

International

Myanmar junta chief meets ousted Suu Kyi party stalwart

Suu Kyi faces a raft of charges that could see her jailed for decades

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief sat down with a prominent senior figure of Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted party yesterday, the first significant meeting since the February coup. The military deposed Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy party from power, pushing many of her closest political allies into hiding while others have been arrested.

The junta has alleged electoral fraud in last year's poll as a justification for the putsch, but much of the country is in open revolt calling for a return to democracy. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing yesterday met with longtime politician and NLD stalwart Tin Oo, who has in recent years receded from the political landscape due to old age and poor health.

"Min Aung Hlaing told U Tin Oo that health treatment could be provided if necessary, and his army hospital will help," the junta's information team announced. Tin Oo, a 94-year-old former army general and co-founder of NLD, was pictured wearing his party pin—a trademark red flag with a golden peacock—during the meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, who was all smiles in civilian attire.

The junta chief also met with Khin Nyunt, for-

mer spy chief-turned-prime minister before he was arrested under the former junta. "Min Aung Hlaing also went to meet U Khin Nyunt... and asked about his health condition." The 82-year-old spent years in prison before he was released in 2012.

While some in the West saw him as a potential reformer, Khin Nyunt's reign as spy chief saw activists harassed, arrested and tortured en masse. Khin Nyunt's intelligence apparatus—which once infiltrated every neighbourhood across Myanmar—was purged after his ouster, while Tin Oo no longer plays an active role in NLD party affairs, said Richard Horsey, International Crisis Group's Myanmar senior advisor.

"It seems unlikely this meeting was sanctioned by the NLD," Horsey told AFP. "Given that Min Aung Hlaing seems determined to sideline Aung San Suu Kyi and won't meet with her, perhaps he's looking for other meetings that will be politically cost-free." A former NLD MP—who is now part of a group of ousted lawmakers working underground to undermine the junta—criticised the meeting yesterday.

"The intention of this meeting is dishonest. Min Aung Hlaing wants to take political advantage out



YANGON, Yangon division: This handout photograph taken and released by Myanmar's military information team yesterday shows National League for Democracy (NLD) patron Tin Oo (R) meeting Myanmar's armed forces chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at Tin Oo's home in Yangon. — AFP

of this meeting," said Htun Myint, who is currently on the run. After the February coup, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. She currently faces a raft of charges that could see her jailed for decades. Yesterday's meeting came on the eve of a

junta court verdict on Suu Kyi's charges of incitement and breaching coronavirus restrictions.

The verdict was due to be announced last week, but the court adjourned it until December 6, without providing a reason. — AFP

US, West blast Taliban over 'summary killings' of ex-security forces

WASHINGTON: The United States on Saturday led a group of Western nations and allies in condemnation of the Taliban over the "summary killings" of former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), other military personnel, police and intelligence agents "who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces" from mid-August through October.

"We are deeply concerned by reports of summary killings and enforced disappearances of former members of the Afghan security forces as documented by Human Rights Watch and others," read a statement by the United States, the European Union, Australia, Britain, Japan and others, which was released by the State Department.

"We underline that the alleged actions constitute serious human rights abuses and contradict the Taliban's announced amnesty," the group of nations said, as it called on Afghanistan's new rulers to ensure the amnesty is enforced and "upheld across the country and throughout

their ranks." Early this week Human Rights Watch released a report that it says documents the summary execution or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the ANSF, other military personnel, police and intelligence agents "who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces" from mid-August through October.

"Reported cases must be investigated promptly and in a transparent manner, those responsible must be held accountable, and these steps must be clearly publicized as an immediate deterrent to further killings and disappearances," the countries—which include Canada, New Zealand, Romania, Ukraine and several European nations—said in their statement.

The Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August as the US-backed government in Kabul and the country's military collapsed.



KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: This picture taken on November 7, 2021 shows Taliban members walking near the birthplace of Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada at the Sperwan village in Kandahar's Panjwai district. — AFP

Washington held talks with Taliban officials earlier this week when it urged the hardline Islamist group to provide access to education for

women and girls across the country. It also "expressed deep concern regarding allegations of human rights abuses," a US spokesman said. — AFP

13 civilians killed by security forces in India's northeast

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces killed 13 civilians in the northeastern state of Nagaland after firing on a truck and later shooting at a crowd that gathered to protest the attack, police said yesterday. Troops shot dead six labourers returning to their homes on Saturday afternoon in Mon district, near the Myanmar border, after setting up an ambush for insurgents they believed were operating in the area.

Family members and villagers later went looking for the missing men and confronted the troops after finding the bodies. "This is where a confrontation happened between the two sides, and the security personnel fired, killing seven more people," Nagaland police officer Sandeep M. Tamgadge told AFP.

Tamgadge said the situation in the district was "very tense right now", with nine other civilians wounded in the second incident now being treated in local hospitals. The Indian army said in a statement one of its soldiers had died during the confrontation, with an unspecified number of troops wounded. It added soldiers were acting on "credible intelligence" that insurgents were operating in the area and had laid an ambush to intercept them. "The cause of the unfortunate loss of lives is being investigated at the highest level and appropriate



KOHIMA, India: A man walks behind a placard posted at the venue of the Hornbill festival which was shut after Indian security forces killed 13 civilians in the northeastern state of Nagaland firing on a truck and later shooting at a crowd that gathered to protest the attack, at Kisama village in Kohima yesterday. — AFP

action will be taken as per the course of law," the statement said.

'Appeal for peace'

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio appealed for calm and announced an investigation into the event. "The unfortunate incident leading to killing of civilians at Oting, Mon is highly condemnable," he said on Twitter. "Appeal for peace from all sections." Mon district is about 220 miles (350 kilometres) from Nagaland's capital Kohima, and is more than a day's drive only along poorly maintained roads.

year. AFP asked Burhan in an interview on Saturday whether the military components and the paramilitary members of the transitional Council will be able to participate in elections planned for 2023.

Burhan responded by saying the August 2019 deal had "included a clear clause that all participants of the transitional period will not be allowed to take part of the period that directly follows it." But a landmark 2020 peace deal with rebel groups "granted some participants to the transitional period the right to become part of the government" that followed the transition, he said.

The statement issued yesterday said Burhan meant that only ex-rebel groups which signed a peace deal in 2020 could be candidates in the planned elections. Burhan-Sudan's de facto leader since the ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 — removed the civilian government and declared a state of emergency on October

25, upending the planned three-year transition to full civilian rule.

Burhan's interview with AFP was one of a series he gave to international media a day after UN chief Antonio Guterres, in a report submitted to the Security Council, called Sudan hostile to journalists. On November 21, Burhan signed a deal to reinstate Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok who was ousted in the coup and kept for weeks under house arrest.

The Burhan-Hamdok agreement was welcomed by the United Nations, the African Union, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It was also cautiously greeted by Britain and the United States. But critics have lambasted it as "whitewashing" and accused Hamdok of "betrayal". Pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority.

The top general has long insisted the military's move on October 25 "was not a coup" but a step "to rectify the transition". — AFP

News in brief

Two explosions hit UN camps in Mali

GAO: Two explosions hit UN camps in the northern Mali city of Gao yesterday, causing damage but no casualties, AFP journalists at the scene said. The blasts which occurred at 0545 GMT shook the barracks of the United Nations mission in Mali, called MINUSMA, forcing the occupants to take refuge in shelters for two hours. The French army said there was only material damage, but did not provide details about any possible origin of the blasts. The latest violence in the West African country comes after 31 people were killed in an attack on Friday by suspected jihadists near the central town of Bandiagara. Mali has been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency that first erupted in the north in 2012 and has since claimed thousands of military and civilian lives. Despite the presence of thousands of French and UN troops, the conflict has engulfed central Mali and spread to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. France, the former colonial power in Mali, has said it will reduce its number of troops in the Sahel.

Myanmar soldiers ram car into protest

YANGON: Myanmar soldiers wounded at least three people after ramming a car into a peaceful anti-coup rally in Yangon, eyewitnesses said yesterday. The country has been in turmoil since February when the military seized power, triggering nationwide demonstrations which the junta sought to quell with violent crackdowns and mass arrests. More than 10 months of military rule has seen some 1,300 killed rallying against the army but small, highly mobile protests still crop up. The rally in Yangon was violently dispersed Sunday morning when a large car ploughed into it, according to a journalist there. "They increased the speed when they got closer to the protesters—it was like they drove into them," he said, declining to provide his name for security reasons. He said a handful of people, some carrying banners in support of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, were hit and splayed on the ground as others fled the scene.

Trial to begin over alleged coup plot

ANTANANARIVO: A trial will begin today in Madagascar for 21 people accused of planning a coup d'etat, including two French men and their wives. Arrested on July 20, Paul Rafanoharana, Philippe Francois and their wives are accused of endangering the security of the state, criminal conspiracy and a plot to assassinate President Andry Rajoelina. The chief prosecutor accused them of "putting together a plan to eliminate or neutralise various Malagasy public figures including the head of state". They deny all involvement. Together with 17 other accused, the four are set to appear at the Anosy courthouse in Madagascar's capital Antananarivo. It was not immediately clear whether journalists will be allowed to attend the public hearing, which defence lawyers said should last three or four days. Defendant Rafanoharana, who is French-Malagasy, is a former adviser to the president.

Sudan top general denies military could run in elections

KHARTOUM: Sudan's top general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan yesterday denied that military and paramilitary members of the transitional administration could run for the country's July 2023 elections. "The president of the Sovereign Council denied what the Agence France-Presse reported about the participation of the military in the upcoming elections," his office said in a statement.

Sudan has been run by a joint military-civilian ruling council since August 2019, but civilian members were changed following a coup in October this