

Bi-Weekly

ISP INSIGHT EMAIL

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Post-Martial Law Situation, Surge of Rare Earth Minings, and Chinese Special Envoy Trips in the Spotlight



In this mail, you can read **five key takeaways** from the recent events. While there are 47 Townships currently under Martial Law, the situations in **Sagaing Region** and **Chin State** in particular are deteriorating. Meanwhile, we highlight dramatic developments in the destructive rare earth mining activities in **Kachin State** and report on **China's special envoy's** noticeable recent trip to **Myanmar's Northern region**. In "Trends to be watched", the ISP-Myanmar highlights **increasing conflicts between opposition NUG's PDFs and local armed forces** in terms of territorial control, competition for resources, and other power dynamics. ISP-Myanmar also introduces a book recently published by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, "Waves of Upheaval in Myanmar", which **focuses on the role of women** at this time of transformation.

Key takeaways

Post-Martial Law Situation in Sagaing Region and Chin State

Destructive Rare Earth Mining Activities

China's New Special Envoy Takes the Initiative

Trends to be watched

Conflicts between the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and Local Defence Forces

What ISP is reading?

The Women of Myanmar

ISP Calendar

Feedback & Feedforward

Key takeaways

1. Post-Martial Law Situation in Sagaing Region and Chin State

The junta imposed a new round of Martial Law in three townships of the Sagaing Region on February 22, 2023, bringing the total number of townships under Martial Law to 47. Martial Law is apparently “releasing the hell hounds” and we are expecting more restrictions and grievous human rights violations to fall upon the citizens of these areas. Locals will be confronted with more restrictions on their livelihoods and economic activities.

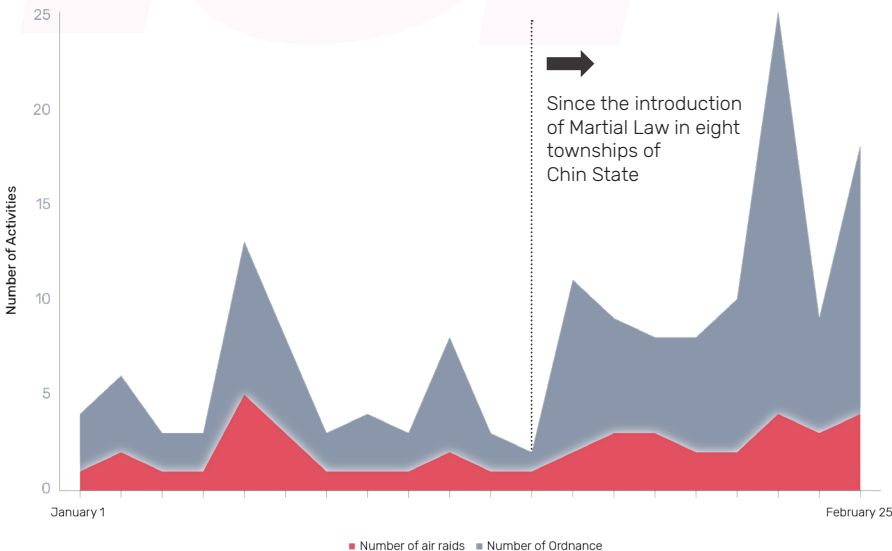
The intensity and frequency of military operations is increasing since the Martial Law announcement. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are now fleeing multiple times from multiple regions, as the static number of IDPs demonstrates a chronic problem of resettlement. There are reports of immense loss and damage in some townships of the Sagaing and Magwe regions. Meanwhile, the SAC is conducting more air raids in the region under Martial Law, particularly in Chin State, where Martial Law is imposed in eight out of nine townships, with the sole exception of Paletwa Township. According to a Chin National Front (CNF) press release, since Martial Law was imposed, from February 1 to 25, the SAC conducted 23 air raids and 75 bombardments. In January 2023, 20 air raids and 40 bombardments were conducted. According to the data by Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), 53 air raids and 138 bombardments were conducted in Thantlang, Hakha, Matupi and Mindat townships in the past two months. The data indicates that the post-coup situation is getting worse.

ISP DATA MATTERS

ISP Gabyin Community

■ Air Strikes in Chin State
(From 1 Jan, 2023 to 25 Feb, 2023)

According to a Chin National Front (CNF) press release, SAC conducted airstrikes more than 43 times by bombarding 115 pieces of ordnance between 1 January and 25 February 2023. Sixty-five percent of all bombardment has occurred since the introduction of Martial Law.



Reference : ISP-Myanmar analyzed the data published by the Chin National Front (CNF).

2. Destructive Rare Earth Mining Activities

Accompanying instability since the military coup, rampant illegal rare earth mining is occurring in Northern Myanmar. The mining has extended from the militia-controlled areas of Chipwi and Pangwa to Mai Ja Yang and Mansi, which are under control of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA/KIO). Recently, tensions have been reported in the Mansi area between a mining company employing Chinese nationals and local religious leaders and residents who are strongly opposed to the mining operation. The locals demanded the mining company completely shut down.

Previous experiences of mining in the Pangwa area saw locals encounter serious environmental damages and socio-economic impacts. The economic interests behind rare earth mining are deeply intertwined with the military, its affiliated border guard forces (BGFs), and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). China is a major market for Myanmar's rare earth export. However, it is not reported in the official trade data.

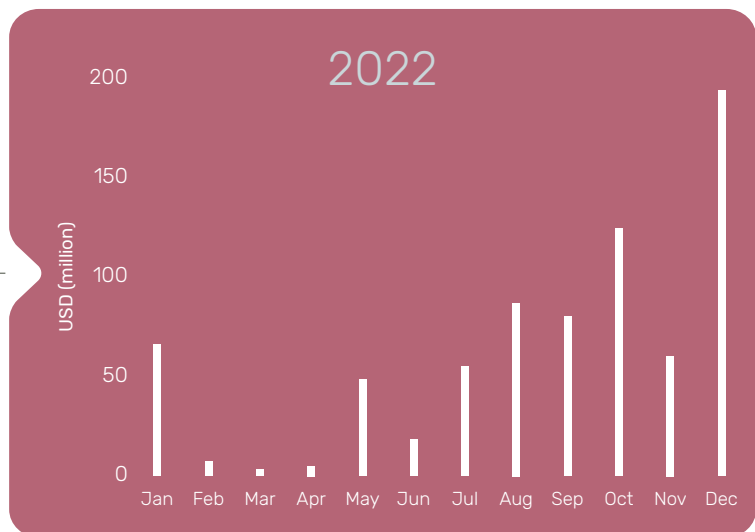
ISP DATA MATTERS

ISP Gabyin Community

■ Over USD 600m Worth of Rare Earth Export to China

USD
600+
MILLION

worth of rare earths, approximately 24,000 tons by volume, were exported by Myanmar to China in 2022.



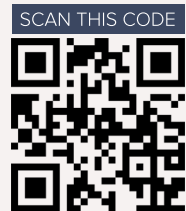
Reference : ISP-Myanmar analyzed the data based on announcements in regard to imports of rare earth metals issued by General Administration of Customs China (GACC) in Chinese.

However according to the General Administration of Customs China (GACC) data, Myanmar exported USD 600m worth of rare earths to China in 2022, approximately 24,000 tons by volume. This could be the reason why, when comparing the two countries' official trade data, there is a discrepancy between Myanmar and China of over USD 11 billion in the eight months April-November in the 2022-23 Myanmar fiscal year. (Please see ISP's DataMatters No. 41).

■ USD 11 Billion: Behind the Trade Gap Between China and Myanmar

ISP Data Matters No. 41

Scan the provided code to read the full article on the Gabyin Community.



3. China's New Special Envoy Takes the Initiative

In the last week of February, China's special envoy for Myanmar, Mr. Deng Xijun met with ethnic armed group leaders in Mong La of Shan State's Special Region No. 4. This is his second meeting with ethnic group leaders within three months since being appointed as China's special envoy to Myanmar. Though the Chinese government made no official announcement about his assignment, effectively replacing Mr. Sun Gao Xiang, Deng invited seven EAOs of Northern Myanmar to Yunnan Province for a meeting in December 2022. He also visited Naypyitaw, the capital of Myanmar.

It is generally presumed that the rapid development of this initiative is in response to concerns about US involvement in the Myanmar conflict, particularly on the news of NUG opening its office in Washington D.C. and the recent adoption of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)-2023 which contains clauses related to Myanmar's military junta. The Chinese government clearly stated its concerns and rejection of US assertions. It is analyzed that the Chinese envoy convinced the EAOs from Northern Myanmar to de-couple from any U.S. assistance to Myanmar's opposition which they may be entitled to under the NDAA. China shows its willingness to deter relationships between the U.S. and those EAOs from areas which border China.

Usually, China's outreach to EAOs along China-Myanmar border focuses on maintaining stability, avoiding border conflicts, and asking for participation in peace dialogues. China's special envoy noticeably expanded this agenda, discussing collaboration on crack-downs against illegal gambling, scams, and cross-border crime with the EAO leaders.



Quotes of the week



“The spring revolution, which is based on unity in diversity, will soon be at a turning point.”

Mahn Win Khaing Than

Prime Minister, NUG said in a speech at the interim local government administration implementation central committee meeting No. (8/2023). February 23, 2023.

“ASEAN is not given a license to interfere in its domestic affairs.”

Vivian Balakrishnan

Foreign Minister of Singapore

February 27, 2023, in the South China Morning Post

“It is obvious that they are not emphasizing the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement). It is obvious that they do not respect those countries who have witnessed it ... We are observing the case as an outsider ... It can say that the military coup finally happened as both parties insisted to yield to each other. As the coup happened, everything built up under the NCA froze, dead.”

Ywad Serk

Chairman of the RCSS

February 13, 2023, at an interview with Mizzima TV

Conflicts between the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and Local Defence Forces

Rebel governance is an emerging area of academic study in conflict and governance. It is important to monitor power abuses and accountability of power holders as well as their opposition. Governments use terms and concepts around “legitimacy” to enforce their rule and punish their citizens. Crimes against the state, such as treason, sedition, sabotage, espionage, and terrorism are serious offenses and are punished sternly. Similarly, many resistance movements use the terms “for the interest of the revolution”, “anti-revolution”, or “anti-people” in acts designed to punish the accused heavily. A major reason for People's Defence Force and Local Defence Forces conflicts are fights over control of scarce resources.

News has emerged from scattered sources, as the conflict between the People Defence Forces (PDFs) under the leadership of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and Local defence forces, of assassination attempts, arrests and other punishments, as well as disputes while collecting taxes from locals. In Wetlet Township, a second incident was reported among the armed resistance forces of arrest and intention to punish.

Members of a guerilla group, the GZ Special Force-Wetlet were arrested on February 17, as they attempted to assassinate one of the leaders of PDF-Wetlet, which operates under the Ministry of Defence (MOD) of the NUG. NUG police charged them under Penal code 307, with “attempt to commit murder”. The GZ leader denies the accusation as they did not shoot the PDF leader, and the GZ leader instead claims the arrest was an act of bullying against the GZ Special Force-Wetlet. The PDF is also planning to arrest the GZ leader and to take him into custody.

Many local armed forces acknowledge there are now many emerging arguments between the local armed forces and the PDF. In August 2022, Bo Kyar Gyi of one local armed force was shot and arrested by the PDF, accused of collecting taxes from locals, two died in the shoot-out. The NUG's PDF declared the Bo Kyar Gyi group a “group of terrorists” and pursued them. On the other hand, 39 local defence forces issued a statement opposing the order, saying they will provide protection for the Bo Kyar Gyi group.

Similar cases are observed in the Pale and Yin Mar Bin Townships of the Sagaing Region. The PDF and local armed groups are competing with each other for control of land and resources, amidst personal grudges. There was an incident of conflict between the PDF, local defence forces, and other armed forces in Pale Township. There was a long public debate online between Bo Naga of Myanmar Royal Naga Force and others. In Yin Mar Bin Township, the PDF arrested and killed a commander of the Hero Tiger Force and five troops. NUG could be seen to be increasingly incapable of managing these conflicts and thus not fully in control of all its forces. If a mechanism to resolve conflict in the opposition armed forces cannot be built, the situation could worsen, leading to more blood-shed. Since the 2021 coup, armed groups have been mushrooming, under various circumstances, with the intention to remove the military junta from power.

Limited information means the full nature of the conflict as well as of “rebel governance” is still little understood. The issue deserves follow-up and studies across the multiple conflicts within Myanmar society.

What ISP is reading?

Hedstrom, Jenny. and Elisbeth Olivius. (ed.) (2023).

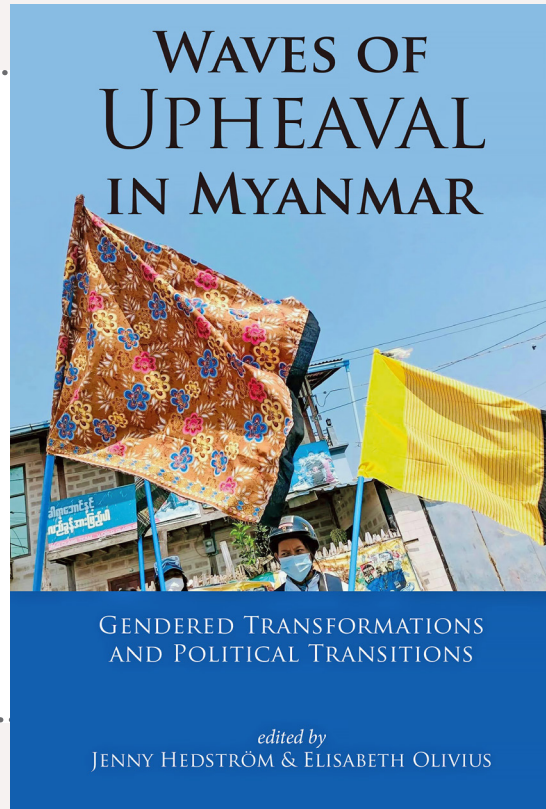
Waves of Upheaval: Political Transformation and Gendered Transformations in Myanmar.

Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).
Gendering Asia no. 17. (284 pages).

“Feminism” is a word that is hard to translate into Burmese, generally translating as “an ideology for women” which is, however, not accurate. Many women’s rights activists from Myanmar then use the term “feminism” in its original form. Feminism is defined as the advocacy of women’s rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes. This recently published book from the Denmark-based Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) contains many articles by Myanmar’s women rights activists, namely, Khin Khin Mra, Aye Thiri Kyaw, Zin Mar Phyo, Khin Mar Mar Kyi and ethnic women activists Naw Kan-yaw Phaw, Dan Seng Lawn, and Sar Moo, along with international scholars. The book focuses on the role of Myanmar’s women at the juncture of political transformation and waves of upheaval from different perspectives.

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The book of twelve articles is divided into three sections: Transitional politics, institutions, and policy-making; Mobilization of feminism, resistance, and building the movement; and labor, land, and daily lives.



In the preface of the book, a feminist scholar quoted Anne McClintok’s words “Nowhere has national or socialist revolution brought a full feminist revolution in its terrain nor has feminism in its own rights been allowed to be more than maidservant to nationalism”. [McClintok, Anne. 1993. ‘Family feuds: Gender, nationalism, and family’. *Feminist Review* 44:61- 80, 78.] It is a powerful sentiment at this time of vibrant social changes in Myanmar.

In the preface to the book, the author recalls a joint international conference in Myanmar in 2014. Dr. Margaret Wong of Yangon University’s Department of History gave a speech on “Myanmar’s women in history”. She showed that traditionally Myanmar’s women have played an important role in society and many, even British colonial rulers, have recognized their independence, status, social equality, and pride. But it is critical to re-examine gender dynamics at this time of transformation, and to consider the complexities and power relationships of the present time. The articles cover broadly different perspectives; from the role of women village heads in local governance to the role of women in the peace process, the rise of the women’s right to land ownership movement, and women’s participation in decision-making.

ISP Calendar






ISP-Myanmar has been working on collecting our work from throughout 2022 which will be published as “a collection report.” The book will be distributed to Gabyin Community Members soon.


ISP-Myanmar has been preparing to publish the “ISP Journal” on Myanmar affairs.

Feedback & Feedforward

“ISP’s Gabyin Community” is built as a social community free from one-way communication. We want to hear feedback from the community and welcome responses and recommendations. ISP-Myanmar intends to enrich our Gabyin community with friendliness, love, and compassion.

If you have something to say to us, you can either reply to this email, write comments on the web page, or call +66-80 747 9712 through Signal, Whatsapp, Viber, and Line apps securely and privately.

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