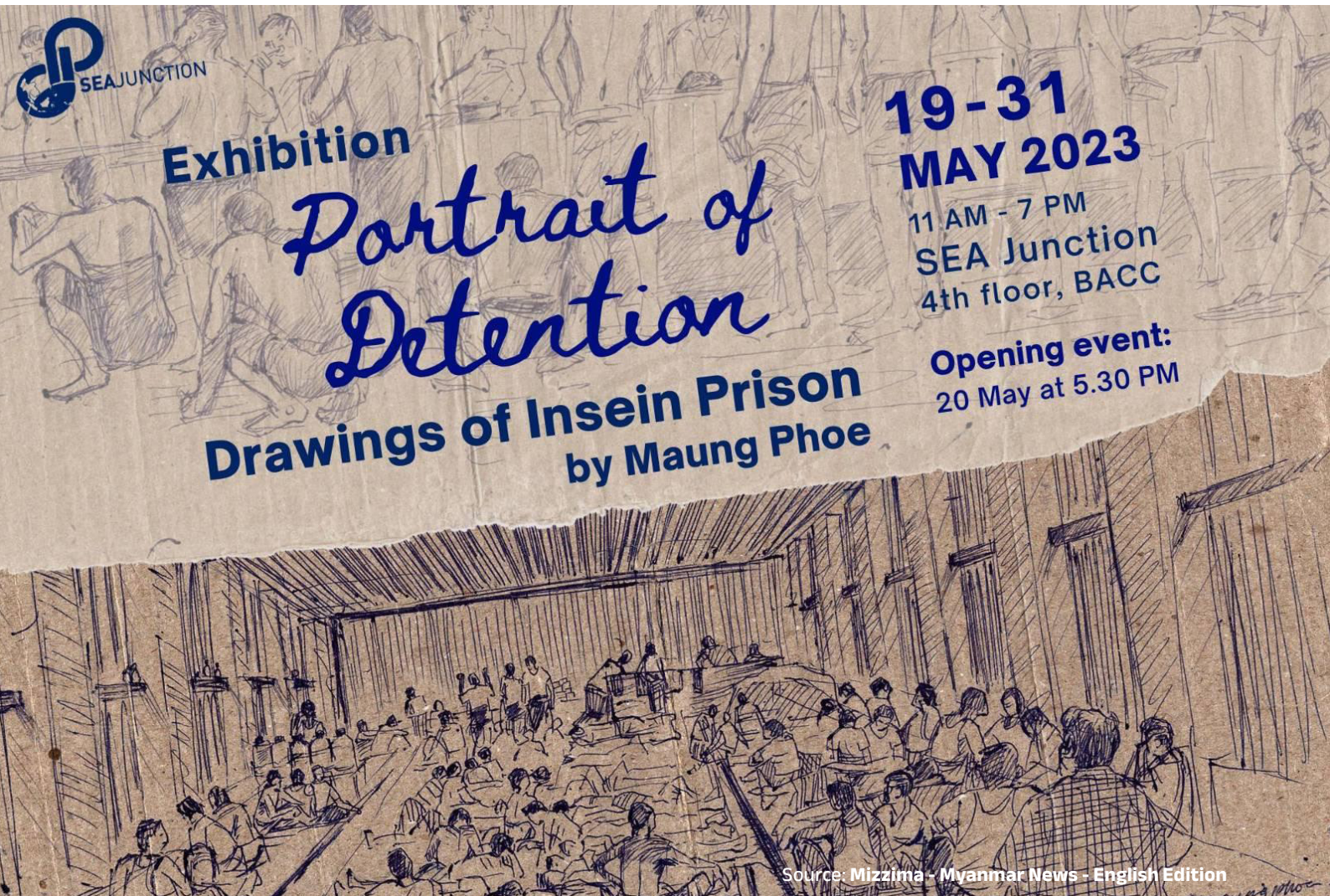


BURMA-INDIA SOLIDARITY



LATEST UPDATES AND NEWS FROM BURMA

The junta conducted several airstrikes in Burma in the month of April. The Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) reportedly retaliated with attacks of their own. According to reports, these attacks were carried out in Shan State's Nawnghkio (Naung Cho) township.

There have been updates that the army is using heavy weapons, which are used in war, against civilians. Moreover, there have been airstrikes that last for several days, continuing even during the night.

Similar killings have been happening in the Kanbalu township in Sagaing Region, where around 200 people were massacred, including more than 30 children, in repetitive airstrikes on a peaceful gathering. This drew global media and diplomatic attention and widespread condemnation.

Recently, around 2,000 political prisoners were released to mark a Buddhist holiday. They were peaceful protestors and journalists, among the thousands who have been arrested since the bloody coup and crackdown.

'Burma-India Solidarity' is a monthly news and perspective update from a network of groups and individuals associated with the Burma-India People's Solidarity (BIPS) network and South Asian Solidarity Collective (SASC).

after February 2021. “There are many prisoners . . . left in the prison,” said Ko Phoe Thar, a student, who was jailed in December 2021 for participating in a non-violent flash-mob demonstration. Those pardoned had been imprisoned under Section 505 (a) of the penal code, which outlaws any action deemed to undermine the military. The law carries a maximum jail term of three years.

In Chin, two members of the Chinland Defense Force-Senthang (CDF-Senthang) were killed and three members were injured in an airstrike on its office in the Hakha township on 8 May. “A helicopter dropped bombs twice over the village but it missed the target. Later, they dropped bombs over the council office . . . We lost our secretary,” said a CDF-Senthang spokesperson.

In Kachin, an unidentified body was discovered with gunshot wounds in Hpakant town on 9 May. At least four bodies of unidentified young men were found dumped by roadsides on 5 and 6 May. Five people, including a senior Burma army official, were killed in a guerilla attack by armed resistance groups at the Hpakant Happy KTV restaurant on 23 April.

In Mon, a woman was killed and another was injured after an airstrike on two villages in Ye township on 8 May. On the same day, bodies of six Burmese army troops were

discovered by a local resistance group in the Banmauk township in Sagaing. “We gave them a proper burial,” said the group’s spokesperson.

Thingyan, the most festive event in the Burmese calendar, has been a subdued affair for the last three years. However, the massacre in the Sagaing region’s Kanbalu township has left the entire population in mass mourning. A day after the attack, a group called the Yangon Revolution Force, hung a banner on a footbridge that said, “Why are you dancing when a whole village is burning?”

In an effort to signal a return to normalcy under its rule, the junta has built Thingyan party pavilions in many townships across the country, hoping to entice crowds of young people eager to have a good time, but the pavilions have remained largely empty.

This is a bulletin from reports prepared by Mizzima News on the ground and also the information given by the resistance groups and NUG:

- There were attacks on four camps of the army and the Pyusawhti militia in Ye-U of the Sagaing region. As many as 10 junta members, including two officers, died.



A man meeting his family after being released from Insein Prison in Yangon on 3 May 2023 | Source: AFP



A Thingyan pavilion in Yangon is deserted on the morning of 13 April | Source: Myanmar Now

- On 6 May, the Minister of Defence of the National Unity Government (NUG) and the Minister of Information, Communication, and Technology of NUG met with the members of Federal Wings.
- On Wednesday, the ethnic revolutionary organizations and the NUG released a joint statement calling on ASEAN to join hands with outside partners including the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance.
- A meeting was recently held between the Central Committee on the Interim Public Administration-NUG and Township People's Administrations from Mandalay Region and Magwe Region.
- In Pulaw township under martial law in Taninthayi Region, the Myeik District Defence Force Regiment completed their basic military training.
- In Butalin of the Sagaing Region, there was a fierce battle between the army and the local People's Defence Force (PDF).
- In Pale, the PDFs attacked the army stationed in town with heavy artillery at night. Reportedly, nine junta soldiers were seriously injured.
- In Pale township, there was an attack on the junta army stationed at the Kandauk Police Station. No less than 10 junta soldiers died.
- On the Monywa-Mandalay Road, there were mine attacks on a convoy of 14 military trucks. Reportedly, there were casualties among junta soldiers.
- In Khin-U township, two junta soldiers were killed and their guns were confiscated.
- In Kantbalu township, the junta armed forces set fire to two local villages.
- Significantly, in Monywa, anti-junta youth protested against the Chinese Government on Thursday, burning Chinese flags.
- In a local village on the Monywa-Amyint roadside, a combined rally conducted a public talk on the current situation of the revolution.
- In Myinmu township, there was a mine attack on a junta convoy. Reportedly, three soldiers died.
- In Banmauk township, the PDFs conducted a burial for the six members of the SNA who had died in a local battle.

- In the west of Banmauk township, the army and the junta-allied Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) have been recruiting by force at the rate of one person per household.
- In Myaung township, there was an attack using 40 mm grenades at the Kyaukyit Police Station. Reportedly, a junta soldier died.
- A rally in Yinmabin North was taken out against the military dictatorship.
- In the Kyaukgyi township of Bago Region, local PDFs caught 11 junta officers and soldiers in their army base in Mone. On the way, a junta soldier was shot dead as he allegedly tried to run away.
- In Moekaung in Kachin State, there was a bomb explosion near the General Administration Office.
- According to Justice for Myanmar, Mexico appointed Sit Tai Aung, a junta crony and arms dealer, to be its honorary consul.
- After the recent ASEAN Summit, the President of Indonesia claimed that the human rights violations by the military junta are unforgivable and that it is necessary to stop violence to protect the people.
- According to Blood Money Campaign-MM, they will send an open letter containing the voices of Burmese people to the G7 Meeting to be held in Japan from 19 to 21 May.
- On 11 May, 27 villagers were reportedly executed by soldiers in Mon Taing Pin and In Pin, Ye-U township, Sagaing region. While the motivation for the attack is not confirmed, Myanmar Witness has found the movement of military convoys in northwest Myanmar since the February 2021 coup. Their

activities center around quelling political dissent and the pro-democracy movement, often through killings, detention, and arson.

- According to Myanmar Witness, between 23 February and 2 April 2023, a Myanmar military column reportedly indulged in killings, fires, rapes, and raids in several villages. Imagery and video footage seem to prove this. There have been reported incidents of citizens being tortured, beheaded, and dismembered. Myanmar Witness has found that at least 33 people were killed in the 8 incidents investigated, 12 of whom were beheaded.

This particular report investigates claims related to the following events:

Airstrike and ground troop incursion: Ma Le Thar

Myanmar military raid: Pa Dat Taing

Beheadings: Kan Taw

Mass killing and beheading: Tar Taing

Detention, mass killing, and beheadings: Let Ka Pin

Beheading: Swea Lwe Oh

Beheadings: Than Bo

Beheading, dismembering, and rape: Ta Ga Nan

Sagaing has been an epicenter of massive resistance since the coup. These eight incidents seem to show a pattern of violence. In many cases, people were first killed and then beheaded. Myanmar Witness reports that since the beheadings serve no functional purpose, they represent a dramatic and horrific warning to those resisting military rule.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The US called on the junta “to cease the horrific violence, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and to respect the genuine and inclusive democratic aspirations of the people of Burma.”

Amnesty International’s business and human rights researcher, Montse Ferrer, said the airstrikes were “horrifying” and “unlawful”. “The relentless air attacks across Myanmar highlight the urgent need to suspend the import of aviation fuel,” he stated. “Amnesty reiterates its calls on all states and businesses to stop shipments

that may end up in the hands of the Myanmar Air Force. This supply chain fuels violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, and it must be disrupted in order to save lives.”

An armed group in Taunggyi district attacked an ASEAN convoy delivering humanitarian aid in the Shan State on 8 May 2023. This attack was condemned by Indonesian President Joko Widodo, “Stop using force. Stop violence because it’s the people who will be victims. This condition will not make anybody win.”

The Secretary of the opposition National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Defense, Naing Htoo Aung, spoke about the attack on Public Voice Television (PVTV). "The military council and Pa-O National Organisation militias are stationed where the incident occurred. The People's Defense Force (PDF) cannot possibly carry out such an attack based on the available geographical information and deployed positions," he said.

The military blamed the attack on the ASEAN aid convoy in Hsi Hseng Township of Shan State on resistance forces. "The terrorists shot them using small arms and the security forces launched a counterattack," the official media reported.

The European Union's clothing production factories in Myanmar have received much backlash. German-based Seaqua Group plans to carry out the project—dubbed the Multi-Stakeholder Alliance for Decent Employment in the Myanmar apparel industry, or 'Made in Myanmar'—with a four-year implementation plan. Khaing Zar Aung, president of the Industrial Workers' Federation of Myanmar (IWFM), said that not only does it grant legitimacy to the military council, but it also promotes labour rights violations. The SMART project, a programme launched in 2013 to support small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the garment industry, was also funded by the EU.

In a statement published in September 2022, the international workers' rights organization, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), highlighted the widespread exploitation in Burma's garment factories since the 2021 coup and stated that workers have been forced to work for long hours under low wages, in terrible conditions and were not paid for overtime work. Moreover, the workers have lost the right to form unions and seek justice from the state. In a statement released by the Confederation of Trade Unions, Myanmar (CTUM)—an alliance of 18 labour organizations—they said they would not collaborate with the 'Made in Myanmar' project. The Solidarity Trade Union of Myanmar (STUM) also opposed the project's implementation.

Ranieri Sabatucci, the EU ambassador to the country, said that he believed the project could help to address some of the issues raised. "Doing nothing would result in massive unemployment and increased exploitation," he added.



The ASEAN Summit in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia on 9 May. Burma's political crisis was discussed in the two-day summit.

SCRIPTING A SENSE OF PRIDE

Guest writer: **Geetanjali Krishna** is the co-founder of The India Story Agency, a cross-border media partnership specializing in environmental, humanitarian and public health stories from South Asia. She has been associated with the Rohingya in India since 2020, when she was awarded the Global Health Security Grant 2021 by the European Journalism Centre, to study the public health implications of the lack of refugee camp infrastructure. As the 2023 grantee of the LEDE fellowship by Solutions Journalism Network, she is writing a monthly newsletter “Rohingya Stories” to showcase community leaders, entrepreneurs and trailblazers in their camps.

From Trash to Cash

In the shimmering heat of May, Syed Hussain squats amidst a mountain of waste as his two sons, both under five, play nearby with old plastic bottles. With his bare hands, he sorts through garbage and separates it into piles of plastic, glass, cardboard, electric bulbs, and wet waste. “People just throw without thinking,” he says, gesturing towards the slew of expensive high-rise condos behind which the Rohingya camp is located. “And people like us make a living going through their refuse...”

His camp, a group of shanties behind a series of expensive condos in Faridabad, is home to 35 families. It has no water, no sanitation, and no infrastructure. “Everyone here collects waste,” he says. They segregate it into cardboard, which sells for Rs 10 a kilo, plastic bottles which go for anything between Rs 20 and 25, plastic bags for Rs 4, and electric bulbs for Rs 1 per piece. “Sometimes people

even throw large items like coolers and old refrigerators,” he says. The work is “dirty,” he says, gesturing to piles of used diapers and festering kitchen waste. “But I’m grateful it enables me to feed my family.

At a time when growing landfills in cities are motivating urban planners to find innovative ways to reduce, reuse and recycle waste, this Rohingya camp performs a critical service for the affluent high-rises of Faridabad. Globally, waste-pickers are estimated to collect and send up to 60 per cent of all plastic for recycling. Waste-picking provides crucial income for refugees worldwide. For example, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, refugee waste-pickers said that their cooperatives create opportunities for people, sometimes “taking them off the streets”.



Recycled waste can be reused in different ways. In Belo Horizonte and Nakuru (Kenya), some of it is sold to artists and groups to work with. Some of the biggest plastic generators, including Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Unilever, and Nestlé, have recently signed up for the Fair Circularity Initiative which advocates for the rights of people in the informal waste sector. Waste pickers are also helping devise the global treaty to curb plastic pollution.

Perhaps, training in waste management and safe handling, market access to scientific recycling companies and waste-handling tools could make waste-picking and recycling a better and more dignified livelihood option for refugees like Hussain. Presently, he takes little pride in what he does. "I want my children to study," he says, "so that they can have more choices when they grow up, compared to my life."

EDITORIAL

In Burma, the Rohingyas have already been forced to flee and now the country is in the grip of a military junta whose ruthlessness is matched only with its determination to hold on to the reins of power. Given our training under the modern border-passport system, we tend to think that nation-states arrived on the planet fully formed and the problems of one state are not only the creation of the people of that state but also their sole responsibility. Though that is manifestly untrue.

In his book, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, Peter Frankopan argues that any modern nation's history cannot be looked at in isolation as singularly the history of the land that the nation has come to occupy through historical accidents. The history of a nation must be understood as interconnected with others because the nation itself is only formed through interaction with others. We need to look at this history not just in terms of changes in the political fortunes of ephemeral regimes, but, more critically, at how societies, trade, and culture, including religion, played such a critical role in shaping what we are and where we find ourselves today.

Burmese history too was shaped by the machinations of multiple forces, like the influence of Buddhism in shaping the monarchy, its contestations with other ethnicities within a region like Rakhine, the narrative built by the British colonialists of a semi-despotic State in dire need of liberation and their subsequent importation of colonial institutions which they had developed and perfected in India, along with the Indians themselves.

In another book called *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the Twenty-first Century*, Thant Myint-U shows us how this constant intermingling of forces and societies has determined where Burma finds itself today. While it may be easy to charge this sort of argument with historical determinism, one can't deny his central thesis that even in the short-lived so-called reform process which barely lasted for a few years since 2011, many of the "older anxieties around race, religion, and national identity" continued to not only

fester but also indelibly affected the new ideas around freedom of expression and democratic politics. In Burma, the process was exacerbated by military institutions having a complete sway over the economy, polity, and other aspects of Burmese life for decades.

To recapitulate, a nation is not a self-produced entity but an entity produced and shaped by and in interaction with others, by what some call the process of 'schismogenesis' wherein identities are formed more by differentiating the self from others than by discovering the self within. While the 19th and early part of the 20th century saw the interplay of regional and imperial geopolitics shaping the Burmese world, we see the current contestations between India and China taking that space even as the West continues to hanker for its share of the pie.

India is Burma's 4th largest trading partner after Thailand, China, and Singapore, and the second largest export market after Thailand, absorbing 25 per cent of its total exports. India continues to engage with the junta of Burma, ignoring all the pleas of human rights watchers. The junta needs trade partners like India to be able to finance its occupation of Burma. Just like India's occupation of Kashmir is very expensive because it has no support from the people and is entirely reliant on the military, the junta's occupation of Burma also has no support among the people and only exists as long as the junta can keep paying the army. While the Burmese people resist the junta and lose their lives to establish a more democratic government that pays heed to their aspirations, their resistance is undercut by the junta receiving finances from abroad.

At this juncture, we know the Indian government will keep bankrolling the decimation of the freedoms of the Burmese people because it wants to do the same thing to its own people. The only thing that we can do in India is to help the Burmese directly or put pressure on the Indian government to reduce its engagement with the junta.



BURMA-INDIA PEOPLE'S SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Burma-India People's Solidarity (BIPS) Network is a collective of journalists, academics, filmmakers, students and women's groups, trade unions, among others. This update is largely based on media reports unless mentioned.

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