

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**WITHDRAWAL
CALL**

**NLD & NUG SEEK TO REMOVE ARGENTINE CHARGES
AGAINST AUNG SAN SUU KYI & HTIN KYAW**

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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.

WORRY OVER US ATTITUDE TO DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR

Many people are raising concerns over the dramatic halt to US aid that has hit NGOs involved in supporting democracy, human rights and humanitarian aid in Myanmar.

Myanmar is in the midst of crisis, with the military at war with its people, and the foreign policy directive from the US administration of President Donald Trump has sent a shockwave through the Myanmar community.

While the Trump administration claims to support democracy and human rights, their attempt to tackle alleged corruption within USAID and other relevant government departments is dramatically affecting the “worthy” cause of Myanmar, and threatens to allow China and Russia to increase their influence in the country. Only last week, Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing went on an important state visit to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin. All of this sparks concern that strong support the US government used to have for democratic forces in Myanmar has taken a hit.

According to the NGO Human Rights Myanmar (HRM), the closure of USAID means that Myanmar is on track to lose approximately \$1.1 billion in aid throughout the Trump presidency, including a total of \$181 million dedicated to the democracy movement. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom’s recent 40 per cent reduction in its foreign aid budget further compounds the crisis.

HRM and other non-governmental organizations claim these cuts will deal a devastating blow to Myanmar’s democracy movement, civil society, and the millions of people who rely on humanitarian support.

In February 2025, HRM cautioned that the US decision to close USAID programmes had frozen \$39 million

in aid to the democracy movement, jeopardising organisations, including independent media outlets, that challenge military rule and promote democratic governance. In November 2024, the NGO warned that a shift in US policy could destroy Myanmar’s civil society foundations. Those warnings have now become a reality.

The consequences of these long-term cuts will be catastrophic and are already playing out. In 2025, at least 19 million people in Myanmar—about 35% of the population—will need food, healthcare, and protection aid. The loss of this funding will deepen the humanitarian crisis, exacerbating food insecurity and worsening healthcare shortages. Displaced communities, ethnic minorities, and marginalised populations—who bear no responsibility for the political crisis triggered by the coup—will suffer the most. At risk communities both inside and outside of Myanmar are already feeling the pinch.

NGOs are calling on the US and UK governments to act immediately to reconsider these aid reductions. Congress, the Senate, and policymakers in Washington and London must recognise the damage these cuts will cause—not only to Myanmar but to the broader fight for democracy worldwide. If USAID is to be permanently closed and its functions transferred to the US State Department, the provision of aid must be treated as an emergency, they say.

NGOs say the Myanmar people should not be collateral damage in shifting foreign policy priorities. Aid must never be used as a political bargaining chip when lives, freedoms, and the future of an entire country are at stake. They urge all who believe in democracy and human rights to take action before it is too late.

EDITORIAL

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Archive cover photo of Aung San Suu Kyi by AFP





FLASHBACK: Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi with President Htin Kyaw. Photo: AFP

WITHDRAWAL CALL

NLD SEEKS TO REMOVE ARGENTINE CHARGES AGAINST AUNG SAN SUU KYI & HTIN KYAW

While many Myanmar citizens welcome the charges being brought by an Argentinian court against Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity concerning his role in the alleged genocide against the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine State in 2017, a number of organizations have expressed alarm that both State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Htin Kyaw are also being charged.

Two key bodies have spoken out – the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the National Unity Government (NUG).

The NLD announced on 27 February that a committee will be formed to work towards the removal of arrest warrants issued by the Argentine court against State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and former President U Htin Kyaw. The warrants were issued in connection with alleged genocide against ethnic Rohingya in Myanmar’s western Rakhine State.

The statement is as follows.

In 2019, the UK-based organization BROUK filed a complaint with the Buenos Aires Court of Justice in Argentina, seeking legal action against the Myanmar military for the violent killings that took place in northern Rakhine State in 2017. The arrest warrant issued by the Argentine court on February 13, 2025, names the then heads of government, President U Htin Kyaw and State Counselor Aung San Su Kyi, as principal perpetrators.

Regarding the case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar under the Convention on the Prevention of Genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), State Counselor Daw Aung San Su Kyi, as the head of the elected civilian government, made the following points in her statement on December 11, 2019:

a. The National League for Democracy (NLD) government was democratically elected and bound by the 2008 Constitution.



Aung San Suu Kyi currently faces decades in prison under trumped up charges. Photo: AFP

b. According to Article 20(b) of the 2008 Constitution, the Myanmar military operates independently of the civilian government, with the Tatmadaw, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Border Affairs under the direct authority of the Commander-in-Chief.

c. Furthermore, given that the military leadership violated the Constitution on February 1, 2021, by seizing power and detaining elected civilian leaders, it is evident that the military was not under civilian control.

Despite this clarification at the ICJ, the current indictment of Daw Aung San Su Kyi and U Htin Kyaw as responsible for systematic violations committed by the military, shifts accountability away from the actual perpetrators, thereby raising concerns about the integrity of justice.

We acknowledge that in December 2023, BROUK submitted a motion to the Argentine court requesting the removal of Daw Aung San Su Kyi and U Htin Kyaw from the list of suspects named in the arrest warrants, citing insufficient evidence to support charges of genocide against the Rohingya.

The Argentine court disregarded BROUK's request and failed to consider the military's autonomy under the Myanmar Constitution. Such an approach risks undermining the court's impartiality in delivering

justice for the victims by issuing these arrest warrants.

The issuance of an arrest warrant for Daw Aung San Su Kyi—a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, a long-standing advocate for democracy and human rights, and now a political prisoner—who remains a symbol of the people of Myanmar and the leader of the democratically elected government, is deeply concerning for all Myanmar citizens resisting military dictatorship. Therefore, we urge the Argentine court to reconsider the arrest warrants for Daw Aung San Su Kyi and U Htin Kyaw.

Additionally, the National League for Democracy will establish a Justice Seeking Committee for Daw Aung San Su Kyi and U Htin Kyaw to advocate for the removal of the arrest warrants and will collaborate with all individuals and organizations pursuing similar objectives.

NUG STATEMENT

Earlier, on 18 February, the NUG issued the following statement:

The perpetrators of the mass atrocities committed against the Rohingya through various violent means are solely the leaders of the Myanmar military and their subordinate battalions. The National Unity Government (NUG) welcomes and supports all efforts to prosecute these crimes in international courts to



ensure appropriate punishment for the perpetrators and justice for the victims.

The mass atrocities committed against the Rohingya in 2017 were carried out solely by the Myanmar military under the leadership of Min Aung Hlaing, as per Article 20(b) and (c) of the 2008 Constitution, which was in effect at the time. Therefore, those who must be held fully accountable for these crimes without exception are Min Aung Hlaing and his associates. As such, the NUG welcomes the legal action taken by the UK-based Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) in the Argentine court to prosecute and issue arrest warrants against Min Aung Hlaing and his accomplices.

However, we strongly consider the Argentine court's attempt to include former President U Htin Kyaw and the incumbent State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the list of perpetrators—alongside Min Aung Hlaing and his associates, who are the actual perpetrators of genocide and war crimes—as a misguided and erroneous legal accusation. Therefore, we call for removal of their names from the prosecution.

The former President U Htin Kyaw and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made various

efforts to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya issue, including the establishment of the “Kofi Annan Commission.”

Similarly, the National Unity Government (NUG) has also established a “Rohingya Policy” and is steadfastly working to ensure justice for the Rohingya people.

Given these circumstances, the inclusion of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and former President U Htin Kyaw in the case filed at the Argentine court may create misunderstandings between the Rohingya community and other ethnic groups. This could hinder long-term peace, reconciliation, and Myanmar's democratic transition.

Therefore, the Argentine court's attempt to prosecute and issue arrest warrants against civilian government leaders will undermine national unity among the people of Myanmar and obstruct the ongoing Spring Revolution, which is relentlessly fighting to bring an end to military dictatorship and will ultimately benefit the terrorist military council.

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- ANALYSIS & INSIGHT
- CORE DEVELOPMENTS
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Civilians have got caught up in the battle for Sittwe. Photo: supplied

THE ONGOING BATTLE FOR SITTWE AND KYAUKPHYU PORT

Fierce clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces continue in Rakhine State, particularly near Wabo village in Sittwe Township. The AA has escalated attacks on key military positions, including the Shwe Mingan naval base, Amyint Kyun, Ye Chanpyin, and Padaleik-based camps. In response, the junta is leveraging its air force and naval firepower to resist the offensive.

Since the AA launched its operation in Sittwe on January 16, the conflict in the town has persisted for over a month. The AA is also conducting artillery strikes from surrounding townships it previously seized, further pressuring the junta's defenses.

To bolster its defenses against the AA, the junta has formed a new Rohingya militia group, the Arakan National Defence Force (ANDF), in Sittwe. Led by a former high-ranking member of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), the militia reportedly comprises over 2,000 Rohingya fighters prepared to support the junta.

In addition, the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) has allied with the junta, further strengthening its defensive position in Sittwe.

In Kyaukphyu, a strategic town housing major Chinese-backed projects, the junta launched a counteroffensive against the AA on February 20. Following intense ground battles, the junta deployed airstrikes near the Danyawaddy naval headquarters. Reports indicate that one elderly civilian was killed, and several others were wounded in the bombardment.

AA spokesperson Khine Thukha confirmed that since late February, battles near Simaw and Shaukchyaung villages have intensified due to junta troops advancing under cover of artillery and airstrikes. "The junta penetrated these areas by using the advantage of artillery and airstrikes. The intense battles are continuing in these areas," he stated.

The escalating conflict has led to a surge in displacement. Civilians from at least 10 villages have fled their homes due to ongoing airstrikes. Additionally, residents of Sittwe Township, as well as neighboring townships of Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Rathedaung, are unable to return to their homes due to persistent artillery shelling by junta troops.

"Due to recent clashes, people from 10 villages around the fighting area have been fleeing," said Aung Aung, a representative of a local rescue committee told AFP, referring to Kyaukphyu.

"According to our data received, there's been around 4,000 people displaced," he said, adding that the total number of people displaced in that particular area was now around 15,000.

More than 300,000 people are currently displaced across these four townships, facing dire shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. As battles intensify around the junta's remaining strongholds in Rakhine State, the regime is sending reinforcements to both Sittwe and Kyaukphyu in a bid to maintain control.



Water crisis faces Myanmar's IDPs

Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Myanmar are facing an escalating water crisis, with Ponnagyun Township in Rakhine among the worst affected. The township, which experiences seasonal water shortages annually, is now under extreme pressure due to a sharp increase in displaced persons. The rising temperatures have further exacerbated the problem, as ponds and wells—the primary water sources for both locals and IDPs—are drying up.

Although civil society organizations (CSOs) and the Arakan Army (AA) have attempted to address the crisis, the growing demand has outstripped supply. Many displaced persons are now forced to trek into remote jungles and mountains in search of water. To mitigate the crisis, the AA has been maintaining reservoirs since late January, imposing restrictions to ensure water availability during the dry season, according to local media reports.

The lack of clean water has triggered a surge in skin diseases across several townships, including Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, and Thandwe. Overcrowded living conditions, poor personal hygiene, and a lack of medical supplies have contributed to the rapid spread of infections.

A resident of Ponnagyun described the dire situation: “We have not received any treatment since the outbreak began. The disease is spreading rapidly among all age groups, but children under five years old are suffering the most.” Humanitarian organizations working in the area have raised concerns that without urgent intervention, the crisis could worsen, leading to more severe health complications.

Food scarcity is another mounting crisis in IDP camps across Myanmar. The influx of new IDPs due to ongoing armed conflicts has pushed many camps beyond their capacity. In the Shan-Karenni border region, intensified battles have forced thousands to flee to Karenni IDP camps, straining already limited food supplies.

“We are receiving more people than we can accommodate. Even though we get some aid from donors, it is not enough for everyone,” a CSO worker told DVB. According to local media outlet Karenni People Voice, at least seven camps are facing severe food shortages, with 504 households—comprising over

2,500 people—experiencing an emergency-level crisis.

A recent UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) report highlighted the growing humanitarian emergency, stating that more than 3.5 million people have been displaced since the February 1, 2021, military coup. Additionally, over 15 million people across 13 states and regions are experiencing food insecurity and extreme economic hardship.

Adding to the humanitarian crisis, Myanmar's military continues to carry out airstrikes on IDP camps, resulting in civilian casualties. The Bangawk IDP camp in Karenni State was bombed for the second time on November 18, 2024, injuring two women and one man. A previous attack in September left nine people dead, including six children, and injured 20 others.

Similar attacks have been reported in other regions. On January 31, 2025, the junta air force launched an airstrike on the Kokekol IDP camp in Kale Township, Sagaing Region. The attack killed nine civilians, including three children under the age of 12, and wounded 17 others.

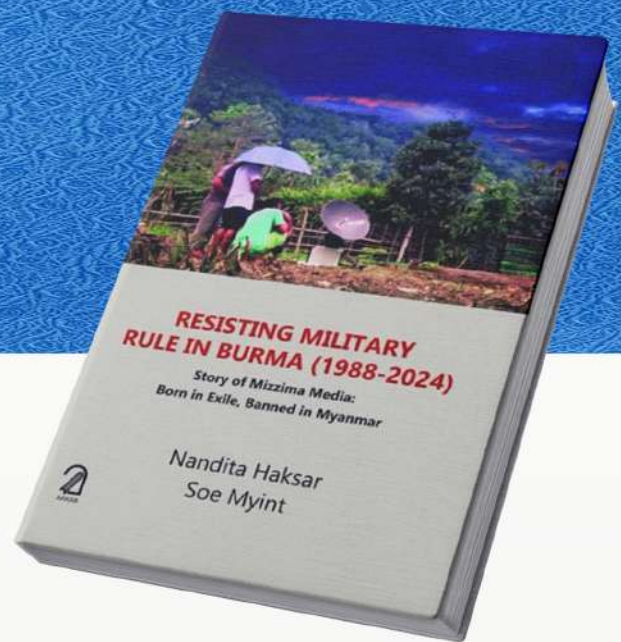
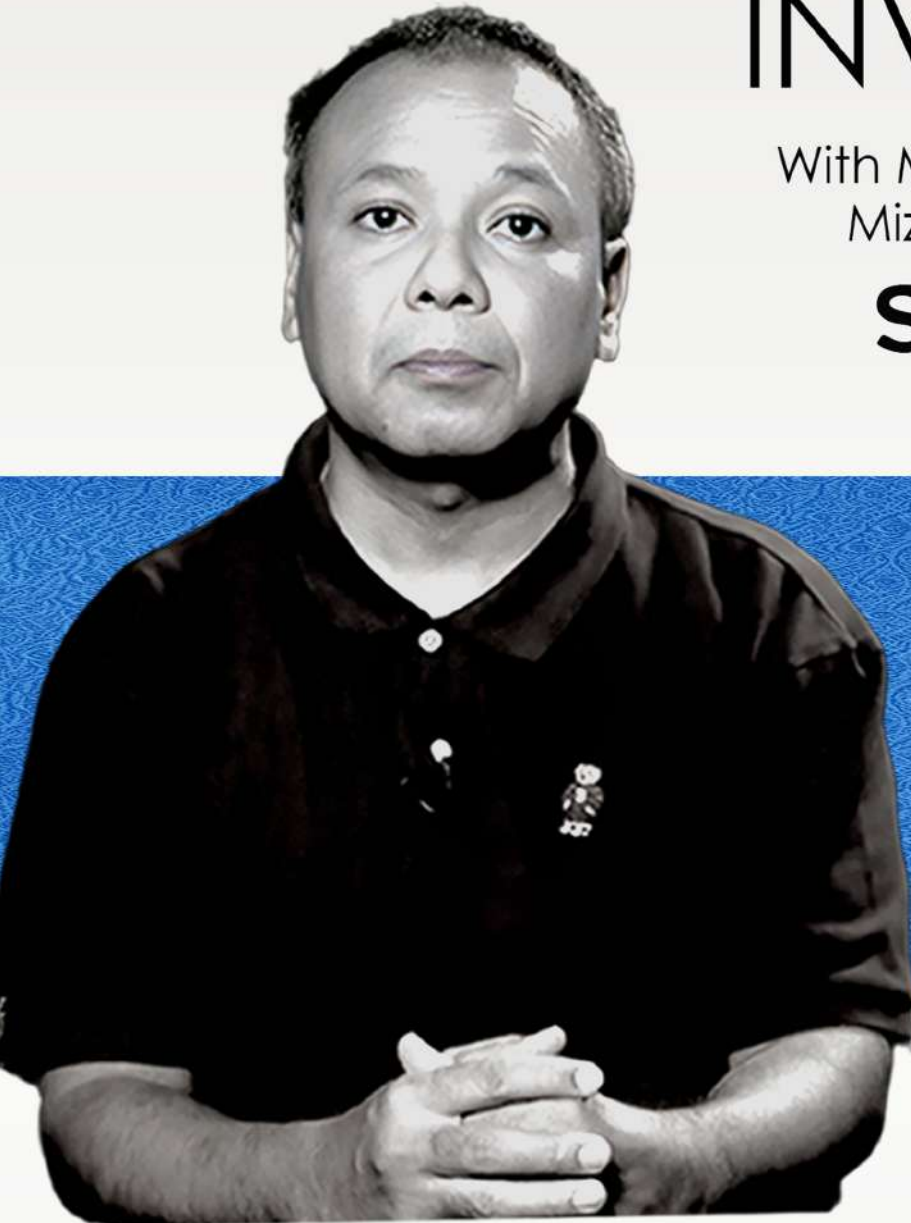
Human rights organizations have condemned these attacks as deliberate violations of international humanitarian law. Despite calls from international bodies for an end to military violence, Myanmar's junta continues to target civilian populations, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.

As displacement figures continue to rise and conditions in IDP camps deteriorate, urgent international intervention is needed to provide humanitarian aid and pressure the military regime to cease attacks on civilians.

BOOK LAUNCH INVITATION

With Myanmar co-author and
Mizzima media founder

SOE MYINT



*You are cordially invited to this discussion
moderated by Gwen Robinson about this book on
Mizzima Media and the ongoing crisis in Myanmar*

Date : 10 March 2025 Monday
Time : 7 pm to 9 pm
Venue : The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand
Address : P floor, 518/5 Phloen Chit Rd,
Lumphini, Pathum Wan, Bangkok 10330

Photo: AFP

AID RESUMES FOR REFUGEE CAMPS ON THAI-MYANMAR BORDER, BUT FUTURE REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Eight refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border have resumed receiving aid from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) after a suspension on 27 January. However, camp officials remain uncertain whether the support will continue beyond the next three months.

"Everyone in the camps is back to work now, following the same process as before. But it's only for three months, and I'm unsure what will happen after that. I don't know if it's related to the budget they allocated to us," said the secretary of the Karen Refugee Committee.

Since 21 February, services such as healthcare, sanitation, and clean water have been restored at Mae La refugee camp. While Umpiem refugee camp was informed that assistance would resume on 21 February, operations only began on 24 February. Similar services have also restarted in other refugee camps.

IRC's aid is currently set to continue for 90 days from 20 February, but its future beyond that remains uncertain.

"In the meantime, we are just trying to survive on our own. Those with serious illnesses, the sick, and pregnant women have struggled to access oxygen. For now, we can say we have returned to the original level of assistance," the Karen Refugee Committee secretary said.

The suspension of aid has already taken a toll on refugees. Karen refugee Daw Phi Khloe, 71, was discharged from a US-funded hospital run by the IRC

due to the funding halt and subsequently passed away from pneumonia on 2 February, just four days after being sent home.

The head of Karenni refugee camps 1 and 2 said, "We can provide basic medical care at the camp, but for serious emergencies, individuals must pay out of their own pocket and travel to the city for treatment. We only engage in small-scale farming and weaving here, and the lack of a market for these goods is a major issue."

According to camp officials, over 13,000 refugees reside in Karenni refugee camps 1 and 2, while more than 60,000 live in various Karen refugee camps, including Mae La, Nu Po, Ban Don Yang, Tham Hin, and Umpiem bringing the total number of refugees in the region to around 73,000.

The funding crisis followed an executive order by US President Donald Trump on 20 January, suspending nearly all foreign aid worldwide for 90 days.

On 24 January, Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued directives to US embassies, halting billions of dollars in US State Department funding, including programs managed by USAID.

As a result, the IRC, which relies on US government support to provide health and other services to Thai-Myanmar border refugee camps, suspended its operations on 27 January.

Following negotiations, the IRC resumed aid on 21 February. However, uncertainty remains over whether the assistance will continue beyond the next three months.



Photo: Supplied

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA CUSTODY, ANOTHER MISSING IN AYEYARWADY REGION

The Myanmar military junta arrested three men in Ayeeyarwady Region, resulting in the deaths of two detainees, one shot dead and another beaten to death during interrogation, according to local sources.

In December 2024, junta forces detained Ko Min Khant Nyar and Ko Ye Min Soe, both middle-aged men from Thidar Kone Pyin village, Ngathaingchaung town. On 20 February, they also arrested Ko San Win, a resident of Meik Thalín village tract in the same area.

A resident reported that Ko Min Khant Nyar and Ko Ye Min Soe were tortured for nearly two months at Thidar Kone Pyin Police Station. Ko Ye Min Soe died during interrogation on 19 February.

"Ko Ye Min Soe got severely injured and died during interrogation. After that, he was taken to Yekyi Hospital and died," Ngathaingchaung resident said.

Ko San Win was also subjected to severe beatings and questioning at the police station before being transported to the Gwa-Ngathaingchaung road, where the military is engaged in clashes with the Arakan Army (AA). A junta-linked source reported that he was shot dead en route.

"He is believed to have been shot in the head, and his body was hidden. He is not at the police station as far as we know, and we have no idea where he is," said a local source.

Residents also reported that Ko San Win's wife was arrested by the junta on accusations of supporting the People's Defense Force (PDF) and was sentenced to a lengthy prison term.

"The junta claimed Ko Ye Min Soe died of a heart attack, and that Ko San Win was hit by a stray bullet in the fighting on the Gwa-Ngathaingchaung road. But they are indiscriminately arresting and killing civilians," said a resident from Yekyi Township.

Attempts by Mizzima to contact Yekyi and Thidar Kone Pyin police stations for comments were unsuccessful. The whereabouts of Ko Min Khant Nyar, who remains in junta custody, are still unknown.

Meanwhile, military tensions remain high in the region as clashes continue between the AA and junta forces in the border areas of Yekyi, Ngathaingchaung, Thabaung, and Shwe Thaug Yan townships near Rakhine State.



IDPs in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

SEVERE WATER SHORTAGES HIT LOCALS AND IDPS IN MYANMAR'S PONNAGYUN AND RATHEDAUNG

Residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ponnagyun and Rathedaung townships, Rakhine State, are facing a worsening water crisis, according to local charities and aid workers.

Although Rakhine State has historically struggled with freshwater shortages, the situation has deteriorated in 2025 due to the increasing displacement caused by ongoing conflict.

Ko Wai Hin Aung, who assists displaced communities, noted that while village lakes and ponds previously provided enough water, the growing number of IDPs has exacerbated the crisis.

"In the past, locals managed with existing water sources, but now they must share them with a rising IDP population. This year, the number of displaced people is even higher, making the situation worse than usual," he said.

Currently, around 200,000 locals and IDPs in the two townships are experiencing severe water shortages.

The Ponnagyun Youth Association (PYA) reported on social media that Ponnagyun town has faced water

scarcity since December 2024, with the price of a single water truck at about 144,000 Myanmar Kyat.

"To get just one gallon of water, we have to walk a mile every morning and night, carrying buckets. Even after traveling that far, we can only collect a limited amount," a PYA official said.

To alleviate the crisis, the Arakan National League for Democracy, the United League of Arakan/ Arakan Army (ULA/AA), civil society organizations, and local charities are transporting water to affected communities. However, the supply remains inadequate.

Ko Wai Hin Aung explained that IDPs struggle to afford water, and village administrations oversee distribution.

"For drinking water, each person gets about 20 liters per day, which we have to share," he said.

Rakhine State typically faces water shortages until after the Thingyan water festival, but local charities predict the crisis may persist into April and May this year.



Photo: Aeria Digital

84 INDONESIAN WORKERS FROM MYANMAR SCAM CENTRES RETURN HOME

Eighty-four Indonesians returned home overnight on two flights from Thailand, Indonesian officials said last Saturday, the latest group of alleged scam workers to be repatriated from the region.

Cyberscam operations, which have thrived in Myanmar's lawless border areas for several years, lure foreign workers with promises of high-paying jobs but hold them hostage and force them into committing online fraud.

Under pressure from key ally Beijing, Myanmar has cracked down on some of the compounds, freeing around 7,000 workers from more than two dozen countries.

The 69 Indonesian men and 15 women landed in capital Jakarta after negotiations between Indonesian officials and their Thai and Myanmar counterparts, Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' citizen protection director Judha Nugraha told AFP Saturday.

"They will be brought to the Social Affairs Ministry's safehouse and trauma centre. They will undergo a rehabilitation process," he said.

Ministry spokesperson Rolliansyah Soemirat also confirmed their return.

The group, which included three pregnant women, were in "good condition and healthy" after their evacuation from Myanmar, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

They arrived in Jakarta on two AirAsia flights -- one late Friday and one early Saturday.

The ministry said it had repatriated an early group of 46 Indonesians in February, bringing the total repatriated since last month to 140.

Thousands of Indonesians have been enticed abroad in recent years to other Southeast Asian countries for better-paying jobs, only to end up in the hands of transnational scam operators.

Between 2020 and September last year, Jakarta repatriated more than 4,700 Indonesians entangled in online scam operations from countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, according to foreign ministry data.

AFP

OVER 660 MYANMAR NATIONALS ARRESTED IN THAILAND FOR ILLEGAL ENTRY IN ONE MONTH

At least 669 Myanmar nationals who entered Thailand through unauthorized routes were arrested within a month, according to Thai media and official statements.

The arrests took place in various border areas between 29 January and 24 February.

On 24 February alone, Thai immigration authorities in Tak district detained 60 individuals across different locations, including Mae Ku village, Mae Sot town, Huai Muang village on the Thanlwin River, Ban Thong Chai, and Mae Taung village.

In Kanchanaburi district, seven Myanmar nationals were apprehended in Sangkhla Buri District on 22 February, while nine were arrested in Naung Lu village on 20 February. Additionally, 14 individuals were detained at a checkpoint, according to Kanchanaburi News.

On 18 February, 15 people were taken into custody at the Sangkhla Buri checkpoint in the morning, followed by 116 more arrests later that evening, as reported by Thai-based Khaosod News.

Other arrests included 22 Myanmar nationals found on a roadside in Sangkhla Buri on 17 February and 13 more in Mae Sot District on 14 February.

Further incidents include the 11 February arrest of 57 Myanmar nationals who were allegedly deceived by brokers and abandoned in Khao Kho district, Phetchabun province, along with 23 others near the Vajiralongkorn Dam in Thong Pha Phum district.

Additional detentions occurred on 6 February, with eight individuals arrested in Mae Sot, and on 1 February, when 10 were apprehended in Sangkhla Buri township.

A major operation on 29 January led to the capture of 169 Myanmar nationals hiding inside a 22-wheeled vehicle in Thong Pha Phum township, while more than 110 others were found in five private cars in Thakhanong village. That same evening, 26 Myanmar nationals were arrested at a Mae Sot checkpoint in Tak Province.

The total of 669 arrests within the one-month period may not reflect the full scale of detentions, as actual numbers on the ground could be higher.

On 17 February, Thai police chief Kitrat Panphet issued an order to tighten enforcement against foreigners violating laws, ranging from public disturbances to activities that threaten national security. Following this directive, the Thai government has intensified crackdowns on undocumented migrant workers and law violators nationwide.

Meanwhile, authorities have been deporting arrested Myanmar nationals through the Kawthaung-Ranong border. On 24 February, 200 individuals, including 198 men and 2 women, were sent back to Myanmar after serving their sentences. Many of those deported now face the risk of military conscription by the Myanmar junta.



Photo: Supplied

200 MYANMAR NATIONALS DEPORTED FROM THAILAND, FACE RISK OF MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Two hundred Myanmar nationals who completed their sentences for illegal entry in southern Thailand were deported to Myanmar, according to a report from the Bangkok Post on 24 February.

The deportees, 198 men and two women were transported from Thailand's Ranong district to Myanmar's Kawthaung town via 14 boats through a customs pier at Khao Nang Hong village, Thailand.

Local residents said many deportees from Ranong are often recruited by Myanmar's junta upon their arrival.

"The Military Council has sent those eligible for military service to the military training centre in Myeik. After that, I don't know where they are sent," said a resident of Kawthaung.

Myanmar authorities typically detain returnees at holding centres before transferring them to military training camps.

In the past, family members could secure their release by paying bribes through the township general administration office. However, locals say this method has become increasingly difficult due to a shortage of new recruits.

In August 2023, the cost of avoiding military conscription through bribery ranged from 6,000 baht (approximately 800,000 kyats) to 15,000 baht (about 2,000,000 kyats) per person. By November, the price had surged to 50,000 baht (around 6,700,000 kyats). However, this illegal practice is reportedly no longer as effective due to the junta's urgent need for recruits.

Following the enforcement of the military service law, many young people from Myanmar have been fleeing to Thailand through legal and illegal means to escape conscription.

However, with Thai authorities intensifying crackdowns on undocumented migrants, more Myanmar nationals are being arrested and deported. Those returned to Myanmar now face the growing risk of forced military service.

MYANMAR EMBASSY URGED TO ASSIST STRANDED MIGRANT WORKERS AFTER THAI AUTHORITIES SHUT DOWN AAC OFFICE

The Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok must take immediate action to support Myanmar migrant workers left stranded following the closure of the Aid Alliance Committee (AAC) office in Thailand, said AAC Executive Director U Khaing Gyi.

The AAC office in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, was assisting Myanmar workers, but was shut down by Thai authorities, leaving many in a dire situation.

On 18 February, Thai officials inspected and initially closed the office but did not issue an official order at the time. Authorities found more than 100 migrant workers, including MOU workers and their families residing there during the inspection.

Two days later, on 20 February, Thai authorities sent an official notice stating that the office was illegal and must be demolished within two months.

The notice also warned that continued operations would result in a daily fine of 10,000 baht, a three-month prison sentence, and an additional fine of 60,000 baht.

The Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok evacuated over 30 MOU workers on the night of 23 February, but did not assist the remaining individuals, including disabled migrant workers.

"They only called in MOU workers and left the others behind. Right now, we still have around 40 people in distress," U Khaing Gyi said.

Among those still at the AAC office are five migrant workers and their families who were injured in the collapse of a concrete beam on Rama 2 Road in November 2024. The AAC has been supporting the workers since they have not received promised compensation of 1,000,000 baht after a three-month wait.

"The Thai government pledged to provide compensation, but they haven't received it yet. The Myanmar Embassy has made no efforts to follow up on this matter," U Khaing Gyi added.

Despite Thai authorities ordering the demolition of the AAC office, U Khaing Gyi insisted that the building, which was funded through public donations, would not be taken down voluntarily. He stated that he was willing to face legal consequences if necessary.

"The well-being of these workers is the state's responsibility. If the authorities say they don't need our help, we will step back. But if they expect us to handle it on our own, we will do so while facing the consequences. Even if we can't use the building, we will not demolish it," he said.

U Khaing Gyi criticized Myanmar's military regime for collecting taxes from Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand through the embassy but failing to assist them when needed. He pointed out that labour organizations have stepped in to fill the gap, leading to the current crisis.

The AAC office, which has been supporting Myanmar migrant workers since 2015, faced a similar threat under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government when Thai authorities bulldozed its fence and ordered its closure. However, intervention by the Myanmar Embassy, under the direction of the State Counsellor, prevented its permanent shutdown at that time.

Mizzima is currently seeking a response from the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok and its labour attaché, Daw San Thit Yee, regarding their plans to address the difficulties faced by the AAC and the stranded migrant workers.



**FORMER NUG
DEFENCE SECRETARY
U NAING HTOO AUNG
APPOINTED AS
ADVISOR TO PRIME
MINISTER'S OFFICE**

U Naing Htoo Aung, who recently stepped down as Secretary of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) under the National Unity Government (NUG), has been appointed as an Advisor to the Prime Minister's Office, according to official sources.

Confirming the appointment, NUG Prime Minister's Office spokesperson U Nay Phone Latt stated, "U Naing Htoo Aung has been appointed as Advisor to the Prime Minister's Office."

On 10 February, U Naing Htoo Aung announced his resignation from the MOD via social media, clarifying that while he was leaving his official position, he remained committed to the revolution.

A source close to the NUG stated that the advisory position is a newly established role within the Prime Minister's Office.

U Naing Htoo Aung, a former National League for Democracy (NLD) representative for Natogyi Township, won parliamentary seats in both the 2015 and 2020 elections.

Following the 2021 military coup, he joined the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) before serving as the Permanent Secretary of the NUG's Ministry of Defence.



Photo: Supplied

TOWNSHIP AUTHORITIES IN AYEYARWADY REGION ACCUSED OF PURCHASING RECRUITS FOR MILITARY SERVICE

An investigation has revealed that township-level departments in Ayeyarwady Region are sourcing and supplying young men for conscription by purchasing them from other regions and states. This comes as the junta enforces recruitment under the military service law.

A source close to the Zalun Township General Office stated that authorities are under intense pressure to meet recruitment quotas, leading to extreme measures. "Even female clerks from the township general administration office have been instructed to track down and detain individuals on the military service list at night," the source said.

For Military Service Training Course No. 10, ward and village administrators in Pathein, Thapaung, Ngaputaw, and Kangyidaung townships sent 150 men to the Southwestern Region Military Command in Pathein in early February. Among them, 40 were reportedly brought in from other regions.

A source close to the Southwestern Region Military Command disclosed that this was uncovered when the regional commander and the Minister of Security

and Border Affairs inspected the soldiers temporarily housed at the command before their transfer to training camps. The 40 men were then taken away by the junta.

During the inspection, the recruits, allegedly intoxicated from beer sold within the camp, claimed they were from Yangon and Bago. According to a source, ward and village administrators from these areas collaborated to purchase recruits, issuing them Ayeyarwady registration cards to formalize their enlistment.

Local sources reported that officials were paying between 50 to 100 million kyats per recruit. A person close to the general administration office revealed that Ayeyarwady administrators were coordinating with their counterparts in Bago and Yangon to obtain recruits while collecting 30,000 to 70,000 kyats from each household under the pretence of supporting conscripts. However, a portion of these funds was allegedly used to buy recruits, while the rest was pocketed by officials.

Many of those being forcibly recruited were initially lured with promises of porter jobs, only to be handed over to military authorities. In addition, the junta and police across Ayeyarwady Region have been conducting mass arrests, registering young men for military service, and extorting money from them. As the 11th week of mandatory conscription approaches, many youths in the region are fleeing to avoid recruitment.

Meanwhile, clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces continue in Ye Kyi, Ngathaingchaung, Tharpaung, and Shwe Thaung Yan townships along the Rakhine State border, escalating military tensions.

In December 2024, during an outbreak of fighting in Ayeyarwady Region, Vice Senior General Soe Win visited Pathein to meet with military trainees and organize reinforcements.

The junta enacted the mandatory conscription law on 10 February 2024, and has since been training recruits. Many military trainees have died in combat, while others have been injured, captured, or defected.

On 11 February, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) under the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement urging new conscripts to defect to the People's Defence Forces (PDF), People's Security Forces (PSF), People's Defence Organisation, People's Administrations, or ethnic revolutionary groups whenever possible.



UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S PLAN TO VISIT BANGLADESH WELCOMED BY BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

The Burma Campaign UK released a statement on 26 February welcoming reports of an upcoming trip by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to visit Bangladesh in March. The visit is reportedly to discuss how “we can maximise humanitarian aid and livelihood support to communities in Rakhine.”

The text of Burma Campaign UK's statement continues below.

Burma Campaign UK today welcomed reports that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres will visit Bangladesh next month to discuss how “we can maximise humanitarian aid and livelihood support to communities in Rakhine.”

Burma Campaign UK has been campaigning for Antonio Guterres to visit Bangladesh to discuss the growing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, Burma. More than 1,000 people have so far signed an online petition calling on the UN Secretary General to visit Bangladesh.

An aid and trade embargo imposed by the Burmese military on areas of Rakhine State which it no longer occupies is a deliberate tactic to use starvation as a tool of oppression.

In November the United Nations Development Programme warned of impending famine in Rakhine State:

- 2 million people face starvation.
- 95% of the population will be living in ‘survival mode.’
- The state is expected to produce only 20% of the food it needs.
- There is already a crisis, with well over 600,000 people displaced.

The petition calls on Antonio Guterres to negotiate the opening of an emergency aid corridor into Bangladesh, followed by agreements for the border of Bangladesh and Rakhine State, Burma to be opened to aid and trade into areas now under control of the Arakan Army.

Rakhine State (also known as Arakan State) is in western Burma, bordering Bangladesh in the North. The largest ethnic group there are Rakhine, but many ethnic and religious minorities live there, including the Rohingya.

The Arakan Army, mostly made up of ethnic Rakhine people, now controls most of Rakhine State, including areas where most Rohingya live. The Burmese military have used every tactic they can to try to weaken resistance to their occupation of Rakhine State. They have launched indiscriminate airstrikes and artillery attacks, exploited ethnic and religious tensions to try to divide and rule, and placed strict restrictions on aid and trade, including medicines, seeds and fertiliser, into the areas where they have lost control.

High level UN agency staff meetings with the Burmese military have elicited few concessions and not succeeded in persuading the military to end their aid and trade embargo or to allow unrestricted humanitarian access in Rakhine State. The only sustainable solution is for aid and trade across the border with Bangladesh into the areas under the control of the Arakan Army.

With the Arakan Army needing the long-term opening of the border with Bangladesh for trade going both ways, Bangladesh could be expected to use its strong negotiating position to seek major concessions from the Arakan Army regarding creating safe conditions for Rohingya refugee return into areas now under their control.

“We are relieved to see Antonio Guterres recognising that the scale of this crisis requires his personal intervention,” said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. “This visit by the UN Secretary General provides the best hope of garnering momentum for the significant changes in approach that are required, including opening aid and trade routes from Bangladesh into Rakhine State, Burma.”



NUG ACTING PRESIDENT URGES MYANMAR REVOLUTIONARY FORCES TO STAY HONEST AND STRENGTHEN RESISTANCE

Duwa Lashi La, Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG), has called on revolutionary forces to remain honest with the people while intensifying their resistance against the military junta. He made these remarks during the NUG cabinet meeting on 26 February.

“The influence of regional powers has prolonged internal conflicts. We must realistically assess the political dynamics of neighbouring countries and plan strategically to best serve the people in this crisis,” he stated. He further emphasizing the need for serious diplomatic engagement with key regional players such as China, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India.

NUG Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than also addressed the meeting, stating that 2025 will be a decisive year for the revolution.

“The revolution is not led by one person or group alone. Our government operates under Collective

Leadership, so it is crucial that we work together,” he said, urging coordinated efforts across all ministries and sectors to strengthen the movement.

Since the military coup in 2021, the junta has retained control over only 107 out of Myanmar’s 330 towns.

According to an NUG statement on 17 January, revolutionary forces have fully taken control of 48 towns, established territorial administration in 96 townships, and continue to engage in battles in 79 townships.

The NUG remains committed to resisting military rule and working toward the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA BLOCKS EVACUATION OF VILLAGERS NEAR NAVAL BASE IN KYAUKPHYU AS AA ENCIRCLES AREA

Starting 24 February, Myanmar’s military junta began blocking residents from evacuating five villages near the Dhanyawadi Naval Base in Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine State, according to family members who spoke to Mizzima.

Phone contact with village administrators and their families has been cut off since the evening of 24 February, with Mizzima last contact with them around 12:30 pm on 25 February.

“The junta has sealed off all the villages in the area, and no one is allowed to leave. We haven’t been able to contact them since yesterday. The AA has surrounded them, and the navy is still firing heavy weapons. Additionally, the roads in the town are closed,” a Kyaukphyu resident said.

Military forces have reportedly been using heavy artillery to prevent villagers from fleeing, while locals believe the blockade is a response to reports that the Arakan Army (AA) has encircled the naval base.

Residents of Kyaukphyu are growing increasingly worried after losing contact with their trapped relatives. Meanwhile, military sources confirmed that junta forces

are shelling nearby villages to prevent AA troops from advancing.

A source close to the AA told Mizzima that the Dhanyawadi Naval Base, Police Battalion 32, Light Infantry Battalion 542, and Infantry Battalion 34 near Kyaukphyu are now isolated.

“They are firing at villages from the naval base. While both sides are holding their positions, there has been no fighting today. The AA’s strategy is to prevent junta troops from moving in any direction. Now, they are isolating the naval base,” the Rakhine source said.

CDM Captain Zin Yaw told Mizzima on 24 February that the AA has surrounded all junta battalions, including the naval base in Kyaukphyu.

The Arakan Army, which has taken control of 14 towns in Rakhine State, now has only the coastal areas of Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung left to seize.



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TWO POLITICAL PRISONERS DIE IN MANDALAY'S OBO PRISON DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL CARE

Two political prisoners, a man and a woman, died in Obo Prison, Mandalay Region, in February due to inadequate medical care, according to a statement from the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) on 25 February.

PPNM reported that prisoners in Obo Prison have been denied proper healthcare, leading to preventable deaths.

Ko Aung Tun, a 28-year-old political prisoner, passed away on 18 February after developing severe sores that became infected. He had been in good health before his arrest by Amarapura Township police on 15 April 2022.

Sentenced to three years under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code, he had been held in Obo Prison since 6 September 2022. Despite being treated in the prison hospital for about a week, he succumbed to his illness. His body was not returned to his family, according to PPNM.

Daw San Yee, a 65-year-old political prisoner, died on 10 February. She suffered from multiple health conditions, including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and liver disease.

Arrested on 22 April 2021, by Chanmyathazi Township police, she was sentenced to 22 years in prison on 5 February 2022, under Sections 52(a) and 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.

PPNM condemned the prison's lack of adequate medical care, stating that poor healthcare conditions have led to unnecessary deaths.

The organization urged authorities to ensure proper medical treatment for prisoners and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees.



UK AID CUT A BOON TO MYANMAR'S JUNTA, SAYS BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

Burma Campaign UK released a statement on 25 February in response to the announcement of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's decision to cut the United Kingdom's official international assistance.

The text of the Burma Campaign UK statement continues below.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's decision to reduce UK aid from 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) to 0.3% is indefensible and will cost lives, Burma Campaign UK said today.

Aid cuts from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5% by the former Conservative government contributed to a 73% cut in aid to Burma and to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in recent years. A small increase in aid to Burma by the new Labour government had led to hopes that UK aid to Burma would be restored and then increased to help respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in the country. An estimated £6 billion a-year cut in UK international aid has dashed these hopes.

Keir Starmer's savage cuts in international assistance break the UK's international legal obligation to spend 0.7% of GNI on international aid.

The increased cuts in UK aid come on top of a US

freeze in international aid and dismantling of USAID, and huge cuts in the aid budgets of Germany and other countries.

"The Burmese military are already gloating about the cuts in US assistance to people fleeing their bombs and their bullets, now Keir Starmer is giving them something else to celebrate," said Anna Roberts, Executive Director of Burma Campaign UK. "The UK should be stepping up and providing more assistance, not stepping back."

The UK and other countries massively reducing international assistance are abandoning people in countries like Burma who are paying a heavy humanitarian price while struggling for human rights and democracy. They are potential future allies in defending the international rules-based order. US President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer are leaving the field clear for authoritarian regimes in China and Russia to expand their sphere of influence.

"It is a sad irony that cuts in international aid to fund increasing defence spending will actually create space for and embolden the same regimes that threaten our security," said Anna Roberts. "This is a short-sighted and panicked response and it is the poorest people in the world who will pay the price."



CLASHES ESCALATE IN MYANMAR'S PAUKKHAUNG AND PANTAUNG TOWNSHIPS AS RESISTANCE FORCES WARN CIVILIANS OF INTENSIFYING CONFLICT

Tensions between Myanmar junta forces and revolutionary groups in Paukkaung and Pantaung townships, Pyay District, Bago Region, have escalated, prompting resistance forces to warn local residents to remain alert for security risks. The area is home to several military weapons factories.

The junta launched offensives in mid-February targeting villages in northwestern Paukkaung Township. Clashes remain ongoing between the military and local defence forces as of 24 February.

“There are ongoing confrontations. The Military Council has not advanced but has been indiscriminately firing heavy weapons. No airstrikes have been conducted yet, but surveillance drones have arrived,” said an information officer from Pyay District People’s Defence Force (PDF) Battalion 3601.

The junta’s offensive operations are focused on villages including Ahine Sauk, Kyot Pin Wann, Thaik Chang, Natalin, and Tha Pham Kaine in Paukkaung Township, leading to direct confrontations with resistance forces.

On the night of 19 February, the junta began

dropping bombs using paramotors. The attack resulted in the death of one woman and injuries to two others, including a child, in Ahine Sauk village. More than 3,000 residents have reportedly fled their homes.

“Displaced people are hiding in forests on their own or seeking refuge with relatives in town. They are managing food and water supplies by themselves,” the PDF officer said.

Meanwhile, in Pantaung Township, located on the west bank of the Ayeyarwady River, Arakan Army (AA)-led resistance forces launched an assault on a military camp in Nyaung Kyoe village where junta forces have deployed heavy weaponry.

The attack on Nyaung Kyoe began on 18 February and the junta is reinforcing its troops daily from Pyay town, according to resistance sources in Pantaung.

Nyaung Kyoe village is located along the Taunggup-Pantaung road in the Rakhine Yoma region, about 15 miles from the No. 3 Weapons Factory.

The AA’s operations in Pantaung Township have been ongoing for over a month. The group previously captured the Moe Hte Taung military base along the Taunggup-Pantaung road.

Weapons Factories No. 3, No. 5, and No. 9 are based in Pantaung Township, while factory No. 19 is located in Paukkaung Township. Resistance forces report that current fighting is occurring just a few miles away from these defence production sites.

On 20 February, the Pyay Township Basic Education Students’ Union issued a warning that hostilities were intensifying, and that the junta was stepping up violence against civilians, including using scorched-earth tactics.

Pyay District People’s Defence Force (PDF) Battalion No. 3601 also cautioned residents that the junta is using civilians as human shields and burning villages. The battalion urged people to remain vigilant, stockpile essential supplies such as food and medicine, and prepare for emergencies.

Additionally, the battalion advised civilians to identify safe locations in advance, dig bunkers to protect against aerial bombings, and take necessary precautions against potential airstrikes and paramotor bomb attacks by junta forces.



Colonel Saw Chit Thu.
Photo: AFP

JFM URGES THAI GOVERNMENT ISSUE ARREST WARRANTS FOR THREE BGF LEADERS

Justice For Myanmar (JFM) released a statement on 25 February, urging Thailand to issue arrest warrants for three leaders of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), Colonel Saw Chit Thu, Major Mote Thone, and Colonel Tin Win. The organization is calling for these individuals to be held accountable for their crimes against victims.

The text of the statement is as follows.

We urge the Thai government to expedite the process and apply for these warrants in court. The issuance of arrest warrants would be an important step towards addressing rampant criminality perpetuated by the Karen BGF leadership along the Thai border.

Application for arrest warrants would follow mounting domestic and international pressure to clamp down on transnational organised crime. Thailand has also recently sought to cutoff the supply of electricity, fuel and internet to areas on the Myanmar border where there are cyber scam compounds.

Hundreds of previously trapped scam compound workers have been released and handed to Thailand

in recent days, which is welcome, but all concerned stakeholders must continue to push for the full dismantling of the industry. Prosecutions have a key role to play, for which arrest warrants are the obvious next step.

The depth of the Karen BGF's involvement in the cyber scam industry means they must not be allowed to escape justice through short term gestures to diffuse the situation.

A 2024 Justice For Myanmar report revealed how Karen BGF leaders and their family members profit from transnational crime through the control of land, interest in real estate developments where cyber scams take place, tax collection, the provision of security, smuggling, human trafficking and the sale of utilities.

Chit Thu and his children collectively own 9 Karen BGF companies. Among them are two cyber scam compounds through the companies Myanmar Apolo International Investment Company Limited (Apollo Park) and Yulong Bay Resort Tourism Development Company Limited (Yulong Bay Park).

Tin Win jointly controls the Karen BGF companies Shwe Myint Thaung Yinn Holdings Limited and Shwe Myint Thaung Yinn Industry & Manufacturing Company Limited with his wife, Nan Myint Myint Win. Shwe Myint Myint Thaung Yinn Industry & Manufacturing Company Limited has been contracted to import power from the Thai state owned Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA), powering scam centres and online casino operations in Myawaddy township.

Shwe Myint Thaung Yinn also traded oil from PTT, which has implicated the Thai state-owned conglomerate in the cybercrime industry.

In addition to seeking warrants against the three Karen BGF leaders, Thai authorities should expand criminal prosecutions to their family members, associates, the BGF's Myanmar military commanders, and Thai companies and individuals who have enabled and profited from transnational crime.

The Myanmar military needs to be dismantled

The Myanmar military launched an illegal coup attempt on February 1, 2021, and is a key enabler of cyber scams and human trafficking in the region. This organised criminal activity cannot be eradicated without dismantling the military and its cartel.

The Myanmar military runs a web of criminal businesses, and breeds and harbours the Karen BGF and its criminal enterprises. The Karen BGF is under Myanmar military command. Together, they function as a transnational organised crime network that generate funds for their ongoing campaign of international crimes.

International action to address cyber scams must therefore target the Myanmar military broadly by cutting its access to funds, arms and aviation fuel, and ensure international accountability for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, as civil society has demanded.

The military is a terrorist organisation under Myanmar law and as defined in international law.

Since the military's illegal coup attempt, ASEAN has lent false legitimacy to the junta and provided intelligence and training to the Myanmar military and junta police, while it commits international and transnational crimes with impunity.

ASEAN's legitimisation of the junta has not only emboldened this criminal cartel but undermined the international response to transnational crime by providing it with knowledge that can help it evade international law enforcement.

Action must therefore also involve excluding the junta from international organisations, including Interpol and ASEAN.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "It is positive that the DSI is investigating three Karen BGF leaders and it is now imperative that the Thai government follow through by applying for arrest warrants. This is a necessary step towards accountability for victims of the Karen BGF's crimes.

"Thai authorities must also address the root cause of cyber scams and human trafficking, the Myanmar military, which need funds to continue its campaign of terror against the Myanmar people.

"As long as Thailand legitimises the Myanmar military, allows it to act with impunity and provides it a financial lifeline through the purchase of natural gas, cyber scams and human trafficking will continue.

"As a neighbouring country and a member of ASEAN, Thailand has a clear responsibility and incentive to respond to the crisis in Myanmar and the scourge of cyber scams in the region by taking decisive action to cut the junta's access to funds, arms and aviation fuel.

"Thai authorities also need to widen their action against human trafficking by seeking arrest warrants for Karen BGF family members, their junta commanders and their accomplices in Myanmar and Thailand."



TNLA ACCUSES MYANMAR JUNTA OF USING POISON GAS IN ONGOING CLASHES IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

On the morning of 24 February, TNLA issued a statement alleging that the junta launched a poison gas attack around 1:30 pm on 23 February. The attack reportedly injured ten TNLA soldiers, four of whom sustained serious wounds.

Fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) persists in Nawngkhio Township, Northern Shan State, particularly in the area between Taung Shay and Mang Maw villages.

According to TNLA, affected troops exhibited symptoms including dizziness, rapid breathing, nausea, agitation, fatigue, and oxygen deprivation.

The injured soldiers are currently receiving medical care. The group also accused the junta of committing war crimes by using chemical weapons, which are banned under international law.

A local resident confirmed after the attack that intense clashes have taken place around Taungkham village throughout the week.

"The battle is fierce, with both sides exchanging fire between Taungkham and Mang Maw villages. The junta has been deploying aircraft extensively, forcing TNLA troops to withdraw from some hilltop positions," the resident said.

Mizzima is attempting to reach TNLA spokesperson Lway Ye Oo for further information regarding the poison gas allegations.

Meanwhile, clashes have continued despite peace talks held between the TNLA's political wing, the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), and the junta in Kunming, China, on 16 and 17 February. The discussions, mediated by China, ended without an agreement.

The junta has escalated its use of airstrikes in TNLA-controlled areas. On the night of 20 February, two 500-pound bombs were dropped on Webaung village in Moemit Township, killing three civilians and injuring seven.

Similarly, in the early hours of 21 February, the military launched airstrikes on Shwe Muhtaw and Taung Shay villages, dropping five and 27 bombs respectively. The attack on Taung Shay resulted in one civilian fatality and widespread damage to homes, according to TNLA reports.

TNLA further stated that throughout February, junta airstrikes and artillery shelling targeting civilian areas have killed seven people, including a child, and injured 15 others.



Photo: AFP

WEAPONISATION OF ROHINGYA BY VESTED INTERESTS WILL FURTHER DESTABILISE THE REGION

COMMENTARY

Bangladesh's position on the Rohingya refugee crisis is centred on the systematic return of refugees to their ancestral villages in Myanmar. Bangladesh acknowledges that a sizable population of permanent refugees negatively affects the welfare of its people. Bangladesh is trying to get the help of regional and international powers, especially China to solve this situation and find a workable solution to this catastrophe.

The ongoing conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State, between the Myanmar government and the Arakan Army insurgents, has intensified, causing thousands of Rohingya to flee into Bangladesh. Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman has stressed the need to stop the influx of new refugees, citing decreasing foreign aid and growing population pressure in the refugee camps.

Meanwhile, intensified fighting in Rakhine has added another element to the complex conflict. Recent reports indicate the possibility of intensified conflict between the Rohingya armed militants with jihadi leanings and the Arakan Army (AA).

Groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) have been involved in militant activities, and there have been reports of these groups recruiting and training Rohingya youth for armed conflict. Refugees in Cox's Bazar, where militant recruitment and violence have surged this year, are poised to fight with the Arakan Army and the Myanmar armed forces to take back their lands. Groups like the ARSA are known to have connections with foreign jihadist organisations. These militants have been involved in various violent activities, including attacks on Myanmar border police and other acts of violence.

According to Aman Ullah, an author and expert on Rohingya issues, "Initially, the Rohingya were positioned against the Myanmar junta or Burma Army, but the Arakan Army started attacking them. Nearly 2,000 Rohingya have gone for training with the Burma Army. The Rohingya are victims of both airstrikes by the Burma Army and atrocities by the Arakan Army. Of the nearly 500,000 Rohingya in Myanmar, some are seeking refuge in Bangladesh, while others are looking for safe havens in cities like Maungdaw. Due to the

ongoing attacks, most cannot stay in their homes, and there is a severe shortage of food and money."

The formation of a joint front by the Rohingya armed groups, including ARSA, RSO, Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA), and Islamic Mahaaz (IM), to launch offensives against the AA is a significant development in the ongoing conflict in Rakhine State. This alliance could potentially escalate the violence in the region, affecting both the Rohingya and Rakhine civilian populations.

The demography of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is changing very fast, which will have multi-faceted consequences. In the camps, child marriages and adolescent pregnancies are common. Every year, the Rohingya camps welcome over 30,000 newborns, posing significant risks and impacts. Nearly 200,000 children have joined the Rohingya camps within the last seven years. The demographic profile of Rohingya refugees shows that currently 55% of them are children, 41% are adults, and 4% are older people.

Crime rates are sharply increasing. This consists of human trafficking in this area, illegal drug business, clashing with different groups within and outside the camps, murders, and gun fights among the criminals in the camps. Additionally, there is ample reporting that Rohingya embarking on dangerous journeys at sea has increased over time.

Added to this, the AA has claimed that jihadi groups are carrying out atrocities along the border with Bangladesh and claimed that there is a nexus between the junta and some of these groups.

Quoting an Arakan Army source The New Indian Express reported, "There are nearly 11 militant groups operating out of Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, which include the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA). Hundreds of people have died due to their atrocities: killings, rapes, kidnappings and other kinds of torture," said a source from AA. The RSO is suspected to have partnerships with Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) and Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel).

Given these security and socio-economic pressures on Bangladesh on account of the Rohingya situation, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain recently stressed the importance of cooperation between Bangladesh and China to address the Rohingya crisis. Speaking at a seminar "Our Shared Vision for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity" at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) on 23 January 2025, he said, there can be no lasting peace and stability in Myanmar without resolving the Rohingya issue. "Both Bangladesh and China have vital interests in resolution of the conflict, and we must cooperate wholeheartedly in bringing about the resolution," he noted.

Touhid has said that, "the crisis is already having a serious impact on regional security and will get aggravated further if allowed to fester for too long."

According to a report by the Global Arakan Network (GAN), Islamists have used the Muslim population in Maungdaw in Rakhine State of Myanmar, as human shields and urged them to fight the non-Muslim population (Buddhists and Hindus). The report also stated that the militant outfits have recruited young orphans (some as young as six years of age) from Rohingya camps in Bangladesh and are training them to fight when they turn teenagers. It said, "Bangladesh's support – both tacit and overt – for Rohingya armed actors has facilitated the rise of militant groups at the expense of the moderate, non-violent Rohingya leadership." It further added, "We are aware of the involvement of Bangladesh's security agencies in the recruitment of members for these radical groups as Dhaka feels that they will help repatriate the over 1 million Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar."

The allegations of involvement of Bangladesh's security agencies in recruiting members for radical groups has raised significant concerns. Dhaka reportedly believes that these groups will assist in repatriating over 1 million Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar. Bangladesh retired Brig. Gen. Md. Manzur Qader, who has visited the camps, said his country's government should back the Rohingya in their armed struggle, which he said would push the junta and AA to negotiate and facilitate the Rohingya's return.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that some jihadi groups are fighting independently, while others have allegedly allied with the junta.

The political instability in both Myanmar and Bangladesh has exacerbated the situation. In Bangladesh, political tensions and governance issues have created an unstable environment. This instability has made the borders more porous, increasing the risk of cross-border militant activities and leaving locals in fear.

The regional security implications are significant. The porous borders and the presence of radical groups pose a threat not only to Myanmar and Bangladesh but also to neighbouring countries. The potential for these groups to exploit the instability and carry out cross-border attacks is a major concern for regional security.

China has been actively involved in mediating conflicts in Myanmar, including negotiations with the AA and the Myanmar junta.

Since 2020-21, China's Border Liaison Office has been operating in Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State in Myanmar. This office plays a pivotal role in assisting Chinese businessmen with establishing businesses in the Kachin region. Additionally, it facilitates the illegal transfer of rare earth elements through unofficial border crossings along the Sino-Myanmar border. The presence of a robust network of Chinese NGOs throughout Myanmar has further bolstered China's influence in the region, providing additional support and resources for Chinese interests.

And yet recent developments in Myanmar clearly illustrate that China's primary focus is on safeguarding its own interests, rather than working towards resolving the ongoing crisis in the country. China has deployed security personnel under the pretext of Joint Security operations, which has raised concerns about Myanmar's sovereignty. The presence of Chinese security forces on Myanmar's soil is perceived as an infringement on the nation's autonomy, further complicating the political landscape. China's actions are seen as prioritizing its strategic and economic objectives, rather than addressing the humanitarian and political issues that have plunged Myanmar into turmoil.

During a seminar held in Dhaka on February 3, 2025, titled "The Rohingya in Bangladesh: In Search of a Sustainable Future," Md Touhid Hossain, reiterated that a peaceful Myanmar is essential for both Bangladesh and China. He indirectly conveyed that if China can successfully engage the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to restore peace in Myanmar, then Bangladesh would be free to focus on its own interests. However, he also alleged that despite assurances from China, there has been no tangible progress on the ground regarding the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. Furthermore, the situation has worsened as the AA has made significant advances in Northern Rakhine, exacerbating the crisis.

While China has publicly stated that the root cause of the conflict in Rakhine is economic underdevelopment and has promoted its large-scale infrastructure investments as a means of conflict resolution, its actions suggest a focus on its own economic, diplomatic and strategic interests such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), thus prioritising its own interests rather than addressing the complex drivers of the humanitarian crisis.

What is emerging is both the Myanmar junta and agencies of the Bangladesh government are weaponizing the Rohingya for their own ends. This crisis is negatively influencing the dynamics of the region.

The commentary does not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.



FCC South Asia is pleased to host a discussion on

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

Story of Mizzima Media: Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

Story of Mizzima Media:
Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar

Nandita Haksar
Soe Myint



Scanned with CamScanner

With Authors

Nandita Haksar and Soe Mynt



Nandita Haksar



Soe Mynt

THE INSIDE STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA AND THE PROMOTING OF A FEDERAL FUTURE FOR MYANMAR

The Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC) of South Asia hosted an important discussion about Myanmar and its future on 28 March in New Delhi.

The meeting was intended to launch Mizzima Media's book: "Resisting Myanmar Military Rule (1988-2024): Story of Mizzima Media; Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar" by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint.

The panel discussion provided a good opportunity to discuss Myanmar's troubled history of military rule and the importance of the work of the independent media house Mizzima, now into its 27th year, and the question of a possible federal democratic future for this Southeast Asian country.

As lawyer and co-author Ms Haksar noted, this book launch and event was an important day both on a political and personal level as there are very few books where two authors of the Third World collaborate on Indo-Burmese relations.

Ms Haksar briefly outlined how co-author Soe Myint got caught up in the democracy demonstrations in 1988 and 1990 and eventually fled Myanmar in a dramatic fashion – hijacking a plane – and eventually setting up Mizzima Media in 1998 to cover developments in Myanmar. Mizzima is now one of the top three independent media houses covering Myanmar, working to cover the crisis, despite current security and funding challenges.

EXCITING STORY OF STRUGGLE

The book looks in depth at the developments in Myanmar and the struggles of Soe Myint and Mizzima to report the truth, including their time in exile, a return to Myanmar in 2012, and then a flight into exile again following the February 2021 military coup. It is an exciting story of struggle.

As Ms Haksar noted, Mizzima has "taken part in the movement for democracy and human rights and engage with all those issues."

Soe Myint thanked the organizers of the meeting and Ms Haksar for the 35 years she has spent working

to help people from Myanmar, including himself, who sought sanctuary in India due to the political crises in their country.

"My life from 1988 onwards basically has been a part of struggle for democracy and human rights and that continues till today and for those of us we call it the 1988 generation, we lived under a so-called socialist regime and we didn't have media freedom, we didn't have privately owned private newspapers. In those days the only media that we had to depend on was BBC World Service radio. So, with that background, I like many others decided to join the resistance movement after the 1988 military coup to fight back against the military, though in those days the situation was very different, there was no weapons as such."

Soe Myint said he wanted to enact a "hijacking drama" with a friend without weapons to gain international attention, particularly from India. They staged their act in November 1990, hijacking a Thai Airways flight and landing in Kolkata.

"Why I'm mentioning it here is because we looked at India first of all as the world's largest democracy. Of course, I studied India along with Soviet Union those days in the university before 1988, so India was one of my major subjects, so I was personally very enthusiastic to know about India but more than that I looked at India being the largest democracy, being the neighbour we look up to, India we looked to for support and solidarity in terms of democracy and the human rights movement in Burma or Myanmar," he said.

"We were so lucky and so right to choose India as a destination in November 1990," Soe Myint said, referring to the hijacking, adding they were welcomed, as detailed in the book. Soe Myint and his colleague were eventually acquitted.

"We basically also learned a lot from India about freedom of the press, democracy, even the complexities of federalism and it was fascinating to examine Indian democracy and the Indian situation. We were very proud of those days ... I think when we look at the (post-coup situation) after 2021 we have a new generation with the same commitment that we had in 1988, 1989 and 1990, and after 2021 coup, they have the same commitment.

"I've seen the military brutality over the last 30 years, but after this brutality after the 2021 coup, it is inhumane brutality," he noted, going on to give an example of Myanmar soldiers have killed young people and made the local people watch. In addition, the junta bombs schools, clinics and marketplaces. It is open season on civilians.

BROADCASTING UNDERCOVER

Soe Myint noted how in the wake of the coup, Mizzima broadcast footage of the peaceful protests and the brutality of the junta and how the protest morphed into a civil war, with young men starting to initially make their own weapons.

"Today out of 330 townships in Myanmar, 240 townships have active fighting. This is more than two out of three Myanmar townships where there is active fighting and in the last four years as a result of this armed resistance movement, different resistant groups for the first time in history minor nationalities and majority Burman groups are coming together, fighting together against the Myanmar military dictatorship. The Myanmar military lost in the last four years more than half of the country's territories to different resistant groups."

This has prompted the development of a huge humanitarian crisis, as he writes in the book, and the number of people negatively impacted is increasing.

Soe Myint noted that a total of seven Mizzima colleagues were arrested and tortured, including Mizzima co-founder Thin Thin Aung. Luckily, he said, they are all eventually released.

"When we set up Mizzima in 1998 – not just for news and developments - when we set up, we wanted it to be part of the movement for federalism and democracy."

Noting that Myanmar is full of different nationalities, Soe Myint said it was important to find ways to live and work together.

"Even before they staged a coup on 1 February 2021, we were ready. We decided to continue Mizzima

television particularly even if even in one state why because we need independent media first of all to tell what is happening in the country but secondly to also provide the platform to have a discussion to have different voices heard, to have a venue for talking about the future and we continue with this until today with all these challenges," Soe Myint noted.

DEVELOPING INTEREST IN MYANMAR

Panelist Mr Rajiv K Bhatia, former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar, addressed the meeting saying that the publishing of one more book on Myanmar is "most welcome for India as it is important for us to learn more about Myanmar and to show more interest and support for what is going on there."

Mr Bhatia explained how over the decades, beginning 35 years ago, he was involved with Myanmar including his tenure as Indian Ambassador from 2002 to 2005.

"Generation after generation, tragedies have not stopped unfolding in Myanmar and this book is about one exceptional person. Usually, we know that a journalist is supposed to present the story, he's not supposed to become a story himself, but in this case you have an exceptional person who grew up with the revolution, who was shaped by the revolution and at some stage he tried to shape the revolution and now he is in exile from his own country," he said.

Mr Bhatia said the story reminds us of many other great Indian leaders who themselves fought the British Raj who had to leave India and do things outside India to help India. Mizzima does not take sides and today is one of four main independent news services focused on Myanmar.

Mr Bhatia mentioned a few broad important points. Firstly, it was that in India there is a lot of sympathy and support for the people of Burma or Myanmar. This is for historical reasons, cultural and religious reasons. Secondly, the Indian government typically maintains a relationship with whoever is in power in Myanmar. In this case, it is the Myanmar military. Thirdly, Indian government policy typically supports the democratic impulses in Myanmar, even though there may appear to be a contradiction here.

He noted it was very important what the FCC was doing to raise people's awareness about Myanmar.

"So there should be no doubt about (Indian) people's sympathy and support," he said. But people in India have their own challenges also, they also face a difficult neighbourhood.

MILITARY LOSING TERRITORY

Mr Bhatia posed some questions for the authors. The first question was about the level of fighting. The second question was how much of the territory is with the military and how much with the opposition. And the third question was what is the future in the next two or three years.

Soe Myint responded that in terms of fighting, two thirds of the country's territories are involved in active fighting. Having said that, large population centres, like for example, Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw, do not have active fighting. There are sporadic peaceful protests, here and there, and these are generally quickly suppressed and those arrested are taken away.

"The Myanmar military under the name of the State Administration Council (SAC) is led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who staged the coup. He is Commander in Chief he is also acting president and he is also prime minister. That is the absolute power he has the control. So, under his rule, population centres like Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw, are under tight control. The resistance forces are not able to reach into those centres as we speak but there are, for example, the Arakan, Rakhine State, where we can say 90 per cent of Arakan is not under the control of the Myanmar military anymore. They are under the control of the Arakan Army. Similarly, most of the areas in Chin State which border with India are not under the control of the Myanmar military.

"If you look at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, it is not under the control of the Myanmar military. If you look at the large border areas between India and Myanmar, they are not controlled by the Myanmar military anymore. Similarly, the large border areas between China and Myanmar are not controlled by the Myanmar military. Similarly in Thailand, as well as the Thai-Myanmar border as well.

"So, we are seeing that the Myanmar military, for the first time in the history of the military, which I was proud of before 1988, and which people like me continued to fight against for democracy and human rights, the Myanmar military has been losing for the first time on the ground, militarily. Of course, they don't have the people's support, as I mentioned there were nationwide people's protests, from time to time including immediately after the coup regarding the future. The future for Myanmar is very uncertain. I don't know what will happen but what I can be sure is that Burma or Myanmar will not be the same as it was before February 2021. What is happening now, I think that can lead to what could happen, what is happening now is ethnic minorities with their due rights, with their birth rights, are gaining control of their own areas more and more.

"Either you talk of Kachin, either you talk of Chin, it is likely to lead to the future where the minority, the places where minority nationalities with lots of natural resources in their areas, are going to be governed more and more by themselves.

"Of course, the question is how about the whole country, still Burman areas largely, since Burman areas are largely under the control of the Myanmar military, like half of the country's populations living in such populated areas, the Myanmar military looks to continue to rule in these areas as well. So, we are going to have areas controlled by the Myanmar military, largely Burman populated areas and the areas more and more controlled and governed by the different resistance minority groups.

"But as I mentioned for the first time even though there is no blueprint unfortunately yet, where everyone agrees for the future of Burma-Myanmar between the Burman majority and minority nationalities or minority within minorities, but now they are all together for the first time fighting against the Myanmar military dictatorship. Because the fighting is so bitter, painful, people are suffering, large populations are being displaced, so the pain is what will determine what this country will be. Some people say it can be fragmented, I don't know, but what we can do as an independent media, being a part of this struggle for democracy and human rights, what we can do is we provide a forum for discussion, we can provide a platform for dialogue among these different stakeholders - excluding the

Myanmar military for now. Why do we say excluding Myanmar military? Because the Myanmar military cannot be trusted, particularly this current leader, he himself is not liked and supported by many people, even within the Myanmar military. It is a fact. That's why he had to imprison many senior generals in the last four years.

THE TRUST IS GONE

"So, we don't know when there will be a time for discussion with the military and the different resistance groups because the trust is gone, the pain is already there, suffering is already there, tragedies are already there. But we believe there will be a time when there are discussions with them, probably after a leadership change within the Myanmar military, we don't know.

"But right now the fighting and the struggle will continue. Independent media like Mizzima are determined to tell these complexities to tell these stories to our own people and the international community, particularly neighbours. Neighbours are important for us, particularly countries like Bangladesh, India, Thailand, because the governments I think should be aware that democracy is better than dictatorship and that is what we have to promote. Democracy is not perfect, as we all know, but democracy is better. Having a democracy next door is better than having a dictatorship rule next door, so that is what I can see. So, we continue our work despite all these challenges, we continue to tell these stories, we continue to tell what is happening on the ground. One of the reasons that many of us do not go outside the country is because we want to be on the ground, to tell what is on the ground, to tell this to you and to all," Soe Myint said.

Ms Haksar said that as mentioned in the book, "what is happening in Myanmar directly affects India and Northeast India, which again I'm sorry most of us are unaware of. The things which come to every dialogue on the northeast of India is of course the narco terrorism, cybercrime, the insurgencies both sides, and the humanitarian crisis which is the migrants."

The book covers these serious developments and that is useful, Ms Haksar said, noting this is not an academic book. It is a fantastic story of a journalist or a media house surviving in India and thriving, she said. She then read out a section of the book indicating the

drama involved.

NEVER UNITED

As S. Venkat Narayan, president of FCC South Asia, noted for thousands of years, Myanmar was never a united country, and added that the late Burmese General Aung San tried to unite the various groups but was assassinated before he could make good on his promise.

"The Myanmar military has never been as weak as they are today and the Chinese have been pushing the Myanmar military to hold elections and to talk with the various opposition factions, in a push for dialogue."

Mr Venkat noted that if China, India and Russia stopped supplying weapons to the Myanmar military, their ability to wage war would be negatively affected and the crisis could finish by next year or by 2030.

Mr Venkat asked Soe Myint what his impressions were.

"I think the Myanmar military talk about elections as a way of prolonging their rule. Of course, they can and without giving any reason they can continue their brutal rule, but we are talking elections because they want to get legitimacy, particularly from neighbouring countries, particularly because China - which I call it the Chinese package - decided to support Myanmar military elections but that is not what the people in Burma want. It is for the interest of the Chinese, to protect their economic interests, to protect its influence, to protect its control in its neighborhood, so that's why the Myanmar military has to talk about elections. Initially, when they staged the coup in 2021, they talked about elections that would be held very soon, within one year, within two years. Then they started changing that the election will be held when the situation became normal and of course they lost their control of many parts of the country. Then they keep saying that now even they are not sure that they can have elections in the areas which they control even in 2025. But they keep saying elections because they want legitimacy, particularly they want the support of neighbouring countries and also ASEAN," Soe Myint said.

"So I think that is where we are today and but for

the people particularly the people in the ethnic minority areas the elections cannot be held at all, and even in the city areas the election cannot be held peacefully. Plus, there are no opposition parties in any election the military will hold.

THE LADY 'FORGOTTEN'

"Aung San Suu Kyi, as you know, before 2010 she was under house arrest for many years but this time she is in prison, she's over 80 years old, and it seems that everyone has forgotten her and because of the situation that happened in 2017 in Rakhine State, because of what happened to the Rohingyas, everyone just forgot, everyone tries to forget but we know that she is still very much loved by many people and it is very sad to see that people don't even mention her name nowadays.

"So, the Myanmar military knows all this. The Myanmar military doesn't want her to compete. And that is there is no single leader particularly in the Burman majority community because she is forgotten, and she's in prison. Of course, in the minds of the people, she is still loved. And of course, as you might be hearing, the Myanmar military has been trying to use her release in the last four years as a bargaining chip. The day she says she will not support the armed struggle, she will probably be released but even though she doesn't support armed struggle she will not say this. That's how she is in jail until today. So, this is how we see things with the elections and what is happening in the country. And of course, Myanmar was never united in history, it is very complex, we have many nationalities, many minorities, and the historic divide between the Burman majority and minorities, but as a journalist, as an independent media, we want to and we will continue to tell this," Soe Myint added.

Responding to a question, regarding the encouragement for a free and fair election, from the audience, Soe Myint said: "For me, the Myanmar military has in 1990 shown that it cannot be trusted. In the 1990 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory and those who won the elections members of parliament were either put in jail including Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest or many of them had to leave the country, so that was one example, in 1990. Then in 2020 with the landslide victory of the NLD again, the Myanmar military staged a coup.

"So there was a deficit of political trust by the different stakeholders including by the ethnic nationalities minorities, why should they trust the military this time again if they said they will hold the elections? So that has to be dealt with, the political trust, so how it can be dealt that is one of the demands of the different resistance groups is - let's have changes first, let's have democracy, let's have freedom, let's have a discussion, let's have an agreement, before any elections can be held. So, the Myanmar military is not going to do that, and I don't think to be honest they will do that because the day they do that there will be a big question of justice. Justice has to be done because many injustices have been done to millions of people and many injustices has been done to different communities and nationalities in the country. So, unless there is a real political change whoever does this, even if China, I mean China has been really pushing for the State Administration Council (SAC), this will not be a genuine long-lasting peace, not a long-lasting solution for the country," Soe Myint said.

Ms Haksar said she wanted to add one dimension to this because lot of time when they have a discussion they are talking about government to government and then of course they have other diplomatic circles. "But I think there are few things which we can all do, those of us not involved in that official process and especially media because that's why I think that what the FCC is doing is so important is to provide a place to air these issues in different ways whether it's opinion piece or stories. And one very important emphasis I would like to give is the (Myanmar) refugees who are in India - I'm not talking about illegal migrants - I'm talking about political refugees just as the Mizzima people were at one time. I think they should be treated as a resource because they are the ones who will rule or they will have a say in the future of Myanmar."

Ms Haksar suggests having a freer environment.

"Now these people (Myanmar political refugees), there are 10,000 who are in Delhi, the government of India has allowed the National Unity Government (NUG) to have an office but it doesn't allow them to speak. I think that there is an area in which people or media can actually assist in a growth of an understanding and all these minority people are in India. So, there is a need to reach out to them and to have some kind of talks here of building up a vision of India relations or it may be of helping raise questions because these are the people who will go back just as Soe Myint and others went back.

QUESTION OF A FEDERAL FUTURE?

The FCC chairman Mr Venkat asked if the Myanmar military is forced to give up or is defeated, does he think the rebel groups will come together to form a federal government where different ethnic groups will have their own little centres of power or something like a united states like in India, the United States and other parts of the world. Is that a possibility that will ever happen because it has never happened in Burma's history?

Soe Myint replied: "Having been a part of the struggle, witnessing the oppression, being oppressed, I believe the people in Burma, Myanmar definitely know that they will be and they are the ones who will have to pay the price of not being united when they have a chance to be united, to be supported. I think they will be there together, the only question is when and how.

"Of course, we are not sure yet what type of being together, what type of living together, what type of working together, we don't know federalism, confederation, we don't know yet but definitely even in the last one or one and a half years we have seen more and more hard work being put in by different groups, resistance groups, different political groups,

different CSOs, even independent media like us, coming together because I think their life is proof and their life has told them that they have to be together, they have to be united, I think that is the essence of the struggle. Of course, a lot of them, a lot of this work needs support that's why we are looking at the Indian experiences, Indians politics, we are looking at India's kind of federalism, what India is doing, either good or bad, weaknesses and strengths, and we are looking at the examples from others and we are trying to learn as we also continue the fight to get rid of the military dictatorship.

"Every country needs a military. Myanmar, Burma will have a military but the military has to be democratic. What we have is a dictatorial military, a dictatorship, and I'm very sure I think I can say on behalf of many of the people fighting for democracy that there will be a true democratic military, there will be a united nation of Burma in the future in one form or another.

Catch the Youtube video of the launch of the book here :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsG5QkD0M-I>

To purchase a copy of the book, please contact: marketing@mizzima.com

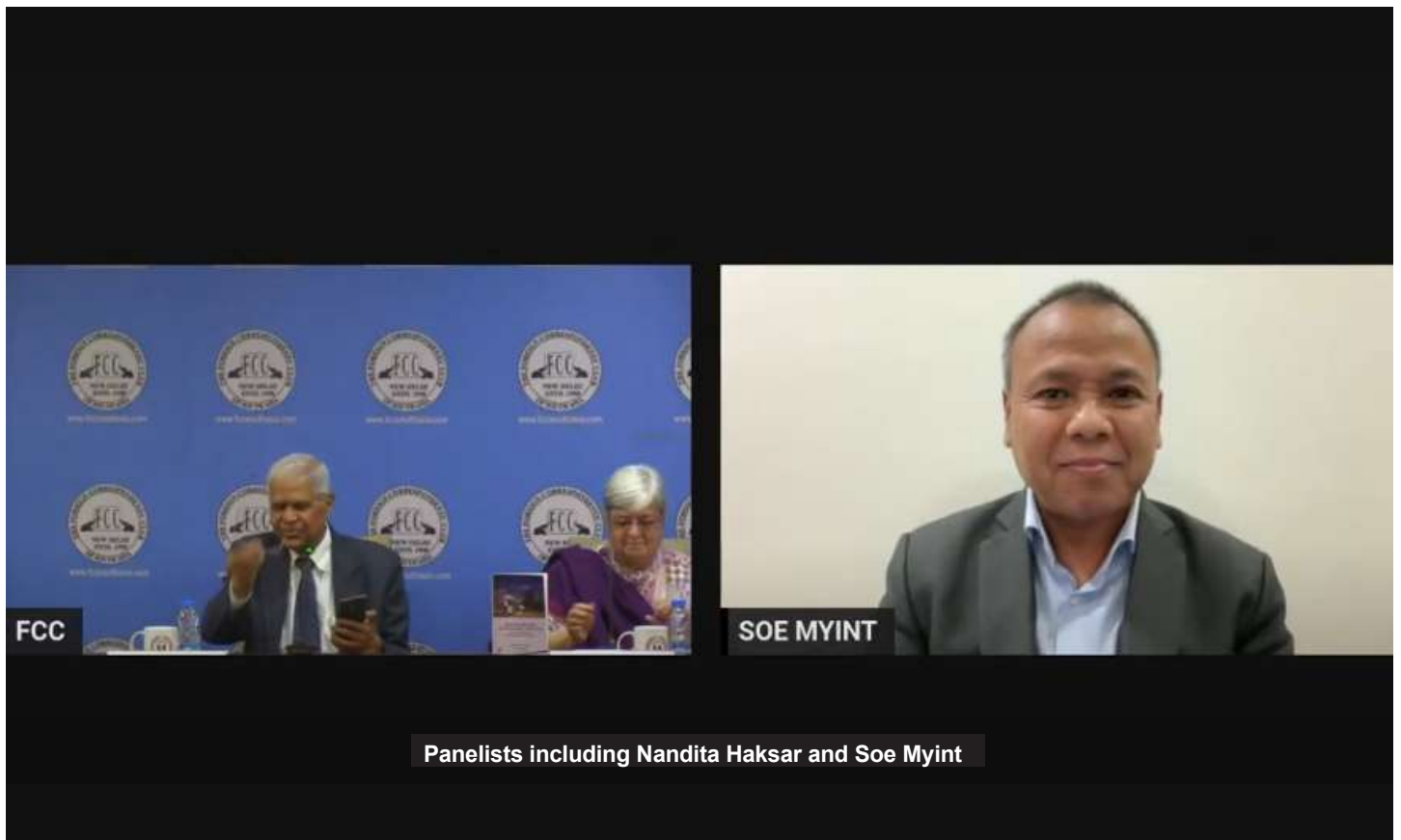




Photo: AFP

MILITIA FIGHTERS SURRENDER LOOTED WEAPONS IN RESTIVE INDIAN STATE

Militia fighters from rival ethnic groups in India's conflict-torn Manipur have surrendered scores of guns and other gear looted from security forces, police said 28 March, days after the state was placed under New Delhi's direct rule.

Manipur has been split along ethnic lines since the outbreak of deadly violence between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki community in May 2023.

At least 260 people have been killed and tens of thousands have fled their homes in the northeastern state along India's border with war-torn Myanmar.

The state's chief minister, N Biren Singh, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, resigned this month after criticism that his government had not done enough to quell the violence.

Community groups welcomed his resignation and the subsequent imposition of direct rule by New Delhi, hoping it would end mutual suspicions and allegations by the rival ethnic groups of favouritism by the state authorities.

The Manipur police, in a series of posts on X on Friday, shared photos of hand grenades, pistols, rifles, helmets, bulletproof jackets and ammunition

surrendered by ethnic militias from across the state.

At least 307 weapons were handed over in the last week, police said in a statement.

The "request for the surrender of looted and illegally held weapons and ammunition has yielded a positive response", it added.

"Such voluntary surrender of weapons will significantly help in restoring peace, communal harmony and lawfulness in the state of Manipur."

Those who gave up weapons would not be criminally charged, police said.

Long-standing tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities revolve around competition for land and public jobs.

Rights activists have accused local leaders of exacerbating ethnic divisions for political gain.

Internet services were shut down for months in Manipur during the outbreak of violence, which displaced around 60,000 people from their homes, according to government figures.

Thousands of the state's residents have still not returned home due to ongoing tensions.

AFP



Photo: Andreas Brucker

THAILAND DEPORTS DOZENS OF UYGHURS TO CHINA

Thailand deported dozens of Uyghurs to China on 27 March despite warnings from human rights groups that they would face persecution on their return, drawing swift condemnation from the United Nations.

Beijing is accused of committing human rights abuses in its northwestern Xinjiang region, including the incarceration of around one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. It denies the allegations.

Rights groups had warned in recent weeks that Bangkok was preparing to deport a group of 48 Uyghurs being held in immigration centres around Thailand.

They said the Uyghurs fled China more than a decade ago and lived in constant fear of being sent back.

Thai national police chief Kitrat Phanphet confirmed the deportations on Thursday, saying Beijing had requested the return of 40 Uyghurs.

"The Chinese government wrote to the Thai government expressing sincerity and their intention to take care of Uyghurs, promising in the letter that they will be looked after, and guaranteed their accommodation

and their safety," Kitrat told reporters, adding that the handover went smoothly and the Uyghurs did not resist.

Thailand forcibly deported 109 Uyghurs to China in 2015, drawing a stern rebuke from Washington and the UN, but had repeatedly denied the existence of plans for a new round of deportations.

International condemnation was swift Thursday.

"There is a complete prohibition in cases where there is a real risk of torture, ill-treatment, or other irreparable harm upon their return," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio slammed Thailand, an ally.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms Thailand's forced return of at least 40 Uyghurs to China, where they lack due process rights and where Uyghurs have faced persecution, forced labor and torture," Rubio said in a statement.

Germany's foreign ministry warned the deportees face "serious human rights violations" on return.

It called on China "to respect and protect the rights of those deported and their families" and on the Thai government to "monitor the living conditions of those deported in China and to work towards their protection."

In London, Foreign Secretary David Lammy said "The UK disagrees in the strongest terms with Thailand's decision."

'Concrete measure of cooperation'

China's public security ministry said 40 Chinese "illegal migrants" had been deported from Thailand in accordance with international law.

Asked whether the group included Uyghur detainees, Beijing's foreign ministry said only that they had "Chinese nationality".

"The repatriations... were a concrete measure of cooperation between (China and Thailand) in combating cross-border crimes," ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular news briefing.

"The legitimate rights and interests of the persons concerned were fully protected," Lin said. He declined to give further details.

Chinese public security officials said in a statement the deportees "were lured by criminal organisations into illegally leaving the country and remaining in Thailand".

"They and their families have suffered great harm, and their relatives have repeatedly requested that the Chinese government provide assistance so that they can return to the embrace of the motherland," the unidentified officials said.

Beijing and Bangkok are working closely to return thousands of Chinese workers from online scam compounds, with Thailand acting as a bridgehead for returns.

Most of those compounds are based in Myanmar, with few if any workers staying in Thailand for prolonged periods.

'High risk of torture'

The group of 48 Uyghurs, arrested in 2013 and 2014, were being held in immigration centres across Thailand.

Thai authorities had allegedly held the group in de facto detention for more than a decade with no access to lawyers or family members.

Rights groups and Uyghurs overseas allege that China has detained more than a million Muslims, mostly Uyghurs, in a network of facilities in Xinjiang that are rife with violence, torture, forced labour, political indoctrination and other abuses.

The UN has said Beijing's actions may constitute "crimes against humanity" and the United States has branded them a "genocide".

China says its policies in Xinjiang have eradicated extremism and boosted development, and that the facilities were voluntarily attended training centres that closed years ago after attendees "graduated".

On Thursday, China's foreign ministry accused "some political forces" of spreading lies about Xinjiang.

Rights groups slammed the deportation, with Human Rights Watch calling it "a blatant violation of Thailand's obligations under domestic and international laws".

"The men now face a high risk of torture, enforced disappearance, and long-term imprisonment in China," its Asia director Elaine Pearson said.

The Thai government acknowledged the concerns but insisted it acted in accordance with international law.

Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai told a news conference on Thursday that the handover had been "carefully considered", and that the Thai government is "confident that this group of Uyghurs will not face the problem everyone is concerned about."

AFP



HOPE DEFERRED

"This is a battle between lightness and darkness, between good and evil. I think we have to be really clear on our position on this issue, and to do everything that we can to make sure that the good triumphs over the evil."

Celito "Lito" Arlegue, the executive director of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), shares his experiences and insights regarding the political landscape of Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Myanmar in this Insight Myanmar Podcast. Throughout the interview, he delves into his personal journey, the challenges of democratization in the region, and the role of international organizations in promoting democratic values and human rights.

Arlegue's passion for Asian politics began during his undergraduate studies, when he focused on civil society engagement in ASEAN. This interest led him to become a program officer for a project on political parties and corruption in 2002. After returning to academia for a time, he eventually became the Executive Director of CALD in 2010, motivated by his enduring passion for Asian politics and desire to see improvements in the region. "I am always disappointed in the way this region has been progressing in terms of democracy and human rights," he says. "Maybe 'regressing' would be more appropriate, but we have to recognize that democracy in this part of the world has never been very strong to begin with, even prior to the so-called declined democracy, which has been happening for 17-18 years. Democracy in Southeast Asia in particular, has never been strong."

Nevertheless, he has spotted some glimmers of hope in the modern histories of many Asian nations "When CALD was founded in the early 1990s there were significant positive developments that time, reflecting the global trend after the demise of the Soviet Union," he says. "We saw in this part of the world, some countries opening up to a more democratic, more liberal political situation." He illustrates his points with three examples within Southeast Asia: his own native Philippines, along with Thailand and Indonesia. He examines the democratic and civil progress in each, and the ramifications of their domestic policies for the region.

No country's transition to democracy has been smooth, and for Arlegue, the Philippines is no different. In what will be familiar to those following Myanmar's road to democracy, Arlegue describes his own country's political system as a "Cacique democracy," or maybe a "pseudo-democracy." He laments the dominance of powerful elites within society, including the country's political parties, which inhibits the creation of strong, democratic institutions. Arlegue feels that, besides the Labor Party, Filipino political parties are weak, which leads to frequent party-switching among politicians.

Because Filipino politicians have leaned so heavily into populism, this has resulted in political leaders who capitalize on their own "brand," rather than focus on party beliefs and policies, or even the good of the country as a whole. He cites as examples figures like Rodrigo Duterte, who uses populist rhetoric to his advantage, and Ferdinand Marcos, who manipulated social media to rehabilitate the negative image of his political family dynasty. But Arlegue also argues that the political system's imperfections are counterbalanced by a strong Filipino civil society organizations. "Weak state, strong society," is how he characterizes it. He explains that these CSOs have historically played a significant role in mobilizing support for democratic and social causes, helping counteract the challenges posed by personality-driven politics. For this reason, Arlegue remains optimistic about the potential for democratic renewal and future reforms in the Philippines.

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<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/2/18/episode-314-hope-deferred>



Photo: AFP

JUNTA BURNS OVER 3,000 CIVILIAN HOMES IN DECEMBER 2024 ALONE AMID ONGOING CAMPAIGN OF DESTRUCTION

In the aftermath of Myanmar's coup, over 112,485 civilian homes have been destroyed by arson, with junta forces responsible for 108,645 of these destructions, According to Data for Myanmar, an independent research organization that provides "data for the people" in Myanmar.

December 2024 alone saw 3,083 homes burned across seven regions, with the Mandalay Region suffering the highest toll at 2,220 homes destroyed.

The most devastating single incident occurred in Twin Nge Village of Thabeikkyin Township, where over 1,100 homes were razed after junta forces recaptured the strategically important settlement.

In Madaya Township, eight villages lost more than 970 homes to junta-set fires during counter offensives against resistance forces. Meanwhile, Magway Region

saw systematic destruction across multiple townships, with junta army units torching homes in retaliation for resistance activities.

The Myanmar military and its affiliates have carried out arson attacks in areas with a strong resistance presence, said the report of Data for Myanmar.

Since the coup, destruction has been widespread but concentrated, with Sagaing Region accounting for 67% of all destroyed homes nationwide.

The pattern of destruction has remained consistent throughout the conflict, with junta forces systematically targeting civilian infrastructure in contested areas. The burning campaign shows no signs of abating, with December's figures highlighting a concerning uptick in destruction following increased junta offensives against resistance-held territories.



Bomb crater in Magway. Photo: AFP

OUTRAGE ON FACEBOOK AS MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL 12 CIVILIANS

Facebook users expressed grief and anger after Myanmar's military junta conducted deadly airstrikes on villages near Letpanto oil field in Magway Region, killing at least 12 civilians and injuring more than 30 others.

The attacks occurred between 1 am and 2 am on March 3.

"I'm heartbroken over the deaths of innocent civilians. May the terrorist military that commits war crimes be effectively held accountable. May the military dictatorship fall quickly," wrote a Facebook user responding to news of the tragedy.

Another commented: "The law of karma fails to punish these evildoers. The world turns a blind eye to justice, and unarmed innocent civilians continue to suffer like this. May the victims find peace in a better place."

Many users questioned the international response, with one asking, "Will the UN just stand by watching

these atrocities?"

According to the resistance forces in central Myanmar, the junta conducted eight separate airstrikes targeting villages between Myaing and Pauk townships. Four of the dead were civilians from Bauntbin Village, while others were oil field workers.

The junta used Y-12 transportation aircraft and fighter jets to bomb multiple locations, including villages, farmland, and a monastery. Photos released by resistance forces show victims with severed limbs.

This attack follows a February 25 airstrike on a wedding in Myaing Township that killed 11 civilians and injured over 20 others.

Residents are currently seeking temporary shelter as local forces work to clear the area, provide aid, and notify families of the deceased.

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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.