

BURMA-INDIA SOLIDARITY

In a recent article in 'The Guardian', Simon Tisdall wrote that the problem is not that governments around the world are unaware of what is happening in Burma, "It's that they are not doing nearly enough to stop it."

He writes in an insightful and moving piece: "The carnage is unceasing, yet, only occasionally does it hit the international headlines. One such moment came in April when the junta bombed the village of Pazigy in Sagaing region. More than 160 people, including children, were killed by what Human Rights Watch said was a thermobaric, fuel-air vacuum bomb, followed by helicopter gunship attacks. 'The ordnance detonated with deadly impact, ripping the bodies of men, women and children open, turning their skin to ash, and inflicting critical shrapnel wounds,' a UN report said."

Tisdall continues: "Myanmar's dictator, General Min Aung Hlaing, is as paranoid as he is brutal. He has banned opposition political parties, silenced the media, and jailed the country's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

An estimated 1.38 million people have been displaced. That's in addition to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, victims of what investigators say may be genocide...

"The US, the UK and the EU have imposed several rounds of sanctions on the regime, including an arms embargo, but their efforts are undercut by China, Russia, India and others. While condemning the junta, the ASEAN regional grouping is split – and has proved ineffectual, too... China could probably stop the killing if it wanted. But it values Myanmar's natural resources and ports above human rights and democracy. The UN says Beijing has supplied the junta with \$254m in arms since the coup.... Russia, whose \$400m in weapons sales include the helicopter gunships used to kill the Pazigy villagers, joins China at the UN to protect the junta from tougher international action..."

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN BURMA?

The military junta, known as the Tatmadaw, has taken over the country and is engaged in ethnic cleansing of minorities. This was already visible even before the military coup in 2021 as the military targeted the Rohingyas over many years.

Post the coup, it has totally demolished the rule of law in favour of arbitrary rule by military diktat. The security forces are responsible for all kinds of heinous crimes for which there is no way to hold them accountable. People have fled the big cities

of Yangon and Mandalay. Tatmadaw forces, in turn, have bombed ethnic communities internally displaced in Karen and Kachin states.

The minorities in the country, along with activists and lawmakers who are against the military, have been resisting and protesting. They have come under the military group, People's Defence Force (PDF), initiated by the parallel opposition-led National Unity Government (NUG), opposing the junta's rule.

'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).

LATEST UPDATES



Source: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images

There are reports that due to the increasing intensity of the crisis, the junta has made several overtures to Aung Saan Suu Kyi, currently in prolonged detention on cooked-up charges, with no evidence whatsoever. This includes sending top army generals to negotiate with her. The content and nature of the talks are not known.

Meanwhile, there are shocking reports that more than half of the nearly 2,000 attacks on health facilities and workers reported globally took place in Ukraine and Burma. Under international law, attacking or interfering with medical services during an armed conflict is a war crime. Some of the attacks appeared to target medical facilities deliberately.

However, in abject pessimism, the latest news from the UN is being interpreted as a sign of possible good news. Noeleen Heyzer would be stepping down as the United Nations Special Envoy for Burma after an 18-month tenure, which was marked with criticism from all sides, including the opposition and the junta in Burma. A new envoy is like to be appointed soon.

ASEAN nations seem to be in a bind as the junta refuses to enter any dialogue or choose ceasefire. Neighbouring nations are therefore forced to eliminate it from any collective forums in the region. For instance, Heyzer, too, tried her best to create conditions for dialogue and an end to violence, but, unfortunately, failed, in the final instance.

The de facto united opposition alliance led by the NUG should be given international legitimacy and invited for dialogue so as to effectively restore democracy in Burma. In the current blood-letting from both sides, innocent citizens are suffering, especially in the border

zones where the underground resistance is most intense. Indeed, in one of her final symbolic gestures, Heyzer publicly met the NUG foreign minister, sending a strong message to the top brass in the junta.

Meanwhile, 'Mizzima' reported the latest updates from the ground in June:

- The Karenni State Interim Administration Council was officially established.
- The Acting President stated that the formation of the Karenni Interim Administration Council would play a vital role in a new federal democratic union of the future.
- In Kentucky and Indiana of the United States, the Chair of the Committee Representing the Pyitaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and NUG ministers met with the Myanmar community.
- There was a meeting between the Central Committee on the Interim Public Administration-NUG and Township People's Administration from Taninthayi Region, Ayeyarwady Region and Bago Region.
- In Sagaing Township in Sagaing Region, the leader of Zero Guerrilla Force and his members, fully equipped with arms, went around the town of Sartaung on 6 June. Reportedly, the junta soldiers and police did not come out of their bomb-shelters and bunkers.
- In the south of Monywa, the junta army opened fire and raided Nyaungbintha village. Reportedly, a woman was injured as she was hit by a bullet and a tea-shop was burnt.

- A rally from Yinmabin North led a march against the military dictatorship.
- In Kantbalu District, the junta armed forces set fire to two local villages. Reportedly, 48 houses were burnt to ashes.
- A rally of Salingyi Township Public's Administration, Local Security Forces, People's Democratic Forces (PDFs) and local residents protested against the military dictatorship, raising a banner: 'We give a red salute to Ko Bantgyi'.
- Revolutionary forces released a video showing the battle between the junta army and local resistance in U-Mingone Village of Kawlin Township on 4 June.
- May Bagyi, an actress who had changed her profile picture to black on social media to protest the junta's air attack on Pazigy Village of Kantbalu Township, was sentenced to three years in prison last week.
- In Myingyan Township of Mandalay Region, two junta soldiers were shot dead on their way from Kyi Village to Simikone. Reportedly, a gun was also confiscated.
- In Salin Township of Magwe Region, all the junta soldiers and police ran away to towns after the attack on Thayettaw Police Camp.
- In Oatpho Township of Bago Region, there was a mine attack on a junta troop somewhere near Bago Mountain Range. Reportedly, four soldiers died.
- On 8 June, the junta army raided a frontline camp of the Nattalin PDF. In the incident, three PDF members lost their lives.
- In Thayetchaung Township of Taninthayi Region, the junta army set fire to Kanat Thiri Village.
- In Mabai Township of Shan North, the junta armed forces set fire to Shwetone Village and Kwayhaungtone Village. They also arrested 50 local people and used them as human shields.
- In Mindat Township of Chin State, the displaced people from Matupi have been badly in need of assistance.
- In Charoen Sin of Thailand, the 10th Spring Revolution Football Match was conducted to raise funds.
- The 78th birthday of Aung San Su Kyi has been celebrated widely by the underground resistance and the NUG.
- In Moby of Shan South, some local people, including three children, lost their lives due to the attacks by the junta armed forces from 27 May to 9 June.
- In Kutkhine Township of Shan North, there were battles between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the junta army.



- In the west of Pekone on the border of Shan-Karenni, there has been heavy fighting against the junta army. The Dimawso PDF has been conducting a campaign for funding an MG-3 weapon to use in those local battles.
- Lt-Gen Yar Pyae and retired Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo, who have been leading the junta's peace process, met with Aung San Su Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw Prison on 27 May and 4 June.
- The junta minister of industry donated medicines worth Rs 100 lakh to the chief minister of Rakhine State for the victims of Cyclone Mocha.
- According to military sources, the junta soldiers, who got injured in frontline battles, were not allowed to leave the junta army. Instead, they were sent to Chaungtha Beach for relaxation.
- In Karenni State, where there has been heavy fighting, the Interim Administration Council was established.
- In Sagaing Township of Sagaing Region, the junta armed forces set fire to over 50 houses in Yonebin Village during their attack on 10 June. They also took away valuable things from people's houses.
- On their 815th day of protest, a combined rally of Salingyi and Yinmabin marched against the military dictatorship.
- On 6 June, the Salingyi Special Task Force conducted bomb attacks via drones on the Northwest Military Headquarters in Monywa and the junta police station in Kani.
- In Yinmabin Township, a rally of Shwe Oakkan protested the military dictatorship.
- In Shwebo Township, over 70 junta soldiers faced a mine attack in the east of Thanbo Village. Reportedly, some of them died.
- In Paungte Township of Bago Region, Tin Aung Lay, a Pyusawti member and a local guide for a junta troop, was shot dead in the east of Latpankone Village.
- In California, US, there was a celebration of Burma Day, along with an anti-junta protest, in front of the California State Capitol.
- In Mandalay Region, the TBK Force based in Thabaitgyin Township called for contributions to their rations and medicines in the rainy season.

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.

TRADITIONAL SKILLS TO THE RESCUE

When the World Food Programme drastically cut the food rations for the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, from \$12 to \$8 this June, it again highlighted the consequences of letting large, displaced communities rely on dole, instead of empowering them with education and livelihood, indeed, better opportunities to lead independent lives. Whether it is Cox's Bazar or rural Haryana, the majority of Rohingyas are leading a hand-to-mouth existence, unable to put their native skills and ingenuity to practical use. Faizul Rahman, a Rohingya living in a camp in Haryana, shows how his traditional skills have helped him move from dole to dignity.

"When I came to India in 2011, all I brought was this skill in my hands," says Faizul Rahman. He comes from a long line of carpenters, who have now, unfortunately, scattered, because of the genocide of the Rohingyas in Burma. "Back home, we would work with bamboo as it grows abundantly in Burma and is commonly used for building houses there," he says. "It was only after I came to India that I realised that my work is unique." It was by chance that Rahman got his first project to build a cane and bamboo house, almost 20 years back, and he has not looked back ever since.



Source: Author

“Bamboo houses require much more skilled labour than basic cement constructions,” he says. “And Rohingya-made structures are much more artistic than local ones.”

Rahman’s work was appreciated and soon the demand for it grew. He decided to train team of artisans from his camp. Today, he is simultaneously working on two projects and says that he could have had much more work if he had a national ID. “Without a bank account and Aadhar card, people tend not to trust us,” he says. To vent his frustration, Rahman decided to build a mosque in his camp, an elegant bamboo structure with sturdy scaffolding and tightly woven, highly decorative, cane walls.

Given the right opportunities, artisans like Rahman can not only earn a living but also keep their traditional crafts alive. UNHCR’s initiative, MADE51, addresses exactly this: it identifies refugees with artisanal skills, develops producer groups, and connects them to local social enterprise partners. Additionally, it partners with private sector vendors to curate collections, create marketing opportunities and make products available for sale to consumers worldwide. Rohingya refugees too, need such projects.

Meanwhile, Rahman trains other young boys in this craft. “After learning under me, 15 young men have started their own business,” he says, proudly.

BURMA AND ASIA

States in South Asia have reacted to the military coup in Burma according to their own political and economic interests. Countries like India and Sri Lanka have only tried to benefit from the conflict without contributing anything positive to stop it. The maritime democracies in the region—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines—have been the most active in condemning the junta’s actions, especially its attacks on ethnic minorities and ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas. However, Brunei, the current chair of ASEAN, has been quiet on the issue. Thailand, which shares a border with Burma, has been in a bind because it doesn’t want to bring attention to itself by speaking about Burma. Countries like Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are also mute due to similar reasons.

This has increased the presence of big powers like China and United States in the region, which are pursuing their own agendas through the war. China is seeking to

expand its sphere of influence economically, while the USA is attempting to occupy yet another place and use yet another war to defame and delegitimize China. The increased role of America—which already has military presence in South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam — threatens to plunge all of Asia into proxy wars (under the ruse of containing China), which is what happens whenever America intervenes in a region. Besides, it is the largest weapons supplier in the world and benefits directly from an increase in war; so to expect it to contain the war in Burma is totally pointless.

Despite various peace interventions by international organizations during the ongoing crisis in Burma, the status quo after the military coup in 2021 has remained more or less the same. This is because all the interventions have been extremely half-hearted.

Recently, the military, attacked the convoy of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) on 7 May, 2023. Providing humanitarian assistance is the fourth part of the five-point ASEAN consensus for Burma. The five-point consensus of the ASEAN states that first, there should be an immediate end to the violence. Second, there should be dialogue among the different parties. Third, there should be appointment of a special convoy. Fourth, there should be humanitarian aid/assistance by ASEAN, and, fifth, a special convoy visit to meet all the parties in Burma.

When the ASEAN leaders gathered for their 42nd Summit in Indonesia on 10 and 11 May, 2023, the junta conducted attacks in Nyaung Pin Thar Village, Htantabin Township in the Bago region, killing at least 18 people, including five

children. One reason for this blatant show of arrogance can be the continuation of the representatives of the Burma military in the Governing Board of the AHA Centre. This has received a lot of flak from the people of Burma disappointed by the ASEAN's intervention while also questioning its credibility in resolving crises when the military is part of the AHA governing body.

Another message that the junta is trying to deliver through this attack is that it has no intention of providing people with humanitarian aid through international bodies or any kind of national set-up. The junta has specifically targeted ethnic minorities when it comes to receiving international aid. In the past, it has also tried to create a rift among the various ethnic minorities by providing discriminatory aid to one group, while denying it to the other.



ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Recent Attack on a Convoy of the AHA Centre and ASEAN Monitoring Team in Myanmar

We were deeply concerned with ongoing violence in Myanmar and urged the immediate cessation of all forms of violence and the use of force to create a conducive environment for the safe and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogues.

We supported the statement of the President of the Republic of Indonesia as the Chair of ASEAN on 8 May 2023 in response to the recent attack on a convoy of the AHA Center and the ASEAN Monitoring Team in Myanmar. We condemned the attack and underlined that the perpetrators must be held accountable.

We supported the efforts of the Chair of ASEAN, including its continued engagements with all stakeholders in Myanmar, to encourage progress in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus.

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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