CYCLONE MOCHA HUMANITARIAN AID UPDATE

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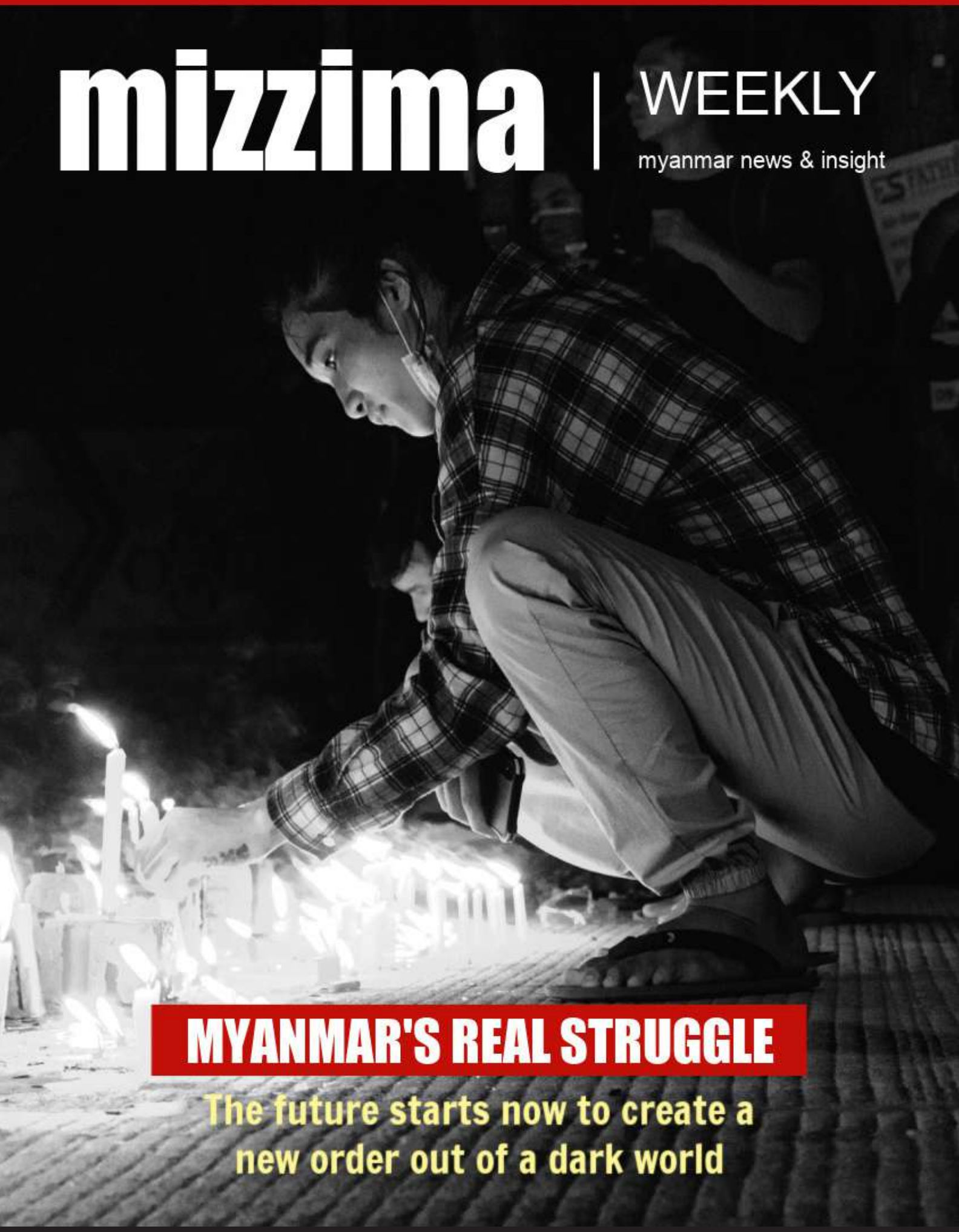

MYANMAR'S REAL STRUGGLE

The future starts now to create a new order out of a dark world

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THAI PM HOPEFUL'S SENTIMENT FOR MYANMAR PEOPLE SHOULD BE CAUTIOUSLY WELCOMED

It is edifying that Pita Limjaroenrat, the leader of Thailand's Move Forward Party that gained the most seats in the recent Thai election, has spoken out in support of a humanitarian response to the crisis caused by Cyclone Mocha that has caused so much devastation in Myanmar.

On 21 May, he tweeted, "I call on the Thai caretaker government and the international community to expedite the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those affected by the Cyclone, with priorities given to those in dire need first. This is in line with my new foreign policy agenda as PM-Elect."

"My policies on Myanmar will engage with all stakeholders, focusing on human security considerations, including humanitarian and economic aspects. These will be implemented with a view to achieving mutual peace and prosperity for Thailand, Myanmar, ASEAN and beyond," he wrote.

Similarly, in his first post-election interview with Zain Asher of CNN on 17 May, he emphasized the need for achieving the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar crisis and proposed establishing a humanitarian corridor between Thailand and Myanmar to address the ongoing crisis.

"So in terms of Myanmar, we want to push ahead to make sure that the five point consensus is really achieved. And you know, with the proximity of Thailand and Myanmar, whether you call it an asset or a liability, without Thailand's presence, the five point consensus is not gonna be achieved. And I think, what we have to start off is to establish a humanitarian corridor between Thailand and Myanmar. It has been a protocol in the country for a long time. We have the legal basis to do it, given the past experience, we have gone through. So hopefully we will start off with the humanitarian journey, especially with BURMA Act that has the Congress in America. I think we can start that and work with the international community to make sure we have the right amount of pressure and incentive for the people of Myanmar to resolve their own conflicts."

On the other hand, Myanmar's Vice Senior General Soe Win expressed concerns about the Thailand's Move Forward Party being pro-West and potentially assisting Myanmar's anti-regime resistance groups, urging vigilance and border monitoring, as reported by The Irrawaddy.

For the Myanmar people - facing both the crisis caused by the Myanmar military and the natural disaster of Cyclone Mocha that barreled through the western part of the country – Pita's voice is a message of encouragement that echoes the ASEAN call for help at this time.

Pita - potentially the new leader of Thailand - has demonstrated a concern for a neighbour and indicated the leader has a regional - even a global - vision, which would appear to bode well for Thailand and for neighbourly relations with Myanmar.

But let's not jump the gun. The Move Forward Party might appear to lead the stakes in the formation of the new political landscape in Thailand - clearly a slap in the face to Thai military rule that has dogged the country since the military grabbed power.

But in assessing Pita's statement of support for Myanmar people, we need to be wary of not assuming too much.

The success of the Move Forward Party, which captured 152 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives, compared to Pheu Thai, the second in line - under Thaksin Shinawatra's daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra - would appear to indicate they are on the home run and it is only a matter of time before Pita is appointed prime minister. However, the political landscape in Thailand, including the influential Senate composed of 250 members appointed by the Royal Thai Military, suggests potential obstacles ahead. Pita could get blocked. And Pheu Thai? What is exiled father Thaksin saying to his daughter at this crucial juncture?

So, victory is still not set in stone.

Then there is the other aspect, which may sound cynical. Pita is a Harvard-educated politician and businessman who has been around the block and understands diplomacy. His statement of support for Myanmar people in the wake of Cyclone Mocha might be something that is expected. Either he or advisors may have said - let's offer support to the Myanmar people, our sentiment is genuine but as a strategic move it will demonstrate leadership, and it will echo an anti-military stance for Thailand and for the region.

Let's face it, ASEAN countries are in a mess when it comes to democracy and leadership at the moment.

And they have failed miserably in trying to solve the Myanmar crisis under their Five Point Consensus.

So Pita sticking his head up to make the statement helps him and his party appear to be a new breed - not just for Thailand but also for the region.

There is no doubt Pita meant well with his statement of support for the battered people of Myanmar.

But the real test will be both in whether he takes up leadership of Thailand and whether he then continues this supportive regional role going forward.

Let's wait and see.

EDITORIAL

mizzima
WEEKLY

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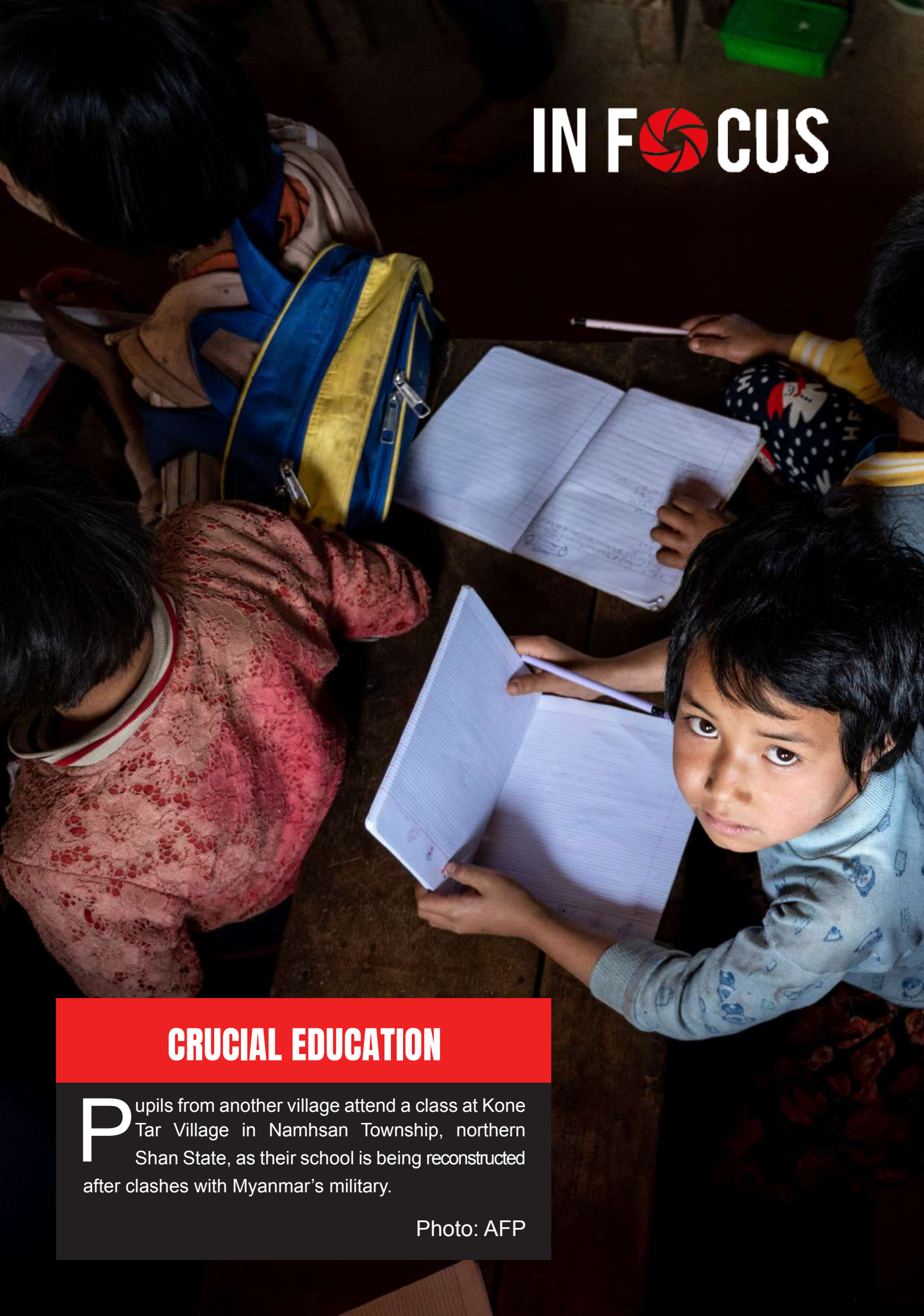

IN FOCUS

CRUCIAL EDUCATION

Pupils from another village attend a class at Kone Tar Village in Namhsan Township, northern Shan State, as their school is being reconstructed after clashes with Myanmar's military.

Photo: AFP

FIVE KARENNI FIGHTERS KILLED IN EASTERN DEMOSO TOWNSHIP FIGHTING

Five Karenni resistance fighters including a Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) deputy platoon commander have been killed whilst fighting Myanmar junta soldiers in eastern Demoso Township, Karenni State.

The fighting near to Taneelarle Village in eastern Demoso Township between the junta army and the Karenni defence forces of the Karenni Army (KA) and the KNDF started on 14 May. It was still ongoing at the time of reporting, 22 May.

According to the KNDF four of its fighters were killed. One died on 15 May, the deputy platoon commander, Maung Francisco (aka Jarja) was killed on 18 May and two other fighters were killed on 19 May.

"The fighting is fierce on both sides. Beginning on 14 May, things started to get quite intense. Almost every day, the Military Council has carried out an airstrike. Day and night, heavy weapons are also fired. These rounds are specifically fired into the battle area from the military bases of Loikaw and Demoso", said a KNDF representative.

According to the KA spokesperson, Khu Nyae Reh, one KA fighter has been killed in the fighting.

He added: "The Military Council side has also suffered a significant number of casualties. We are still verifying the number of Junta soldiers who have died, and once we have that information, we will make an announcement."

There have been reports of property damage and injuries to civilians in villages near the fighting, as a result of junta airstrikes.

According to reports, in eastern Demoso Township, nine homes in Dawlyarkhu Village and one school in Phelyar Village were damaged by junta airstrikes on 18 May.

At the time of reporting, 22 May, junta troops were still stationed in villages in eastern Demoso Township.

TWO POLICE OFFICERS KILLED IN SAGAING CHECKPOINT DRONE ATTACK

Resistance forces killed two police officers and injured another three in a drone attack on a military checkpoint on the Mandalay to Monywa road in Sagaing Region.

At about 4:00 p.m. on 21 May five bombs were dropped from two drones onto the Kantalu Checkpoint, located three miles from Sagaing Township and not far from the Light Infantry Division 33 base, according to the Unicorn Guerilla Force, which said that two police officers died and three more were injured in the attack.

It also said that it had carried out the attack because junta police officers and soldiers at the checkpoint had been demanding money from residents and travelers and arresting defence force members.

"According to our military informants, two policemen were killed and three others were injured. At that checkpoint, revolutionary soldiers were frequently arrested and military equipment for resistance forces was frequently seized", said a Unicorn Guerilla press officer.

Following the attack, at 5:00 p.m. the same day, junta soldiers arrived and started randomly firing in the area of the checkpoint.

According to locals, security was ramped up at the checkpoint following the attack and junta soldiers are carrying out patrols in the area.

A Sagaing resident said: "In the aftermath of the assault, the checkpoint is being watched. Since 21 May, army soldiers have been conducting midnight guest registration list checks in the villages near the Kantalu toll gate."

The defence forces that carried out the attack were the Unicorn Guerilla Force, Phoenix SGG, Black Cat Force, and the Fight For Federal Force.

YANGON WARD ADMINISTRATOR SHOT DEAD

Three Myanmar junta-affiliated people, including the Yangon City Ward 88 administrator were shot dead in Yangon City's Dagon Seikkan Township, at about 10:30 a.m. on 22 May.

The three men were riding motorcycles down Ngwe Zin Yaw Street in Ward 88 when unidentified gunmen driving motorised trishaws fired about 20 shots at them.

Two men accompanying the Ward 88 Administrator, Zaw Lwin, died on the spot. Zaw Lwin was hit and taken to hospital, where he died later the same day.

A Ward 88 resident said: "The ward administrator was an awful person. The two [other] people who got shot were not staff at the ward administration office, they were the ward administrator's supporters. The ward administrator was also shot."

In response to the killing, junta soldiers searched wards 88, 90 and 91 in South Dagon Township and Dagon Seikkan Township where they seized motorised trishaws. They also inspected the night guest registration

lists for Dagon Seikkan Township.

According to locals some young men in the area were arrested, but Mizzima has been unable to confirm this.

Zaw Lwin was the third ward 88 administrator to have been shot dead since the February 2021 coup.

According to the Myanmar junta, as of February 2023, local defence forces have killed 5,447 people, of which 744 were working in the junta administration. These include administrators and 100 household administrators.

DEPUTY STAFF OFFICER KILLED IN LAUNGLON IMMIGRATION OFFICE

Resistance fighters raided Launglon Immigration Office in Tanintharyi Regions Dawei District and killed the Deputy Staff Officer, at midday on 23 May.

Ten gunmen turned up at the immigration office in Launglon and six of them entered the office and carried out the gun attack.

The Deputy Staff Officer of the Immigration Office, Min Thein Latt, was shot and died on the spot.

He was hit by a bullet in his left ear and died on the spot and another person was injured according to reports on junta-supporting Telegram channels.

No civilians were injured in the attack, according to local witnesses.

As of 24 May, the time of reporting, no defence force group had claimed responsibility for the attack.

The dead man, Min Thein Latt, aged 44, previously served in Mon State and is said to have relocated to Launglon Township only six months ago.

The junta arrested four local people after the attack, according to local sources.

"Four locals were detained by the Military Council. This morning [24 May 24], the Military Junta soldiers have been patrolling in three trucks", said a Launglon resident.

The detained were a middle-aged couple who were arrested in their home in Launglon Township's Ward A and a young man and a young woman who live behind the police station.

Over 70 Military Junta soldiers are currently stationed on the mountain of Innwa Pagoda Mountain in Launglon Township's Theapon Village.

MYANMAR'S REAL STRUGGLE

The future starts now to create a new order out of a dark world

Min Min Thar

Praying for a freer future. Photo: Zinko Hein

Myanmar is engulfed in war. Each day the People's Defense Forces (PDF) of the National Unity Government (NUG) and the armies of the Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO) attack the Myanmar military. They destroy military columns, attack Sit-Tat posts, capture weapons, and kill dozens of Sit-Tat soldiers each week.

This fight must continue until the Myanmar military is willing to come to the table and negotiate an end to its own role in the political and economic life of the country. But the real struggle today in Myanmar is not against the military. The Myanmar military as an institution has already defeated itself. The real struggle is for what comes after. This is not a military struggle. It is a struggle of ideas, norms, beliefs, and, above all, values. It is a struggle to determine what kind of country Myanmar will be without military domination.

THE TATMADAW IS DONE

The institution once respectfully known as the Tatmadaw is done. The military has ruled Myanmar for most of the last 75 years. It was a hated, but still somehow a legitimate national institution. Those days are over. The military irreversibly discredited self with the coup of February 2021. Its horrifying brutality over the last two years has only cemented public hatred.

As a practical matter, no one, not even the military itself, argues that it is in control of the country. It is fighting for survival. It is no longer a national institution, but an armed group at war with its own people. In an effort to crush resistance, it bombs, burns, loots, and kills its way through villages, like medieval bandits with an air force. The military itself admits it has control over only a portion of Myanmar's townships. It has political credibility nowhere. There are people who understandably act out of fear. But there are very few who genuinely back a return to military rule. A future Myanmar may have a national military, but not this one.

The question therefore is, after the military what next? Since 1948, the Sit-Tat tried to make itself Myanmar's defining institution. Its model was absolute monarchy, not nation-building. It sought to integrate the country and its diverse people, control of the population, and impose of its version of Bamar culture by force. Like monarchs, the Sit-Tat equated the country with themselves. They styled themselves "mother and father" to the people, without whom there would be

Protesting against the Myanmar junta. Photo: AFP

Long way from peace. Photo: AFP

no Myanmar. Paranoid and inward looking, like most monarchs, they isolated the country internationally and invented foreign threats where none existed.

CONTROL & VIOLENCE

The Sit-Tat understands power only as control and violence. It forced itself into almost all aspects of political, economic, and civic life. It tried to dictate where people could live, who had economic opportunity, the role of religion, neighborhood activity, who could say what, even who could legally marry whom. The education system the military imposed created fierce competition and obedience to authority. It was designed to crush the skills and instincts necessary to organize against it. They expected everyone to know their place. Army officers appropriated livestock, land, people for forced labour at will. Their wives took what they wanted from shops. Their offspring raced cars in Yangon's streets. Government officials and army officers could slap 'disobedient' farmers. Civil servants in local offices had to provide gifts for visiting ministers. Successive juntas rewarded loyalists with land and import licenses. This was feudalism disguised as bureaucracy.

In fact, the would-be kings in green succeeded primarily in creating the world's longest running civil wars. These in turn became an excuse for everything else. They squandered the country's human and natural resources. Millions of Myanmar's citizens live in exile, unable to make a living at home. Able to destroy but not create, the military had no vision beyond "non- disintegration of the union" and perpetuation of sovereignty. In other words, their only vision was for the country not to fall apart. They apparently never stopped to consider that it was they themselves who drove the 'disintegration' they feared. Now the military is at last facing the consequences of its own actions. It has no political credibility and is beginning to lose in the terms it understands - militarily. It will never rule the country again. A return to the absolute dictatorship of 1962 to 2011 or the military-civilian co-governance of 2011 to 2021 is physically impossible and politically inconceivable.

IN THE PEOPLE'S HANDS

Therefore, Myanmar's future is in the hands of its people and their representatives, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the National Unity Government (NUG), the Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), the National League for Democracy (NLD) and other political parties. Millions of people have staked their own and their fellows' lives on a future free of military rule. It is they who must define what kind of country and society replaces the wreckage left by the military. This is no easy task. The military may be on its way out, but its legacies will live on without conscious, deliberate change. 'Uprooting the military' will not be enough. Articulating a new vision and people, at every level, leading by example will be essential. This is the essence of revolution. Revolution means the overturning not just the rulers, but also the beliefs, norms, and conceptions of power that kept them there. Revolution creates new order and meaning. It changes how people understand themselves and others, how they understand the meaning of power.

It also means starting now. “After the revolution will not work.” Many nations are, in one way or another, forged in civil war. The society that goes to war is not the same one that emerges at the end. Revolution is a university. It is when new values and norms are learned and practiced.

It is the habits built during the revolution that determines the future, not visions of a post-war utopia. The quality of peace and democracy after a revolution depends on how democracy is practiced during the revolution itself. As a regional example, Timor-Leste is consistently rated as one of Asia’s most democratic countries. Timorese democracy is the result of internal democracy, self-criticism, and accountability during the country’s 24-year struggle.

NO TIME TO WAIT

Myanmar’s future starts now. The PDFs and EROs of Myanmar’s revolution do not burn villages and massacre civilians. This is not because they are angels or because of international norms. It is because they depend on these villages and are fighting for society in which men with guns can’t kill with impunity. The NUCC does not hold long discussions because they love each other. They talk because they are people joined by geography and a commitment to a new Myanmar. If debate is to be part of political life of the future, tolerance of constructive criticism starts now. If children are to be taught to think, allowing questions starts now. If there is to be press free, it must not be threatened now. If the army of the future is to respect civilians, PDF soldiers who abuse civilians must face penalties now.

Fortunately, this revolution of ideas is already

Resistance forces gain military training. Photo: AFP

well underway in Myanmar. The coup generated a tidal wave of social solidarity and agency. Ordinary people in neighborhoods took control of administration, gathered and distributed food, and kept the streets safe, the water running. The night San Chaung township in Yangon was attacked by the military, people from across the city went out onto the streets to draw the military away from the embattled neighborhood. With breath-taking creativity, demonstrators took aim at the rigid hierarchies, divisions, and 'know your place' norms that had underpinned military rule. Pregnant women wrote slogans on bare stomachs. Women hung htamein across roadways. Priests, imams, and monks marched together. Use of the name 'Rohingya' went from anathema to accepted. The demonstrators pivoted the conversation from restoring the results of the 2020 election to federal democracy, a new constitution, and an end to authoritarianism in all forms. This shift moved the action on the streets from uprising against military rule to the Spring Revolution.

What the norm-shattering of the demonstrators pointed to is that military rule in Myanmar rested not just on violence but on norms, beliefs, worldviews that dictate the relationships between people. Rigid, irrational, brutally enforced hierarchies benefit dictators. The Myanmar military fostered hierarchies of gender, age, ethnicity, education, and socio-economic status, with themselves at the top. They used these to regulate speech and action. There's no need to put people in jail if you can silence them by saying 'you are too young, too female, too uneducated, too ethnic, too poor, blah, blah, blah … to speak' or simply 'you are not on my level.'

SPRING REVOLUTION PROMISE

The Spring Revolution shattered the silence the military sought to re-impose as housewives banged pots and pans, drivers parked their buses between police and demonstrators, and most of the country went to the streets or supported those who did. These were acts of conscience. Dictators are unable to conceive of people as autonomous political agents acting on conscience. Instead, they search for leaders to arrest, believing none will arise to take their place, see 'foreign agents' where none exist, and make it a criminal offense to 'insult' authority. Unable to see acts of conscience for what they are, they are eventually brought down.

The question of the moment is not what we are fighting against, but what are we fighting for. It is not just a question of constitutions, of federation, confederation. Constitutions and administrative arrangements are important. But they will not change geography. Myanmar's true struggle is to create a new order and meaning to replace the dark world of the military. It means answering difficult questions. How will power be exercised? How will people relate to each other? Will society ladies still be allowed to beat their maids? Will critics be mocked and shamed? Will assistance to those in need be held hostage to stupid rules? Will people be allowed to kill because they have a gun? Will hierarchy and formal education trump ideas and innovation? These are the questions at the heart of Myanmar's struggle. That struggle is for the freedom to treat each other better than the military has.

Min Min Thar is a pseudonym for a reporter and writer closely following the Myanmar crisis.

UN $333-MILLION APPEAL FOR CYCLONE MOCHA-DEVASTATED COMMUNITIES PRIMARILY IN RAKHINE

The United Nations launched a desperate appeal for funds last week to help 1.6 million people badly affected by the onslaught of Cyclone Mocha that ripped a swathe of destruction across Myanmar last week.

As of going to press, there was little to indicate foreign aid was being delivered, though there have been some deliveries from the World Food Programme and the Indian government and the King and Queen of Thailand.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued the Flash Appeal on 23 May to the international community as the Myanmar people, primarily in Rakhine State, Chin State, Kachin State, Magway and Sagaing regions, attempt to pick up the pieces after homes were destroyed, animals lost, water sources polluted, and a total of over 145 people were registered as dead. The total death toll has yet to be ascertained.

The Flash Appeal comes in parallel to efforts underway by local NGOs and Myanmar junta-supported activities to reach out to those in need, as well as the regional efforts of the ASEAN Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) that is reportedly working with Naypyidaw on relief efforts.

The UN Resident Humanitarian Aid Coordinator Mr Ramanathan Balakrishnan told media in Yangon on 23 May in announcing the appeal that the situation in the wake of the cyclone is "much worse than expected".

Cyclone Mocha is classed as one of the worst storms to hit Myanmar, with winds of up to 250 kms per hour, with heavy rain and flooding, on a par with the 2008 Cyclone Nargis.

PERFECT STORM

"This perfect storm has devastated coastal areas, leaving hundreds of thousands of already vulnerable people without a roof over their heads as the monsoon looms," Mr Balakrishnan said.

"We are now in a race against time to provide people with safe shelter in all affected communities and prevent the spread of water-borne disease. For this life-saving work, we need the generous financial support of the international community."

The Flash Appeal requests an urgent injection of funds for activities to support vulnerable people in the highest impact zone across Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing and Kachin.

"This is a humanitarian catastrophe in one of country's poorest areas, where there are high pre-existing needs, and we need donors to dig deep to sup-

port scaled-up distributions to the most vulnerable ahead of the rains," the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. said.

FLASH APPEAL

The Flash Appeal includes a combination of $211 million in prioritized activities from the 2023 Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan that are being pivoted to support the cyclone response in affected areas, plus $122 million for additional activities or support to people newly affected by this disaster. The 1.6 million people identified for support under this appeal include those who have lost their homes, people who lack access to health services and clean water, people who are food insecure or malnourished, displaced people living in camps, stateless people, women, children and people with a disability.

"Extremely Severe" Cyclone Mocha crossed the coast in Rakhine State just over a week ago, before moving inland bringing flooding, landslides and strong winds. The cyclone recorded wind speeds of more than 250kmph as it approached the Rakhine coast, making it one of the strongest cyclones ever to hit the country – classified as a Category 5 storm.

The storm hit many areas of Myanmar that in the west and northwest that are already poverty-stricken, including internally displaced people's camps in Rakhine of both Rakhine people and Rohingya. In addition, it compounded problems in areas that have been seeing conflict between the Myanmar junta and resistance and ethnic forces.

"In the Rakhine State capital, Sittwe, almost no house was spared damage and displacement camps in the path of the cyclone have been left in splinters. Those affected are facing a long, miserable monsoon season if we cannot mobilize resources to deliver life-saving supplies," Balakrishnan said.

'EMERGENCY WITHIN AN EMERGENCY'

Mr Balakrishnan noted that the UN is now responding to an "emergency within an emergency" given the poverty-stricken area the storm hit.

"Since I last spoke with you a week ago, our teams have been moving around the impact zone and clearer picture has emerged of the damage and suffering caused by this disaster," he said, noting that barely a building has escaped damage in areas of highest impact along the coast between Sittwe and Rathedaung in Rakhine state.

"Houses, camps, schools, health clinics and bridges have been destroyed by the cyclone which recorded wind speeds of more than 250kmph as it approached the Rakhine coast, making it one of the strongest cyclones ever to hit the country. The disaster has left hundreds of thousands of already vulnerable people without a roof over their heads as the monsoon looms."

RACE AGAINST TIME

The humanitarian community is now in a race against time to provide people with safe shelter in all affected communities and prevent the spread of water-borne disease, Mr Balakrishnan said.

"One IDP from the Sittwe camps told colleagues in Rakhine that his shelter was destroyed while his family took refuge at an evacuation site at the height of the storm. He reported that those who stayed had faced a horrible experience as the camp was submerged in water from storm surge. He told us that the IDPs need medical care, clean water and food, as well as support to rebuild their shelters," he noted.

"This cyclone has hit one of country's poorest areas, where there were already high pre-existing needs, leaving these communities extremely vulnerable. Interruptions to livelihoods including agriculture and fishing are also going to add to the distress of many people. Conflict-affected parts of the country in the Northwest and Northeast have also been heavily affected by flooding and need urgent support," the UN humanitarian aid coordinator said.

HUMANITARIAN OUTREACH

Humanitarian partners with access to the affected populations have geared up to provide critical and lifesaving assistance, Mr Balakrishnan told the media.

"Hundreds of humanitarian personnel are on the ground in Rakhine and are already distributing food aid, shelter support, water and hygiene items wherever they have access, while mobile health teams have been supporting people on the ground. Thousands of people have already received support and we are hoping to soon receive the greenlight for a two-week distribution plan for support that is ready to be provided across all affected communities in Rakhine and Chin," he noted.

Mr Balakrishnan said that they were also working to bring additional supplies into the country for urgent distribution in the high impact zone.

The 1.6 million people identified for support under this appeal include people who have lost their homes, people who lack access to health services and

clean water, people who are food insecure or malnourished, displaced people in camps, stateless people, women, children and people with a disability – a group that is particularly at-risk during disasters.

"Those affected are facing a long, miserable monsoon season if we cannot mobilize resources for the distribution of additional assistance. The Emergency Relief Coordinator has kick-started the cyclone response with a $10m allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). But much more is needed, and I urge the international community to dig deep in support of our response to this devastating crisis on top of a crisis," the UN humanitarian aid coordinator said.

OTHER EFFORTS

The national Natural Disaster Management Committee was activated in Nay Pyi Taw before the cyclone and local authorities carried out evacuations in high-risk areas. In areas under the control of the State Administration Council (SAC), local authorities deployed personnel to start initiating debris clearance, restore communications and begin distributions, OCHA reports.

The ASEAN Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) deployed staff to support the Emergency Operations Centre in Naypyidaw before the cyclone hit. A 14-member ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT) has been deployed to Rakhine to support the response by the Department of Disaster Management (DDM). The first three plane loads of AHA shelter supplies arrived in Myanmar on 21 May and were handed over to DDM for distribution in affected areas.

OCHA continues to coordinate closely with AHA on the response.

In areas outside SAC control, various ethnic and resistance groups have been measuring the impact in affected communities and delivering assistance to the extent of their resources and access, with appeals being made by the National Unity Government (NUG) and various NGOs for outside support.

Civil society organizations and religious networks are also working to support affected communities.

Communities themselves have also swung into action, clearing debris from blocked roads, and providing shelter to those who have lost their homes.

For many people in damaged communities, the clean-up is a local affair with community members pulling together to clean up and rebuild or at least put up temporary makeshift shelters to protect from the elements.

Communities and humanitarian responders are now in a race against time to implement the response outlined with the monsoon imminent and hundreds of thousands of people either homeless or living in damaged shelters with limited access to clean water.

Humanitarian supplies from USAID in a warehouse in Sittwe. Photo: AFP

UN URGES MYANMAR JUNTA TO OPEN UP TO CYCLONE MOCHA RELIEF

Collecting water in Sittwe. Photo: AFP

The United Nations on Wednesday last week called for Myanmar to open up and ensure life-saving aid can get to parts of the country hit by deadly Cyclone Mocha.

UN rights chief Volker Turk urged the country's military rulers to let needs assessments go ahead as the Southeast Asian nation reels from the cyclone's impact.

Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh on May 14, collapsing buildings and turning streets into rivers.

"The damage and loss of life was both foreseeable and avoidable -- and is clearly linked with the systematic denial of human rights," Turk told a press conference in Geneva.

"It is imperative that the military lift the blockages on travel, allow for needs assessments to happen, and ensure access to and delivery of life-saving aid and services."

Myanmar's junta has given a death toll of 148 people, mostly from the persecuted Rohingya minority in western Rakhine state.

"For decades, the authorities in Myanmar have deprived the Rohingya of their rights and freedoms and relentlessly attacked other ethnic groups, eroding their capacity to survive," Turk said.

Rakhine is home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, many of whom live in displacement camps following decades of ethnic conflict.

"Displaced communities have subsisted in temporary bamboo structures, some since 2012, with Myanmar's military repeatedly denying requests of humanitarian agencies to build more sustainable living conditions in areas less prone to flooding," said Turk.

"I saw this myself on my many trips to Myanmar, especially to the east. They have also consistently prevented the Rohingya from moving freely, including in the days before the cyclone."

On Tuesday, the UN launched an appeal for $333 million in emergency funding for 1.6 million people it said were affected by Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar.

AFP

DELAYS REPORTED IN MYANMAR AID DELIVERY TO CYCLONE MOCHA VICTIMS

Some aid is getting through. Photo: AFP

Local Myanmar media are reporting concern over alleged problems over aid delivery to Cyclone Mocha victims over 10 days after the storm hit Rakhine State, according to a report 25 May.

Rakhine Communications Hub, tracking developments, cites Narinjara saying on 25 May that no aid from the military government or international community has arrived for many cyclone-affected families. The devastated Rakhine people are waiting for aid from Thailand, India, and other ASEAN nations, they note.

Mentionable is that a large number of items, donated by the international community for the cyclone affected Rakhine people, have arrived in Yangon, but have apparently not been transported to Rakhine State yet, Narinjara notes.

India and Thailand have sent humanitarian supplies that have arrived in Yangon but have yet to be sent to Rakhine State, according to the report.

Meanwhile, Development Media Group reported on 24 May that the local authorities have banned the collection of donations led by social workers in Kyaukphyu Township to provide emergency support to the people affected by the cyclone in Rakhine State.

About 70 people, including representatives of more than 30 community-based organisations and monks from Kyaukphyu Township, held a meeting on 21 May to organise support for those in need in all affected townships in Rakhine State, but when they approached the authorities for permission, they were denied.

According to the report, the people affected by the cyclone urgently need support from local and international donors to have access to food, shelter, drinking water, and medicine. Local philanthropists said that Kyaukphyu-based social organisations want to help the people affected by the storm, but if they collect donations without permission, they may face a situation where they will be prosecuted.

NUG CALLS FOR QUAD COUNTRIES TO TAKE PUNITIVE ACTION AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA

Photo: AFP/KACHINWAVES

The National Unity Government (NUG) urged the Quad countries to take punitive action against Myanmar military through a statement issued on 21 May.

The Quad Leaders issued a joint statement on 20 May stating, "We remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation in Myanmar and again call for an immediate cessation of violence. We call for the release of all those arbitrarily detained, unhindered humanitarian access, resolution of the crisis through constructive dialogue, and the transition of Myanmar towards an inclusive democracy. We reaffirm our consistent support to ASEAN-led efforts, including the work of the ASEAN Chair and Office of the Special Envoy. We call for full implementation of all commitments under the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus."

The NUG's statement on 21 May welcomed the joint statement, and called for strengthening their collective engagement on Myanmar by providing direct humanitarian assistance, bolstering the NUG and its ethnic partners, pushing for ASEAN progress, and taking punitive action against the illegal military junta as a threat to peace, stability and security.

The NUG also expressed its appreciations of Quad leaders for their message concerned with Myanmar, in accordance with their their "steadfast commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific" that is inclusive, resilient, peaceful and stable.

The NUG also reiterated the same proposals which were brought forward to the G7 Leaders at their meeting in Hiroshima, Japan in relation to their communique issued on 20 May.

The proposals of the NUG on 21 May included a call on the G7 countries to formally recognized the NUG and provide it and its ethnic partners with direct financial, material and technical assistance.

The Quad, formally known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) is a strategic security dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the United States that is maintained by talks between member countries.

ASEAN NOT ADDRESSING MYANMAR CRISIS, CLAIMS NGO

In the wake of Cyclone Mocha. Photo: AFP

Campaign group Progressive Voice has criticised the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the failure of its Five Point Consensus (5PC) in addressing Myanmar's crisis.

It says that the continued ineffective approach and delay of concrete actions in response to Myanmar's crisis by ASEAN emboldens the Myanmar junta to commit further atrocity crimes across the country.

Progressive Voice says that ASEAN'S reaction to the recent attack on the ASEAN convoy from the Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) is yet another indication of the failure of ASEAN's Five Point Consensus (5PC) in addressing Myanmar's crisis.

Following the recent attack against the AHA Centre convoy in Shan State, Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of Progressive Voice said: "The attack on the AHA Centre convoy took place in an area controlled by the Pa-O National Organisation, an ethnic militia armed group that acts as a proxy to the military junta with no active armed conflict at present. It is highly likely that the Myanmar military junta is behind the recent attack".

The Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC), which is the political leadership body of Pa-O people who are taking part in the Spring Revolution, also stated that "eyewitness statements by resident Pa-O nationals indicates this attack was perpetuated by the those impersonating the local People's Force", and "..observing this shooting of the diplomatic convoy incident that the terrorist military council has no intention helping the people with the required humanitarian aid whatsoever, nor does it have the capacity nor the will to help either."

The Myanmar military has historically weaponized humanitarian aid and used divide-and-rule tactics among inter- and intra-ethnic communities for their political gain and as stated by the PNFC, at the time of unrest, and discord, actors must be aware of the junta's strategy "to instill more disharmony between different ethnic communities."

Progressive Voice believes that allowing representatives of the Myanmar military, the group responsible for the crisis in Myanmar, to remain on the

Governing Board of the AHA Centre undermines the AHA Centre's credibility, independence, and impartiality and enables the junta to advance its political agenda while committing atrocities.

The National Unity Government (NUG) and civil society organisations have called on ASEAN to immediately remove the junta's representatives from the AHA Centre's Governing Board.

Progressive Voice also criticised the implementation of the ASEAN 5PC signed with Min Aung Hlaing over two years ago saying that it has become clear that the Myanmar junta never had any intention of honouring the agreement.

President, Joko Widodo, even admitted that "there's been no significant progress" on the implementation of the five-point consensus.

Yet, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed at the 42nd Summit that the 5PC will remain as its main reference in addressing the crisis in Myanmar without concrete action to enforce it.

As the Myanmar crisis escalates, with spillover effects increasingly reaching beyond Myanmar's borders, ASEAN's decision to hold on to the failed 5PC is a failure of its own responsibility for regional peace and stability.

To illustrate ASEAN's toothlessness Progressive Voice points out that while the ASEAN's leaders were gathering for the 42nd ASEAN Summit in Indonesia on 10 – 11 May 2023 the Myanmar military committed a massacre of at least 18 people, including children and women, in Nyaung Pin Thar Village in Htantabin Township, Bago Region, on 10 May. Reportedly, after soldiers brutally killed the victims, they burned their bodies.

Following the horrific massacre, the Karen Human Rights Group and the Karen Peace Support Network issued a joint statement condemning the brutal act of the military junta stating: "The deliberate targeting of civilians constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes. The murder of civilians in a systematic and widespread manner is also a crime against humanity."

The statement also called on the international community to stop turning a blind eye to the junta's atrocity crimes and take immediate and meaningful action to stop the junta's attacks. The Nyaung Pin Thar massacre is the second-largest massacre in Bago Region since the February 2021 coup.

The largest massacre in Bago occurred on 9 April 2021, when 80 people were killed in an attack against peaceful protesters in Bago City.

Last year in 2022 and this year in January 2023, the Myanmar junta launched several airstrikes against resistance groups where they breached the airspaces of the neighbouring countries of Thailand and India.

The junta dropped two bombs into Indian territory in January this year and caused some damage on the Indian side of the border.

In addition to that is the inevitable growing number of conflict-affected people fleeing into neighboring countries. In line with international human rights and humanitarian law, these neighboring governments must not turn a blind eye and ensure that refugees receive adequate assistance.

These dynamics make it evident that the crisis in Myanmar does not just concern Myanmar but it is a regional issue and is a growing threat to the peace and stability of the ASEAN region, according to progressive Voice.

It says ASEAN must heed and implement the five recommendations made by civil society, including the immediate end to the military junta's atrocity crimes, an end to all official engagements with the military junta, ensuring the delivery of aid by centering border-based local organisations, and for the ASEAN Special Envoy to engage with NUG, National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs).

Progressive Voice says it is time for ASEAN leaders to prove their commitment and effectiveness in helping to solve the Myanmar crisis by taking decisive action, including calling on the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

MYANMAR DELEGATION VISITS ROHINGYA CAMPS FOR REPATRIATION SCHEME

Myanmar delegation arrives in Bangladesh to discuss proposed repatriation plan. Photo: AFP

A Myanmar junta team visited Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh on Thursday last week as part of a mooted pilot repatriation scheme.

Most of the refugees have been stuck in ramshackle camps in southeastern Bangladesh since fleeing a 2017 crackdown by the Myanmar military that is now subject to a United Nations genocide investigation.

Several previous repatriation attempts have failed but Bangladesh and Myanmar are looking to return around 1,100 people to the violence-racked state of Rakhine in the coming weeks.

Twenty Rohingya visited two resettlement camps last month in Rakhine, where the Myanmar junta plans to house them in what experts say is land that for generations belonged to the Rohingyas before being confiscated.

The team of 14 Myanmar officials, all in civilian clothes, arrived by boat in the Bangladeshi border town of Teknaf on Thursday morning last week, went to the camps and talked to around 200 people.

But Mohammad Selim, one of the Rohingya who met the Myanmar delegation, told AFP by phone that their demands were being ignored.

"We said that we have to return to our own ancestral house... We told them they should give us citizenship. But they said they will give us NVC (national verification card), which is not citizenship," Selim said.

"They repeatedly said so. There is no way we can trust them."

"We have no permanent representative in this repatriation process," Khin Maung, a prominent Rohingya leader, told AFP before the meeting.

"This repatriation process is just an eyewash. If they didn't ensure our dignity, there is no point returning to IDPs (internally displaced people)," he said.

One Rohingya who is meant to be repatriated in the pilot project told AFP on condition of anonymity that they did not want to go back and live in Myanmar "as non-citizens and stay in IDP camps".

"Our place should be given back to us, our right to live like other ethnic groups should be legally guaranteed. Otherwise, we cannot believe the mass murderers," they said.

Mainul Kabir, head of the Rohingya wing in Bangladesh's foreign ministry, told reporters Thursday that repatriation was "the only way to solve the Rohingya issue".

He said the Myanmar delegation "assured that the confusions that are being created will be resolved gradually".

Last week, Human Rights Watch criticised the repatriation plan, saying it posed "grave risks" to the Rohingya.

"Bangladesh is frustrated with its burden as host, but sending refugees back to the control of a ruthless Myanmar junta will just be setting the stage for the next devastating exodus," the group said in a statement.

AFP

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REASSESSING MYANMAR'S 2015 NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

NICHOLAS NUGENT

A new report says the 2015 peace process between Myanmar's military government and several ethnic armed organisations was a mechanism for strengthening state control rather than a gateway to ethnic peace and reform.

The report was compiled by the Transnational Institute (TNI), an international think tank based in the Netherlands. Subtitled 'Promoting Ethnic Peace or Strengthening State Control?' the report's authors come down in favour of the former.

It concludes that the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of October 2015 was not a genuine attempt to bring the country's ethnic armed organisations in from the cold to give them a say in running the nation, says the report. Instead, it was a strategy to strengthen the role of the army, or Tatmadaw, which for much of the country's 75 years of independence has been engaged in military operations against the armies of those ethnic organisations.

It delves into the history of efforts by governments of Burma, and subsequently Myanmar, to pacify the armed struggles of regional ethnic armies. These began before the end of British rule in February 1947, at the Panglong Conference held at the town of that name in southern Shan State. It was agreed at Panglong that the Shan, Kachin, Chin and other nationalities should have 'full autonomy' in the frontier areas they inhabited.

Burma's independence leader Aung Sang was the chief signatory on behalf of the fledgling government.

The day of the signing, 12th February, is celebrated each year as Union Day, a national holiday, though Aung San did not live to see the first anniversary of the signing or foundation of the Union of Burma.

Seemingly endless peace talks but what has been the result? Photo: AFP

There have subsequently been a succession of peace talks between military leaders and ethnic organisations, notably in 1949, 1958, 1963, 1980-1, 1989, 2011-12 and 2015 till Aung Sang's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, came into power at the head of the National League for Democracy (NLD) government in March 2016.

The NLD inherited the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed in October 2015 between th military government and eight armed organisations representing Arakan, Chin, Karen, Pa-O and Shan peoples in a process later dubbed a 21st Century Panglong, or 'Panglong-21', by the NLD. Lahu and Mon organisations subsequently joined the agreement but it has never been clear why other armed groups were not invited, or else declined, to take part despite the agreement being labelled a 'nationwide' ceasefire.

The implication is that other ethnic forces – including those representing Kachin, Kokang and Ta'ang communities – were excluded by the Tatmadaw from full participation in the accord, remaining at war with the central government. According to the TNI, of the eight ethnic armed organisations (or EAOs) originally included only two were militarily important at the time: the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) once associated with the notorious warlord and drug-runner Khun Sa.

Some absentees from the agreement, like the Kokang-based Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (MNDAA), the Ta-ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA), excluded themselves because they were expected to renounce armed struggle before engaging in talks. The report details the precise involvement of each ethnic organisation and suggests the Tatmadaw prefers engaging with groups "that have lost their way" than with political diehards or newcomers to the anti-government armed struggle.

The significance of the 2015 agreement and associated peace process were overshadowed by expectations generated by the National League for Democracy coming into government alongside the Tatmadaw. The internationally-funded Myanmar Peace Center fell into irrelevance as the NLD "put its own stamp on the peace process".

"Despite Aung San Suu Kyi's promises of the 21st Century Panglong, the NLD appeared unwilling or unable to establish an inclusive roadmap for peace." Military representatives in what was, in effect, a coalition government "continued to bring their own agendas to peace negotiation meetings", says the report.

With fighting in the borderlands increasing, a perception grew that the "key national reconciliation struggle" of the era was not between the government and minority nationalities but between the NLD and Tatmadaw.

By the time Tatmadaw leaders seized power from the NLD in February 2021, there had been no significant progress towards peace between the central government and minorities. "Despite its bold aspirations the NCA did not mark a nationwide breakthrough," concludes the TNI report. On the contrary a "new cycle of distrust" began to develop between the main signatories.

Critics of the Tatmadaw believe "commanders have used such tactics as peace talks, the declaration of ceasefires and promotion of militia as temporary measures to allow the advancement of government authority into the conflict zones by other means." This has allowed the Tatmadaw to function as a "state within a state" with no serious commitment to resolving regional conflicts, according to the report.

Commitment to the 2015 peace process was stronger under the government of president (and general) Thein Sein, who stepped down after being defeated by the NLD shortly after signing the NCA. It is arguable too that greater progress in pacifying the borderlands has been made since the 2021 coup by the rival National Unity Government (NUG), which includes representatives of minority communities though lacks power to implement a peace plan.

The TNI stops short of predicting any future role in government for non-Bamar peoples, though it begs the question of whether Myanmar can ever be united in the way its founding fathers intended. Rather, it seems to be engaged in a constant struggle between the armed forces and ethnic minorities who inhabit around half the land area and all the strategic borderlands.

Since the 2021 coup the struggle has widened as the Tatmadaw's now counts among its enemies members of the mainstream Buddhist Bamar community campaigning for a return to democratic governance as well as the ethnic and religious minorities making up nearly a third of the country's total population of 60 million. Hopes that a 21st Century Panglong Conference would unite the diverse land have dimmed alongside those of a democratic future for Myanmar.

DECODING THE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT ON MYANMAR'S COCO ISLANDS

SHWE YEE OO

Satellite imagery released by Maxar Technologies in January 2023, revealing new construction on Myanmar's Great Coco Island, has raised concerns and questions. The imagery discloses an extended airport runway and two new widened hangars next to it. A report from Chatham House Policy Institute says that the runway seems to have been freshly lengthened to 2,300 meters (7,500 feet) from 1,300 meters 10 years ago, and the new hangars appear to have been enlarged by approximately 40 meters.

This extensive nature of this development has provoked suspicions as to whether the infrastructure under construction is a Chinese espionage base for suspected military expansion into the Indian Ocean.

WHY CHINA?

China has been a friend to the Myanmar military since the late 1980s. Even when Myanmar was isolated during the junta's rule in the 1990s and 2000s, China remained a supportive partner of the regime.

Despite the harmonious relations with the civilian government during the democratic transition of 2011-2020, China has always wanted to keep closer ties with the Myanmar military for economic and security reasons. The 2021 coup in Myanmar seems to have strengthened the military's relationship with China and increased Beijing's sway over Myanmar. The presence of a Chinese intelligence base on the Coco Islands has long been rumored among the international security community, yet there was little to no evidence to prove China's presence before the satellite imagery's release.

Given the prevailing instability across Myanmar, the military cannot carry out the ongoing construction on the Great Coco Island without China; only the latter has both the willingness and capability to develop an airport on the remote island.

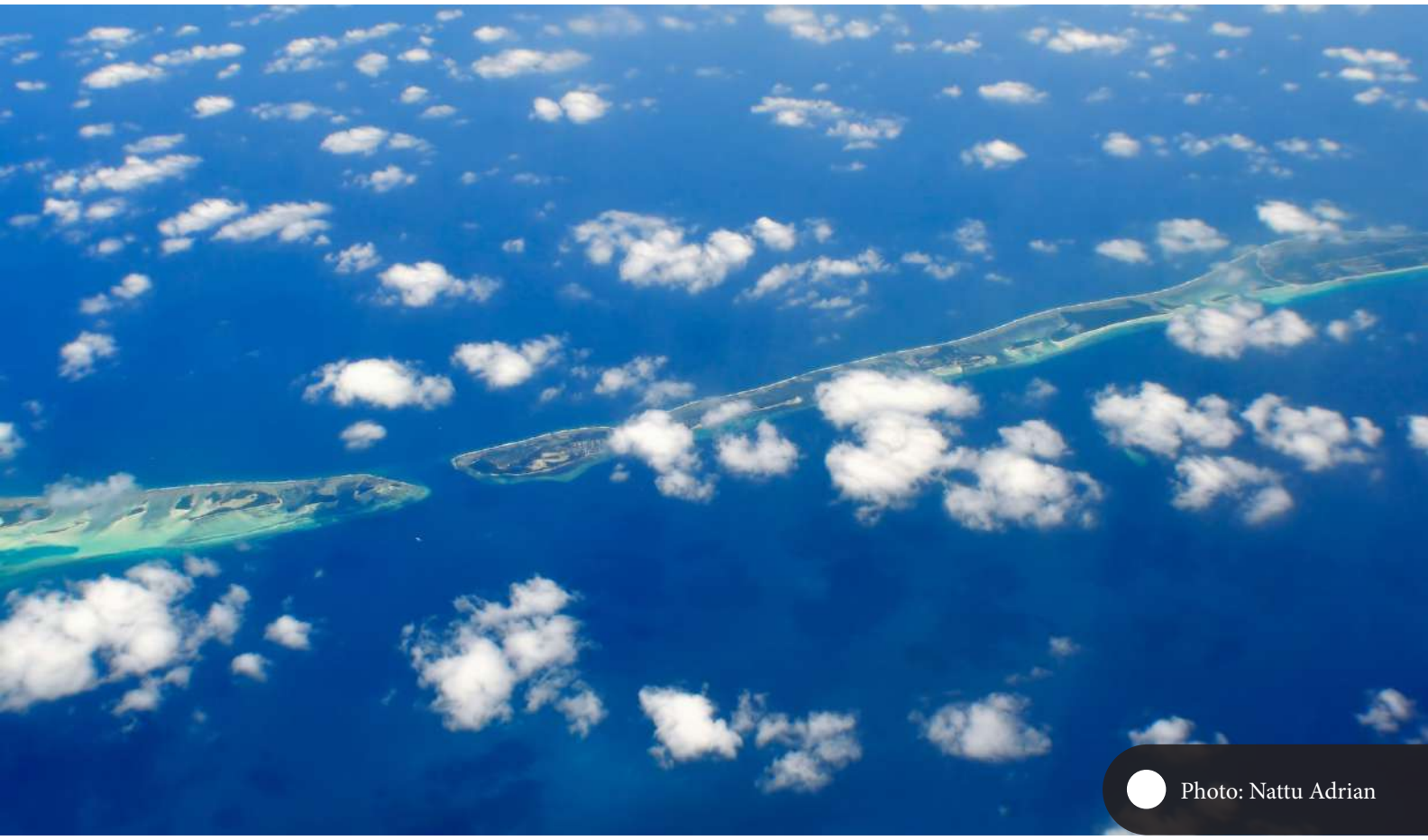

Photo: Nattu Adrian

WHY WOULD CHINA SECRETLY—NOT PUBLICLY—DEVELOP SUCH INFRASTRUCTURE? WHAT IS THE PROJECT'S GOAL, IN THESHORT OR LONG TERM?

While not part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the infrastructure development taking place on the Coco Islands is reminiscent of other projects under the BRI in other parts of the world, as these projects often generate controversy and criticism. Specifically, rumors have swirled that these projects serve China's regional military and security objectives, rather than the needs of the communities they take place in.

For instance, in 2018 and 2019, Koh Kong province in Cambodia underwent the Dara Sakor Airport Development project funded by China's Union Development Group. Due to the extreme difficulty of attracting visitors to Koh Kong Beachside resort, the development of an international airport was not a logical decision. Dara Sakor, deviating from the initial plan to develop an international airport for commercial airliners, developed a long runway (10,500 feet) with a "tight turning bay" favored by jet fighters. The Dara Sakor investment zone covers 20 per cent of Cambodia's coastline and is located close to the Ream Naval Base, granted to China for 30 years in return for the funding required to renovate the naval base. Although the developer declared that the airport would be for civilian use, there were critiques that Beijing would benefit from the Dara Sakor airport in terms of its military strategy.

Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port is another China-sponsored infrastructure project that raised security concerns. In 2017, a 70 per cent stake in the port was leased to China Merchants Ports Holding Company Limited (CM Port) for 99 years under a concession agreement signed by Sri Lanka's cabinet of ministers, keeping the remaining 30 per cent under Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA). Although the commercial operations are said to be operated jointly by the CM Port and SLPA, the port is still considered a Chinese debt trap. Hambantota Port is poorly connected to the rest of the country, and thus its purpose has been questioned. Some analysts believe China could potentially use the Hambantota Port as a pretext to establish a security base due to its strategic location for the import of energy from the Middle East.

WHY THE COCO ISLANDS?

Given the projects above, there are questions as to whether Coco Island's airport construction would eventually provide critical infrastructure for China, facilitating its future military expansion. The Coco Islands are remote from and poorly connected to the rest of Myanmar. It would seem consistent, however, with the PLA's naval base expansion in Djibouti and China's current aspiration to set up a permanent military base in Equatorial Guinea.

For China, the Atlantic Ocean is important for its exports while the Indian Ocean is crucial for its energy and raw material requirements. China has, and will continue, to undertake infrastructure projects along the maritime route as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. The suspicion and concerns over the China-developed infrastructure mainly arise from the lack of transparency and the mysterious nature of the relationship, given the previously mentioned cases of BRI construction in corrupt states.

In fact, the Coco Islands' undisclosed construction, along with other infrastructure ventures in its vicinity, have revived the "String of Pearls" Theory. This suggests that the Coco Islands could be viewed as one of the "beads" in China's strategy to expand its military presence. According to this theory, China can be expected to persist in establishing its economic and military foothold in or around the Indian Ocean region by investing in dual-use infrastructure development projects. The Maldives, Seychelles, and Madagascar can expect similar projects sooner or later. However, it will remain crucial to observe how China will handle tensions in Pakistan's Gwadar Port, key BRI infrastructure on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

All in all, the ongoing construction of an airport on the Great Coco Island suggests China's unwavering determination to broaden its sphere of influence. As Myanmar faces isolation, China sees an opportunity. If it wishes to ease such doubts and suspicions, China needs to establish a mechanism for "sustainable transparency" to demonstrate its sincere and responsible economic cooperation. Without transparency, it will be hard for China to justify the development of infrastructure of such questionable use.

It is recommended that other major powers also enhance their active engagement in the Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean regions to appropriately respond to the expanding influence of China because it is crucial to explore constructive measures that promote a balanced regional environment and ensure the collective stability and prosperity.

MYANMAR RAPPER BYU HAR ARRESTED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA RANT ABOUT ERRATIC POWER SUPPLY

Byu Har. Photo: Supplied

The Myanmar junta released a picture of popular rapper Byu Har after he was arrested for complaining about power outages in Yangon on social media.

At 2:00 p.m. on 23 May he posted a video on his Byu Har social media page where he swore at and criticised the Ministry of Electric Power for not even being able to provide electricity in Yangon for four hours on and four hours off.

He unfavourably compared the current electricity supply in Yangon with the electricity supply the city received when Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party was in power, saying it was far better then.

He also said which housing estate he lives on in the video.

The 4-minute-long video went viral among social media users and his fans said they were worried that he would be arrested by the junta.

After the video's release there were calls for the rapper's arrest on junta Telegram channels.

Sure enough, on the night of 23 May, Byu Har was arrested by a large force of junta soldiers at his home in the Ba Htoo Housing Estate in Yangon's North Dagon Township.

His arrest and the photograph of him handcuffed and under arrest were put up on junta Telegram channels on the afternoon of 24 May.

In a social media post made at 3:00 p.m. on 25 May, Ko Byu Har's brother said: "The soldiers and police came to arrest Ko Byu Har at his home in North Dagon. We do not know where they took him. His wife said that he was punched even when talking calmly to the soldiers."

After news of Ko Byu Har's arrest spread worried fans of his started leaving comments on social media.

One said: "He was arrested. In our country people are not allowed to speak the truth."

Currently, it is not known where Byu Har is being held, Mizzima is still investigating.

Byu Har is the son of the famous Myanmar composer Sir Naing Myanma.

Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) says that currently it is rotating electricity supply with the electricity being on for four hours, then off for four hours. In reality, they often just supply one hour on, instead of four.

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TRAVEL INDUSTRY LOOKS TO CHINESE TOURISTS TO CAP POST-COVID REBOUND

The return of Chinese tourists to destinations worldwide will top off a spectacular post-coronavirus global tourism revival this year, according to industry leaders.

Jet makers, airline executives and hotel tycoons at this week's Qatar Economic Forum spoke of an apparently insatiable demand for travel. Chinese tourists, now unshackled from Covid-19 restrictions, will complete the boom, they said.

"The desire to travel has never been greater and the industry is struggling how to respond to that demand," said Boeing chairman David Calhoun as he told of the aviation giant's battle to meet demand for jets.

Leisure travel has overtaken business as the main reason for taking a plane or booking a room, according to Sebastien Bazin, head of Accor, Europe's biggest hotel group.

The northern hemisphere summer travel season is expected to send airline traffic back to levels last seen before the pandemic erupted in December 2019.

Executives said China's free-spending tourists will play a key role in the revival, while putting new pressure on the travel industry.

Hotel group Accor has predicted that "millions" of Chinese could boost travel industry coffers in coming months.

Akbar Al-Baker, Qatar Airways' chief execu-

Many Chinese are going on holiday abroad. Photo: AFP

tive, said all of its planes leaving China are "absolutely packed".

"Not only are they paying the fares that I am asking due to the lack of capacity available to them, but also the amount of money they spend in our duty free at (Doha) airport is more than any other nationality," he added.

William Ellwood Heinecke, the billionaire Thai-American owner of the Minor International hospitality group, said that in the first quarter of 2023 the number of Chinese tourists in Thailand was 85 percent lower than in 2019.

"I think we are definitely in rebound, but more importantly we haven't seen China come back yet," he said, predicting the boom would be completed in the second half.

'STRANGE POSITION'

Tony Fernandes, a Malaysian tycoon whose conglomerate includes the AirAsia budget carrier, said he hoped to have all 250 planes in his fleet, which were grounded during Covid-19, running again by August.

"We are in a strange position where one minute we were fighting for survival, then restarting 200 planes which is a massive job."

Earlier this month, Dubai-based Emirates Group announced record full-year profits of three billion dollars, trumpeting a "full recovery" from the pandemic.

Fernandes said airline and credit card data indicated that leisure travel was now a key consumer priority.

Bazin said his group's 5,400 hotels had seen a "total shift" in travel habits.

For decades, big hotel chains had two-thirds business customers and one-third leisure.

"Now that mix is probably going to be reversed. We are already 55 percent leisure and 45 percent business," Bazin said, describing a "remote working" revolution.

Twice a month, a new class of tourist leaves home on a Wednesday night, travels for less than three hours and only returns the following Tuesday, he said. "That means that on Thursday and Friday and Monday, they work remotely."

The industry could not assess how much is leisure and how much business, Fernandes said.

Hotel and airline owners defended the higher prices they are now charging.

"We have been through two years of hell," said Bazin, noting fares for luxury rooms are about 33-35 percent higher than 2019, while economy rooms are 10-12 percent higher.

The hotel industry had to recoup billions in lost revenues, he said, while it was now more difficult to find and keep staff.

"We are not taking advantage of people," said Bazin.

"Anyone using low interest rates, low labour costs and low energy prices to make their model work - it ain't going to work anymore," added Ellwood Heinecke.

Travellers are now paying a "sensible price" for plane tickets, Fernandes insisted.

AFP

CHINA ACCUSES US, ALLIES OF 'DISINFORMATION' OVER HACKING CLAIMS

Photo: Li Yang

China accused the United States and its allies of waging a "disinformation campaign" Thursday last week, after Washington, its Western partners and Microsoft said state-sponsored Chinese hackers had infiltrated critical US infrastructure networks.

"This is an extremely unprofessional report with a missing chain of evidence, this is just scissors-and-paste work," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.

The allegations were "a collective disinformation campaign of the Five Eyes coalition countries", she said.

In a report Wednesday, Microsoft highlighted Guam, a US territory in the Pacific Ocean with a vital military outpost, as one of the targets of the allegedly Chinese state-backed hackers.

But, it said, "malicious" activity had also been detected elsewhere in the United States.

The stealthy attack -- carried out by a China-sponsored actor dubbed "Volt Typhoon" since mid-2021 -- enabled long-term espionage and was likely aimed at hampering the United States in the event of a conflict, it said.

The claims were echoed by the United States and its allies in the Five Eyes security alliance -- Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom -- accusations Beijing denied on Thursday.

The United States, Mao said, "was expanding new channels for disseminating disinformation".

"But no change in tactics can alter the fact that the US is a hacker empire," she said.

AFP

ONE DEAD IN FRESH VIOLENCE IN INDIA'S REMOTE NORTHEAST

Trouble in Manipur. Photo: AFP

One person was shot dead and houses were set on fire as fresh ethnic violence erupted in India's restive northeastern state of Manipur, officials said Thursday last week.

Manipur has been on the boil after an explosion of inter-ethnic violence this month killed at least 70 people and left tens of thousands displaced.

Some 2,000 houses were also burned down across the state that borders Myanmar.

The violence was sparked by anger among the Kuki tribal group at the prospect of the majority Meitei community being given guaranteed quotas of government jobs and other perks in a form of affirmative action.

This also stoked long-held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for them and other tribal groups.

The military has deployed thousands of troops to the state, where curfews have been imposed and the internet cut for several weeks.

An indefinite curfew was reimposed on Wednesday in the flashpoint Bishnupur district after suspected militants fired at a group of people, fatally wounding one person.

"Two persons, who had been living in a relief camp, were injured during the firing by the militants and one of them later died in a hospital," a local police officer, who did not want to be identified, told AFP.

Before the shooting, suspected militants torched some abandoned houses close to a relief camp set up for those displaced during the violence, the officer said.

The house of local minister Govindas Konthoujam was also attacked and ransacked when the family was away.

India's northeast has seen decades of unrest among ethnic and separatist groups seeking more autonomy or even secession from India, with at least 50,000 people killed in Manipur since the 1950s.

Such conflicts had waned over the years, with many groups striking deals with New Delhi for more powers.

AFP

70 YEARS AFTER FIRST SUMMIT, EVEREST KEEPS GIVING

Looking at a painting of climber Tenzing Norgay who together with Edmund Hillary were the first to climb Mount Everest in 1953. Photo: AFP

When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa first climbed Everest 70 years ago, they paved the way for thousands of foreign climbers to try to follow in their footsteps.

The eight-day trek to the Everest base camp is among the most popular multi-day hikes in Nepal, with tens of thousands of tourists making the journey every year.

What were small agrarian villages when the British expedition passed through in 1953 have since been transformed into tourist hubs with hotels, tea houses and equipment shops, boosting the livelihoods of local communities.

In many homes, three generations have found employment in mountaineering - a far more lucrative occupation than farming or yak-herding.

The work is hazardous by definition, but in a climbing season of about three months, an experienced guide can make up to $10,000 -- several times the country's average annual income.

And other Sherpas and Himalayan community members have opened restaurants and guesthouses that line Everest's money trail.

Veteran mountain guide Phurba Tashi Sherpa was born and raised in Khumjung, a village about 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) from base camp.

He grew up watching his father and uncles go to the mountains for work, and soon joined them on expeditions, eventually climbing Everest 21 times before he retired.

"There would be just a few expeditions before but now there are so many every year," he said.

"That means an increase in income. It has helped improve the lifestyle here. A lot has changed."

Since the first British teams set their sights on summiting Everest in the 1920s, Nepali climbers - mostly from the Sherpa ethnic group - have been by their side.

"Sherpa" became synonymous with high-altitude guiding as they became the backbone of the multimillion-dollar industry, bearing huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

Now local expedition groups -- instead of playing second fiddle to foreign climbing agencies -- bring the bulk of paying clients into Nepal.

And a younger generation of Nepali climbers is slowly being recognised in their own right.

Renowned Italian climber Reinhold Messner told AFP in a 2021 interview that it was a well-deserved climb up the ladder.

"It is an evolution," he said. "And this is also important for the future economy of the country."

'GIFT OF THE MOUNTAINS'

The first ascent of Everest brought Nepal to the world's attention and its mountains have since captivated adventurers and tourists alike.

That has played a crucial role for Nepal's branding as a destination, according to tourism writer Lisa Choegyal.

"Through Covid and earthquakes and all the other setbacks, the insurgency even, that Nepal has suffered over the decades, mountaineering has really endured," she said.

The Khumbu region welcomes more than 50,000 trekkers a year.

"It is a gift of the mountains and we have to thank the first summit for opening this region to tourism," said Mingma Chhiri Sherpa, chairman of the local municipality.

"Education and modern amenities have come here because of it."

Driven to help the community he worked with, Hillary funded the region's first school in Khumjung and is said to have hauled timber himself to help build it.

One of its first students, Ang Tsering Sherpa, now owns an expedition company.

"It is because of mountaineering that the young Sherpas today have higher education," he said. "It has brought a wave of economic prosperity."

More than 10 percent of Nepalis are employed in tourism and the government this year collected over $5 million in Everest permit fees alone as a record number of summit hopefuls arrived.

Tenzing Chogyal Sherpa, 30, whose grandfather Kancha Sherpa was part of the 1953 expedition, is a glaciologist and said that education had opened up options for Sherpa youths.

"A Sherpa can now be a doctor, engineer or a businessman, anything they want to be. That is very good," he said.

"And if they want to be a mountaineer, they can."

AFP.

CYCLONE MOCHA: URGENT FUNDING NEEDED AS HUNGER, DISEASES LOOM

As a clearer picture emerges of the trail of destruction left by Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar and Bangladesh, humanitarians are continuing to provide life-saving assistance, and the need for an urgent increase in funding.

In Myanmar, the UN appealed on Tuesday for $333 million to assist 1.6 million of the most vulnerable people, many of whom have lost their homes as the cyclone hit the west of the country over a week ago.

The UN's top aid official in the country, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, told reporters in Geneva that the disaster had left hundreds of thousands without a roof over their heads as the monsoon looms.

Among the priorities is providing people with safe shelter and preventing the outbreak and spread of water-borne diseases.

1.6 MILLION IN MYANMAR IN NEED OF AID

With coastal winds recorded at up to 250 kilometres per hour making landfall off the Bay of Bengal on 14 May, Mocha brought flooding and landslides to an area that is home to hundreds of thousands already displaced by the protracted conflict in Myanmar, many of them the Rohingya minority of Rakhine state.

The UN appeal requests an "urgent injection" of funds to support those in the highest impact zone across Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing and Kachin states.

Speaking via Zoom from Yangon, Mr. Balakrishnan, who is the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar, said that the 1.6 million people identified for support under the new funding appeal include "people who have lost their homes, people who lack access to health services and clean water, people who are food insecure or malnourished, displaced people in camps, stateless people, women, children and people with disabilities".

REBUILDING BEFORE THE MONSOON

Mr. Balakrishnan warned that "those affected

Cleaning up. Photo: UN News

are facing a long, miserable monsoon season if we cannot mobilize resources in time".

He also gave reporters a glimpse of the harsh conditions facing internally displaced people, or IDPs, in the capital of Myanmar's Rakhine State, Sittwe.

He recounted that an IDP from a camp in Sittwe told his colleagues that his shelter was destroyed while his family took refuge at an evacuation site at the height of the storm.

"Those who stayed had faced a horrible experience as the camp was submerged in water from the storm surge," the UN aid official said, before insisting on the need for medical care, clean water and food, as well as support to rebuild shelters.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE UNDERWAY

Hundreds of humanitarian personnel are on the ground in Rakhine state, already providing food aid, shelter, water and hygiene items "wherever they have access", while mobile health teams have been supporting people on the ground, Mr. Balakrishnan said, with plans for additional urgent aid distribution.

"Thousands of people have already received support and we are hoping to soon receive the green light for a two-week distribution plan… across all affected communities in Rakhine and Chin", he announced.

ROHINGYA REFUGEES HIT IN BANGLADESH

In neighbouring Bangladesh, the UN is appealing for $42 million to support the cyclone response, including $36 million for Rohingya refugees living in camps in the affected areas.

Gwyn Lewis, UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh speaking from Dhaka, told reporters that more than 400,000 people in the country were impacted and 40,000 Rohingya refugees living in camps saw their homes – most often temporary bamboo structures – destroyed or damaged.

MORE FOOD RATION CUTS

Ms. Lewis stressed that the cyclone came on the heels of food ration cuts for refugees and a devastating fire in March, in which 16,000 had lost their homes.

Adding to the refugees' hardship, she said that lack of funding is forcing the UN to cut their food rations for a second time as of 1 June. "This means that the Rohingya refugees will receive only 67 per cent of the needed food rations, so one million people will only be getting about two-thirds of the needed food," she added.

LIFE-SAVING EARLY WARNINGS

Thankfully, the Government of Bangladesh acted quickly upon the cyclone warnings, Ms. Lewis said, and evacuated some 700,000 people from Mocha's path, which helped save countless lives.

She expressed hope that new funding will allow to rebuild the homes of the Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh with more weather-resistant materials and improve resilience.

On Monday, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) stressed the power of early warning services in preventing the worst impacts of extreme weather. The agency said that in the past, weather disasters similar to Mocha had caused "death tolls of tens and even hundreds of thousands" in both Myanmar and Bangladesh.

WMO also reported that over the past 50 years, Asia saw the highest death toll due to extreme weather, climate and water-related events, with close to one million deaths – more than half in Bangladesh alone.

Courtesy of UN News

Photo: Zink Hein

CHIN STATE

Cyclone Mocha destroyed 3,338 buildings in Chin State

Cyclone Mocha destroyed at least 3,338 buildings in Chin State, according to figures released by the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC), on 23 May.

Cyclone Mocha hit Chin State on 14 May. According to reports it ripped roofs off and destroyed houses, schools, religious buildings, and barns. Roads connecting villages were also blocked by landslides The INCC compiled its list of the damage caused by collating information from humanitarian and disaster management officers in Chin State townships.

According to the INCC Cyclone Mocha affected eight of the nine townships in Chin State. The only township unaffected by the cyclone was Tonzang Township.

Of the 3,338 buildings destroyed by the cyclone, there were: 2,774 houses, 185 schools, 102 religious buildings, 12 places where people could receive medical treatment, 259 barns and six auditoriums.

In addition, 69 domestic animals, including buffalo, cows, chickens, ducks, pigs and goats, where reported killed by the cyclone.

"There is initial assistance for the cyclone victims. Now that we have finalized data collection, we are going to act on that data in cooperation with the [National Unity Government (NUG)] Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management", an ICNCC member said to Mizzima.

He added that roof tiles, nails, tarps, and waterproof canvas are needed to repair damaged buildings and that villages, where rice barns have been destroyed, are also in urgent need of rice, basic food and medicine.

The INCC has called on local and foreign organisations to donate aid.

ICNCC, which was formed on 13 April 2021 by Chin politicians, armed groups and civil society organisations opposed to the Myanmar junta. Currently, the ICNCC has formed two committees, a Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Committee and a Covid-19 Response Coordination Committee and it has said it will form more committees as they are needed.

FOURTH MYANMAR-CHINA BORDER TRADE FAIR HELD IN NAY PYI TAW

The fourth Myanmar (Lashio)-China (Lincang) border trade fair was held from 25 to 28 May in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw, according to local news outlets.

When it comes to Myanmar's major trading partners, China undoubtedly holds a prominent position. The robust economic ties between these two nations are strengthened significantly by border trade, which plays a pivotal role in facilitating commerce between them.

At the opening ceremony, the junta's Planning and Finance Minister Win Shein said that the trade fair reflects fraternal friendship, promotion of bilateral trade and economic cooperation and multi-sector cooperation between the peoples of the two nations.

Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar, Chen Hai, shed light on the exceptional significance of Lincang, a border region located in the southwestern province of Yunnan, China.

A total of 60 associations or enterprises from Myanmar participated in the fair, showcasing an array of offerings including food, souvenirs, gems and jewelry, tea, coffee, agricultural products, wood products, and tourism services.

More than 70 Chinese enterprises actively participated in the exhibition, showcasing a diverse range of products such as solar appliances, clothing, construction materials, consumer goods, and cosmetics.

In the last week of December 2022, China's newly appointed special envoy, Deng Xijun, engaged in significant diplomatic efforts. He held meetings with seven ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) from Myanmar, which took place in China's Yunnan Province.

Subsequently, Deng Xijun traveled to Naypyitaw, where he had a crucial meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of Myanmar's military junta.Then he flew to Naypyitaw and met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing]

REMITTANCE BY MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS REACHES OVER US$1.5 BILLION IN SIX MONTHS

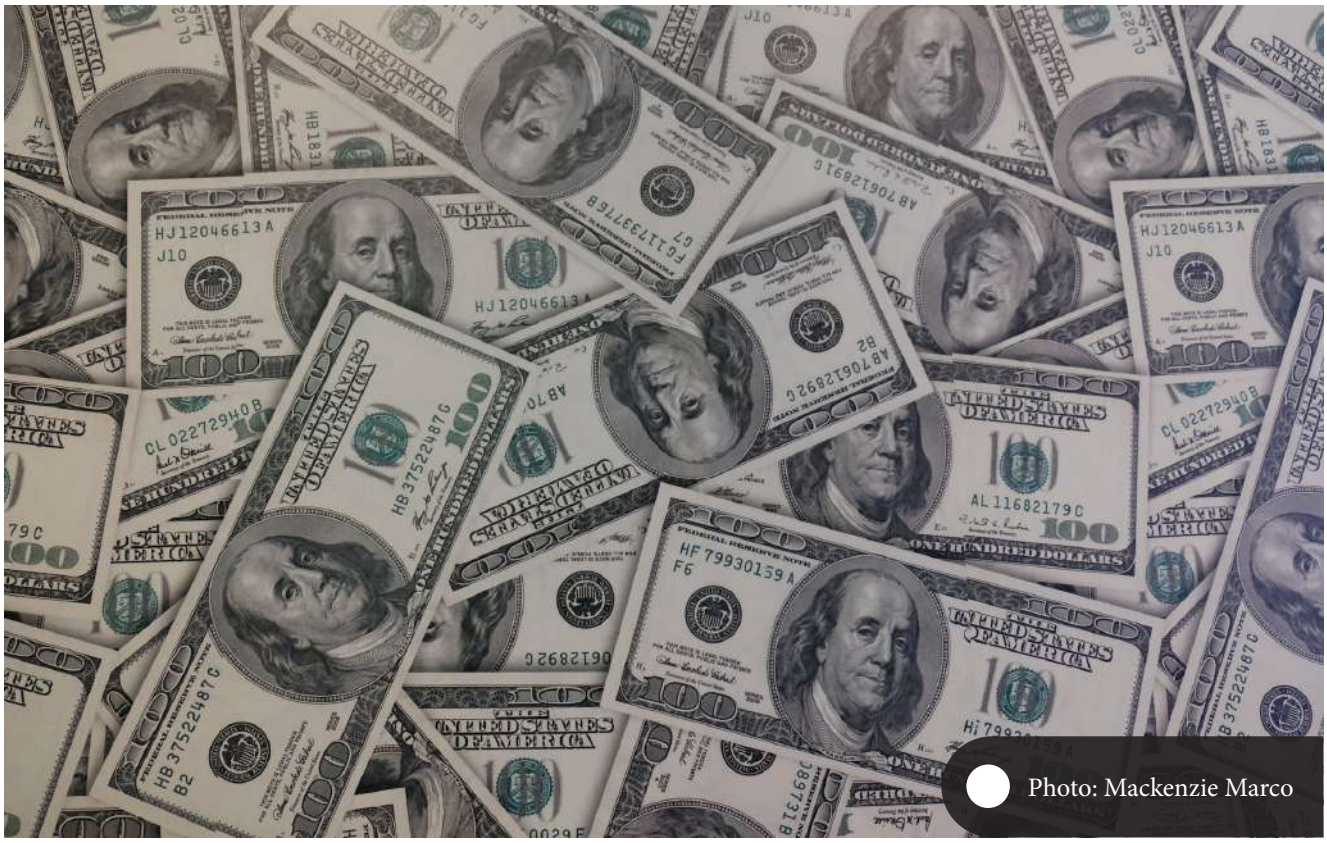


Photo: Mackenzie Marco

According to available data, the remittances made by Myanmar workers have reached over US$1.5 billion in the last six months.

According to data released by Myanmar foreign missions, the remittances made by Myanmar workers mainly from Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and Singapore in the period from 1 November 2022 to 28 April 2023 total over US$ 1.5 billion.

People are leaving Myanmar for foreign countries for work as the job opportunities at home fell sharply after the coup as the economy slowed down.

The remittances made by Myanmar nationals working in Thailand in the last six months from 1 November 2022 to 28 April 2023 were US$496.49 million and Thailand stood first in this regard.

This figure is the remittances received by the Authorized Dealers (AD) banks in Myanmar in the last six months since it started adding supplementary money to the remittances six months ago. The foreign missions of Myanmar released the remittance figures from their respective countries as US$360 million from Singapore, US$211.58 million from Malaysia, US$202.29 million from South Korea and US$117.53 million from Japan respectively.

In transferring Workers' Remittances, Myanmar workers transferred in the local currencies from their countries and Myanmar AD banks received them in US dollars so that they had to adjust the exchange rate with them and it was fixed between 2,865 and 2,870 kyat per dollar.

The Myanmar authorities allowed workers to travel to foreign countries for work since May 2022.

Most of these workers went to Thailand and Malaysia. In Thailand alone, the number of Myanmar workers who went on MoU is over 150,000 within a year.

According to the data released by the Labour Department of Myanmar, the remittances made by Myanmar workers from 2014 to 2022 are US$6.15 billion.

PRICE GOUGING IN AA-CONTROLLED AREAS OF RAKHINE STATE SINCE CYCLONE MOCHA

Photo: Kentaro Kamado

The price of commodities in Rakhine State were raised after cyclone Mocha hit and they remain high despite local authorities telling merchants not to raise prices.

A Mrauk-U resident said: "The price of commodities is not falling. The controls are still ineffective… some merchants are still selling their goods at twice the normal price."

Both junta and Arakan Army (AA) run Rakhine State administrations warned businessmen and vendors not to raise their prices. But, according to local residents, many people are still paying exorbitant prices for basic commodities, especially in the more rural areas of Rakhine State, because no action has been taken against vendors selling overpriced goods.

Rakhine State residents say that the price for one liter of cooking oil, which previously cost 6,000 MMK, has increased to 7,000 MMK. Prior to Cyclone Mocha, a bag of 53 kg of rice cost about 50,000 kyats, but today it can cost up to 150,000 kyats.

"Even though the authorities warned the dealers, the price is still going up," said a Rathedaung Township resident.

The price of wood, bamboo and other materials needed to rebuild buildings damaged by the cyclone has also gone up.

In Rakhine State 100 bamboo poles used to cost 30,000 kyats, but since Cyclone Mocha the price has gone up to between 70,000 and 80,000 kyats in many areas. Before Cyclone Mocha zinc roof rivets cost about 7,000 kyats a viss (1.63kg) but now they can cost 50,000 kyats a viss.

A Ponnagyun resident said: "Waterproof polythene sheeting costs 100,000 kyats. Many people in Rakhine State have yet to repair their houses. The only upside is that it hasn't rained yet. We haven't finished repairing our house yet.

Recently, the AA specifically warned building material suppliers not to price gouge and to stop charging exorbitant prices. This caused the price of building materials to drop slightly, but they have not yet returned to the same levels as before Cyclone Mocha hit.

The cost of basic food commodities in Rakhine State also remains much higher than prior to Cyclone Mocha.

CHINA STEPS UP RESPONSE TO US CHIP MOVES BUT ECONOMIC REALITY LIMITS HOW FAR

Beijing's restrictions on American chipmaker Micron in retaliation to sweeping US chip curbs mark a major step up in its response to Washington's pressure and could open the door for further measures in the geopolitical standoff, analysts say.

But they warned President Xi Jinping's ability to raise the stakes will be limited as he battles to re-energise the world's number two economy while it struggles to recover from years of zero-Covid-imposed inertia.

China last week banned the use of Micron's chips in critical infrastructure projects, which Beijing said posed "major network security risks" that could affect "national security";.

Washington expressed "serious concerns" over the ruling that came just as leaders of the world's seven richest nations (G7) signed a statement urging Beijing to end "economic coercion".

The move marked a significant shift in China's response to US measures that have targeted the country's technology sector, with Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis who specialises in the global chip trade, calling it "a landmark case".

He emphasised it was China's first cybersecurity probe into a foreign company since tighter rules were announced in 2021, and a rare instance when the scope of such reviews was ex-

panded to include national security concerns.

"I wouldn't be surprised if regulators used these reviews as a tool for retaliation in future" when faced with other geopolitical issues, he said.

Emily Weinstein, a research fellow at Georgetown University specialising in the US-China tech rivalry, added that the definition of what fell under "critical information infrastructure" was very broad - ranging from online government services and defence to healthcare and water conservation.

"Technically that could mean that anything qualifies," she said.

"China has consistently found national security or other reasons to create protectionist barriers" including mandatory technology transfer agreements, which require companies to store all data locally and requirements for foreign entities to have joint ventures with local partners in several sectors.

'FUEL TO THIS FIRE'

China began an investigation into Micron in late March, five months after the US unveiled sweeping curbs aimed at cutting off Beijing's access to high-end chips, chipmaking equipment and software used to design semiconductors.

"This is clearly part of a tit-for-tat retaliation for what Beijing perceives as Washington's support of Micron and the US semiconductor industry," said Paul Triolo, a China tech expert at consultancy Albright Stonebridge.

Micron was singled out to make a political statement, Triolo said, adding that previous cybersecurity reviews of domestic firms, such as ride-hailing app Didi, focused on data instead of broadening the scope to include national security.

Photo: Vishnu Mohanan

Washington has banned Chinese chipmakers including Micron rival Yangtze Memory Technologies.

The announcement came as the G7 nations said they would move to “de-risk, not decouple” from China, while Washington pressures allies to unite in restricting chip equipment exports to China.

“The strong statement from G7 may have added fuel to this fire,” Ng said.

However, Xi’s desire to combat what he sees as US hegemony will need to be balanced against the impact such measures would have on the economy.

According to analysts, Micron - one of the US’s largest memory chipmakers - was an easy target because its semiconductors could be replaced by products from South Korea’s SK Hynix and Samsung.

But restrictions against other US firms such as Intel and Qualcomm would be much harder to deal with because their technologies are used in consumer goods, including smartphones, that are made in the country and shipped abroad.

BETTING ON SOUTH KOREA

“The approach of limiting US firms like Micron intends to send a signal that Beijing is willing to bear some pain as it contests with the US,” Ja Ian Chong, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said.

“But Beijing is quite careful to limit costs to itself,” he said, according to Bloomberg News.

The ban will come down particularly hard on companies offering cloud services or data centres because they use hardware that requires high-end memory chips, according to Toby Zhu, an analyst at market research firm Canalys.

He told AFP that Micron’s consumer goods products are “completely replaceable” by South Korean and domestic memory chip suppliers.

And Triolo said Beijing was “betting on switching to South Korean suppliers”.

However, the White House last month urged South Korean chipmakers not to export to China to fill any gap left by a ban on US semiconductor imports.

The Netherlands and Japan have already announced their own restrictions on chip exports, following requests from Washington.

Ng added: “China has been quite cautious not to retaliate too much... because Beijing can’t ramp up domestic capacity quickly to match any shortfall.”

AFP

Penrose Thitsa

CONTROVERSY ARISES AS ASEAN-JAPAN CENTER ALLEGEDLY FUNDS BURMESE JUNTA MINISTRIES

Japan-based ASEAN-Japan Center for Trade, Investment, and Tourism has allegedly provided funding to the Burmese junta's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations and Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, according to activist group Justice For Myanmar (JFM).

According to the activist group, leaked documents and public sources have reportedly provided confirmation of a grant being allocated to the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations for a capacity-building program.

The group stated on Friday that the grant for the 2022-23 period supported at least one event held in March, which was inaugurated by junta minister Dr Kan Zaw.

JFM highlighted that the center is actively engaged in a partnership with the junta's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, actively supporting the regime's efforts to promote tourism. The group claims that this collaboration not only lends legitimacy to the junta but also serves as a source of foreign revenue for them.

CLEANING UP

A monk cleaning up the debris in a Buddhist temple in Sittwe in Rakhine State after Cyclone Mocha hit.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS

PORTRAIT OF DETENTION DRAWINGS OF INSEIN PRISON BY MAUNG PHOE

Sketches by Maung Phoe on display by SEA-Junction.

Sketches and fragments of diary by the artist when he was in Insein prison, which is infamously known as Myanmar's primary jail, were on show at SEA-Junction at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center that ran from 20 to 31 May.

Insein Prison is infamously known as Myanmar's primary jail. Built by British colonialists in 1887 with a circular panopticon design to closely control detainees, it has a decade-long history of being used for repression of political dissidents by the military especially during the 1988-2011 period. Since the 2021 coup, Insein Prison has again received thousands of political prisoners, who have been tortured, incarcerated in inhumane conditions, with some condemned to death and executed.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), as of 9 May 2023, a total of 21,990 people has been arrested since the coup and among them 17,766 are under detention in 56 penitentiaries (with 5,811 serving sentences and 112 in death row), with the largest number in Insein Prison.

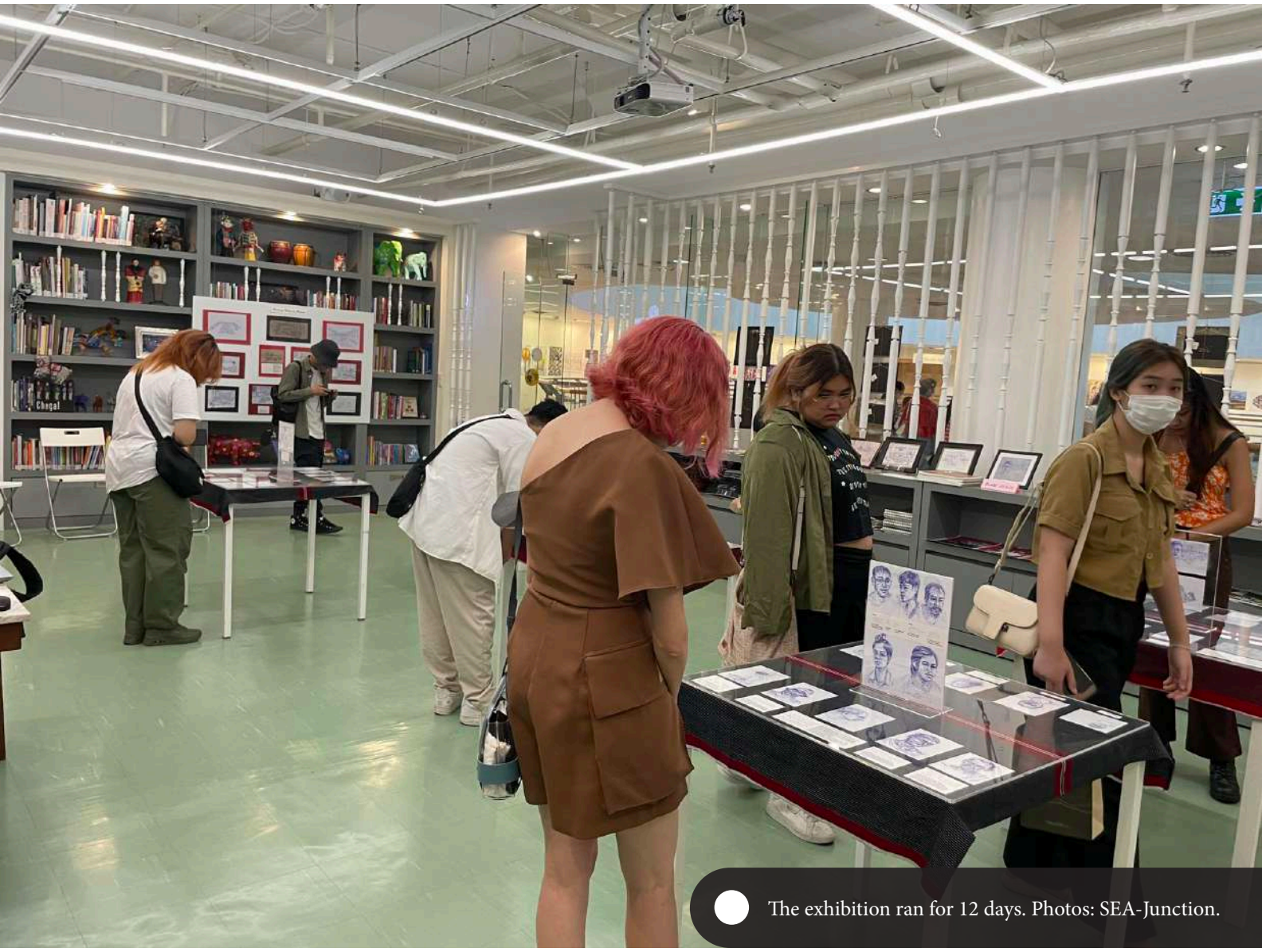
The exhibition consisted of drawings of Insein Prison by artist Maung Phoe. He was arrested along with his wife and son (who were released shortly afterwards) due to possessing materials considered prohibited and imprisoned in Insein Prison for six months from April to October 2021. In the exhibition, over 70 ink-drawings on all kinds of pieces of papers and selected fragments of his diary will be on display to portray detention conditions. The sketches provide

glimpses into crowded rooms, with rows of male inmates sleeping side-by-side or sitting together, attempting to pass the time, as well as scenes of them queuing to wash. Most importantly, there are individual portraits of the prisoners, political and non, who spent time with him in detention and brief annotations of their lives making visible the humanity of those who are invisible behind walls. A smaller number of sketches has previously been exhibited in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai attracting significant media attention.

The drawings are also a testimony to the sense of power of art. As the artist put it in an interview with Global Platforms:

"Denied of rights, privacy and control, for the artists in detention and the communities fighting injustice, art and creativity remain a source of strength and power. The creative force unleashed by resistance to the coup in Myanmar has served to chronicle what is happening, to inspire and motivate and to continue the fight."

The exhibition officially launched with a panel discussion titled "Transcending Prison Walls with Art," inspired by the title of a 2015 Al Jazeera article about an exhibition by former political prisoner Htein Lin.



The exhibition ran for 12 days. Photos: SEA-Junction.

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