



ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

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MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- Justice for Myanmar, Info Birmanie, and BankTrack published the [report](#), *Investing in Myanmar’s military cartel: What does your bank finance?*
- Germany’s Bundestag [issued](#) a statement stating plans to impose more sanctions on entities and individuals linked to the junta.
- UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews [addressed](#) the UNHRC in Geneva on the need for more action and less rhetoric.
- An open letter to President Macron [sought](#) French support to stop Indian arms sales to the Burmese junta.
- Singapore’s United Overseas Bank [closed](#) down accounts belonging to Myanmar Airways International, whose owner has close ties to the military regime.
- The U.S. [sanctioned](#) two junta-owned banks.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hold the Junta accountable by taking tangible actions, including, but not limited to: imposing immediate targeted sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise;
2. Provide immediate cross-border assistance directly to local civil society organizations;
3. Recognize and engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exert all possible pressure through every available means, including multilateral, regional, and bilateral engagement, to ensure that the military allows humanitarian assistance in impacted areas, immediately stops offensives throughout the country, and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners.

ANALYSIS

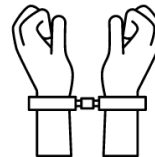
Humanitarian catastrophe rings in the one year anniversary of the executions of pro-democracy activists

July 25th marked the one year anniversary of the executions of pro-democracy activists. In the one year span, the crises in Burma continue to spiral out of control as the military regime increases its campaign of violence and aerial assault on the civilians. There has been a rise in extrajudicial killings under the pretense of alleged escapes. The AAPP has highlighted numerous individual cases of unlawful killings and disappearances of political prisoners in Burma, often occurring during supposed "prison transfers." There have been over 3,757 recorded deaths since the February 2021 coup, including 150 in prisons. The intense armed conflict is plunging the country further into chaos as nearly 2 million civilians are displaced in Burma. Natural disasters, such as Cyclone Mocha, have exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation.

Latest Statistics



24,246 arrested since the 2021 coup



19,740 prisoners still detained



150 people dead as a result of prison



~800,000 affected by Hurricane Mocha



~500,000 evacuated to Bangladesh due to Hurricane Mocha

“

These executions amount to arbitrary deprivation of lives and are another example of Myanmar's atrocious human rights record.

Amnesty International's Regional Director Erwin van der Borgh

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The events that unfolded in Burma in July 2023 paint a grim picture of a country still engulfed in a multifaceted crisis. The military junta's relentless grip on power has resulted in severe political repression, violence against civilians, and economic turmoil, leading to a profound humanitarian catastrophe.

July marks the one year anniversary of the [July 25, 2022 executions](#) of Phyo Zeya Thaw, a former member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu (also known as Ko Jimmy), and two other men, Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw, convicted of alleged murder, who were executed following secretive and unfair trials conducted by Burma's military authorities. This resumption of executions in Burma represented a significant escalation in state repression, which demonstrated a disregard for [international human rights law and standards](#). Burma's military authorities appeared to be using the death penalty, alongside other human rights abuses, as tools to suppress opposition and dissent. These actions not only undermine the global trend towards [death penalty abolition](#) but further isolate Burma internationally.



*The Burmese junta executed Phyo Zeya Thaw along with three other pro-democracy activists.
Credit: HipHop Canada*

These secretive and unfair trials conducted by the military violate prohibitions against arbitrary deprivation of life and cruel punishment, suggesting a need for [urgent international response](#). Considering the apparent politicization of charges and the transfer of civilian trials to these tribunals, the international community

should strongly condemn these acts, impose stricter sanctions, and work towards holding these authorities accountable, including through potential avenues of international justice. Furthermore, the situation emphasizes the necessity for promoting human rights education and advocacy in Burma to empower civil society, as well as establishing dialogue and peace-building measures that might alleviate the conflict.

Today, Burma's political prisoners are still treated with the same lack of transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights, with a rapid increase in [extrajudicial killings](#) by military authorities under the pretense of alleged escape. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has highlighted numerous individual cases of unlawful killings and disappearances of political prisoners in Burma, often occurring during supposed [prison transfers](#). With over 3,757 recorded deaths since the February 2021 coup, including 150 in prisons, the AAPP calls for [international intervention](#) and accountability to condemn the blatant human rights violations that render the rule of law void in the country.

Another significant incident during this month was the [detention of Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise personnel](#) after a document leak exposing the military's attempts to circumvent sanctions. This highlights the military's desperate attempts to maintain control over the country's resources and finances. The international community must closely monitor detainees' safety and exert pressure on the military to ensure their fair treatment. Concurrently, the international community should also conduct investigations into the [junta's financial operations](#) to create precise sanctions and obstruct future evasion. This should be done through international collaboration with key nations, civil society groups, and global financial sectors, to promote adherence to international law, democratic governance, and transparency in finance.

The continued armed resistance by the People's Defence Force and collaboration between ethnic

armed groups against the military indicate a deepening polarization in the country. While these resistance efforts reflect the people's frustration with the regime, the use of force has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation, particularly evident in the evergrowing IDPs in several regions, such as [Mandalay](#), [Karen](#), [Sagaing](#), [Chin](#), [Shan](#), [Kachin](#), and [Karenni](#) State. Adding to these challenges, natural disasters like [Cyclone Mocha](#) in Rakhine State have disproportionately affected vulnerable communities already grappling with political turmoil. The military's lack of adequate disaster preparedness and response measures has resulted in preventable loss of life. Urgent international assistance and collaboration with local aid groups are essential to mitigate the impact of such disasters on affected populations.

The economic crisis, worsened by the military coup and international sanctions, has had devastating consequences for ordinary civilians in Burma. The sharp decline in the value of the Myanmar kyat has led to rising inflation and exacerbated economic hardships. The issuance of [high-denomination notes](#) by the Central Bank may offer temporary relief, but it is imperative for the government to implement long-term economic reforms and stabilize the currency to address the root causes of the crisis. Amidst this bleak landscape, the establishment of the [Spring Development Bank](#) by the National Unity Government presents some hope in the resistance against the junta. However, careful monitoring of the bank's operations is necessary to ensure transparent use of funds and prevent any misuse that could undermine the legitimacy of the democratic movement.



*At least two schools in Karenni state have been damaged during aerial strikes launched by the Burmese junta.
Credit: BNI*

Furthermore, the [military's appointment](#) of complicit individuals to key positions, such as Lieutenant General Ni Lin Aung as the new police chief, demonstrates a lack of accountability and a disregard for international sanctions. The international community should continue to impose targeted sanctions and diplomatic isolation until the junta demonstrates genuine commitment to democratic principles and human rights.

In conclusion, the events in Burma in July 2023 illustrate a country in turmoil, marked by political repression, armed conflicts, economic hardships, and humanitarian crises. The international community's united response is crucial to exerting diplomatic pressure on the military junta, supporting legitimate democratic movements, and providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence and displacement. Only through concerted efforts and diplomatic engagement can there be hope for a peaceful and inclusive resolution to the ongoing crisis.

VOICE OF A KARENNI IDP

Interview provided by the Karenni Human Rights Group

At this moment, there are more difficulties in terms of livelihoods. Those with more family members are facing greater struggles. There have been problems between war evaders staying close to town and those inside the town due to the lower number of donors, which has led to an insufficiency of rice and the main supply. Unfortunately, only some members of the families are capable of farming to support their livelihoods, while others rely on donors.



*One of the Karenni IDP camps in the jungle.
Credit: Karenni Human Rights Group*

The school reopened on June 1, 2023. Since there were not enough dorms, new ones were being built. To this day, the construction is still ongoing. The school is open to G-9. We don't have enough teachers as we cannot afford to give them allowance. Thus, no one wants to take up the role. Now, we have started collecting donations from

the parents. Last time, Ka Yaw youth donated money for the teachers' allowance. In a month, each youth donated 30,000 kyat (~\$14.30). We are also in need of teacher's guides, cleaning supplies, and water pipes for the school.

In terms of health, there aren't any needs. We are all fully healthy and doing great, thanks to the medical and health teams' regular check-ins, their constant presence, and overall effectiveness. Around here, there are close to no worrisome sicknesses, just about a runny nose and a cough.



*Some of the shelters at an IDP camp in Karenni state.
Credit: Karenni Human Rights Group*

While humanitarian aid is in dire need, the people expressed interest in receiving training on human rights awareness, as well as child protection for the children.

AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA

CHIN

A junta jet dropped two bombs on a village in Mindat Township on July 3, [killing](#) three and injuring one. Ground troops then fired artillery at the village, destroying the school and damaging ten homes. As usual, there was no armed conflict nearby to provoke such an attack. Fighting has been fierce in southern Chin State all month since the CDF [attacked](#) junta troops in Paletwa Township on July 4, opening up a new front. Battles [continued](#) through mid-July in Kanpetlet Township, displacing hundreds of villagers. The junta has been [pushed back](#) and now only controls a few towns. On July 16, junta soldiers in Mindat Township [abducted](#) four clergymen, believing the clergymen were supporting the CDF. Soldiers then interrogated, beat, and tortured them. One managed to escape, but the other three are presumed dead.

KACHIN

In July, tensions continued to rise between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Burmese army forces. The junta [dispatched](#) more soldiers into Kachin state, trying to gain control of 3 hilltop camps strategically located on a crucial route that leads to KIA's headquarters in Laiza. Junta troops have indiscriminately [shelled](#) and [torched](#) various villages. Locals [estimated](#) that at least 1,000 new soldiers arrived by July 10th and began launching attacks in Namsan Yang for over ten days. In 2019 under the NLD government, the Burmese army and the KIA negotiated an agreement that neither party would establish a permanent presence in Nam Sang, and resettled those who had been displaced by the conflict in 201. However, with active conflict restarting in this area, these residents have had to leave and flee for safety again. Persistent rainfall from the monsoon season caused a [landslide](#) on June 10th. This has delayed rice deliveries to Nognug, causing a severe rice shortage in the township. Locals fear the possibility of facing starvation both from lack of access to rice and the inability to make a livelihood by selling it.

KARENNI

A junta jet [dropped](#) three bombs on an IDP camp in Demoso Township on July 4, severely injuring three people and damaging several houses. The junta [conducted](#) another bombing in Hsapant Township on July 11, killing a child, injuring two. The next day, they bombed an IDP camp, killing a man and injuring five. Additionally, the bombs destroyed the camp's school and clinic. Fighting has [intensified](#) in Hpaswang Township and Loikaw Township after the junta sent in reinforcements on July 21. Since then, the junta has indiscriminately bombed civilians in Hpaswang Township three times, killing a boy and injuring eight others. At least 1,000 villagers from four villages have been displaced. Armed conflict and military restrictions are [disrupting](#) food imports into Karenni State. Combined with low rice cultivation, this has increased rice prices over 25%. Food reserves are critically low and depleting.

MON

On July 5-6th and 11-13th, civilians stepped or rode over landmines, [killing](#) one child and leaving the other victims in critical conditions. From May to July, 12 [political prisoners](#) from Thaton prison were arrested under the Anti-Terrorist Act. They were unlawfully removed and their whereabouts are unknown. After a [bridge](#) in the Kyike Hto Township was destroyed on July 6th, the junta increased security checks, effectively cutting off transportation routes and causing commodity prices to rise. The Mon State Health Department [reported](#) that there are about 600 cases of dengue fever mainly affecting small children. The military regime, in charge of health and education, has failed to control and prevent mosquito-related illnesses. Junta troops entered the Karen National Union-controlled Donthahtoo District and [killed](#) 3 civilians, seized vehicles and ammunition, and caused 699 families to seek safety in nearby villages. On July 19th, 3 children drowned in the [flooding](#) of Mawlamyine after two days of heavy rainfall.

KAREN

On July 2, Military Council soldiers [fired](#) artillery shells onto civilians in Mone Township, injuring 3. IDP workers in Nyaunglebin District have [brought attention](#) to the lack of medicine in the camps. Immigration officers working under the Military Council in Hpa-an and Myawaddy townships are [gathering](#) personal information for Smart National Identification Cards. These cards make it easier for the junta to identify and target Rohingya immigrants and PDF members. On July 7, the Special Operation Force [demolished](#) an electricity distribution center in Kyainseikgyi Township, destroying the power source for the Military Council's command center. Karen activist Sa Thein Za Min was sentenced to [10 years in prison](#) for terrorism; Min is a Karen youth who promoted Karen culture and literature. While fighting a resistance group in Thandaung, the military [killed](#) 4 men and set 4 houses on fire. Junta officials guarding Thanlwin Bridge in Hpa-an Township have been [heavily inspecting](#) civilians in the area.

SHAN

Locals reported a significant increase in fighting between armed groups in Shan state throughout July. On July 9th, [fighting](#) broke out between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese Army in Kutkai township, causing villages in the area to be hit by mortar shelling. On July 10th and 11th, the Burmese Army [clashed](#) with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army with reports of a shoot-out between the two groups. On July 18, active conflict [restarted](#) in Pekon between the People's Defense Force (PDF) and the junta. Residents were forced to leave their homes and flee to safety, reporting that groups were firing both light and heavy weaponry the whole day. On July 11th, representatives of the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army [met](#) with the junta's National Solidarity and Peace-making Negotiation Committee in Naypyidaw. Further information on the outcome of this meeting remains unknown.

RAKHINE

Despite being more than 2 months after Cyclone Mocha, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) stated that the junta State Administration Council continues to [block](#) travel permits for many humanitarian organizations. Junta Chief General Min Aung Hlaing visited Rakhine state on July 10th, stating that [rehabilitation](#) efforts were going effectively despite facts on the ground contradicting this statement. Soldiers [prohibit](#) locals from returning to their homes and growing crops, significantly impacting their livelihoods and increasing hardships. On July 21st, the junta [intensified](#) its weapon testing as tension between the Arakan Army and the military council heightened. Most villagers near Saka 9 army headquarters seek refuge in IDP camps as they worry of the growing potential of violence with a violation of the ceasefire agreement.

CENTRAL BURMA

On July 9, the foreign minister of Thailand [met](#) Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw, marking the first meeting between a high-ranking government official and Aung San Suu Kyi since the coup. Representatives of the Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State [met](#) with the junta on July 11 to discuss peace matters. On [July 12](#), the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) revoked the licenses of 10 money exchange companies because they did not follow CBM's rules and regulations. These measures were taken so that the junta could closely inspect companies and control the flow of money. During a [meeting](#) of the Military Council on July 13, General Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the importance of "stability" and "the rule of law," meaning that he will extend the state of emergency in the country. This also means that he is not willing to relinquish his power.