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THE TERROR TWINS OF CLIMATE AND CONFLICT

Three Critical Points to Consider

In times of conflict and climate change crises, Myanmar's society urgently needs the emergence of everyday champions.



Sai Aung MAIN / AFP

Displaced people due to flooding in Pynmana Township, Naypyitaw, on September 13, 2024.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Myanmar is among the nations most acutely vulnerable to natural disasters on a global scale. It has endured a series of severe impacts, starting with Cyclone Nargis in 2008, followed by devastating nationwide flooding in 2015, Cyclone Mocha in 2023, and the recent flooding, which has left a trail of destruction and death. This year has already seen unprecedented weather extremes due to El Niño, setting new highs for temperatures and floods. With La Niña on the horizon, these challenges are only expected to escalate. In the face of such a relentless climate crisis, some regions in Myanmar may soon become uninhabitable.

Beleaguering relentless natural disasters, the entire nation is grappling with the armed conflict. As conflict and security issues take center stage in Myanmar, the country's underlying social crises have been sidelined. The dominant military rule has not only isolated Myanmar

internationally but also lost friends in the international community, decreasing international aid. Myanmar people are tightly trapped between the twin onslaughts of conflict—including bombings, arson, murders, arrests, and forced conscriptions—and rampant exploitation of natural resources and severe climate change. Yet, within these deepening crises, heroes and champions usually emerge. Now, Myanmar awaits the rise of everyday peace champions.

This week's ISP Insight Email addresses these issues across its three sections—Key Takeaway, Trends to Watch, and What ISP is Reading. Typically, the *Thadingyut* season is marked by the gentle glow of festive lights, symbolizing a time of tranquility and celebration. However, amid the current dual crises, a pervasive unease casts a shadow over what should be a peaceful time, weighing heavily on the collective heart. ■

KEY TAKEAWAY

THE TERROR TWINS OF CLIMATE AND CONFLICT

Three Critical Points to Consider

In times of conflict and climate change crises, Myanmar's society urgently needs the emergence of everyday champions.

Myanmar, despite only encountering the tail end of Typhoon Yagi, tragically saw higher fatalities than Vietnam, which bore the full brunt of the typhoon. According to State Administration Council (SAC) reports, the death toll reached 433 people. This disaster was deadlier and more severe than the 2015 flooding incident, previously considered the second-largest natural disaster in Myanmar since Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

While many nations are susceptible to the impacts of El Niño and La Niña, Myanmar is facing some of the worst effects. In the summer of 2024, Myanmar had three cities ranked among the top 15 hottest cities globally. When the 2024 monsoon season returned, areas along the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin rivers suffered severely from the first round of floods. The second major flood of 2024, caused by Typhoon Yagi, brought unexpected landslides and heavy flooding to highland areas. From July 1 to September 30, 2024, over 5.7 million people were affected by the flooding, and more than ten million acres (41,500 square

kilometers - over 6 percent of Myanmar's total land area) were submerged.¹

The latest data places Myanmar alarmingly high on the list of nations most vulnerable to the ravages of climate change. Ranking second among 183 countries in the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index, Myanmar has confronted a particularly stark reality since the coup. ISP-Myanmar wants to highlight three pressing aspects of the escalating climate crisis that demand immediate attention.

1. Lack of Social Capital

The period since the coup has been one of the most intense in the 70-year history of civil war in Myanmar. Human resources are now being further depleted as the war voraciously consumes resources. This situation has significantly eroded Myanmar's social capital. The prioritization of security and conflict has drained the civic space, undermining community resilience. Many young people have been drawn into the conflict, and many are

¹ This description is provided by the UN Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) and the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), which jointly operate the UNOSAT S-1 FloodAI Monitoring Dashboard.

▶ frantically fleeing due to fears of the SAC's conscription laws. The SAC is tightening its grip on community organizations, restricting their scope and activities, and fraying the socioeconomic fabric. Much like beekeeping, social capital must be carefully cultivated and cannot be instantly activated like flipping a switch on a machine.

On the other hand, Myanmar finds itself increasingly ostracized under the SAC's rule. With international backing waning

and alliances dwindling, resources have grown scarcer due to sanctions and policies designed to penalize the junta.

2. Underestimating Climate Change

During the two terms of quasi-civilian governments of Myanmar's democratic transition, many scholars have repeatedly warned about the climate threats facing the country. Climate change and Myanmar's climate vulnerability have been ▶

■ Comparative Casualties in Three Storms

Myanmar experienced the peripheral effects of Typhoon Yagi in 2024, while Cyclone Mocha struck with full intensity in 2023. The 2015 flood caused by Cyclone Komen was regarded as Myanmar's second-biggest disaster after Cyclone Nargisin 2008. However, Cyclone Komen also impacted the region primarily through its peripheral effects. When comparing casualties from these three storms, the fatalities resulting from the peripheral effects of Typhoon Yagi were higher than those from Cyclone Mocha and Cyclone Komen.

	2024 Yagi	2023 Mocha	2015 Komen
Fatalities	433	152	132
Affected Populations	958,640	5,400,000	1,676,086
Affected Townships	110	39	218
Affected States/Regions	8	5	12
Affected Houses	117,951	242,233	524,000
Affected School Infrastructures	538	2,114	430

Sources - The damages from Typhoon Yagi in 2024 are based on figures reported by the SAC (as of September 28). The damages from Cyclone Mocha in 2023 are based on figures published by the AHA Center and the World Bank. Other figures claimed that 400 people, including Rohingya, died in Cyclone Mocha. The figures for Cyclone Komen are based on the report published during President U Thein Sein's term.

► frequently discussed and highlighted. ISP-Myanmar has also convened experts and other specialists for the *Yaw Min Gyi Zayat* talk show titled *Climate Action: More Urgent Than Ever* in 2019. The effects of climate change are so significant that they cannot be ignored, affecting various sectors and posing threats everywhere. From various perspectives, the panels discussed the need to develop a vision, strategy, policy, and new practices emphasizing climate crises' impact. When Cyclone Mocha hit the country in 2023, ISP-Myanmar also published an *On Point* analysis titled *Cyclone Mocha and Return of El Niño: a crisis of climate-conflict-humanitarian triple nexus in Myanmar*.

The analysis discussed three key points: (1) the risks of natural disasters and the deterioration of Myanmar society's resilience, (2) the potential of conflict landscape shifts due to natural disasters, and (3) massive migration driven by climate crises threatens to disrupt social cohesion between local populations and new migrants, intensifying competition for resources and igniting new ethnic tensions. Additionally, the article emphasizes the need for collective efforts to find new ways to address the interconnected crises of climate change, conflict, and social distress.

However, until now, key stakeholders still do not regard climate change as a serious crisis. Leaders and influential figures in various sectors continue to prioritize political storms over environmental storms. Such thinking cannot be wholly dismissed as wrong. Myanmar remains a

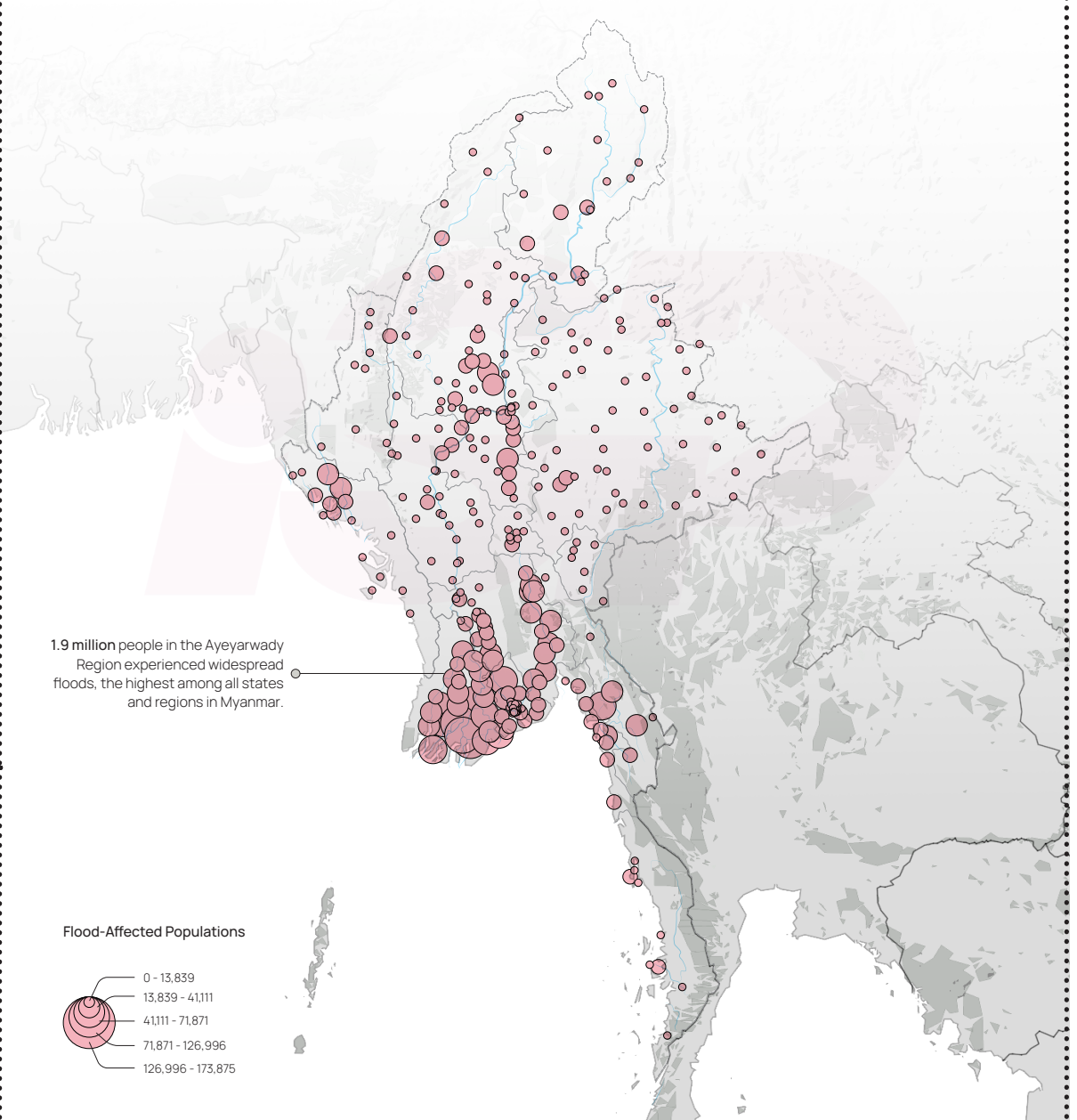
democracy-deficient state ruled by authoritarian power. A responsive and effective governance model that caters to the public's needs cannot flourish in such authoritarian systems. Simultaneously, various factions indiscriminately extract resources to drive the war machinery without considering the consequences. They remain deaf to environmental calls. Consequently, Myanmar is on course to become an uninhabitable wasteland where natural disasters will be neither selective nor sparing.

Amid Myanmar's acute conflict, some advocate for the indiscriminate bombing, believing it to be acceptable as long as land remains—a profoundly disastrous narrative. Bombing over cities, towns, and villages rendered them uninhabitable. The heavy emphasis on military means severely devastates public and civilian infrastructures: buildings are reduced to ashes, and trade arteries are clamped shut. This extremism exacerbates the already dire poverty of Myanmar's grassroots populace.

At the same time, successive military regimes have shown a troubling track record of myopia in addressing the impacts of natural disasters. This short-sightedness has been especially evident during major crises like Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and Cyclone Mocha in 2023, where the regime's restrictive approach significantly constrained international aid and domestic initiatives. Notably, there was a pronounced suspicion towards international organizations and foreign governments who were trying to help. Additionally, the regime could follow the

■ Over 5.6 Million People Experienced Flood (July 1, 2024 - September 23, 2024)

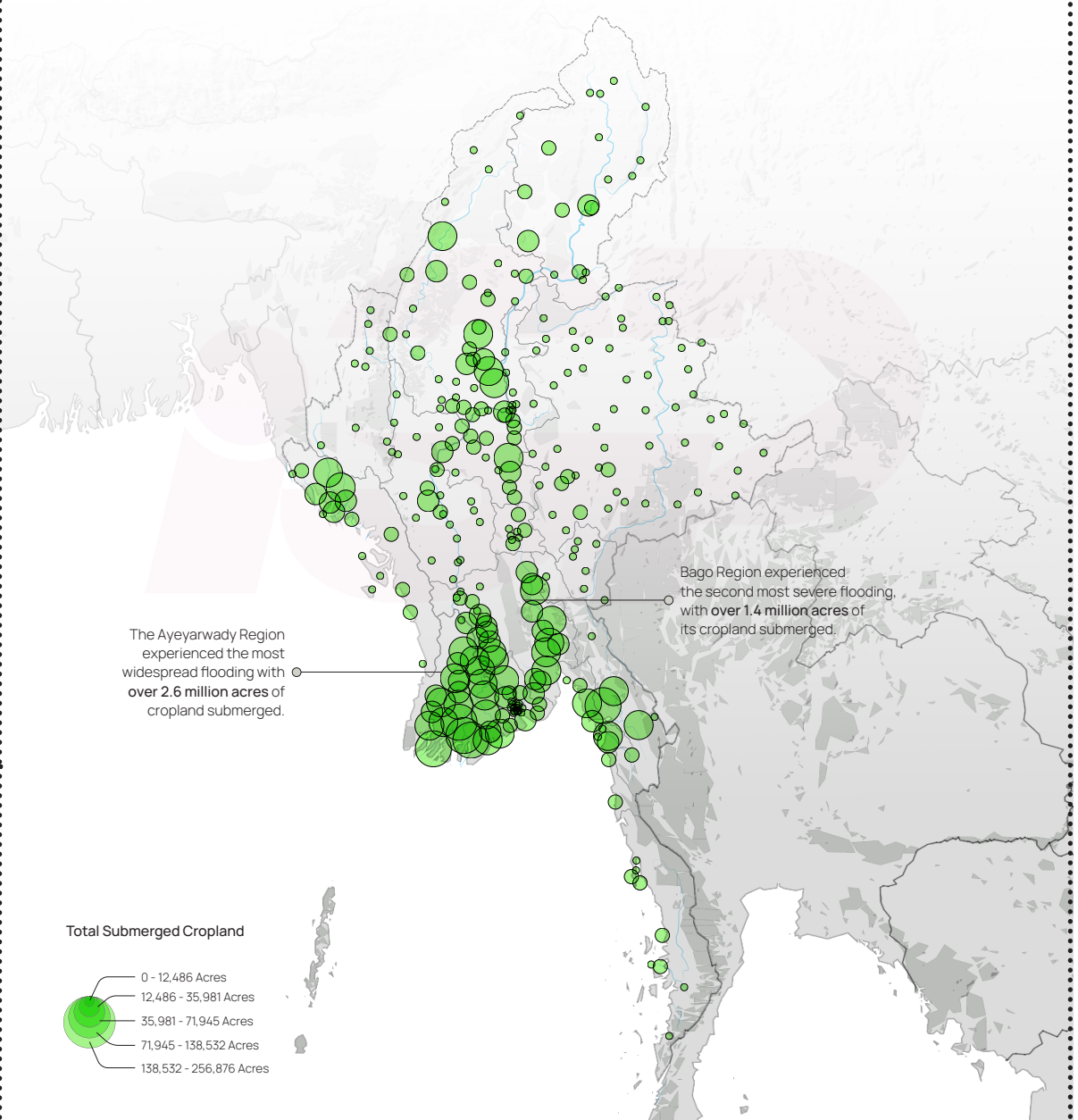
From July 1 to September 23, 2024, **5.6 million** people across Myanmar faced floods. The Ayeyarwady Region bore the brunt, accounting for **nearly 35 percent** of the total people impacted. Bago and Sagaing regions followed, with the second and third highest impacted populations respectively.



Note: This data is extracted from the UNOSAT S-1 Flood AI Monitoring Dashboard. It involves preliminary analysis based on surface water information collected via artificial intelligence technology from the Sentinel-1 satellite. On-ground data may vary.

■ Over 24 Percent of Cropland Flooded (July 1, 2024 - September 23, 2024)

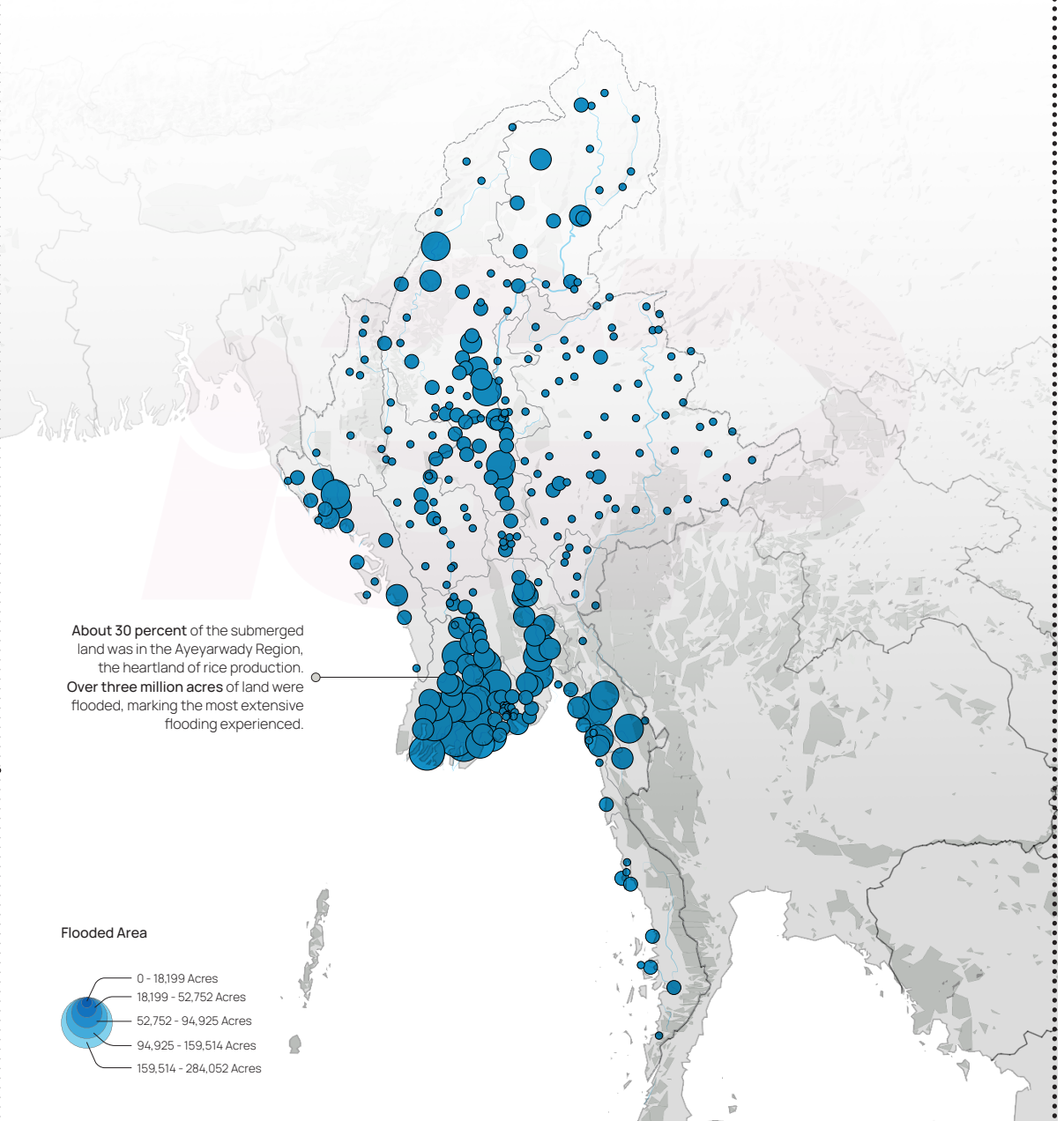
From July 1 to September 23, 2024, floods submerged more than **10 million acres** of land area across 314 townships (95 percent of total townships) in Myanmar. **Over eight million acres** from over 300 townships of this submerged area were croplands, representing nearly **24 percent** of the country's total cropland area.



Note: This data is extracted from the UNOSAT S-1 Flood AI Monitoring Dashboard. It involves preliminary analysis based on surface water information collected via artificial intelligence technology from the Sentinel-1 satellite. On-ground data may vary.

■ Over Six Percent of Myanmar's Total Landmass Flooded (July 1, 2024 - September 23, 2024)

Floods submerged **over 10 million acres**, spanning **314 townships** in Myanmar. This deluge submerged **over six percent** of the nation's total landmass, within three months, between July 1 and September 23, 2024.



Note: This data is extracted from the UNOSAT S-1 Flood AI Monitoring Dashboard. It involves preliminary analysis based on surface water information collected via artificial intelligence technology from the Sentinel-1 satellite. On-ground data may vary.

▶ practices of other authoritarian regimes worldwide: either aim to smoothen the facilitation of international aid to selectively divert resources to benefit specific factions or block international aid entirely. The junta selectively aids only a fraction of the affected population that supports them politically, weaponizing the disaster for their own gain. They often exploit the crises politically, pretending to be capable of resolving them while intentionally creating severe humanitarian crises.

3. Champions From the Crisis

Whenever crises arise, heroes often emerge from the turmoil. During Cyclone Nargis in 2008, under the junta regime, religious leaders, local community organizations, and humanitarian volunteers braved the authorities' obstructions to provide essential aid. According to ISP-Myanmar's Research Network studies, only local ad hoc disaster relief groups and volunteer organizations continue to deliver assistance currently.²

From March to August 2024, ISP-Myanmar researched socioeconomic conditions across 110 townships. Among these, 48 townships experienced extreme heat, while 37 faced heavy and frequent rainfall. Additionally, 45 townships suffered from flooding. Regarding the question of who responds to disaster relief, local ad hoc

disaster relief groups are the most common entities in many townships, assisting in rehabilitating their communities. Volunteer groups were seen as the second most active, while the third most common answer was 'no group came for help'. The capabilities of civil society organizations and the assistance provided by the junta's Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement were markedly inadequate.

In this critical situation, some celebrities, online influencers, and wealthy business owners are stepping up to support the victims of climate-related disasters by directly bypassing the SAC channels. They are donating and helping on their own terms. Regardless of who donates or how they contribute, acts of generosity benefit society and promote compassion. Yet, when these efforts are politicized through a narrow, dogmatic division lens, they deepen the suffering of already vulnerable communities. Such an approach offers no real assistance, serving only to fuel hatred without accountability.

In the face of unprecedented climate crises, the country needs everyday champions far more than those who spread propaganda and hate. What's needed are people who can genuinely help rebuild the lives of those affected. The crisis is worsened by rising poverty, a case of "when it rains, it pours." People already overwhelmed by multiple ▶

² Since May 2023, ISP-Myanmar has been using an observational method to collect data from 110 townships—one-third of the 330 total townships in Myanmar—to analyze the socioeconomic situation. This includes 75 district townships, with the remaining 35 chosen based on their large population size and economic significance.



■ The Threat of Storms is Escalating

“The climate in Myanmar has been changing since 1978. Myanmar has a monsoon system. The monsoon pattern is intriguing: it arrives and departs, each phase marked by significant strength and the formation of storms... Historically, the pre-monsoon season began on April 15 and lasted until May 15, a span of 30 days. The post-monsoon previously spanned from when the monsoon departed on October 10 until the end of November, totaling 50 days. Previously, the cycle included 30 days of pre-monsoon season and 50 days of post-monsoon season. Now, the monsoon’s arrival has shifted to late May, lengthening the pre-monsoon season to 45 days, starting from April 15. Monsoon ends on September 15 and extends the post-monsoon through November, lasting 75 days. The key point here is that both the pre and post-monsoons have become longer. It poses a significant challenge because the climate event in this period is specific and unlike other periods. Myanmar faces two major issues during these times. Firstly, there is a marked increase in the formation of heavy clouds. Secondly, storms predominantly affect Myanmar only during these two pre-monsoon and post-monsoon periods. Consequently, with longer pre-monsoon and post-monsoon, there is an increased window for storms to impact the region. This pattern results in consistent storm threats annually. For instance, last year, a storm directly hit Munaung, while in previous years, storms have brushed past Rakhine State. If we look back, no year has been exempt from these risks. The threat of storms is escalating.”

Dr. Tun Lwin (1948-2019)
Meteorologist

Excerpted quote from Season 1, Episode 7 of ISP-Myanmar’s *Yaw Min Gyi Zayat* talk show, held on June 22, 2019, entitled: “Climate Action: More Urgent Than Ever.”





■ Yangon will be an Island

“The impact of climate change on Myanmar will be nothing less than catastrophic. And the impact will come not over centuries or decades but over years. Myanmar today is in a climate emergency... Even a two-degree warmer world, which we could reach well before mid-century, will be devastating for this country. We will see intense storms and cyclones like Nargis more and more frequently, perhaps, every year. We will see sea levels rise, inundating the coastline parts of the Ayeyarwaddy delta and areas around Yangon. We will see unbearable heat not for weeks but for months of the year. We will see prolonged drought with unpredictable rains, which combined with intense heat and drought, may make agriculture impossible in the dry zone and the delta. We will see mass extinctions of animal species in Myanmar and the spread of new diseases... (If we move to) A four-degree warmer planet, much of this country, much of Myanmar will become uninhabitable. The Ayeyarwaddy delta will be gone, as well as much of Rakhine state. Yangon will be an island. The center of the country will be too hot to live for humans as well as for most animals. We will see migration of millions of people or tens of millions of people. Bangladesh next door will also be in severe crisis and will produce tens of millions of climate refugees. We may well see this four-degree warmer world well before the end of this century, well within the lifetime of young people today.”

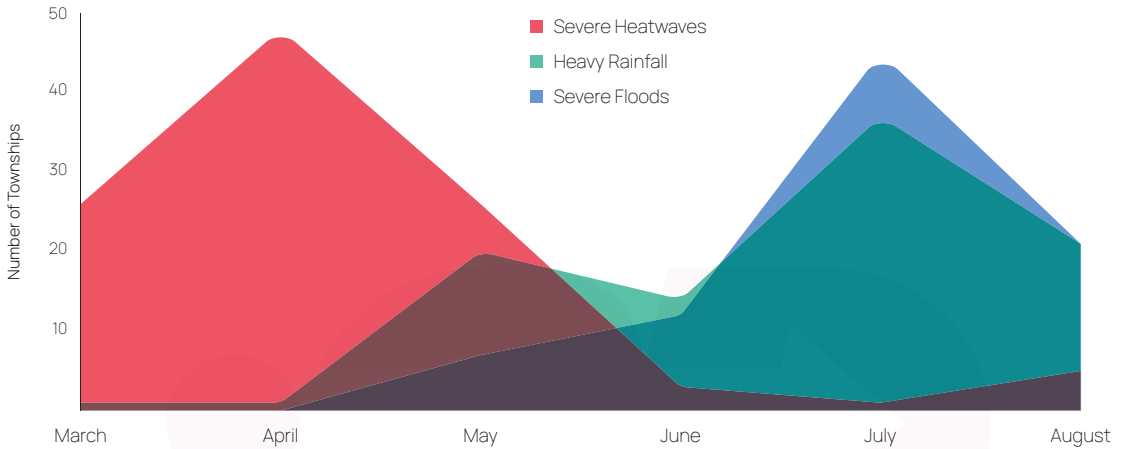
Dr. Thant Myint-U
Historian

Excerpted quote from Season 1, Episode 7 of ISP-Myanmar's *Yaw Min Gyi Zayat* talk show, held on June 22, 2019, entitled: “Climate Action: More Urgent Than Ever.”



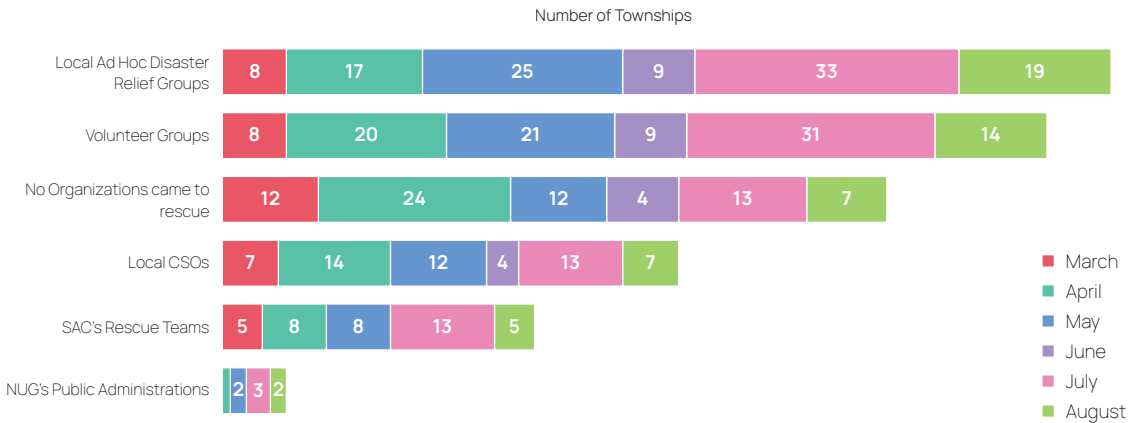
■ Many Suffered from Severe Heatwaves and Floods the Most

According to ISP-Myanmar's Research Network data on 110 townships, many experienced severe heatwaves and floods the most, among other climate crises, between March 2024 and August 2024. The peak of the heatwaves occurred in April, whereas the worst flooding was recorded in July.



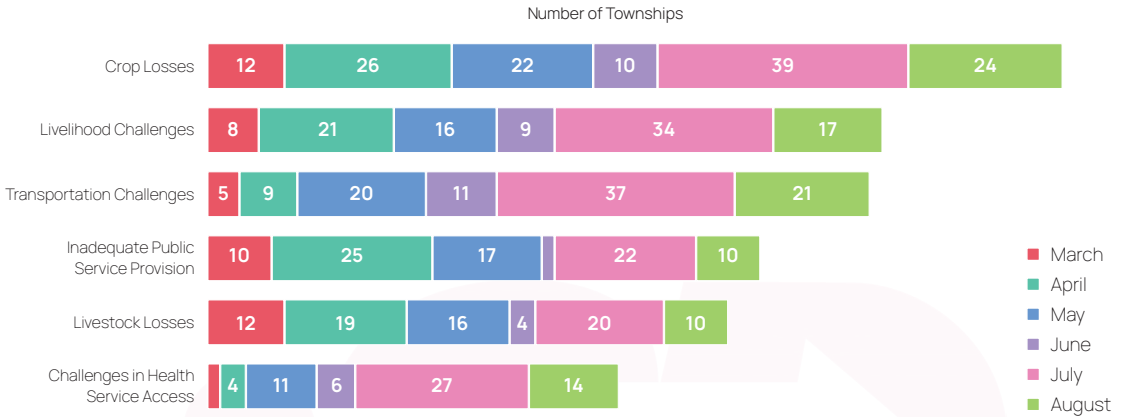
■ Relied Mainly on Local Ad Hoc Disaster Relief Groups

ISP-Myanmar's Research Network data of 110 townships from March 2024 to August 2024, reveals a significant reliance on local ad hoc disaster relief groups and volunteer groups for rescue efforts during natural disasters.



■ The Biggest Damages: Crop Losses

ISP-Myanmar's Research Network survey of 110 townships from March 2024 to August 2024 reveals that most of the townships experienced crop losses caused by natural disasters. Many also experienced challenges in livelihoods and transportation.



▶ hardships lack the strength to rebuild. External aid is scarce, and the shortage of resources hinders sustainable recovery efforts, from early warning systems to emergency response strategies. It is, regrettably, an almost impossible situation.

In essence, conflict and climate crises feed off each other, like adding fuel to a fire. The war economy, particularly through the exploitation of natural resources, worsens the climate crisis. Meanwhile, resource scarcity from climate-related disasters emboldens armed groups and

fuels predatory, warlord-like behaviors. As conflict and climate crises converge, more people are displaced, and the grassroots face the dire threat of starvation. Human security has reached a precarious peak. Not only is societal resilience weakening, but the capacity for conflict resolution is also eroding. Faced with the twin terror of war and environmental catastrophe, communities must rally behind emerging everyday champions rather than succumb to those who promote an ideological driven utopian vision with egocentric attitude. ■

SPOTLIGHTS

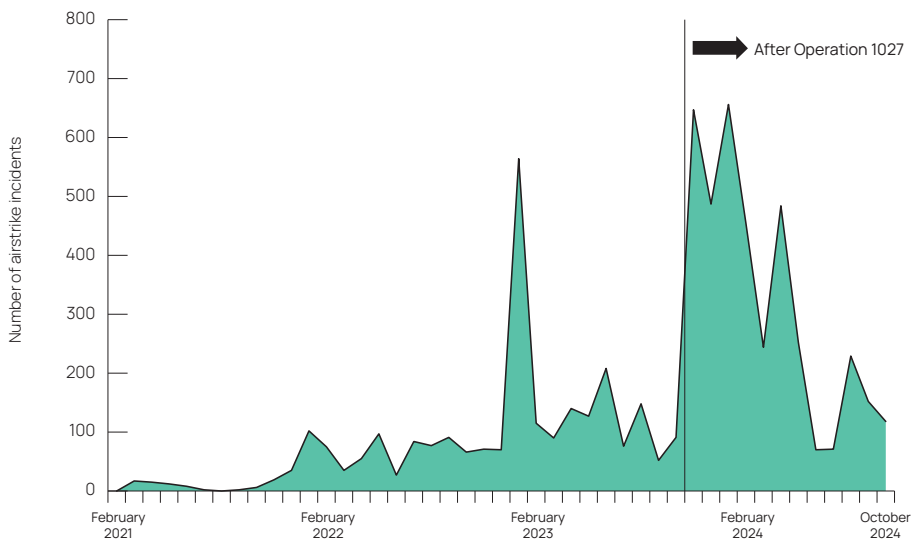
The "Spotlights" section aims to provide a succinct overview of recent noteworthy developments. Among various topics, two compelling issues will be discussed.

SAC's Raining Bombs

The State Administration Council's (SAC) troops have been relentlessly executing intense aerial assaults after losing control of a regional military command (RMC) and several major towns. These airstrikes intensified after Operation 1027 restarted in late June 2024, spreading the conflict into central Myanmar. The resistance forces have successfully captured towns like Mogoke, Thabeikkyin, and Singu in the Mandalay Region, increasingly threatening Mandalay itself. In response to the operation's sequel, the SAC officially declared Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (MNDA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA) as terrorist organizations on September 2. ▶

■ Over 7,100 Airstrike Incidents Across the Country (February 1, 2021 - October 6, 2024)

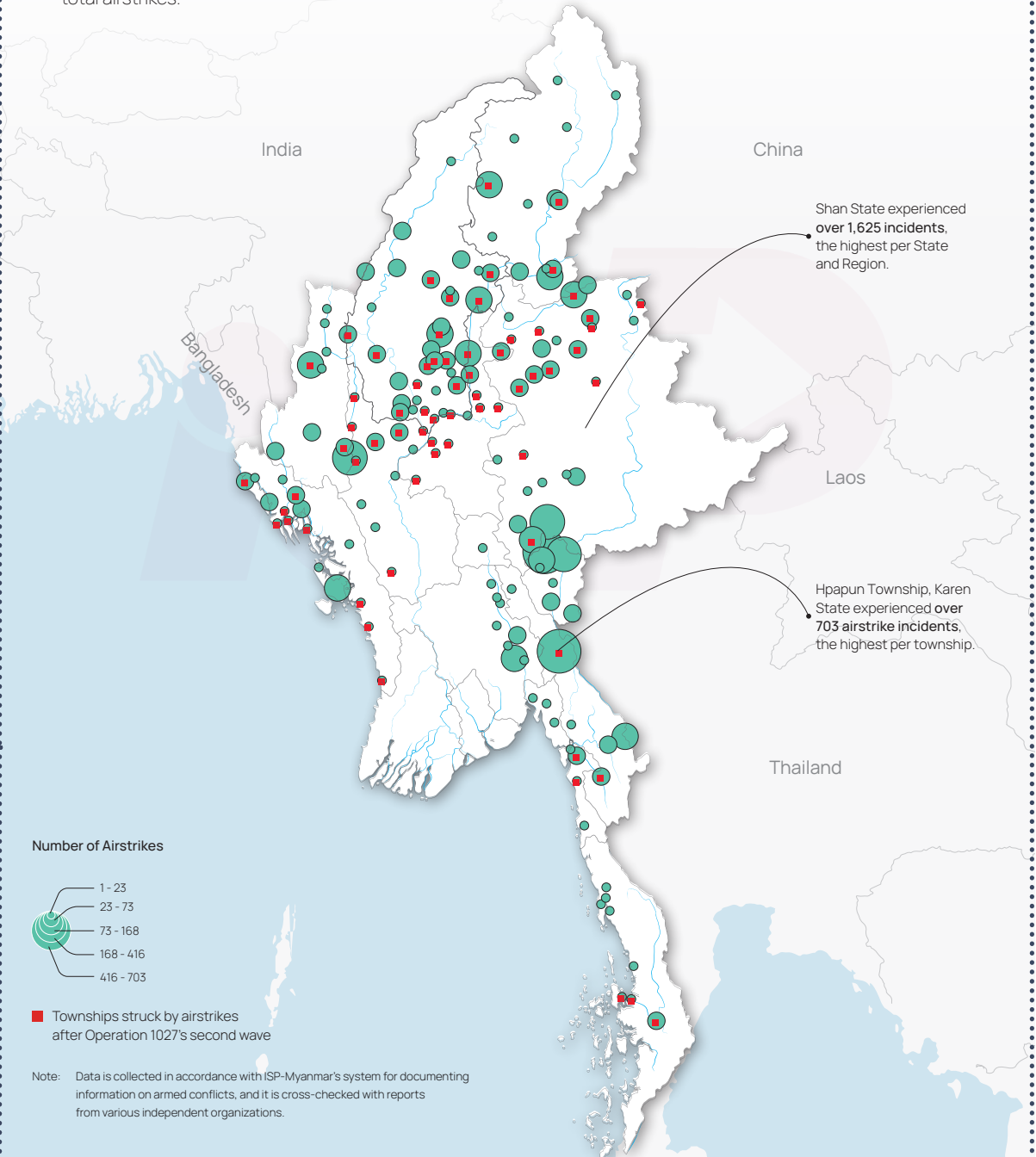
The State Administration Council's (SAC) troops conducted **at least 7,186 airstrikes** during armed clashes following the coup. Of these, **54 percent** of air strikes (at least 3,864 incidents) occurred within the first ten months after the start of Operation 1027. January 2024 saw **650 incidents**, the highest per month.



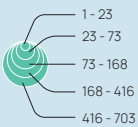
Note: Data is collected in accordance with ISP-Myanmar's system for documenting information on armed conflicts, and it is cross-checked with reports from various independent organizations. Actual figures may vary.

■ Total 156 Townships Nationwide Experienced Airstrikes (February 1, 2021 to October 6, 2024)

Following the coup, the State Administration Council's (SAC) troops conducted **at least 7,186 airstrikes** across the country during armed clashes. These incidents spanned **at least 156 townships** nationwide. Hpapun Township in Karen State experienced **over 703 airstrikes**, while Shan State faced over 1,625 incidents, nearly 23 percent of total airstrikes.



Number of Airstrikes



■ Townships struck by airstrikes after Operation 1027's second wave

Note: Data is collected in accordance with ISP-Myanmar's system for documenting information on armed conflicts, and it is cross-checked with reports from various independent organizations.

- ▶ Since then, SAC propaganda has consistently emphasized that innocent civilians must not be forced into human shields, and the SAC troops will protect and maintain the sovereignty at all costs, responding as necessary. The primary response has involved even more severe and frequent aerial bombings aimed at instilling fear in the opposition and reinforcing the belief that nothing else matters than reclaiming the land.

The SAC escalated its aerial offensives across Kachin, northern Shan, Rakhine, Karen States, and the Sagaing Region in early September. ISP-Myanmar's data indicates that over 3,000 airstrikes were conducted during the first phase of Operation 1027, the six months from November 2023 to April 2024. This averages over 500 strikes per month. When comparing this to the previous three months of the second phase of Operation 1027, there were 71 strikes in July, 229 in August and 152 in September respectively, indicating a decrease in frequency. Yet, the number of civilian casualties has been high. On September 5 and 6 alone, two attacks targeting the two towns, Namhkan in the Chinese border and Pekon in the Karenni area, respectively, involved schools and camps for internally displaced persons, resulting in the deaths of around 21 children and civilians. Additionally, an assault on a detention camp in Buthidaung, Rakhine State, held by the AA, resulted in over 50 casualties, including SAC troops. These intense attacks not only suggest an escalation in violence but also foreshadow potential retaliations in response. ■

The Spring Revolution: Women's Sacrifices

Myanmar's women played a significant role in the resistance against the 2021 military coup. To symbolize their defiance, they actively participated in various street protests, including strikes such as the Sarong (htamein) Revolution, Flower Strike, and Thanaka Strike. Women also played a crucial role in the armed resistance. Over the three and a half years of the Spring Revolution, 5,649 women have been detained.

On September 1, 2024, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) documented the struggles of these political detainees in a report titled: *Women Behind Bars in the Spring Revolution*. The detainees were arrested on political charges by the SAC under various pretexts. Following their arrest, they suffered both physical and psychological harm, ranging from torture to severe sexual abuse. Recent incidents include group assaults by male wardens on women's quarters in the Daik U prison in Bago Region last month, where they faced brutal beatings. In court, the women were subject to invasive searches that grossly violated their dignity and privacy. The majority of detained women are from Yangon, with Mandalay and Sagaing following second and third.

Moreover, 1,132 women were killed by the SAC. Of these, 82 percent were casualties of heavy artillery, air strikes, and shootings. The remaining 10 percent died in police stations, prisons, and detention centers, while about 1.4 percent were victims of murder following sexual assaults. The significant involvement of women in the revolution reflects their immense contribution. ■

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ASEAN should send a unified message to all parties in Myanmar that there is no military solution. It is time to start talking. Thailand is ready to help.”

Paetongtarn Shinawatra
(Prime Minister of Thailand)

Excerpted from RFA Burmese news article titled, “Thai PM Urges Dialogue to Resolve Myanmar Crisis,” published on October 10, 2024.
The Thailand Prime Minister delivered this quote to ASEAN leaders during the 44th ASEAN Summit on October 9.

To stay updated on Myanmar politics,
scan this and read ISP series.



Public Resilience, Nation's Capability, and Humanitarian Diplomacy

In times of natural disasters, empathy and humanity must triumph over hatred, conflict, and war.

Public resilience is often discussed, especially when natural disasters like cyclones and floods were encountered. Robust resilience can enhance mutual support and improve recovery capabilities. On the other hand, the resilience of the populace is seen in the research literature as indicative of the nation's overall capacity, often linked to political institutions.

Political institutions significantly impact the response to crises. Specifically, robust political institutions greatly influence state capacity, which can enhance capabilities such as (1) informational capabilities, (2) decision-making and implementation capabilities, (3) enforcement capabilities, and (4) public mobilization and coordination capabilities.

Currently, Myanmar is encountering a catastrophic crisis in addition to the civil war as a sequel of the coup. Consequently, political institutions are facing these natural disasters at their most feeble state. Additionally, Myanmar, under the SAC's rule, is grappling with international isolation and sanctions due to human rights violation records. This analysis aims to discuss how Myanmar can most effectively garner international aid for rescue and rehabilitation efforts and

how humanitarian diplomacy can be expanded in this context. The focus is on exploring viable strategies for recovery efforts.

Myanmar is no stranger to major natural disasters. The devastating impact of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 resulted in over 130,000 fatalities and property damages exceeding USD 12 billion. The former military regime initially restricted international access, citing security concerns. However, interventions by ASEAN and establishing the Tripartite Core Group (TCG), which includes UN agencies, gained access to assess the disaster's impact and facilitated rehabilitation aid.

The monsoon floods in 2015 were particularly severe. Back then, international collaborations were strengthened due to the quasi-civilian government's leadership, increased transparency, and stable diplomatic landscape. The floods and landslides from July to August 2015 impacted 12 out of 14 regions and states in Myanmar, leading to 132 deaths. The floods affected approximately 5.2 million people in 40 townships, causing an estimated USD 1.51 billion in damages, equivalent to 3.1 percent of Myanmar's GDP for the fiscal

► year 2014-2015. The government mobilized extensive rescue operations and hosted international donor conferences for rehabilitation efforts. To assess the rehabilitation needs, former Vice-President Nyan Tun led ministries, Myanmar scholars, and international organizations in conducting a Post-Flood and Landslides Needs Assessment (PFLNA). Substantial efforts were made to secure commitments for international aid.

Cyclone Mocha's destruction in 2023 was also severe. As the cyclone struck in the aftermath of the coup, the junta mostly focused on security concerns and, as a result, international aid and domestic humanitarian relief efforts were closely monitored and restricted. Although early warnings helped limit the casualties, the impacts of the cyclone were felt by over 5.4 million people across various regions in Myanmar. The country sought disaster relief, particularly from neighboring countries and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on

Disaster Management (AHA Centre), which also coordinated the assessment of the disaster's impacts.

The floods and landslides in 2024 were exceptionally disastrous. The saying of "the strength of the nation lies within" is largely inadequate. It is crucial to prioritize people over political conflict. There is a pressing need to broaden the scope of humanitarian diplomacy to facilitate international assistance. Once again, it is evident that neighboring countries, among others, will offer assistance through the AHA, despite existing limitations. However, politics plays a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding and compassion among nations facing similar challenges, from assessing the impact of disasters to mobilizing an international donor conference for aid. It's time for empathy and humanity to triumph over hatred, conflict, and war. It is vital to closely monitor the state's capacity and the cleverness of humanitarian diplomacy in the post-disaster period. ■

Cyclone Mocha and Return of El Niño:

A Crisis of Climate-Conflict-Humanitarian Triple Nexus in Myanmar

SCAN THIS CODE



ISP OnPoint No. 15

El Niño to La Niña Time to Draft a Disaster Communication Playbook

El Niño, a significant climate phenomenon that reshapes Myanmar and global weather patterns, is transitioning to La Niña.

As Myanmar faces escalating climate disasters and flooding, concerns are growing over the rampant spread of rumors, disinformation, and misinformation. Some of this misinformation is intentionally seeded on social media to instill fear and confusion among the population. Without verifying these snippets, many impulsive sharers on social media unwittingly amplify falsehoods through their networks, intensifying the public's distress. Although, some of them may insidiously share misinformation as well. Given these circumstances, an effective and systematic disaster communication plan for climate-related crises is urgently needed.

Myanmar is ranked as the second most vulnerable nation in the global climate disaster indices, demanding vigilant monitoring. El Niño, a significant climate phenomenon that reshapes local and global weather patterns, is transitioning to La Niña. Both El Niño and La Niña profoundly impact global and regional climates by inducing natural changes in wind patterns, ocean currents, and temperatures. However, the overarching concern is that climate change exacerbates these fluctuations, resulting in prolonged and irregular weather events. Last year, Cyclone Mocha struck

Myanmar during the developing stage of an El Niño and caused widespread devastation in Rakhine and other parts of Myanmar. Currently, meteorologists are observing a shift toward colder La Niña conditions.

El Niño, marked by warmer-than-average temperatures, has spurred heavy rainfall and floods in some regions while instigating droughts in others. The transition to La Niña ushers in cooler temperatures and amplified trade winds, heralding a drop in global temperatures. This climatic shift presages drought in South America, southern Africa, and the southern United States, whereas the Atlantic is braced for heightened hurricane activity. Eastern Africa anticipates floods, with the south facing droughts. In Asia, nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand are poised for increased flooding. Meanwhile, Europe and North America brace for a colder climate, paralleled by heavy rainfall, flood and colder conditions in Australia. El Niño's influence began to wane in June and completely withdrew from the northern hemisphere in September. Now, La Niña is making its presence felt across the region from September to November, with expectations of continuing until January to March 2025.

With this in mind, let's turn to managing severe and persistent climate crises. Disaster management is usually approached through a four-step strategy. This strategy includes 1) prevention, 2) preparation, 3) crisis response, and 4) emergency recovery efforts. Myanmar also has a disaster management plan that extends from the national framework to the township to community level planning and committees to cope with natural disasters. These systems are codified in

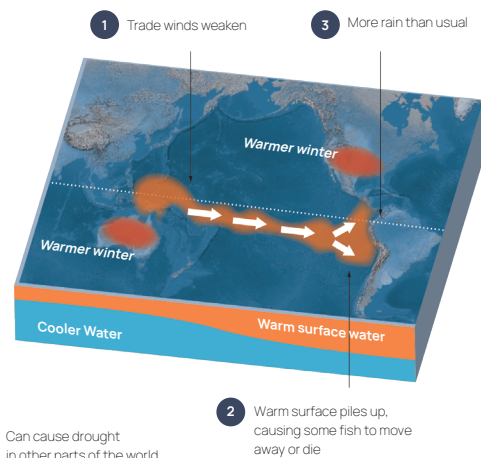
legal frameworks on how to govern responses to natural disasters. However, there seem to be deficiencies in disaster communications. The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology website (<https://www.moezala.gov.mm/my>) is comprehensive and has detailed alerts on storms, rising river levels, and imminent flash floods. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this online resource relies heavily on the level of its public engagement and trust.

■ El Niño and La Niña Climate Patterns

The El Niño and La Niña are opposing climate patterns in the Pacific Ocean that can significantly impact weather, wildfires, ecosystems and economies worldwide. Each event lasts nine months to a couple of years, occurring every two to seven years. A La Niña usually follows one or two years after an El Niño.

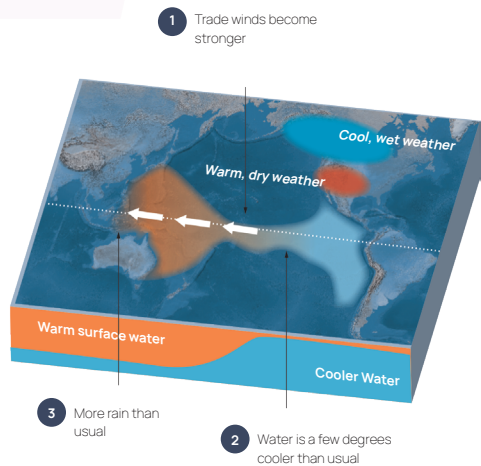
El Niño

Known as "Little Boy" or "Christ Child"
Because it typically peaks in December
Warming of ocean surface



La Niña

Called "Little Girl", "El Viejo" or "anti-El Niño"
Cooling of ocean surface



Sources: NOAA, WMO



Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine suggested methods for effective disaster communications in an article. It emphasizes the importance of a dual approach—being both proactive and reactive—to manage communications during the climate crisis efficiently. Rapid dissemination of information is crucial, but equally important is building trust, combating disinformation and misinformation, and ensuring the public remains well-informed.

Tulane University's article discussed eight steps to developing a successful disaster communication plan. This plan includes

1. Anticipating possible disasters
2. Assembling a team and assign a designated spokesperson
3. Establishing a coordinated plan of action
4. Communicating a clear message
5. Identifying key stakeholder groups and tailoring messaging to each group
6. Staying up-to-date and communicating with relevant groups
7. Strategizing social media use and

8. Building an accessible disaster communication system.

In Myanmar, private banks perpetually peddle trivial SMS messages to bank users, yet no SMS alerts were received about the flooding. It is also essential to utilize alternative communication channels, including phone calls, television alerts, emergency hotlines, radio broadcasts, social media updates, and roadside signs. Neighboring countries employ FM radios as a vital lifeline, broadcasting crucial disaster-related information to a broad audience. Yet, in Myanmar, the grip of stringent control suffocates free flow of information. The SAC blocks major social media outlets, such as Facebook, forcing citizens to scramble through Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). This excessive prioritization of security over accessibility cripples the efficacy of disaster response efforts. To break away from this gridlock, Myanmar urgently requires creative strategies to combat rumors, disinformation, misinformation, and forge a robust, trustworthy disaster communication network. ■

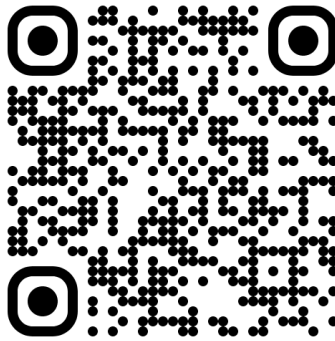
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