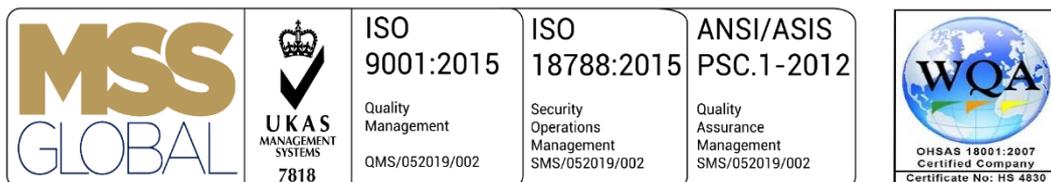


EXERA

Weekly Security Review

Safety and Security Highlights for Clients Operating in Myanmar

Dates covered: 11 June– 17 June 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**Covid-19 epidemic**

When EXERA released its latest Weekly Security Review (WSR) on 12 June, Myanmar had had 246 confirmed cases since the beginning of the epidemic, i.e. 13 more than the previous week.

As of 17 June, at 08:00 Hrs, 262 confirmed cases have been reported since the beginning of the epidemic, i.e. 16 new cases in the last week. However, all of them except 1 case are imported: 11 people repatriated from India and 4 from Bangladesh. All of them had been repatriated to Myanmar recently and were staying in quarantine facilities. This may mean that those cases are under control.

Internal Conflict

As previous week, Rakhine State saw a relative lull in armed clashes. However, other forms of tensions were noticeable. In two days, 2 members of security forces were stabbed to death in broad daylight in major towns while wearing plainclothes. After attacking Thazin Myaing police station late May, AA attacked another police station in southern Rathedaung Township, in Done Paik village, on 13 June. On 17 June, the dead body of a civil servant was found in Kyaukphyu town. Those episodes seem to confirm AA's intention to oust Myanmar administration and put forward its own political influence.

The AA seems to be gaining sway in the Rakhine sway, with reportedly fruitful recruitment campaigns. In response, the Myanmar authorities have led numerous arrests and searches, including teenagers and young girls. Some abuses and lootings were reported during those operations.

In Rakhine State parliament, the military-appointed lawmakers requested the imposition of martial law in the State. This initiative was derailed by civilian lawmakers and criticized by the civilian members of the Union government.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar ministry of communications hinted that the Internet blackout on 8 townships of Rakhine and Southern Chin State might be lifted on 1 August, provided the conditions are conducive.

In Northern Shan State, punctual clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Restoration Council of Shan State / Shan State Army South (RCSS/SSA-S) were reported. Although the RCSS/SSA-S signed the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement, it occasionally clashes with the army for conflicting territorial claims. Situation in Muse and Kutkai has somehow stabilized for the moment.

In Kayin State, last week's tensions in Hpapun, Myawaddy and Kawkareik areas have somehow eased.

Drugs

Drugs seizures are a daily occurrence in Shan, Rakhine States, and to some extent in Kayin State as well. This week, a senior commander of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) was reportedly involved in a serious trafficking case.

Myanmar General Elections

This week, several senior political leaders claimed their ambitions for the November elections. It appears that most incumbent NLD leaders will contest the poll.

INTERNAL CONFLICT

During the reporting period, combats concentrated in Rakhine State, between the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) and the Arakan Army. Clashes also broke out in Shan State.

Rakhine State

The main incidents collected through news outlets, reliable social media accounts and informers on the ground are the following (fig. 1):

- 1) 10 June, Mandalay Region: Mandalay District Court initiated the lawsuit against 6 men arrested in the town in September 2019, and accused of being AA members. Massive quantities of gunpowder, detonators and electronic devices were found in their house.
- 2) 10 June, Paletwa Township: a 43-year-old IDP was reportedly shot dead by the Light Infantry Division (LID) 22 from Myanmar Army. The incident took place outside the village of Tha Htay Kone as the Tatmadaw open fired on a lorry carrying 21 people to the village of Nanchaungwa (Hnan Chaung) to pick up rice for IDPs. The group had been authorized to undertake the journey and distribute the food items by the tactical commander based in Seint Sin village.
- 3) 10 June, Taungup Township: the National Security Organization, a local radical political organization stated that they gave a warning to two local residents. The latter are accused of denouncing to AA fellow villagers who reportedly act as Myanmar Army informers. The motivations of the NSO are still unclear. According to observers, the NSO may seek to showcase its efforts to preserve local harmony and avoid divisions within the local community.
- 4) 10 June, Ann Township: a 21-year-old man traveling from Sittwe to Yangon without any ID was arrested by Myanmar Army at a checkpoint in Ann. The authorities accuse him of being a member of the AA.
- 5) 10 June, Rathedaung Township: a bomb exploded in a Buddhist temple in Htee Swea village during an investigation visit by the authorities. One member of the security forces was wounded by the bomb blast.
- 6) 11 June, Ponnagyun Township: one army officer was stabbed to death and another one abducted by a group of five people in Ponnagyun town. The two soldiers were off duty and wearing civilian clothes. The incident happened near the local market at 8.00 Hrs. The Myanmar Army searched several houses for the abducted soldier, blocked roads and reportedly shot warning shots. In April 2020, artillery shelling on Ponnagyun town claimed the lives of

8 people and injured 13 others. Some analysts consider this stabbing might be a retaliation for it.

- 7) 11 June, Ponnagyun Township: on the same day and the same place, a Ponnagyun inhabitant with mental illness was shot dead by soldiers. According to the Tatmadaw, he was wielding a knife; the man's family contest this narrative. Due to the high tension in town, his funerals had to be postponed.
- 8) 11 June, Mrauk-U Township: two villagers were arrested in Leik Sin Pyin village by the Myanmar Army for alleged links with the AA. One was released shortly after his arrest; the other was taken away by the army. The soldiers searched several houses. According to villagers, they looted valuables while searching houses.
- 9) June 12, Kyauktaw Township: 3 patients and health workers of Ah Pauk Wa hospital were evacuated to Kyauktaw town due to rising tension between the Tatmadaw and AA. The Myanmar Army settled down its camp near the hospital, making patients and health workers vulnerable to any fight. Last year, some villagers were wounded when fighting broke out into the village.
- 10) 13 June, Rathedaung Township: in one of the major incidents during the reporting period, AA attacked a police base in Done Paik village. Some police officers were reportedly killed and some others injured. About sixty commandos of AA attacked the police station at 5:00 Hrs and withdrew after 06:00 Hrs. Done Paik police station is approximately 10 km away from Thazin Myaing border guard police station which went under AA attack on 29 May. Criticized for this attack, the AA claimed that police provided operational support to the Tatmadaw.
- 11) 13 June, Kyauktaw Township: a police officer was stabbed to death in Kyauktaw town. He was off duty and wearing civilian clothes. The police and Myanmar Army searched the town for the murderer, but to no avail.
- 12) 13 June, Sittwe Township: two teenage girls of 16 and 18 were released one day after they were arrested for discussing the arrest of 4 fellow villagers on their mobile phones. The authorities accused them of being AA informers.
- 13) 14 June, Rathedaung Township: fighting broke out near Ohn Chaung village between Myanmar Army and AA, prompting villagers to flee the area. The clash lasted from 16:00 until night.
- 14) 14 June 14, Ponnagyun Township: a group of Myanmar Army soldiers were hit by a roadside bomb in Hgnet Gyi Kyun village. The incident happened at 12:00 Hrs, while the troops were leaving the village after collecting household members lists. It is still unclear whether the blast caused any casualty. The

Tatmadaw has already pointed out the advanced technologies mobilized by the AA to detonate its mines remotely, and assumed those technologies were provided by other, well-equipped EAOs.

15) 17 June, Mrauk-U Township: fighting broke out between AA and Myanmar Army in Let Kar village area around 9 am local time. Some soldiers were first hit by roadside mine, and exchange of fire subsequently lasted for 15 minutes according to local sources. The number of casualties is still unknown. Let Kar village has been abandoned by its residents for a year now, and was set ablaze on 15 May.

16) 17 June, Kyaukphyu Township: a dead body was found west of Kyaukphyu airport. The victim appeared to be a civil servant working in local General Administration Department. This may be a reminder of AA's intention to get rid of Myanmar administrative system and replace it with its own authority.

This week was marked by two stabbings of members of security forces in two days, in broad daylight and in major towns. This seems to confirm the evolution of the conflict from a conventional, military, well-located confrontation to a low-burning, unconventional and widespread struggle.

As analyzed in previous WSR, the distinction between military stakeholders and civilians is getting increasingly fuzzy, and residents, including teenagers, can be arrested for travelling without ID or for a SMS chat. On June 13, in Mrauk-U Township, the Myanmar Army searched the Tein Nyo IDP camp for AA members. The search started at 6:00 Hrs and lasted for 4 hours. Considering that the camp is settled near the Yangon-Sittwe highway, the road was blocked during the whole operation.

On 15 June, relatives of 18 residents of Tin Ma village (Kyauktaw Township) detained by Myanmar Army Light Infantry Division 55 since 16 March held a press conference in Sittwe. They urged the authorities to release their relatives, claiming they are innocent. According to them, 10 of the 18 detainees have been forced to work for Myanmar Army since they were arrested. On the same day, it appeared that at least 10 villages from Dar Let village tract (Ann Township), ran out of food because of food transportation restriction imposed by the Myanmar Army. 70 villagers from Dar Let Chaung moved from their village to a nearby Buddhist monastery for lack of food. Such restrictions reminded some observers of the "4 cut policy" led by the Tatmadaw since the 1960s: deprive insurgents of food, funds, intelligence and recruits.

On 15 June, the military lawmakers in Rakhine State regional parliament made a strong move: they requested that the martial law be imposed on the State to better address the AA threat. This proposal was derailed by the civilian lawmakers (who are mainly from Arakan National Party and National League for Democracy). On the

same day, the President Office in Nay Pyi Taw doubled up, stating that the situation in Rakhine State does not justify martial law.

On 10 June, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Communications announced that the Internet blackout in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon and Paletwa Townships (Rakhine and Chin State) would remain enforced until 1 August, but that it might be lifted afterwards “if there are no more threats to the public or violations of the telecommunications law”.

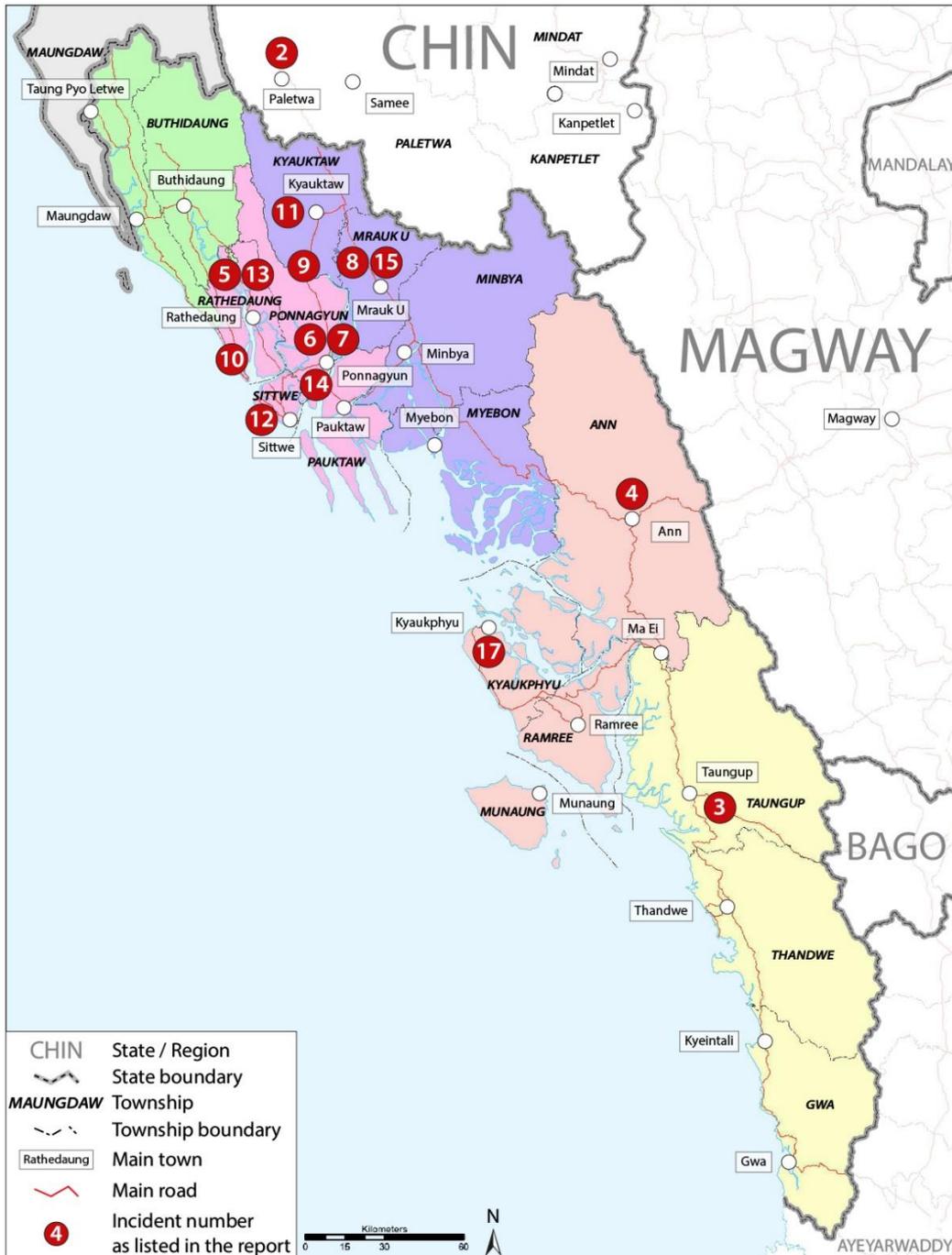


Figure 1: Security incidents in Rakhine State between 10 June and 18 June, 2020

Shan State

The reporting period saw some tensions between the Tatmadaw and the Restoration Council of Shan State – Shan State Army South (RCSS/SSA-S). After decades of conflict, the RCSS signed several ceasefires with the Myanmar government, including the October 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). From then on, it has cultivated some understanding with the Tatmadaw. Some analysts have even reported some operational cooperation between both organizations and considered that the RCSS is acting as an informal militia for the Myanmar Army.

Historically, the RCSS-SSA-S has been based in Southern Shan State, in Loi Tai Leng, on the Thai border. However, since the NCA, it has deployed troops to Northern Shan State. When clashes broke out between the Tatmadaw and another Shan EAO, the Shan State Progressive Party – Shan State Army North (SSPP/SSA-N), the RCSS/SSA-S seized some of its bases. This has fuelled the idea that the Tatmadaw is playing a “divide and rule” strategy. Nowadays, the RCSS/SSA-S has strong bases in Namtu, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, and Namkham Townships, and is reportedly trying to extend its influence, triggering conflict with other EAOs, such as Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

Although the RCSS/SSA-S is officially an NCA signatory, punctual clashes pit it against the Tatmadaw when one party encroaches on the other’s, as it happened on 3 June in Pongpakyin Township. During the reporting period, two clashes happened:

- 1) 10 June, Namlan Township: fighting broke out between RCSS/SSA-S and the Myanmar Army in Kutkha village.
- 2) 10 June, Hsipaw township: a Tatmadaw convoy clashed with the RCSS/SSA-S when driving through a territory controlled by the EAO. This clash happened in spite of preliminary exchanges of information and permissions between both parties. It lasted an hour and left 2 Tatmadaw soldiers dead and 2 others wounded.

Tensions also surfaced between the Myanmar authorities and the TNLA in Mogok Township: on 14 June, TNLA soldiers manning a Covid-19 checkpoint intercepted a car transporting two police officers. The latter were arrested and detained for one day, before being released.

On 13 June, the police, acting on a tip-off, intercepted one truck and one bus on the highway between Mandalay and Pyin Oo Lwin. Those vehicles were respectively transporting 45 and 895 kg of soft explosive powder. The transporters were arrested. The origin and the destination of this equipment is still unclear.

On 12 June, the IDPs Committee in Northern Shan State issued a statement reporting that over 14,000 IDPs in 39 camps may face food shortage very soon because of the Covid-19 epidemic, and because IDPs cannot leave the camp and work for an income. Although some camps get support from the World Food Programme (WFP), some others are still left off.

In Kayin State, no clash was reported, one week after explosions in Myawaddy and Kawkareik. However, the tensions we mentioned between the Myanmar authorities and its ally of the Kayin Border Guard Force (BGF) are set to increase in the next few months. On 15 June, it was learnt that the Myanmar government had formed an investigation body to scrutinize the Shwe Kokko project, the flagship real estate project led by the BGF, in joint venture with Chinese investors. The controversial project is indeed much bigger than first agreed with the Myanmar authorities, and is suspected of harbouring illegal activities.

Assessment for clash areas

1. Rakhine State:

Although armed clashes have somehow receded since late May, tension remains very high. Some lower-key incidents happen, with stabbings, arrests and abductions, even in downtown areas. Myanmar authorities react with numerous arrests, criticized by the Rakhine civil society. This may fuel the Rakhine resentment and strengthen the popular support that the AA enjoys locally. The organization is leading active recruitment campaigns across the State, and this strategy is reportedly met with success. It also controls some swathes of territory and several village tracts, in which it seeks to impose its political and fiscal control.

In Southern Rakhine State, armed clashes are still a rare occurrence, but tensions are now surfacing in Ann and Taungup Township, with the NSO pursuing a still unclear strategy.

The risk therefore remains very high in Rakhine State and Southern Chin State.

2. Shan State:

After several weeks marked by high tensions in Muse and Kutkai area, this reporting period saw a relative lull, with two minor clashes were reported between the Tatmadaw and the RCSS/SSA-S. In spite of this temporary lull, Northern Shan State remains considered as a very high-risk area.

Comments and recommendations

Travel by road should be avoided at all cost in Northern and Central Rakhine State as well as in Southern Chin State. Even major towns' outskirts have become high-risk areas. Awareness and vigilance should be priority before planning or performing any activities in these regions. Daylight attacks against members of security forces in plain clothes and in downtown areas show that conventional security measures (avoid proximity with Myanmar security forces, avoid leaving towns, be alert of gunshot noise) are not sufficient, and that extra vigilance is needed.

Although incidents in Northern Shan State and Kayin State have receded compared to the previous week, we also advise our clients to avoid those regions for the moment. EXERA remains at your disposition to offer tailor-made security diagnostics and secure travel plans throughout Myanmar.

SOCIAL STABILITY

Although no demonstration normally can be held in Myanmar at the moment because of the Covid-19 pandemic, a symbolic protest was held in Maungdaw town on 12 June. Following the Ministry for Health and Sports' ban on any public gathering of more than 5 people, 5 residents of Maungdaw marched in Maungdaw to ask the government to quell illegal border crossing from Bangladesh. Indeed, since 8 June, 5 people back from Bangladesh have been tested positive to Covid-19. The government has reiterated its will to take action against illegal border crossing, and against people giving shelter to those trespassers. The Covid-19 epidemic may therefore fan tensions between Rakhine Buddhist and Bengali/Rohingya.

On 10 June, it was also learnt that more than 200 Pa-O in Hsiseng Township (Southern Shan State) were in dispute with the Tatmadaw over 2,000 acres of land. The army reportedly grabbed them in the 1990s but did not use them. The farmers resumed farming for several years. Conflict resurfaced in May, when soldiers arrested villagers and seized farming material. Land use and land ownership are one of the most acute problem in transitional Myanmar, and a major source of conflict, which can sometimes turn violent.

Lastly, this reporting period was marked by important announcements about the coming elections:

- After weeks of rumours about a possible postponement, the Union Electoral Commission (UEC) confirmed they would take place as scheduled in November 2020. The precise date is yet to be announced.
- On 14 June, the NLD announced that it had chosen Henry Van Thio, the second Vice-President of Myanmar, as its candidate in Thantlang Township (Chin State).

- On 15 June, the Yangon Region Chief Minister announced he would not run for the elections for health reasons. Since the beginning of his tenure, he has been the target of numerous criticism about his attitude towards journalists, his opacity about Yangon budget or recent breaches of the Covid-19 precaution measures.

- On 16 June, Ye Min Oo, former vice-mayor of Nay Pyi Taw and recently appointed Finance Ministry of Yangon Region, announced he would run for the elections in Dagon Township (Yangon Region). Analysts consider that this rising star of Myanmar politics may be the next Yangon Region Chief Minister.

- On 16 June, during a press meeting, a Facebook representative for Southeast Asia stated that the company had recruited 120 extra staff to monitor the 2020 election and tackle hate speech and fake news.

- On 17 June, the incumbent Myanmar president, U Win Myint, announced he would contest the elections in his usual constituency of Tamwe (Yangon Region). Aung San Suu Kyi is widely speculated to contest her own seat in Kawhmu constituency (Yangon Region). However, the NLD is yet to confirm this.

- On 17 June, it was learnt that all the NLD members within the regional government of Mandalay Region would seek re-election. This includes U Zaw Myint Maung, the incumbent but ailing Chief Minister, suffering from leukaemia. In that context, observers have long speculated whether his candidacy was a relevant move.

Elections will be a very sensitive time in some conflict areas of Myanmar, and especially in Rakhine State and Southern Chin State. The Arakan National Party, the main local ethnic party is already calling its members to run for a seat. AA may not recognize the legitimacy of the poll and may attempt to disrupt it. The Union Election Commission therefore warned that elections might not take place in Rakhine State. If that were to happen, the Army is reportedly willing to rule the region. This prospect may prompt the civilian members of the government to push for elections despite the risks. In Chin State, it was learnt on 10 June that the Chin State Election Commission is gearing up to organize the elections in Paletwa, which has been the hotspot of the war between AA and Tatmadaw.

With the elections getting closer, EXERA will offer you a specific section in the next Weekly, Monthly and Quarterly Security Reviews, with analysis and focuses on important stakeholders, parties and issues.

TRANSPORTATION**Main Incidents**

Based on the main Myanmar media, notable road accidents since the last report include:

- 1) 10 June – Kachin State: A speeding car crashed on signage and overturned at Indaw Gyi Town, Mohnyin Township at 12:00 hrs. One person died on the spot and 9 people got injured.
- 2) 11 June – Bago Region: A speeding car collided with another on the opposite lane at the milepost 132/3-4, Phyu Township, on Yangon – Mandalay Highway at 13:00hrs. 15 people got injured.
- 3) 11 June – Yangon – Mandalay Highway: a car overturned near milepost 191/5-on Yangon – Mandalay Highway at 22:40hrs. No injury nor fatality were reported.
- 4) 12 June – Kayin State: a truck collided with a car driving on the opposite lane on Kawkareik – Myawaddy Highway at 07:20hrs. 4 people got injured.
- 5) 12 June – Mandalay Region: a speeding truck crashed on a rock beside the road between milepost 6/7 and 7/0 at Thabeikkyin Township at 13:15 hrs. 3 people died on the spot, and 2 were injured.
- 6) 13 June – Bago Region: A truck crashed on a car beside the road between milepost 109/4 and 109/5 on Yangon – Mandalay Highway, Kyauktaga Township at 04:30hrs. 2 people died on the spot.
- 7) 13 June – Yangon – Mandalay Highway: a speeding car overturned near mileposts 267/ on Yangon – Mandalay Highway at 12:35hrs and one person got injured.
- 8) 15 June – Kachin State: an express bus overturned in Mogaung Township at 19:10hrs and no injury and fatality were reported.
- 9) 17 June – Shan State (North): an express bus overturned and fell down a slope below between mileposts 83 and 84, at Gote Twin on Mandalay – Lashio Highway due to brake failure. 3 people including the driver died on the spot and 13 people got injured.

Comments and recommendations

Road accidents are a major risk in Myanmar, and one has to be extremely careful. The Yangon – Mandalay Highway is especially dangerous. Among other risks, this road is made of cement, which is known to wear out tyres much faster than macadam. If you often drive on that road, monitor closely the wear and tear of your tyres.

As a rule, avoid speeding, even on good roads. Keep your distances, keep clear from motorbikes and be careful of light vehicles or cattle on the road. Do not assume other drivers have a good command of their vehicles, the right reflexes and know the traffic rules. Make sure to use properly-trained drivers and well-maintained vehicles. Always fasten your seat belt.

At night, keep in mind that many vehicles, especially motorbikes, drive without any light; drive slowly and be extremely cautious. Accidents are even more frequent during rainy season. Assess road and climate conditions before starting your trip.

CRIME

Main incidents

Based on the main Myanmar media, notable crimes since the last report include:

- 1) 10 June – Naypyitaw: 2 staff of the Ministry of Transport and Communications were beaten by their neighbour. They had to be hospitalized.
- 2) 10 June – Rakhine State: 4 men wearing masks and wielding swords robbed a Kanbawza bank branch in Sittwe. They escaped with 180 million MMK (i.e. approximately 130,000 USD). No casualty was reported. Two people were arrested on the same evening, and one other on 14 June in connection with this case.
- 3) 11 June – Kayin State: 8 Chinese nationals with no visa were arrested in Myawaddy town. They had crossed the border in Muse and were heading to Kayin State to find work over there. The 2 drivers transporting those migrant workers were also arrested.
- 4) 11 June – Mandalay Region: A motorcycle taxi driver was stabbed by 3 people in Patheingyi Township. They stole his motorcycle and mobile phone. The victim survived his injuries. The 3 offenders were arrested.

- 5) 12 June – Yangon Region: two Bengali/Rohingya from Rakhine State were arrested by authority in Kyauktan township. Bengali/Rohingya's movements have been very severely restricted by Myanmar authorities for several years already. After interrogation, they confessed that they were being trafficked by a broker, and that they were planning to work in China.
- 6) 13 June – Tanintharyi Region: 3 family members of a railway worker living in Yebyu Township were murdered in their house. Authorities are still investigating about the case.
- 7) 13 June – Kayin State: A 13 years old girl from Kamamung Township, Kayin State was sexually assaulted by a 25-year old member of the Kayin Border Guard Force (BGF). The offender was arrested.
- 8) 14 June – Ayeyarwaddy Region: a pawn broker of Pyapon Township, was robbed gold and money. The value of the haul is estimated at 21,758,000 MMK (15,500 USD).
- 9) 15 June – Sagaing Region: two women sustained gunshot injuries when unknown men on motorbike opened fire on their house in Tamu Township. Authorities are still investigating about that case.
- 10) 16 June – Shan State (North): Two women's dead bodies were found in the bush near a Chinese cemetery in Lashio Township.
- 11) 16 June – Mandalay Region: One man scavenging for rock near Tagaung Taung nickel mine in Thabeikkyin Township, was shot dead by a policeman. That policeman has not been charged yet.

TRAFFICKING

Main incidents

- 1) 8 June, Kayin State: the Karen State Government requested the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) to allow investigations on one of its senior commanders, Saw A-One, accused of drug trafficking. Indeed, the latter's name surfaced in the wake of a recent 1615-kilo seizure of methamphetamine.
- 2) 11 June, Shan State (South): the authority seized 136,000 pills of methamphetamine tablets and 968 kg of heroin in a car in Taunggyi. The value of the seizure is approximately 150 million MMK (107,000 USD). The car driver was arrested.

- 3) 11 June, Shan State (North): an abandoned truck was found in Mong Nawng town, with 28 barrels of chemical drug precursors. The value of the seizure is approximately 560 million kyats (400,000 USD).
- 4) 11 June, Rakhine State: two men were arrested on the Bangladesh border, in Maungdaw Township, with 341,250 amphetamine pills, which value is estimated to be 680 million kyat (485,000 USD).
- 5) 11 June, Shan State (South): a car was intercepted on the highway in Hopong Township, with 136,000 amphetamine pills on board, with a value of 150 million MMK (107,000 USD).
- 6) 12 June, Shan State (North): the authorities in Mabein Township seized 733,000 pills of different types of amphetamines, with a value of 140 million MMK (100,000 USD).
- 7) 13 June, Shan State (North): the authorities in Hseni Township found 22 kg of heroin in a car arriving from Muse.
- 8) 13 June, Shan State (North): the authorities in Tangyan Township seized 8,000 amphetamine tablets in a house.
- 9) 14 June, Shan State (Eats): one car was intercepted in Tachileik Township, with 6.5 million methamphetamine tablets on board. The two people in the car were arrested.
- 10) 14 June, Rakhine State: the police seized 674,500 amphetamines pills in Maungdaw town, inside of a house. The house owner was arrested.
- 11) 14 June, Kachin State: two women were arrested in Mohnyin township, with 63 kg of raw opium in their car. Their cargo was reportedly bought in Southern Shan State.

On 16 June, the Tatmadaw announced that since 6 June (i.e. in just 10 days), the authorities had seized 36.3 billion MMK (26 million USD) worth of drugs in Shan State and 1.6 billion MMK (1.15 million USD) worth of drugs in Maungdaw township in Rakhine State. Such figures confirm at the same time the magnitude of drug production and trafficking in Myanmar, and the pivotal role of those two states on trafficking routes.

On another note, 3 businessmen were charged in Gwa Township (Rakhine State) for illegal sand extraction. Those people are still on the run. Illegal sand extraction is a little-known, but severe issue in Myanmar, both on the coast and along the Irrawaddy river. Unregulated sand extraction can have strong consequences on the environment and the local biodiversity.

Comments and recommendations

Do not indulge in any drug-related activities in Myanmar, even for recreational and private purpose. It is against the law and can yield every heavy sentences. Northern, Eastern Shan State, as well as Rakhine State are major drug hubs; this can result in violent disputes between traffickers or violent arrests. Extra precaution should be taken when visiting those areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

- Earthquakes

Current situation

Myanmar is located on the active Sagaing seismic fault line and is therefore vulnerable to earthquakes. Since our previous report on 12 July 2020, 7 earthquakes have been measured, but no fatality and injury has been reported:

- 1) 10 June: A slight earthquake with a magnitude of 3.4 was recorded in Sagaing Region.
- 2) 14 June: 3 earthquakes were recorded in Kachin State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region, with respective magnitudes of 4.5, 3.5 and 5.0.
- 3) 15 June: A slight earthquake with a magnitude of 3.8 was recorded in Shan State (South).
- 4) 16 June: A slight earthquake with a magnitude of 3.9 was recorded in Sagaing Region.
- 5) 16 June: A moderate earthquake with a magnitude of 5.0 was recorded in Rakhine State.

Comments and recommendations

Be aware that Myanmar is a seismic country and prepare yourself accordingly. Try to settle down your accommodation or your office in recent, well-built buildings. Adapt the common earthquakes reaction tips to your environment. Keep a survival kit at home and in your office, within reach. Spread those instructions to your family and in your work environment.

- Fire breakouts

Current situation

Based on the main Myanmar media, the most significant fire since the last report are the following:

- 1) 10 June 2020 - Rakhine State: a fire due to the overheat of an electric kettle broke out in Pyi Taw Thar Ward, Sittwe Town at 14:30 Hrs and one shop was destroyed. No injury and fatality were reported. The house owner was charged with existing law.
- 2) 11 June 2020 – Mandalay Region: a fire broke out in Ngazun Township, at 01:03 hrs and one house was burnt down. No injury and fatality was reported. The house owner was charged with existing law.
- 3) 11 June – Yangon Region: a flat in Merchant Street (Yangon) collapsed. No injury nor fatality was reported.
- 4) 12 June 2020 – Yangon Region: fire broke out in No.9 Ward, Moe Ma Kha Road, Hlaing Thar Yar Township at 05:35hrs. One house was burnt down, 2 people died in fire and one got injured. The house owner was arrested and charged with the existing law.
- 5) 13 June 2020 – Kayin State: fire broke out at No.9 Ward, Khine Shwe War Street, Hpa-An (Hpa-An Township) at 20:45hrs and one house was burnt down. The owner was charged with the existing law.
- 6) 14 June 2020 – Yangon Region: fire broke out on a stopped YBS bus in front of a police station on Nyaung Tone Street, Hlaing Thar Yar Township at 00:02hrs.
- 7) 15 June 2020 – Magway Region: fire broke out in a village in Pakokku Township, at 11:50 hrs. No injury nor fatality was reported.
- 8) 15 June 2020 – Yangon Region: fire broke out at 1 Ward, Hlaing Township, Yangon at 01:21 hrs and no injury nor fatality were reported.
- 9) 16 June 2020 – Shan State (North): fire broke out in a restaurant in Lashio at 04:00hrs and 6 shops were destroyed. No injury and fatality were reported.

Comments and recommendations

Fire is a severe risk in Myanmar. Make sure your office or your accommodation comply to satisfactory electric norms and are fitted with a fire alarm; make sure they have a proper and clear evacuation route; equip yourself with fire-extinguishing devices; be extremely careful when dealing with candles or mosquito coils. Moreover, the Myanmar legal system may hold you responsible for the fire and charge you accordingly, with possible heavy sentences.

Health Hazards

The sanitary situation in Myanmar is still dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

When EXERA released its latest Weekly Security Review (WSR), the figure for 12 June at 08:49 hrs was 246 confirmed cases since the beginning of the epidemic, i.e. 13 more than the previous week.

As of 17 June, at 08:00 Hrs, 262 confirmed cases have been reported since the beginning of the epidemic, i.e. 16 new cases in the last week. However, all of them except 1 case are imported cases: 11 migrant workers from India and 4 people returning from Bangladesh. All of them had been repatriated to Myanmar recently and were staying in quarantine facilities. This may mean that those cases are under control.

Based on MoHS statistics, the number of positive patients went through a sustained growth in the first 3 weeks of April, before reaching a plateau. Since mid-May, the increase of new figures has been chiefly driven by imported cases: from 16 May to 17 June at 08:00 hrs, 81 new cases were confirmed, out of which 77 imported cases: 45 Myanmar nationals back from India, 13 from Malaysia, 8 from UAE, 6 from Bangladesh, 2 from Italy, 2 from Thailand and 1 from China. Numerous Myanmar nationals have been repatriated since the beginning of the crisis. For the sole period from 23 May to 13 June, more than 26,000 people came back from Thailand by land. Repatriation was also operated by flight: as of 15 June, Myanmar had repatriated a total of 3,764 people by special relief flights.

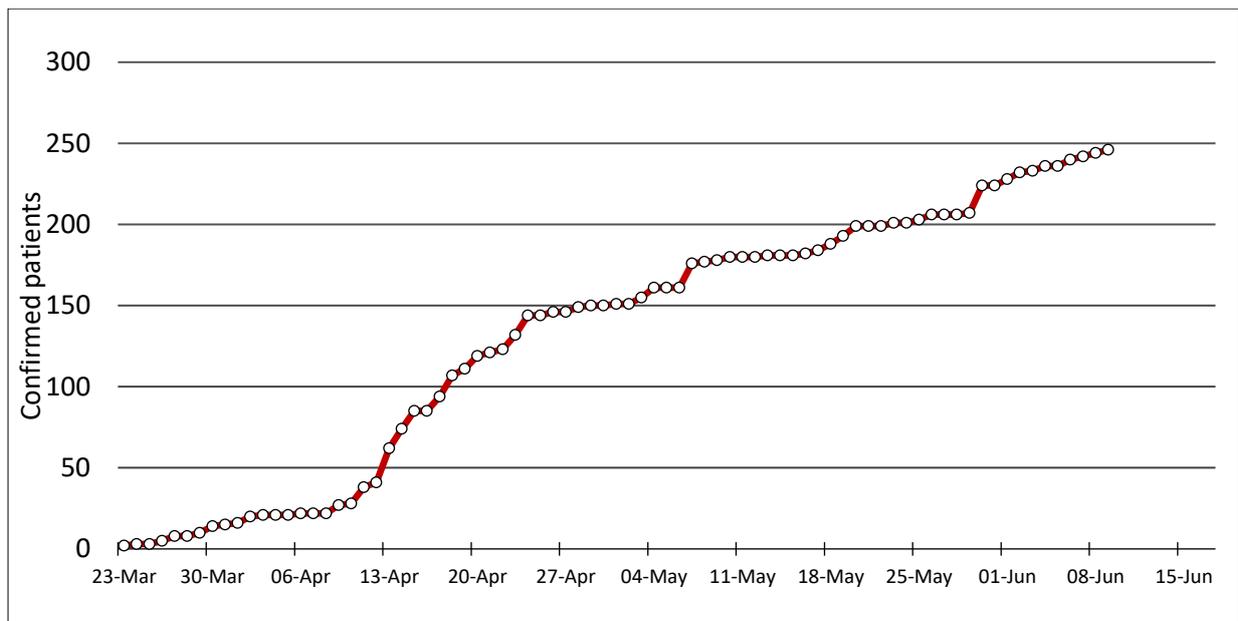


Figure 2: Total Covid-19 cases in Myanmar since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic. Source: MoHS

As of 17 June 2020, at 08:00 hrs, MoHS has tested a total of 54,493 people since the beginning of the epidemic. Since the publication of the latest WSR, 12,909 Persons Under Investigation have been tested, i.e. an average of 1844 per day, versus 1638 in the previous reporting period. At the beginning of the epidemic, Myanmar was notorious for its very low number of tests, with little more than a few dozens a day. The clear spike that has happened since then illustrates the increase of the testing capacities in Myanmar: at the beginning of the crisis, Myanmar did not have any suitable testing lab; nowadays, it has 5.

We suggest being careful of the distinction between:

- the total number of patients since the beginning of the pandemic, which combines active cases, deaths and discharged patients. It is the commonly-used and oft-quoted metric. As of 17 June, at 08:00 hrs, a total of 262 people have been contaminated in the country.
- the current number of active patients, which is the immediate risk indicator. As of 17 June, at 08:00 hrs, there were 77 active patients in the country, out of whom 60 in Yangon Region (i.e. 78 %).

In Yangon, the main clusters are:

- Insein Township, with 49 cases since the beginning of the epidemic, i.e. 1.44 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- South Okkalapa Township, with 23 cases, i.e. 1.43 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Mayangone Township, with 16 cases, i.e. 0.81 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Botahtaung Township, with 13 cases, i.e. 3.2 cases for 10,000 inhabitants
- Dagon Myothit (North), with 12 cases, i.e. 0.59 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Dagon Myothit (South) with 11 cases, i.e. 0.26 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Hlaing, with 11 cases, i.e. 0.26 case fir 10,000 inhabitants
- Tamwe, with 10 cases, i.e. 0.61 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Bahan, with 9 cases, i.e. 0.93 case for 10,000 inhabitants
- Pabedan, with 7 cases, i.e. 2.1 case for 10,000 inhabitants

As a comparison, EU countries had an average of 3.6 positive cases for 10,000 inhabitants as of 25 March, at the peak of the epidemic.

It must be noted that the surge of South Okkalapa and Hlaing Townships in the last weeks must be taken carefully. Some people usually residing in those 2 townships were tested positive among the migrant workers flown back from third countries, but they did not live in their home townships when they got infected.

Outside of Yangon Region, the most affected townships of Myanmar since the beginning of the epidemic are:

1. Sagaing Region with 9 cases
2. Bago (West) Region with 8 cases
3. Rakhine State with 8 cases
4. Tedim (Chin State), with 7 cases
5. Southern Shan State with 4 cases.

The set of preventive decisions that had been made by the authorities in March and April has been extended on 15 May, 28 May and 12 June, with gradual relaxing throughout time.

The current situation is the following:

- 1) The prohibition of gatherings of more than 5 people is now relaxed. Gatherings are now allowed in the following contexts:
 - governmental departments, organizations, companies, factories and workshops
 - in public, private and monastic schools
 - meetings, discussions and classes at governmental departments, organizations, companies, factories and workshops in accordance to the health ministry guidelines
 - food shops which have been allowed to re-open as they follow the ministry's guidelines
 - essential sectors described in the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population's May 3 -notice.

Mass gatherings such as marriages, festivals, demonstrations, rallies and conferences remain tightly restricted. On 12 June, it was learnt that the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs had opened 8 cases against the organizers of religious events across the country.

- 2) International commercial flights, as well as the issuance of any kind of visa remain suspended until 30 June at 23.59 Myanmar time. Relief and special flights are not concerned.

- 3) A curfew remains enforced from midnight to 04.00 Hrs.
- 4) Wearing facial mask in public spaces remains compulsory
- 5) The only township still under semi-lockdown order is Insein. Local inhabitants are not supposed to leave their homes, except to go to work, buy supplies and seek medical care. The restrictions in Mayangone Township were lifted on the 15 June at 4:00 Hrs.
- 6) Express inter-city bus service operates back to normal, although they have to follow MoHS guidelines. Bus companies report that passengers are still very scarce. In Yangon, YBS mainly operate back to normal, while most airlines have resumed their domestic operations. Travellers are requested to produce a residence certificate or a recommendation letter from their ward/village administrator. In Mandalay, travellers still have to go through health screening in 7 checkpoints around the town. Those checkpoints will remain in place at least until 30 June.

Comments and recommendations

Based on the current data, it seems that the epidemic is receding in Myanmar. However, a second wave of contamination remains possible if precautions are not relaxed sensibly. On 15 June, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi took to Facebook to urge Myanmar people not to let their guard down, and to remain extremely careful in the long run. According to her, a second wave may hit the country harder than the first one.

We advise you to carefully follow the official instruction and orders:

- wear facial mask in public spaces: it is a compulsory requirement on streets and on buses. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 3,100 people were fined in May for failing to wear facial mask nationwide.
- Abide by the curfew rules, from midnight to 4 am. In the sole Kayin State, 861 people were arrested from 18 April to 16 June for breaching the curfew rules. More than 180 of them were sentenced to one month in jail. Violation of Section 188, which prohibits deliberate disobedience to an order “duly promulgated” by a public servant, is punishable by one month in prison, a fine or both.

More generally, we invite you to follow the usual precautionary measures:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Practice social distancing: maintain at least 2-meter (6 feet) distance with any other people.

- Avoid crowded places and public gatherings.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Practice respiratory hygiene: wear face mask as much as possible. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the used tissue immediately. Make sure the people around you also follow those good practices.
- Stay home as much as possible. Whether you live in a semi-lockdown area or not, limit your movements to the most necessary tasks.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, do not rush to medical facilities, as it may contribute to the propagation of the epidemic. Inform the medical authorities beforehand.
- Stay informed about the latest developments and follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your local and national public health authorities or your employer.

Those precautions should be followed even more closely by people living in cluster areas where Covid-19 is especially active, who visited such regions in the last two weeks, or who have been in contact with a confirmed case.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AA: Arakan Army

ARSA: Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army

ICOE: Independent Commission of Enquiry

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

ICJ: International Court of Justics

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

EAO: Ethnic Armed Organization

KDA: Kachin Defense Army

KIA: Kachin Independence Army

KNLA: Karen National Liberation Army

KNPP: Karenni National Progressive Party

KNU: Karen National Union

MMT: Myanmar Time

MNDAA: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army

MoHS: Ministry of Health and Sports

NCA: National Ceasefire Agreement

NLD: National League for Democracy

NMSP: New Mon State Party

NSCN-K: National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang

RCSS: Restoration Council of Shan State

SNA: Shanni Nationalities Army

SSA-N: Shan State Army - North

SSA-S: Shan State Army – South

SSPP: Shan State Progressive Party

TNLA: Ta'ang National Liberation Army

UNWFP: United Nations World Food Programme

UNWHO: United Nations World Health Organization

UWSA: United Wa State Army

WSR: Weekly Security Review

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