

MYANMAR - JUNTA ABUSES SPUR SPIRALING CATASTROPHE

# mizzima | WEEKLY

myanmar news & insight



**AIRSTRIKES INTENSIFY**  
**UN raps Myanmar junta**

ISSUE 13, VOL. 13, March 28, 2024 | Issued every Thursday | [mizzima.com](http://mizzima.com)

# mizzima

WEEKLY  
myanmar news & insight

OUT EVERY  
THURSDAY

PRINT VERSION

PDF ONLINE VERSION

For more contents to read  
Follow us on:

Our Websites:

[www.mizzima.com](http://www.mizzima.com)

[www.mizzimaburmese.com](http://www.mizzimaburmese.com)

[www.mizzima.tv](http://www.mizzima.tv)

## SUBSCRIBE HERE

KEEP UP ON WHAT MATTERS



Available at...

- Every City Mart in Yangon
- Innwa Book Store, Pansodan Road
- Yangon Bakehouse, Pearl Condominium, Block C
- Popular Bookstore in Mayangone Township
- Pansodan Gallery (1st Floor, 286 Pansodan Road - Upper)
- Book Worm Books, Pearl Condominium, Block C
- And in Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw

Contact Us!



➤ Subscription  
(95) 9 421010101

# CHAOS AND CONFUSION AS MYANMAR JUNTA CONSCRIPTS YOUTH

**A**lthough the official Myanmar junta line is that military conscription will begin after the Thingyan Water Festival in April, moves are already afoot in a number of areas of Myanmar to induct young men into the military. Since the 10 February junta announcement, many young people have been trying to leave the country or escape to the “free zones” in ethnic areas.

Various media reports from Mizzima and other independent news outlets have been publishing stories on junta efforts to force mainly young men to join the armed forces. These include arrests on the street, while traveling, and while checking out house registration.

Media stories mention “cat-and-mouse” games as youth try to dodge the draft. From the town around the Golden Rock to the backstreets of Yangon and Mandalay, local junta administrators, soldiers and police have been rounding up young men for service. The queues are long outside the Thai and Korean embassies as young people chase options to leave their homeland.

Some people are paying bribes to the authorities to avoid conscription. Others get special treatment. For example, all relatives of Kyu Kyu Hla, wife of the

junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, hailing from her hometown, have been exempted from the Military Service Law, a source familiar with the village administration tells a local media group. Kyu Kyu Hla’s hometown is Zee Kyun village in the Auk Nat Maw village tract in Thandwe Township in southern Rakhine State. A former village administrator informed Narinjara News that on 14 March, the General Administration Office (GAD) of Thandwe District issued military service exemption cards to the relatives of Kyu Kyu Hla.

Meanwhile, travel restrictions and checks are tightening and young people have been told to get letters from their local administration if they want to travel. The families of these youth are also being pressured to adhere to the rules.

All in all, the junta’s conscription drive is causing fear, chaos and confusion, yet one more problem the illegal junta is imposing on the people of the Golden Land.

## EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

**Editor In-Chief and Managing Director**  
Soe Myint

**Contributors**  
Sai Wansai,  
Andrew Landen, Marc Jacob

**MIZZIMA MAGAZINE**  
Neither this publication nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission from Mizzima Media Co. Ltd.

**Photos are by Mizzima**  
Unless otherwise credited.  
© 2015 MIZZIMA All rights reserved

**INFORMATION**  
Mizzima is owned by Mizzima Media Group in Yangon, Myanmar.

**Subscriptions and sales in Myanmar**  
Mizzima Weekly is currently available as a PDF.

**Contact:** Mizzima Media Group  
Email: [sm@mizzima.com](mailto:sm@mizzima.com)  
Phone: +95-9421010100



# CONTENTS


**mizzima** WEEKLY

## NEWS & INSIGHT

- 3 EDITORIAL
- 6 IN FOCUS
- 8 NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 10 AIRSTRIKES INTENSIFY UN raps Myanmar junta
- 14 Myanmar - Junta abuses spur spiraling catastrophe

## CONSCRIPTION

- 15 Youths leaving Mandalay Region subject to stringent checks
- 16 Irregularities taint military draft lottery in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady



20

- 17 Myanmar conscription lotteries start in Ayeyarwady Region

- 18 TNLA to take action against junta conscription whilst conscripting civilians itself

## INDIAN CALL

- 20 India calls for "inclusive federal democracy" in Myanmar

10





- 22** No bids as house of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi auctioned
- 24** UK government offers scholarship for women in Myanmar and across ASEAN
- 25** ARNO condemns Myanmar junta's treatment of Rohingyas
- 26** Indonesia rescuers save 69 Rohingya refugees at sea

## COMMENTARY

- 28** UN rights expert urges global action to halt Myanmar junta atrocities
- 30** ETHNIC NEWS ROUNDUPS
- 31** LAST WEEK IN NAY PYI TAW

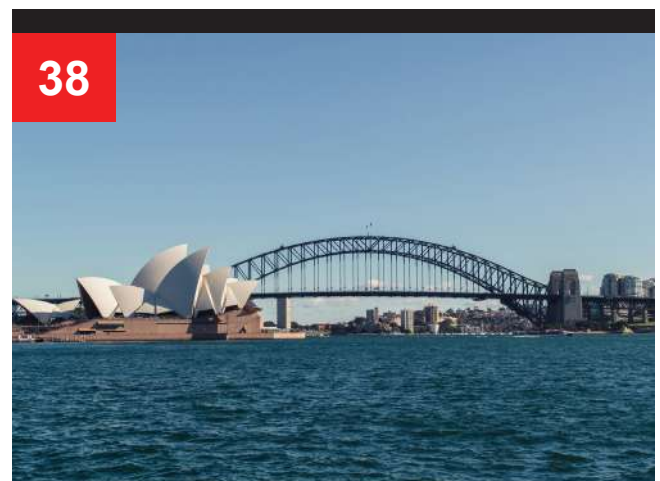
## BUSINESS

- 32** Drop in kyat value and transport problems increase prices of Thai imports
- 33** EU firms in China struggle with 'politicised' environment
- 34** China youth unemployment edges up in February
- 35** BUSINESS ALERTS

## CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

- 36** IN FOCUS
- 38** Changing immigration scene for Myanmar nationals entering Australia

**Cover photo of Russian-built jet fighter  
by AFP**





IN FOCUS







## MORNING ROUTINE

**B**uddhist monks walk for morning alms in front of the home of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's in Yangon, Myanmar, 19 March. A district court in Yangon ordered the auction of Aung San Suu Kyi's home on 20 March, with a floor price of 315 billion Myanmar Kyats (around 149.6 million US dollar, according to the government set exchange rate).

Photo:EPA



## TEACHER SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR TAKING PART IN CDM

A teacher in Chin State's Tonzang Township was sentenced to life imprisonment on 18 March for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

Though the CDM is a peaceful movement against the coup where people refuse to work for the government Ma Vung Huai Kim, a 23-year-old primary school teacher, was sentenced to life imprisonment under Section 50 (j) and 52 (a) of the Anti-Terrorism Law by the Tonzang Prison Court on 13 March for taking part in the CDM.

Ma Vung Huai previously worked for the Tonzang Township Basic Education Department, which is part of the junta's Tonzang Township Administration. She was arrested at her house in Tonzang Township's Khawon Ward on 14 January 2024.

An official from the Tonzang Township Public Administration said, "She received a life sentence under Sections 50 (j) and 52 (a) of the Anti-Terrorism Law because of her involvement in the CDM."

Though Tonzang township, in the western part of Myanmar's Chin State, was put under martial law by the junta on 2 February 2023 it does not completely control the township.

Both the junta and the Chin National Front/Chin National Army (CNF/CNA) control parts of Tonzang Township and no group has overall control of the

area. The current Tonzang Township Public Administration was put in place by the CNF/CNA.

The Tonzang Township Public Administration issued a statement rebuking the junta and expressing its strong opposition to the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of innocent people by the junta.

Tonzang residents also criticised the junta's judicial system for imposing such a severe sentence on a teacher whose only crime was to peacefully oppose the coup by joining the CDM.

One said: "When the military seized power, people joined the CDM to resist the regime. It is excessive to arrest and unjustly sentence her to such a lengthy prison term. The Military Council's actions are highly disappointing."

Ma Vung Huai Kim's father, 53-year-old U Thang Lian Pao, who was arrested at the same time as Ma Vung Huai Kim, was also sentenced to seven years in prison by the court, but what he was charged with is unknown, according to the Tonzang Township Public Administration.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), as of 20 March, more than 26,000 people have been arrested since the military coup in Myanmar. Of those, approximately 20,000 remain detained in junta prisons.

## VILLAGERS FLEE JUNTA RAID IN MANDALAY REGION'S WUNDWIN TOWNSHIP

Most inhabitants have fled Theekone Village in Wundwin Township, Mandalay Region following a junta military raid on the village when villagers were arrested and taken away, on 21 March.

The junta raid was believed to be in retaliation for the killing of the Theekone Village Administrator, Maung Pu, by the Wundwin Township Revolution Force who said it was because he was involved in the junta's conscription process.

Maung Pu was shot dead on the Theekone Village main road at 5:00 pm on 19 March as he was returning from submitting lists of local people eligible for conscription to the Wundwin Township General Administrator's Office.

Junta soldiers then raided Theekone Village at 7:00 a.m. on 21 March and targeting and arresting young adults of conscription age.

A villager from Theekone said: "As junta

troops, led by Maung Pu's son-in-law, stormed into the village, shooting and apprehending people, the entire village fled. Over ten people were arrested. The junta troops remained in the village until 11:00 am on 21 March. The current status of the village is unknown. There are fears that they may set fire to the village."

Villagers of neighbouring villages were warned to be cautious by the Voice of Wundwin, a group that releases information about fighting in Wundwin Township.

Prior to the killing of Maung Pu, on 18 March, Wundwin-based revolutionary forces issued a statement, threatening severe punishment against ward and village administrators involved in organising, mobilising, and collecting data for the junta's conscription drive.



# THAI GOVERNMENT MULLS CORN IMPORT BAN TO REDUCE POLLUTION

In an attempt to cut down on trans-border smoke pollution in Thailand, the Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin announced he is considering banning corn imports from neighbouring countries from January to April 2025.

Every year between about January and April northern Thailand is blighted by PM2.5 pollution. PM2.5 refers to particles smaller than 2.5 micrometers, 30 times smaller than the width of a human hair.

Such particles are very dangerous to human health because they easily get into the lungs and from there are absorbed directly into the bloodstream. Once in the human body PM 2.5 can cause many adverse health reactions, some of which are life-threatening. It is the most damaging and dangerous of particles because due to its small size it can reach and affect all the organs in the body.

On certain days of the year, the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai has the dirtiest air in the world due to PM2.5 pollution.

The PM 2.5 pollution in northern Thailand comes from the burning of crop residues and the forest. Whilst a lot of the burning that produces the PM2.5 pollution occurs within Thailand, a considerable amount of Thai PM 2.5 pollution also comes from burning in neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar.

PM2.5 pollution from Myanmar's Shan State and other areas and countries bordering Thailand often comes from burning plant material produced as a by-product of growing corn, which is usually grown as animal feed. This is why the Thai government is considering banning the import of corn from neighbouring countries.

Mr Srettha said the problem cannot be solved unless corn imports from neighbouring countries are prohibited during the burning season from January to

April.

Whether a ban on corn imports just between the months of January and April will reduce cross-border pollution is debatable as corn producers will be able to just wait till after April to sell their corn in Thailand.

Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos hold meetings to discuss ways to curb the trans-border smoke and haze problem caused by burning as it can severely affect public health.

Mr Srettha told reporters that Thailand has discussed banning corn imports with ministries in Cambodia and Laos, as well as with the Myanmar Army commander-in-chief.

Myanmar exports most of the corn it produces to Thailand and China. It has not yet commented on the proposed Thai corn ban.

But, burning this year has already caused bad pollution in Myanmar, on the border with Thailand.

From the beginning of March the Myanmar town of Tachileik, in eastern Shan State, on the border with Thailand, has been covered in a blanket of haze.

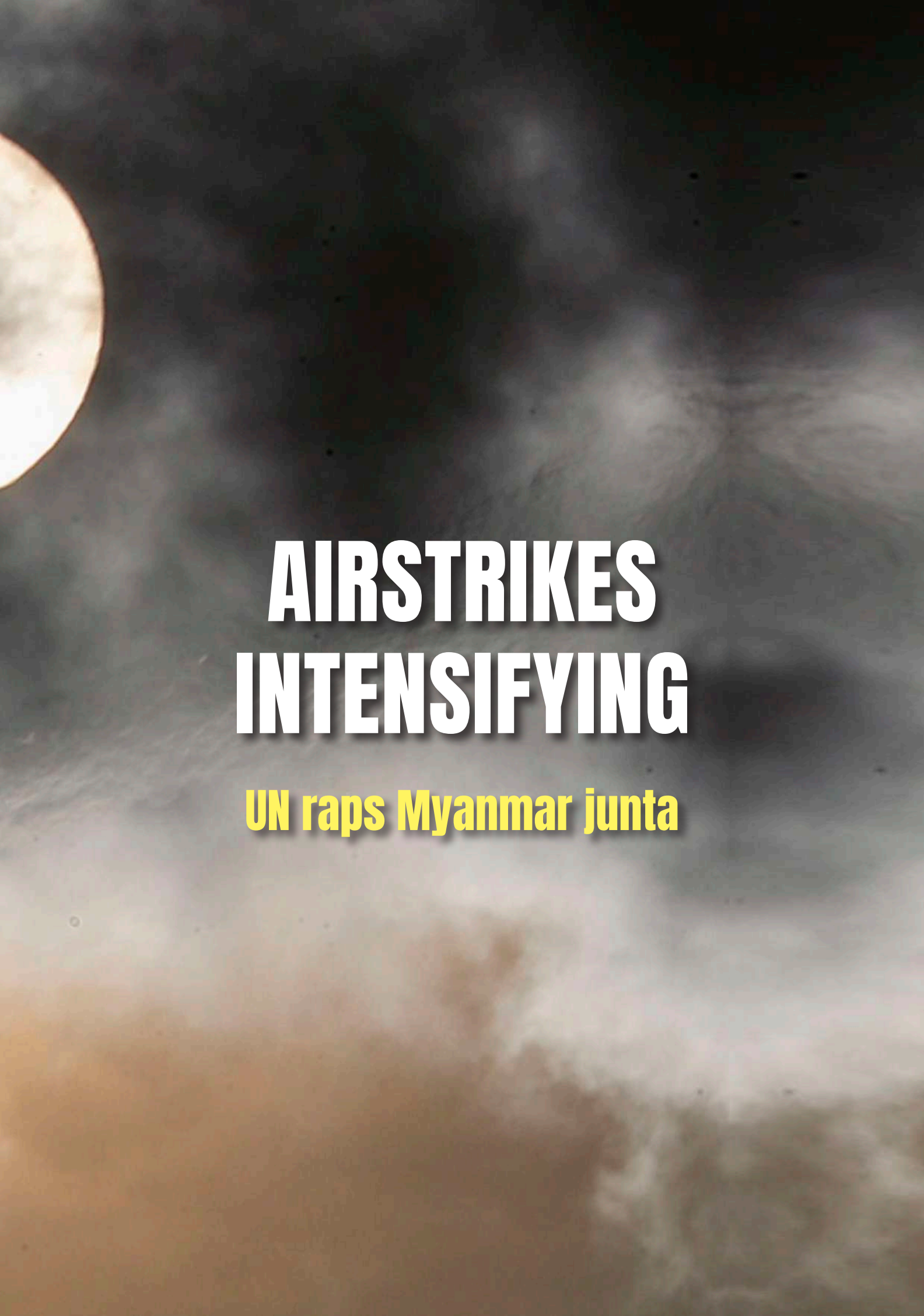
According to residents, the haze came from farmers burning to clear fields and forest areas to grow crops and natural wildfires.

According to the Tachileik District Environment Conservation Department, the air quality index (AQI) level in Tachileik on 14 March 2024 at 7:00 am was 234, meaning that the level of PM2.5 particles in the atmosphere was 184.39 micrograms per cubic meter, a level that is very hazardous to human health.

Tachileik city elders have warned people not to go outside unless it is necessary and to wear masks when they have to go outside.







# **AIRSTRIKES INTENSIFYING**

**UN raps Myanmar junta**

**T**he United Nations and human rights NGOs have called out the Myanmar junta over intensifying airstrikes, many of the targets being civilian areas.

Over the last few weeks, the UN has drawn attention to the worsening humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by the use of air and artillery attacks on towns and villages. Claims have been made that the junta is deliberately targeting civilians, even targeting villages where there is no conflict.

In a statement released on the day of the attack, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlighted a massacre that took place in the west of the country.

A total of 23 people were killed and at least 10 others were injured in Myanmar junta airstrikes on Tharde Village in Minbya Township, Rakhine State on 18 March.

“Twenty-three civilians lost their lives in the junta’s sudden airstrikes, with at least ten others sustaining injuries. Numerous houses and buildings have also suffered damage, including the destruction of four houses and two paddy barns,” said a local source.

Of the dead, 10 were residents of Tharde village and the other 13 were internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other villages in Rakhine State who were sheltering in Tharde.

The Arakan Army (AA) is providing medical



The damaged Tharde Village in Minbya Township, Rakhine State after the air raid. Photo: Supplied



treatment to those injured in the airstrikes.

“We are enduring significant hardship due to the state of the country. The residents of Tharde Village are very concerned about their future in these communities,” said a Minbya Township resident.

The Myanmar junta has been carrying out frequent airstrikes and artillery attacks around the country, particularly in contested areas and where ground troops may be finding themselves vulnerable to attack.

Media report that airstrikes have increased in Rakhine State on Arakan Army-held towns, resulting in many casualties amongst civilians. Other areas that have been hit by airstrikes include Sagaing, Magway, Chin, Karen, Karenni, Kachin and Shan states.

The UN Secretary General called in his press statement on 18 March on all parties to prevent further incitement of communal tensions. He said he was alarmed by reports of ongoing airstrikes by the military, including in Minbya Township that reportedly killed and injured many civilians. He also expressed his concern by reports of forcible detention and recruitment of youths, including Rohingya, and the potential impact of forced conscription on human rights and on the social fabric of communities in Myanmar.

“The United Nations is committed to staying and delivering in Myanmar and to working with all stakeholders, including ASEAN and other regional actors, to attain sustainable peace,” he noted.



# MYANMAR: JUNTA ABUSES SPUR SPIRALING CATASTROPHE



Photo: AFP

**T**he number of people needing assistance in Myanmar has risen from 1 million before the coup to 18.6 million today and other nations should take more concrete action against the Myanmar junta, according to a 19 March Human Rights Watch (HRW) statement.

Below is the text of the statement:

Over three years since the Myanmar military coup, the junta's flailing efforts to consolidate power have ravaged the country's population. Fighting has intensified across much of the country, displacing 2.4 million people since the coup.

The number of people needing assistance has grown from 1 million before the coup to 18.6 million today, amid spiraling atrocities and countrywide economic and infrastructure collapse. The UN estimates that 10,000 children under age 5 died last year due to lack of treatment for malnutrition.

Yet the junta has only ramped up its deadly blocking of humanitarian aid as a method of collective punishment of the population. These blockages

sustain the military's longstanding "four cuts" strategy, designed to maintain control of an area by isolating and terrorizing civilians.

The conflict is now increasingly impacting regional peace and security, spilling over into China, India, Bangladesh, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The military's crimes against humanity and war crimes are fueled by decades of impunity and meager international efforts to stop the violations. Much more needs to be done.

The 2022 Security Council resolution—presented as a first step to further action—has instead become the feeble peak of council activity on a country in harrowing crisis.

In the face of the junta's unrelenting repression, UN member states should take more concrete, collective action to pressure the military to stop its abuses, guided by the voices of the Myanmar people. Their resolute struggle for democracy and freedom is a clarion call that global actors need likewise to persevere.



# YOUTHS LEAVING MANDALAY REGION SUBJECT TO STRINGENT CHECKS

**T**he junta authorities in Mandalay Region have increased inspections, searches and questioning of conscription-age youths who are trying to leave the region.

According to local sources, these increased inspections came into force on 15 March, after the junta had started compiling lists of people available for conscription in Mandalay Region.

Young people are being targeted at checkpoints on the borders of Mandalay Region. These include the Sagaing Bridge checkpoint, the Shwegyin checkpoint on the Mandalay to Mogok Highway, the 16-Mile checkpoint on the Mandalay to Pyin Oo Lwin Highway and the Myitnge checkpoint on the old Yangon-Mandalay Highway.

A resistance force source said: “The junta’s tightening of security and inspection of youths at certain exit gates in Mandalay is aimed at obstructing their

path to Sagaing and Shan states, where resistance forces are stationed. This is an effort to prevent youths from joining the resistance. Despite these measures, there remain numerous other exits.”

A person living close to the Sagaing Bridge checkpoint said: “Junta soldiers are conducting thorough inspections of travelers’ phones and identification cards. This process is particularly rigorous for individuals aged 20 to 25, resulting in prolonged wait times.”

Since 11 March, the junta authorities in Mandalay Region have been summoning men aged 18 to 35 to attend public meetings about conscription. They have also been going door-to-door in some areas, compiling lists of those eligible for conscription.

According to local sources in Mandalay people who do not want to be conscripted are fleeing from their homes and joining the resistance forces.

# IRREGULARITIES TAINT MILITARY DRAFT LOTTERY IN MYANMAR'S AYEYARWADY

**A**uthorities in southwestern Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Region have commenced lotteries to select who will be drafted into the military from among lists of draft-eligible youths, but residents say the process is tainted by irregularities.

The announcement last month of a conscription law, prompting youths of fighting age to flee to areas controlled by rebel groups or leave the country to avoid service. While the military regime says it will not begin drafting people until April, RFA Burmese has received reports indicating that forced recruitment is already underway.

The draft comes as the military tries to replenish its ranks after suffering a series of battlefield defeats to rebel forces, including the surrender of hundreds of soldiers.

Residents of Ayeyarwady region told RFA that authorities in the townships of Pyapon, Myaungmya, and Hinthada began instituting lotteries for the draft at the village level on Saturday 16 March, after compiling lists of residents aged 20-30. The selection process is being supervised by relevant administrators, officials and community elders, they said.

But the lotteries have raised hackles in communities where residents say not everyone on lists of the draft-eligible are being added to the selection pool.

"When the neighbourhood elders compile a list, those included are required to attend the [lottery] meeting," said one resident of Hinthada who was among those selected for service. "However ... some people on the list are not called upon ... They are neither employed nor studying. So why are these people being left out?"

The resident who, like others interviewed for this report, spoke on condition of anonymity due to security concerns, said that "only a minority are included" in the lottery.

Some who have taken part in the draft lottery accused authorities of "administrative dishonesty," although they were unable to provide details or evidence of their claims.

RFA has reported that amid forced recruitment drives in other parts of the country, some residents have been able to avoid service by paying "fines" to authorities.

Another resident of Hinthada told RFA that in some neighborhoods in the township, those selected in the draft lottery were immediately taken away by authorities.

"After the draw, the person who was chosen must go," said the resident. "In a nearby neighborhood, people said they were taken at once."

A resident of Pyapon told RFA that lotteries for military service were held on Sunday in some of the township's villages, but said some of those chosen had managed to "avoid participation."

Attempts by RFA to ascertain why some draft-eligible residents were omitted from lotteries remain inconclusive.

## TRAGEDY FOLLOWING LOTTERY

Reports of conscription irregularities came as RFA learned that one young man in Ayeyarwady's Kangyidaunt township took his own life after being selected to serve in the military.

Residents of Kangyidaunt's Pathein district said that on Saturday, a lottery was held and three young men from Yae Twin Chaung village were chosen for service.

A 20-year-old from among the three men, who was known to be against the draft, died by suicide the following day, said one of the residents, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to security concerns.

"I learned that he died that evening after receiving emergency medical treatment at the Pathein Public Hospital," said the resident. "His family has been summoned by the local police station for interrogation."

A source who lives in proximity to Yae Twin Chaung also confirmed to RFA that the man had taken his own life after being selected for service in a lottery overseen by village elders.

Although there is no positive proof that the man's death and his selection in the draft lottery are related, it highlights the tensions young Burmese men are facing due to conscription.

Young adults aged 20-30 are eligible for conscription in Ayeyarwady region through lotteries, residents told RFA. Typically, two or three people are chosen from each village or ward.

Youths in Ayeyarwady region have told RFA they are reluctant to serve in the military.

Attempts by RFA to contact Khin Maung Kyi, the junta's social affairs minister and spokesperson for Ayeyarwady region, for comment on the recruitment process went unanswered Monday.

Junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun announced on 15 February that 50,000 people would be recruited annually under the country's draft law.

Based on Myanmar's 2019 transit census, at least 13 million people are eligible to serve, he said.

*Courtesy of Radio Free Asia*



# MYANMAR CONSCRIPTION LOTTERIES START IN AYEYARWADY REGION

**T**he junta started the lottery process to decide who gets conscripted in all the Ayeyarwady Region townships from 16 to 18 March, according to residents.

All men between the ages of 18 and 35 have to attend the lotteries where they are forced to draw lots to see who has to serve in the military. According to locals about 30 people every month will be conscripted from each Ayeyarwady Region township.

A source close to the junta explained: "Lots are drawn in every quarter and village. With only 30 people selected from each township for military service, the remaining selected people will be called up in the coming batches."

They also explained that all the people who were selected for military service at the lottery must then report to their Township General Administration Office.

Explaining what happens to people unlucky enough to be selected in the lottery process a Patheingyi Township resident said: "I was selected to serve in the military during the lot drawing. The junta verifies whether the chosen individuals comply with the [rel-

evant] laws. If not, they are rejected, and the process continues with the remaining candidates... I am currently anxious about being selected. Escape is not an option."

According to residents of Maubin Township, junta personnel have been threatening to arrest and punish the families of anyone who is selected in the lottery and then tries to flee.

If enough people from a township volunteer to join the army lots are not drawn for that township. But, when this happens township administrators have reportedly been forcing residents to give money to support the volunteers, according to locals.

The people who have been selected to serve at the lotteries are anxious according to reports. Many say they do not know on what date their military service will start. According to some sources in Ayeyarwady Region and statements by the junta, training of the first batch of conscripts will start after the Thingyan water festival celebrations in mid-April.

# TNLA TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST JUNTA CONSCRIPTION WHILST CONSCRIPTING CIVILIANS ITSELF

**D**espite conscripting youths into its own army, the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) said that it would take decisive action against junta administrators conscripting people into the Myanmar Army.

The statement was made on 19 March after the TNLA said that it had received complaints and requests for help from members of the public, following the junta's recruitment drive in the northern Shan State townships of Lashio, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Nawng-hkio, Mogok, and Mongmit.

According to the TNLA, junta ward, village and village tract administrators have been told how

many recruits they must supply and some of those administrators are already conscripting people.

The TNLA has responded by saying that it will severely punish any junta administrators who work towards conscripting people.

The junta announced on 10 February 2024 that it was bringing into force the conscription Law that was initially drafted in 2010 but not ratified.

Under the law all men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 are liable to be conscripted into the Myanmar Army for two years. People that the junta deems to have specialist skills, such as doctors, can be conscripted between the ages of 18 and 45 for men



TNLA fighters checking ammunition in Shan State. Photo: AFP



and 18 to 35 for women and they will have to serve three years, instead of two. Everyone's military service can also be extended up to five years.

Ironically, the TNLA announced its own conscription drive on 7 February 2024.

The TNLA requires that all Ta'ang families send one man, aged between 16 and 35 years old to serve in the TNLA.

Women from families with more than three siblings are also expected to enlist, although women working as Ta'ang civil society organisations (CSO) committee members, or those with family members working as CSO committee members are exempt. Monks and people with poor health are also exempt from conscription.

The TNLA does not conscript non ethnic Ta'ang people, but it is happy to accept volunteers from other

ethnic groups.

On 1 March, Frontier reported that the TNLA had practiced different forms of forced conscription since it was founded in 2009 and that the TNLA had informally practiced conscription, as laid out in the Feb 2024 policy, since 2017. Conscripts would usually serve as under the TNLA until death.

An anonymous TNLA official stated that forced recruitment remained unpopular amongst Ta'ang people, but stated that it was necessary in order to build a strong Ta'ang nation.

In recent times, a TNLA recruit in Kutkai Township stated that families were sending more accomplished siblings for conscription with the hope they were better able to contribute to the Ta'ang cause.





# INDIA CALLS FOR “INCLUSIVE FEDERAL DEMOCRACY” IN MYANMAR

**T**he Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has called for Myanmar to become an ‘inclusive federal democracy’ through dialogue and constructive engagement amongst key stakeholders.

The MEA spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said: “We call upon all sides (to restore peace)... We want peace and stability in the country; we want constructive dialogue in the country, and we want inclusive federal democracy to be established through dia-

logue and through constructive engagement.”

The comments were made at a 15 March press conference where the MEA spokesperson also said that India is worried about the current situation in Rakhine State, saying: “The situation in Myanmar remains a cause of concern because of the deterioration in the security situation. There is a lot of fighting happening there, and the security situation is not conducive [to peace].”



Delhi. Photo: Lorentiu Morayui



He described the situation in Rakhine as delicate and unsafe for Indian nationals who have been warned by the MEA since February 2024 not to travel to Rakhine State.

He said: "We have issued an advisory for Rakhine State where the situation is very delicate. The security situation has deteriorated. We told all Indian nationals to evacuate and move away from there."

The advisory notice for Indian travellers to Rakhine also warned that in Rakhine State telecommunications are often disrupted, there are severe shortages of some foodstuffs and security is deteriorating.

The Arakan Army and the junta started fighting in Rakhine State in October 2024 after the breakdown of a ceasefire. Since then, the AA has taken control of many towns and junta army posts in Rakhine State. This has led to many people fleeing from the fighting seeking shelter in India and Bangladesh.

Currently, India maintains normal diplomatic relations with the Myanmar junta. Tom Andrews, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said that India was one of the few countries that has continued supplying weapons and ammunition to Myanmar even after the military coup.



# NO BIDS AS HOUSE OF MYANMAR'S AUNG SAN SUU KYI AUCTIONED

**T**he lakeside mansion where Myanmar's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi spent years under house arrest went under auction on Wednesday with a minimum price of \$150 million - but attracted no bids, officials said.

The two-storey house and 1.9 acres of land was put up for sale following a decades-long dispute over the property between the Nobel laureate - who has been detained since the 2021 military coup - and her brother.

Ahead of the auction, a small crowd - mostly of journalists - gathered outside the colonial-era house on leafy University Avenue, a few doors down from the

US embassy.

Officials emerged from the locked gates and announced the opening of the auction by striking a small bell three times.

Above the gate, a portrait of Suu Kyi's father, the independence hero Aung San, watched over the proceedings, while a notice advertised the price as 315 billion kyats, or \$150 million based on the official exchange rate.

The auctioneer - wearing a sarong-like longyi - held his hand up for bids, but there was only silence.

"There is no one to bid," he announced, striking the bell again to close the auction.



Officials at the gate of the house announce the results of the auction. Photo: AFP



Plainclothes security officers took photos of journalists covering the event.

For around 15 years, Suu Kyi was confined within the house's crumbling walls by the military after she shot to fame during huge demonstrations against the then-junta in 1988.

Cut off from her husband and children in England, Suu Kyi spent time playing the piano, reading detective novels and meditating as her status as a democracy leader grew.

Hundreds gathered regularly on the pavement outside the property to hear her talk about democracy and fighting military rule through non-violence.

After her release in 2010, she continued to live at the villa, where she received a string of foreign leaders, journalists and diplomats.

In 2012, then-US president Barack Obama

visited her at the villa and lionised her as an “icon of democracy”.

## **JAILED**

Suu Kyi left Yangon in 2012 and moved to the military-built capital Naypyidaw to govern as part of an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with the military.

She was detained there in the early hours of February 1, 2021 when the military seized power again, ending a 10-year experiment with democracy and plunging the Southeast Asian nation into bloody turmoil.

A junta-controlled court has since jailed her on a litany of charges that critics have slammed as farcical and designed to remove her from politics.

The Nobel Peace Laureate, 78, has been largely hidden from view since the coup, appearing only in grainy state media photos taken during court proceedings.

She remains hugely popular in Myanmar, even after her international image was tainted by her power-sharing deal with the generals, who she had defended against charges of committing genocide against the Rohingya minority.

Many of those now fighting for democracy have abandoned her principle of non-violence and taken up arms to try and permanently root out the military dominance of Myanmar's politics and economy.

Last month, Suu Kyi's son told AFP she was in “strong spirits” after he received a letter from her - their first communication since she was detained since the coup three years ago.

**AFP**



# UK GOVERNMENT OFFERS SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN IN MYANMAR AND ACROSS ASEAN



**Are you Women in STEM?**

**Don't miss ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarship**

**Deadline: 5 April 2024**

Co-led by **BRITISH COUNCIL**   **EdTech Hubs**  **ACER**

Delivered by

**T**he UK Government has launched a scholarship for women in Myanmar and across ASEAN to study a Masters in a Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics in certain leading UK universities.

The UK, through the ASEAN-UK Supporting the Advancement of Girls' Education Programme (ASEAN-UK SAGE), seeks to address gender disparities in STEM by providing more access to STEM education for women and girls in ASEAN and Timor-Leste.

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics or STEM is an umbrella term used to group together the distinct but related technical disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Who can apply? Women, Myanmar citizens, those who hold an undergraduate degree in a STEM subject, those who have the required English language level of a UK university, and those who have work experience or a proven interest in their subject area.

The programme provides full tuition fees, a living stipend for 12 months, visa and health coverage fees, refund of an IELTS English language test, if needed, and travel costs.

## HOW TO APPLY?

Applications should be made directly to the participating universities. You can make more than one application, but you will need to apply through each institution separately.

Please check the application requirements and eligible programs on each university website where you may also start your application.

University of Bristol (Deadline: 30 April 2024)

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/support/finances/scholarships/women-in-stem-scholarship/#ep>

University of Warwick (Deadline: 5 April 2024)

<https://warwick.ac.uk/study/scholarships-and-bursaries/scholarships/women-in-stem-scholarship/>

Imperial College (Deadline: 5 April 2024)

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/scholarships-search/asean---uk-sage-women-in-stem-scholarships-20242025.php>

Learn more about the scholarship at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org.mm/study-uk/women-in-STEM>



# ARNO CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S TREATMENT OF ROHINGYA



**T**he Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) has released a statement condemning the Myanmar junta's treatment of Rohingya people in Myanmar.

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) is based in London. It is a broad-based Organisation of the Rohingya People founded in 1998 and is one of the Founding members of the Arakan Rohingya Union which was formed with the help of the Euro-Burma Office and Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC).

Below is the text of the ARNO statement:

ARNO firmly declares its position as being with the freedom-loving people of Myanmar, who are currently waging a historic resistance against the evil forces of the Myanmar military throughout the country. Never in the history of this nation have people from all walks of life been more united in the revolutionary struggle against the Myanmar military. It is with surprise and cautious excitement we see that regardless of ethnic identities, the people of Myanmar are rallying together against the forces of darkness and injustice which masterminded the genocide of our people.

As the people remain united as never before, the brutal military is once again relying on their age-old strategy of creating divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ethnic tinderbox of Arakan, where the SAC [State Administration Council] forces try to light the fire to destroy this unparalleled unity of our people.

On 19 February, the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) issued a press release titled 'United we stand, divided we fall', which mentioned how the SAC is trying to raise 'Village Defence Forces' from Rohingya villages in Northern Arakan.

This old practice of the security forces, rais-

ing men to carry out military activities in the form of slave labour, is a continuation of the same tactic the now-disbanded NASAKA once used against Rohingya villagers.

In reality, the Village Defence Forces are nothing more than human shields, using a more subtle strategy to continue fanning the flames between the two communities of Arakan state.

Ironically, this is the same military which carried out the genocide of 2017, which ended the existence of ancient Rohingya settlements, west of the Mayu River and forced them into southern Bangladesh, where they currently live as refugees. In many cases, people have been arrested from villages in Buthidaung and Kyauktaw for refusing to serve as human shields against the Arakan Army, which is currently on an offensive against the junta's military.

We would once again like to reinstate that the Rohingya people are victims of the gravest genocide ever committed in contemporary times. We cannot and will not forget the mass atrocities carried out by the military and their accomplices, the peak being in the years 2012 to 2017.

Those who fight alongside the brutal military are complicit in the genocide against the Rohingya people. We are aware of and entirely against the military junta's heinous plans to divide the people, and we reinstate our support to the forces fighting for a federal democratic Myanmar where all ethnic groups have a right to justice and self-determination.

We request that all people of Myanmar, especially those in Arakan, learn from past mistakes and urge everyone to come to a strong understanding so that past mistakes are not repeated. A new chapter in history should be opened to create a federal democratic Myanmar. In our country, the brutal military and its cohorts should be relegated to the dustbins of history.

# INDONESIA RESCUERS SAVE 69 ROHINGYA REFUGEES AT SEA

**D**ozens of Rohingya refugees stranded on the rusty hull of a capsized ship were rescued Thursday last week after the dehydrated and sunburnt group had drifted at sea for more than a day.

The group included 69 men, women and children, some of whom had been at sea for weeks on a rickety wooden boat from squalid camps in Bangladesh where many of the heavily persecuted Myanmar minority have fled.

The reddish hull of the vessel poking out of the water was the Rohingyas' only refuge after their wooden boat and another vessel trying to help them both capsized on Wednesday.

The second boat, belonging to local fishermen, overturned when the refugees tried to climb on in a panic.

"Why did the boat capsize? There was heavy rain," said a 27-year-old survivor who gave his name as Dostgior in broken Indonesian.

The boats sank 16 nautical miles (30 kilometres) off the coast in West Aceh.

Survivors estimated around 150 Rohingya had been on board with dozens swept away, according to local fishermen and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), in what would represent another tragedy at sea for the heavily persecuted Myanmar minority.

"The total victims rescued (alive) is 69," the local search and rescue agency said in a statement, adding nine children, 42 men and 18 women were saved.

AFP footage from the boat showed men,



Stranded Rohingya refugees waiting to be rescued off the coast of Indonesia. Photo: AFP



women and children being taken to safety by the local search and rescue agency.

"I'd been at sea for 15 days, but there are others here who have been here longer than that. Some have been here for a month," said Dostgior.

The refugee said he had travelled from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh where many Rohingya have fled.

"In Bangladesh, I met someone who could take me to Indonesia. My goal in going to Indonesia is to pay someone to take me to Malaysia. Once in Malaysia, I will pay someone else to enter," he told AFP.

Many Rohingya make the perilous 4,000-kilometre journey (2,500 miles) from Bangladesh to Malaysia, fuelling a multi-million dollar human-smuggling operation that often involves stopovers in Indonesia.

## **LOCAL PROTESTS**

The authorities took the group to shore in West Aceh capital Meulaboh on Thursday, the local search and rescue agency said.

They were met at Meulaboh port by 10 await-

ing ambulances and medics, which whisked some of the refugees to hospital while others were taken to a temporary shelter at an old Red Cross building in a nearby village, said an AFP journalist.

But locals in Beureugang village launched a protest against the refugees staying there and unfurled a banner that read: "We reject the Rohingya refugees."

Some Rohingya boats landing in Aceh in recent months have been pushed back out to sea as sentiment towards the minority group shifts in the ultra-conservative Indonesian province.

Many Acehnese, who themselves have memories of decades of bloody conflict, are sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslims.

But others say their patience has been tested, claiming the Rohingya consume scarce resources and occasionally come into conflict with locals.

## **'COULDN'T FIND THEM'**

Some of the refugees said they were from Myanmar and had tried to reach Thailand but were rejected, West Aceh fishing community secretary-general Pawang Amiruddin told AFP Wednesday.

On Wednesday, six Rohingya from the same vessel were rescued by fishermen.

One of those survivors said dozens of refugees had been swept away by currents and were missing or feared dead.

"He said the boat took 151 people. Once the boat capsized approximately around 50 people may be missing and passed away," Rahman said.

"We are still coordinating with respective government agencies to do our best to save as many lives as possible."

From mid-November to late January, 1,752 refugees, mostly women and children, landed in the Indonesian provinces of Aceh and North Sumatra, according to UNHCR. Hundreds remain in shelters.

The agency said it was the biggest influx into the Muslim-majority country since 2015.

**AFP**



# UN RIGHTS EXPERT URGES GLOBAL ACTION TO HALT MYANMAR JUNTA ATROCITIES

**T**he UN independent human rights expert on Myanmar called on the international community on Tuesday to take strong, coordinated action to protect civilians from ongoing atrocities committed by the military junta's forces.

In February 2021 the military overthrew the elected Government in Myanmar arresting hundreds of officials, political leaders and activists, including President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The takeover triggered an intensification of armed conflicts with separatists and opposition forces across the country, including indiscriminate air strikes which have killed numerous civilians.

There have been mass killings of detainees, including dismemberment and desecration of corpses, reports of rape and the deliberate burning of entire villages.

In the latter half of 2023, several armed resistance groups united in an alliance against the regime, attacking several key junta strongholds, pushing back the military and forcing soldiers to surrender.

## **KILLINGS AND SUFFERING CONTINUE**

Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews told members of the Human Rights Council – the UN's paramount rights body – that despite some opposition successes, the junta remains “extremely dangerous”.

“The killing of civilians continues with sophisticated, powerful weapons of war obtained from abroad,” he added.

Over the last five months, there has been a five-fold increase in airstrikes against civilians. Across the country, about 2.7 million people are displaced and 18.6 million – including six million children – require humanitarian aid.

“Now the junta has begun a program of forced



● IDPs in a camp in Myanmar.  
Photo: UN News



military recruitment, at times abducting young men on the streets. This is pushing young people into hiding, or to flee the country, or to join resistance forces – young people who are unwilling to be drafted into the junta’s campaign of brutality,” Mr. Andrews said.

Among the worst affected are members of the minority Muslim Rohingya community, who continue to be attacked and persecuted. Several hundred thousand Rohingya were forced to flee their homes in Rakhine state due to a widespread military operation in 2017, seeking refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

### **IMPACTS BEYOND MYANMAR**

The Special Rapporteur said the actions of the junta are impacting not only the people of Myanmar but also the region and the wider world.

“Thousands of desperate people continue to flee into neighboring countries, while junta fighter jets have violated the airspace of Myanmar’s neighbors, bombs have landed across borders,” he said.

“International criminal networks have found safe haven in Myanmar, which is now the top opium producer in the world and a global center for cyber-scam operations that enslave tens of thousands

and victimize untold numbers of people around the world.”

### **VIOLENCE MUST STOP**

He warned that the response of the international community to the developments in the Asian country using appeasement and engagement with the junta without conditions, is not working.

The “inevitable conclusion” is that for engagement to succeed, certain prerequisites are imperative, chiefly that the violence must stop.

“For this to become a reality, the international community must undermine the junta’s murderous campaign by denying it the weapons and the money it requires to carry on this campaign,” he said.

Mr. Andrews called for the “immediate convening” of a coalition of States to establish coordinated, targeted sanctions to protect Myanmar’s people.

### **TIDE IS TURNING**

In addition, he highlighted three crucial steps, which must be taken urgently. These include ensuring humanitarian aid reaches those in desperate need, ending impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and investing in Myanmar’s transition.

“I urge support for those who are building a political framework that enfranchises Myanmar’s rich and diverse population, while affirming human rights, equality and justice as the pathway to peace,” he said.

“The tide is turning in Myanmar and it is turning because of the courage and tenacity of its people. It is time for the international community to pay attention to Myanmar and take the strong, coordinated action that will enable them to seize this moment,” Mr. Andrews concluded.

### **INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT**

Appointed by the Human Rights Council in 2020, Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews is tasked with impartially assessing, monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in Myanmar.

Special Rapporteurs serve in their individual capacity, independent of the UN system and national governments. They are not UN staff and draw no salary.

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar was first established in 1992 under the then Commission on Human Rights and extended annually.



*Courtesy of UN News*



Photo: Drzayar Min

## MON STATE

### *Junta abducts youths from their homes for military service in Mon State's Kyaikhto Township*

Ward Administrators accompanied by soldiers and police officers abducted young adults from Kyaikhto Township, in Mon State on the night of 18 March, according to locals.

About 20 victims were taken between 11:00 pm and midnight from the Kyaikhto Township wards of Hpa Ka Leik, Aung Chan Thar, Zayyarmon, Kawt San Naing.

The junta claimed that their names were allegedly drawn out as part of a lottery process used to determine who will be conscripted.

In other townships and areas, the lottery process for selecting who will be conscripted has been held in public and all youths of conscription age have been forced to attend the lotteries.

But, in Kyaikhto Township the township administrators claim that they held the lottery in secret. They did not inform anyone when it was going to be held or tell anyone that they had held the lottery before they started abducting youths.

"We haven't conducted any drawing of lots yet. We're unaware of when it occurred. The administrators conducted it independently without notify us. A group comprising police, soldiers, and administrators

began abducting people at 11 pm. The residents are extremely frightened", said a Kyaikhto Township resident.

Some residents claim that the junta kept the lottery secret because Mon State revolutionary groups had threatened to disrupt the process and attack anyone involved in it. Other residents believe that no lottery was actually held.

There have been reports of people eligible for the conscription lottery not being forced to attend the lotteries in the Ayeyarwady Region, causing locals there to question the honesty of the whole conscription selection process.

Also, prior to the Kyaikhto Township abductions, on 17 March, youths from villages in the vicinity of Kyaikhto Township received notices summoning them for military service. They were told that they had to attend their Township General Administration Offices on 19 March to provide personal information and supply their original identity cards to register for military service.

The youths abducted from Kyaikhto Township were allegedly taken to Infantry Battalion No. 96 in Kyaikhto Township. Mizzima is currently trying to verify this information.





## JUNTA'S INFORMATION MINISTER'S HOLLOW CALLS FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AMIDST TIGHTENING RESTRICTIONS

Junta's Information Minister, Maung Maung Ohn, based in Nay Pyi Taw met with media staff in Yangon to discuss media development and national unity, according to local news and junta-controlled newspapers.

The minister reportedly emphasized the importance of accurate information and responsible media use, while urging staff to work together in the public interest.

The minister also inspected the facilities of the MRTV broadcasting station and the Printing and Publishing Department.

However, following the 2021 coup, Myanmar's media landscape has become increasingly restrictive.

Independent media outlets have been shuttered, journalists arrested, and access to social media platforms like Facebook significantly limited.

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) reported that, as of February, the junta in Myanmar had arrested a cumulative of 206 journalists, including 31 women reporters, representing nearly 100 media outlets since the coup in February 2021.

# DROP IN KYAT VALUE AND TRANSPORT PROBLEMS INCREASE PRICES OF THAI IMPORTS



Photo: AFP

**T**he prices of Thai commodities in Myanmar are rising again due to the value of the Myanmar kyat falling steeply against the Thai baht in the last month and transport problems.

In the last week of February on the black market, one Thai baht was worth 98 Myanmar kyats, but now the value of the Thai baht is at an all-time high of 105 kyats on the black market. This means that imported commodities from Thailand are more expensive.

There is also an official Myanmar exchange rate of 58 kyats to the Thai baht that has remained fixed for a long time and does not fluctuate with market conditions. Myanmar exporters are forced to exchange at least 35 per cent of the Thai baht they gain from their exports at this official exchange rate. Unfortunately, importers cannot buy Thai baht at the official rate of 58 kyats to the baht. They have to buy all their baht on the black market, paying 105 kyats for each baht they want to spend on imports, raising the price of imports.

According to traders the fall in the value of the kyat is due to domestic inflation, and rising gold and dollar prices.

The price of gold on the domestic market has fluctuated wildly and has been as high as 4,125,000 Kyats per tical (approx. 16.3 gms) for 24-karat gold. Currently, one US dollar is worth about 3,665 kyats on

the black market.

Another reason that Thai commodities have become more expensive inside Myanmar is because the main route between the border town of Myawaddy and the rest of Myanmar, the Asia Highway, has been shut due to fighting.

As a result, traders have to use an alternative route through Htawkwakoe which is slower and more expensive than using the Asia Highway. Many different organisations have checkpoints on the Htawkwakoe road where they force traders to pay 'taxes' which raises the price of imported commodities even more.

Importers are predicting that the prices of Thai commodities will continue to rise until the Thingyan New Year festival in mid-April because of taxes, the continuing rise in the Thai baht exchange rate and transport difficulties.

Myanmar imports basic foodstuffs, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, consumer goods, construction materials and general merchandise from Thailand.

Currently, condiments and spices, such as Knorr chicken seasoning powder are in short supply in Myanmar. A Yangon resident said that the prices of all foodstuffs imported from Thailand were rising.



# EU FIRMS IN CHINA STRUGGLE WITH 'POLITICISED' ENVIRONMENT: REPORT



Photo: Zhang Kaiyv

**E**uropean companies in China are facing “less predictable” business conditions in the world’s second-largest economy, a report said on Wednesday last week, forcing them to allocate more resources to risk management.

The study, published by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, sheds light on the increasing challenges for foreign firms with operations in the country.

More than half of those polled - 55 percent - reported a business climate that is “more political over the past year”, according to a recent survey conducted by the chamber, which represents more than 1,700 companies present in China.

This “general sentiment of uncertainty” has pushed three-quarters of European companies to review their exposure to China and diversify supply chains over the past two years, the survey found.

However, only 12 percent have decided to establish completely new supply chains outside China, while just one percent are severing all links with the country.

“With the complexity and severity of the risks that businesses face having grown exponentially in recent years, companies are now having to allocate more resources to risk management and compliance

activities than ever before,” the report said.

In order to navigate those risks, investing in due diligence services and detailed supplied chain reviews could become a competitive advantage, the chamber said.

“Derisking” has emerged in recent months as a core pillar of the EU’s economic policy towards China, becoming necessary after the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the report said.

The term contrasts with the more drastic approach known as “decoupling”, pursued by some policymakers in the United States who aim to isolate China or cut all commercial ties with the country.

The EU views China as a “partner” but also as “an economic competitor and systemic rival”, the report said.

But China’s top diplomat Wang Yi criticised this position as “not factual or feasible” during a press conference this month.

“It’s like a car driving towards an intersection, only to find the red, green and yellow lights on at the same time,” he said.

AFP

# CHINA YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT EDGES UP IN FEBRUARY: OFFICIAL DATA



Young people at a job fair in China. Photo: AFP

China's youth unemployment rate rose slightly in February, official data showed Wednesday last week, as policymakers in the world's second-largest economy work to ease mounting fears of a downturn.

After youth joblessness soared to 21.3 percent in June last year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stopped releasing monthly figures, then resumed in December under revamped calculation criteria.

The latest unemployment figure for 16- to 24-year-olds - which now does not include students - edged up to 15.3 percent in February, from 14.6 percent in January, NBS data showed.

The youth unemployment rate in December last year was 14.9 percent.

Unemployment is one of several challenges now facing China's economy, which has struggled to recover since the cancellation in late 2022 of stringent Covid control measures that had weighed heavily on activity.

Also dragging on confidence in recent months is a long-running property sector crisis, as several top developers struggle to manage skyrocketing debt, as well as weaker exports and slowing domestic consumption.

AFP



**Penrose Thitsa**

## **DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS POVERTY ALLEVIATION EFFORTS DESPITE ECONOMIC STRUGGLES AMIDST JUNTA RULE**

**T**he Department of Rural Development held a workshop in Nay Pyi Taw to share experiences on poverty alleviation and rural water access projects in Myanmar, according to junta-controlled media.

The workshop was attended by junta officials, businesspeople, and rural residents.

During the workshop, Deputy Minister for Cooperatives and Rural Development, Myint Soe, emphasized the ministry's commitment to reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development.

He said that the ministry implemented four projects using Mekong-Lancang Cooperation funds in 2022, including a model village in Bago region and water sanitation systems in three villages in Ayeyarwady region. The projects reportedly benefited over 4,000 rural residents.

However, independent reports indicate a significant rise in poverty in Myanmar since the 2021 coup, with many residents struggling to afford basic necessities.

East Asia Forum, an English-language platform focused on publishing analysis on political, economic, and social issues in Asia, reported in late February that meager economic growth of 2 to 3 percent in Myanmar in 2023 does little to claw back the double-digit economic contraction inflicted by the junta.



## MYANMAR TEAM

The starting eleven of Myanmar pose for photographs before the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification soccer match between Myanmar and Syria in Yangon, Myanmar, 21 March.

Photo:EPA



IN FOCUS





# CHANGING IMMIGRATION SCENE FOR MYANMAR NATIONALS ENTERING AUSTRALIA



 Davin Hartanto

**D**avin Hartanto is a registered migration agent who has been practicing immigration law for nearly 10 years.

As he tells Insight Myanma in a podcast, when it comes to immigration policy in Australia, changes are in the works.

“Recently, the Australian government has announced their new migration strategy roadmap, and specifically for student visas. There will be certain changes that will happen in the future,” he explains.

This could affect Myanmar nationals.

The proposed changes to student visas that Hartanto mentions will assess whether an applicant is a genuine student, and one who intends return to their country of origin after their education is completed. But the issue becomes much more complex when looking at students coming from places of conflict, such as Myanmar, where a return would likely pose a real risk to the student's life.

Hartanto notes that case officers refer to the Country Information Report, issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which assesses global risks, and can be a determinant in the visa application process. This is true not only for students, but anyone trying to enter the country under the Genuine Temporary Entrant criteria.

“It doesn't matter what you say or what documents you present to immigration, they will always have residual or subjective power in deciding it,” Hartanto says, adding that no explanation need be given for visa refusals, and at times it is not even clear if the case officers have reviewed the entire file being submitted. “And if we are talking about the situation in Myanmar, there is a trend that the refusal rate has gone up very high!” Citing information gleaned through the Freedom of Information Act, it appears that nearly 70% of all Burmese visa applicants are being rejected. In these cases, the burden of proof about the intent to return is on the applicant. “The discretionary power is too big,” he adds. “And [the applicants] don't have any right to appeal, because they are overseas. That goes silent, and there are no further follow ups after that.”

Hartanto says that he personally became aware of the rapid increase in declined visa applications from Myanmar about a year after the coup, and around that same time, Australia announced it would be prioritizing Myanmar nationals already in the country over new visa applicants. “When we look at what has happened or has transpired around that time, I'm not too sure whether this is coincidence, but I don't believe in coincidence,” he says. “That's my personal opinion.”

This issue fits into a wider narrative of Australian politics and immigration policy. Hartanto explains that the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is part of the present Labour Government, accused the previous administration, overseen by the Liberal National Coalition Government, of presiding over a broken system in desperate need of reform. More specifically, they criticized the fact that the type of visa someone has doesn't always match their real purpose for being in the country, and charged that this was particularly



true of the Genuine Temporary Entrant status visas. But the stricter procedures and guidelines they are trying to introduce has not yet been written into law, so people are still waiting to see exactly how their statements will translate into policy.

Looking next at the Temporary Protection visas, Hartanto acknowledges that more options were offered to applicants from other conflict zones, such as Ukraine, Hong Kong, and Afghanistan, than to Burmese applicants. He surmises this it might be because of some political reason or other, although it is not exactly clear to him as to what or why.

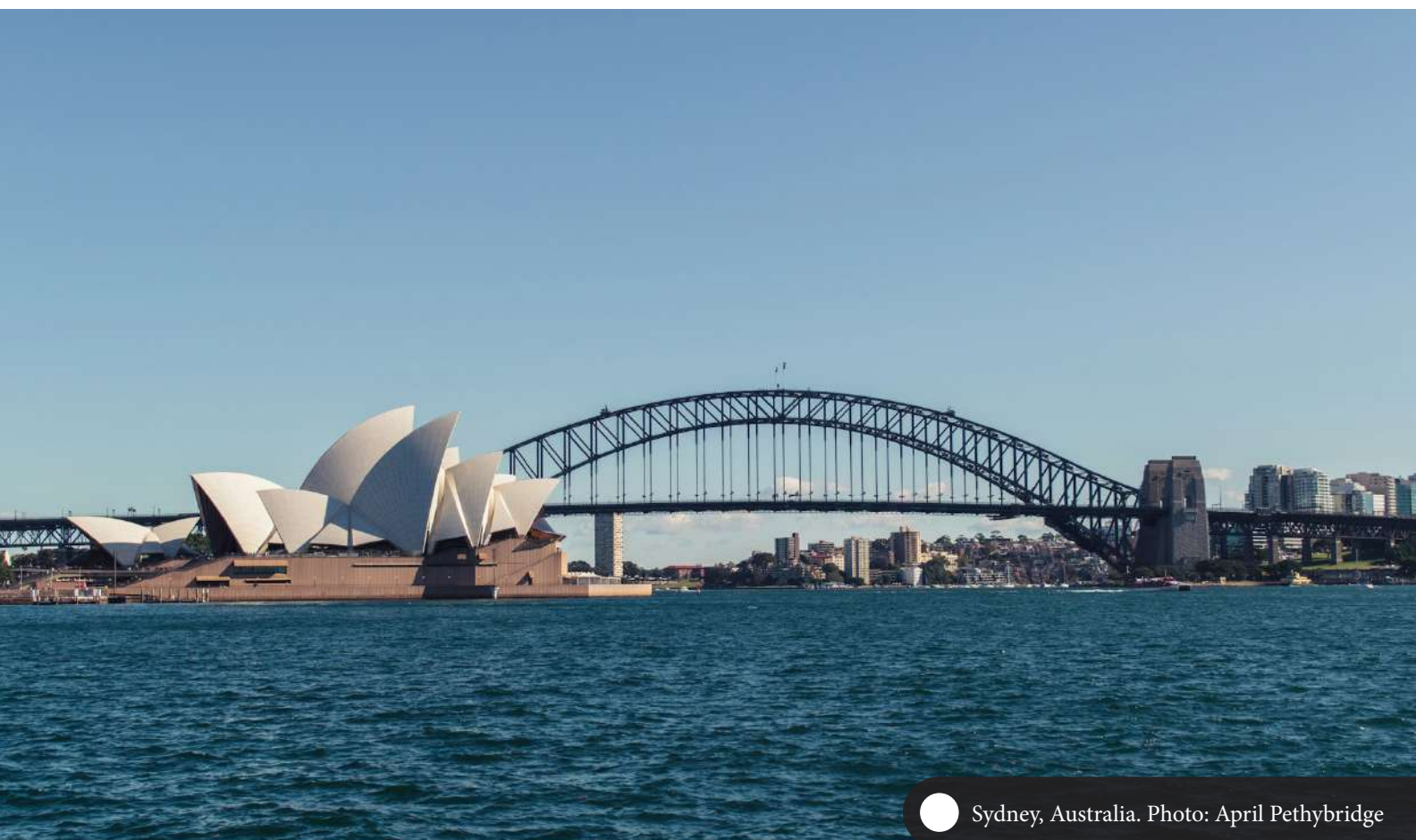
“The main issues that the Australian government is facing is that it’s very hard to say that it’s not politically influenced,” he says. “Because any decision that they make, obviously it goes through a political process. Any special visas or any special pathways that they will introduce for certain nationalities or for certain circumstance, they need to explain it in a Parliament session as to why the ministers do this, and why the ministers do that.”

Yet as frustrating as this can seem, Hartanto believes that it presents a silver lining in the form

of greater activism, which can then impact policy. “As much as we hope, and really want Australian government to do more, they’re limited by the migration program quota [and] all these processes are really driven by the political process,” he says in closing. “I understand and appreciate that the issues of immigration law is never as simple as it seems... My message to listeners is to unite, to keep raising this awareness, keep talking about it, keep sharing experiences amongst others, keep helping each other... As far as we can maintain this movement to get ourselves heard by the authority, by the current government, or by the legislature, then, hopefully one day, we can look back and say that, okay, we’ve tried.”

Check out the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/3/1/episode-222-visa-verses>



Sydney, Australia. Photo: April Pethybridge



# Mizzima TV

Be Different

## FREE TO AIR DIGITAL TV CHANNEL

Proudly broadcast by Mizzima Media Group

