

BURMA-INDIA SOLIDARITY



Source- Getty images

JUNTA'S ATROCITIES

On 11 April 2023, Myanmar's military conducted a series of airstrikes on a mostly civilian crowd in what could be the junta's deadliest attack since the coup two years ago. More than 100 people, including at least 30 children, were killed at the peaceful function in the Sagaing region. The scene became more horrible for witnesses and locals because body parts and limbs were found scattered everywhere and recognition of the dead was impossible.

Duwa Lashi La, acting president of the National Unity Government (NUG) set up by opposition parties to oppose the junta rule, told the British daily newspaper, The Guardian, that multiple bombs were dropped even as helicopters strafed the gathered civilians.

Images shared online that appeared to have been taken after the attacks on the village of Pa Zi Gyi showed people in civilian clothes dead on the ground beside a destroyed structure. In a video, a man can be heard saying: "If you have survived, please make a sound." He tells others: "If you hear a shout, help them. Go, go."

Sagaing region—near the country's second-largest city, Mandalay—has put up some of the fiercest resistance to the military's rule, with intense fighting raging there for months.

Most opposition party leaders in Myanmar are in prison. The leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Aung San Suu Kyi, who won a landslide victory in 2020,

'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).

is in jail with many of her ministers and colleagues. She has been sentenced to over 33 years in prison on fake and flimsy charges by the military regime. Thousands of civilians, including students, doctors, nurses, and teachers, have joined the resistance and have gone underground. Most of them have made alliances with ethnic guerrilla groups who have been fighting an armed struggle for freedom and regional autonomy. The underground resistance is currently led by NUG and its armed wing, the People's Defence Force.

Aung Myo Min, minister of human rights in the NUG, said: "Only last week, the UN's HRC [human rights council] passed a resolution that condemned the junta's deliberate use of force against civilians and called on the junta to immediately cease all airstrikes. The junta has answered in the only way it knows how – through intensified atrocities and bloodshed."



This photo provided by the Kynhla Activists Group shows aftermath of an airstrike in Pazigyí village in Sagaing Region's Kanbalu Township, Myanmar, April 11, 2023 / Source- AP

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The US government called on the regime to stop the "horrific violence". The State Department spokesperson, Vedant Patel, said: "These violent attacks further underscore the regime's disregard for human life and its responsibility for the dire political and humanitarian crisis in Burma following the February 2021 coup."

Nabila Massrali, a spokesperson for EU foreign affairs and security policy, said: "The EU is deeply shocked by reports of the latest atrocity committed by the military regime in Sagaing, taking the lives of dozens of innocent civilians. We will continue to work to hold those responsible fully accountable."

Germany's foreign office said, "it strongly [condemns] the Myanmar army's airstrike killing dozens of civilians, including many children," adding: "We expect the regime to end the violence against its people immediately."

Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi, after becoming the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has insisted on keeping Myanmar out of the ASEAN with a categorical stand that the nations in the group would only accept its representation after the restoration of democracy.

Tom Andrews, a UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, criticized the international response to the crisis in Myanmar: "The Myanmar military's attacks

against innocent people, including today's airstrike in Sagaing, is enabled by world indifference and those supplying them with weapons. How many Myanmar children need to die before world leaders take strong, coordinated action to stop this carnage?"

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres released a [statement](#) strongly condemning the attack and called for those responsible to be held accountable. He also called for the injured to be allowed urgent medical treatment and access to assistance.

The Secretary-General reiterated his appeal for the military to "end the campaign of violence against the Myanmar population throughout the country," in line with a [Security Council](#) resolution adopted in December last year. [Resolution 2669](#) demands an immediate end to all forms of violence in Myanmar. It further calls for restraint, de-escalation of tensions, and the release of all prisoners.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, also said he was "horrified" by reports of the airstrikes. "It appears that school-children performing dances, as

well as other civilians, attending an opening ceremony at the hall in Pazi Gyi village, Kanbalu Township, were among the victims. A helicopter gunship then reportedly fired on those fleeing the hall," he said.

The UN rights chief noted that despite clear legal obligations for the military to protect civilians in the conduct of hostilities, "there has been a blatant disregard for the related rules of international law." He called on all parties to take "all feasible precautions" to protect civilians from the effects of attacks, including by avoiding locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas. "As I have previously noted, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the military and its affiliated militias are responsible for an extremely broad range of human rights violations and abuses since 1 February 2021, some of which may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes," Türk said, adding, "I firmly believe the international justice processes now underway will one day hold the military leadership accountable for such crimes."

ESCALATION OF ATROCITIES

Meanwhile, according to other reports, a clash between the local community and the military in the village of Kone, led to the raiding of the village by the military. The army set fire to the houses, but when the people did not desist from peaceful resistance, it unleashed a wave of air strikes leaving the place in complete ruins. However, people are still fighting with the junta in different parts

of the eastern as well as western townships. One of the residents of Kone reported that the army has destroyed about 40 houses and 600 are still standing.

U Kyaw Zaw, the leader of Tar Taing village's defence force was brutally murdered by the junta, with his legs, arms, and head decapitated. Other similar killings have



Nam Name village is burned by junta troops on March 13 / Source- KNDF

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.

The Rohingya language is spoken and understood by about ten lakh people in Myanmar (Rakhine State) and by two lakh people in Bangladesh. Although accompanied by a rich literary tradition, the language had no definite script until Islamic scholar Mohammad Hanif developed a standardised script in the 1980s. Now, known as the Rohingya Hanifi language system, it has become a crucial symbol of the identity and culture of the persecuted minority which has long been denied recognition in Myanmar. However, few Rohingyas can actually read and write in their language even today.

In a ramshackle camp in Faridabad, Haryana, Maulvi Ismail teaches it to all the camp children. From a book that he has printed from a PDF, its pages withered with use, Ismail recites poetry to the children. He also texts in Rohingya, ever since Google introduced a keypad in the Rohingya script.

About 40 miles away in Mewat, Haryana, Abdullah pores over his mobile phone, looking at a WhatsApp group of Rohingya script learners from across Asia. "I spend time learning it every day... I feel it is a way to connect with my heritage," he says. "The Rohingya script might not be very old, or even widely read, but at least it's our own," he says. Usually, they text Rohingya words in English. "But our own script feels like home."

Ismail says that in his camp, where not even one of the 70-odd children under 14 is studying in school (residents say that without the national ID card, Aadhar, school admissions have become impossible), there is a little pushback from the community against his Rohingya language classes. "They tell us that the Rohingya script is useless, that their children will be better off learning English," he says. "To them, I say, how can we forget where we have come from? This script is our culture. I believe



A village burned by Myanmar regime forces in Sagaing / Source- Wetlet True News.

been reported in the region of Myinmu. As many as 17 bodies have been found in the Sagaing region which has signs of torture.

In another sinister move, the military junta has allegedly been threatening and intimidating the Rohingyas so as to compel them to give favourable testimonies in the ongoing case of genocide in the International Court of Justice. High-ranking soldiers and intelligence officers from the Military Operations Command in Buthidaung, Rakhine State—commonly known by the abbreviation Sa Ka Kha—met with several Rohingya residents of nearby Rathedaung Township on February 24 and 25 this year, according to a source close to the residents. The Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) was formed in 2018 in order to investigate the violence that happened in Chut Pyin against the Rohingya community. The military came up with its own version of the 'Military Court of Inquiry' in March 2019 to "complement" the ICOE's findings. It was restored in January 2023 due to international pressure faced by the military of mass killings and human rights violations.

Two European engineering firms have been engaged in the construction of a dam project earning millions which is socially and environmentally damaging. The military has been involved in the construction of hydropower projects along with waging a campaign of terror among the people. There is data that Swedish engineering firm

AFRY AB and Austrian-German ILF Group pocketed huge fees at a time when other European and Japanese firms pulled out of Myanmar dam projects following the coup. Under the cover/impression of "development", these are the tactics used by the Junta to crush the freedom of speech and expression, and assembly. Companies like ILF when asked to stop said "The dam required for the power plant is a so-called rockfill dam with a clay liner. With this type of dam, once construction has begun, it cannot be stopped immediately for safety reasons. Our activities were discontinued some time ago, and most recently focused on dam stabilization and slope stabilization for spillway purposes." Shan Human Rights Foundation [documented](#) grave human rights violations by the Myanmar military near the Upper Yeywa project. The Upper Yeywa is an 80MW hydropower project on the Namtu River/Myitnge River. It was initiated under the former military dictatorship in Myanmar in 2008, and it faced mass resistance by the local communities because of its devastating social and environmental impacts, lack of transparency, a threat to ancestral lands, and fuelling of conflict. Despite human rights violations and international responses condemning the military junta, many international corporations still have been working hand in hand with the Junta. In the process, they have enabled continuing destruction at a mass scale.



Students reading Rohingya (written Hanifi script) from books in Kutupalong Refugee Camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Source: Atlas of Endangered Alphabets/ Eric DeLuca

that every camp should have a Rohingya language class so that we can all stay true to our roots even though we have been displaced from our homeland.”

For a community whose culture and heritage have been systematically destroyed over the years by mainstream Myanmar, their own script offers a chance for them to record their history, culture, and heritage. Given that

the decade between 2022–2032 marks the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, and that the Rohingya, as the largest population of displaced people in the world, are staring at the extinction of their culture and identity, reviving the Rohingya script could re-script cultural and communal pride. Ismail advocates, “If the UNHCR were to have one Rohingya teacher in every camp, it would greatly enhance our Rohingya pride.

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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