

CDM as a Social Revolution and Its Effect on Park Management: A Case Study from Alaungdaw Kathapa National Park

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Abstract

Responding to the coup in Feb 2021, many professionals in Myanmar have joined the well-known Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) as a social revolution to oppose the military regime. Among them, wildlife rangers and their 36 elephants from Alaungdaw Kathapa National Park have sought refuge in the 350,000 acres of the country's first national park as well as ASEAN Heritage Park located in the northwestern Sagaing region. This situation poses challenges for the effective conservation and management of the National Park, as surrounding villages have become conflict zones. The long-term commitment of CDM staff and their loyal elephants is now threatened by uncertainties regarding survival, medicinal supply and food supplement for the elephants and the need to generate revenue for armed revolution.

Following the coup, all international assistance to the park has been suspended. Even the Park's Director, non-CDM, is unable to operate from the park's headquarters, due to security concerns. Consequently, effective management of the Park has diminished since the coup. Nevertheless, reports indicate that CDM rangers and their elephants are still providing localized protection, using the elephants for transporting food, equipment, and medicine. They play a crucial role in preventing illegal logging, wildlife poaching, and encroachment.

Numerous armed revolutionary groups have emerged across the country, leading to localized conflicts within the broader conflict that is to terminate military dictatorship. Some groups are operating independently, rather than unifying under the command of National Unity Government and allied Ethnic Armed Organisations that offer training and supplies. This fragmentation has resulted in territorial disputes and revenue generation efforts by certain armed groups near the National Park. Tragically, honest CDM rangers and their loyal elephants have been targeted by some separate armed groups, culminating in the recent killing of a working female elephant that had joined the CDM movement alongside its rangers.