

DESCENT INTO CHAOS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The decision by [ASEAN to exclude Myanmar's military junta](#) from its annual summit held on October 26-28 is a major setback for the Generals' attempts to gain regional legitimacy for their brutal regime. Ever since it seized power by [toppling the democratic government of Aung San Suu Kyi](#) in February, the junta has unleashed a reign of terror claiming an estimated 1,000 lives. Ms. Suu Kyi, who had been the State Councillor for five years from 2015 heading the quasi-democratic government, has been in detention since the coup and is facing absurd charges such as "illegally owning walkie-talkies". Thousands of others were arrested by the military, notorious for its reprisal of democratic protests in the past. But this time, the crisis seems much worse. Months after the seizure of power, the junta, led by Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, is still struggling to restore order. If in the past the National League for Democracy (NLD), Ms. Suu Kyi's party, had upheld non-violence even in the face of repression, this time, NLD leaders have called for a "revolution". The remnants of the old regime have formed a National Unity Government, which claims to be the true representative of Myanmar. In cities, protests slid into armed fighting between pro-democracy protesters and security personnel, while in the jungles, anti-junta groups joined hands with rebels for military training. The situation was so grave that the UN Special Envoy warned this month that Myanmar had descended into a civil war.

One of the regional groupings with some leverage over the junta is ASEAN. In April, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing was invited to Jakarta for emergency talks with ASEAN members. The bloc asked him to immediately end violence, start the reconciliation process and allow a regional special envoy to meet with all stakeholders, including Ms. Suu Kyi. None of these requests was met. Most recent reports suggest that the junta has been systematically torturing political prisoners. A special envoy was appointed as part of the ASEAN plan, but he was not allowed to meet Ms. Suu Kyi. Regime violence, political crises and strikes and counter-attacks by protesters have all pushed Myanmar to the brink of collapse. According to the UN, some three million people are in need of life-saving assistance because of "conflict, food insecurity, natural disasters and COVID-19". Still, the Generals do not show any signs of compromise and are not even ready to talk with the NLD. Violence might allow them to hold on to power for now, but that is not sustainable. The ASEAN snub is a reminder that continuing violence could cause regional isolation of the regime, which could worsen the crisis. The international community should continue to put pressure on the junta and urgently start a reconciliation process.

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