

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2021 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the November & December 2021 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

The People's Defense Forces ("PDF") and other resistance groups escalated their operations across Myanmar, resulting in an increase in the number of casualties from ongoing fights between the military regime and civilian resistance groups. On November 3 and 4, around 100 soldiers were reportedly killed in firefights across the country.¹ Around 150 troops were reportedly killed in fights that took place on November 6 and 7.² In one such fight, the military regime used two helicopters to attack resistance forces after suffering heavy losses in the fight.³ Almost 200 troops were killed in attacks on November 8-11 in numerous regions across the country.⁴ Firefights from November 8-9 resulted in the deaths of around 90 soldiers,⁵ while firefights from November 10-11 resulted in the deaths of almost 90 soldiers and at least three civilian resistance fighters.⁶

On November 13 and 14, clashes in multiple regions resulted in the deaths of more than 70 soldiers.⁷ On the afternoon of November 15, an armed resistance group ambushed a convoy that included Dr. Htay Aung, the regime-appointed hotels and tourism minister, and Tin Maung Win, the chief minister of Ayeyarwady, while on the Chaungtha-Pathein highway in Pathein Township.⁸

Resistance groups also used landmines to target military troops and vehicles.⁹ Mines were used to ambush the chief minister of Sagaing Region on November 22, which was the second ambush targeting the minister that week.¹⁰

Around 80 military troops were reportedly killed on December 9 in Magwe, Sagaing, Mandalay and Yangon regions and Chin and Kayah States.¹¹ Around 60 troops were killed within three days in mid-December in ambushes by civilian resistance groups in Sagaing Region and Mon State.¹²

Military troops continue to raid villages across the country. Soldiers raided around twenty villages in Sagaing region since November 9, leading to the looting and destruction of property, as well as the displacement of around 30,000 residents.¹³ Around thirty villages along the Demoso-Loikaw Highway have also been subject to military raids since November 17.¹⁴ Thousands of residents were forced to flee their homes, and military troops reportedly used villagers, including a teenage boy,¹⁵ as "human shields" as they traveled from village to village.¹⁶

There have also been instances of military soldiers capturing and taking residents hostage. On November 18, upon raiding a village in the Magway Region, troops entered a monastery school and took hostage a teacher and five students, all between the ages of 6 and 14.¹⁷ Troops have also captured multiple members of local PDF medical teams.¹⁸

On November 11, three soldiers gang raped a mother of a newborn baby after raiding Aklui Khua Village.¹⁹ The woman's husband was forced to crouch at gunpoint while his wife was raped.²⁰ The soldiers returned to the house later that night and raped the woman multiple more times.²¹

Military troops attacked and torched field huts in the Depayin Township, Sagaing region on December 4.²² Soldiers burned down thirteen huts, the Depayin PDF training camp and barns

used to store crops for PDF trainees.²³ Around 100 houses were burned down on December 13 during a raid conducted by military forces in Ayadaw Township in Sagaing Region.²⁴ More than 100 troops and members of the Pyuu-Saw-Htee group, a group trained and armed by the military, raided the township and looted homes and stole items such as motorbikes.²⁵

Residents of the village of Yae Myet in Sagaing Region were forced to evacuate when troops attacked their village on December 20.²⁶ The military surrounded the village with five helicopters and fired at all sides.²⁷ Two days later, the troops burned at least 60 houses and dozens of vehicles and other property.²⁸ Seven bodies were recovered after the airstrikes.²⁹ The military stated that it targeted the village because it was the location of a meeting between local PDF forces.³⁰ There were also reports of troops raiding and burning villages in Chin State,³¹ Mingin Township³² and Kayah State³³ in December.

Military troops even resorted to burning locals alive during their village raids. Myanmar soldiers shot and set fire to 11 people in Sagaing Region on December 7.³⁴ Military troops also killed and burned five people in Sagaing Region on December 12³⁵ and two people in Chin State on December 28.³⁶

On the morning of December 25, 35 charred bodies were found on eight burned vehicles and five motorbikes in eastern Kayah State.³⁷ The military claimed that the victims were armed rebels.³⁸ However, locals and the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force believe that the victims were residents fleeing the area, since a child's remains were found among the dead.³⁹ Also, at least 13 locals were identified as missing following the massacre.⁴⁰ Humanitarian aid organization Save the Children confirmed that two of their staff were among those killed in the massacre.⁴¹

Myanmar security forces rammed through anti-coup protestors on December 5, killing at least five people and leaving at least eight injured according to media reports.⁴² Protestors were also shot at and beaten by military troops.⁴³ After videos and photos of the protests went viral, multiple flash mob counter protests took place. Civilians banged pots and pans in their homes as a sign of protest, and some were arrested for doing so.⁴⁴ In Mandalay, soldiers arrested 11 people, including a mother and her two daughters, and eight men.⁴⁵ A father and his two children were among those arrested in Tharkayta, Yangon.⁴⁶

More local government officials have resigned after receiving death threats from resistance groups. Almost every ward and village administrator in the Kayan Township, Yangon Region (around sixty) have reportedly resigned en masse since early October after receiving death threats from anti-regime forces.⁴⁷ More than 80 ward and village administrators have resigned in Natmawk Township, Magwe Region.⁴⁸ The financial chief of Mytel, one of the nation's main telecoms carriers, was killed on November 4, as part of resistance groups' targeting of officials linked to the military.⁴⁹ Two generals who served as ministers with the National League for Democracy ("NLD") government were reportedly forced to retire by the military regime.⁵⁰ Lieutenant General Sein Win and Lieutenant General Ye Aung were military-appointed defense and border affair ministers under the NLD government from 2015 to January 2021.⁵¹

Numerous households and businesses have refused to pay their electric bills as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement.⁵² The civilian shadow government, the National Unity Government (“NUG”), has been encouraging the public to refuse to pay their bills to cut off the regime government’s revenue.⁵³ As a result, the military regime has pressured members of the public to pay their bills on time, warning that their electricity will be cut off if their bills are not paid.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in some regions, such as Mandalay, the military regime has cut off power in factories, workshops, places of business and homes.⁵⁵ In response, resistance groups have targeted electricity offices. For instance, on November 6, the Phoenix PDF targeted the electricity office at the Oketarathiri Township in Myanmar’s capital Naypyitaw.⁵⁶

Members of the public staged a silent strike by staying at home and shutting down businesses for the day on December 10, coinciding with Human Rights Day.⁵⁷ Regime forces told people not to participate and promised to protect those who kept their businesses open. Nevertheless, roads were deserted, and in some cities almost all businesses were closed.⁵⁸ In other regions, such as Bago region, a local media outlet reported that shop owners who closed for the day were beaten and sworn at by regime forces for participating in the silent strike.⁵⁹

On November 16, the military regime added new charges against former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and fifteen other officials in connection with alleged electoral fraud during the 2020 elections.⁶⁰ On November 2, Aung San Suu Kyi’s counsel cross examined the four soldiers and a police officer who detained Aung San Suu Kyi during the coup and allegedly found her in possession of walkie talkies.⁶¹ They reportedly gave contradicting testimonies as to where the walkie talkies were found, whether they were found in Aung San Suu Kyi’s residence or on her security team.⁶²

Verdicts for the first two of twelve charges against former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi were handed down on December 6. The military regime court sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint to four years in prison, convicting them of sedition and violating COVID-19 restrictions.⁶³ Later that day, regime chief Min Aung Hlaing lowered their sentences to two years of house arrest.⁶⁴

Other NLD party members and former officials are facing their own trials and more than fifty NLD officials have been sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment.⁶⁵ Former Member of Parliament and NLD speaker Win Htein was sentenced to 20 years in prison for treason on October 29, becoming the first high-ranking member of the NLD to be sentenced by the military regime courts.⁶⁶ On November 11, former Tanintharyi chief minister Myint Maung was sentenced to eleven years in prison for alleged violations of COVID-19 regulations and financial regulations regarding the use of regional development funds.⁶⁷ He is now facing additional charges regarding the 2020 elections.⁶⁸ Military courts have also handed down sentences to civilians involved in anti-regime protests. Military tribunals in townships currently under martial law issued death sentences to 21 people and life imprisonment to 29 people on November 23 for their alleged involvement in protests and attacks against the military.⁶⁹

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Government of Bangladesh continues to transport Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to the island of Bhasan Char, despite international concerns that the low-lying island remains vulnerable to natural disasters.⁷⁰ The Bangladeshi government claims that all Rohingya refugees are being sent willingly and that they plan to transport 1,500 refugees to the island in the coming weeks.⁷¹ The island currently houses roughly 19,000 Rohingya refugees and the Bangladeshi government believes that island can accommodate as many as 100,000 people.⁷²

On December 7, Rohingya refugees sued the parent company of Facebook, Meta Platforms Inc., for over USD\$150 billion in damages for contributing to the anti-Rohingya rhetoric and violence that has occurred in Rakhine State since the Rohingya refugee crisis began around 2017.⁷³ The Rohingya refugees allege that Facebook allowed malicious public and private actors within Myanmar to spread anti-Rohingya hate speech and misinformation, stoking the fear and mistrust that allowed the Myanmar military to attack the Rohingya people with nearly complete impunity.⁷⁴ Meta Platforms Inc. responded that they stand firmly against the violence committed against Rohingya refugees and that they have hired a team of Myanmar speakers to better monitor the site and remove harmful content.⁷⁵

On December 23, a General Administration Department clerk was found murdered in Myanmar's western Rakhine State.⁷⁶ While the murder is still under investigation, many fear that it may lead to increased tension between the Government of Myanmar and the remaining Rohingya Muslim communities that continue to inhabit the region.⁷⁷ Several arson attacks have been reported near Muslim-majority communities in the Rakhine State since the murder, though it is unclear if they are related.⁷⁸

B. Corruption

In the corruption trial against former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, the wife of a former chief minister of the Yangon Region testified that she helped her husband prepare gold and money to give to Aung San Suu Kyi as a bribe.⁷⁹ The Yangon chief minister previously testified that he gave gold and US\$600,000 to Aung San Suu Kyi between 2017 and 2018.⁸⁰ On cross-examination, the witness could not remember dates and admitted that she did not observe her husband offering the alleged bribes.⁸¹ The witness also did not present receipts.⁸²

The military regime has charged, deposed and detained investment minister and former national security adviser Thaug Tun with corruption in connection with a land lease in Yangon.⁸³

National immunization director Dr. Htar Htar Lin and Director-General of Public Health Dr. Soe Oo have been charged with violating the Anti-Corruption Law in connection with their return of COVID-related funds to the United Nations.⁸⁴ Dr. Htar Htar Lin also faces charges related to her opposition to the junta.⁸⁵

The detained Kayin State chief minister of the ousted NLD government, Nan Khin Htwe Myint, was sentenced by the military regime's courts to 75 years in prison in connection with five corruption charges.⁸⁶ The municipal minister, Than Naing, was sentenced to 90 years in prison in connection with six charges.⁸⁷

Magwe chief minister Aung Mow Nyo was found guilty of six corruption charges, with a sentence of 18 years in prison.⁸⁸

C. International Community / Sanctions

Argentine courts have agreed to hear allegations of war crimes committed by the Myanmar military during their operations in Rakhine State from 2017.⁸⁹ The Argentine courts are invoking the principle of universal justice, which states that certain crimes, such as war crimes and crimes against humanity, are so horrific that they can be tried anywhere.⁹⁰ Argentina has previously used universal justice to justify investigating allegations against Spain's Francisco Franco and China's Falun Gong movement.⁹¹ Six Rohingya women gave remote testimony from refugee camps in Bangladesh, explaining how they had been sexually assaulted and had lost family members due to Myanmar military aggression.⁹² Another representative from Myanmar's Rohingya community testified on December 16.⁹³

The United States and six of its allies urged Myanmar's military government to end all violence in Myanmar while simultaneously calling "on the international community to suspend all operational support to the military, and to cease the transfer of arms" and any "technical assistance" to Myanmar.⁹⁴

For the second time in a month, ASEAN excluded Myanmar from a regional summit. According to reports, the move rebuffed Beijing's request to include the military regime's top general.⁹⁵ U.S. President Joe Biden joined the summit, marking the first time in four years that the President of the United States has engaged with ASEAN.⁹⁶ The U.S.'s top diplomat to Asia began his visit to Southeast Asia at the beginning of December to reaffirm the United States' commitment to working with Southeast Asian countries on global and regional challenges, including the crisis in Myanmar.⁹⁷ Myanmar's military government was also excluded from the virtual Asia-Europe Meeting, the third summit it has not been invited to in two months.⁹⁸

A U.K.-based nongovernmental organization submitted evidence to the International Criminal Court ("ICC") that allegedly proves that Myanmar military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is guilty of crimes against humanity in connection with the regime's "widespread and systemic use of torture" as part of the violent crackdown against the anti-coup protests in the country.⁹⁹ The NUG is also working to prosecute Myanmar's military at the ICC. Acting NUG President Duwa Lashi La previously lodged a declaration accepting the ICC's jurisdiction in August 2021 with respect to international crimes committed in Myanmar since July 1, 2002.¹⁰⁰

The Credentials Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations deferred its decision on the Myanmar application to replace the current Myanmar ambassador.¹⁰¹ As a result, the UN will continue to recognize Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, who was appointed by the ousted democratic government and continues to represent the NUG.¹⁰²

In the wake of an attack where military soldiers allegedly burned 11 captured villagers alive, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released a statement saying it was "appalled by the alarming escalation of grave human rights abuses" in Myanmar.¹⁰³ The United States said it was "outraged by credible and sickening reports" of the incident and is considering new measures to pressure the military to return to a "democratic trajectory."¹⁰⁴ In

response to credible reports that at least 35 civilians were separately killed and buried in Myanmar, the UN condemned the violence and demanded the junta government launch a “thorough and transparent” investigation.¹⁰⁵ Two Save the Children humanitarian aid workers were among the casualties from the attack.¹⁰⁶ Following the attack, the United States renewed calls for an arms embargo on the junta,¹⁰⁷ and the UN Security Council has called for accountability for the massacre and an “immediate cessation of all violence.”¹⁰⁸

The Myanmar military shut down the office of the UN Special Envoy for Myanmar.¹⁰⁹ Although another diplomat has been appointed to the post, the junta justified the closure of the office because the term of the former envoy, Christine Schraner Burgener, ended.¹¹⁰ The new UN Special Envoy for Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, in her first statement since taking on the role, said that she is “deeply concerned by the continued escalation of violence.”¹¹¹

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (“SACM”), an independent group of former UN human rights observers, called on foreign governments and the UN to designate the junta as a terrorist organization.¹¹² SACM also published a briefing paper demonstrating how the junta is a terrorist organization under national and international laws.¹¹³

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

On December 10, civilian protestors carried out a nation-wide silent strike, leaving streets completely empty and closing businesses, despite warning from the military regime. The silent protest was felt in cities across the country, including the commercial capital Yangon, the second-biggest city Mandalay and the administrative capital, Naypyitaw.¹¹⁴ The protest took place on Human Rights Day to send a message to the world about the regime’s violations of human rights. The military regime responded by attacking some business owners and seizing goods from roadside stalls left unattended in Kamayut Township. They also arrested three people for clapping in Mayangone Township, Yangon, as a round of applause celebrated the strike.¹¹⁵

At least 62 people were sentenced to prison on December 30 for supporting or participating in the anti-regime protests. Among those sentenced were NLD government ministers, NLD leaders, artists and student leaders in Yangon, Bago and Magwe regions and Kachin and Shan States.¹¹⁶ In Magwe, a court sentenced the region’s chief minister, Dr. Aung Moe Nyo, to 18 years in prison on six corruption charges and an additional two years in prison for incitement after publishing statements declaring the State Administrative Council to be unlawful. The Shan State minister of planning and finance, Soe Nyunt Lwin, was sentenced to 38 years in prison on four charges of incitement, sedition and high treason, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Forty other detainees were sentenced by the court inside Pyay Prison in Bago Region, mainly for their participation in protests.¹¹⁷ Celebrities and student leaders were also sentenced for their support and participation in anti-regime protests, with convictions ranging from two to three years.¹¹⁸

Also on December 30, the former bodyguard of detained State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, Cherry Htet, was sentenced to three years in prison for breaching police rules over her

social media posts supporting the detained leader. Such posts included statements like, “We miss you Amay (mother),” and “If you do not dare to be outspoken about justice, keep your mouth shut and do not say there is justice.” She is also charged with incitement, which could result in an additional prison sentence of up to three years. Furthermore, she is accused of communicating with an NLD lawmaker and receiving information about the civilian National Unity Government.¹¹⁹

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

In mid-November, American journalist Danny Fenster’s months-long detainment reached a resolution. Fenster, the managing editor of *Frontier Myanmar*, was initially detained in May and was awaiting sentencing for allegedly working for *Myanmar Now*, a banned publication.¹²⁰ On November 12, he was sentenced to 11 years of prison and hard labor—the maximum punishment—despite widespread criticism from outside Myanmar.¹²¹ Fenster’s charges and sentence were strongly condemned by various NGOs and the U.S. government.¹²² The United Nations also called on Myanmar to release Fenster as well as all detained media workers.¹²³ Three days later, former U.S. diplomat Bill Richardson visited with the regime leadership and negotiated Fenster’s release and deportation.¹²⁴ Fenster’s legal team expressed relief at his safe exit from the country but noted that he never should have been incarcerated in the first place because he had resigned from the banned publication when the military regime seized control of the government in February.¹²⁵ Fenster is now safely back in Detroit, Michigan where he retains contact with his colleagues at *Frontier Myanmar*.¹²⁶

According to an annual prison census by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Myanmar ranked among the world’s worst countries for jailing journalists since the coup. According to the report released on December 9, around 110 journalists have been arrested since the coup, at least 24 journalists were killed in 2021 while working, and 18 others died in circumstances too unclear to determine whether they were specific targets.¹²⁷

A group of junta soldiers critically wounded video journalist Hmu Yandanar Khet Moh Moh Tun when they drove a Toyota Hilux into a group of on-foot protestors.¹²⁸ The soldiers also arrested photojournalist Ko Kaung Sett Lin, who was less seriously injured.¹²⁹ At least five other protestors were killed in the incident.¹³⁰

A photographer who recorded the Silent Day Strike, in which Myanmar citizens stayed in their homes on one December day to demonstrate their opposition to junta rule, is dead after he was arrested by regime soldiers in Yangon.¹³¹ The regime contacted Ko Soe Naing’s family and requested that they retrieve his body from a local hospital.¹³²

A court has sentenced three detained Shan State media staff and a family member to three years in prison for allegedly spreading misinformation.¹³³ Sources who spoke to *The Irrawaddy* characterized these charges as unfair and inaccurate and took special offense that the sentences were announced on Human Rights Day.¹³⁴

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

Just six companies, including Chinese firms and local companies with connections to the military regime, have made bids for the 12 solar power projects Myanmar’s military regime put up for tender in May, although some 40 firms including Thai companies expressed interest in the projects.¹³⁵ The projects are planned to be built in Mandalay, Bago, Magwe and Sagaing Regions and Shan State. Each project is expected to generate between 20 to 40 megawatts of electricity.

The Myanmar Investment Commission (“MIC”) approved 13 new investment projects, which could create 2,972 employment opportunities for locals, according to a release from the Ministry of Information on November 3.¹³⁶ The projects are in the sectors of agriculture, hotel and tourism, manufacturing and other services.

Plans by Norway’s Telenor to withdraw from Myanmar by selling its telecom operations in Myanmar to M1, an investment firm owned by the family of Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, have stalled after the military regime indicated it favored at least part-ownership by a local company, according to people familiar with the matter.¹³⁷ M1 is in advanced talks for a partnership with at least one Myanmar company, Shwe Byain Phyu Group, which has interests in petrol stations and gem mining.

On November 19, Myanmar Economic Holdings Public Co. Ltd (“MEHL”), a military-owned conglomerate, made an application to the Yangon Region Western District Court to dissolve Myanmar Brewery Co, a joint venture between Japanese beverage giant Kirin and MEHL, under the Myanmar Companies Law.¹³⁸ In response, Kirin filed a request with the Singapore International Arbitration Center to resolve the dispute with MEHL after it had failed to convince MEHL to sell its stake in Myanmar Brewery rather than dissolve the joint venture.¹³⁹

Myanmar’s shadow government, the NUG, said it would allow the use of the world’s largest stablecoin, Tether, as an official currency, potentially making it easier for it to raise funds and make payments.¹⁴⁰ The NUG has been seeking to raise funds for its “revolution” to topple the ruling military government.

South Korea’s embassy in Myanmar organized a high-level meeting last month between civil servants of the military government and Korean companies, including units of Samsung and LG, according to documents seen by the Financial Times.¹⁴¹ Participants at the “Dialogue for Economic Cooperation between Team Korea and Myanmar” included the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, a government agency, the United Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, a lobby group representing the private sector and the Korean chamber of commerce. The event was also attended by executives representing units of Samsung Electronics, LG Electronics and steelmaker Posco, according to documents seen by the Financial Times.

According to a statement issued by the ministries of information and investment, Myanmar will start accepting Renminbi as an official settlement currency next year for trade

with China, as it looks to restart several joint projects and forge closer economic ties with Beijing.¹⁴²

In its statement released on December 20, Coast Capital, a New York-based institutional investor, called on Total Energies, a French multinational integrated oil and gas company of which Coast Capital is a shareholder, to immediately discontinue its partnership with the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, which is directly financing the current military regime's ongoing acts of crimes against humanity.¹⁴³

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

The Myanmar government is planning to restart development and infrastructure projects with China, as well as accelerate bilateral economic and technical cooperation with its close neighbor, according to an announcement released by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on December 21.¹⁴⁴ According to the announcement, Myanmar's State Administration Council ("SAC") has reviewed a list of 97 projects that were proposed by the previous government in late 2020 in response to the China's offer of 4 billion yuan (USD\$627 million) in development assistance to Myanmar.¹⁴⁵ The SAC also reviewed 15 projects under a separate 200 million yuan (USD\$31 million) grant from China, which will contribute to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor ("CMEC").¹⁴⁶ The CMEC, under the Belt and Road Initiative, includes road and rail infrastructure stretching 1,700 kilometers, from Kunming in Southwest China's Yunnan Province, through several regions in Myanmar to Kyaukpyu along the Bay of Bengal, the site of a proposed Special Economic Zone Deep Sea Project, which is of special significance for economic cooperation between the two countries.¹⁴⁷ However, Beijing remains wary of resuming full cooperation with Myanmar after the widespread anti-China protests that followed the regime's February 1 coup and subsequent attacks on Chinese-owned factories in Yangon.¹⁴⁸

C. Land Seizure

Farmers in Rakhine State expressed concern about confiscation of approximately 250 acres of farmland in the China-backed special economic zone in the township.¹⁴⁹ The special economic zone is expected to be extended across a 4,300 acre site, which will include multiple ports and industrial centers.¹⁵⁰ The farmers' concerns were stoked by members of the implementation committee for the special economic zone "making field surveys of the farmland in the project area."¹⁵¹ Farmers are concerned about receiving no (or low) compensation for their land if it is confiscated by the state.¹⁵² As is common in Myanmar, some of the farmland is land "handed down...from generation to generation," but that is not formally registered to a specific family.¹⁵³ Of the 250 acres in question, a "sudden discovery" was made that 60 acres of land in fact belong to three unknown individuals, which has led to officials claiming that 22 farmers are "illegally occupying land that they and their families have worked for generations."¹⁵⁴ Similar events have occurred in other areas with large scale infrastructure projects, which commentators noted "highlights the corruption in government departments."¹⁵⁵

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

In early November, nearly 4,000 villagers in Pekon Township, southern Shan State, fled their homes following fighting between the military regime and Karenni forces in Kayah and Shan States that left five soldiers dead.¹⁵⁶ Military troops launched offensives in Pekon and eastern Moby in the first week of November.¹⁵⁷ On November 3, the military burned houses in Lwel Whel village in Pekon Township.¹⁵⁸ A local resident said nearly 4,000 residents of Lwel Whel and other villages have fled their homes.¹⁵⁹

Military regime atrocities have increased, including raids, arrests, the arbitrary killing of civilians, bombardment and burning down of houses, especially in Magwe and Sagaing regions and Chin, Shan and Kayah States.¹⁶⁰ The military regime recently burned down more than 160 houses in Thantlang, Chin State, according to residents.¹⁶¹ The NUG said on October 30 that since the February 1 coup, around 267 houses in Loikaw and Demoso Townships in Kayah State and 58 houses in Pekon Township were burned down and that the military attacks are increasing.¹⁶²

Shortly after the November 3 attacks, regime troops conducted raids in Shan State's Pekon Township from November 8-9, setting buildings alight and arresting local residents under the pretext of fighting terrorism, which caused 10,000 residents from 20 villages to seek refuge.¹⁶³ Additionally, government troops stormed a PDF camp in Pekon Township on November 8 and set fire to nearby Latu village, according to a local militia who declined to be named.¹⁶⁴

Myanmar's military and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army ("MNDA") clashed six times on November 21 in Mongkoe, Shan State near the Chinese border, according to the MNDA.¹⁶⁵ Regime troops fired more than 900 artillery strikes at an MNDA base before attacking the base for more than three hours.¹⁶⁶ The regime suffered around 20 casualties while an MNDA fighter died and three others were injured, according to the MNDA, who also claimed that the two sides had clashed in five other locations in Mongkoe.¹⁶⁷ More than 10 regime battalions are now in Mongkoe.¹⁶⁸

On November 23, at least four clashes broke out between Karenni anti-regime resistance groups and the Myanmar army in Kayah State's Demoso and Loikaw Townships, reportedly causing multiple military casualties.¹⁶⁹

In the first week of December, the villagers of Ei Nie fled to Lashio after the MNDA attacked their village in northern Shan State, where Myanmar Army soldiers were camped.¹⁷⁰ According to a local, the villagers sought refuge in a Buddhist monastery in Lashio or with their relatives.¹⁷¹ He said that about 20 Myanmar Army soldiers were in the village for a few days before the MNDA arrived.¹⁷²

Fresh fighting between the Myanmar military and the Karen National Union ("KNU") broke out in mid-December and Myanmar's military conducted air raids and used heavy artillery on KNU-held areas near the border with Thailand.¹⁷³ More than 4,200 people have crossed into Thailand since the violence began, according to Thailand's foreign ministry.¹⁷⁴ Civil society

groups have placed the number of displaced as high as 10,000.¹⁷⁵ Thailand's foreign ministry spokesman Tanee Sangrat said he was concerned about the latest violence that also affected Thai people living along the border.¹⁷⁶ Several foreign envoys to Myanmar, including from the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, issued a joint statement calling for an end to "indiscriminate attacks" in the border area and elsewhere by the military.¹⁷⁷

On December 24, the Myanmar military killed and burned around 35 fleeing civilians, including women and children, in seven vehicles near Moso village in Kayah State.¹⁷⁸ The massacre reportedly occurred after a battle between junta troops and the Karenni Nationalities Defense Forces, an alliance of armed resistance groups fighting the regime.¹⁷⁹ Four members of the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front, a border guard force, were tied up and shot in the head while they were negotiating with junta forces for the release of the 35 civilians, according to the armed group.¹⁸⁰ According to Save the Children, two of its relief workers were among those killed in the attack on Christmas Eve.¹⁸¹

B. Peace Talks

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

- ¹ The Irrawaddy, November 5, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/almost-100-myanmar-junta-soldiers-killed-in-two-days-resistance.html>.
- ² The Irrawaddy, November 8, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/around-150-junta-troops-killed-by-myanmar-resistance-over-weekend.html>.
- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ The Irrawaddy, November 9, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/around-90-myanmar-junta-troops-killed-in-resistance-attacks.html>; see also The Irrawaddy, November 10, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/over-100-myanmar-junta-troops-killed-in-clashes.html>.
- ⁵ The Irrawaddy, November 9, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/around-90-myanmar-junta-troops-killed-in-resistance-attacks.html>.
- ⁶ The Irrawaddy, November 12, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/resistance-groups-claim-to-have-killed-90-myanmar-junta-troops-in-two-days.html>.
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