

SPOTLIGHTS

The "Spotlights" section aims to provide a succinct overview of recent noteworthy developments. Three compelling issues from the past two weeks will be discussed.

China's Investments Under Threat

On July 25, the People's Defense Force (PDF) announced they had taken control of the Chinese-invested Tagaung Nickel Factory in Tigyaing Township, Sagaing Region. The National Unity Government (NUG) has stated that they are currently responsible for the factory's security and the safety of the Chinese workers and their families. The project, which involves an investment of over USD 855 million, has a 20-year operational permit.

On July 16, the Mandalay PDF (MDY-PDF) seized the Chinese-invested Alpha Cement Factory in Madaya Township. Additionally, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and PDF forces took control of the Chinese-invested Nawngkhio Sugar Mill. These are the three China's invested projects that have been seized. According to ISP-Myanmar's data, China's invested projects across the country, including the Tagaung Nickel Factory and the Letpadaung Copper Project, have been attacked at least 23 times. Additionally, towns with oil pipeline control gates are being attacked and seized.

Reports indicate that the Beijing government has contacted the NUG to discuss the seizure of the Tagaung Nickel Processing Factory. On January 1, 2024, the NUG outlined a 10-point policy to protect China's investments in Myanmar, emphasizing its stance on relations with China.

ASEAN: The Myanmar Exhaustion

Laos, which currently holds the chairmanship of ASEAN, recently held the ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting (AMM) from July 21 to 27 in its country. During this gathering, ASEAN once again grappled with discussions regarding the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Myanmar's representatives have been barred from ASEAN meetings for some time. This time, permanent secretary Aung Kyaw Moe from SAC's Foreign Ministry attended the meeting.

Before the meeting, Alounkeo Kittikhoun, Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, held discussions with the SAC in Naypyitaw. The trip and the meeting discussed to halt violence, to release political prisoners, and to allow humanitarian aid programs. Unfortunately, this meeting did not lead to significant progress. As a result, some ASEAN member countries are beginning to explore alternative effective approaches to the situation.

On July 24, during the Laos summit, the past, current, and future ASEAN chairs held informal discussions on Myanmar's situation. This group, called the "Troika," is contemplating more effective ways to address the issue. Last year's ASEAN chair, Indonesia engaged in over 100 meetings with various stakeholders involved in the Myanmar conflict, yet no significant results were achieved. Some key neighboring countries, like Thailand, have sought

A Country of Killing Field

When conflicts intensify, the civilians suffer the most, which is why there is a strong emphasis on protecting them. However, the deliberate targeting of civilians is a grave issue. These attacks constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law and, in some severe cases, crimes against humanity. Within Myanmar's conflict, mass killings continue unabated.

According to ISP-Myanmar's data, 57 instances of mass killings of civilians, defined as incidents where at least 10 people were killed, have been documented (as of July 22, 2024) over the past three years. These incidents resulted in a total of 1,224 deaths.

On April 11, 2023, an airstrike on Pa Zi Gyi Village in Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, resulted in the highest number of casualties, with 174 people killed, including 62 women and children. In the first half of 2024, at least 348 civilians were killed in mass detentions and executions by both the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and its aligned militia forces in regions such as Rakhine, Mandalay, Sagaing, and Magway. Most of these incidents involved the junta rounding up villagers for suspicions and executing them, conducting aerial bombings, or using heavy artillery. These atrocities occur while civilians are asleep at night, taking refuge in religious buildings, and during village raids, arrests, and armed conflicts between opposing forces.

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- ▶ alternative, less publicized approaches to address the Myanmar crisis. Recently, Vietnam facilitated a meeting between a senior Myanmar official and the U.S. Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs in Vietnam. The statement after the meeting urged all parties in the conflict, including the junta, to cease targeting civilians and public infrastructure and emphasized the urgent need to expand humanitarian assistance. As the conflict and humanitarian crisis intensify and when the conditions are unfavorable for the SAC, ASEAN countries are feeling the fatigue of finding solutions through various means to address Myanmar's turmoil.

■ Tragic Toll: 57 Massacres Claimed Over 1,200 Civilian Lives (February 1, 2021 - July 22, 2024)

Amidst ongoing armed conflict following the coup, there were **over 57 incidents** of civilian massacres, resulting in **over 1,224 deaths**. The Sagaing Region amounted to the highest number of fatalities, with **over 32 incidents** of civilian massacres in a total of **17 townships**. These incidents in the Sagaing Region resulted in **over 662 civilian deaths**, amounting to **54 percent** of the total.

