

BURMA-INDIA SOLIDARITY



A Rohingya woman carries her baby next to her destroyed house at Basara refugee camp in Sittwe on May 16 after cyclone Mocha made landfall. | Source: Sai Aung Main/AFP/Getty Images

JUNTA'S INTERFERENCE IN RELIEF SUPPLIES TO CYCLONE-AFFECTED AREAS

The junta's deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid in the month of Cyclone Mocha has put thousands of people at immediate risk, while endangering the lives of millions of people. The junta has refused to authorize travel visas for aid workers, and release of urgent supplies from customs and warehouses, along with other life-saving assistance. "The junta's moves to block aid have turned an extreme weather event into a man-made catastrophe," said Shayna Bauchner, Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar on May 14, 2023, and is one of the strongest cyclones to have ever hit the region. The UN estimates are that about 7.9 million people were affected, with 1.6 million in need of urgent aid across five of Myanmar's states and regions—Rakhine, Chin, Sagaing, Magway and Kachin. On June 8, 2023, after several appeals to donor organizations and countries for humanitarian aid, the junta formalized its obstruction by issuing a blanket suspension of travel authorizations for aid groups in Rakhine State, reversing initial approvals granted in early June. This ban was followed by a letter by the junta asking the UN and other international organizations to hand over all the domestic aid and distribution of relief supplies. "It is unfathomable that humanitarians are being denied access to support people in need," the acting UN resident and humanitarian coordinator, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, said following the suspension. "Just when vulnerable communities need our help the most, we have been forced to stop distributions of food, drinking water and shelter supplies. This denial of access unnecessarily prolongs the suffering of those without food to eat or a roof over their head." The Junta disregards multiple international calls regarding humanitarian aid, most notably the five-point consensus from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the December 2022 UN Security Council resolution, which urged "[full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access.](#)"

'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).

In a surprising but welcome move, Don Pramudwina, Foreign Minister of Thailand's caretaker government, reportedly met Aung San Suu Kyi at Naypyidaw on July 9. This was reported as an exclusive news story by 'Kyodo News' of Japan.

This was later confirmed by the minister himself during the meeting of the ASEAN foreign ministers on July 11 at Jakarta, Indonesia, in the first-day session of the 56th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. If true, this was the first such meeting between a top foreign official and Burma's last democratically-elected head of government since the coup of February 1, 2021. The Japanese media organization also reported that the Thai minister read out a document, which was a message by her, during the second day of the ASEAN foreign minister's meeting.

Suu Kyi was imprisoned on cooked-up charges by the military junta after the coup which ousted her democratically-elected government. She is currently imprisoned in prolonged, solitary confinement. Among the charges is the preposterous charge of possessing illegal walkie-talkies!

If convicted in a kangaroo court, where even her lawyers are not allowed to meet her, she will get at least 36 years in prison. Along with her, most of her ministers and political colleagues, and around 16,000 citizens have been arrested. Among the arrested are journalists, doctors, nurses, teachers,

students, and scores of peaceful dissenters who were protesting against the coup and seeking the restoration of democracy.

The protests were crushed with killings and detentions. This pushed hundreds of citizens underground to join the rebel armies, including ethnic guerilla forces in the rural areas, which also operate at the borders of India and Thailand. Since then, an armed guerilla struggle has been relentlessly waged by the underground resistance led by the combat forces of the People's Defense Force (PDF) under the unified command of the National Unity Government (NUG) which combines all the opposition forces. There have been scores of deaths on both sides.

Despite its best efforts, the ASEAN collective of nations has been unsuccessful in restoring peace in a country ravaged by a bloody civil war, with the junta unleashing unprecedented repression and mass killings, including bombing villages using war-planes and firing indiscriminately with machine-guns mounted on helicopters. Ceasefire has remained a distant dream, and all peace initiatives seem half-hearted and trapped in a deadlock.

The junta, allegedly supported by countries like India, including with supply of arms and ammunitions, has chosen to ignore international appeals and critical condemnations, and has continued to unleash its armed forces on the people across the rural and urban areas of Burma.



Aung San Suu Kyi (R) and Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwina (L) at joint press conference in Naypyidaw on May 9, 2016 | Source: AUNG HTET/AFP



JOINT COMMUNIQUE 56TH ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING IN JAKARTA

The good news in a bleak scenario is that the 56th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Jakarta has finally issued a Joint Communique. However, critics have pointed out that the long communiqué has devoted only five paragraphs to the current situation in Burma.

DEVELOPMENTS IN MYANMAR: FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS (5PC)

We discussed the developments in Myanmar and reaffirmed our united position that the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remains our main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar. We strongly condemned the continued acts of violence, including air-strikes, artillery-shelling, and the destruction of public facilities, and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence, denounce any escalation, and create a conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogue.

We commended that the AHA Centre for its partial delivery of aid to 400 households of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Hsiseng Township, located in the Southern Shan State, on July 7, 2023. We appreciated the support of the relevant stakeholders in ensuring safe delivery. We called

on further facilitation to ensure that the humanitarian assistance can safely reach the 1.1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), identified in the Joint Need Assessment (JNA)

Report of the AHA Centre. We appreciated the support from all stakeholders in Myanmar for helping the completion of the JNA by the AHA Centre in an inclusive manner, facilitated by the ASEAN Chair. We called for additional support from the international community for humanitarian assistance to implement the JNA Report.

We appreciated the Chair's efforts in intensifying engagement with all relevant stakeholders in Myanmar to build trust and confidence, create a conducive environment, and bridge gaps and differences leading toward an inclusive dialogue for a comprehensive political

solution. We supported sustaining such engagements to push for the implementation of the 5PC in its entirety, in line with our leaders' decision at the 42nd ASEAN Summit. We called for continued support of the external partners, including the UN and neighbouring countries of Myanmar, to work with ASEAN, for concrete implementation of the 5PC.

In line with paragraph 14 of the ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the Implementation of Five-Point Consensus, we were briefed by Thailand on its recent activities on Myanmar, which a number of ASEAN Member-States viewed as a positive development. We reaffirmed ASEAN unity and reiterated that any effort should support, in line with 5PC and in coordination with the Chair of ASEAN.

We will conduct our comprehensive review of the 5PC implementation and submit our recommendation to the 43rd ASEAN Summit.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN Chair, Indonesia, appealed for a political solution to the crisis, while there has been widespread criticism that this 10-member bloc has turned out to be rather toothless in dealing with a ruthless junta. "Only a political solution will lead to a durable peace," said Retno Marsudi, Chairperson, ASEAN. "We are still very much concerned to see the continuing and increasing violence in Myanmar. We strongly urge all stakeholders to denounce violence as this is paramount to build trust."

MONEY, ARMS AND INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY

According to 'The Guardian', Naw Hser Hser, the first human rights defender from Burma to brief UN Security Council members in an open session since the 2021 coup, will call for greater action to cut crucial supplies of arms and finances to the military junta. She said: "Right now the military just has three things to sustain itself – money, arms and international legitimacy. These things all come from international support."

Naw Hser Hser is a member of the advisory board for the Women's League of Burma (WLB). She will speak as part of the council's annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence.

According to the London newspaper, since the coup, WLB has documented more than 100 cases of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence, though this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg, according to Naw Hser Hser. Among the cases documented are incidents where women have been gang-raped by soldiers, and raped at checkpoints because they are unable to pay bribes. Fear of further harassment has stopped locals from reporting cases of sexual violence.

"Women risk their lives collecting information [and to provide] other essential services," said Naw Hser Hser, who fled her home after the coup and spent five days in the jungle with her two-year-old daughter, carrying little more than milk powder with her. Many activists have had to work outside the country because of the risk of military violence and imprisonment. The military has issued arrest warrants for most of the staff of WLB's member organisations.

Those who remain in Myanmar are living in hiding, frequently changing their location, and are often unable to access the internet to communicate securely. They have faced constant risks – from informants reporting them to the military, to their phones being searched at checkpoints, she said.

The EU has provided an additional 12.5 million Euros to address the humanitarian needs of people in Myanmar, as well as those of Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh and the broader region.

The latest financial assistance aims to mitigate severe food insecurity in refugee camps due to a massive funding gap that resulted in a reduction of food rations distributed to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The situation is expected to become untenable by autumn if no additional funding is mobilized by the international community.

An escalation of the conflict and the consequences of Cyclone Mocha that swept through Myanmar in May have worsened the humanitarian situation in Myanmar.

The new EU funding also aims to respond to these pressing needs with an allocation of 7 million Euros to ensure critical food assistance in Bangladesh; 4.5 million Euros to provide food and health assistance in Myanmar and mitigate the consequences of the current funding gap; and 1 million Euros to respond to the increasing protection needs of displaced people and refugees throughout the region, including in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and India.

Regarding this financial aid, Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarcic, said, "Imagine having to struggle to access food or basic health care. We cannot fathom the immeasurable suffering of vulnerable people in need in Bangladesh and Myanmar, but we can strengthen our humanitarian support to make sure their lifeline will continue. This new allocation will help respond to their most urgent needs and mitigate the consequences of the current funding gap."

In Myanmar, following the coup in February 2021, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has risen from 1 million to over 18 million.

Almost 90,000 people have fled Myanmar for neighbouring countries since the coup. Ongoing conflict and human rights abuse keep driving up the number of refugees and internally displaced people.

The EU has been providing humanitarian aid to people in Myanmar since 1994, and in Bangladesh since 2002.

In February 2023, the EU released over €43 million to address the humanitarian needs of people in Myanmar, as well as those of Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh and across the region.

Following cyclone Mocha's impact in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the Commission released €2.5 million in emergency humanitarian aid and supported the Myanmar Red Cross Society in delivering immediate assistance through the distribution of emergency shelter items, primary healthcare assistance, cash grants and hygiene kits.

OPEN LETTER TO FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON

Campaign group Justice for Myanmar sent an open letter to French President Emmanuel Macron calling on him to raise concerns with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi about India's arms, dual-use goods and technology exports to Myanmar.

Modi visited France on 13 and 14 July and Justice for Myanmar wanted Macron to raise concerns about the exports and require India to ban further exports to the Myanmar junta as a condition on the export of French arms and technology to India.

Below is the text of the letter:

Dear President Macron,

We are writing this open letter to you from Justice For Myanmar, a covert group of activists using research, data visualisation, and reporting to expose and dismantle the business networks that fuel the Myanmar military's international crimes, brutality and corruption.

We request that you raise concerns regarding the sale of arms, dual-use goods and technology from India to the Myanmar junta with Prime Minister Modi during his upcoming visit to France. We also request that you require India to ban further exports of arms, dual-use goods and technology to the junta as a condition on the export of French arms and technology to India.

After Russia and China, India is the third biggest supplier of arms to the Myanmar military. The flow of arms and dual-use goods and technology from India to Myanmar has continued following the military's illegal coup attempt of 1 February 2021, notably including from Indian state-owned companies.

Since the military's coup attempt, India's majority state-owned Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), a joint venture partner of Thalès, transferred multiple items to the Myanmar military, including:

1. A coastal surveillance system;
2. A remote-controlled weapon station;

3. Slip rings that can be used in any electromechanical system that requires rotation while transmitting power or signals, such as for shipborne radar turntables, rotating turrets on military armoured vehicles, airborne radar turntables or guidance systems;
4. Mounting base plates (true north) with the harmonised system (HS) code 8529.90, confirming that the item is a part for use with radio transmission or radar equipment;
5. A sonar transducer and associated main equipment (specified to be wet end) for likely use in a junta submarine;
6. A directing gear system that would support transducer arrays of hull mounted ship sonar systems, such as those developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation;
7. An underwater telephony system, coupled with three sets of unspecified technical documents and test equipment;
8. An expendable bathy thermograph, which can be launched from a ship or submarine to measure the temperature as it falls through the water;
9. MHS-355 and 20W HF SSB manpack radios.

In the same period, items supplied by other Indian companies to the Myanmar military include:

1. 3,000 fuzes supplied by Sandeep Metalcraft, a private arms manufacturer;
2. Spare parts and an alarm monitoring and control system supplied by Larsen & Toubro;
3. 122mm gun barrels supplied by Yantra India Limited, a state-owned arms manufacturer;
4. Motors, timing belts and laboratory items from Jainkoch Corporation.

The Myanmar military junta is a terrorist organisation under Myanmar law and as defined in international law. Since the attempted coup, the junta has killed more than 3,700 people and arrested over 23,700 more. It has conducted deliberate armed attacks on people across Myanmar including children and launches regular indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling as part of a campaign of terror. These actions constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law, for which the military has yet to be held accountable. While the military junta is directly responsible for these attacks, they have been enabled by the continued supply of arms, equipment and technology from international suppliers such as India, and the insufficient level of action taken by the international community to prevent this support from continuing.

We note that in November 2022, H.E. Mr Sébastien Lecornu, Minister for the Armed Forces of France, paid his first official visit to India to hold the Indo-French Annual Defence Dialogue and to strengthen Indo-French strategic ties. The Armed Forces Minister's visit to India reaffirms France's engagement in the Indo-Pacific and India's centrality in the French strategy for the region and came in a year that has seen an acceleration of the French and Indian armed forces' endeavours towards greater interoperability through joint air, navy, and army exercises. Minister Lecornu also held wide-ranging talks with his counterpart, Rajnath Singh, covering industrial and technological partnerships in line with the Make in India policy, under which the Indian government has brought in reforms to encourage design, development and manufacture of defence equipment in India. Without adequate safeguards in place, France may find itself indirectly supporting the Indian government's exports of arms and dual use goods and technology to Myanmar as a result of its defence cooperation with India, including through links to India's domestic production of arms.

India, like France, is a member of the Wassenaar Arrangement. Under this arrangement, India is expected to apply export controls on transfers of arms and dual-use goods and technologies. India also has obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to not transfer weapons when there is an expectation that these weapons could be used in violation of the Geneva Conventions, or to aid and abet atrocity crimes. The fact that that Indian companies have continued to supply weapons, dual use goods and technology after the attempted coup in Myanmar shows a serious disregard by the Indian government for its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, and its commitments under the Wassenaar Arrangement.

In a May 2023 report on the junta's procurement of arms and equipment, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar found that India's supply of materials used in surveillance technology and artillery, as well as likely for missiles, contravenes its obligations under international law. He noted,

"India has the requisite knowledge that the Myanmar military is committing probable war crimes given the substantial international reporting on this subject. India should therefore be aware that the arms it provides to the Myanmar military – though relatively limited – are likely to be used in the commission of international crimes."

Our request for France to take action on Indian arms sales to Myanmar is consistent with the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar in his reports on arms, and UN General Assembly resolution A/75/L.85, which "calls upon all member States to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar."

We further note that in your joint statement regarding the official visit of Prime Minister Modi, it is stated, "France and India have a shared vision on peace and security, especially in Europe and the Indo-Pacific and uphold the objectives and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which are also the basis of our cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region". The UN Charter states that the first purpose of the United

Nations is "to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace".

Your action in support of the human rights and democratic aspirations of the people of Myanmar is in line with this commitment, as well as the French values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

We look forward to your response.

Regards,

Justice For Myanmar



**JUSTICE
FOR
MYANMAR**

FROM THE CAMPS: STORIES OF DEPRIVATION AND RESILIENCE

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.

THE CAMERA DOESN'T LIE

Sahat Zia Hero is a 29-year-old Rohingya photographer from Arakan State, Myanmar. When he fled to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar in 2017, he lost everything, including his precious camera phone and all the photographs in it. But as soon as he was able to buy another one, he began taking pictures of refugee life in Bangladesh. Soon, with support from producer David Palazón, Hero founded Rohingyatographer, a photo magazine with a collective of 20 Rohingya photographers (including four women) in Cox's Bazar. A non-profit initiative published bi-annually, the magazine raises awareness about the Rohingya community and their situation, while also providing a historical record of their lives and experiences in the refugee camps. Hero believes that it is important to preserve the memories of the Rohingya so that future generations remember what they have been through.

The photographs taken by this unique collective do much more than document their displaced community – they capture the intimacy of the shared experience of refugeehood in ways that no outside photographers can. They show that even in the midst of a crisis, there is always beauty to be found, and that the Rohingya are not just numbers, but human beings with a lifetime of stories to tell.

Hero and his colleagues face many challenges in their work. It is not easy to convince people to agree to be photographed. "Often people are too fearful to consent," Hero says. "They're too traumatized to trust." Another challenge is copyright infringement. Hero and his colleagues have had their photographs lifted from their social media handles and reused without permission. "It's hard for us to negotiate such problems," Hero says.



Source: Author

Despite these challenges, Hero and his colleagues are currently working on their third volume of Rohingyatographer, which will focus on food culture. "This has become more urgent now that the UN is reducing their expenditure on food supplies to our camps," Hero says. "With our smartphone cameras, we need to document these issues and become the voices of our community."

A firm believer in the maxim that a picture is worth a thousand words, Hero says that this ragtag bunch of refugee photographers are performing an important function by

making the Rohingya crisis come to life through images and videos. "We want to show the world the truth of our lives, we want to show the world that we are not just refugees, but human beings," he says. "And the camera doesn't lie..."

MYANMAR AND JAPAN'S AMBIGUOUS INTENTIONS: A CLOSER LOOK

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Rakhine State, reversing initial approvals granted in early June. This ban was followed by a letter by the junta asking the UN and other international organizations to hand over all the domestic aid and distribution of relief supplies. "It is unfathomable that humanitarians are being denied access to support people in need," the acting UN resident and humanitarian coordinator, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, said following the suspension. "Just when vulnerable communities need our help the most, we have been forced to stop distributions of food, drinking water and shelter supplies. This denial of access unnecessarily prolongs the suffering of those without food to eat or a roof over their head." The Junta disregards multiple international calls regarding humanitarian aid, most notably the five-point consensus from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the December 2022 UN Security Council resolution, which urged "full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access."



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ISP DATA MATTERS

Conflict, Peace and Security

Data Matters No. 45 | May 17, 2023

■ At least 442 Airstrikes Unleashed in the Last Four Months

In the first four months of 2023, widespread violence unfolded across Myanmar. **At least 1,407** clashes erupted in **115** townships, while **442** airstrikes ravaged **no fewer than 56** townships, claiming the lives of **693** civilians. The deadliest airstrike struck Pazi Gyi village in Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, leaving a toll of **at least 150** civilian fatalities.

Source : Data is collected in accordance with ISP-Myanmar's system for documenting information on armed conflicts, and it is cross-checked with reports from various independent organizations. Actual figures might be higher.

Kachin State's Shwegu Township experienced the highest number of airstrikes with **no fewer than 36**.

Number of airstrikes



Number of clashes



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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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