

The Chin in a Time of Revolution in Burma

Min Thang¹

Abstract

On 1 February 2021, a military coup took place and the elected civilian administration was overthrown. Following the coup, massive anti-coup protests took place across the country. In response to the nonviolent protestors, the military has carried out harsh crackdowns, arrests, and tortured, and killed civilians, who participated in peaceful demonstrations. As a result, civilians who are mainly young people, have progressively changed from peaceful demonstrations to becoming partially armed with a concentration on protecting civilians and attacking military personnel and property. Chin State has led some of the toughest opposition and has refused to cooperate with the junta. Young residents have formed the Chinland Defense Force (CDF), primarily made up of young men and women with homemade weapons like handmade guns, knives, and arrows (known as sa-hnet in Chin and tu mae in Burmese) alliance with

¹ Min Thang is former Research Fellow at Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. His areas of interest are in the field of religion, politics, and forced displacement. He has participated and presented papers in various seminars, and conferences at the regional and international in Europe, Southeast Asia and Burma. He has published many research articles in both national and international journals. He has contributed book chapters in many edited volumes.

Chin National Front (CNF/A) one of the ethnic armed groups to resistance brutal attack of the State Administration Council (SAC) military on civilians in Chin State and beyond. One may argue that Chin state was the true birthplace of this spring revolution. The articles used qualitative research methods and data will be collected from secondary sources to analysis this study. The study will look at Chin resistance and resilience to continuous revolutionary politics and processes at the state level with a focus on the consequences of the military coup, the Covid-19 pandemic, and other social challenges in Chin sate and beyond since 2021. The major goal of this study is to understand the risks, challenges, and advantages of the Chin people's perseverance and resistance in Burma.

Keywords: Coup, Armed Resistance, Conflict, Chin, Burma

Introduction

Right after the 2021 coup, the local militias attacked on the SAC military, therefore, Tatmadaw appears to be weaponizing mass starvation in order to hit back resistance groups across the country. The military have carried out mass killings, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, and other abuses against civilians, peaceful protesters, journalists, lawyers, health workers, and political opposition members amounting to crimes against humanity. The military have subjected many detainees to torture and other ill treatment, including routine beatings, burning with lit cigarettes, prolonged

stress positions, and gender-based violence. They continue to launch targeted and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and internally displaced people (IDPs) camps. The junta has deliberately blocked humanitarian aid from reaching million risks, in violation of international humanitarian law. Troops have attacked aid workers, destroyed supplies, and blocked access roads and aid convoys, as a form of collective punishment against civilians in areas where junta rule is contested (HRW, 2022).

There has been resistance for more than 2 years now. Armed resistance spread across the country once the revolution was started with handmade guns by the Chin people in April 2021. In Burma, there are more than 400 local defense forces. The military regime is currently being battled by opposition groups in the following states: northern Kachin, western Chin, eastern Kayah, southeast Karen, central Anyar, which includes the Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe, and southern Tanintharyi regions. At least 27 armed resistance groups are based in Chin state, most of which are made up of young people from various backgrounds, which is opposition against the junta. In the Chin State townships of Mindat, Kanpetlet, Hakha, Thantlang, Paletwa, and Matupi, fighting is happening between the SAC military and Chin resistance groups. The majority of Chin state is currently controlled by revolutionary groups. Except for the towns, most of areas are under control of the CDF (Yuzana,

2023). Armed opposition to the Tatmadaw is currently present all over the country. However, not all armed opposition organizations are part of the People Defense Force (PDF) of the covert National Unity Government (NUG). The essay gives a general description of the Chin resistance and how it has continued resisting and resilience to oppose the coup for more than 2 years. The study looks at the violent and disruptive incidents that have disrupted the lives of the people in Chin State and beyond regions.

Burma before the 2021 Coup

Burma is one of the world's longest-running civil wars. Right aftermath of independence from the British rule in 1948 until 1958, parliamentary democracy was used for governing. On 2 March 1962, general Ne Win overthrew a democratically elected administration. The country was cut off from the rest of the world under Ne Win dictatorship. Burma became one of the world's poorest nations as a result, and on 8 August 1988, student leaders called for a massive protest that became known as the 8888 Uprising (Nay, 2020). The majority of people from Burma migrated to neighbouring countries because of violence, poverty, unemployment, discrimination and statelessness in some places. Conflict, insecurity, political violence, and natural catastrophes are all significant forces behind migration, helping to create complicated flows of people driven by a combination of economic, familial, educational, and survival goals. A

decade-long battle between Tatmadaw (the official name of the Burma military) and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in Burma has resulted in increased internal displacement as well as outflows of refugees and asylum seekers to neighboring nations. Every year, hundreds of thousands of migrants from Burma are trafficked into Southeast Asia for a variety of reasons, with the majority going to India, Thailand, and Malaysia (David, 2016).

The majority of those leaving the country through the borders are doing so because of the junta's economic mismanagement, political persecution, and violations of human rights. Every time there is an armed clash, the local people hide in jungle and end up as IDPs and some crossing international border for safety. And with the money they earn, they may support their loved ones back home. The majority of the Chin migrate in India relocated the political unrest in 1962 and 1988, a time when persecution on account of ethnic and religion was widespread in Burma especially in border region. The diaspora Chin community, including churches and people have made contributions and supported their families and relatives back home in education, church construction, and other developments in Burma from a variety of perspectives. The people of Burma are also enjoyed life in the country from brutal dictatorship to democratic since 2010 to 2021. There was some development and reforms in various ways under democratic transition.

Reflection from the Pandemic, Election, and Coup

The COVID-19 pandemic was present prior to the national elections on 8 November 2020, endangering the lives of citizens there. Both the pandemic and the 2020 elections were important events for the people of Burma. Civil warfare broke out in Rakhine, Chin States, and the northeast of Burma during the pandemic and until the 2020 election. Furthermore, the NLD government stopped humanitarian aid deliveries to those conflict areas and held the general election, and disallowed votes in constituencies in those conflict areas. The pandemic was declared a global emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, however Burma did not have its first confirmed case until 23 March 2020 in Chin State (World Bank, 2022). To stop the COVID-19 pandemic, it implemented lockdown in one village in Chin State. A humanitarian crisis was exacerbated by the continuous armed conflict in Chin and Rakhine States during the COVID-19 outbreak. People are forced to relocate because of the violence, which also results in inadequate living conditions and affects access to healthcare. The right of the people to obtain vital information on the pandemic and other matters was threatened by the NLD government's blocking of Internet access in nine townships in the states of Rakhine and Chin. There was no policy to offer humanitarian relief or healthcare for refugees, they are particularly at risk (Su Yin Htun).

The 2020 Election

The importance of holding and announcing the 2020 general election should not be underestimate by the NLD government, nor should the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. After all, one of the hardest tests for a democratic transition is conducting elections in the midst of a pandemic. The smaller and ethnically-based parties perceive themselves as being at a disadvantage in comparison to the bigger parties like the NLD and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The Union Election Commission (UEC) planned election to be place on 8 November 2020. Smaller and ethnically based political parties' elections are anticipated to be more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic related ban on gatherings of more than 30 persons (Thomas and Annabelle, 2020). International observers and the majority of voters are certain that the NLD will win a second term. Aung San Suu Kyi's appearance before the International Court of Justice in The Hague in December 2019 to defend the country, which is accused of the genocide of the Rohingya people, eventually helped to build this strong support. During the hearing, thousands of people had gathered across the country and waved banners that read, "We stand with Aung San Suu Kyi." The NLD unveiled its schedule of candidates for the 2020 elections on 23 July 2020 (Thomas and Annaabelle, 2020). The Rohingya were once again denied the opportunity to vote, despite the fact that the majority of potential

voters fled to Bangladesh in late 2017 to avoid Tatmadaw brutal attacks and killing. A number of candidates from various ethnic nationalities were rejected, and some ethnic political parties accused the UEC of making biased election rulings (Michael, 2021).

Prior to the 2020 election, the military had expressed initial worries about the UEC and alleged promised to hold the NLD accountable. Due to security concerns related to the civil war, voting was cancelled in 56 townships large portions of the Shan, Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, and Mon states as well as the Bago region (Michael and Anne, 2021). The NLD held elections and once again won by a landslide, securing them the next five years of leadership. The military-backed USDP rejected the outcome (Chiraag, 2022). The USDP held a press conference on 11 November 2020, in which they stated that they would not accept the outcome and asked that the Tatmadaw take appropriate measures. The military took up the concerns in December 2020 and asserted that it had discovered 10.5 million errors on voter registers, a claim for which it provided no supporting documentation (Myanmar Country Report 2022). The military asked that the NLD dissolve Burma's electoral board, the UEC, and enlist its cooperation in the recount of all the ballots cast in November. Prior to the swearing-in of parliamentarians elected in the 2020 election two days later, on January 28, 2021, the NLD rejected these requests at a meeting.

On 1 February 2021 the military seized power and established State Administration Council (SAC) (Jasnea and Roshni, 2021).

The Military Coup 2021

The military seized control through a coup d'état on 1 February 2021, and proclaimed a one-year state of emergency, citing electoral fraud and the necessity to save the nation's democracy. Vice-President Myint Swe, a member of the USDP, the military-backed opposition party, authorized the declaration of an emergency that gave Min Aung Hlaing control of the country (Hnin, 2021). Massive anti-coup protests took place across the country since the 2021 coup. The military has carried out brutal crackdowns, arrests, tortured and killed civilians. As a result, civilians took armed and resistance the military and its affiliated groups across the country. The country become collapsed and people are living fear, pain and lost love one life and hope are in vain because of the coup. Thousands are civilians and tens of thousands of civilians become internally displaced and refugees in neighboring countries.

Chin State after the 2021 Coup

For many years, the military regime has systematically mistreated the Chin people in Burma. After the 2021 coup, civilians had adapted with peaceful demonstration across the state, however, after the military brutal attack, arrest and killed civilians. Many young people including students, civil servants, healthcare workers, and school teachers have picked up arms to

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defend themselves and civilians from the regime's attacks after it mercilessly killed, tortured, jailed, and so on. Many people worry that the country is led for a complete civil war and governmental collapse. The coup has resulted in grave human rights violations, including murder, enforced disappearances, persecution, torture, and imprisonment (Damian, 2021). In the wake of the 2021 coup, the Chin state has led some of the toughest opposition and has refused to cooperate with the junta. Numerous thousands of people demonstrated in the streets. The military and polices has indiscriminate attacks on whole towns across the state. Therefore, young people have formed defense groups called the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) alliance with the Chin National Front (CNF/A) on 4 April 2021, and the exile government called National Unity Government (NUG) afterwards organized the People's Defense Force (PDF) in heartland of Burma in 5 May, 2021. On April 24, CDF members in Mindat Township engaged in their first altercation with law enforcement after the officers refused to release seven prisoners. Because they had set up anti-regime strikers throughout the city, three men and four women were detained. When a police officer fired into the crowd during a protest demanding the release of the captives, the defense force retaliated, killing three security personnel. In Myanmar's history, it was probably the first time that civilians had used a homemade gun to defend themselves against a military assault. The army tried to send reinforcements

via road to Mindat to help the overworked local battalion as the situation quickly deteriorated. On April 26 and 27, CDF fighters ambushed military convoys on the routes going into town. It is said that more than 30 soldiers were killed, army trucks were destroyed, and weapons were looted (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Post-Coup Armed Resistance in Chin State

The Chins live in a region that is bordered by Bangladesh in the southwest, Manipur in the north, and Mizoram in the west of India. They belonged to the Mongolian race and went by a variety of names, including Chin, Mizo, and Kuki. About half of the Chin people in Burma reside in the Chin Hills, the other half in the plains and the Kale Valley of Sagaing and Magwe regions, and a tiny number in Rakhine State. In India, Assam and Mizoram are home to two-thirds of the country's Chin population, while Manipur is home to one-quarter of them (David and Barbara, 2005), and less in Chittagong Hill Tract of Bangladesh. One of the seven states in Burma is the Chin state. It has a 13,902 square mile land area (Khin, 2012). The early day, the Chin chiefs who are supported by the older members of society rule the Chin people. The Chin land is independent and freedom before colonial rule, and postcolonial times. They made every struggle to fight back as the British attempted to annex their territory and establish dominion over them. They were unable to vanquish their enemies because of they have superior

weapons. The Chin chiefs made every struggle to safeguard their territories and people (Lalthanglian, 2014). In this research the author focused mainly on the Chin people in Burma. Under the British colonial rule of Burma, the Chin Hills were administrated as a part of the Province of Burma and constituted a scheduled district. When Burma gained independence in 1948, they were grouped into a political unit and their habitation was given the name Chin Special Division (Khai, 1995).

Under colonial rule and postcolonial period Burma was one of the top countries in Southeast Asia from 1948 to 1958. When U Nu and Ne Win coup proclaimed Buddhism as official religion in 1960, the country's majority Christians, including the Chin and Kachin, began armed revolution against the military and Bamar central government (Physician for Human Rights, 2011). Suppression of federalist Chin leaders in Chin state by the 1960s sparked an expanding revolution by the Chin National Organization (CNO). The Chin National Front (CNF) was established by ethnic Chin leaders in Mizoram, India, in March 1988. Its mission was to "recover the Chin people's right to self-determination and to restore democracy and federalism in the Union of Burma." Nevertheless, in response to the CNF, the SLORC militarized the Chin state even further, driving tens of thousands of ethnic Chins to cross the border into Mizoram, India (Physiican for Human Rights, 2011). Students from the Uprising and other young Chins joined uprising in 1988 (Peter,

2013). Chin resistance is therefore nothing new. They again engaged in the country's largest percentage of Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) during the most recent coup in Burma. They were the first ethnic group to use homemade weapons like handmade gun, knife, and arrow to resist the coup. The CNF has denounced military action, demanded the release of the imprisoned elected government, restored democracy, and rejected the military's role in the peace process. Most pro-democracy organizations reject the military takeover. One of Burma's ethnic armed groups, the CNF, has joined forces with the National Unity Government (NUG), the country's shadow government established to overthrow the military regime (The Irrawaddy, 2021). In Chin State, the CNF has played a significant role in aiding, educating, and arming members from various militias connected to the recently created CDF at its base camps.

Chin state is part of the western frontier of Burma towards India and Bangladesh and is often described as the least developed region. The government of Burma had little economic interest in the remote region. Armed conflict remained relatively low in the region before the 2021 coup. Following 1988, Chin state experienced considerable militarization and expansion of army battalions and with-it regular human right abuses (Rainer, 2018). The Chins are largely Christians and have long faced persecution from the military and majority Bamar central

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government of Burma. Lacking profitable natural resources such as oil, teak, gold and precious stones, it is one of poorest states in Burma. In response to the 2021 coup, new armed resistance formed in Chin state, comprising local students, civil society members, and professionals: the CDF. It's have allied themselves with the long-established CNF, one of the many armed organizations in Burma formed in response to decades of ethnic discrimination by the central government. Together with other armed organizations across the country, the groups in Chin state aim to remove the military dictatorship and replace it with a federal democracy. They have relied on donor support from the Chin diaspora and civilians. Although Chin's armed organizations are doing their best to drive out the Tatmadaw, most major towns remain under its control. Residents have become subject to arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, and harassment (Alex, 2022).

Since 2021, Chin state has been the forefront of the armed resistance (CDF/CNA) to the junta and therefore, they have faced the brunt of the Burma army's madness. There were deadly clashes in the Chin state between the armed resistance groups and the junta. The military has burnt down entire villages and towns in Chin state and more troops have been arriving steadily, giving rise to fears of a new offensives. There are fleeing unrest to India border because there is no humanitarian aids, healthcare, education and security reason. The situation in

Burma today is critical, with human rights organizations alleging that the military junta is responsible for actions that constitute crime against humanity prohibited under international law (The Hindustan Times, 2022). Persecuted in their own country and fearing for their lives and refugees who continue to cross over into Mizoram state of India.

The Impact and the Cost of Armed Conflict

Post-coup, the regime has brutally repressed the people as it tries to quash dissent and consolidate its grip on the country. A broad-based resistance movement is using non-violent and violent means to prevent the junta from succeeding. In such situation, vulnerable populations face a dire future. In addition to the insecurity, Burma's economy is in freefall, the national currency is crashing, health and education system have collapsed, poverty rates are estimated to have doubled and half of all household cannot afford enough food. Despite the severe situation and the considerable risks associated with having a failed state at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, international attention is declining (International Crisis Group, 2021). "Four cuts" policy was used by the military to the civilians and resistance to cutoff like funding, food, intelligence and recruits" (GK Today, 2022). The troops committing widespread acts of arson, looting, rape and murder during its offensives in the country, where it has encountered strong resistance from armed resistance groups and members of anti-junta People's Defense

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Force paramilitary groups. International efforts to deescalate the violence have yielded few results and announced ceasefires have failed to reduce armed conflict, while authorities regularly conduct raids on dissenters, and humanitarian operations are denied access to the people in most need (RFA Burmese, 2022). There are currently 15.2 million people who experience acute and moderate food insecurity (OCHA, 2022). Since 2021, Burma is one of the largest numbers of migrant in Southeast Asia. More than 50,000 the Chin have been forced to seek asylum in Mizoram state and New Delhi of India.

Fighting has been most intense in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Shan states and the Sagiang and Magwe regions. Burma has a central area inhabited by the Bamar majority ethnic group, surrounded by minority ethnic groups on its periphery and borders, almost all of whom have been waging armed resistance against military dictatorship for decades (Rashed, 2022). Since 2021, resistance groups more than 250 groups have emerged and carrying out regular attack on regime targets. The resistance groups, many of which have the words “defence force” in their names, range from underground urban cells consisting of a few people to large, well-organized militias with hundreds of fighters equipped with modern light arms. Some alliance with ethnic armed groups and trained by EAOs (International Crisis Groups, 2021). Fighting between regime forces and People’s Defense Forces (PDF) continues across the

country, especially in Chin, Kayah, Karen and Kachin states and Sagaing, Magwe, Mandalay and Yangon regions. The resistance forces use guerrilla tactics and have inflicted heavy casualties on junta troops. In retaliation, regime forces have increasingly carried out indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including air and artillery strikes, arbitrary killings and massacres, burning people alive, using civilians as human shields, and looting and burning houses. The properties were destroyed either in air and artillery strikes or were torched by regime soldiers and pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia (The Irrawaddy, 2022). Since 2021, more than 5,683 civilians have died in Burma, according to RFA (RFA, 2022).

The military set up many checkpoints where all motorcycles, cars, and personal items like laptops, mobile phones, and storage devices for Facebook, Instagram, and other social media were checked. In addition to other things, they have packed medicine, a knife, protective clothing, sleeping bags, blankets, solar lights, and other things. No one can enter or exit towns in Chin state from Magwe and Sagaing regions because the Junta has blocked all major highways. The SAC military shut down all traffic between Pakokku and Chin state, and there were food and medicine shortages in the Chin state. There were many restaurants between Pakokku-Chin state before the coup, but now there was no restaurant where one could eat. In the Chin state, there are a lot of children, old people, women and

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individuals sick who urgently need of health care, food, security, nourishment, and other things.

Burma urgently needs humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies, from domestic and international communities due to the country's current political instability and food insecurity. The junta is preventing millions of displaced individuals and other persons in danger from receiving urgently needed humanitarian supplies. New travel restrictions for aid workers have been put in place by the SAC security forces, who have also cut off communications, obstructed assistance convoys and access roads, damaged non-military supplies, and attacked relief workers. New restrictions put in place by the military have led to a national humanitarian crisis (HRW, 2021). Chin state desperately needs humanitarian assistance. When it comes to reaching displaced people and conflict zones, local networks and humanitarian organizations face security obstacles that are made worse by the fact that some of the affected areas have never experienced conflict or needs of this magnitude, which means that the agencies do not yet have any operations there. The military has obstructed transit to these places, taken away relief goods, and arrested and, in at least two cases, killed those bringing them. These domestic networks have been attempting to provide assistance to residents displaced from Mindat town of Chin state. The regime should be pressured by humanitarian organizations through all possible channels to

grant immediate access to displaced individuals. International actors should exert all of their efforts to prevent the military from continuing its obvious violations of international law and its obstruction of aid flows (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Suffering and Destruction of Civilians Properties

The military has carried out aerial bombing of civilians in Karen, Kachin, Chin, Magwe, Sagain region close to border areas. Targets have included schools, hospitals, and mines as well as civilians' homes and agriculture, with the aim of destroying villagers' livelihoods. Tens of thousands of civilians' mostly ethnic minority areas including Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah, Mon and others have been displaced and remain in hiding. The Myanmar soldiers had been firing on boats carrying aid to the displaced people. The intensification of airstrikes caused thousands of people to flee in forest and border areas (Terese and Hayso, 2021). The military have been targeting areas that are known to be home to thousands of armed civilians who call themselves the PDF/CDF. Soldiers have attacked residential neighborhoods with rocket launchers and arson, cut off Internet access, restricted food supplies, and shot at fleeing civilians. And now tens of thousands of civilians become homeless and internally displaced persons within Burma and neighbouring countries like India and Thailand from 1 February 2021 to November 2022, there have been at least 592 armed clashes in all nine townships of Chin state. These battles were

fought by the military council and the local defense force. At the same time, at least 1,489 homes and buildings were burned down during the armed conflict. The most cases of arson were in Thantlang township and at least 1,325 houses were burned down by the military. As a result of these conflicts, there were at least 99,550 refugees fleeing the civil war in Chin state (Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar, 2022). The number of refugees varies depending on the definition, but according to UNHCR, there were an estimated 1,473,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Burma, including 1,143,000 people who have been newly displaced since the coup 2021. In India an approximately 49,600 individuals fled from Myanmar mostly the Chin (UNHCR, 2022).

Conclusion

Burma has now entered a violent new chapter. The military faces widespread, fierce opposition from ethnic armed organizations it was fighting even before the coup and ordinary citizens who organized militias. Wowing to resist the military junta, former lawmakers and activities formed a shadow government and mobilized fighting forces across the country. The military has responded with a brutal crackdown on opposition forces and protesters. But it still has not been able to consolidate control over large areas of the country. It is going to be two years, but still resistance and resilience of civilians are strong enough and the military cannot take control the country.

Violence is not limited to the areas that have large ethnic minority populations but is also occurring in major central cities such as mainland Burma. Although the widespread violence has led thousands of civilians to flee into neighboring India and Thailand. More than 1.4 million people fled abroad as refugees. Hundreds of thousands more remain displaced internally (Lindsay, 2022). The Chin resistance will not give up fighting the junta, regardless of the many violations they may do on civilians and destroyed their homes and belongings in the state. They will resist for their last breath. The Chin needs to united as to resisted together the coup with other resistance groups. The military have known how divide rule its people but most of the time civilians do not know how united ourself as one and resist the coup from national politics.

As a result, Chin state has become an active frontline of the armed resistance to the junta that has experienced a series of brutal attack. The CDF are supported by Chin diaspora community as much they can. The relatives from abroad have support basic and modern weapons to resist the coup in Chin state. Thantlang township in Chin state was completely burnt down by the regime in several times and all town is become an ash. The most a massacre that took place on 6-7 January 2022 in Matupi township of Chin state, in which 10 civilians were killed, including a 13-year-old boy. Burma has been collapsed with social, political, financial, education, and healthcare because of

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nationwide protests and strike by hundreds of thousands of civilians, civil servants, and healthcare workers. It is still continued human rights violation by the junta in across the country. Even though neighbouring countries include the ASEAN, India, and China, they should pay closer attention to the country's dilemma. Despite being one of the most democratic nations in the world, India has chosen to remain silent on the suffering of people in Burma. Both China and India cooperated with the regime for their interest on investment in Burma. They have failed to promotion and support Burma on its way to becoming a federal democratic nation in the midst of strife and civil war. The neighboring nations of Burma do not support the country's road to democracy and development; rather, they merely have Burma's own interests in mind.

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