

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



THAI-MYANMAR AFFAIRS

Engagement and dialogue crucial to solving the Myanmar crisis, says Thai expert

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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.

WARNING OVER MYANMAR JUNTA'S 2025 ELECTION PLAN

Myanmar's junta has been meeting with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) representatives to "sell" the idea of national elections in 2025. The country's opposition is clearly concerned that ASEAN – and the wider international community – will be taken in by this "sham poll".

Top of the list of opposition concerns is the overall lack of legitimacy, given the fact that the junta ripped control of the country from the democratically-elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021. With Suu Kyi locked up, and the NLD dissolved, a poll organized by the junta would be viewed as a means to consolidate military control rather than a genuine effort to restore democracy. With the junta losing ground on the battlefield, the military generals are looking with some element of desperation at a poll to facilitate the cementing of their power under the façade of "democracy".

A core concern about the planned 2025 election is that most opposition groups, including the NLD, would be excluded – meaning the absence of popular parties would not reflect the real will of the Myanmar people. Most likely, the junta would facilitate a victory for the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), given the other players in the poll would be small players.

Then there is the issue of the ongoing civil war and insecurity that prevails in Myanmar four years after the coup. The country is plagued by widespread armed conflict between the military and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), as well as the anti-coup resistance movement led by the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and the National Unity Government (NUG). Large areas of the country are under the effective control of opposition forces – meaning it would

be impossible to hold a poll in those areas. In addition, the fighting and chaos would clearly undermine the fairness and inclusiveness of any public electoral process.

A critical element would be that since the coup the junta has imposed severe restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly, and the media. Independent media outlets have been shut down, and journalists face arrest, imprisonment and even death. Without simple civil liberties, voters cannot freely express their political preferences or access unbiased information about candidates and parties. In addition, the junta has made changes to electoral laws, including a shift from a first-past-the-post system to proportional representation, which critics argue is designed to dilute the influence of popular opposition parties like the NLD that won a landslide in the 2020 poll. On top of this there are widespread worries that the junta would manipulate voter registration, ballot access, and vote counting to ensure a predetermined outcome favourable to the military.

Naturally, many opposition groups and activists have called for boycotts of junta-organized elections, arguing that participating would lend legitimacy to an illegitimate regime, and if a large enough portion of the population abstains, the election results would really lack credibility.

Myanmar's opposition is hoping the international community will realize that an election carried out under the junta's control would be a highly-flawed process aimed at maintaining military dominance rather than reflecting the genuine will of the Myanmar people. At this stage of the game, international support should be thrown behind the opposition led by the NUG and ethnic players who in many ways represent the will and fighting spirit of the Myanmar people.

EDITORIAL

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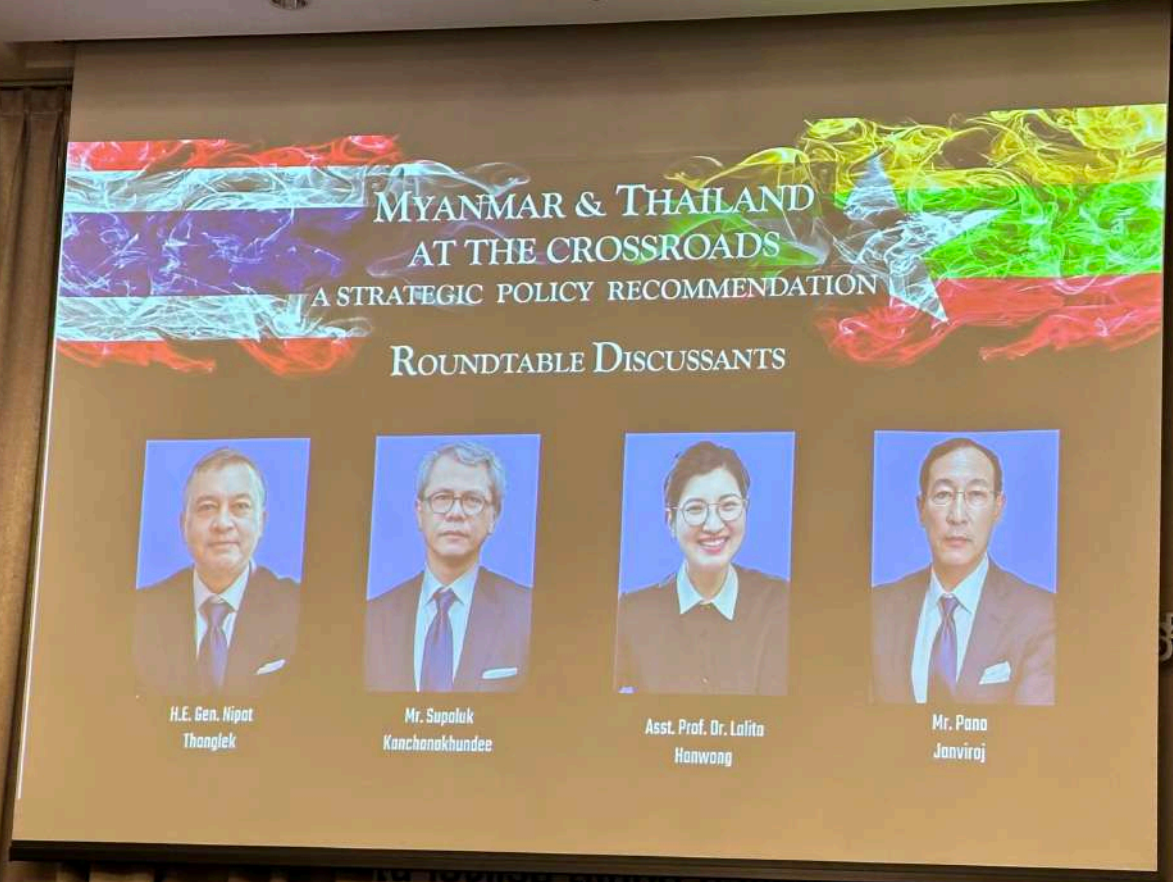
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Cover photo of Thai soldiers on the border in Mae Sot by AFP





Thailand & Myanmar at The Crossroads: Strategic Pathways to Regional Peace and Stability meeting organized by CSP in Bangkok. Photo: Supplied

THAI-MYANMAR AFFAIRS ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE CRUCIAL TO SOLVING THE MYANMAR CRISIS, SAYS THAI EXPERT

Thailand-Myanmar relations are arguably at a crossroads as the post-coup conflict approaches its fourth year. Despite the efforts of ASEAN to bring peace to its member state, the crisis continues. And this matters immensely to neighbouring Thailand.

With this in mind, Mr. Supalak Ganjanakhundee, who is Founding Director of the Center for Strategic Policy (CSP) made a presentation on 16 December at the discussion on Thailand & Myanmar at The Crossroads: Strategic Pathways to Regional Peace and Stability, organized by CSP in Bangkok.

This Strategic Policy Recommendations cum Roundtable Discussion is considered to be the first of its kind in Thailand's academic think-tank community, to have an in-depth discussion on issues of national and regional concern, based on a well-researched policy recommendation paper, to finalize the practical and actionable Policy Recommendation Paper for submission to and consideration by the Thai Government.

The CSP Roundtable Series is designed as an exclusive platform for experts, policymakers and key stakeholders to exchange ideas, share insights, and develop practical evidence-based solutions to address the complex challenges that Thailand is facing at the national, regional and global levels.

Supalak has written a paper on the subject that accompanies his presentation at the event. The follow is a synopsis of his key points:

The Myanmar crisis represents a significant challenge with wide-ranging implications for Thailand's security, economy, and regional standing. However, it also presents an opportunity for Thailand to assert its leadership in regional stability and conflict resolution.

Through a multifaceted strategy that integrates border security, economic resilience, constructive diplomacy, and humanitarian response, Thailand can address immediate challenges while contributing to long-term solutions. By aligning with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and engaging global partners, Thailand can enhance its credibility as a mediator and safeguard its national interests.

A proactive, sustained approach will not only mitigate the immediate impacts of the Myanmar crisis but also position Thailand as a key player in fostering stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

For Thailand, Myanmar's closest neighbour, the stakes are exceptionally high. The crisis brings heightened security risks along the shared border, disrupts vital trade routes, and places immense strain



Thai army provides extra security on the Thai-Myanmar border at Mae Sot earlier this year. Photo: AFP

on Thailand's capacity to address the growing influx of refugees and undocumented migrants. Beyond these immediate concerns, the crisis challenges Thailand's role within ASEAN and its ability to navigate an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Thailand faces an array of interconnected challenges stemming from the Myanmar crisis, demanding a coordinated and multifaceted response. These challenges span border management, economic resilience, geopolitical engagement, and the humanitarian response.

Border Management

Thailand's porous 2,401-kilometre border with Myanmar has become a hotspot for cross-border violence, trafficking, and displacement. Conflict spillovers, including stray artillery fire, disrupt local communities and pose risks to sovereignty. Illicit businesses, such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, and scam cities further strain security efforts. Thailand must deploy advanced surveillance technologies and foster local community collaboration to address these vulnerabilities effectively.

Economic Resilience

The Myanmar crisis has disrupted bilateral trade, labour migration, and Thai investments. Trade volumes at key checkpoints like Mae Sot-Myawaddy have plummeted due to extortion by armed groups and logistical hurdles. Thai businesses face risks in Myanmar's energy and manufacturing sectors, compounded by sanctions and political instability. Securing trade routes, diversifying logistics options, and refining labour migration policies are critical for mitigating these economic disruptions.

Geopolitical Engagement

Thailand must skillfully navigate its complex relationships with China, the U.S., and ASEAN to safeguard its national interests and elevate its international stature. By leveraging these engagements effectively, Thailand can enhance its diplomatic credibility and demonstrate regional leadership.

Proactively supporting ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and fostering alignment with major powers will not only strengthen Thailand's position as a mediator



Thai lawmakers and analysts are concerned about the Myanmar crisis having a negative effect on their country. Photo: AFP

but also allow it to play a pivotal role in addressing the broader implications of the Myanmar crisis.

Humanitarian Response

Thailand hosts over 1.5 million displaced Myanmar nationals, including registered refugees and undocumented migrants. Refugee camps along the border face overcrowding and resource shortages, while trafficking networks exploit displaced populations. Collaborative efforts with international organizations are needed to balance immediate humanitarian needs with sustainable integration strategies.

Recommendations

Policy and Diplomatic Measures

Engage Constructively: Foster dialogue with Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) while engaging the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), and civil society groups.

Strengthen ASEAN's Role: Advocate for a Standing ASEAN Special Envoy to coordinate diplomatic and humanitarian responses.

Leverage Superpowers: Partner with China to utilize its influence on the SAC while actively engaging neighbouring countries and key external partners, particularly the U.S., to support Thailand's initiatives in fostering peace and stability in Myanmar.

Security and Border Management

Enhance Surveillance: Deploy drones, AI-driven surveillance, and biometric systems to monitor border crossings and deter trafficking.

Joint Operations: Partner with Myanmar's Border Guard Forces (BGFs) and EAOs to address cross-border crime.

Economic Resilience

Secure Trade Routes: Establish safe zones along key trade corridors like Mae Sot-Myawaddy-Yangon.

Support Migrant Workers: Simplify work permit processes and provide skills training for Myanmar migrants.

Humanitarian Response

Community-Based Aid: Partner with local organizations to deliver assistance directly to conflict-affected areas.

Integrate Refugees: Provide legal pathways for refugees to access employment and education, reducing dependency on camps.

Conclusion

A proposed three-year implementation plan includes the setting up of the "Road of Peace" initiative involving humanitarian corridors from Thailand to various areas of need in Myanmar. Positioning Thailand as a regional leader in peacebuilding and conflict resolution as efforts are made to bring peace to Myanmar. Developing long-term agreements for joint border management with Myanmar and neighbouring countries. And the transitioning of refugee camps into self-sustaining communities with access to employment and education.



General Maung Maung Aye

MYANMAR APPOINTS NEW DEFENSE MINISTER AS ARMY STRUGGLES

General Maung Maung Aye, a member of the State Administration Council (SAC) and Chief of General Staff for the Army, Navy, and Air Force, was appointed Union Minister of the Ministry of Defence, announced the junta-run Myawaddy television channel on the evening of 18 December.

The junta announced that General Maung Maung Aye has also been appointed to the joint position of Deputy Prime Minister.

The shift in the junta's leadership comes at a time when it has lost much of its territory. The year-long Operation 1027 resulted in the loss of much of northern Shan State and Most of Rakhine State. Most recently, the resistance seized the No. 5 Border Guard Police Battalion in Maungdaw, Rakhine State, took the surrender of junta troops from the Western Command in Ann Township.

Former Defence Minister General Tin Aung San has been reassigned to the Prime Minister's Office as Union Minister.

General Tin Aung San was appointed Minister of Defence in August 2023 and was in the position for just over a year.

This is the third time the junta has changed the Minister of Defence since the coup.

The newly appointed Minister of Defence, General Maung Maung Aye, is a graduate of the 25th intake of the Defence Services Academy and previously served as Chief of Armed Forces Training.

He became Chief of General Staff for the Army, Navy, and Air Force in February 2021, following the military coup.

Myanmar junta receives new planes from Airbus close partner AVIC

On 23 December, Justice for Myanmar released a statement indicating that the Myanmar military junta has commissioned eight new aircraft supplied by the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). AVIC is a close partner and investee of the European aerospace giant Airbus.

The statement reads as follows.

An examination of junta-controlled media from the anniversary of the Myanmar Air Force, held on 15



Fighter jets. Photo: Supplied

December 2024, shows one Hongdu K-8 light attack aircraft (tail number MAF/3941), up to six FTC-2000G light combat aircraft (which include tail numbers MAF/1407, MAF/1411, MAF/1412 and MAF/1413) and one Shaanxi Y-8 military transport plane (tail number MAF/5922).

These types of aircraft are regularly used by the military junta in its indiscriminate airstrikes on the civilian population. Between February 2021 and August 2024, the junta has killed at least 1749 civilians in thousands of airstrikes with total impunity.

The latest transfer of new AVIC aircraft shows that the company is continuing to aid and abet the junta's ongoing war crimes.

Despite growing public scrutiny and evidence of the serious human rights implications of its investment in AVIC, Airbus has publicly denied any wrongdoing.

An investigation by Justice For Myanmar and Info Birmanie has linked Airbus to AVIC, while it has delivered multiple aircraft to the Myanmar military, including since its 2021 coup attempt and despite European Council Regulation (EU) No 401/2013 concerning restrictive measures on Myanmar.

This has led to protests that demand Airbus use its leverage over AVIC to stop its continued supplies of military aircraft, arms and maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft to the Myanmar junta.

In a recent public statement, Airbus defended its relationship with AVIC, which it describes as “a Chinese state-owned group of civil aviation, aerospace and defence companies” and confirmed that it holds a 5% stake in AviChina Industry & Technology Company Limited (AviChina). This makes Airbus the biggest international shareholder of this key subsidiary of AVIC.

While Airbus insists its financial stake and ongoing business dealings with AVIC “are exclusively focused on civil aviation and services”, AVIC’s business activities are inseparable from its military applications, particularly given China’s policy of military-civil fusion which integrates civilian research and military industries.

In this context, we fail to see how Airbus can guarantee its business with AVIC is limited to civil aviation. We note that Airbus has failed to take this situation into account in its duty of vigilance plan.

As a shareholder in AviChina, Airbus is accountable



People fleeing the fighting in Rakhine State. Photo: Supplied

to international standards on business and human rights, including the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which require companies to conduct thorough human rights due diligence on their business relationships.

Airbus' stance contrasts sharply with the actions of other institutional investors, including the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund and prominent Dutch investors and pension funds that have all divested from AviChina over ethical concerns and the human rights risks posed by AVIC's transfer of military goods to Myanmar.

Airbus' defense of its partnership with AVIC raises serious questions about its commitment to mitigate the risk that its investments contribute to human rights harms.

Airbus' public denial of any ethical responsibility has only escalated calls for accountability, including protests in Myanmar and London, and an open letter to the CEO of Airbus, Guillaume Faury, from over 300 international and local civil society organisations including Justice For Myanmar and Info Birmanie, to end all investments in companies that enable the war crimes committed by the criminal Myanmar military junta.

The letter calls on Mr. Faury to take "responsibility to ensure that you do not enable atrocity crimes through financial and strategic links to AVIC and directly associated companies such as AviChina."

If Airbus were to comply with international standards of human rights, it must use its leverage over AVIC to stop the continued flow of arms, military aircraft and maintenance supplied to the Myanmar military by AVIC and AVIC subsidiaries.

Approximately 570,000 people left homeless as Rakhine conflict escalates

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports a worsening situation in Rakhine State, with nearly 570,000 internally displaced people (IDPs).

The ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine State has displaced an estimated 360,000 more people in recent months, raising the total number of IDPs to nearly 570,000.

This displacement is a result of the ongoing military conflict and clashes between the junta and the Arakan Army (AA), which has persisted since November 2023.

Of the 17 townships in Rakhine State, 16 have been affected by the conflict. People from neighbouring Paletwa Township in southern Chin State are also fleeing the conflict.

UNOCHA reports a worsening security situation in southern Rakhine State as clashes between the AA and the Myanmar military persist.

The report also highlights that 16 townships in Rakhine State are facing significant humanitarian challenges, including restrictions on access, hindering the delivery of essential services to the local population.

The conflict in Rakhine State has resulted in an influx of thousands of Rohingya refugees into the Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh. According to Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the situation for the Rohingya is expected to deteriorate further amid the ongoing armed conflict.

The town of Buthidaung, located along the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, has been under the control of the AA since May, while Maungdaw was seized in the first week of December after months of intense fighting.

The number of displaced people across Myanmar has risen by over 1.5 million compared to last year, driven by the ongoing conflict not only in Rakhine State but throughout the country.

According to UN figures, more than 3.5 million people have been displaced by the ongoing conflict in Myanmar since February 2021.

The UN has therefore reiterated its call for compliance with international humanitarian law, emphasizing the need to protect civilians, humanitarian workers, and aid supplies, while ensuring unrestricted humanitarian access to the region.



Aerial view of attack on the junta position.
Photo: AA

MYANMAR'S ARAKAN ARMY SAYS CAPTURED JUNTA WESTERN COMMAND

A Myanmar ethnic rebel group has captured a military regional command in Rakhine state, it said, in what would be a major blow to the junta.

The Arakan Army (AA) had “completely captured” the western regional command at Ann on Friday after weeks of fighting, the group said in a statement on its Telegram channel.

Ann would be the second regional military command to fall to ethnic rebels in five months, and a huge blow to the military.

Myanmar’s military has 14 regional commands across the country with many of them currently fighting established ethnic rebel groups or newer People’s Defence Forces that have sprung up to battle the military’s 2021 coup.

Fighting has rocked Rakhine State since the AA attacked security forces in November last year, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since the putsch.

AA fighters have seized swathes of territory in the state that is home to China and India-backed port projects and all but cut off state capital Sittwe.

The AA posted photos of a man whom it said was the Ann deputy regional commander, in the custody of its fighters.

AFP was unable to confirm that information and has contacted the AA’s spokesman for comment.

AFP was unable to reach people on the ground around Ann where internet and phone services are patchy.

In decades of on-off fighting since independence from Britain in 1948 the military had never lost a regional military command until last August, when the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) captured the northeastern command in Lashio in Shan State.

Myanmar’s borderlands are home to myriad ethnic armed groups who have battled the military since independence for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Last month the UN warned Rakhine State was heading towards famine, as ongoing clashes squeeze commerce and agricultural production.

“Rakhine’s economy has stopped functioning,” the report from the UN Development Programme said, projecting “famine conditions by mid-2025” if current levels of food insecurity were left unaddressed.

AFP



Rohingya refugees. Photo: AFP

'UNRAVELLING THE MAUNGDAW EXODUS' REPORT SHEDS LIGHT ON FACTORS DRIVING LARGE-SCALE ROHINGYA DISPLACEMENT

A new report by Kaladan Press Network (KPN) gives insight into the factors driving the recent large-scale displacement of Rohingya in Maungdaw township of northern Rakhine State.

"Unravelling the Maungdaw Exodus" sheds light on factors driving large-scale Rohingya displacement in Maungdaw, according to a statement by KPN on 18 December.

Based on testimony of recent refugee arrivals to Bangladesh, the report provides a step-by-step timeline and mapping of the advances of the Arakan Army (AA) into Maungdaw during 2024 and the resulting displacement of Rohingya villagers.

Refugees described the shifting patterns of Rohingya displacement in Maungdaw, with most villagers fleeing into the town until July, then a complete reversal of direction in August, when the AA forcibly evacuated everyone out of the town into areas under their control.

Those evacuated testified to extreme hardship due to insufficient provision of shelter and food, which, together with fear of forced recruitment and arrest by the AA, led them to flee to Bangladesh by boat across

the Naf River, a journey fraught with danger.

The report gives unique insight into the movements of the various Rohingya armed groups in Maungdaw, whose influence appears to be dwindling, despite AA's claims to the contrary.

Refugees also revealed that hundreds of Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) fighters had gathered at a port north of Maungdaw to leave by boat in the evening of August 5, and this was the likely reason for the AA's fierce drone and artillery attack that killed hundreds of Rohingya civilians in the vicinity.

It is hoped that the insights provided by the refugees in the report will lead to a better understanding of the factors contributing to the current crisis and help shape appropriate responses – the most urgent of which is to provide humanitarian aid as soon as possible for the Rohingya remaining in northern Rakhine State.

The report can be viewed on <https://kaladanpress.org/unravelling-the-...ment-in-maungdaw/>



Aerial view of a store house where WFP supplies were kept. Photo: AFP

WFP STATEMENT REGARDING WFP-BRANDED BAGS FOUND IN MYANMAR BORDER GUARD CAMP

The World Food Program released a statement on 18 December regarding media reports of WFP-market food bags discovered in buildings at the now-Arakan Army occupied Border Guard camp in Maungdaw.

The WFP statement continues as follows.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is aware of media reports indicating that WFP-marked food bags were allegedly found in a building previously used by border guard forces in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar.

WFP is currently unable to verify this information, primarily due to the lack of access to this region.

In June 2024, WFP's warehouse in Maungdaw in northern Rakhine was looted and burnt.

Any misappropriation of humanitarian assistance intended for the most vulnerable communities

depriving those most in need of lifesaving assistance is unacceptable.

WFP reiterates its call on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian law to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and assets.

The overall food security situation in Myanmar, already alarming, continues to deteriorate. Alongside ongoing conflicts, recent climatic shocks and the economic slowdown are further exacerbating hunger and malnutrition in Myanmar.

In 2024, 1.7 million people across the country received WFP food, nutrition, and resilience-building support.



MYANMAR'S KAREN FIGHTERS RECAPTURE MANERPLAW HQ AFTER ALMOST 30 YEARS

Myanmar Karen National Union (KNU) said on Tuesday it had recaptured its headquarters from the Myanmar military, almost 30 years after it was forced out.

The KNU has clashed repeatedly with the current junta following its latest coup in 2021 and has provided shelter and training to other opponents seeking to topple the military.

KNU fighters had seized Manerplaw on the Thai border following days of fighting, KNU leader Saw Thmain Tun told AFP.

Manerplaw "was a historical place for the Karen", said Saw Thmain Tun, with around 100 of its soldiers buried there.

Myanmar junta troops "still want to take it back and they used drones and tried to bomb our troops," he said.

"We need to rebuild the area to pay respect to all of them," he said.

"But, our troops took the base already," he said.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup, which sparked renewed fighting with rebel groups such as the KNU and birthed dozens of pro-democracy People's Defence Forces now battling the military across the country.

For years Manerplaw was the headquarters of the KNU's decades-long armed struggle for rights for the Karen minority and home to other dissident politicians opposing Myanmar's then-junta.

More than three million people have been displaced by the fighting according to the United Nations.

Following a split within the Christian-majority KNU, the junta and a breakaway Buddhist faction captured the base in 1995, sending thousands fleeing into Thailand.

Clashes regularly send thousands fleeing across Myanmar's 2,400-kilometre (1,490-mile) border with Thailand.

After the fall of Manerplaw, the junta renamed the area Kayin State and put the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organization, an allied armed group, in charge of it.

AFP



Female Wa soldiers in Shan State.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR AND THAILAND TO DISCUSS DISPUTED MILITIA POSTS ON BORDER

Representatives of the Thai government and Myanmar junta are due to discuss a series of militia posts along the two countries' common border that Thailand says are in its territory, Myanmar's junta spokesperson said.

The United Wa State Army, or UWSA, militia force controls autonomous regions in Shan state including one on the border with Thailand, which says nine of the group's outposts are in Thai territory and must be removed.

The confrontation has raised fears of violence between what is probably Myanmar's most powerful militia force, which is also accused of massive involvement in the drug trade, and the Thai army.

Myanmar junta spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told Myanmar state media on Monday that military representatives were due to meet the Thai government and the issue of the UWSA camps would be tackled.

"Mainly border issues and matters related to cross-border crime will be discussed. We will discuss cooperating in order to enact border stability and fight criminal violations," the junta spokesperson said.

He did not give a date for the talks.

Thai officials, at a meeting with UWSA representatives in the Thai city of Chiang Mai in November, gave the UWSA a deadline of Dec. 18 to withdraw from the posts, media reported.

But Wa officials dismissed the Thai demand on Dec. 7, and said the matter should be taken up in

government-level discussions, adding that the Thai army was "not their enemy."

The UWSA emerged from the break-up of the Communist Party of Burma in 1989, when its rank-and-file fighters, drawn largely from the Wa ethnic minority, mutinied against the party's aging leadership.

The UWSA struck a ceasefire with the Myanmar military in exchange for autonomy in zones on the borders of both China and Thailand.

Despite being what is largely seen as the best equipped militia force in Myanmar, it has not joined the anti-military insurgency that has swept the country since the generals ousted an elected government in a 2021 coup.

International anti-narcotics agencies say the UWSA has been heavily involved in the opium and heroin trade for decades and took up the manufacture of methamphetamines on a massive scale in more recent years.

The UWSA, which is known to have close contacts with China, denies involvement in drugs.

The nine disputed border outposts that the UWSA says are in its "171 military region" are in the Shan state townships of Tachileik, Mongsat, Mongton, Hway Aw and Pong Par Kyi, along the northern Thai border.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



KIA fighters on the trail. Photo: KIA

KIA AND ALLIED FORCES CAPTURE MILITIA CAMP IN KACHIN STATE

On 15 December, around 6 pm, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied forces seized a militia camp in Kawnglanghpu Township, Putao District, Kachin State, according to Colonel Naw Bu, the KIA's Press and Information Officer.

The captured camp reportedly belonged to the Lahu Se militia, which operates under the junta. While Colonel Naw Bu confirmed the camp's capture, details about weapons and ammunition taken during the operation remain unclear.

A source from the KIA revealed on social media that the camp housed approximately 100 militia members. The attack began early in the morning of 15 December, culminating in the camp's capture by that evening.

Kawnglanghpu Township, located in the upper May Kha River region, is primarily home to Kachin, Rawang, and Lisu ethnic groups. The name "Kawnglanghpu" translates to "valley" in the Rawang language.

Colonel Naw Bu also noted that clashes continue in Bhamo, where the situation remains volatile. He could not confirm further developments related to the captured camp.

The ongoing fighting in Bhamo has caused significant displacement among locals, with reports of civilian casualties. Social organizations in the region are appealing for urgent assistance to aid those affected by the conflict.



A Naga boy in a village in the border area.
Photo: AFP

FOOD SHORTAGE LEADS TO RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN MYANMAR'S NAGA AREA

In Naga Self-Administered Zone in Myanmar's Sagaing Region, a concerning situation has emerged where food scarcity is driving religious conversion.

According to local sources, approximately 400 Christian villagers from Sappalaw Ah Nount Gone Village in Lahe Township recently pledged allegiance to Buddhism in front of local Buddhist monks who were providing food aid. The villagers signed a document on 7 December, vowing to leave the village if they ever convert to another faith.

A former Parliamentary member who won the 2020 Naga self-administered zone election revealed to Mizzima that while some villagers wish to go back to their original religion, they face threats of expulsion if they do so.

"At the moment, the powerful are exerting influence on the non-powerful. Christians are non-powerful, whereas Buddhists are powerful. The village heads and chiefs are using this imbalance to coerce the locals into cooperation with the (Buddhist) monks," the representative explained.

The situation has been exacerbated by severe livelihood challenges in Sappalaw Ah Nount Gone Village, where crop yields have been poor for the past three years. In response, the village's abbot, Bhaddanta Pandita, Saddhama Jotikadhaja, initiated a donation appeal. The local Infantry Battalion No. 272 responded by donating over 10 million kyat worth of food supplies, including rice, beans, cooking oil, salt, and dried tea leaves.

The pledge-signing event, where villagers had to promise not to convert from Buddhism to other religions, emerged as a result of the abbot redistributing the donated supplies to impoverished villagers.

However, Naga News reported on 18 December, citing a Christian pastor, that the promises were signed under duress. The report indicated that households faced various pressures, including mandatory Sunday work requirements, leading them to sign the pledge when unable to withstand the threats.

The religious dynamics in the region have a complex history. Before 1980, local Nat worship was prevalent in the Naga self-administered zone. Christian missionaries arrived in 1985, leading to widespread conversion.

However, after 1994, the then-junta named State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) mandated the construction of Buddhist monasteries in Naga villages regardless of the residents' faith, offering incentives for Buddhist conversion.

The aforementioned former Amyohta Hluttaw (Upper House) representative told Mizzima that while some religious conversions were voluntary, military intervention in certain villages led to the destruction of churches, persecution of Christians, and arrest of Christian leaders.

In areas struggling with food insecurity and unemployment, locals were reportedly offered food assistance alongside pressure to convert.

Despite these conversion efforts, many locals who converted to Buddhism remained just nominal Buddhist adherents due to language and literacy barriers, with only urban government workers fully embracing Buddhist practices.

Currently, Christians comprise 80-90 percent of the Naga population in the self-administered townships of Layshi, Lahe, and Nanyun, with Buddhist and local Nat worshippers forming a minority.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TO RELEASE FOUR THAI FISHERMEN ON 4 JANUARY, SAYS THAI DEFENSE MINISTER

Thai Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said the Myanmar junta will on January 4 release four Thai fishermen who were arrested on a fishing boat off Thailand's Ranong province late last month.

According to Mr. Phumtham, Thai foreign affairs officials spoke with the Myanmar junta about the issue and learned that the Thai fisherman could be freed from Kawthoung town, Tanintharyi Region in the southernmost part of the country on 4 January, Myanmar's Independence Day.

In response to a question concerning Thai authorities' defense of the detained fishermen, the Thai minister stated that he gave their release first priority because the issue was delicate.

According to Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa, the Thai fishermen were accused of entering Myanmar waters and the Myanmar junta had to take normal legal action.

A total of 31 people, including Thai nationals and Myanmar fishermen who were captured by Myanmar junta's navy on 30 November at Andaman Sea, were sentenced to prison at a court in Kawthong town, according to Thai news reports.

According to the news reports, the boat owner received a six-year sentence, which included five years

in prison for illegal fishing in Myanmar waters, one year for illegal entry, and a 200,000 kyat fine.

According to Thai news reports, three further Thai nationals were each given a four-year prison sentence and a 30,000 kyat fine.

Moreover, 27 Myanmar fishermen were also given a four-year prison sentence and fined, with the Thai fishermen.

The Thai fishermen are expected to be released after being deported from Myanmar in January 2025, according to Thai news reports.

During a meeting with fishermen's organizations in Ranong on 13 December, the Thai Ministry of Labour promised to make sure the Myanmar fishermen received their wages while they were being held in custody.

The Myanmar junta's navy opened fire and detained Thai fishing vessels, accusing them of fishing illegally, and one individual lost his life after jumping into the water to escape.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has expressed her concern about the action of firing on the Thai fishing boats.

ARRESTS SURGE IN YANGON FOLLOWING MYANMAR'S MILITARY DRAFT MANDATE FOR YOUNG MEN



Photo: AFP

Arrests of young men in Yangon have reportedly increased after news emerged that all males aged 18 to 35 from Yangon Region would be required to serve in the military. Local sources confirm that authorities are ramping up detentions in response to draft avoidance.

According to reports, the junta issued instructions in early December mandating compulsory military service, prohibiting the long-practiced option of paying for substitutes. The directive also includes penalties for draft evasion, with authorities threatening to conduct raids in wards, streets, and homes if there is significant resistance.

The junta has intensified inspections following this announcement, including checks on overnight guest lists submitted to local authorities and increased surveillance at intersections in Yangon. Residents report that young men are being detained under various pretexts.

"They are mainly targeting young men. Arrests happen on the streets, during guest list inspections at homes, or even for activities like watching news on Facebook. I've personally seen these arrests escalate," said a resident of Ward 10 in Thakayta Township.

A local from Shwe Pauk Kan Township shared a similar account, saying, "I've heard about arrests in

different areas. Last night in South Dagon Township, around 9 pm, my sister's friend saw young men being forced to kneel."

The Rangoon Scout Network (RSN), which monitors the junta's activities in Yangon, reported 59 cases of young men being detained in the region between 1 and 15 December, with seven cases still to be confirmed.

"There's been a significant increase in arrests to meet military recruitment quotas. Arrests occur during guest list checks, street patrols, or targeted raids based on individual names. They're also detaining individuals with drug issues and underground activists. It's getting harder for the council to fill its recruitment batch, especially as rumours spread about stricter draft measures starting next month," an RSN official said.

In response to the crackdown, many residents in Yangon are reducing nighttime activities.

"By 8 pm, the streets are empty. It feels like midnight. Young people, in particular, are avoiding going out at night," said a resident from North Okkalapa Township.

Additionally, some young men have reportedly fled to border areas to avoid being conscripted, with others seeking opportunities to leave the country altogether, according to Yangon locals.

KNDF SENTENCES THREE OVER TRAGIC DROWNING INCIDENT THAT CLAIMED 18 LIVES IN KARENNI STATE

The Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) announced that three individuals, including a training supervisor, have been sentenced to prison following the deaths of 18 combat medic trainees who were swept away by sudden flood waters during a training exercise.

The incident occurred on the night of 11 September, when a total of 102 male and female trainees were participating in a Frontline Combat Medic Training Exercise. Intense mountain creek waters, exacerbated by Cyclone Yagi, swept 18 trainees to their deaths.

In the wake of the tragedy, the KNDF convened a central military tribunal to investigate and adjudicate the matter. According to the KNDF statement, the head of training and the Physical Training (PT) instructor were sentenced to one year and three months of hard labour and imprisonment under Sections 17 and 27 of the KNDF Military Act. Additionally, a training assistant received a sentence of three months of hard labour and imprisonment under Section 27.

The tribunal's decision was based on the findings of an investigation team, along with testimonies from the accused and witnesses.

KNDF's 1 October report on the incident revealed that the training supervisor made the decision to conduct the "Happy Mission" exercise on 11 September, despite the dangerous weather conditions brought on by Cyclone Yagi. The head of training had access to weather information via the internet and was aware of the cyclone's impact at the time.

Furthermore, two instructors had crossed the creek earlier that afternoon and were aware of the hazardous conditions. The report also indicated that the mission was conducted without proper support equipment, emergency medical care, or rescue personnel. Adding to the negligence, the training supervisor and the two instructors had consumed alcohol before the exercise. All three admitted responsibility for the incident.

Mizzima reached out to a KNDF official for comment on the tribunal's decision, but no response was received at the time of reporting.



Photo: TNLA

OVER 60 MYANMAR ELEPHANTS TRANSFERRED TO TNLA, 70 RESERVED FOR NEW DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) transferred over 60 elephants to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in the second week of December, while retaining approximately 70 elephants to hand over to a future People's Democratic Government, according to Ni Ni Kyaw, General Secretary of the PLA.

"Having already handed over more than 60 elephants to the TNLA, we are safeguarding the remaining 70 elephants. These elephants will be placed in areas where they can serve the country's needs once the new government is established," Ni Ni Kyaw said.

The move is part of an agreement aimed at distributing the responsibility for the welfare of elephants and their trainers, while also strengthening ties between the PLA and TNLA.

"Elephants are accompanied by their trainers, the trainer's family, and their dependents. In total, the 138 elephants are connected to over 300 individuals who require support. Managing food and shelter for

all of them has been a significant challenge for us alone, which is why the TNLA has taken on some responsibility," Ni Ni Kyaw said.

The PLA's political department under Battalion 222 continues to provide health and welfare support to the remaining elephants and their mahouts.

The PLA announced on 3 September that 11 elephant groups, including logging elephants under the Ministry of Forestry, fled to forests in PLA-controlled areas following conflicts in Thabeikkyin and Singu Townships in Mandalay Region. These groups, comprising 138 elephants, sought refuge in PLA-controlled territories.

The elephants, regarded as national treasures, are being preserved under the care of PLA Battalion 222 and will be officially transferred to relevant departments under the anticipated new People's Democratic Government.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM MUST BE DEFENDED IN MYANMAR'S TIME OF CRISIS

SALAI ZA UK LING



Chin State. Photo: AFP

As the world prepares to celebrate Christmas, tens of thousands of Christians in Chin State, Myanmar, face a dark and devastating reality. Instead of gathering in the warmth and safety of their churches, they will be forced to assemble in makeshift shelters, constantly in fear of airstrikes and military brutality. Nearly 100 churches have been obliterated in ruthless arson, artillery, and air attacks by Myanmar's military regime. This is not collateral damage - it is a targeted and deliberate assault on Myanmar's Christian minority, part of a long-standing policy of religious discrimination aimed at breaking their spirit and extinguishing their will to resist.

Since the military coup of 2021, in Chin State alone, 17 religious leaders, including seven pastors, have been killed, with four more disappeared, their fate unknown. For the Chins, a predominantly Christian ethnic group, this is nothing less than a coordinated campaign to erase their faith, their culture, and their identity. More than a quarter of a million Chins have been forced to flee their homes, now displaced within their own homeland. With their churches reduced to ashes, they gather in fear under the open sky or in hastily erected

shelters, knowing that even in prayer, they are not safe from the relentless bombardment.

In a heartbreaking tragedy, four internally displaced persons (IDPs), including a couple in their sixties, were killed in a car accident on Saturday, December 21. They were on their way to reunite with family members for a Christmas celebration in an IDP camp in the village of Salen, a brief respite from the terror that has engulfed their lives. The families, displaced alongside more than 10,000 residents of Thantlang, had fled after their town was attacked repeatedly and completely destroyed by the regime in 2021. Their journey was one of hope, a brief attempt to reclaim a sense of normalcy amid the horror, only to end in devastating loss.

In a recent, senseless act of brutality, four family members were killed, and ten civilians were seriously injured in a midnight airstrike on a village with no military presence or combatants. This village, like so many others, has become a killing field for Myanmar's military - an indiscriminate theatre of violence against unarmed civilians whose only crime is their faith.

These atrocities do not just concern Myanmar's Christian population; they are an assault on religious freedom itself. Under international human rights law, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is fundamental. The deliberate destruction of churches, the killing of religious leaders, and the forced displacement of entire communities for their faith are gross violations of these principles. Myanmar's military junta is flagrantly violating the basic human right to religious freedom, which the international community has a duty to protect.

While these atrocities unfold, our brothers and sisters in Myanmar, of all faiths, are not just facing the loss of their homes, churches, and loved ones - they are struggling for their very survival. In neighbouring India, the state of Mizoram, which shares deep ethnic and religious ties with the Chin people, has opened its doors to nearly 100,000 refugees fleeing this reign of terror. Yet, even here, they are barely scraping by, with inadequate resources and little international support.

Global Religious Freedom Response Needed Now

What of the global community that professes to uphold religious freedom and human rights? The response has been shamefully slow. As lives are lost daily, we cannot afford to remain indifferent. This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Christ and the hope He brings, we must also remember that hope is being crushed under the heel of military oppression in Myanmar. This is a moment to defend religious freedom in Myanmar with conviction, not just through words, but through tangible actions.

This is a call to action, not just for prayers, but for concrete steps. Religious communities around the world - Christian or otherwise - must rise in defense of their persecuted brothers and sisters. We must demand that our governments and leaders intervene, that they act swiftly and decisively to stop the slaughter. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, alongside the UN Human Rights Council, must prioritize the situation in Myanmar. We must ensure that the plight of Burma's religious minorities is not met with silence or apathy, but with a global outcry that forces the world to take notice.

The Cross-Border Challenge: Navigating Unpredictable Policies and Infrastructure Breakdown

Beyond the horrors unfolding inside Chin State, those attempting to provide humanitarian assistance along the India-Burma border face increasingly unpredictable challenges. While the border was once more accessible, shifting conditions on the ground - particularly the growing control of resistance forces over territories - have led to sudden changes in Indian policy, creating uncertainty for cross-border operations. This unpredictability has stifled the flow of aid, with new restrictions imposed due to security concerns and complex political dynamics.

At the same time, the already dire situation is compounded by the lack of basic communication and transportation infrastructure on the Burmese side. The military junta has enforced widespread internet shutdowns and telecommunications blackouts across much of Chin State, making it nearly impossible to coordinate aid efforts or even assess the needs of displaced communities in real time. Roads and transport networks have been severely damaged or blocked, and the isolation of many areas has worsened, making the region even more challenging to navigate than other Myanmar border regions, where humanitarian operations benefit from better connectivity and infrastructure.

These conditions have created one of the most difficult operating environments for humanitarian actors, requiring innovative and flexible strategies to reach those in need, despite the near-total breakdown of communication and transportation networks in parts of Chin State.

A Call for Swift International Support and Community-Based Protection

These compounded difficulties necessitate urgent and flexible intervention from the international community, particularly from the United States, European, and Australian governments. The current aid delivery mechanisms, constrained by diplomatic protocols, bureaucratic hurdles, and geographical isolation, must be rethought to better align with the complex realities on the ground. More flexible cross-border arrangements are essential, and international

actors must work closely with trusted local partners who have a proven track record of operating along the India-Burma border.

A critical component of this strategy involves engaging in nuanced and respectful dialogue with India. Given India's sensitivities toward international presence on its soil, it is vital to work collaboratively with Indian authorities to explore ways to channel aid from the global community in ways that respect India's sovereignty while ensuring that aid reaches those in need along its borders with Myanmar. This cooperation could include logistical support, cross-border access, and streamlined bureaucratic procedures to expedite the flow of humanitarian assistance to those displaced by the conflict.

Moreover, as the conflict in Myanmar intensifies, with the junta's use of airstrikes and other forms of military aggression, international partners must provide the financial resources and technology necessary to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms. This includes equipping local communities with tools to defend themselves, as well as enhancing efforts to document and investigate crimes committed by the military. Financial support must be directed toward expanding human rights documentation that meets international legal standards, ensuring that this evidence can be used in future accountability mechanisms and transitional justice efforts. Given the operational challenges along the India-Myanmar border, close cooperation with India in facilitating this work is crucial to protecting those most at risk.

Supporting Human Rights Defenders

As these challenges mount, the international community must also recognize the critical need for sustained support for human rights defenders. Organizations like the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) are leading the fight for justice and accountability in Burma. CHRO's expertise in documenting human rights abuses and leading justice initiatives is unparalleled, and with additional support, it can expand its work to share knowledge and resources with other human rights groups across the country.

Conclusion: Act Now

The time to act is now—before more religious sites are desecrated, more lives are taken, and more hope is lost. This Christmas, let our faith move us beyond the sanctuary of our own churches and into the fight for justice, peace, and survival for those who have been targeted for their belief, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu. In the face of this brutal oppression, we cannot remain passive. Religious freedom is a universal human right, and it must be defended with all our strength. Lives depend on it.

Salai Za Uk Ling, a rights activist for the past nearly three decades, is executive director of the [Chin Human Rights Organization](#) and contributes to international media advocating human rights, religious freedom and democracy in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA EXPANDS AIR FLEET AS RESISTANCE GROUPS CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The Myanmar junta is bolstering its fleet of aircraft, including fighter jets, as resistance groups urge the international community to halt airstrikes and cut off jet fuel supplies.

On 15 December, the junta celebrated the 77th anniversary of its Air Force at the Flying Training Base in Meiktila, raising fears of intensified airstrikes in conflict-affected regions.

“We are mainly afraid of airstrikes. These days, we are constantly on the run. Even children cry when they hear junta aircraft while at school. The more airstrikes occur, the more dangerous it becomes for our people,” said a teacher involved in interim education in Pauk Township, Magway Region.

Reports indicate that the regime has added several new aircraft to its fleet, including Mi-17 multi-role helicopters, FTC-2000G fighter jets, K-8W fighter jets, Y-8F 200WB transport aircraft, and reconnaissance aircraft MAT-1A and MAT-1B. However, the exact number of additions remains unverified, according to a CDM Air Force official.

CDM Air Force Sergeant Zeya said, “Before the coup, Mi-17 helicopters were not prioritized, as Mi-35s were preferred. However, with aircraft maintenance needs and losses during battles, the focus shifted to Mi-17s. The air force has become a key pillar for the junta, so they are reinforcing it as critical support.”

Despite these reinforcements, the military has faced significant air losses over the last four years. According to military sources, the junta’s Air Force lost the following aircraft, one each of F-7, A-5, K-8W, FTC-2000G, and MiG-29 fighter jets, one Beechcraft 1900 transport aircraft, one Y-8, one Mi-35 attack helicopter, two Mi-17 multi-purpose helicopters, one PT-6 transport aircraft, one H120, one Grob-120 TP trainer aircraft, and two Eurocopter AS365 multi-purpose helicopters.

The expansion of the junta’s air power continues to pose a significant threat to civilians, particularly in resistance-controlled areas, as calls for international intervention grow louder.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL FIVE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING THREE STUDENTS, IN SAGAING REGION

Airstrikes by Myanmar's military junta on 16 December killed five civilians, including three students, and left around 10 others seriously injured in Kyauk Hle Gar and Nat Gyi villages, Kani Township, Yinmarpin District, Sagaing Region, according to local residents.

The attacks were carried out by a Y-12 aircraft at approximately 8 pm when it dropped 15 bombs on the two villages. One of the bombs exploded on a civilian residence, causing significant casualties and damage.

"Kyauk Hle Gar village was hit four times, with bombs directly striking residential areas. The impact was devastating, three students and two civilians were killed, and their bodies were severely mutilated," said a member of the Kani Township Board of Education.

The deceased students were identified as Maung Zin Ko Chit (11 years old, Grade 6), Ma Zin Myat Noe (14 years old, Grade 7), Ma Shwe Zin Win (19 years old, Grade 12).

The two other victims were confirmed as Ma Nwe Nwe Win and Ko Kyaw Naing Lin, local sources reported.

"A bomb fell directly on a house in the eastern part of the village, killing three members of one family," a resident told Mizzima. The injured victims are currently receiving medical treatment, according to locals.

A representative of the Kani Township People's Defense Forces (PDF) said, "The military carried out airstrikes based on unverified claims that armed resistance forces were transporting weapons in the area. There were no PDF members in these villages. This attack deliberately targeted civilians."

Kyauk Hle Gar village, located on the border of Kani and Minkin townships, bore the brunt of the assault.

Junta forces also launched an airstrike near a jetty in Nat Gyi village, though no casualties or property damage were reported.

The attacks have forced residents of both villages to flee their homes, fearing further airstrikes.

This latest assault follows a similar airstrike on 3 December, when the military dropped 500-pound bombs on Nat Gyi village, damaging homes and displacing residents.



Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

NUCC CONDEMNS CONTINUED RUSSIAN SUPPORT FOR MIN AUNG HLAING IN SPITE OF ICC CHARGES AGAINST HIM

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) released a statement on 14 December condemning the Russian Federation for publicly supporting Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his junta despite the charges levied against him by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The statement is as follows.

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) strongly condemns the Russian Federation for publicly supporting the potential International Criminal Min Aung Hlaing and his junta.

Sending of Russian personnel under the guise of "monitoring the illegal election" and then sending along armed personnel, to "protect these people is a pre-disposed plan to attack possible non-violent civil unrest and seen as a big planned invasion of Myanmar.

The brutal junta, isolated by the international community for its atrocities against all the peoples of Myanmar, in looking for support has found a friend whose nature is also based on crude arms exercising totalitarian rule.

The Myanmar Spring Revolution towards a Federal Democratic system has prevailed for nearly four years, and for the fourth successive year, the United Nations General Assembly has rejected the junta's lobby by

acknowledging the voice of the people and agreeing to accept our representative.

Recently the International Criminal Court announced Min Aung Hlaing as the main person responsible who orchestrated genocide against the Rohingyas.

It is very strange to see Russia stand with this perpetrator of genocide, crimes against humanity and war Crimes in almost all significant international forums. Min Aung Hlaing and his junta have lost a great deal of manpower and territories with time and so there are no benefits at all to Russia by standing with SAC.

Russia's support for the Min Aung Hlaing junta is not only insulting the desire of the people of Myanmar but also destabilizing the ASEAN region. Introducing nuclear technology to the junta is also stirring up militarization within the ASEAN and BIMSTEC regions.

The NUCC strongly condemns Russia's support for SAC's planned sham elections and puts on record that all those ill-gained treaties and agreements are to be nullified in the future Federal Democratic Myanmar.



UN EXPERT CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO BUILD ON ICC ARREST WARRANT FOR MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER

UN Human Rights expert, Tom Andrews called for quick action to build upon the momentum created for justice and human rights in Myanmar by the request for an arrest warrant for junta leader Min Aung Hlaing by the International Criminal Court's Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan.

The text of the UN press release continues below.

"The Prosecutor's decision to request an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing in relation to his crimes against the Rohingya was a long-awaited and critical step forward," said Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar.

"There is not a moment to lose to move the wheels of justice forward. I am encouraged by the Prosecutor's commitment to requesting further warrants and that this will be done as soon as possible. It is critical that governments lend their full support to enforcing them," he said.

Andrews said this was an important moment for victims of the 2017 attacks against the Rohingya, who have waited for justice for far too long.

"Min Aung Hlaing is not only accused of atrocity crimes against the Rohingya, he is also responsible for ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity throughout Myanmar. He must be stopped and held accountable," he said.

On 27 November, ICC Prosecutor Khan, speaking in Bangladesh, announced that his office had filed an application for an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing in relation to the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya. He stated that the alleged crimes, which took place between August and December 2017, were committed in part in the territory of Bangladesh, which is State Party to the ICC. Such crimes therefore fall within the Court's jurisdiction. Myanmar itself is not a State Party to the ICC, and the Security Council has not referred the situation in Myanmar to the Court.

"Unfortunately, because of the jurisdictional limitations on the Court the Prosecutor's case does not address the full breadth of atrocities committed against the Rohingya, the ongoing international crimes committed by the junta since the February 2021 military coup, nor the historic crimes perpetrated by the military against pro-democracy activists and ethnic groups," Andrews said.

He reiterated his call for governments to support universal jurisdiction cases concerning Myanmar in competent national courts and for States Parties to the ICC to consider referring the situation in Myanmar to the Prosecutor under Article 14 of the Rome Statute, further to the declaration made by the National Unity Government accepting the Court's jurisdiction.

"All States that continue to engage with the junta should be re-evaluating their relationship with the Senior General in light of the Prosecutor's application for an arrest warrant," the Special Rapporteur said.

"Min Aung Hlaing is on notice that he and his brutal military junta can't hide from justice," Andrews said. "But the international community must act swiftly. The Prosecutor's recent decision is an important step forward, but much more needs to be done to ensure robust accountability for the staggering catalogue of crimes committed in Myanmar."

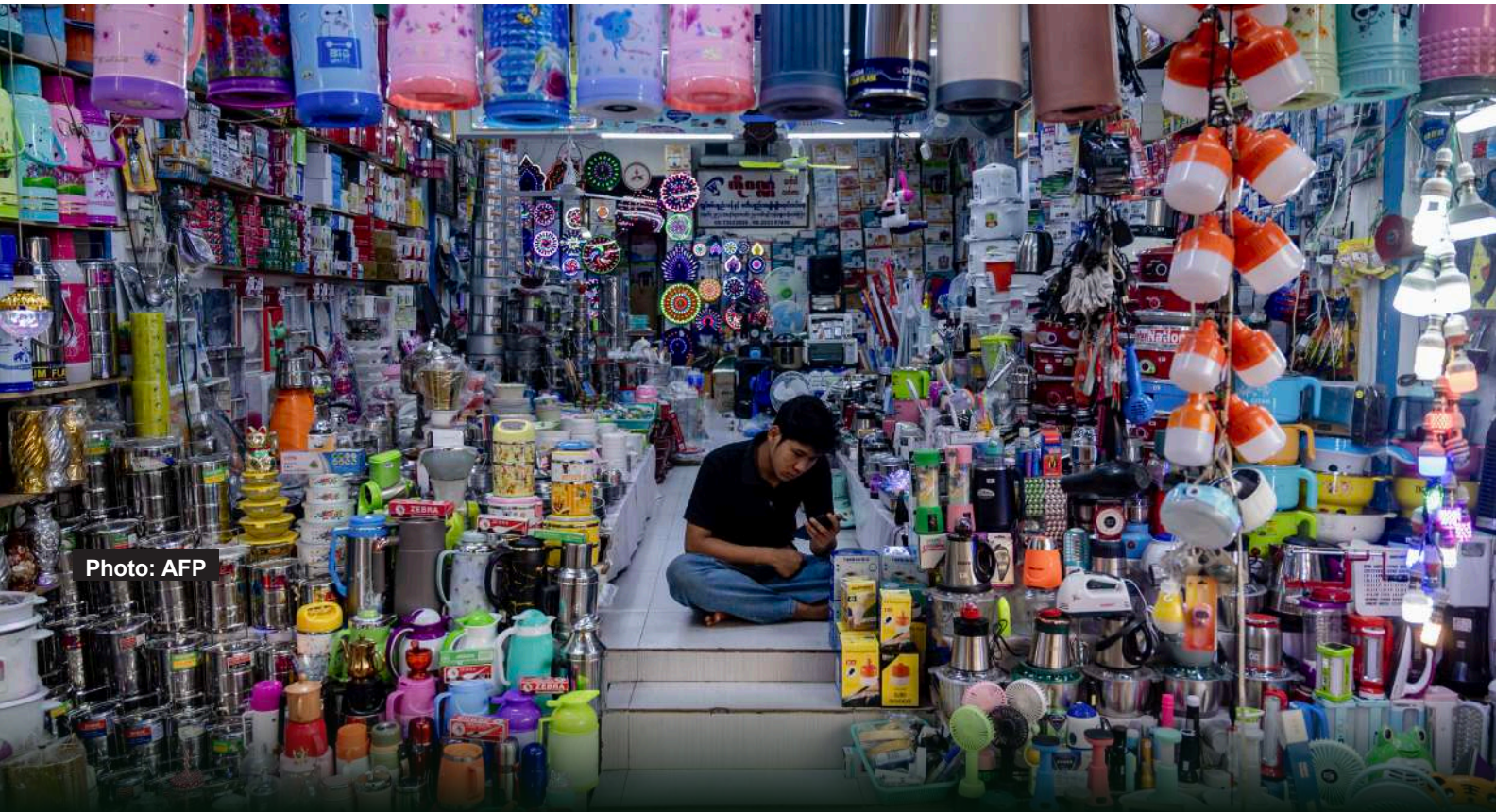


Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA PROJECTS ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE AT 3.8%

The junta's Union Minister of Planning and Finance, Win Shein, said at the 33rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) that the economic growth rate for the 2024-2025 financial year was targeted at 3.8 per cent. The event was held on 14 December at the National Theatre in Yangon.

"Despite challenges in certain sectors due to Typhoon Yagi, regional and territorial conditions, the GDP growth rate for the first six months (from April to September) has reached 2.4 per cent," he said.

He acknowledged the crucial role played by UMFCCI in fostering collaboration between the government and the private sector saying that the close collaboration between government and private sector would create a better economic environment through its contributions to policy-related issues and would be able to overcome all coming challenges.

The Union Minister said that the country was working for adequate supplies of basic foodstuffs and consumer goods in the market. He emphasised price stability of these goods. He also stated that the junta

is striving for economic development with stability in foreign exchange rates and efficient use of foreign reserves.

However, the World Bank warned in its Myanmar Economic Report December 2024, "Myanmar's GDP is expected to contract by 1 percent in the fiscal year ending March 2025, a downward revision from the previous projection of modest growth due to natural disasters, ongoing conflict and widespread shortages of basic commodities."

Issued on 11 December, the World Bank's report noted that agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors are projected to contract, with production constrained by ongoing shortages of raw materials, inadequate electricity supply, and weakness in domestic demand.

"The recent natural disasters and ongoing conflict have severely impacted Myanmar's economy, with households bearing the brunt of rising prices and labour market weakness," said Melinda Good, World Bank Country Director for Thailand and Myanmar.



Photo: Mizzima

FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN MYANMAR HALVES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEAR

The amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Myanmar has declined by more than half compared to the first eight months of the previous fiscal year, according to data from the Department of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

While FDI inflows to Myanmar reached US\$587.242 million by the end of November in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, FDI inflows fell to US\$235.709 million in the same period this fiscal year, representing a decline of nearly 60%.

Investments from Singapore and China, including increased investments, totalled over US\$553 million last year. However, by the end of November this year, investments amounted to only around US\$140 million.

As of now, Singapore, China, Thailand, and Hong Kong remain the top investors, with their total FDI exceeding US\$69 billion.

In terms of FDI inflows into Special Economic Zones (SEZs), only three FDI projects worth over \$36 million were recorded in the first eight months of this fiscal year.

The junta leader has informed local businesses about the decline in foreign investment and has urged them to invest in the agriculture and livestock sectors.

Myanmar's political instability, exchange rate volatility, economic sanctions, and power shortages remain major challenges for international companies.

Following the military coup, new international investments have come to a halt, while dozens of major international companies in sectors such as oil and gas, telecommunications, electricity, and mining have withdrawn from Myanmar.

Charles Petrie

RAGE AGAINST THE DYING LIGHT

INSIGHT MYANMAR

"The defeat of the SAC is just the first step in a very complicated journey", says Charles Petrie, a diplomat and humanitarian with over 20 years of experience in the United Nations. His career has focused on conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa and the Middle East, and he was the UN representative in Myanmar from 2003 to 2007 and later returned to facilitate peace dialogues in 2012. In this podcast, he speaks about his experience in the United Nations, his journey to the Karenni States, his opinions on the current situation, and the future of Myanmar's spring revolution.

Charles begins by sharing some of his extensive background, which included dealing with rebels and humanitarian crises. Perhaps most impactful for him was his experience during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Witnessing the horror there left a deep and lasting impression on him, as he saw unrestrained violence driven by political motives and ethnic hatred. This pushed him to understand the roots of such atrocities, which in turn shaped his career, motivating him to work in other conflict zones, including Sudan and Somalia.

DANGER OF OVERSIMPLIFICATION

Charles argues that policymakers and the media often oversimplify conflicts in their analysis, leading to misinterpretations of the true nature of the social tensions that give rise to them. "It's a lazy approach," he says, noting that they often understand violence as being a direct outcome of those tensions, as opposed to being a result of political actions that exploit them. He emphasizes that this oversimplification—especially

the tendency to label groups as "good guys" and "bad guys"—is due to a lack of intellectual rigor and a preference for easy narratives. Charles also criticizes the media's predilection for adhering to conventional Western wisdom rather than digging more deeply into issues and understanding the dynamics of conflicts on their own terms. He used to believe the press is consistently independent and objective, and that there will always be justice in the end... but he has learned that is not the case. "[An independent press and justice] are not a given," he exclaims. "If you want them, you have to fight for them, and you have to stand up for them as an individual."

Charles was working with the UN in Myanmar during the 2007 Saffron Revolution. When the military violently suppressed the protests, he ignored UN protocol and gave a speech on the Myanmar crisis, which was very clearly outside of the topic of global warming that the UN had assigned him, and he urged officials to listen to the protesting monks. This drew mixed reactions within the UN, and though Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon supported him, his speech ultimately caused his expulsion from the country. Charles was replaced by another UN representative who later built positive relations with the military, sidelining those who supported Charles' stance.

CONCERN OVER UN LEADERS

Charles critiques UN leaders who avoid challenging oppressive regimes. He notes a division within the organization: one faction sees it as an administrative body, while the other views it as a promoter of its

Charter principles. “The higher you go in the system, the more you develop this sort of realpolitik approach to states and to international world order,” he observes. The UN’s hierarchical structure, influenced by powerful member states - particularly the Permanent Five (P5) - discourages risk-taking, creating what he calls a “golden cage” for staff, with its substantial perks and job security.

Yet despite these criticisms, Charles defends the UN in the end, firmly reminding us that “the United Nations is not pointless.” Formed in response to two world wars, the organization aimed to prevent national interests from dominating global agendas. However, he warns that the organization’s relevance is at risk if powerful nations continue to prioritize self-interest over multilateralism.

Charles next addresses the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. He explains that initially, it was crafted as a tool to help protect civilian populations from atrocities; however, the post-Cold War focus on intervention rather than prevention led to mistrust from non-Western countries, who saw R2P merely as a tool of Western dominance. He describes how R2P was allowed to be inaccurately portrayed, becoming sort of a “fairy tale” for Myanmar’s youth, who thought it guaranteed intervention. “For me, the sadness [of seeing] these young CDMers raising the R2P banners was the fact that there were many Western politicians and government officials who were also invoking R2P, [all the while knowing] that there would be no intervention.”

ABSENT DURING CRITICAL PERIOD

Charles believes the UN failed Myanmar during the 2021 coup, noting that engagement was absent during that critical period. “The UN country team in Myanmar was basically orphaned,” he says. He criticizes the UN’s lack of decisive action in crisis situations like Myanmar, which he attributes to systemic issues, based on his experience reviewing the UN’s failures in Sri Lanka for Ban Ki-moon. There were also similar issues during the 2017 Rohingya crisis. He stresses that the UN must prioritize civilian protection, and assign a senior official to manage crises. The organization’s systemic failures in this regard, Charles believes, are undermining the UN’s ability to respond effectively to the crisis in Myanmar. Nonetheless, he says simply, “We have to save the UN.” He believes that collective action is needed to realign the UN with its own, stated, moral obligations. In spite of the UN’s challenges and failings, for Charles, the UN offers hope in a chaotic world.

Charles also expresses disappointment over the UN’s perceived double standards, such as its different responses to the recent crises in Ukraine and Gaza; while the UN passed a resolution demanding that Russia withdraw from Ukrainian territory, it did not do the same about Israel’s incursion into Gaza. He criticizes the Secretary General for not invoking Article 99 in December, 2023, to address the deteriorating situation in Gaza. Article 99 allows the UN Secretary General to bring a matter up him-/herself before the Security Council. Instead, the UN’s focus shifted solely and reactively to the humanitarian crisis there, likely



Charles Petrie on a visit to an ethnic region of Myanmar.

due to pressure from powerful states. "It was a huge missed opportunity," he reflects, noting that the UN's moral leadership was again undermined.

Inspired by the actions of one Father Vieco during his time in Rwanda, Charles believes in holding to ideals even during dark times. He uses "fairy tale" in a different sense than he did previously regarding R2P to illustrate his underlying meaning. "I think, to have a 'fairy tale institution' like the UN is essential to help guide [the younger generation]," he says, emphasizing that the UN serves as a moral compass, especially for Gen Z activists in Myanmar.

BORDER VISIT

Charles recounts his journey to the Myanmar-Thai border in 2023, where he initially went to help refugee friends in need of asylum. While there, he noticed two significant things: the lack of humanitarian aid reaching non-SAC-controlled areas, and the emergence of new, local governance. Intrigued by the governance shifts—particularly in Karenni under the Karenni States Consultative Council—he co-authored an article advocating for the international community to invest in these local systems. Despite positive responses from various governments that he talked with about supporting local governance in Karenni, he sensed the discussions were superficial and would quickly lose momentum once he left. So, he decided to investigate further, himself, by spending more time in Karenni.

Most striking to him were Generation Z activists, whose energy and commitment are reshaping Myanmar's socio-political landscape. He believes that this new generation is deeply interconnected not only within the country, but also with global movements. He quotes the words of young doctors he met there: "You need to understand that this is no longer a civil war. This is a revolution; they told me. And you really got that sense which was really interesting to see."

NOTION OF REVOLUTION

Yet there was more that he found there. "One of the interesting phenomenon that I saw in Karenni is the notion of a revolution, [that] means that everybody's involved in the revolution in different aspect To illustrate this, he describes Spring Hope, a group of young doctors from diverse ethnic backgrounds, mostly trained in Yangon and Mandalay, who have fled to Karenni. Despite repeated bombings forcing them deeper into the jungle, they continue setting up hospitals to treat the wounded. He saw that in Karenni, the revolutionary spirit engages everyone, with both

locals and the diaspora funding support for fighters and displaced persons. He describes how, due to the risk of SAC forces discovering hospital locations through infiltrators or social media, the doctors there had to run two separate hospitals: one for fighters and prisoners, and another for civilians, ensuring safety for both patients and staff.

Charles explains that SAC deliberately also targets churches, makeshift clinics, markets, and schools to intimidate and subdue the population. He says that makeshift clinics avoid displaying the Red Cross sign as a means of identification, so as not to draw the military's attention. "It's a blatant strategy of the SAC to target in order to break the spirit of the people. And that's not working," he says simply. Not only do communities remain unified in resistance, SAC's tactics have caused many Burmese donors both within the country and in the diaspora to target some of their funds to supporting fighters rather than solely aiding displaced civilians. This unity, Charles argues, marks the distinction between a civil war and a revolution. "A civil war is an insurgency. You can have people who stay out of the civil war," he says, "But when you're in a revolution, it's everybody resisting this aggression." At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of creating a stable and inclusive governance structure, and warns that without it, the people's present solidarity may fade when SAC is defeated, and unresolved underlying tensions rise to the surface. "Setting up of this local governance structure is very important, because it needs to be in place to be able to manage these underlying tensions that are going to emerge afterwards."

SHIFT IN GOVERNANCE

Charles describes a transformative shift in governance in Myanmar, particularly in Karenni. "What you have is a mosaic of much stronger, autonomous components [with] a bottom-up form of federalism, in contrast to the more top-down model that characterizes the NUG and many Western nations." He adds that a new participatory model of local governance is emerging through structures like the Interim Executive Council (IEC) and KSCC. Local groups now provide essential services, as the central authority has lost its influence since the 2021 coup. Here Charles contrasts two competing visions for the future: one, favored by some Western donors and the NLD, aims to reestablish a central government; the other embraces autonomous, regional governance. He believes the latter is more realistic, as communities like Karenni have little incentive to expect a responsive

central government. Instead, they are creating inclusive structures with open roles for various political and ethnic groups. He stresses that the NUG should think seriously about a decentralized structure that will work after the revolution, rather than trying to reestablish central power. "This is the moment for the NUG to try and investigate what could potentially be their role in a new Myanmar."

Charles believes that the Karenni model is drawing interest from other regions and ethnic groups in the country, who see the benefits of a participatory, decentralized approach. As groups gain control of new territories, they recognize the need for civilian buy-in to establish legitimacy, especially in transitioning from a military-dominated administration. "There are some really interesting discussions between groups and the [Karenni] IEC is very open to try and share their experiences with the other groups," he says. He believes that the IEC's model offers a promising path toward more inclusive governance, and addresses potential, inter-ethnic tensions. He argues for a humble, non-imposing approach to peacebuilding and governance in Myanmar, one that respects local autonomy, which is taking precedence not only over centralized control, but attempts at imposing external models.

FOREIGN MEDIATORS

Drawing from past experiences, Charles describes how foreign mediators during the 2012-2015 ceasefire tried to do just that, undermining local efforts and disrupting the process by sending key local leaders to other countries for training in furthering the mediators' agendas. He also warns that similar mistakes could be repeated if foreign groups condescendingly treat local structures just as "donor darlings," rather than supporting their organic development. "These mediation groups [want to] claim ownership [in the process], because it's their way of getting funding," he says. "My greatest fear is that we are going to be the instruments of screwing this up."

Charles shifts to the complex dynamics around prisoners-of-war held by local armed groups in Myanmar. He notes that the capture and humane treatment of SAC prisoners by groups like the KNDF and the IEC demonstrate a moral high ground and commitment to standards, even as public enmity towards the SAC remains strong. But at the same time, he expresses concern over the growing violence and widespread availability of weapons across Myanmar. "The management of tensions is going to be a lot more difficult, because of this violence that's been

introduced," he says. The normalization of violence could pose challenges for maintaining moral authority in the revolutionary movement. With increased calls for the assassination of government administrators, it illustrates a potential loss of restraint. He mentions that a "small monster" of violence has been unleashed, which could complicate post-conflict governance and reconciliation.

FIGHTING ONGOING

Regarding the current situation in Karenni States, Charles is unsure whether they can be the first liberated state in Myanmar. Despite the KNDF's partial control of the territory, there have been temporary withdrawals by resistance groups from some areas, such as Loikaw, due to SAC reinforcements and airstrikes. The fighting is ongoing.

Of course, life in Karenni States is not easy. However, despite the hardships, civilians in Karenni are adapting. "Life continues, but in a completely different way," he notes. "I think [characterizing the situation in Karenni as unsustainable] is a slight misrepresentation of what's going on, because it implies that the people are just submissive and passive." Goods continue to flow into Karenni State from Thailand and even some through SAC-controlled areas, though transport requires negotiation and additional payment. Charles notes that although daily life has been disrupted and trauma is widespread, people are resilient and actively finding ways to rebuild. However, he warns, "The moment when the economy is no longer able to sustain and support those in need of subsistence, then it is going to become catastrophic." For now, a functioning, yet fragile economy exists, but those who remain displaced and destitute in remote jungles are heavily dependent on external aid. If the conflict drags on, the number of people in dire need could grow significantly, intensifying the crisis.

In conclusion, Charles delivers a powerful message of resilience and responsibility. He urges listeners to "never give up." He emphasizes that true resistance comes from individual commitment—not from relying solely on organizations, and that each person holds responsibility and can make a difference, even if the impact isn't immediately visible.

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/4c3b38c3-b5bf-4123-92e4-a0097697d712>



Photo: AFP

CHINESE MILITARY OFFICERS RESIST PROBES, RESULTING IN FATALITIES

SUN LEE

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is intensifying its military purge following the third plenary session in July, leading to significant disruptions within the ranks. Internal reports reveal two incidents of resistance to investigations, resulting in multiple fatalities, including a suicide. Yuan Hong Bing, an Australia-based legal scholar with CCP connections, disclosed that in late October, the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the Military Discipline Inspection Commission issued a document titled "Notice on New Developments and Cadre Investigations." This document detailed two cases.

In late August 2024, within the Central Theater Command, a logistics officer named Lou, holding the rank of Colonel, shot and killed two investigators from the Military Disciplinary Commission during

an investigation and then took his own life with his service weapon. In early September, within the Southern Theater Command, a naval officer overseeing equipment, holding the rank of Senior Colonel, killed four investigators with his service weapon during an investigation. He was subsequently shot dead by nearby guards.

The CCP circulated the notice internally, instructing investigators to remain vigilant and wear bulletproof vests during high-risk investigations. These vests are now being centrally procured and distributed by the CCDI and the Military Commission. Yuan noted that the notice caused a significant stir in Beijing's political circles. Previously, officials cornered by investigations would often take their own lives by jumping off buildings. Now, it seems they are escalating to armed resistance and direct confrontation with investigators.

Yuan believes that CCP officials harbour deep resentment toward Xi Jinping, with some taking extreme measures out of rebellion. Instead of reflecting on their own corruption, these officials retaliate against investigators. Their mindset is, "Why should I be investigated? It's only because I lack the right connections with senior leaders that I'm being targeted. Every official has skeletons in their closet, and those investigating me might be even dirtier than I am." This sense of injustice fuels their defiance.

This wave of resistance is spreading among CCP officials in both civilian and military sectors, particularly following large-scale purges in the military. Since last year, the CCP has subjected numerous military leaders to investigations, including two former defence ministers, the leadership of the Rocket Force, the Strategic Support Force, and over 100 senior officials in the military-industrial sector. The leadership of the Military Equipment Department has also been thoroughly investigated.

On November 28th, the Director of the Central Military Commission's Political Work Department, Miao Hua, came under investigation. Current Rocket Force Commander Wang Hobin and Defence Minister Dong Jun have reportedly also been implicated in the Miao Hua case. Recently, information in Beijing political circles suggested that Lu Yuan, the son of former Chinese President Lu Shaoqi and a retired general, submitted a letter to the CCP Central Committee expressing grave concerns.

Yuan Hong Bing revealed some details of the letter, allegedly leaked by conscientious individuals within the CCP. In the letter, Lu Yuan reportedly warned of a political crisis threatening the CCP's rule, citing widespread discontent among officials and instability within the military. He wrote that many officers now keep loaded firearms with them at all times, prepared to fight to the death with investigators if arrested. They would rather die in confrontation than endure the humiliation of imprisonment.

On December 10, Yu Jianhua, the head of the General Administration of Customs and a former special envoy of Xi Jinping, reportedly took his own life using a gun in his office after being summoned for questioning by the CCDI. However, official statements issued the following day claimed that Yu died of sudden illness, leaving the true cause of his death unclear.

Yuan also highlighted a growing trend of corruption involving cryptocurrency. Higher-ranking officials often use cryptocurrency wallets to facilitate bribes and transfer wealth abroad, circumventing traditional anti-corruption measures. Officials below the county level or military brigade rank generally engage in more traditional forms of bribery. However, senior officials have increasingly adopted sophisticated methods, including the use of cryptocurrency wallets. For instance, the senior colonel from the Southern Theater Command reportedly used a cryptocurrency wallet to transfer funds abroad through an intermediary, emboldening him to resist investigation.

A 2022 article published in "Theory and Reform," a journal run by the CCP Sichuan Provincial Party School, acknowledged the difficulty of addressing new forms of corruption. It described how corrupt officials exploit financial innovations such as shadow banking, cryptocurrencies, and decentralized finance protocols to conduct illicit transactions and launder money.

In conclusion, the CCP's ongoing military purge has led to significant disruptions and resistance within the ranks. The use of cryptocurrency for corruption and the increasing willingness of officials to resort to violence highlight deep-seated issues within the CCP. As the purge continues, the CCP faces the challenge of maintaining control and stability within its military and political structures.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers China and geopolitical issues.



Russian soldiers examine fragments of one of the drones. Photo: AFP

DRONE ATTACK HITS RUSSIAN CITY 1,000KM FROM UKRAINE FRONTIER

Kyiv on Saturday staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from the frontier, as Moscow's troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine.

The drones damaged buildings in Kazan, capital of the Tartarstan republic, with a population of more than 1.3 million, but there were no victims, local officials said.

Kazan City hall said some fires had started and were being tackled by the fire brigade.

The city's airport was temporarily closed, the Russian civilian aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said.

Some residents were evacuated, but authorities did not give figures. Authorities said that all major public events in Tartarstan had been cancelled as a precaution.

Videos on Russian social media networks showed drones hitting high rise buildings setting off fireballs.

AFP could not immediately verify the authenticity of the images.

Ukraine, which has staged regular attacks on targets inside Russia since the start of full scale military offensive in February 22, did not immediately comment.

"Today Kazan suffered a massive drone attack,"

Rustam Minnikhanov, the Tartarstan republic leader, said in a post on Telegram.

"While before industrial enterprises were attacked, now the enemy attacks civilians in the morning," he added.

Minnikhanov's press service said at least eight drones had been detected.

Russia's defence ministry accused Ukraine of targeting "civilian infrastructure" in Kazan. It said six drones had been neutralised or destroyed but did not say how many had been involved.

The ministry said the Russian army had captured a new village near the key city of Kurakhove in eastern Ukraine where Russian forces have made major advances in recent months.

Russian troops had "liberated" the village of Kostiantynopolske, just eight kilometers (five miles) from Kurakhove, an industrial town that is a looming Russian target, a statement said.

Russia on Friday staged strikes on the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, that left one dead and 13 wounded, according to the city's authorities.

Another five people were killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian frontier region of Kursk, the local governor said.

Russia's security service said meanwhile that a man had been sentenced to 19 years in jail for sending information to US intelligence services about the Russian military,

The unidentified man, who was born in 1993, was found guilty of "high treason" and other charges, the FSB agency said.

The inquiry "confirmed that he had established a confidential cooperation relationship with representatives of the US intelligence services," the agency said.

The man was accused of sending information about the identity and other personal details on Russian soldiers. He was arrested in January 2023.

A regional court at Orenburg in the Urals ordered the jail term and sent the man to a "strict regime" penal colony, the FSB said.

It released images of the man surrounded by agents and in court.

Russian courts have ordered multiple heavy jail terms for treason, terrorism and sabotage since the start of the military offensive.

AFP



THE LAST STAND

“There is the personal interest that I had in Myanmar, being someone that’s specialized in civil uprisings, rebellions, protest movements, and the general struggle for democracy against autocracy. Myanmar was right up that alley!” exclaims the journalist Thomas van Linge, talking on the Insight Myanmar Podcast. “I was following the protests in Myanmar from day one, from the moment the coup took place in February of 2021. I was in awe of the bravery of the Burmese protesters; with their persistence as they continued to take to the streets and resist. I was also fascinated by how they successfully transformed that civil street resistance into an armed rebellion! So, already in 2022, I took it upon myself to be the first one to map out the conflict in Myanmar, to identify the different resistance territories, and to distinguish where the fault lines are—to get a broader picture of the situation.”

Thomas van Linge joined the podcast earlier this year to discuss his journey into Karenni state. The devastation caused by the military junta has been relentless—Karenni villages have been partially or completely destroyed, and entire communities displaced. Even once-bustling refugee camps now lie abandoned, with people struggling to survive without essential resources or protection from diseases like malaria. Thomas feels that the international community has largely failed them, with ineffective humanitarian aid efforts. However, he commends smaller NGOs, as well as the Free Burma Rangers, who have acted as a real lifeline for those in need. These unsung heroes venture into the most dangerous areas to bring relief, undeterred by the obstacles that keep larger organizations at bay.

Thomas explains how challenging it is to map the conflict accurately in Myanmar due to the elusive and ever-changing frontlines. He developed an innovative approach, marking areas by the “permanent presence” of forces rather than attempting to fix static boundaries. Initially, Thomas underestimated the resistance’s hold in Karenni. However, on a visit there, he witnessed firsthand that the junta’s grip was even weaker than anticipated, confined mostly to isolated, hilltop bases. This discovery only deepened his respect for the resilience of the Karenni people, and the effectiveness of the local resistance.

Building on the concept of territorial control, Thomas delves into the dynamics of the conflict, painting a vivid picture of resistance fighters who operate with remarkable unity and determination. The cooperative nature of the various anti-junta groups has enabled them to counter the regime’s forces effectively even without a centralized command structure. Despite being typically outgunned, they have strength in numbers, benefit from a sense of solidarity, and have greater freedom of movement. Meanwhile, junta forces are trapped in their isolated, hilltop bases and reliant on helicopters for supplies. Thomas expects it won’t be long until these bases are overrun entirely, compounding the junta’s challenges to control the country.

Thomas highlights the contrasting strategies employed by the junta and the resistance. Many past podcast guests have pointed out the military’s inability to innovate beyond their usual response of brute force, and indeed, the junta’s repetitive, rigid tactics have only served to alienate the local Karenni population. In contrast, Thomas notes how the resistance has demonstrated patience, adaptability, and foresight, which have garnered local support. They also know when to bide their time and when to strike—a disciplined approach that has allowed them to hold their ground and steadily expand their influence.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Please read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/12/5/episode-293-the-land-stand>

MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF CALLS FOR MILITARY UNITY AMID MAJOR TERRITORIAL LOSSES



Photo: AFP

Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing made desperate calls for military unity during a female officer cadet graduation ceremony in Yangon on December 22, just days after suffering significant territorial losses in Rakhine State and Chin State.

Speaking at the Officer Training School in Hmawbi Township, the junta chief emphasized that “no one can shatter or disrupt” the military as long as unity prevails within its ranks. His remarks come in the wake of the fall of the junta’s Western Command headquarters in Ann Town in Rakhine State and the loss of strategic positions in Mindat and Kanpetlet in Chin State.

The speech coincided with a wave of military defections, including over 150 soldiers and police officers who surrendered in Chin State in mid December.

The junta chief’s focus on ceremonial events amid critical military setbacks has drawn criticism even from military supporters, who argue for greater attention to frontline needs. His recent leadership reshuffle, particularly the promotion of Lt-Gen Kyaw Swar Lin, who lacks significant combat experience, to the military’s third-highest position, has also reportedly sparked controversy within military circles.



MYANMAR ACTRESS UNDER FIRE FOR CONTROVERSIAL HAO SU BALM ADVERTISEMENT

Social media personality and actress Phyu Phyu Htwe has drawn widespread criticism for her recent advertisement promoting Hao Su Balm, with viewers accusing her of mocking detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi through the commercial's content.

The controversy centers around the actress's promotional video for the medicinal balm, with social media users interpreting the advertisement's presentation and the product's name as appearing to make light of the former state counsellor.

Facebook users have responded with strong condemnation, with many calling for boycotts of products endorsed by the actress. Critics have also questioned her broader activities and public engagements, with some examining the sources of funding for her philanthropic work.

One Facebook user expressed disgust at the advertisement, while others called for accountability and encouraged boycotts of all products associated with the actress.

As of publication, Phyu Phyu Htwe has not publicly addressed the controversy surrounding the advertisement.

NUG AND NUCC REJECT JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTION AS "FRAUDULENT"

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) have issued a joint statement on December 24, 2024, denouncing the military regime's planned election as illegitimate and fraudulent.

The statement emphasizes that the 2020 election results remain legally valid, and the military junta has no authority to conduct new elections after illegally seizing power.

It highlights that the junta only controls about 21% of the country's territory, according to BBC reports, while resistance forces control over 50% and hold about 90 townships.

The opposition bodies point to ongoing challenges, including widespread displacement, forced military recruitment of young people aged 18-35, and the regime's inability to conduct a proper census in October 2024, managing to cover only 80 townships.

The statement warns that any election under current circumstances would involve voter coercion and manipulation, without proper international or domestic election monitoring.

It reaffirms that Myanmar's anti-junta movement, locally known as Spring Revolution, will not end with a mock election and emphasizes that only a solution chosen by the Myanmar people themselves, aligned with federal democratic principles, will be accepted.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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