

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Analysis & Insight



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Argentine court  
seeks Myanmar  
junta leader's  
arrest

Sean Turnell  
releases new  
report on the  
economy under  
Myanmar junta

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# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.

# 2025: THE YEAR OF HUNGER IN MYANMAR

For many people displaced by conflict, and those on the bottom rungs of society in Myanmar, 2025 will be a year of hunger.

Myanmar faces one of the world's most complex humanitarian crises, with ongoing conflicts, political instability, and natural disasters exacerbating the plight of displaced populations. Despite urgent needs, delivering humanitarian aid to these vulnerable groups presents numerous challenges, including security risks, government restrictions, logistical difficulties, and funding constraints.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military coup in February 2021, which intensified clashes between the military junta and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), as well as pro-democracy resistance groups. These conflicts have led to the displacement of over two million people, particularly in regions such as Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan, and Karen states. The ongoing violence makes it difficult for aid workers to access affected populations safely. Airstrikes, landmines, and ambushes pose severe threats to both displaced persons and humanitarian personnel.

The ruling military junta has imposed severe restrictions on humanitarian organizations, limiting their ability to operate freely. Bureaucratic hurdles, such as visa denials for aid workers, delays in obtaining permits, and stringent monitoring of NGO activities, hinder timely and effective aid distribution. Additionally, the junta has been accused of obstructing relief efforts for political reasons, prioritizing assistance to pro-military communities while restricting aid to opposition-held areas.

Myanmar's rugged terrain, inadequate infrastructure, and frequent natural disasters further complicate aid delivery. Many displaced communities are located in remote, conflict-affected areas with limited road access. Seasonal monsoons, floods, and landslides often exacerbate transportation difficulties, making it nearly

impossible to reach those in need. The destruction of bridges, roads, and supply chains due to conflict or neglect further restricts movement.

Ethnic minorities, particularly the Rohingya, face systemic discrimination that affects their access to aid. The Rohingya, who are denied citizenship and basic rights, have been subjected to severe restrictions on movement and access to services.

Despite the dire humanitarian situation, funding for aid efforts in Myanmar remains insufficient. Donor fatigue, shifting geopolitical priorities, and sanctions against the military government have affected financial contributions. Many international donors are hesitant to provide direct funding to Myanmar due to concerns that aid may be diverted or manipulated by the junta. Moreover, organizations that rely on cross-border aid from neighboring countries, such as Thailand and India, face increasing restrictions from both Myanmar and regional governments.

The military frequently restricts internet access and telecommunications in conflict zones, making it difficult for humanitarian agencies to coordinate efforts and gather accurate data on displaced populations. These communication blackouts hinder crisis response and complicate logistics for aid distribution.

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar remains dire, with displaced populations facing immense challenges in accessing aid including essential food. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated international pressure on the junta to allow unfettered humanitarian access, increased funding from global donors, and innovative approaches to delivering aid in conflict-affected regions.

Without urgent action, the suffering of displaced persons in Myanmar will continue to worsen, with 2025 proving a particularly bleak year.

## EDITORIAL

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**Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing by AFP**





Photo: AFP

# WANTED!

# ARGENTINE COURT SEEKS MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER'S ARREST

**A**n Argentine court has issued arrest warrants for the head of Myanmar's military junta and former officials including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi over alleged "genocide and crimes against humanity" targeting the Rohingya minority group.

The court ruling was issued in response to a complaint filed in Argentina by a Rohingya advocacy group.

It was filed under the principle of "universal jurisdiction" by which countries can prosecute crimes regardless of where they occurred if, like genocide or war crimes, they are considered sufficiently serious.

Warrants were issued for military and civilian officials including current junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, ex-president Htin Kyaw, and former elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as "state counselor" from 2016 to 2021, when she was ousted in a coup.

In that time, she has been accused by detractors of doing little to stop the abuse of Rohingya. Supporters claim she had little choice, given the strength of the military and influence they have under the military-written 2008 Constitution.

Min Aung Hlaing is also under investigation by the International Criminal Court, while the International Court of Justice - the UN's highest tribunal - is examining a complaint of "genocide" against Myanmar.

The Rohingya, mainly Muslims, are originally from Buddhist-majority Myanmar where, according to Amnesty International, they have been subjected to a regime akin to apartheid.

Beginning in 2017, many have been forced to flee persecution and violence to richer and predominantly Muslim Malaysia, or to refugee camps in Bangladesh, where about a million of them live.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing lies in the sights of the Argentine court. Photo: AFP

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and saw the formation of dozens of People's Defense Forces now battling the junta.

In her ruling issued Thursday, Judge Maria Servini said the allegations listed in the complaint "constitute crimes that violate human rights recognized in various international criminal law instruments, subscribed to by most countries in the world."

They included "internationally known crimes such as genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by the political and military authorities in power in that country," she added.

## 'Historic step'

Argentine courts have in the past opened investigations into crimes in other countries under the principle of "universal jurisdiction," including for acts committed by the Francisco Franco regime in Spain.

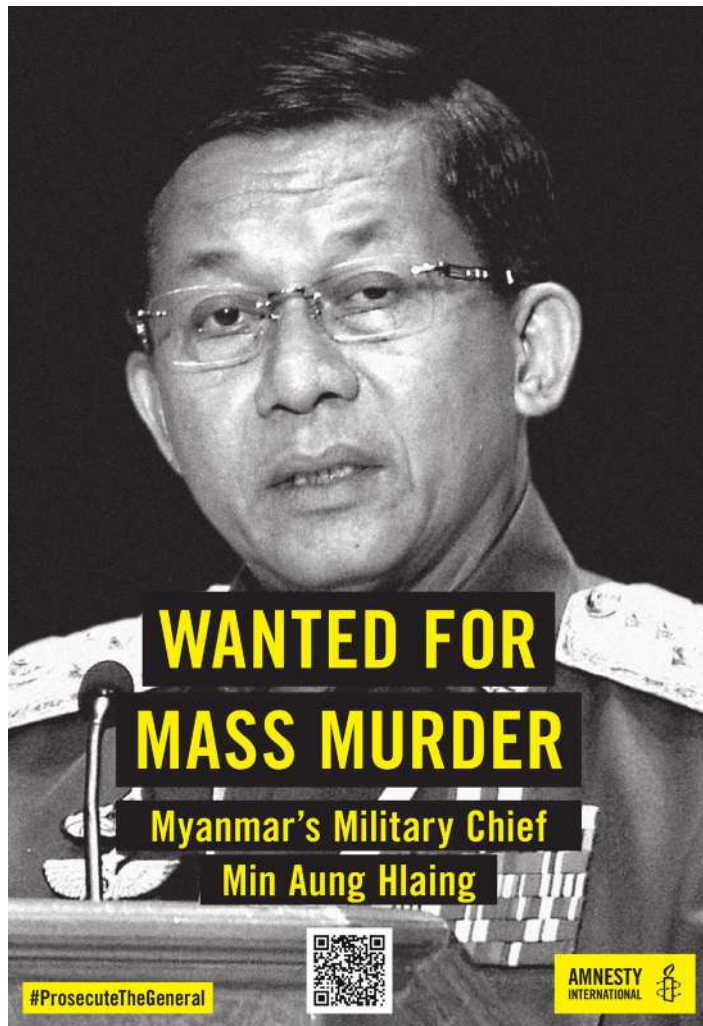
And last December, a judge ordered the arrest of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega for "systematic violation of human rights."

None of the cases have yet resulted in action against a foreign national.

Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, nevertheless welcomed the latest ruling as an "historic step towards justice for Rohingya and everyone in Burma suffering under the Burmese military."

It was "also a victory for international justice at a time of growing violations of international law worldwide," he said in a statement.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, the Rohingya' plaintiffs' lawyer in Argentina, told AFP the next step will be for the ruling to be forwarded to prosecutors, who will take the steps necessary for the notification of Interpol, which issues international warrants.



## Junta hits back

Myanmar's ruling junta criticised the Argentine court on Saturday for issuing the arrest warrant for its top leader.

In response, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said: "Does Argentina know Myanmar? The Myanmar government does not know Argentina."

"We like to suggest Argentina to appoint their needed and vacant judge positions firstly for their domestic judiciary if they want to criticise Myanmar according to the law," he told journalists in a message on Saturday.

Zaw Min Tun's comments appear to reference reports in December that Buenos Aires needed to name 150 judges across all levels of the judiciary.

The call for the arrest of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is seen as a welcome boost for the Myanmar resistance battling to take down the junta and bring democracy to Myanmar.

*Reporting: AFP, Mizzima*



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Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR JUNTA STOPPING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM LEAVING MYANMAR

The Myanmar junta has abruptly stopped issuing the Overseas Workers Identity Card (OWIC) since February 18, forcing many migrant workers to leave the processing centre without the necessary documentation to work abroad, according to overseas employment agencies. While workers who already possess the OWIC may still have a chance to travel, those without it now face uncertainty about their overseas job prospects. The sudden suspension comes after Chit Swe, a former ambassador to Thailand, was appointed as the new Minister of Labour.

At the same time, over 1,000 migrant workers have been denied departure at Yangon International Airport since February 14. All of them, holding PJ-type passports and falling within the conscription age range

of 18 to 35, were turned away without explanation. They not only lost their travel opportunities but also suffered financial losses from their unused airfare.

A source from the Ministry of Labour told Hkit This News Agency that the junta is reconsidering its overseas labour policy, leading to a temporary halt in sending workers abroad. New directives are expected after February 21, as the newly appointed minister takes charge of labour policy adjustments.

The move reflects tightening restrictions on young people leaving Myanmar amid increasing concerns over forced conscription and labour migration controls.



A PDF forces in Sagaing Region. Photo: AFP

## Military junta operations expand in Sagaing and Magway

Myanmar's junta forces, along with pro-junta Pyusawhti militias, have escalated "area-cleansing" operations in Sagaing Region, burning villages and displacing thousands, according to local sources.

In the second week of February, junta columns raided Wetlet and Kantbalu townships, torching nearly 200 homes and forcing more than 10,000 residents to flee. On February 10, around 120 junta soldiers, accompanied by Pyusawhti fighters, stormed Koemyo and Thoboe (Boeboe) villages, setting 80 houses ablaze. This marks the seventh attack on Koemyo and the fourth on Thoboe, leaving both villages nearly destroyed.

Although villagers had advance warning and managed to escape, the forced displacement extended beyond these two villages, affecting residents in at least six neighbouring villages. A People's Defense Force (PDF) fighter told RFA Burmese that the junta is targeting villages under the National Unity Government (NUG) administration, aiming to eliminate resistance strongholds near Pyusawhti-controlled areas.

On February 9, a junta column raided Ywathit village in Wetlet Township, killing one PDF fighter and a civilian before burning all 120 homes in the village. Ywathit is located just one mile from Shamemakar, a Pyusawhti stronghold where around 40 junta troops are stationed.

Meanwhile, PDF fighters successfully overran a junta outpost in Kanparni village, Kalay Township, on February 12. The PDF launched the attack on February 11, targeting a junta base manned by combined junta and Pyusawhti forces. The junta responded with

airstrikes, but the PDF managed to seize control of the base after an intense battle.

The latest developments highlight the ongoing scorched-earth tactics employed by the junta in Myanmar's dry zone, particularly in Sagaing and Magway regions, which remain strongholds of anti-junta resistance.

## What the junta is doing to protect the last junta positions in Sittway and Khyaukphyu

Myanmar's junta has been intensifying its defensive preparations in Sittway and Kyaukphyu, two of the last three major cities under its control in Rakhine State, amid the Arakan Army (AA)'s growing offensive.

Since November 2024, the junta has been reinforcing its positions in Sittway, fencing off coastal areas and preparing defensive outposts. Authorities have reportedly forced homeowners with three- or four-story buildings to allow snipers and troops to use their properties in case of urban combat. Most buildings in Sittway are only one or two stories, making taller structures critical for military operations.

Following the Byaingphyu village massacre, where an estimated 80 villagers were killed, the junta has forcibly relocated over 20 ethnic Rakhine villages from the outskirts of Sittway, citing concerns that the AA might use them as staging grounds. A resident told BBC Burmese that only Rakhine villages were evacuated, while Rohingya villages in the same area remained untouched.

Similarly, residents near the navy headquarters were also forced to relocate, a move believed to be aimed at sealing off potential intelligence leaks

regarding junta troop movements.

The AA has escalated attacks on Sittway, launching artillery strikes on junta headquarters since the first week of February. On February 15, junta airstrikes targeted Minhla village, setting fire to dozens of civilian homes. Another airstrike hit Wabo village, where AA forces were positioned. On February 17, the AA resumed its artillery attacks on junta bases in Sittway. Skirmishes have been occurring on the outskirts of the city since late January.

The junta is also reinforcing its defenses in Kyaukphyu, home to both a navy headquarters and China's deep-sea port project, a site of strategic and economic importance. In early December, troops from Sittway were transferred to Kyaukphyu, where security measures had already been heightened since November 2024.

By late January, security forces from the No. 34 Military Regiment and the No. 34 Reserved Police Battalion intensified civilians checks and reinforced defensive positions at the city's entrances. On the maritime front, more than seven navy vessels have been patrolling along the river encircling the city, increasing patrols.

Junta troops stationed at the navy headquarters have also been setting up hidden outposts in nearby villages. In one such incident, a civilian was shot and killed by junta forces.

As security restrictions tighten, AA forces are encircling Kyaukphyu, preparing for a potential assault on the city. With the AA's steady advance across Rakhine State, Sittway and Kyaukphyu remain the junta's last major strongholds in the region.

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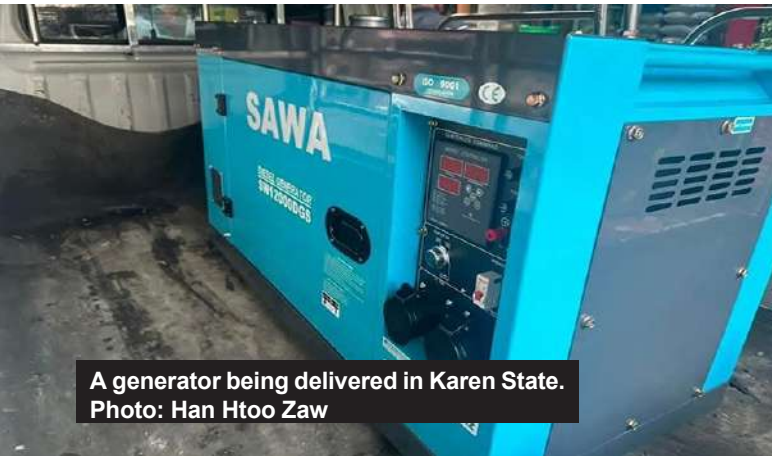
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A generator being delivered in Karen State.  
Photo: Han Htoo Zaw

# THAILAND CUTS ELECTRICITY AND FUEL SUPPLY TO MYANMAR BORDER TOWNS, SPARKING CRISIS

**MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

**HAN HTOO ZAW**

In an effort to curb online scam operations near the Thailand-Myanmar border, the Thai government halted electricity and fuel exports to key areas starting 5 February. This move has significantly impacted towns such as Payathonzu in Karen State, Myawaddy in Kayin State, and Tachilek in eastern Shan State.

Several Myanmar-based companies, which previously relied on Thai power, have been affected by the decision. These include Mya Pan Investment Company in Payathonzu, Allure Group (P&E) in Mongton-Tachilek, and Nyi Naung Oo Co., Ltd. & Enova Grid Enterprise (Myanmar) Co., Ltd., which powered the area at Myawaddy's Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 2.

Among the companies affected by Thailand's decision is Shwe Myint Thaug Yinn Industry & Manufacturing, another key supplier. The company, owned by Major Saw Tin Win of BGF Battalion 2 and his wife Nan Myint Myint Win, was responsible for importing electricity and fuel from Thailand. A Justice for Myanmar report from May 2024 alleged that Shwe Myint Thaug Yinn company supplied power to scam centres and online casinos in Myawaddy Township.

In addition to its electricity supply contracts, Shwe Myint Thaug Yinn company has secured fuel import rights and operates fuel stations in Myawaddy and Hpa-An.

"Major Saw Tin Win is a wealthy man. He will find a way to continue supplying fuel to Chinese scam centres. Fuel trucks have already started entering the sites," said a source close to the BGF.

While Thailand justified the power cut by citing online scam activities across the border, sources report that these illicit operations have not ceased. Instead, scam centres continue to function using alternative energy sources.

## Myawaddy Scam Centres Power Up

Despite the Thai government's crackdown, scam centres near the border remain operational. According to a former security guard from KK Park, these facilities primarily rely on diesel generators and solar panels.

"Since 2022, they started using diesel generators for operations. By 2023, many sites switched to solar panels, depending on the scale of their activities. Large scam centres use a combination of high-capacity solar panels and multiple diesel generators—typically two or three per site," said a 27-year-old former security guard from KK Park.

In June 2023, Thailand previously cut electricity to Shwe Kokko and KK Park, yet illicit operations continued using over 100 diesel generators within the scam compounds.

Reports indicate that Myawaddy-based scam centres use 200 KV, 400 KV, and even 800 KV generators, along with extensive solar power installations.

"In the daytime, they rely on solar panels. After 5 PM, they switch to diesel generators until 4 AM. Some sites use generators exclusively, running them in shifts throughout the night," said an employee of the Yatai Company in Shwe Kokko.

Casinos, private KTVs, restaurants, and beauty salons in these areas also use generators and solar systems to maintain business operations.

Despite Thailand cutting off electricity, Chinese-operated sites in areas such as KK Park, Shwe Kokko, Wankha, 100 Acres, Apollo, AA Park, and UK continue to function as usual. When Mizzima inquired about their power sources, BGF spokesperson Lt. Col. Nai Maung Zaw provided the following response.

"For the past six months, we have faced electricity shortages in Shwe Kokko. Most sites are now using solar power and generators. If fuel runs out, everything will come to a halt," said BGF spokesperson Lt. Col. Nai Maung Zaw.

On 29 October 2024, the European Union imposed sanctions on Major Saw Tin Win, along with BGF leader Colonel Saw Chit Thu, Major Saw Mote Thon, and Saw Min Min Oo, a director of Chit Lin Myaing Company. The sanctions were based on their involvement in online scams, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and

transnational crimes, as well as serious human rights violations.

On the day Thailand cut power, online scam site operators in Karen State scrambled to purchase alternative energy supplies. According to local sources, they bought large quantities of solar panels, power banks, and generators from Tainhlwarwin Industrial Mall.

## Cuts Bite Locals in Payathonzu and Myawaddy

Eyewitnesses reported that since November 2024, diesel generators have been smuggled from Thailand to Chinese-run scam centres in Payathonzu.

"For more than three months, unmarked trucks have been delivering generators to scam sites in Payathonzu. This was planned in advance," said a Payathonzu resident.

The electricity and fuel import cuts have made daily life even more challenging for local residents.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) has assured locals that efforts are underway to restore Thai electricity and fuel imports by proving that online scam centres are no longer active in Payathonzu.

The Thai government's decision has severely affected residents of Myawaddy, where power shortages have already persisted for nearly two years.

In December 2023, fighting along the Asia Highway and in Thingannyinaung Town damaged a power substation, leaving much of Myawaddy without electricity. Emergency Thai power was reserved for government offices, hospitals, and administrative buildings, with only limited supply reaching residential areas.

"Electricity is not the main issue but fuel is. Myawaddy has relied on generators and solar power for a long time. But now, with fuel shortages, people are struggling," said a Myawaddy resident.

On 5 February, as news of the fuel ban spread, residents rushed to fuel stations. Some stations were forced to halt sales due to high demand.

"If public hospitals lose electricity, it will be disastrous. The Myawaddy Foundation, which donates oxygen to the hospital, has had to stop. Without power, we can't supply oxygen to patients. This is a devastating situation," said BGF spokesperson Lt. Col. Nai Maung Zaw.

Payathonzu is facing similar challenges. Thailand has banned not only electricity and fuel imports but also high-capacity power banks and solar panels exceeding 20,000 watts.

"People are trying to buy solar generators from other routes. But even if they get generators, where will they get the fuel? Thai border gates are under strict inspection, making it very difficult to transport fuel," said a resident of Payathonzu.

## Thai parliament discussed power cut decision

On 20 January, the Myanmar junta claimed that online scam centres in Shwe Kokko and KK Park relied on electricity and internet from Thailand. However, Thai authorities dismissed the allegation.

Following discussions in the Thai parliament, the government decided to cut off electricity and fuel imports. According to Thai PBS World, Thailand could lose up to 600 million baht annually due to this decision, as electricity exports to Myanmar were a significant source of revenue.

While Thailand's move to cut electricity and fuel imports was aimed at dismantling online scam operations, the illicit industry has quickly adapted by increasing reliance on alternative power sources. However, the decision has had severe unintended consequences for local residents, worsening fuel shortages and disrupting essential services. As authorities on both sides of the border navigate this crisis, the long-term impact remains uncertain.



A casino in Karen State. Photo: Han Htoo Zaw  
KK Park. Photo: Han Htoo Zaw





Photo: Supplied

## DKBA ORDERS CHINESE NATIONALS RUNNING ONLINE SCAM CENTRES IN PAYATHONZU TO LEAVE TOWN

The No. 2 Tactical Command of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) issued a statement on 9 February, ordering Chinese nationals operating online scam centres in Payathonzu, a town in Karen State near the Thai border, to leave by 28 February.

According to the DKBA, residents of Payathonzu are facing economic hardship after the Thai government cut off fuel and electricity supplies in an effort to crack down on online fraud operations.

To alleviate the impact on locals and prevent scam centres from taking root in the town, the DKBA's statement instructed Chinese nationals who have illegally entered Payathonzu and are involved in food sales, casino operations, and illegal gaming businesses to leave by the deadline.

"Effective action will be taken if they do not comply," the statement warned.

The DKBA also pledged to take measures to prevent further illegal entry of Chinese nationals into the area.

Additionally, the DKBA assured residents that it is working to regain Thailand's trust by proving that online scam centres are no longer operating in Payathonzu, with the ultimate goal of restoring fuel and electricity supplies from Thailand as soon as possible.

Beyond the power outage, locals are also struggling with a severe fuel shortage. Sources indicate that fuel is now being smuggled from Thailand through illegal routes, driving up prices.

Residents of Myawaddy and Shwe Kokko are reportedly facing similar difficulties.





Photo: AFP

## OVER 250 PEOPLE HELD AT MYANMAR SCAM CENTRE RELEASED AT THAI BORDER

**M**ore than 250 people rescued from online scam centres in Myanmar were handed over to Thailand on Wednesday, a senior Thai army official said, following a series of crackdowns on the illegal operations.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars.

The group released on Wednesday had been working at a scam centre in Kyauk Khet, a village in Kayin state along the Thai-Myanmar border, according to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a Myanmar insurgent group that controls the area.

After being taken by boat across a small border river, they were dropped off in Phop Phra, about 30 kilometres (19 miles) south of Mae Sot on the Thai side of the border, an AFP journalist saw.

"There are currently 261 (people), but the final number is yet to be confirmed," said Natthakorn Rueantip, an army commander in Mae Sot.

Cyberscam compounds often lure people from the region with promises of high-paying jobs but then effectively hold them hostage and force them to commit online fraud.

In an effort to curb the illicit enterprises -- which have also been linked to drug smuggling and gambling -- authorities and militia groups in Myanmar and

Thailand have made a show of raiding the centres before releasing and repatriating the foreigners inside.

Thai officials said the Kyauk Khet centre first appeared on the other side of the Moei River in 2019 and is still under construction.

A Thai border official said that the compound is run by Chinese nationals but that the workers were smuggled in from all over the world.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, added that the compounds are now running on generators since Thailand cut off electricity and fuel supplies starting last week.

In contrast to Kyauk Khet, Shwe Kokko, one of the most notorious scam compounds almost 50 kilometres to the north on the Myanmar side, is a gleaming built-up city.

Security has been tightened in the area, with several Thai military checkpoints and signs warning of Thais and foreigners being "deceived" into working illegally online.

The proliferation of so-called "scam cities" has caused a storm on Chinese social media, with netizens calling Thailand a "dangerous place".

Last week, Chinese and Thai media reported that 61 people, including 39 from China, were released from a Myanmar scam compound and handed over to Thai authorities.



Photo: Mizzima

## FUEL SHORTAGES IN MYAWADDY LEAD TO MORE BORDER CROSSINGS AND BLACK-MARKET SALES

**A**s major fuel stations in Myawaddy Township, Karen State, continue to limit fuel sales per vehicle, many residents are crossing the border into Mae Sot, Thailand, to purchase fuel, according to local sources.

Since 7 February, fuel stations in Myawaddy have reportedly been selling only 30,000 Myanmar kyats' worth of fuel per vehicle. Some larger stations operate only during specific hours, while smaller stations have shut down completely due to a lack of fuel supply.

"Fuel stations sell around 30,000 kyats per vehicle using a waiting system. Sales are conducted at designated times, and when fuel runs out, purchases stop. Unfuelled cars are left parked. Many licensed vehicles are crossing into Mae Sot, Thailand, to buy fuel," said a Myawaddy resident.

A black market for smuggled fuel has also emerged, where fuel is sold by the barrel. A barrel of fuel, containing over 200 litres, is reportedly priced at approximately 2,350,000 kyats (18,000 Thai Baht), according to residents.

"I noticed that fuel is available at PTT stations every day, but the crowd is so large that it's difficult to even

pass through the area," a resident said.

On the morning of 10 February, a long line of vehicles was seen waiting at the No. 1 Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge to cross into Mae Sot for fuel.

Reports indicate that some vehicles from Myawaddy crossed the border two or three times per day until 9 February. However, local news agency Myawaddy-Mae Sot Media reported that authorities have now imposed a restriction allowing only one border crossing per vehicle.

Citing official border records, Myawaddy-Mae Sot Media reported that on 9 February alone, approximately 1,200 vehicles crossed into Mae Sot to purchase fuel.

"In recent weeks, fewer vehicles were making the trip. But on 9 and 10 February, there was a significant increase in the number of vehicles lining up to cross into Mae Sot," said a Myanmar national who had returned to Myawaddy after renewing his border permit on the morning of 10 February.

Meanwhile, Thai authorities have intensified efforts to curb illegal fuel transportation from Thailand's Tak Province into Myanmar.

On 9 February, the Thai military seized 26,021 litres of petrol and 114,837 litres of diesel being transported by a pickup truck at a military checkpoint in Mae Lamao, Tak province. Additionally, on the evening of 8 February, Thai authorities confiscated 600 litres of fuel intended for transport to Myanmar via Phop Phra Township.

Further, on the evening of 9 February, Thai officials in Kanchanaburi province seized a Toyota vehicle carrying 290 litres of diesel that was enroute to Myanmar near Payathonzu, another border town where Thailand has recently cut off fuel and electricity supplies.

On 7 February, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Phumtham Wechayachai, announced that Thailand would suspend fuel exports to Tachilek, Myawaddy, and Payathonzu for six months.

Similarly, on 8 February, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra told local media that Thailand must prioritize its own national interests, adding that she expects Myanmar to take similar measures for its people.

Since 5 February, Thailand has cut off electricity supplies to Myawaddy, Payathonzu, and Tachilek, citing concerns that online scam centres operating in Myanmar were relying on Thailand's power grid.



# LAOS TO RESTRICT ELECTRICITY SUPPLY TO MYANMAR'S TACHILEK OVER ONLINE SCAM OPERATIONS

The Lao government announced on 7 February that it will limit the electricity supply to Tachilek Township in Shan State, located near the Thailand-Laos-Myanmar border, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Laos' Minister of Energy and Minerals, Phoxay Sayasone, stated during a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Laos, Fang Hong, that the country would prioritize providing electricity for its own citizens' daily needs. He emphasized that the power supply would be restricted for activities linked to criminal activities, such as online fraud operations.

The announcement follows Thailand's decision on 5 February to cut off electricity and fuel supplies to five areas, including Tachilek and Myawaddy, due to their alleged involvement in illicit activities such as the Kyar Phyant online scam networks. With Thailand's restrictions in place, Tachilek had been relying on electricity from Laos, prompting this latest decision by the Lao government.

Chinese Ambassador Fang Hong reaffirmed China's commitment to combating transnational cybercrime, stating that regional countries share a common interest in addressing such threats.

He also emphasized China's ongoing cooperation with Laos and other nations to strengthen law enforcement and security efforts.

In early January, Kyar Phyant scam syndicates operating in Myawaddy district were linked to the trafficking of high-profile individuals, including Chinese actor Wang Xing. This incident has drawn significant international attention to cyber fraud activities along the Thai-Myanmar border, leading to intensified crackdowns.

Additionally, the Chinese embassy announced on 21 January that China, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam would jointly launch the second phase of Joint Operation Zinyaw to combat online fraud, organized crime, and arms smuggling in the region.



Colonel Saw Chit Thu

## PROSECUTORS DECIDE EVIDENCE INSUFFICIENT FOR ARREST WARRANTS FOR 3 BGF LEADERS

The Nation Thailand reported on 12 February that the Thai Department of Special investigations (DSI)'s request for arrest warrants for Colonel Saw Chit Thu, Major Mot Thone, and Major Tin Win have been rejected by human trafficking prosecutors due to insufficient evidence. The three men are leaders of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) based in Myawaddy.

Earlier this week, Pol Lt-Col Surawut Rang sai, Deputy Director-General of the DSI, and his team met with Sakda Klairomsai, Special Prosecutor of the Office of Human Trafficking Cases 1, to discuss submitting a request for arrest warrants for these suspects in connection with human trafficking linked to call-center operations.

Subsequently, the case prosecutors investigating human trafficking in border areas held initial discussions and found that the evidence was not yet sufficient for the court to issue arrest warrants. The Thai prosecutors have decided to gather more evidence.

The Nation Thailand also reported that the prosecutors advised the DSI to conduct more investigations and gather more evidence before submitting the case again to the court for the issuance of arrest warrants.



## 56 CRYPTO SCAMMERS ARRESTED IN CAMBODIA, VIETNAM: STATE MEDIA

Nearly 60 people working in a crypto fraud ring that stole millions of dollars from Vietnamese nationals have been arrested in Cambodia and Vietnam, Vietnamese state media said Thursday, citing police.

Online scam operations have ballooned in Southeast Asia in recent years, with transnational criminal organisations often trafficking and forcing thousands of people to swindle their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars annually.

Cyberscam rings often lure people from the region with promises of high-paying jobs but then effectively hold them hostage and force them to commit online fraud.

The busted fraud ring targeting Vietnamese was allegedly enticing them to invest in the cryptocurrency Bitcoin through a mobile app and then pocketing their money, People's Police newspaper quoted police in central Ha Tinh province as saying.

Vietnamese authorities arrested 26 people when they entered the country via airports in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city, while 30 others were taken into custody in neighbouring Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh.

The date of the arrests and nationalities of those arrested were not given.

According to police, the Chinese-run ring was managed by a 29-year-old Vietnamese national and had organised fraud operations based in Manila between late 2023 and the beginning of 2024.

They had created fake Facebook accounts, luring victims to download an app and invest a minimum of eight million dong (\$315) in Bitcoin, promising high profits in a short period.

As fraud victims began investing larger sums, the gang used the excuse of system errors, taxes or insurance fees to ask for more money, and then blocked communications and kept all the money.

The scammers had "constantly changed their workplaces and residences to avoid detection by authorities", police said.

At the end of 2024, the scammers had relocated to Phnom Penh where their offices were later raided by authorities.

The ring allegedly defrauded thousands of Vietnamese people, stealing millions of dollars, according to police.

AFP



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES ON MONYWA VILLAGES KILL SEVEN CIVILIANS, INCLUDING CHILDREN

**M**yanmar's military conducted airstrikes and artillery shelling on Nyaung Phyu Pin and Bu Ba villages in the southern part of Monywa Township, Sagaing Region, on the night of 12 February, killing seven civilians, including two 10-year-old children, according to local sources.

A junta-operated Y-12 aircraft reportedly dropped bombs on the villages nearly 30 times starting at around 11:00 pm.

"The airstrikes continued throughout the night despite no clashes occurring in the area. Four adults and two children were among the dead, while several others sustained injuries. Villagers fled with nothing," a local woman said.

Six of the victims were from Nyaung Phyu Pin village, while another woman from Bu Ba village was killed by an artillery shell fired from Ma-U gate near Monywa's outskirts. Ten others were also wounded, according to an officer from No.3 southern part of Monywa.

Following the airstrikes and artillery fire, junta forces, reportedly dressed in Kachin Independence Army (KIA) uniforms, advanced toward Bu Ba village, located about six miles from Monywa. Sources from the local People's Defence Forces (PDFs) claimed that the troops, disguised in attire commonly worn by PDFs, are now stationed at a monastery in Bu Ba village.

"The junta troops are advancing in military uniforms often worn by PDFs. They are currently stationed within a monastery in Bu Ba village," said local sources.

About 1,000 locals from the villages in the southern section of Monywa, including Nyaung Phyu Pin, Lae Taw, and Chan Thar Kyun, were forced to leave their homes as a result of the junta's airstrikes and artillery fire.

On the same day, two more civilians were killed in Chaung-U Township, adjacent to Monywa, after the junta's Y-12 aircraft bombed Shan Htoo village.



Photo: AFP

## JUNTA LEADER ACCUSES FOREIGN COUNTRIES ON UNION DAY OF WORSENING MYANMAR'S INTERNAL CONFLICTS

**D**uring a message delivered at the 78th Union Day ceremony in Naypyidaw on 12 February, Myanmar's junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, accused certain foreign nations of deliberately exacerbating the country's internal conflicts, pushing them toward a regional crisis.

Vice Senior General Soe Win read out the junta leader's statement at the event.

The junta leader made reference to "some foreign countries" in the message, although he did not identify which countries he was referring to. He warned that if Myanmar's national unity collapses, external powers could exploit the situation under the guise of neocolonialism. He emphasized that ensuring the country's stability and survival requires collective efforts between the junta and the people.

He further claimed that the military regime remains open to peace and insists that political conflicts should be addressed through dialogue rather than confrontation.

The junta has suffered heavy military and territorial losses in the ongoing conflicts with the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations since the military takeover and junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has previously criticised foreign nations in his speeches for helping them.

In a message sent to the ceremony to mark Karenni State Day on 15 January, he similarly accused external forces of fuelling unrest in the country.



Photo: AFP

## **NUG URGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NOT TO RECOGNIZE MILITARY JUNTA'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**O**n 13 February, the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement declaring its non-recognition of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, which was established by the military junta. The NUG also urged the international community not to recognize, engage with, or invite the commission to any meetings.

The Statement is as follows.

The National Human Rights Commission of Myanmar, established by the terrorist military council after unlawfully seizing state power, is neither an independent nor credible institution. It does not align with the Paris Principles and operates solely in accordance with the terrorist military council's interests. Furthermore, the Commission has failed to stand with or advocate for the people suffering from human rights violations, choosing instead to remain silent on the military council's international crimes.

The newly reconstituted National Human Rights Commission of Myanmar on January 31, 2025, consists largely of former members who had previously acted in line with the military council's directives. As such, it is not an independent or impartial body. The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) has also determined that the Commission does not meet the Paris Principles and, as a result, officially revoked Myanmar Commission's membership and recognition on December 31, 2024.

In light of this, the National Unity Government (NUG) does not recognize and hereby dissolves the military council's National Human Rights Commission of Myanmar.

The NUG urges international governments and organizations not to recognize, engage with, or invite the terrorist military council's Commission to meetings or discussions.

*National Unity Government*





Photo: Mizzima

## SUSPECT WHO SET THREE PEOPLE ON FIRE IN YANGON'S DAWBON TOWNSHIP REMAINS AT LARGE

A suspect who doused three people with gasoline and set them on fire in Dawbon Township, Yangon Region, including a 100-household administrator conducting a voter registration census, is still at large, according to local residents.

The attack took place on the afternoon of 12 February on Dhamma Yeikthar Street in Kyisu Ward. The victims, a 100-household administrator, a ten-household administrator, and a woman, were reportedly conducting a voter registration census when they were targeted.

"The attacker mistakenly believed they were collecting data for military conscription. He came down from an apartment, poured gasoline on them, and set them on fire before fleeing," a local witness said.

The male 100-household administrator suffered the most severe burns, while the female ten-household administrator and the other woman also sustained burn injuries.

"Neighbours tried to put out the flames, but the

100-household administrator was already engulfed," the witness said.

The suspect, described as a middle-aged man, remains on the run, according to reports from local sources.

"A young woman lived in the attacker's house. Although the administrators were conducting voter registration, it appeared they were also collecting data for military conscription, which may have triggered the attack. The suspect has not been caught yet," a Dawbon Township resident said.

Residents across Yangon have reported that the military junta has intensified census efforts in preparation for the 2025 elections as well as military conscription.

While urban guerrilla forces frequently target administrators collaborating with the junta, this marks the first known case of an individual civilian attacking officials conducting voter registration.



Photo: AFP

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On the same day, two more civilians were killed in Chaung-U Township, adjacent to Monywa, after the junta's Y-12 aircraft bombed Shan Htoo village.



# CRPH CALLS FOR FEDERAL DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR ON 78TH ANNIVERSARY OF PANGLONG AGREEMENT

The Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) reaffirmed its commitment to federalism and the fight against military dictatorship on the 78th anniversary of the Panglong Agreement, observed on 12 February.

“There was never a genuine union under military rule and its political systems,” said U Sithu Maung, CRPH spokesperson, emphasizing that the promises made at the Panglong Conference were never done.

U Sithu Maung highlighted that the failure to implement the Panglong Agreement has resulted in over 70 years of civil war, with ethnic communities continuing to endure hardships under military rule.

He stated that the Spring Revolution is based on a bottom-up federalism approach, where strength originates from federal units and extends to the union to establish a new nation.

On the anniversary, CRPH issued a formal letter stressing that military dictatorship must be dismantled through mutual understanding, trust, and coordination among revolutionary forces. The group also reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening unity with ethnic groups.

The CRPH’s statement declared that once the struggle against dictatorship is won, a federal democratic system will be established, ensuring enhanced military and political cooperation.

Union Day, observed annually on 12 February in Myanmar, commemorates the historic Panglong Agreement of 1947, when General Aung San and some ethnic leaders pledged to unite in the fight for independence from British colonial rule.



## IEC TO IMPLEMENT INTERSTATE PASS CARDS FOR SECURITY AND OVERSIGHT IN KARENNI STATE

The Interim Executive Council (IEC) of Karenni State has announced plans to introduce interstate pass cards aimed at improving security for both local residents and visitors entering the state for work or travel.

As part of the initiative, personal data from visitors will be collected to ensure proper identification.

"There are various reasons why people travel in and out of Karenni State. This system is designed to facilitate secure and organized movement while ensuring peace and stability for residents. However, we are not imposing any restrictions," said U Banyar Khun Aung, Secretary of the IEC.

According to the Karenni State's Immigration Department, non-residents will be required to apply for the card, which must be returned upon departure. Individuals from other states without an interstate pass card will not be allowed to pass through Karenni State. The card is non-transferable and must be presented to officials during inspections.

Additionally, the IEC is working on issuing work permits under different categories for those residing and working in the state.

In 2024, the IEC launched a data collection process across five townships and intends to extend it to the remaining townships by March. Once completed, the interstate pass cards will be distributed to non-

residents, including foreign nationals residing in Karenni.

"There will be multiple types of permits, such as residence permits, work permits, business permits, media permits, and humanitarian permits. Details on these will be shared gradually," U Banyar Khun Aung said.

The implementation process remains under discussion, and official announcements will be issued by the relevant township immigration departments in due course.

According to the IEC's 2024 annual report, released on 10 February, the Immigration Department oversees population movement, investigates unauthorized entries and exits, monitors foreign nationals per legal requirements, and conducts population censuses.

Currently, border checkpoints at entry points connecting Karenni State with Thailand, Karen State, Naypyidaw Union Territory, and Shan State are operational to collect travellers' basic information, according to local sources.

Meanwhile, the Karenni revolutionary joint forces maintain control over Mese, Shadaw, Mawchi, Demoso, Nan Mae Khon, Ywathit, and Moebye townships. However, clashes continue as the junta attempts to reclaim Moebye.

# NEARLY 2,000 IDPS IN MYANMAR'S BANMAUK TOWNSHIP IN URGENT NEED OF HUMANITARIAN AID



Photo: Supplied

Nearly 2,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Banmauk Township, Katha District, Sagaing Region, require immediate humanitarian assistance after fleeing ongoing clashes and junta airstrikes, local sources report.

Fighting has persisted in the western part of Banmauk Township since 27 January between the junta-backed Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) and the People's Defence Forces (PDF), keeping the situation tense.

Amid the conflict, airstrike warnings have been issued, forcing residents in affected areas to flee.

According to Banmauk Revolution (BR), 418 households totalling 1,945 individuals, have been displaced since early 2023, and are seeking refuge in areas controlled by revolutionary forces.

"There are long-term displaced persons, and the recent fighting has only increased their numbers," said a local source.

In recent days, 243 more households from Kyaung Le and Ping Kha villages have also been forced to flee, adding to the growing number of IDPs in urgent need of aid, BR reported.

Currently, only non-CDM government employees and a few residents remain in Banmauk town, as most of the population has sought safety in liberated areas.

The rising number of displaced persons has led to critical shortages of drinking water and shelter, according to BR's latest statement.

"By the end of winter and into the summer transition, the western part of Banmauk faces water shortages, making it difficult for IDPs to access drinking water. Many are suffering from cholera outbreaks and struggling with a lack of shelter and food," a BR member said.

Since March 2023, residents in villages near Banmauk Township have been continuously displaced due to ongoing clashes between junta forces, SNA troops, and joint defence forces.

## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON LOCAL VILLAGE KILLS ONE, INJURES ANOTHER IN SAGAING REGION

The Myanmar junta conducted an airstrike using parachute bombs on Nat La Port (North) village in the southeastern part of Kani Township, Sagaing Region, despite no ongoing fighting in the area. The attack resulted in the death of one man and left a woman severely injured, according to local sources.

Around midnight on 10 February, the junta dropped two 120-mm mortar shells used as bombs.

"They directly targeted the house with parachute bombs. I heard two explosions. The sound of the machine [aircraft] was very loud at night, but I couldn't see clearly," said a local man.

The bomb blast killed a 45-year-old man instantly, while a woman sustained serious injuries and is currently receiving medical treatment, according to the local People's Administration.

Nat La Port (North) village, located approximately 10 miles from the Northwestern Regional Military Headquarters, has frequently been subjected to artillery shelling and drone bombings by the junta. In late 2023, junta troops raided the village and set fire to about 100 houses, locals reported.

In 2024, the People's Defence Forces (PDF) of Yinmabin District reported that the junta launched 127 airstrikes using jet fighters and Mi-35 attack helicopters across four townships in Yinmabin District. These airstrikes dropped over 700 bombs, resulting in civilian casualties.

Residents of villages near the Northwestern Regional Military Command have been urged to build bomb shelters for protection.

## MORE REFUGEES RISK DANGEROUS SEA JOURNEYS FROM MYANMAR AS CRISIS WORSENS

Photo: AFP



On 11 February, the UNHCR released a press statement indicating that the intense conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State has further aggravated the situation for the Rohingya, a persecuted and stateless Muslim minority, leading to an increasing number of individuals fleeing by boat.

The following is the text of the UNHCR press release.

Since the boat he was travelling on reached a beach in East Aceh, Indonesia, a month ago, Ali, 30, has been staying at a crowded site with some 380 other stateless Rohingya refugees who risked similar sea journeys in recent months.

He is worried about his parents and siblings, who remain in the camp for internally displaced people in Myanmar's western Rakhine State where he spent the last 13 years. Life there was never easy, but since late 2023, residents of the camp and communities throughout Rakhine State have been paying a heavy price amid a resurgence of conflict.

Hundreds of civilians have been killed by indiscriminate shelling, aerial bombardments and landmines, while others have been forcibly recruited, displaced or cut off from their livelihoods and essential

goods and services, including health care, food and clean water.

The conflict has also severely restricted the amount of humanitarian aid that UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and other humanitarian organizations have been able to deliver to camps for displaced Rohingya like the one where Ali was living. Humanitarian access to parts of Rakhine State has been challenging since the conflict reignited in November 2023, although some assistance is still provided by local partners and volunteers.

### Two weeks at sea

The Rohingya have long faced violence and discrimination in Myanmar, but the current conflict has re-kindled long-simmering tensions between Rohingya and Rakhine communities. Leaving the camp to look for work or food became highly risky, says Ali. "Sometimes we would go to the beach to catch fish to earn money ... but they would catch us and put us in jail or even kill us. We had no access to work for a while, and life was tough. There were no opportunities to earn a living."

When he heard that other people in the camp were planning to escape by boat, he decided to join them, together with his wife and two children, and his

younger brother.

The journey took two weeks. "Many of us were very sick on the boat, vomiting, and having various health problems," he says, noting that of the 125 people on board, 35 were children. "After 10 days, we ran out of food and water."

The boat reached Malaysia's coastline just as it ran out of supplies, but Ali reports that the Malaysian Navy stopped them coming ashore and pushed the boat back out to sea. When they tried to approach Thailand, they were blocked again.

The boat finally reached the coast of Indonesia's Aceh Province on 5 January. Ali and the other passengers waded ashore and sat on the beach until they were discovered by some local people who contacted the authorities.

"I would never recommend anyone to take the boat journey here," he says now. "I faced many difficulties I could not have imagined."

## Shifting routes

Despite the risks, increasing numbers of Rohingya are making similar journeys. Last year, more than 7,800 attempted to flee Myanmar by boat – an 80 per cent increase compared to 2023 – of which over 650 died or went missing. A further 700 have taken boats since the start of this year.

While in 2023 the majority of boats departed from Bangladesh, which hosts over 1 million Rohingya refugees in camps in Cox's Bazar, since last year most boats have been leaving directly from Myanmar.

As well as heading out to sea towards Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and even Sri Lanka, in the past year thousands of Rohingya have also tried to cross the Naf River to reach safety in Bangladesh. Among them was 19-year-old Sadeqa Bibi and her 2-year-old son. Until 2024, she and her husband had been leading what she described as "a normal life" in a village near the town of Maungdaw in Rakhine. But food prices began to rise and become unaffordable and on 17 June, as they prepared to cook meat for the Eid al-Adha meal, bombs began to rain down on their village. They fled to Maungdaw, where they spent the night, but the following morning a bomb struck the wall of the house where they were staying, killing Sadeqa's husband and severing her brother's hand.

Sadeqa and her son, along with her parents and younger siblings, managed to secure passage on a boat crossing the Naf River. "There were many people on the river; more than 50 were in a single boat," she recalled. "Among them, around 10 were either dead or

near death from gunshot wounds ... After enduring a full day and night of hunger, we finally reached land the following evening."

After reaching Bangladesh, Sadeqa and her family stayed with relatives living in one of the camps who shared with them the little they had. They soon decided they had no choice but to leave and boarded a boat that spent weeks at sea. Without enough food or water, they resorted to drinking seawater to survive and three people died. By the time the boat reached the coast of South Aceh on 18 October, many of the remaining 151 people on board were seriously ill. It took several days of advocacy efforts by UNHCR and its partners before Sadeqa and the other passengers were finally allowed ashore. Despite their initial opposition, the local community donated food, water and clothing to the refugees.

"Having spent days on the water, we were constantly praying to Allah, asking when we would be able to set foot on land," said Sadeqa. "When [they] rescued us and brought us to shore, we were incredibly grateful."

## Longing for a brighter future

UNHCR is working with the local government and the International Organization for Migration to manage seven temporary sites in Aceh and North Sumatra where Rohingya refugees have been staying since arriving by boat. Only two of them in Aceh have been designated by the government as formal sites with adequate conditions. UNHCR is providing food through a local partner organization as well as security, counselling and other services to support the refugees.

With the calmer waters between monsoon seasons and the situation in Myanmar continuing to deteriorate, more Rohingya are expected to risk such journeys in the coming weeks. UNHCR has called on States in the region to prioritize saving lives and to ensure that measures to control borders do not affect the rights of people to reach safety.

Ali is thankful for the safety and support he has received in Indonesia, but the country is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not allow refugees the right to work. He longs to go somewhere he can find employment and send his children to school. "I want my children to have a good education; I don't want them to be uneducated like me. I want them to have a bright future."





## **NUG URGES FORCIBLY CONSCRIPTED SOLDIERS TO DEFECT TO REVOLUTIONARY FORCES**

**O**n 11 February, the Ministry of Defence of the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement urging young men forcibly conscripted under the junta's military service law to defect to the revolutionary forces.

The NUG called on these conscripted individuals to join resistance groups such as the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), Local Defence Forces (LDFs), People's Defence Teams, and ethnic revolutionary organizations whenever possible whether during training or after being armed.

Additionally, those seeking to defect were encouraged to contact organizations like People's Embrace, which assist junta soldiers in transitioning to the resistance. The NUG assured defectors of their safety to the greatest extent possible and stated that those bringing weapons would be rewarded.

"If forced to serve in the military, draftees can still choose to defect. We are ready to accept and support them," said Ko Nay Min Khant, a leader of the people's strike movement in Wetlet Township.

Similarly, Ko Nay Min, an officer from Yinmarbin District Battalion 12 of the PDF, urged conscripts not

to believe junta propaganda claiming they would be executed if they surrendered. He assured them that the revolutionary forces would welcome them with respect and provide necessary accommodations.

"The defectors are cordially welcomed by our revolutionary forces. They will be respected and given accommodations. Therefore, the conscripted young men who are on military columns should attempt to leave the junta columns and escape as much as they can," he said.

Since enforcing the People's Military Service Law on 10 February 2024, the junta has been forcibly drafting 5,000 men per batch and has now reached its ninth round of conscription.

Many of these conscripts have been deployed to frontline combat zones, resulting in heavy casualties. Meanwhile, some have managed to escape, surrender to resistance forces, or defect with their weapons after coordinating with revolutionary groups, according to the NUG's statement.



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# လိင်အမြတ်ထုတ်ရယူခြင်းများ

## POLITICAL PRISONERS EXPOSE SEXUAL ABUSE AND POWER EXPLOITATION INSIDE MYANMAR'S INSEIN PRISON

**K**o Ye Yint (not his real name), a political prisoner in his 20s, recounted the harrowing experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation he endured while imprisoned in Insein Prison.

He was arrested in Yangon Region after two unidentified men in plain clothes searched his phone and bag in 2023. Though nothing was found on his phone, the contents of his notebook led to a charge under Section 505-(a) of the penal code, resulting in a three-year prison sentence. After 15 days in detention, he was transferred to Insein Prison, where he remained for five months before being unlawfully sentenced. He was released in 2025.

In May 2024, prison authorities relocated 120 political prisoners within Insein Prison, and Ko Ye Yint was among them. Exhausted from the move, he

fell asleep, only to be approached by a cell supervisor serving an 11-year sentence for drug-related offenses. Cell supervisors are prisoners who manage a cell in the ward. The cell supervisor, Zayar Aung, began engaging him in conversation before progressing to inappropriate physical contact.

Ko Ye Yint recalled how the abuse escalated. The cell supervisor repeatedly fondled him, kissed him, and forced him into unwanted physical acts.

The prison system's rigid structure made it nearly impossible for him to report the abuse, as complaints had to follow a strict chain of command. Seeking justice often led to further punishment, as former political prisoners have stated.

Prisoners serving long-term sentences for offenses such as murder and drug-related crimes are appointed as prisoner in-charges. They are assigned roles such as cell supervisors, disciplining inmates, and as cell guards.

The distribution of tasks among inmates is overseen by designated prisoner leaders, known as board officers within the prison. A prisoner in-charge is a prisoner who is authorized by prison officials. Above the prisoner in-charges are the prison department staff, including the ward chief, deputy ward chief, chief officer, warden, deputy warden, and other prison staff.

Although prisoner in-charges do not receive a salary, they enjoy more privileges than other inmates. Their close connections with prison authorities grant them greater freedom and a reduction in their prison sentences.

After enduring the abuse for a month, a prisoner in-charge claimed an investigation was ordered by the warden. However, despite Ko Ye Yint detailing his ordeal, the inquiry concluded without any action, citing a lack of evidence. The perpetrator remained in his position, and Ko Ye Yint was merely transferred to another cell.

"A prisoner in-charge, who was close to the authorities, questioned me about the issues between the cell supervisor and me, assuring me that he would report it to the warden. Later, the warden summoned me and asked about the incident, to which I provided a summary of everything that had happened," said Ko Ye Yint.

Yet, the abuse did not end. In his new cell, another cell supervisor, Moe Myint Aung, subjected him to further sexual violence, including physical assaults and psychological humiliation. Despite the presence of eyewitnesses and CCTV footage, no action was taken.

"Moe Myint Aung frequently bit my back. His bites were so severe that they didn't heal even after a week or ten days, leaving deep scars. That's what made me cry at night. I struggled to sleep. He told me, 'You are a gay,'" said Ko Ye Yint.

"In some cases, victims do not report the abuse due to fear for their lives in prison, while those who resist are threatened with death. These cases will only cease if effective measures are taken. Prison authorities themselves sometimes cover up the crimes of inmates who act with impunity, using their power to suppress the spread of information," said Ko Thaik Htun Oo, spokesperson for the Political Prisoners' Network (PPNM).

Ko Min (unofficial name), another former political prisoner, also shared his experience of sexual abuse.

As an LGBT individual imprisoned for opposing the coup, he was targeted by a fellow inmate, Pyae Phyo Aung (also known as Aung Lay), a convicted murderer-turned-cell supervisor. Ko Min was repeatedly molested and threatened with transfer to the so-called LGBT ward, a section of the prison where detainees face even harsher treatment and restrictions.

"I shared a cell with Aung Lay, who repeatedly groped my buttocks, grabbed my chest, and forced me to suck on his chest. At times, he forcibly made me hold his private part. If I resisted or refused, he would escalate the abuse. He would forcefully kiss my ears and cheeks, warning me that things would get worse if I didn't comply. He frequently threatened to send me to the LGBT ward," said Ko Min.

Ko Min said he still feels unsafe and unsettled.

"Sexual abuse among male inmates occurs in Insein Prison's Thapyay Ward. Even if the victims resist, the cell supervisors hold significant power within the prison. This issue is not limited to Thapyay Ward—cell supervisors and disciplinary officers in other wards also abuse prisoners. They treat this abuse as casually as eating or drinking. I want to see them held legally accountable," said political prisoners.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports that since the 1 February 2021, coup, at least 28,501 political prisoners have been detained, with 21,772 still in custody.

Photo: AFP



## IOM DELIVERS LIFESAVING AID AND BUILDS RESILIENCE FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) released this situation report on 10 February. The report updates humanitarian partners and the public on the support provided to Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

The text of the situation report continues below.

In 2024 IOM has continued to lead efforts in delivering high-quality, comprehensive lifesaving and humanitarian services to the Rohingya refugees and host community in Cox's Bazar. Through innovative interventions, IOM fosters skill-building, leadership development, women empowerment and community engagement, enabling the Rohingya refugees to develop their skills and build resilience. Additionally, IOM has continued to extend support to the most vulnerable members of the host community, promoting social cohesion and resilience.

IOM's involvement in the Rohingya response spans a wide range of critical sectors, including camp management and camp coordination, shelter and non-

food items, alternative fuel for cooking, protection services, health, mental health and psychosocial support, water, sanitation and hygiene, social cohesion and livelihoods, disaster risk management, needs and population monitoring, and coordination amongst humanitarian partners. These multifaceted efforts ensure a holistic approach to meeting the diverse needs of the refugee and host populations.

IOM has been implementing integrated activities to restore environmental balance in the refugee camps and adjacent host areas. Preparedness and rapid response remain at the core of IOM's response. As incidents and natural disasters pose a significant threat to the refugees and host people, IOM's disaster risk reduction interventions focus on building resilience, enhancing early warning systems, and ensuring swift emergency responses to safeguard lives and reduce the impact. IOM stands resolute in its response to adapt and deliver impactful, community-driven responses.

## MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKES IN TNLA-CONTROLLED AREAS RESULT IN 28 DEATHS, 66 INJURIES, DESPITE PEACE EFFORTS

In the two months following the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)'s 25 November 2024, declaration of its willingness to resolve tensions with Myanmar's junta, the military has launched at least seven airstrikes on TNLA-controlled areas, resulting in the deaths of 28 locals and injuries to 66 others.

On the night of 10 February, the junta conducted an airstrike on TNLA-controlled Mogok town, killing five locals and injuring 19.

"The Military Council launched airstrikes. Based on the information we've received, five people were killed, 19 were injured, and several houses and buildings were damaged," said TNLA spokesman Lway Yay Oo.

Similarly, on 6 February, an airstrike targeted Thapyay Taung Pagoda Hill in Nawngkhio Township, injuring a 30-year-old sugarcane truck driver, Sai Hla Oo. In the first 10 days of February alone, the junta launched two airstrikes on areas controlled by the TNLA.

In January, the TNLA reported several other attacks, including one on Mogok Township, one on

Kyaukme Township, and two consecutive airstrikes on Nawngkhio Township. These strikes resulted in the deaths of 13 civilians and 26 injuries.

In 2024, just five days after the TNLA called for resolving military tensions through dialogue, the junta carried out an airstrike on Kyaukme Township on 30 November, killing 10 locals and injuring 20 others.

On 25 November 2024, the TNLA issued a statement expressing concern over the suffering of local people due to airstrikes and ongoing military conflicts in the region. The statement emphasized the TNLA's readiness to engage in talks to resolve the issue, while continuing to uphold the right of the people to self-defence.

However, according to Lway Yay Oo, as of early February there have been no talks between the TNLA and the junta.

In January, the TNLA spokesman suggested the possibility of mediation through the Chinese government to facilitate dialogue between both sides.

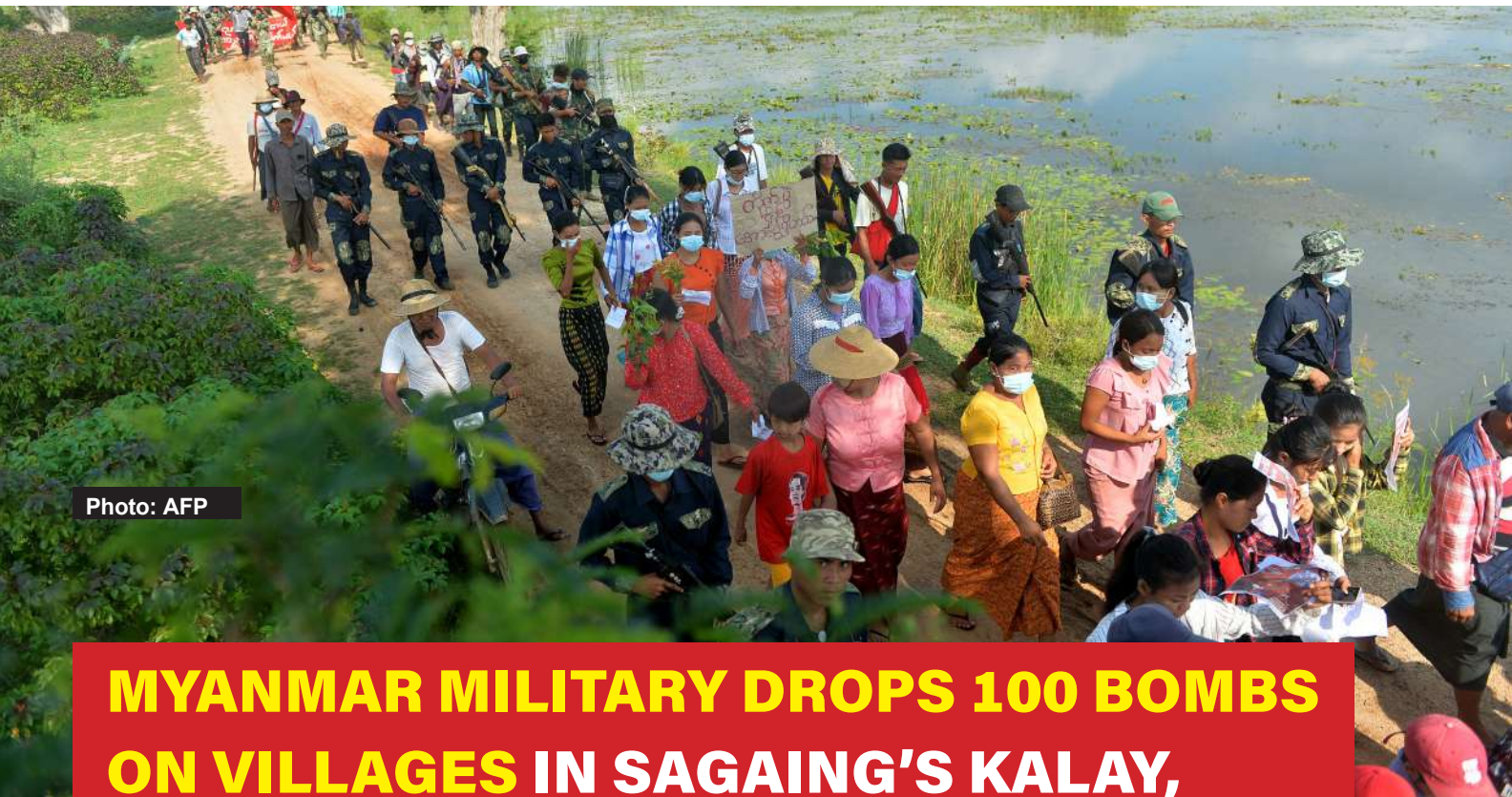


Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR MILITARY DROPS 100 BOMBS ON VILLAGES IN SAGAING'S KALAY, PROMPTING EXODUS

The Myanmar military carried out intense aerial bombardments over two days in southern Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, dropping more than 100 bombs from Y-12 aircraft and forcing villagers to flee, according to local sources.

On 12 February, between 1 pm and 2 pm, 39 bombs were dropped, followed by 55 more around 5 pm. The attacks continued the next day, with 33 bombs dropped between 10 am and 11 am.

"All villagers were running away in fear," said Daw Yati Ohn, a teacher with the Mobile Medical Team–West Division, which provides healthcare in Kalay District.

While those who could afford to flee sought refuge in other areas, many remained in makeshift bomb shelters.

"They are constantly firing. We have stayed in the shelters all the time, day and night," a resident said.

Although there were no immediate reports of casualties, several buildings sustained damage, according to a member of the Kalay Township Administration.

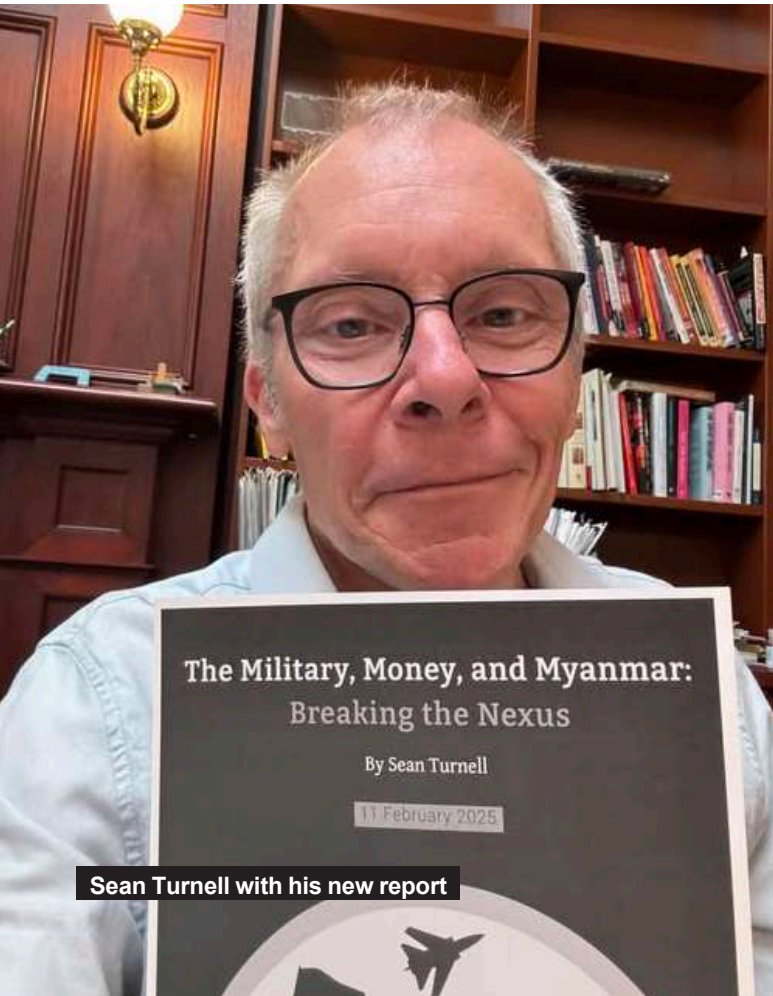
Daw Yati Ohn warned that the ongoing airstrikes, coupled with colder-than-usual weather, pose serious health risks to displaced children and the elderly, many of whom have taken shelter in nearby forests.

The airstrikes came after revolutionary forces launched an attack on a military camp along the Kalay-Gangaw road on 11 February, leading to ongoing clashes. However, locals claim the air raids targeted civilian areas rather than conflict zones.

"Most of the airstrikes are hitting civilians. If I had to list the affected villages, I would have to say almost all have been attacked. They are bombing everywhere indiscriminately," Daw Yati Ohn said.

As a result of the airstrikes, approximately 4,000 residents have fled from at least 10 villages, including Tinthar, Kokko, Hmantaw, Kanpane, Shartaw, Doenwe, Harkharlay, and Kyawwywar.

The Myanmar military previously carried out airstrikes on an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Kokko village on 31 January and in Tinthar village on 2 February, killing nine people including four children and injuring several others.



# SEAN TURNELL RELEASES NEW REPORT ON THE ECONOMY UNDER MYANMAR JUNTA

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) released a new report on 11 February authored by Australian academic and economic advisor, Dr Sean Turnell, detailing the involvement of Myanmar’s military in the country’s economy.

This new report entitled *The Military, Money and Myanmar: Breaking the Nexus* presents a picture of the Myanmar military’s deep involvement in the economy since the February 2021 coup. As part of this, it details the sources of the military’s funds and what can be done to sever these links.

It describes in detail the central role the junta’s control over the country’s finances plays in its war against the Myanmar people. It also notes how mismanagement by the junta has worsened an economic situation already impacted by armed conflict by tying it directly to the need for more money to purchase more munitions.

It also presents the necessary steps to immediately take to begin rebuilding a prosperous economy in a new, federal Myanmar. The report advocates for immediate action and not waiting until an eventual resistance victory.

The report describes how the building of this new economy is currently already underway in parts of Myanmar already under resistance control. It advocates that the economic struggle should be undertaken concurrently with the military and political struggles.

Already the resistance and resistance has moved in innovative ways to secure funds to fight the junta.

Steps to be taken by individual states, private corporations, and the international system to support change in Myanmar are also indicated. The imposition of sanctions and their role in hindering the junta’s efforts as well as making them stronger and smarter are key.

A number of ways are described to permanent separate Myanmar’s military from the economy and direct involvement in the financial sector. The military’s extensive economic holdings should be privatised. Myanmar’s banking sector should be reorganised to remove it from military exploitation.

SAC-M says they hope the analysis and recommendations contained in the report will spur discussions of policy as well as financial action.

Photo: AFP

## STRATEGIC TURBULENCE: CHINA'S AGGRESSIVE MOVES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

**SUN LEE**

**E**scalating tensions in the South China Sea through the past year are poised to continue, as China has become increasingly confident in asserting its claims over waters also claimed by the Philippines and Japan, as well as over self-ruled Taiwan.

There have been a series of confrontations between China and the countries in the Western Pacific, all accusing the former of dangerous maneuvers and escalating tensions. China claims much of the South China Sea, a key focal point for global shipping, but these claims are disputed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. About a third of global trade transits through the waters, which are also rich in fishing stocks, gas and oil.

While the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan have borne the brunt of this aggression, no country in the South China Sea is completely secure. These actions have been widely criticized as provocative and unsafe by other countries, including the United States. Despite the criticism, China continues to employ these tactics to assert its claims in the region.

China maintains its influence over the South China Sea using three key forces: the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), and the People's Armed Force Maritime Militia (PLAFMM).

The latter two have been deployed to encroach on the sovereignty of coastal nations. Chinese vessels often breach the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of other countries, harass ships exercising freedom of navigation rights, attack resupply vessels headed to isolated island outposts, and even seize territory.

In recent months, Beijing has deployed military and coastguard vessels in a bid to eject the Philippines from a trio of strategically important reefs and islands in the South China Sea.

China has been using high-powered lasers and water cannons as part of its tactics in the South China Sea. For instance, in February 2023, a Chinese Coast Guard vessel aimed a military-grade green laser at the Philippine Coast Guard in disputed waters. Later China's Coast Guard used water cannons against a Philippine boat attempting to deliver supplies to a garrison of Philippine marines.

On June 17, 2024, a collision took place between a Chinese Coast Guard vessel and a Philippine supply ship near the Second Thomas Shoal (known as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines). The Chinese Coast Guard claimed that the Philippine ship ignored warnings and dangerously approached their vessel, while the Philippines rejected this account, calling it "deceptive and misleading".



Then in late August, some forty Chinese vessels from the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Coast Guard (CCG), and China Maritime Militia (CMM) blocked passage in the South China Sea of a ship belonging to the Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Services. A CCG vessel then rammed and fired a water cannon at the ship, which was on a humanitarian mission to deliver supplies to Filipino fishermen. In the attack, the Philippine ship was damaged and failed to deliver its humanitarian cargo. It was the first recorded time that the PLAN has participated in the use of force against Philippine government vessels, a dangerous escalation on the part of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Additionally, China has intensified its pressure over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are controlled by Japan in the East China Sea. This has significantly unsettled Tokyo and its regional allies, leading to heightened security measures and diplomatic efforts.

Soonafter in July 2024, leaders of Japan and the Philippines agreed to work more closely together on security, over shared concerns about China's growing assertiveness in the region and confrontations between Philippine and Chinese naval vessels in contested areas of the South China Sea. In December 2024, The Philippines ratified a new defence pact with Japan that would allow each country's military to deploy on each other's soil amid increased regional tensions with China.

China has already staged two rounds of major war games last year near Taiwan, which faces the constant threat of a military attack and relies heavily on US arms sales for its defences. Taiwan has called on China to halt its "provocative acts" after the self-ruled island accused Chinese forces of ramping up military drills on its doorstep. In a statement issued recently Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "These actions inject uncertainty and risk into the region, creating disruptions for neighbouring countries, and it confirms China's a troublemaker that undermines peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

Beijing asserts its claim over the entirety of the South China Sea based on questionable historic grounds, utilizing what it views as its "10-dash line" map and other justifications to assert ownership of

tiny rocks and atolls located hundreds of miles from the Chinese mainland. Meanwhile, countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have their own strong territorial claims, which conflict with Beijing's broad ambitions. For instance, for over a decade, China has been attempting to drive away Vietnamese drilling rigs operating within Vietnam's own waters.

Adding another layer of complexity to the already tense situation, China has expanded its 'nine-dash line' to a 'ten-dash line,' adding an additional dash near Taiwan. This new map has ignited significant controversy and elicited strong reactions from neighbouring countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines. The expanded line is viewed as an effort by China to assert even broader territorial claims in the South China Sea and beyond.

The rising tensions in the South China Sea risk involving the United States, which has a mutual defense treaty with the Philippines and has vowed to support Manila in the event of any armed third-party attacks against Filipino soldiers. President Donald Trump has been vocal about the South China Sea tensions, often emphasizing a more assertive stance against China. During his first term, Trump prioritized freedom of navigation operations and strengthened ties with regional allies like the Philippines. With Trump back in office for a second term, analysts expect increased unpredictability and a more confrontational approach towards China. This could potentially escalate tensions in the region, as Trump's administration might use the South China Sea as a bargaining chip in broader negotiations with Beijing.

The growing concern over China's maritime harassment stems not only from the increasing frequency of these operations but also from the escalating belligerence in Chinese rhetoric. China's escalation in the South China Sea has drawn concern from the international community, as it threatens to further destabilize an already tense region and provoke a stronger response from regional nations.

*Sun Lee is the pseudonym of a writer who covers Asia and geopolitics.*



Photo: AFP

## 124 JOURNALISTS KILLED, MOST BY ISRAEL, IN DEADLIEST YEAR FOR REPORTERS: CPJ

Last year was the deadliest for journalists in recent history, with at least 124 reporters killed -- and Israel responsible for nearly 70 percent of that total, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported Wednesday.

The uptick in killings, which marks a 22 percent increase over 2023, reflects "surging levels of international conflict, political unrest and criminality worldwide," the CPJ said.

It was the deadliest year for reporters and media workers since CPJ began keeping records more than three decades ago, with journalists murdered across 18 different countries, it said.

A total of 85 journalists died in the Israeli-Hamas war, "all at the hands of the Israeli military," the CPJ said, adding that 82 of them were Palestinians.

Sudan and Pakistan recorded the second highest number of journalists and media workers killed, with six each.

In Mexico, which has a reputation as one of the most dangerous countries for reporters, five were killed, with CPJ reporting it had found "persistent flaws" in Mexico's mechanisms for protecting journalists.

And in Haiti, where two reporters were murdered, widespread violence and political instability have sown so much chaos that "gangs now openly claim responsibility for journalist killings," the report said.

Other deaths took place in countries such as Myanmar, Mozambique, India and Iraq.

"Today is the most dangerous time to be a journalist in CPJ's history," said the group's CEO Jodie Ginsberg.

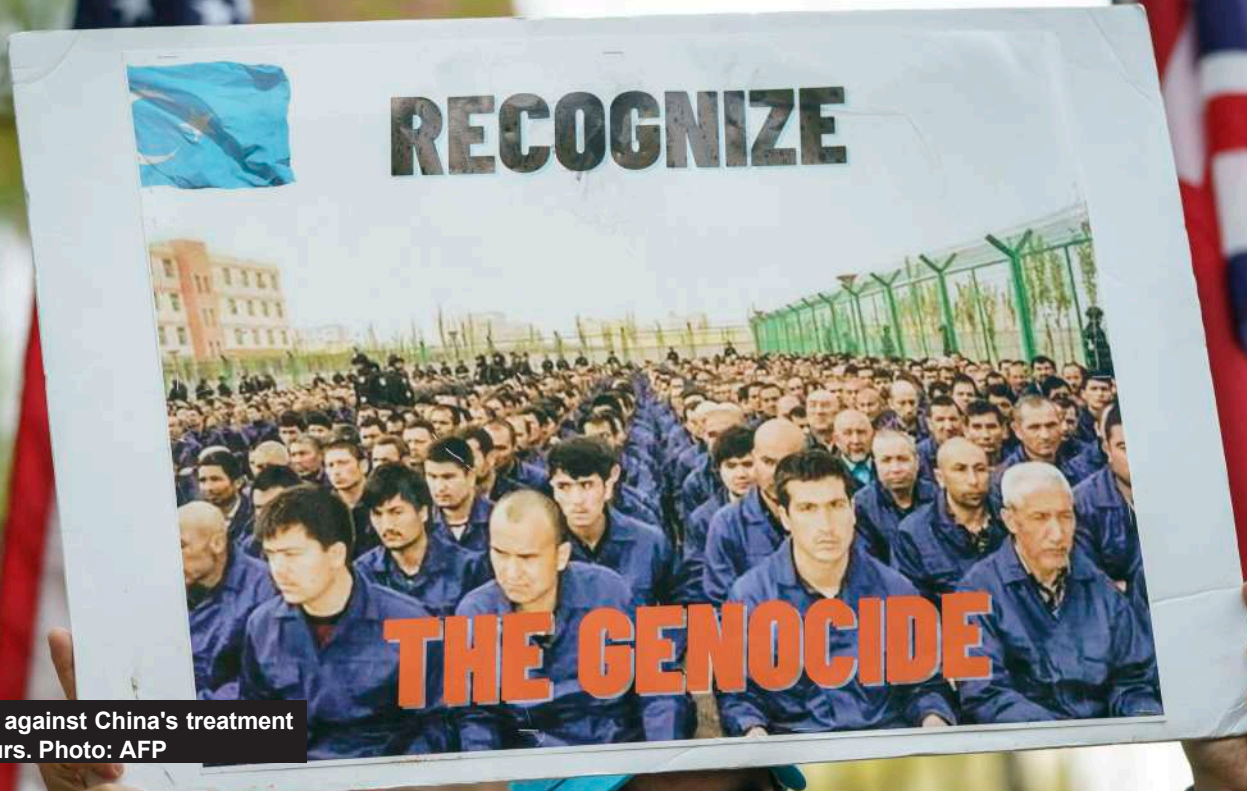
"The war in Gaza is unprecedented in its impact on journalists and demonstrates a major deterioration in global norms on protecting journalists," she said.

CPJ, which has kept records on journalist killings since 1992, said that 24 of the reporters were deliberately killed because of their work in 2024.

Freelancers, the report said, were among the most vulnerable because of their lack of resources, and accounted for 43 of the killings in 2024.

The year 2025 is not looking more promising, with six journalists already killed in the first weeks of the year, CPJ said.

AFP



Protest against China's treatment of Uyghurs. Photo: AFP

# HOW CHINA LEADS THE WORLD IN TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

**SUN LEE**

In a report that highlights China's growing reach beyond its borders, new research by Freedom House exposes China as the world's leading perpetrator of transnational repression, responsible for nearly a quarter of all documented cases over the past decade.

This systematic campaign of global intimidation represents not just a threat to individual dissidents, but a direct assault on democratic values worldwide, with Beijing's tentacles of control reaching into the heart of democracies across five continents. China alone accounts for 272 incidents of cross-border repression, representing 22% of all documented cases. But these figures only scratch the surface of a far more insidious reality. Behind each statistic lies a story of intimidation, surveillance, and fear that extends far beyond China's borders. The Communist Party's reach has become so pervasive that even the world's strongest democracies

like the United States, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, and Sweden have become battlegrounds in Beijing's war against dissent.

At home, Beijing's digital iron curtain, aptly named "The Great Firewall," serves as the backbone of this repressive apparatus. Established in 2006, it has evolved into the world's most sophisticated system of digital control, monitoring and suppressing the voices of 1.3 billion people. This massive surveillance infrastructure includes digital identification cards with microchips containing personal data, enabling the Chinese Communist Party to recognize faces and voices of its vast population. But China's ambitions don't stop at its borders. The regime has exported versions of this technology to other authoritarian states, creating a playbook for digital oppression that's being replicated from Cuba to Iran and Belarus.

The methods of transnational repression are as diverse as they are disturbing. Chinese authorities operate a network of overseas police stations across five continents, with outposts identified in countries including Lesotho, Nigeria, and Tanzania. While these stations purportedly exist to combat telecommunications fraud and internet crimes by Chinese citizens living abroad, the reality is far more sinister. Through operations codenamed Sky Net and Fox Hunt, these stations function as tentacles of the Chinese Communist Party, reaching into sovereign nations to threaten and coerce Chinese nationals abroad.

The regime's tactics follow a calculated pattern of escalating pressure. It begins with seemingly innocent phone calls, escalates to threats against family members back in China, and culminates in the deployment of covert agents who use methods ranging from surveillance to entrapment. Between April 2021 and July 2022 alone, the Chinese government claimed that 230,000 nationals were "persuaded to return" to face criminal proceedings. However, investigation reveals that most of these individuals were not criminals but dissidents, including those who had fled religious or ethnic persecution.

Muslims bear the heaviest burden of this transnational witch hunt, accounting for 64% of targeted incidents worldwide. The Uyghur community, already facing crimes against humanity within China, finds itself subjected to relentless monitoring and threats abroad. Their very existence is viewed as a threat by a regime pathologically afraid of any deviation from its enforced uniformity. The digital dimension of this repression is particularly insidious. Even the world's leading tech companies have become unwitting accomplices in this suppression. Apple's removal of thousands of games and apps from its Chinese App Store, including popular podcast clients, demonstrates how profit motives can trump principles when confronted with Beijing's demands. The regime's requirement for data localization ensures that even international corporations must bend to its will, storing user data within China's borders where it remains within easy reach of state surveillance.

China's cybersecurity law, implemented under the guise of national security, requires companies to engage in patriotic observance of law which is a euphemism

for complicity in the state's surveillance apparatus. The result is a digital ecosystem where every click, every message, and every search can be monitored, analyzed, and used against its citizens. This digital authoritarianism represents a direct challenge to the concept of a free and open Internet, with China's assertion of "Internet sovereignty" standing in direct opposition to the fundamental principle of free information flow. Journalists find themselves particularly vulnerable to these cross-border intimidation campaigns. Since 2014, at least 26 governments have orchestrated 124 incidents of transnational repression against exiled journalists, with China leading the charge. The chilling effect on press freedom is profound, as evidenced by recent attacks on journalists working for BBC Persian and Iran International in London.

The implications of China's transnational repression extend far beyond individual cases of intimidation. As democratic nations grapple with this challenge, they face a difficult choice to stand firm against this digital imperialism or risk seeing the Internet fragment into a series of national intranets, each controlled by its respective government.

The Chinese model of Internet control serves as a template for authoritarian regimes worldwide, threatening to transform the once-open Internet into a tool of state control and surveillance. The world's democracies can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to this systematic assault on freedom. China's transnational repression campaign represents not just a threat to individual dissidents but a fundamental challenge to the principles of human rights and free expression. As China continues to export its model of digital authoritarianism, the response from democratic nations will determine whether the Internet remains a space for free expression or becomes another tool in the arsenal of authoritarian control.

*Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia and geopolitical affairs.*



## UNBROKEN LESSONS

This interview was recorded before the recent suspension of USAID programmes under the Trump administration, which has placed the future of the Diversity and Inclusivity Scholarship Program (DISP) in jeopardy. As a USAID-supported initiative that equips Burmese educators with skills for inclusive and culturally relevant teaching, the program that Maw Maw Tun and Chan Lwin describe in this Insight Myanmar episode now faces uncertainty about its continuation.

“To all the people who are working in the education sector in Myanmar, let’s do what is possible, instead of focusing on creating the ideal situation,” says Maw Maw Tun. “It will be hard for us and we may feel discouraged if we are aiming for the ideal, right? So with the current situation, let’s do together what we can, and let’s move forward, hope for the best, and stay strong.”

Myanmar’s educational landscape is fraught with socio-political complexities, contrasting and competing ethnic narratives and historical challenges. The country’s education system has always been centralized and controlled by state ideology, leading to an academic environment that discourages critical thinking and emphasizes rote learning. It has also created imbalances in educational opportunity, between urban and rural areas, as well as between Bamar and ethnic minority students, in the form of language barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient resources. The 2011 political reforms brought opportunity for change, but many problems persisted, especially for marginalized communities.

Then in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to pivot to online learning, which further underscored the existing disparities in technology and infrastructure. And the 2021 military coup became a nearly unprecedented challenge to the country’s education system. Students in urban areas were able to find ways to adapt to the changing educational landscape, while those in rural regions and the growing number of students in internally displaced person (IDP) camps faced a worsening situation, with their already unreliable internet, lack of devices, and power outages. In addition, many educators joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), leading to teacher shortages and additional disruptions in formal education.

In the face of these obstacles, Chan Lwin and Maw Maw Tun sought ways to foster inclusive education and empower teachers across Myanmar. Chan, a program manager at the Asia Center at Arizona State University, and Maw, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University, have been leading the Diversity and Inclusivity Scholarship Program (DISP), a USAID-supported initiative that aims to equip Burmese educators with the skills needed for conducting effective online and blended learning classes, while incorporating their students’ ethnic, linguistic, and gender diversity.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/2/2/episode-309-unbroken-lessons>



## JUNTA OPENS DOOR TO FOREIGN ARMED SECURITY FIRMS, RAISING CHINESE MILITARY CONCERNS

**M**yanmar's junta has enacted a law permitting foreign companies to provide armed security services, a move that could allow former Chinese military personnel to protect China's economic interests in the country.

The Private Security Service Law, announced in state media, requires foreign security companies to register under Myanmar law and obtain approval from the National Defence and Security Council to handle weapons. Companies must ensure their staff aren't active members of foreign armed forces, and at least 75% of security personnel must be Myanmar citizens.

Analysts suggest this legislation paves the way for Chinese private military corporations to guard crucial infrastructure, particularly the 800-kilometer oil and gas pipelines running from Myanmar's Kyaukphyu port to China's Yunnan province.

These pipelines are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which includes special economic zones, ports, mines, and hydroelectric projects.

Critics, including lawyer Kye Myint, argue the law violates Myanmar's 2008 constitution and international norms. Political analyst Than Soe Naing accused the military junta of "selling out" to China.

The law comes as Myanmar faces ongoing civil unrest since the military coup in February 2021, though resistance forces have largely avoided targeting Chinese infrastructure projects.

The military junta hasn't announced when the proposed China-Myanmar Joint Venture Security Company will begin operations.

Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein

## SOCIAL MEDIA USERS EXPRESS GRATITUDE AS PHYU PHYU'S SIGNED GUITAR FETCHES £2,500 AT UK AUCTION

Myanmar netizens have expressed profound gratitude and joy after a guitar signed by popular singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein during Panglong Day (February 12) sold for £2,500 (approximately 13.7 million Myanmar kyat) at an auction in the UK. Social media users flooded platforms with messages of appreciation, with many noting how the successful auction symbolizes solidarity among Myanmar people.

"Those of us living inside Myanmar are especially overjoyed," commented a user, reflecting the sentiment shared by many Myanmar supporters. Others praised Phyu Phyu's consistent dedication to Myanmar's causes, highlighting how she has never personally accepted funds from such charity events, instead directing them to community needs.

The auction featured remarkable community participation, including guitar owner Aung Lwin who donated the instrument, May Myat Noe who demonstrated the guitar at the event, and Myanmar diaspora in the UK who organized and participated in the bidding. The winning bid came from a couple who are fans of Phyu Phyu, leading to an emotional video call with the artist the following day.

The successful auction has been widely celebrated on social media as a testament to the Myanmar community's unity and shared values of justice, compassion, and resilience.

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.