The looming threat of violence against religious minorities in Burma under the fascist military

In the aftermath of the coup, the fascist military junta continued to mistreat Myanmar's Muslim population, including the Rohingya, using the same policy as in the past. It was found that the religious buildings of Christian and Muslim other religious minorities had become targets of the junta, which the people of Myanmar called as "Fascist Army".

The military is spreading misinformation against the National Unity Government (NUG) which was formed as a parallel government after the coup. The military's propaganda machine said the NUG and ethnic armed groups are working to establish a federal army that will support the establishment of a Muslim state in Myanmar.

The army used the state-run media to spread rumours against NUG saying the group is working to destroy the country. Also, members of the military junta have expressed staunchly negative views against Muslims. After the members of the junta have expressed strong views against Muslims, their remarks were followed by hate speech and anti-Muslim propaganda in magazines and social media published by former military officers.

Many analysts predict that more than a quarter of Myanmar's population could lose their citizenship status and become stateless, the comment was published in an article in the 4 March 2021 edition of the state-owned Kyaymon newspaper.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, said during a meeting of the junta held on 22 March, that it is not known how many people who are not a member of ethnic minority are living in Myanmar. "We have found many people who do not hold any kind of citizenships were allowed to vote in the last elections and it is unknown at this time how many unregistered non-ethnic people are in the country". Many research papers claim that Muslim citizenship has been gradually restricted since the military coup in 1962.

For decades, the military and pro-military groups as a whole have been propagating that Muslims throughout Myanmar, including the Rohingya, are not among the ethnic minorities of Myanmar and that they are illegal immigrants. The junta head Min Aung Hlaing said in an interview with Chinese media outlet Phoenix on 4 June, that "there is no such ethnic group as Rohingya. It's an imaginary name. They are from the Chittagong region. These people were never been called Rohingya for many generations. They are not included in the 135 ethnic groups of Myanmar. We do not recognize them," he said.

U Wunna Maung Lwin, the minister of foreign affairs of the military junta, spoke on the Rohingya issue at a seminar with the title the Past, Present and 2020 held on 11 January 2020 that "the

plan of the Organisation of Islamic State (OIC) is to bring a group of people into this region and forced us to recognise them and also they will put pressure on us to grant them an autonomous state. U Wunna Maung Lwin was appointed as the chair of the Steering Committee to represent Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), when it was reorganised on 14 May. U Ko Ko Hlaing, a former military officer known to be holding extremist nationalist ideology and a member of the Presidential Advisory Council was appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Committee. U Ko Ko Hlaing served as a key adviser to former president U Thein Sein and he was accused of being a key proponent of sectarian violence against Muslims

U Ko Ko Hlaing was one of the first people to write anti-Rohingya articles in 2008 under the previous military government. He was also involved in public awareness campaigns focused on land management in 2009. It was a period before the democratic transition and at that time senior military officers had the distribution of vacant lands across the country.

An article published on 19 April edition of the state-owned newspaper Myanma Alin said the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw the CRPH, which established the NUG government, is organising Rakhine, Chin and Chin ethnic armed organisations for the establishment of a federal army and its aim is for the establishment of a separate Muslim state inside Myanmar. Also, the publications owned by former military personnel are writing propaganda articles referring to the youth who joined the federal army as members of the Taliban and “Generation Z Al-Qaeda”.

These journals continue to spread hate speech against the Rohingya and Muslims, and now these publications are spreading rumours that weapons are being stockpiled in mosques to carry out acts of violence.

The misinformation has been circulating not only in journals but also on social media, by extremist nationalist activists and pro-military groups. It spread rumours saying that ‘schools and markets are the targets of the bombing campaign, however, "NLD offices, mosques and Christian churches have become fire-bomb-free zones,". Following the publication of these reports, mosques were set on fire and Churches were targeted by the junta forces and NLD offices faced bomb attacks.

The BHRN found that mosques were being raided by the forces of the military junta. After the arson attack on mosques, the junta supporter spread rumours that the fire outbreak was due to the explosion of homemade bombs and they posted comments on Facebook calling the security forces to raid on Mosque, as they said underground terrorist groups are operating in the country.

A letter from the Lanmadaw Township Police Chief to the police described a young Muslim man as the leader of the Gen Z youths in the People’s Defence Force (PDF). The Lanmadaw Police Force in an arrest warrant issued on 12 June 2021 has referred to a Myanmar Muslim youth as a terrorist leader

In addition, Muslims are being portrayed among the people of Myanmar as those who are trying to destroy the country with the help of the OIC and the West. There have been rumours spread on social media that the NLD and Bengali terrorists were planning an attack on Yangon.

On 3 June 2021, a raid was carried out on the Mohnyin Jame Mosque and the Station Road Mosque in Mohnyin Township in Kachin State and one of the guards was arrested. In Yangon Region, a Mosque in the Kamakathwe ward in Dala Township and the Iddghar Mosque in Ahlone Township were set on fire at midnight on 9 June and 20 June 2021. The mosques were set on fire during the curfew period.

On 24 May 2021, three women and a man were killed in a catastrophic attack on a Catholic church in Kanthaya (South) village, north of Loikaw town, due to an unprovoked firing by the junta's security forces. Similarly, on 23 May 2021, the military and police raided and destroyed a Karen Christian church in Insein Satellite Township, and a total of three people, including a pastor and a disabled man, were severely beaten and arrested. In another incident, three venerable priests from Christian churches who prayed for peace in Naungmon Township in Kachin State were arrested on June 28 and they were charged.

The junta is trying to portray its crackdown against civilians who are opposing the coup as an anti-terrorist campaign. The junta's crackdown includes extrajudicial killings and unlawful arrests and other forms of gross violations of human rights. BHRN express strong concerns over the safety and security of the civilian population due to continuing violence against them by the junta. At the same time, we are also concerned about increasing attacks on the religious buildings that belong to Muslim and Christian minorities in Myanmar.

Organisation's Background

BHRN is based in London, operates across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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