



Exera Monthly Safety & Security Report

Review of safety and security incidents in Myanmar

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Executive Summary

Peace & Stability. International pressure continues to mount against Tatmadaw leadership in the wake of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) genocide lawsuit, with the US imposing targeted sanctions on Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, and several organizations calling attention to their independence from and lack of accountability to the civilian government.

The issue of a single, unified armed force has been a major area of dispute in recent peace negotiations and agreeing to the contentious principle will be seen as a boon to the stalled peace process.

The declaration by the Arakan Army (AA) Chief on 9 December that any form of business and projects operating in Rakhine State in AA's territory must pay tax starting in 2020, including major infrastructure projects and fisheries marks the next phase in their separatist insurgency: to usurp government powers in areas they control by displacing the public administration. They have begun using language such as the "Arakan State" and the "Arakanese Authority" to describe a parallel state apparatus, and may now be seeking legitimization through the acknowledgement of foreign powers (e.g. India, China) and businesses. This follows a previous declaration from AA Chief on 29 October, declaring their intention to develop a more permanent base of operations in Mrauk-U Township, a symbolically significant former Arakan kingdom capital. This set the tone for a determined push in 2020 down from Paletwa Township, Chin State where the AA previously setup a logistics base, into a more permanent position established in Rakhine State. AA attacks relating to the Kaladan Project began after the Indian President Ram Nath Kovind visited Myanmar in December 2018 to sign the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project memorandum of understanding. Abduction and detainment of foreign nationals working on national infrastructure projects is a significant escalation of the conflict in Rakhine State.

Civil Unrest. Overall, the number of demonstrations and number of attendees in December was significantly higher than recent months. Gatherings in support of State Counselor who in her capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs led a team to defend Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were observed nationwide with a high number of participants. Protests against Myanmar Police Force for revealing identities of a toddler rape victim and her family were observed in Yangon and Mandalay with approximately 1,000 participants respectively.

Law & Order. Drugs and drug-related cases were the most reported crimes at (53.6%) countrywide. While robberies and thefts composed just (14.6%) of media-reported crime countrywide,

Health & Hazards: Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) were the most reported health, safety and environment incidents, representing (52%) countrywide in December. Following RTAs, fires were the most common (21.74%) reported HSE incident. The

number of earthquakes countrywide was significantly high compared to November (13%), but no casualties or damages were reported.

Peace & Stability

Overview

On International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2019, the United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added four senior Tatmadaw officials to the Specially Designated Nationals sanctions list for "serious human rights abuse against members of ethnic minority groups across Burma, including those in the northern Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan States". On the same day, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi attended the first day of hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), UN's highest court in The Hague, Netherlands, where she led Myanmar's defence against genocide charges. The sanctions freeze any US assets held by those targeted and prohibits US citizens from doing business with them:

- Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing
- Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice-Senior General Soe Win
- Senior Commander Major General Than Oo
- Senior Commander Major General Aung Aung

The press release described "credible claims of mass-scale rape and other forms of sexual violence", consistent with Gambia's presentation at the ICJ and the September report of the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission.

On 16 July 2019, the US previously hit the four above mentioned generals with sanctions barring them and their immediate families from travelling to the US.

Earlier in 2018, Facebook banned Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and several other military-linked accounts that were found to be using seemingly non-partisan accounts to push a military political agenda.

A pro-military rally was held in Yangon on 3 August 2019 that drew thousands of military supporters followed by the US State Department's sanctions against Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and three other senior military leaders on 16 July 2019.

While specific individuals or organizations have not been targeted and demonstrations have predominantly remained peaceful, the possibility of escalations exists and seemingly innocuous occurrences could turn into flashpoints. That rallies condemning the UN and ICC have been permitted and a one-man protest critical of the Tatmdaw was shut down, is a reminder that narratives and opinions differing from official government and military accounts, are contentious. Although public dialogue has become much more open since the 2015 general election, personnel are recommended to avoid expressing overt political opinions in public and where possible.

Delegations from the Arakan Army (AA), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) held an informal meeting with the government's peace commission on 15 December in China's Kunming city. According to Northern Alliance members, the issues deadlocking discussions around a bilateral ceasefire agreement include the repositioning of troops, the formation of a conflict-monitoring committee and the issue of a single, unified armed force.

The leader of the Arakan Army (AA), Tun Myat Naing, announced on 9 December that any form of business and projects operating in the AA's territory must pay tax starting in 2020. including major infrastructure projects and fisheries. Stating that the process of assessing taxes is currently being carried out, he indicated that the purpose of the taxation is acknowledgment of the Arakan People's "revolutionary power". The AA also stated that critical national infrastructure projects such as the Kalandan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, supported by the government of India, would also be subject to the tax, and would have to inform them of any movements or projects. Conversely, Chinese-sponsored work such as Belt-and-Road initiative projects, the Kyaukpyu special economic zone, and oil and gas pipelines will not be targeted, as China has purportedly acknowledged the existence of the AA. The AA disrupted Kalandan project related activities for the first time on 16 March, when its troops attacked the Yadana Win vessel, which was carrying 286 tonnes of iron and other construction materials worth US\$715,000 for the Paletwa Bridge project across the Kalandan River. The vessel was making its way to Paletwa, via Sittwe and Kyauktaw, when it was attacked and set on fire. On 30 March, AA forces abducted eight staffs from the Su Htoo San Company, performing Paletwa-Mizoram road construction as part of the Kalandan project.

The AA claimed that the Su Htoo San Company is owned by former military intelligence members, and that the workers were arrested on suspicions of having ties to the Tatmadaw. On 3 November, AA abducted 10 people, including 5 Indian citizens and a National League for Democracy (NLD) member of parliament, from two boats on the Kalandan river between Paletwa and Kyauktaw townships. The Indian citizens were employees of the C&C Construction Company, working on the Mizoram-Myanmar Kalandan road project. One of the Indian citizens suffered a heart attack during the abduction and died. On 04 November, the AA released the detainees except for the NLD representative, who AA spokesman Khaing Thu Kha accused of collaborating with the Tatmadaw and setting up a headquarters in Paletwa to spread dissent between Chin and Arakan communities. On 22 November, AA attacked three cargo vessels transporting construction materials for the Kalandan bridge project and Tatmadaw vessels providing security on the Kalandan River in Kyauktaw Township, using rocket-propelled grenades to damage one vessel.

With threats now directly addressing a foreign government (India), these may escalate in areas controlled by the AA. The AA has become entrenched and developed freedom of movement in conflict-affected areas in Rakhine State, and is usurping government security roles; including the interdiction of road and riverine traffic and abduction of passengers they deem to be suspicious or working against Arakan nationalist causes. The language their spokespeople use to describe these incidents parallels the Tatmadaw's messaging, using terms such as "conducting security measures" to identify "suspicious" individuals cooperating with the Tatmadaw.

Civil Unrest

Overview

Overall, the number of demonstrations in December 2019 was 30% higher than compared with numbers seen in November and the number of attendees was 16% higher than November.

Most demonstrations observed in December stemmed from gatherings in support of State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi who led a team to the Hague Netherlands to defend the country against genocide charges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and gatherings in support of the NLD party's efforts to amend the military-drafted 2008 Constitution.

Following a surprise proposal on 29 January 2019 of the ruling NLD to form a joint committee for the amendment of 2008 military-drafted constitution, widespread demonstrations took place in several cities and townships with more than 1,000 attendees demanding the constitutional change and supporting the NLD's decision of forming a joint committee. In Taunggy, Southern Shan State, despite threats by Buddhist Nationalist and USDP supporters, more than a thousand people participated to a pro-amendment demonstration occurred on 2 March 2019.

Counter-protests organized by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and Buddhist Nationalists were also seen. The counter-protests focussed mostly on protecting section 59 (f) of the constitution which was specifically designed for State Counsellor Aung San Su Kyi. The section 59 (f) states that a presidential candidate must be a citizen, be born of parents who are both Myanmar citizens, and cannot have a foreign spouse or children. Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing said the Tatmadaw will stop involving in politics if there are no more armed groups operating in the country.

More than 1,000 participants took part at a rally in downtown Yangon on 23 December 2019, to take action against Myanmar Police Force officers who revealed the identity of a toddler girl, anonym (Victoria) who was allegedly sexually assaulted at Wisdom Hill nursery in Naypyitaw in May 2019. Widespread demonstrations in major cities demanding justice over the case and online campaigns were observed throughout starting from June 2019.

Law & Order

Overview

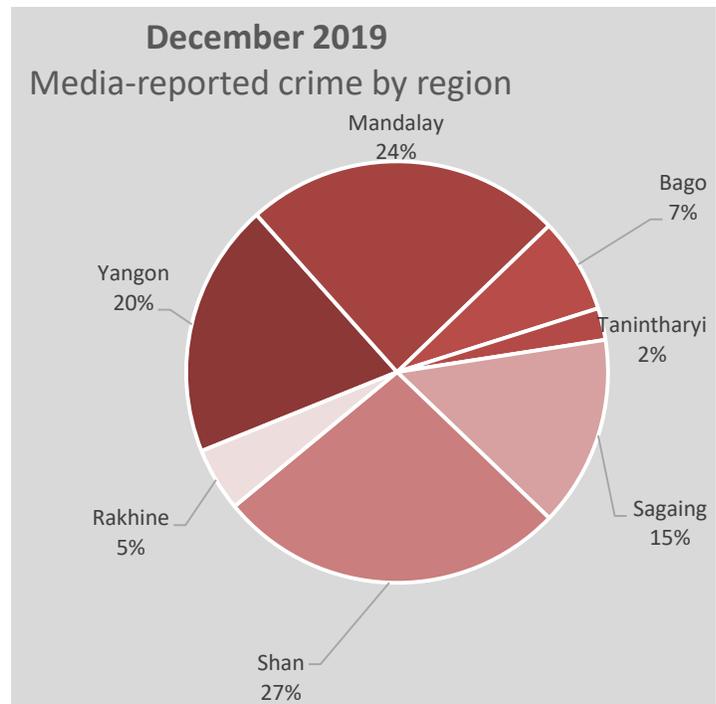
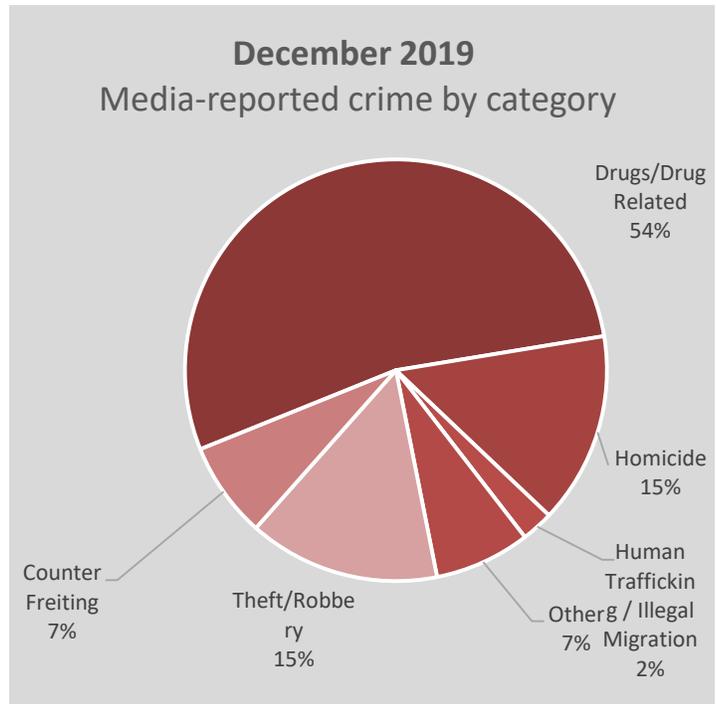
Mandalay and Shan State saw the highest numbers of crime rates in December with (24%) and (27%). Drugs and drug-related crimes remained highest in overall media-reported crime countrywide.

However, the increase in overall crime compared to the previous month may be a result of increased reporting rather than a significant increase in media-reported overall crime.

Incidents of interest

Violent crime. A couple was brutally murdered in public in Taungoo, Bago Region by two men, over a land argument. The video recording went viral, triggering demands for regional stability and strong law enforcement.

Drugs. Police seized more than 6.6 million stimulant tablets hidden under the floor of a vehicle parked in Tachileik Township, Shan State on 6 December. Police arrested a man who tried to run away after spotting the police as he approached the vehicle. On the same day, 1.2 million methamphetamine pills were also seized in Kalay Township, Magway Region heading to Yangon and one man was arrested on suspicion of involving in the drug smuggling. Stimulant tablets normally produced in conflict areas of Shan State are usually smuggled to Bangladesh via Rakhine State's Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships. Various armed organizations from Myanmar

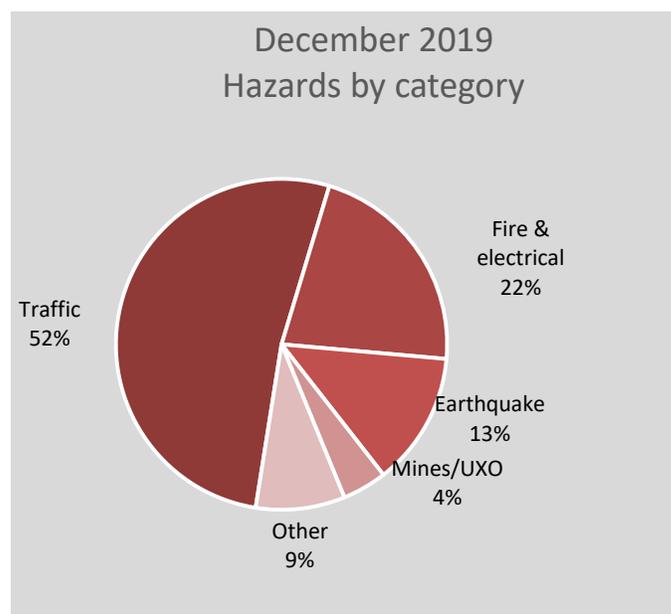
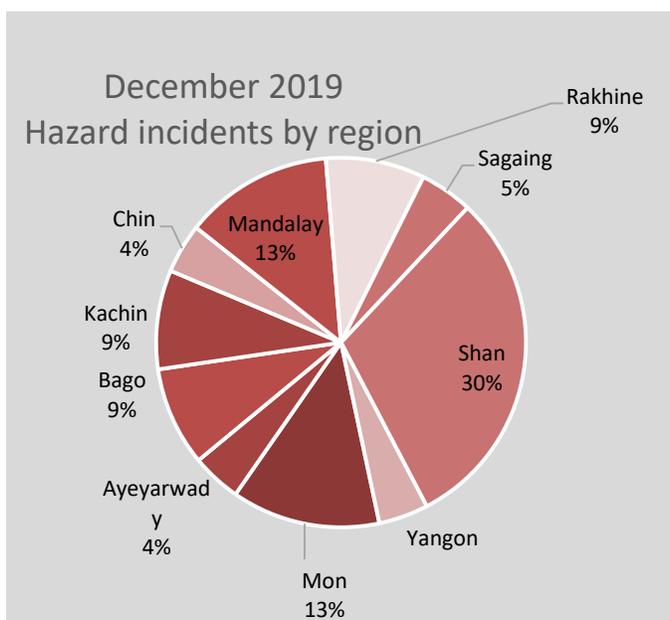


including the Arakan Army (AA) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) are believed to be funding their activities through narcotic trafficking.

Health and Hazards

Overview

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) were the most reported health, safety and environment incidents, representing (52.17%) of incidents countrywide in December, a decrease in 14% RTAs compared to last year December. Loss of control due to poor road infrastructures, motorists lacking experience and failing regular inspection and maintenance of vehicles were the main reasons for RTAs being highest number of overall safety hazards. Collisions caused by speeding, inattention and drowsy driving of passenger bus drivers on highway roads and expressway are also the main reason. Following RTAs, fires were the most common (21.74%) reported HSE incident. The most common causes for fire incidents include electrical problems, failing to install fire protection system and equipment and lacking of regular inspection of fire protection system for construction businesses and the premises.



Access & Advice

1. Personnel are reminded to avoid protests, rallies, and other public demonstrations. While police tactics and response have become more sophisticated, use of force and proportionality remain unpredictable, and the threat of violent confrontations remains regardless of the context. If caught in these situations, do not take pictures or record the demonstration, and immediately move out of the area in a calm manner. Report the incident to your security team.

2. While using public transportation, including taxis, particularly while travelling alone at night, personnel are reminded to remain vigilant. Safe practices include:

- using registered taxis;
- use of applications with emergency reporting functions, such as Grab;
- taking note of the license plate and registration number;
- not sharing taxis with strangers or entering taxis with existing passengers; and
- avoiding drivers you suspect of being intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.

3. Personnel should familiarize themselves regularly with the emergency protocols and procedures of their employers and, if applicable, residences. In the case of a large storm, remain indoors and monitor alerts unless otherwise directed. In the event of an earthquake, do not attempt to leave a building during tremors and try to safely position yourself under a sturdy object. Once the shaking has stopped, follow your organizations emergency management plan for further instructions. Personnel are reminded to keep an emergency supply of water and goods sufficient for 72 hours.

4. For all other safety and security issues, monitor Exera flash reports for potential threats, hazards, assessments and recommendations.

5. Normal business and personal activities should continue in most of Myanmar, with due precautions for the possibility of crime and intercommunal violence. In addition to restricting travel to government non-permitted areas, reconsider non-essential travel to the following areas due to continuing armed conflict:

- Kachin: Hpakant, Mansi, Kamaing, Mogaung, Mohnyin, Tanai, Sumprabum, Laiza, IDP camps;
- Shan: Muse, Namhsam, Namhkam, Kutkai, Lashio, Namtu, Manton, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Monghsu, Mongping, Mongmit, Hopong, Loilem, Tangyan;
- Chin: Paletwa;
- Rakhine: Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U and all IDP camps;
- Sagaing: Homalin;
- Kayin: Hlaingbwe;
- Tanintharyi: Yebyu, Tanintharyi Tsp; and
- Wa, Kokang and Palaung self-administered zones and some Thai border zones.