, forcing individuals into military service. The domestic economy of Myanmar has deteriorated, prices of goods have skyrocketed, and the population has suffered from natural and man-made disasters, including airstrikes and artillery shelling. As a result, many have fled to neighboring countries, with the majority seeking refuge in Thailand, which shares longer border with Myanmar.

2. In this regard, the National Unity Government's Ministry of Labour extends its gratitude to the Thai government for its cooperation in implementing the issuance of the Non-Thai Identification Card (Pink Card) program for undocumented Myanmar migrant workers, as per our requests. Additionally, we deeply appreciate the arrangements made to allow workers holding official documents such as passport or CI, whose visas and work permits are nearing expiration, to renew their status within Thailand without the need to return to Myanmar.

3. However, it has been observed that the current process includes the following issues, which may cause significant difficulties for Myanmar workers, deviating from previously implemented methods:

(a) Requiring workers' personal information to be shared with and verified by the military junta in Myanmar.

(b) Workers applying for visa or work permit extensions are not only required to pay the designated fees but must also provide evidence of tax payments to the junta. Additionally, they are mandated to remit funds to their families in Myanmar through military-designated banks and financial service providers, using exchange rates dictated by the Central Bank of Myanmar under junta control.

(c) The estimated costs for the process are projected to be double or even triple the previous expenses, placing an additional financial burden on the workers.

4. The inclusion of the above-mentioned measures in the extension process further exacerbates the hardships faced by Myanmar migrant workers due to the junta's various suppressions, compelling many into undocumented status. Simultaneously, it indirectly facilitates the military junta in obtaining foreign currency, which is covertly used to finance the bombing and killing of Myanmar civilians.

5. Therefore, we urge the Thai government not to support or enable the oppressive actions of the military junta—a group soon to face accountability from international bodies such as the ICC and ILO due to the violations of basic labour rights and human rights, violence, and genocide in Myanmar. Instead, we request that Thailand ensure that Myanmar migrant workers, who contribute significantly to Thailand's socio-economic development, are not subjected to increased hardships. We appeal for the process to be simplified and for the extension of visas and work permits to follow the previous procedures and cost structures, as Thailand has done in the past.



Thai fishing boat. Photo: AFP

THAILAND SAYS MYANMAR HAS RELEASED DETAINED FISHERMEN

Thailand's foreign ministry said Thursday that Myanmar has released all four Thai fishermen who were detained after a maritime clash in which Myanmar naval vessels reportedly fired on fishing boats.

The incident occurred on Saturday, with Thai authorities announcing that Myanmar boats had attacked Thai fishing vessels after they strayed about seven kilometres (about four miles) into neighbouring Myanmar's waters.

One Thai fisherman had drowned after jumping into the sea during the incident.

A Myanmar junta spokesman later confirmed that a naval vessel had "chased" the boats, arresting 27 Myanmar nationals and four Thais.

On Thursday, the kingdom's foreign ministry spokesperson Nikordej Balankura told reporters that the Myanmar side had released all four Thais and taken them to a border checkpoint to be repatriated.

The Thai Foreign Ministry also conveyed its "best wishes to the families" of the released Thais in a statement, thanking the agencies involved for negotiating their release and "safe return home".

Their release comes after Thailand had summoned the Myanmar ambassador on Monday, and sent the Thai ambassador in Yangon to raise the issue with Naypyidaw.

AFP has reached out to Myanmar's junta government for comment.

The clash highlights ongoing disputes over illegal fishing and maritime boundaries in the Andaman Sea, off the southern point of the 2,400-kilometre (1,490-mile) land border Thailand shares with Myanmar.

AFP



ACDF CAPTURES TWELVE MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS FLEEING CLASHES IN ANN TOWNSHIP

The Asho Chin Defence Force (ACDF) announced on 4 December that twelve junta soldiers, including a captain, fleeing intense clashes in Ann Township, Rakhine State, were captured by revolutionary forces.

“There was no confrontation. They were captured together, and we provided them with food and accommodation,” an ACDF spokesperson said.

The captives were apprehended in November by a coalition of the ACDF, New Society Army (NSA), and People’s Liberation Army (PLA). In addition to the detainees, the coalition seized four rifles, ammunition, a laptop, and a mobile phone.

The ACDF assured that the captured soldiers are being treated humanely, with injured personnel receiving medical care and adequate food supplies. Discussions are ongoing among the allied groups to decide on the appropriate course of action regarding the captives.

The ACDF and its allies have called on junta troops

nationwide to abandon their fight for the military dictatorship and join the people’s cause.

Meanwhile, the Arakan Army (AA) has reportedly gained control of Ann Township and continues its offensive on the military’s Western Command headquarters, according to a source close to the AA.

Intense resistance from junta forces entrenched within the headquarters has led to fierce ongoing clashes.

Junta troops fleeing the area have been intercepted by revolutionary forces in nearby villages and along the Ann-Padan road, connecting Rakhine State to Magway Region.

In late October, the ACDF announced the capture along the Rakhine-Magway border of four junta soldiers who fled from the Western Command headquarters.

CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESMAN CALLS FOR PEACE AND DIALOGUE IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Photo: Ran Liwen

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Lin Jian, said on 4 December at the regular press briefing, "China is closely following the developments in northern Myanmar and has been urging relevant parties in the country to engage in dialogue and consultation."

He urged a halt in fighting as soon as possible, settlement of differences through peaceful means, and avoidance of escalation.

China commended the recent positive remarks of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) on 3 December, he added.

"China will continue to do what we can to assist and support the peace process in northern Myanmar," he said.

"In particular, they should not endanger the security and safety of China's border areas, Chinese people living in the border areas, and Chinese projects, companies and personnel in Myanmar," he warned.

China put pressure on the MNDAA and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) to stop fighting after the MNDAA occupied Lashio, a major city in northern Shan State, in early August. The two organisations subsequently issued separate press statements saying they are ready to resolve military conflicts by political means through the mediation of China.

The MNDAA announced a ceasefire on the night of 3 December, stating that it is "willing to engage in peace talks with the Myanmar Army under China's mediation."

Lin Jian reiterated China's commitment to supporting the peace process in northern Myanmar and pledged to continue efforts to facilitate dialogue.

The National Unity Government (NUG), the parallel government of Myanmar, issued a press statement stating that only China's cooperation with the NUG can protect the smooth functioning of Chinese investments in Myanmar.



MYANMAR'S CIVIC SPACE 'CLOSED' ACCORDING TO NEW ASIA-PACIFIC REPORT

The CIVICUS Monitor announced in a new report Wednesday that the main civic space violations across the Asia-Pacific were the crackdown on protests and the criminalisation of human rights defenders.

The report, *People Power Under Attack 2024*, assesses civic space conditions in 198 countries and territories, looking at citizens' ability to exercise their freedoms of assembly, association and expression. In the Asia-Pacific region, CIVICUS Monitor researchers found the majority of countries seriously restricted civic space.

In Myanmar, where the state of civic space is rated by the CIVICUS Monitor as 'closed', the arrest and prosecution of activists persisted. In Mandalay, the junta arrested individuals in February 2024 for taking part in a "silent strike" protesting the third anniversary of military rule. Jailed anti-junta protest leader Ko Wai Moe Naing was found guilty of high treason in May 2024 by the Monywa Prison court. He was sentenced to an additional 20 years by a junta court, taking his total sentence to 54 years. In June 2024, the police arrested scores of individuals who were seen wearing or carrying flowers as part of "Flower Strikes" on across Myanmar to commemorate the birthday of detained Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi and to push for her release and the release of over 20,000 political prisoners.

There were continued reports of torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners including human rights

defenders with impunity. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, evidence available indicates that acts of torture and ill-treatment by the junta are widespread and systematic and likely constitute crimes against humanity. There were reports of political prisoners held by the junta who died in detention over the year. Renowned Myanmar documentary filmmaker Pe Maung Same died in August 2024, due to complications from tuberculosis, three days after being transferred from Yangon's notorious Insein Prison to a hospital.

There were also reports of the junta cancelling the passports of perceived political opponents residing abroad, disrupting their ability to travel and raising concerns about their legal status in other countries.

Journalists continued to be targeted by the junta. The body of journalist Myat Thu Tan was found in February 2024. He has been shot by two military personnel in Mrauk-U Town, in Rakhine state. In March 2024, the editor-in-chief of People Media, Kyaw Soe Oo, was charged with 'incitement' following critical comments he made in a livestream video. Journalist Htet Aung was sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour in June, in a court in Sittwe, capital of Rakhine State under Section 52(a) of the country's Anti-Terrorism Law. In August 2024, journalists Win Htut Oo and Htet Myat Thu were killed in a military raid on a home in southern Mon State. In the same month, Dawei Watch journalists Aung San Oo and Myo Myint Oo, were sentenced to 20 years and life in prison respectively by a military court inside Myeik Prison.

The junta has continued to seek ways to impose digital restrictions to block the flow of information within and from outside the country. In June 2024, VOA reported that the junta had launched a major effort to block free communication on the internet, shutting off access to virtual private networks. In July 2024, some Google apps, along with the popular messaging app Signal, appeared to be blocked inside Myanmar. The junta has also arrested and jailed people they say posted anti-junta messages on Facebook, TikTok and Telegram.

In Asia, seven countries and territories – Afghanistan, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and North Korea – are rated as 'Closed'. Nine countries are rated 'repressed' while six countries are now in the 'Obstructed category'. Civic space in South Korea and Timor-Leste are rated 'narrowed' while Japan and Taiwan are the only two countries rated 'Open' in the Asia region.

In the Pacific, the civic space situation is more positive with seven countries rated 'Open'. Five rated 'Narrowed' while Papua New Guinea and Nauru remain in the 'Obstructed' category.

There were changes in ratings to four countries. Bangladesh was upgraded to 'Repressed' due to steps taken by the interim government to address civic space concerns following the mass protests in Bangladesh that led to the fall of the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government. Japan has also been upgraded to 'Open' as civil society groups were able to undertake their work across the country without barriers and the rights to peaceful assembly were generally respected and protected. Fiji was upgraded too due to improvements since the change of government in December 2022, including the repeal of a restrictive media law used to silence the press since 2010.

Mongolia on the other hand has been downgraded to 'Obstructed' as human rights defenders face reprisals, journalists were targeted on baseless charges for their work while peaceful protesters have been criminalised.

"The overall picture for civic space in the Asia-Pacific region this year remained dismal, despite some improvements in countries like Bangladesh, Japan and Fiji. Most people in the region are living in countries with 'closed' or 'repressed' civic space where their freedoms to speak up, organise or mobilise are under attack on a daily basis. Authoritarian states are seeking to entrench their rule and there is a critical need to support activists and civil society from these countries who are pushing back against these repressive regimes," said Josef Benedict, CIVICUS Monitor's Asia-Pacific researcher.

The CIVICUS Monitor rates each country's civic space conditions based on data collected throughout the year from country-focused civil society activists, regionally-based research teams, international human rights indices and the Monitor's own in-house experts. The data from these four separate sources are then combined to assign each country a rating as either 'Open', 'Narrowed', 'Obstructed', 'Repressed' or 'Closed'.

The most widespread violation to civic freedoms in the Asia Pacific documented over the past year was the detention of protesters. Activists took to the streets for a wide range of issue, including demands for democratic reforms, labour rights, environmental justice, and calling for an end to the human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In many cases, the security forces resorted to excessive force leading to injuries and even unlawful killings.

Among the countries where this was documented include Pakistan where the government crackdown on the opposition around the elections. In Bangladesh, hundreds were detained as part of a brutal crackdown on the mass student-led protests in July 2024, that eventually brought down the Sheikh Hasina regime. In Sri Lanka police cracked down on protests by the

opposition, students and ethnic Tamils while in India farmers mobilising protests faced excessive force. While in Indonesia, the security forces repressed multiple protests in the region of Papua, where there has been a high level of violations. Protesters across Australia mobilising for environmental issues and to end the war in Gaza were detained.

"These actions are a flagrant violation of the rights to peaceful assembly guaranteed under international human rights law and standards," added Benedict.

Another top violation that was documented across the region was the detention and prosecution of human rights defenders. The main perpetrators were China, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and India. Many were criminalised for defamation and on fabricated charges linked to national security, anti-terrorism or public order laws. In addition, transnational repression, where countries collaborate to target human rights defenders beyond their borders, is on the rise.

Censorship is also a key concern in the region, most noticeably in China, where the government employs one of the most sophisticated censorship regimes in the world. Other countries where censorship was documented include North Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan and India. Over the year, the authorities used their power to restrict access to information critical of the state by blocking television broadcasts and news portals, restricting access to social media apps, suspending mobile internet services and targeting journalists and news outlets. There was an increase of censorship ahead of elections in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the Pacific, there were censorship concerns in Nauru and the Solomon Islands.

"Governments across the region sought to detain and prosecute human rights defenders across the year on trumped-up charges using a range of repressive laws. Censorship was also pervasive in a number of countries to stifle critical voices and block the critical flow of information. The international community must do more to protect fundamental freedoms and support activists in detention," added Benedict.

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that provides quantitative and qualitative data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 198 countries and territories. The data is generated through a collaboration with more than 20 civil society research partners, and input from a number of independent human rights evaluations. The data provides the basis for civic space ratings and countries can be rated as either 'Closed', 'Repressed', 'Obstructed', 'Narrowed' or 'Open'.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S TRADITIONAL THINGYAN WATER FESTIVAL INCLUDED IN WORLD INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE LIST

The Myanmar Traditional Thingyan Water Festival has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's World Intangible Cultural Heritage List during the 19th World Intangible Cultural Heritage Conference in Asuncion, Paraguay. The recognition was granted on 5 December, during the conference held from 2 to 7 December.

The festival was nominated for inclusion in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Myanmar's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, operating under the military junta, on 24 March 2023. It was successfully added to the list in October, with formal approval now finalized.

Thailand's water festival, also known as the Songkran Festival, received UNESCO recognition as

part of the World Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2023.

This year, the conference approved 47 cultural heritage items from 45 countries. Alongside Myanmar's Thingyan, notable inclusions were the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival, Thailand's Tom Yum soup, and North Korea's traditional costumes.

Since its establishment in 2008, UNESCO's World Intangible Cultural Heritage List has included 777 cultural elements from 148 countries, according to the organization.

NUG TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGED UNLAWFUL KILLING BY YE BALU RESISTANCE GROUP IN MON STATE

The National Unity Government (NUG) will establish a tribunal to investigate the killing of a man allegedly by the Ye Balu resistance group, operating in Ye Township, Mon State, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) under the National Unity Government (NUG), U Maung Maung Swe told Mizzima on 4 December.

The incident, which surfaced through a graphic video on social media on 3 December, showed Ye Balu members, including their leader, mutilating the victim's body, cutting off the head, legs and arms and kicking the severed head.

The video sparked widespread outrage. "We will thoroughly investigate this case and take legal action based on the findings," U Maung Maung Swe said.

The victim was identified as U Gaung Phyu, also known as Zan Min, a member of a pro-military Pyu Saw Htee militia from Kundu village in Ye Township.

He was arrested at his home on 30 June and two hand grenades seized, as announced by the leader of the Ye Balu group on his social media page the same day. A video clip was also posted in which U Gaung Phyu can be seen begging for forgiveness.

Ye Balu, an anti-regime resistance group formed in January 2022, was integrated into the Special Operations Forces (SOF) under the NUG's Ministry of Defence on 22 December 2023.

SOF head Ko Aung San Sha emphasized that all SOF-affiliated groups, including Ye Balu, are bound by strict regulations and must adhere to the Prisoner of War Act.

Regarding the actions of the Ye Balu group, SOF head Ko Aung San Sha said, "We have already informed them of all the rules and regulations they must follow, as they are subordinate to the MOD. From the moment we learned about this incident, we instructed them to report all missions, including prisoner handling, and to refrain from taking any action until they receive permission."

The video was reportedly leaked after junta forces recovered a phone lost by a Ye Balu member during a clash. The Ye Balu leader acknowledged this on 4 December but did not provide further details.

The NUG plans to closely monitor People's Defence Forces to ensure strict compliance with their military code of conduct. Details of the tribunal's investigation into Ye Balu's actions have not yet been disclosed.

Resistance members have called for accountability, urging that Ye Balu's actions be thoroughly investigated and appropriately addressed.



Protest in Australia. Photo: Facebook

GLOBAL PROTESTS EXPOSE CHINA'S COMPLICITY IN MYANMAR JUNTA ABUSE

A coalition of Burmese diaspora democracy activists organized peaceful protests worldwide on December 7, 2024, at Chinese Embassies and Consulates.

The rallies called attention to China's ongoing support for Myanmar's brutal military junta, highlighting Beijing's blatant hypocrisy and its role in enabling the regime's violent crackdown on the Burmese people.

The following were the coalition's key protest demands:

- End Diplomatic Shelter: China's repeated protection of the junta at the UN Security Council
- Stop Backing Sham Elections: Beijing's endorsement of the junta's fraudulent 2025 elections
- Halt Arms Supply: China's provision of deadly military equipment to the junta, including combat aircraft
- End Private Security Deals: China's proposal to establish a joint security company with the junta
- Cease Pressure on Ethnic Groups: China's attempts to force ethnic revolutionary forces into ceasefires with the junta

Statement from Organizers: "We are raising our voices against China's direct and dangerous support for Myanmar's military regime, which has been allowed to carry out systemic violence with impunity. Beijing's actions—providing arms, shielding the junta at the UN, and undermining the will of the Burmese people—are in direct conflict with their claims of noninterference and support for a peaceful, Myanmar-led process. China's official statements of neutrality and constructive involvement are an outright contradiction to its destructive role on the ground. This hypocrisy must be exposed, and we call on the international community, particularly the United States, to hold China accountable for its complicity in one of the world's most oppressive regimes."

Background:

Since Myanmar's military coup in February 2021, China has intensified its support for the junta, betraying its claim of non-interference. Beijing has consistently provided military aid, including combat aircraft, while backing the junta's controversial plans for a 2025 election, which has been denounced as a farce by pro-democracy activists. China has also pressured Myanmar's ethnic revolutionary forces into ceasefire negotiations, which many see as another attempt to stabilize the junta's control, not bring about genuine peace. In September 2024, the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar issued a statement claiming to support Myanmar's sovereignty and a Myanmar-led peace process. Yet, China's actions tell a very different story. The junta's violent suppression of dissent, made possible by China's military and diplomatic backing, has led to widespread displacement, human rights abuses, and the deaths of thousands of innocent Burmese citizens. This contradiction exposes China's so-called "friendly policy" as a strategic move to protect its geopolitical interests in Southeast Asia, regardless of the suffering of the Burmese people.

China's actions have only entrenched the military dictatorship in power, while undermining the hopes of millions of Burmese who aspire to freedom and democracy.

About the Coalition: The coalition of Burmese Diaspora Democracy Activists is a global network of organizations and individuals committed to advancing democracy, human rights, and justice in Myanmar. Since the 2021 military coup, the coalition has organized numerous global protests, advocacy campaigns, and efforts to raise awareness of Myanmar's ongoing crisis



UK MARKS THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DISABILITY WITH A FOCUS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

The United Kingdom (UK) marked the International Day of Disability on 3 December by highlighting the needs of women and girls with disabilities in Myanmar.

Over the past year the UK has delivered support to communities most affected by fighting in Myanmar. This has included support for women and girls with disabilities.

In 2024, the UK government provided humanitarian assistance to over 11,000 people with disabilities, including landmine victims. Over 450,000 people received mine risk education support, including people with disabilities.

According to the UK, women and girls with disabilities are up to four times more likely to experience violence.

More than 190 women and girls with disabilities received healthcare support in 2024, including maternal and child referrals, cervical cancer screenings, family planning services, prostheses, and assistive devices.

Education programs supported by the UK in the past year reached 596 children with disabilities. In addition, 40 teachers living with disabilities were also supported.

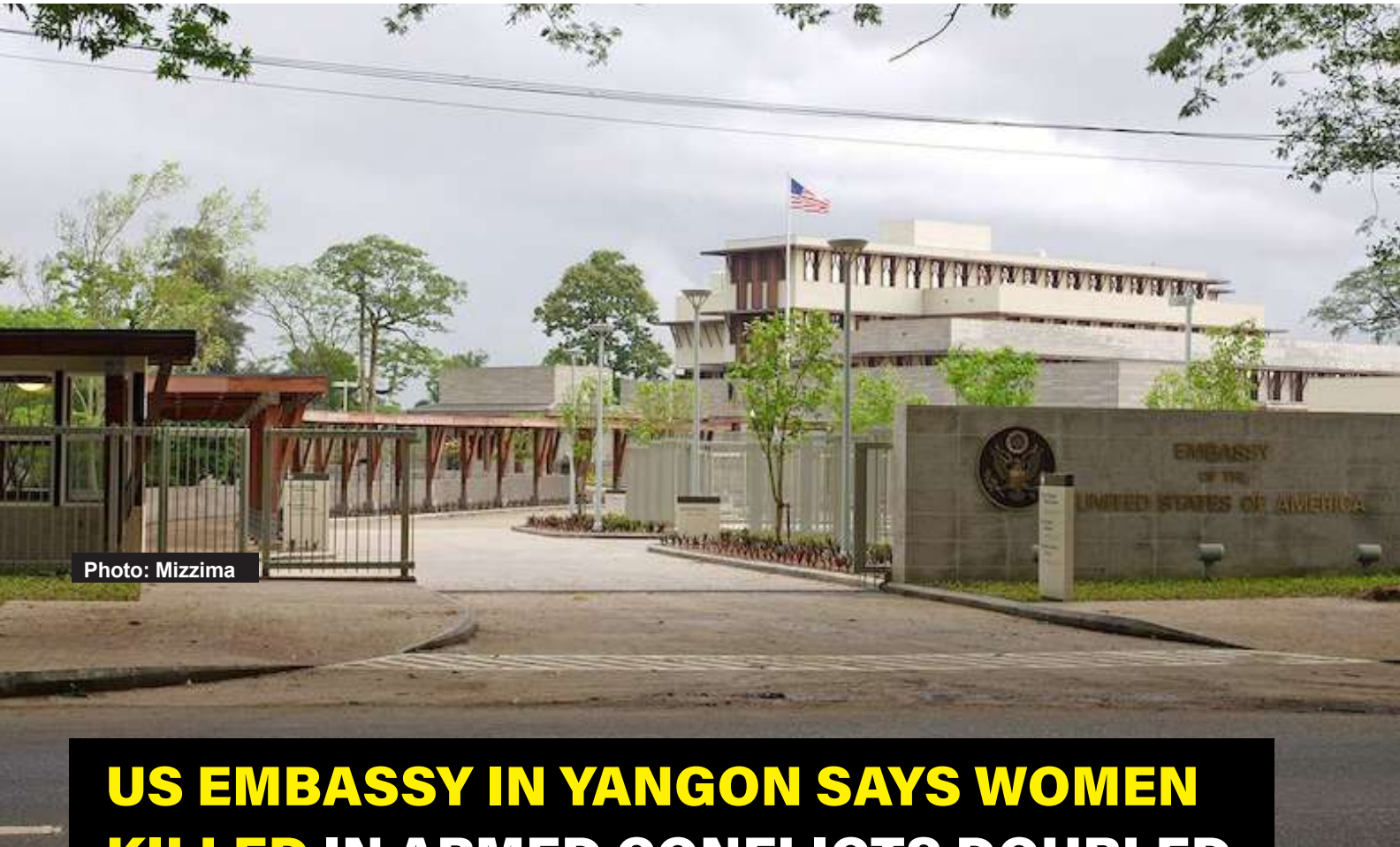


Photo: Mizzima

US EMBASSY IN YANGON SAYS WOMEN KILLED IN ARMED CONFLICTS DOUBLED

A press statement issued by the US embassy in Yangon says that the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts around the world has doubled.

This statement was issued on 4 December in a part of its 16-day campaign against "violence against women".

"In 2023, the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to 2022," the press statement says, noting that women comprise 40% of conflict-related deaths.

Additionally, UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50% during the same period.

The embassy says it seeks to raise awareness that gender-based violence is a global human rights issue.

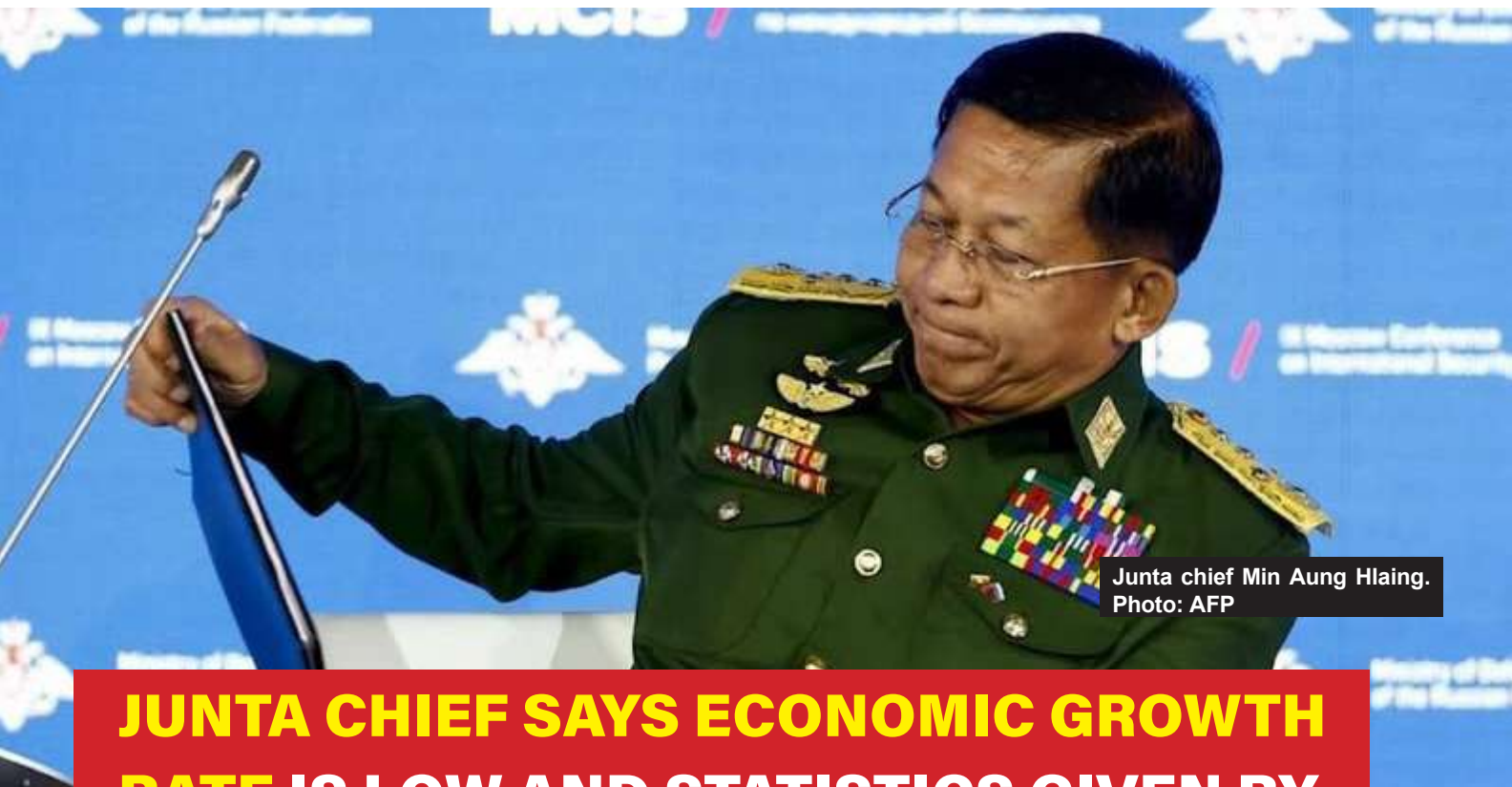
This alarming trend underscores the urgent need to protect women and girls in war zones and to ensure their active participation in peace processes.

"We promote men's involvement in ending violence against women and girls," the embassy statement urged.

The Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP) issued a press statement on 4 December which says that a total 150 women were killed across Myanmar in three months from 1 September to 30 November 2024.

Out of this, 107 were mostly killed in junta's airstrikes and area-wise, Rakhine State and Sagaing Region had the largest death tolls with 34 each. Among them, 30 were under-18 children, the AAPP statement says.

According to AAPP data collected up to 4 December, 6,017 pro-democracy activists and other civilians were killed and 21,201 people are still under detention.



Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

JUNTA CHIEF SAYS ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE IS LOW AND STATISTICS GIVEN BY MINISTRIES ARE INCORRECT

Myanmar junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said at a Union Government meeting held in Naypyidaw on 3 December that the economic growth rate for Myanmar was low, and data collected by the ministries is incorrect.

The junta said surplus agricultural products were being sold to foreign countries, but the data collected differs from the actual export figures.

Min Aung Hlaing gave rice and cotton as examples, but he did not disclose detailed facts and figures.

The government should not be complacent with data and must strive for actual success and progress, he added. He warned that incorrect data used to draw up economic plans would result in incorrect plans.

Moreover, he said that they would manage the rising commodity prices in the country including for basic foodstuffs.

Speaking on the occasion, the Senior General underscored that producers and business owners are urged to sell basic commodities, meat, and fish at reasonable and fair profit margins that can help alleviate the financial burden on the public and contribute to welfare measures.

Production must be increased without fail to enable an up to two-fold increase in exports, he urged.

Data released by the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) shows that Myanmar exported 334,535 tonnes of rice and broken rice in November and earned US\$156 million from these exports. The MRF data shows that the junta is emphasising exporting more rice and broken rice as they desperately need foreign exchange.

A record-high volume was exported in October of over 420,000 tonnes. It is the highest trade volume for rice in the last eight months.

In the first eight months of this fiscal year, Myanmar exported 1,697,165 tonnes of rice and earned US\$804 million.

Farmers predict that rice production will fall this season as the country is facing a lack of farm labour, rising general costs, impacts of Typhoon Yagi, and unseasonal rain that damaged and flooded vast areas of paddy fields in the country.

The Myanmar Economic Monitor published by the World Bank in June 2024 says that economic activity has been constrained by elevated conflict, depreciating Kyats, labour shortage, increased macroeconomic volatility, and a challenging business environment.

JUNTA CHIEF DECRIES MASS MIGRATION OF OVERSEAS WORKERS AS HUMAN RESOURCES IN MYANMAR DECLINE

In his address delivered at the Union Government meeting held in Naypyidaw on 3 December, junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that the low population of Myanmar means a mass migration of overseas workers has caused a noticeable and significant labour shortage in the country.

He urged his cabinet ministers at the meeting to create job opportunities for youths and give them proper wages and salaries. He also urged them to boost agriculture-based job opportunities as an essential task.

"Since 70% of the population lives in rural areas, 50% of them are poorly educated, 41% of the population are engaged in agriculture, fishing and livestock sectors, so job creation must be based on the agriculture sector," he said.

The size of outward migration is increasing due to the general crisis facing the country and the resultant scarcity of employment opportunities.

In a Security, Tranquillity, and Rule of Law Committee meeting held in August 2022, Min Aung Hlaing ordered the imposition of tight controls on mass migration of youths to avoid labour shortage in the country.

The junta then banned youths in the 23-32 age group from leaving the country for overseas work. The junta is currently tightening all departures for foreign countries.

Sources familiar with the current situation said that departures to foreign countries are tightly controlled at Yangon and Mandalay airports since early this month.

Departures to foreign countries by youths have been tightly controlled by the junta since early this year. Male youths and holders of new passports without prior foreign travels are being questioned more thoroughly at the airports.

The size of migration from Myanmar has increased since February 2021 when the military staged a coup and worsened after the People's Military Service Law (conscription law) came into force in February 2024.



Htet Myat Thu, left, and Win Htut Oo

ACROSS ASIA, CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS KEEP MOUNTING

In the decade since the U.N. first launched its International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, nearly 800 journalists have been killed across the globe. Many more have faced violence, threats, harassment and lawfare, with the perpetrators often going unpunished.

This is the situation in war zones like Myanmar, where journalists find themselves trapped in crossfire. But it is also true in ostensibly peaceful countries. China remains the world's largest jailer of journalists; Cambodia has seen reporters assaulted for trying to expose wrongdoing; and, just this week, Vietnam sentenced a blogger to 12 years in prison in a case many believe to be retaliation for his reporting on corruption.

On Wednesday last week, the New York-based press freedom nonprofit Committee to Protect Journalists released its annual Global Impunity Index. Asia was the most represented region, with the Philippines and Myanmar ranked 9th and 10th among countries where the murders of journalists go unpunished.

During the past year, Radio Free Asia and its sister publication BenarNews reported on a number of cases of journalists who faced retribution for doing their job. Some were assaulted, one was abducted and

several were handed stiff prison sentences. For those in the most closed regimes, meanwhile, 2024 simply represented the year in which families learned the fate of those silenced much earlier. Below is a roundup of recent cases in RFA and BenarNews coverage areas.

Myanmar

JOURNALISTS Htet Myat Thu, 28, and Win Htut Oo, 26, were shot dead by junta soldiers on August 21, 2024 in Mon state. The pair were killed when soldiers raided Htet Myat Thu's Kyaikto township home, after reportedly receiving a tip that revolutionary forces were stationed there.

Htet Myat Thu reported for local news outlet The Voice, and had been arrested years earlier while covering an anti-coup protest. Win Htut Oo reported for DVB and The Nation Voice, two more popular local news outlets. At least five journalists have been killed and more than 170 arrested since the Feb. 2021 military coup.

"Journalists are working on the ground and trying to deliver the true news on time. The junta army regarded this work as an attack on them, and treated the journalists badly," explained Nay Aung, editor-in-

chief of The Nation Voice. A resident who wished not to be named for security reasons, said that the junta forces cremated the two journalists' bodies instead of returning them to their families.

Vietnam

Vietnamese blogger Duong Van Thai was recently sentenced to 12 years in prison and three years probation for publishing anti-state propaganda online. (Image from YouTube video)

ON OCT. 30, journalist Duong Van Thai, 42, was tried in Hanoi for creating "propaganda against the state" in violation of Article 117 of the penal code, a vaguely written law that rights organizations have said is often used by Hanoi to silence dissent. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison, in a trial held behind closed doors and with even his family barred from attending.

The trial came more than 18 months after the blogger and YouTuber disappeared from his home in Bangkok, where he had fled and sought political asylum in 2019. Rights monitors believe Thai was abducted, with many condemning both Hanoi and Bangkok for their role in mounting transnational repression.

Thai was known for his searing political commentary, including reporting on corruption and political infighting — work that many believe made him a target. "Thai's work exposing corruption is not a crime—it's a critical exercise of free expression, essential to accountable governance," campaign group PEN America wrote on X shortly before his sentence was announced.

Bangladesh

AT LEAST five journalists were killed and scores injured amid unrest that turned to violence this summer in Bangladesh. Sharif Khiam Ahmed, a reporter for RFA's sister news organization BenarNews, was beaten by protesters, who hit his head with a brick, while Jibon Ahmed, a contributor to Benar, was struck by pellets shot by security forces.

Even those outside the countries faced personal attacks. After doing live broadcasts from the Washington newsroom about the events in Bangladesh, Benar newscaster Ashif Entaz Rabi was targeted by Nijhoom Majumder, a well-known activist for the ruling Awami League party with more than 265,000 Facebook followers.

Rabi was named, pictured and accused in a Facebook post and separate Facebook video of having been assigned by the CIA to "broadcast false news" and "spread false rumors" in a US-funded plot to "overthrow the government." These posts disappeared shortly after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in early August.

Indonesia

VICTOR MAMBOR —a Jayapura-based stringer for BenarNews — and his Papua-based media outlet Jubi are known for covering rights abuses in Indonesia's militarized and restive Papua region. That has frequently brought them in the crosshairs of violence.

In early October, Molotov cocktails were thrown at the Jubi editorial office in Jayapura, igniting a fire between two parked vehicles. The police said they are investigating, but no perpetrators have yet been found, and rights groups note that attacks on the media in Papua often go unpunished.

"If left unsolved, the public will wonder who is behind it," explained Gustaf Kawer, director of the Papua Human Rights Lawyers Association. "I believe it is essential to clarify the perpetrators to prevent future incidents and ensure that the press can operate freely."

The attack was not the first for Mambor. In Jan. 2023, a bomb exploded outside his residence and in April 2021, his car windows were smashed and vandalized, with no arrests ever made.

China

IN THE MIDDLE of the day on Nov. 17, 2023, police entered the Nanjing home of dissident journalist Sun Lin; neighbors reported the sounds of a struggle. The police brought him to the hospital and by evening was pronounced dead, with the overseas-based Chinese Human Rights Defenders network saying he appeared to have been beaten to death.

Lin, who used the pen name Jie Mu, was known for his social justice coverage and had served two four-year prison terms on charges related to his work and outspoken commentary. Police have since tried to claim they were defending themselves after being attacked by the journalist, according to overseas-based dissident Sun Liyong.

"Sun Lin is nearly 70 years old, so how would he be able to beat up a group of young men?" he said. China

ranked 172 out of 180 countries on this year's World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders, which notes it is the "largest prison for journalists."

Uyghur

IN CHINA'S Western Xinjiang region, suppression of Uyghurs has been so complete that virtually no independent or citizen journalists outside state control remain working in the region. Though the mostly Muslim ethnic minority makes up only around one percent of China's population, nearly half of the nation's imprisoned journalists are Uyghur, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Given the extreme repression by Chinese authorities in the region, it often takes years for Uyghurs outside the country to learn the whereabouts of family members and colleagues. In May, Voice of America journalist Kasim Kashgar learned that five former colleagues of his had been sentenced in 2021 to seven years in prison because of links to him.

The 2018 arrest of publisher Erkin Emet was only uncovered in March. Qurban Mamut, an influential Uyghur editor and the father of Radio Free Asia journalist Bahram Sintash, was arrested in 2017.

Earlier this year, Sintash told the Committee to Protect Journalists he had little doubt that Mamut's 15-year-prison sentence was in response to his work editing the influential magazine Xinjiang Civilization. "Many of the members on the board were subsequently taken to re-education camps, including my dad," he told CPJ.

Cambodia

ON MARCH 2, Loun Phearin, a journalist who runs a small online website called Sameang Hot News, showed up at a location in Poipet where there had been reports of illegal gambling. As he and his team got ready to host a livestream, a group of men approached the journalists and began attacking them with sticks and rocks.

"Three people were hospitalized," he told RFA this month. "There are so many of them [the attackers]."

No arrests have been made, but Phearin and his colleagues have been sued by the owner of the gambling venue for trespassing. Nop Vy, executive director of the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association that the case is just the latest in a long line of attacks against reporters that have gone unpunished.

"If this case is not resolved or the perpetrators are not prosecuted, it may be an incentive for others to commit crimes against journalists," he said.

Hong Kong

IN SEPTEMBER, the prominent journalist Chung Pui-kuen was sentenced to 21 months in prison — making him the first journalist to be imprisoned for sedition since the 1997 handover. Chung's co-defendant, Patrick Lam, received an 11-month sentence, allowing him to be released immediately.

Chung had spent decades building up his career in Hong Kong's media industry and was known for his investigative journalism and focus on political and social issues, especially those related to civil rights and democracy in Hong Kong. At the time of his arrest, he was editor-in-chief of the now-defunct Stand News, while Lam was the acting-editor-in-chief.

Both spent almost 12 months in jail following their arrests in December 2021 and faced a 54-day trial this year during which lawyers for the Hong Kong government accused Stand News of promoting "illegal ideologies" and smearing the security law and the police who enforced it.

For observers of Hong Kong, the case reflected the rapid decline in the city's once-robust free press since Beijing imposed a controversial national security law in 2020. A decade ago, Hong Kong ranked 61 among 180 countries on RSF's World Press Freedom Index. This year, it ranked 135th.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

CHINESE LEADER XI'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CRUSADE REACHES HIS DOORSTEP

SUN LEE

Chinese leader Xi Jinping's decade-long anti-corruption campaign, a cornerstone of his leadership, has now hit alarmingly close to home. What began as a sweeping initiative to cleanse the Communist Party of China (CPC) from pervasive graft has morphed into a politically charged mechanism, targeting even those within Xi's trusted inner circle. The recent investigations into Defence Minister Dong Jun and the suspension of Admiral Miao Hua under corruption charges, a senior military officer closely tied to Xi and much admired by him, bring to the fore not only the campaign's reach but also its severe consequences. While Xi has touted the campaign as vital for restoring discipline and modernizing China's institutions, critics argue it has produced little in curbing systemic corruption.

China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is currently undergoing a profound internal upheaval as corruption cases continue to plague the military's top leadership. The recent high-profile cases also follow a series of purges within the PLA's elite branches, such as the Rocket Force, signalling the extent of corruption and mistrust within China's armed forces.

Since assuming power in 2012, Xi has made anti-corruption a hallmark of his leadership. In the military, this campaign has been framed as essential to transforming the PLA into a world-class fighting force. However, instead of achieving its desired ends, the campaign has on the contrary sunk the morale of the military.

The Party's anti-corruption efforts gained significant momentum when Xi announced his political fight against the menace of corruption and officials who indulged in the same. His administration has since then launched an extensive and high-profile campaign against corruption, targeting both high-ranking officials and lower-level bureaucrats in its quest to crackdown on malpractices within the party cadres and government, both alike. The campaign has led to the investigation and punishment of numerous officials, including some at very senior levels. However, the recent case of severe corruption and espionage charges against prominent Military generals and officers within the, until last year 'prestigious', Rocket Forces, has once again brought to light the failures of Xi's anti-corruption rampage.

Last year, Li Yuchao, the commander of the Rocket Force was removed amid corruption allegations. Several other senior officers were also investigated and subsequently purged with one even committing suicide. The Rocket Force's purge is particularly damaging as it directly affects China's nuclear deterrence and strategic capabilities. The removal of experienced commanders significantly disrupted operational continuity, undermining trust within the rank and file of the department. The anti-corruption campaign, while aimed at addressing long-standing issues of graft, has also had several unintended consequences that have weakened the Chinese military. Firstly, the suspension of Miao Hua, a trusted confidant of Xi, sends a chilling message to other officers. If even those closest to the top leadership are vulnerable, it breeds paranoia and undermines camaraderie within the military. This has subsequently led to officers prioritizing self-preservation over effective leadership, leading to delays in decision-making and a decline in operational readiness. The frequent reshuffling of leadership within key branches has also compromised institutional stability and reduced the PLA's overall effectiveness.

However, corruption in the PLA is not a new phenomenon. Decades of commercial entanglements, opaque procurement processes, and a culture of patronage have created fertile ground for corruption. Large sums allocated for modernization programmes have been siphoned off, affecting the quality of equipment and infrastructure, as was revealed in a recent report indicating the bad quality of equipment that was tested by the Rocket Forces.

This has led some analysts to question whether Xi's heavy-handed approach to corruption, including purging his own close associates, has been effective in addressing the pervasive corruption within the CPC. While it has succeeded in politically eliminating Xi's rivals, one could argue that the anti-corruption campaign since its inception over a decade ago, has achieved little of its stated goals. Moreover, the establishment of anti-graft bodies like the National Supervisory Commission (NSC) appears to have had unintended consequences. Instead of curbing corruption, it has instilled fear among party members, discouraging dissent against Xi. Critics argue that Xi has leveraged institutions like the NSC to

consolidate his power, granting it sweeping authority to investigate and hold officials accountable—sometimes under questionable circumstances. This climate of intimidation seems designed to exert control over even the highest ranks of the CPC. The campaign has notably targeted senior officials, including members of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, the Party's top decision-making body.

Xi, on his part, has repeatedly emphasized the need for loyalty, discipline, and efficiency within the armed forces, stating that corruption is incompatible with his vision of military modernization.

However, the iron fisted approach in the anti-corruption campaign within the PLA, while addressing systemic issues, has revealed deep vulnerabilities in China's military structure. The suspension and arrest of high-ranking officials close to Xi himself and the purging of key branches such as the Rocket Force exposes the fragility of a military that is both essential to Xi's governance and riddled with internal contradictions.

As the campaign intensifies, the PLA faces not just the challenge of combating corruption but also the risk of eroding morale and cohesion, leaving it weaker and less prepared to meet the strategic ambitions of the Chinese state.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers China and Asia as a whole.



Julian Ku at the Congressional hearing.
Photo: Supplied

ACTIVISTS TELL US CONGRESS OF CHINA'S FAR-REACHING CULTURAL ERASURE

Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese activists say it's hard to escape Beijing's repressive reach

Alex Willemyns for RFA

WASHINGTON - A campaign by China's government to rewrite the cultural identity and history of the country's minority ethnic groups and political dissidents is increasingly being waged on American shores, activists told a U.S. congressional hearing on 5 December.

The Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian and Chinese activists said that while the United States once stood as a bastion of free speech and a redoubt of cultural preservation for groups targeted by the Chinese Communist Party, many now feared Beijing's extensive reach.

Rishat Abbas, the president of the U.S.-based Uyghur Academy, told the hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China that his sister Gulshan had been jailed in China on a 20-year sentence due to his and other family member's anti-government activism abroad.

The U.S. government says China's government is carrying out a "genocide" against the mostly Muslim Uyghur minority in the country's far-west. Many Uyghurs abroad actively campaign to end the genocide and to do what they can to preserve their language and culture.

But many look to the treatment of the family members, still trapped in China, of those Uyghurs who choose to speak out, and decide it's safer not to provoke the Chinese Communist Party, even from abroad.

"My sister's imprisonment is a clear action of retaliation," he said. "Her detention exposes the CCP's aggressive policies that target Uyghurs simply for their identity and for the activism of their relatives abroad."

"She has never engaged in any form of advocacy in her life," he said.

Abbas said he was nonetheless not deterred, and hoped to one day bring a Uyghur-language textbook developed in the United States back to China's Xinjiang region, where Uyghurs live under surveillance.

Lawfare

It's not only Uyghur immigrants who have been targeted.

In years gone by, American higher education institutions like Stanford University fearlessly curated U.S.-based historical archives about events censored by the Chinese government, said Julian Ku, a constitutional law professor at New York's Hofstra University.

But things have changed.

Ku pointed to a lawsuit brought in the United States by the Beijing-based widow of the late Li Rui – a former secretary to Mao Zedong and later dissident who donated diaries to Stanford.

Stanford says Li Rui donated the diaries through his daughter, fearing that they would be destroyed by Chinese officials if left in China. But Li Rui's widow says

they are rightfully hers and wants them returned.

The widow, Ku explained, was inexplicably being represented by “some of the most expensive law firms in the United States,” and had likely already racked up legal fees in the “hundreds of thousands of dollars – and probably more – on a widow’s Chinese state pension.”

Describing the tactic as “lawfare,” he suggested that the widow had powerful backers funding the battle, who may not even care if the litigation is ultimately successful.

The nearly four years of costly legal battles sent a message to other U.S. universities, museums or nonprofits to avoid any contentious documents that might attract the attention of Beijing, Ku said.

“They might think, ‘Well, maybe I don’t want to acquire that one, because it might subject me to litigation in China and maybe litigation here in the United States,’ he said. “It serves as a deterrence for universities, museums and other institutions in the United States.”

Living in fear

Like Uyghurs, many ethnically Han Chinese in America also fear speaking out against Beijing even while in the United States, said Rowena He, a historian of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing who was last year banned from entering Hong Kong.

“It’s very difficult to not to be emotional being in this room again because I remember 5-10 years ago, when I was first invited to testify to Congress,” He recalled. “I was extremely hesitant, because I was so concerned about my family members, and I was so worried.”

“I lived with fear ever since the day I started teaching and researching the topic of Tiananmen,” she explained, citing the “taboo” around the topic in China, where the massacre is not openly acknowledged.

She said increased funding for curriculums with alternate Chinese histories to the one put forward by Beijing could be one way to counter the “monopoly on historiography” held by China’s government.

“If you go to Chinatown, many people are still supporting the CCP, even though they’re physically in the United States,” He said, noting that figures like herself were denigrated as anti-government.

“Sometimes people call us ‘underground historians,’ but I do not like the term ‘underground,’” she said. “We are the historians.”

Government funding

Geshe Lobsang Monlam, a Tibetan monk who authored a 223-volume Tibetan dictionary and helps lead efforts to preserve Tibetan language outside of China, said one of the main obstacles for Tibetans outside China outside of pressure from Beijing was finding needed funds.

“Inside Tibet, the young Tibetans have appeared powerless in their ability to preserve and promote their language,” the monk said, pointing to concerted efforts to erase use of the Tibetan language as young Tibetans grow proficient in using Mandarin through smartphones.

“If there can be assistance by the United States to help procure technological equipment that can enable those of us in exile to continue our work on preservation of Tibetan culture and language and way of life ... that would be very useful for us,” he explained.

Temulun Togochoog, a 17-year-old U.S.-born Southern Mongolian activist, similarly appealed for more funding for cultural preservation.

Togochoog said while the decreased global focus on the plight of Mongolians in China had allowed her family in the United States to openly teach her about Mongolian culture and their native language with little fear of reprisal, resources were few and far between.

Mongolians living in China’s Inner Mongolia were increasingly facing a similar treatment to Tibetans and Uyghurs, she said, with a “systematic oppression and erasure of Mongolian language” taking place in favor of what is called “patriotic education” lionizing the communist party.

In September 2020, many Southern Mongolians protested the policies through coordinated school boycotts and strikes, but there was little news coverage of the ensuing mass arrests, she explained.

“Approximately 300,000 southern Mongolian students joined the movement,” she said. “The Chinese government responded harshly, detaining and placing under house arrest 8-10,000 people.”

The young activist called on Congress to fund Mongolian-language programs on Voice of America, which currently do not exist. She said that would help the “minority within a minority” to more actively “preserve their language, culture and identity” from erasure.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Former Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. Photo: AFP

REBELS DECLARE END OF ASSAD RULE IN SYRIA

Islamist-led rebels declared that they had taken Damascus in a lightning offensive on Sunday, sending President Bashar al-Assad fleeing and ending five decades of Baath rule in Syria.

Residents in the Syrian capital were seen cheering in the streets, as the rebel factions heralded the departure of “tyrant” Assad, saying: “We declare the city of Damascus free”.

AFPTV images from Damascus showed rebels firing into the air at sunrise, with some flashing the victory sign and crying “Allahu akbar”, or God is greatest.

Some climbed atop a tank in celebration, while others defaced a toppled statue of Assad’s father, Hafez.

“I can’t believe I’m living this moment,” tearful Damascus resident Amer Batha told AFP by phone.

“We’ve been waiting a long time for this day,” he said, adding: “We are starting a new history for Syria.”

The president’s alleged departure, which was also reported by a war monitor, comes less than two weeks after the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group launched its campaign challenging more than five decades of rule by the Assad family.

“After 50 years of oppression under Baath rule, and 13 years of crimes and tyranny and (forced)

displacement... we announce today the end of this dark period and the start of a new era for Syria,” the rebel factions said on Telegram.

Prime Minister Mohammed al-Jalali said he was ready to cooperate with “any leadership chosen by the Syrian people”.

The head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP: “Assad left Syria via Damascus international airport before the army security forces left” the facility.

AFP was unable to immediately confirm the report, which follows a source close to Hezbollah saying fighters from the key Assad ally had left their positions around Damascus.

HTS said their fighters broke into a jail on the outskirts of the capital, announcing an “end of the era of tyranny in the prison of Sednaya”, which has become a by-word for the darkest abuses of Assad’s era.

The rapid developments in Damascus come only hours after HTS said they had captured the strategic city of Homs, on the way to the capital.

The defence ministry earlier denied that rebels had entered Homs, describing the situation there as “safe and stable”.

Homs lies about 140 kilometres (85 miles) from the capital and was the third major city seized by the rebels, who began their advance on November 27, reigniting a years-long war that had become largely dormant.

US President Joe Biden was keeping a close eye on the “extraordinary events” unfolding in Syria, the White House said.

Hezbollah fighters leave

Monitoring events in Damascus, the Britain-based Observatory confirmed “the doors of the infamous ‘Sednaya’ prison... have been opened for thousands of detainees who were imprisoned by the security apparatus throughout the regime’s rule”

Assad’s government had earlier denied the army had withdrawn from areas around Damascus.

Reports the president had fled were followed by the premier saying he was ready to “cooperate” with a new leadership and any handover process.

“This country can be a normal country that builds good relations with its neighbours and the world... but this issue is up to any leadership chosen by the Syrian people,” Jalali said in a speech broadcast on his Facebook account.

Assad has for years been backed by Lebanese Hezbollah, whose forces “vacated their positions around Damascus” according to a source close to the group.

‘Suddenly everyone was scared’

AFP has been unable to independently verify some of the information provided by Assad’s government and the rebels.

Prior to the announcements on Sunday, residents of the capital described to AFP a state of panic as traffic jams clogged the city centre, with people seeking supplies and queueing to withdraw money from ATMs.

AFPTV images from Hama, Syria’s fourth-largest city, showed abandoned tanks and other armoured vehicles, one of them on fire.

Hama resident Kharfan Mansour said he was “happy with the liberation of Hama and the liberation of Syria from the Assad regime”.

Soldiers ‘fled’

Leading up to the rebels’ entry into Damascus, the Islamist-led alliance had wrested away control of Aleppo and Hama and also reached Homs, known during the early years of the civil war as the “capital of the revolution”.

The Observatory said Daraa, the cradle of the 2011 uprising, also fell from government control, while the army said it was “redeploying and repositioning” in the province and nearby Sweida.

The Observatory said troops were also evacuating posts in Quneitra, near the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights.

Jordan has urged its citizens to leave neighbouring Syria “as soon as possible”, as have the United States and Assad ally Russia, which both keep troops in Syria.

An AFP correspondent in Daraa saw local fighters guarding public property and civil institutions.

An Iraqi security source told AFP that Baghdad had allowed in hundreds of Syrian soldiers, who “fled the front lines”, through the Al-Qaim border crossing. A second source put the figure at 2,000 troops, including officers.

Rooted in Al-Qaeda

HTS is rooted in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. Proscribed as a terrorist organisation by Western governments, it has sought to soften its image in recent years, and told minority groups living in areas they now control not to worry.

Since the offensive began, at least 826 people, mostly combatants but also including 111 civilians, have been killed, the Observatory said.

The United Nations said the violence has displaced 370,000 people.

UN special envoy to Syria, Geir Pedersen, called for “urgent political talks” to implement a 2015 Security Council resolution, which set out a roadmap for a negotiated settlement.

US President-elect Donald Trump posted on his Truth Social platform that the United States should “not get involved”, after outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Friday for a “political solution to the conflict”, in a call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

Assad was for years propped up by Russia and Iran, while Turkey has historically backed the opposition.

AFP



BREWING UP CHANGE

“There’s no ending of activism, because injustice is everywhere. And after you finish one milestone, there’s always something you can keep on fighting for,” Johnson Yeung tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast.

Johnson was born in Hong Kong. He developed an interest in politics early in life, and at university, he studied political philosophy, which gave him a theoretical framework for understanding activism. But his real education came from the vibrant culture of student activism he encountered on campus. An activist for over a decade now, his first foray into activism was participating in an event commemorating the Tiananmen Square massacre—a highly sensitive issue in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), yet still publicly remembered in Hong Kong, much to the dismay of the mainland government. As political tensions deepened, many residents in Hong Kong felt their civil liberties and freedoms were being eroded. This growing unrest culminated in the Umbrella Movement of 2014, a mass protest that called for greater freedom and representation. Johnson served as one of its key organizers.

The Umbrella Movement was revolutionary in its highly adaptive yet consistently peaceful nature. It gained global recognition, its tactics closely studied by activists across Southeast Asia who saw the Umbrella Movement as a model for non-violent resistance and collective action in their own struggles for democracy and human rights. This connection, in turn, led Johnson to his present involvement in regional solidarity work.

In between his political activities, Johnson finds time for a hobby that he both enjoys very much and feels has a parallel to activism: rock climbing. “I actually

find the process of rock climbing quite similar to activism, because during rock climbing, you always fall! You always get disappointed about why couldn’t I just get to the top and get to the peak?! But every time we fall, we just keep going. Like what we do in activism.”

Johnson has forged strong connections with activists across the region. Since the 2021 coup, he has been in close contact with activists in Myanmar, and also Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where citizens are increasingly fighting to protect or restore their democracies and civil liberties in the face of growing government overreach and repression. These movements are united under the broad banner of the Milk Tea Alliance (MTA), a transnational solidarity network that connects activists across Asia in their shared struggle for freedom and democracy.

Johnson traces the Milk Tea Alliance’s origins to an online meme war in 2020, initially sparked by a conflict between Thai netizens and trolls in the PRC over comments made by a Thai celebrity regarding Taiwan’s independence—an issue highly sensitive in China. What began as a digital spat quickly evolved into a broader movement as Thai netizens invited their counterparts from Taiwan and Hong Kong to join in solidarity. The term “Milk Tea Alliance” was coined during this period, symbolizing the spontaneous and informal alliance among people from East and Southeast Asia who share cultural similarities, including a love for their respective versions of milk tea—which notably, is not found in China.

To underscore the importance of regional solidarity and the power of online activism, Johnson Yeung attempted to host an event featuring a Burmese CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement) medical worker to share his story and raise awareness of the coup in Myanmar. Although the plan was for just a small event, held in a private bookstore and unrelated to Hong Kong politics, the Hong Kong authorities still intervened. They pressured the bookstore owners, demanding that they apply for an entertainment license to hold the event. Fearing a police raid, Johnson decided to move the event online, instead, where it was a great success, reaching an even broader audience and staying beyond the reach of local authorities. “It does anger me,” Johnson admits. “Talking about CDM in Myanmar is the least thing that we can do in Hong Kong for Myanmar, like raising the alarm and talking about a situation, especially as Hong Kong is the second largest investor in Myanmar... that are still complicit with the junta!”

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/11/19/episode-287-brewing-up-change>

Photo: Nikita Karimov

JUNTA PLANS TO SEND MIGRANT WORKERS TO RUSSIA AMID LABOUR SHORTAGES

Myanmar's military junta is planning to send migrant workers to Russia in response to Russia's labour shortages amid its ongoing war with Ukraine, reported Radio Free Asia.

According to Charles Myo Thant, chairman of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Association (MOEAA), the first group of workers is expected to be deployed in 2025.

The workers will be placed in agriculture, livestock, construction, and factory jobs, with Russian language proficiency being a requirement. While a memorandum of understanding between the two countries is still in preparation, Russia has already submitted a formal request through a demand letter.

This would mark Myanmar's first venture into sending workers beyond East and Southeast Asia, as its migrant workers typically work in Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan.

Currently, only two Myanmar employment agencies have obtained licenses to send workers to Russia.

According to Kyaw Ni, Deputy Minister of the opposition National Unity Government's Labour Ministry, these agencies have connections to the military junta - one owned by junta Deputy Minister's son and the other by an MOEAA executive member.



Soe Lin Oo. Photo: OneChampionship

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS VOICE CONCERN OVER MYANMAR LETHWEI FIGHTER POST-ACCIDENT RETURN

Social media users in Myanmar are expressing concern after news broke that Lethwei fighter Soe Lin Oo will proceed with his scheduled bout against Seksan at ONE 170, despite suffering injuries in a car accident 54 days before the fight.

The announcement comes after initial uncertainty about the matchup following Soe Lin Oo's accident on November 30. While the Myanmar fighter sustained minor injuries, including a forehead laceration, ONE Championship has officially confirmed the bout will proceed as planned.

Social media commentary has centered on safety concerns for the fighter. "Rather than focusing on winning or losing, I just hope it will be a good fight," wrote one user, reflecting a sentiment focused on the fighter's wellbeing over competitive outcomes.

Another user wrote, "I don't want him to fight with an injury, but since the fight is going ahead, I'll support him."

A particularly detailed comment emphasized the risks involved: "The fight should be postponed by two months. Myanmar fighters sometimes show excessive confidence in their toughness. They should value their bodies more. Fighting in an uncertain condition could lead to consequences far worse than just losing."

The bout is now set for January 24 at ONE 170, featuring Soe Lin Oo against four-time Muay Thai World Champion Seksan in a 142-pound catchweight Muay Thai contest at Bangkok's Impact Arena.

The match will mark Soe Lin Oo's return to action following his recent decision loss to Nabil Anane.

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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.