Multiplicity of Challenges in Myanmar

What is the issue?

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Besides the infamous Rohingya crisis, Myanmar also saw multiple challenges on the fronts like press freedom and the “Panglong peace process” in 2017.

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What are the events that defined Myanmar of 2017?

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- Both the civilian government and the military establishment of Myanmar (which is politically powerful), had a rough 2017.
- The issues of - Threats to press freedom, Rohingya refugee crisis, and peace process with the country’s armed ethnic groups got international attention.
- The civilian government of Ms.Suu Kyi’s NLD, attracted severe criticism for its failure to act on these issues more effectively.
- **Press Freedom -** At least 11 journalists of (both Myanmarese and foreigners) have been arrested in the past year on trivial charges.
- Notably, two Reuters reporters were arrested on the charges under the colonial-era “Official Secrets Act” for ‘illegally acquiring information’.
- It is speculated that they were collecting documents regarding the conduct of security forces in Rakhine state, the duo could possibly get long prison terms.
- **Rohingya Crisis -** The UN has called the militaristic crackdown in Rakhine as “ethnic cleansing”, and media has been blacked out in the region.
- Up until now, the gruesome horrors unleashed by the security forces are primarily coming from the Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh.
- But despite serious international condemnation, Myanmar has denied any

wrongdoing and claims that its offensives are only targeted against ARSA (Rohingyan rebel militia), which is officially a terrorist outfit in Myanmar.
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How is the 'Panglong Peace Conference' progressing?

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- Besides the Rohingyas, there are multiple armed ethnic rebels in Myanmar and Ms. Suu Kyi has been prioritising peace with them.
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- Consequently, the 2nd session of "Panglong Peace Conference" was convened in May 2017, to discuss on a 41 point agenda.
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- **Positives -** This brought together the government, military and ethnic rebel leaders and agreement was reached on 37 issues.
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- The rebel groups agreed to recognize a democracy union with federalist polity that gives considerable rights for ethnic self-determination.
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- On its part, the government agreed to treat all ethnicities equally and privileged the provinces to write their own sub-constitutions within Myanmar.
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- **Challenges -** However, the calls for dissolution of rebel armies to pave the way for the constitution of a single national army haven't been agreed.
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- Contrarily, the rebels vouch for a federal army to enable them retain independent command structures.
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- Also, there have been some hiccups with the technicality of whether to specifically iterate the clause for "non-secession" in the peace accord.
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- Also, another major concern is that out of the more than 20 armed groups, only 8 have signed the current "Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement" thus far.
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- While the 3rd round of the Panglong Conference has been scheduled for late January, the future looks uncertain.
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Source: The Hindu

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