

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



Burma's Crisis of Legitimacy
Earthquake Response Exposes the Regime

EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

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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.

MAJOR CHALLENGES AS MYANMAR TRIES TO CLEAN UP POST-QUAKE

The massive 7.7 and 6.4 magnitude earthquakes that struck Myanmar on March 28 has left over 4,000 people dead, more than 5,000 injured, and nearly 200,000 homeless, according to latest statistics with the total toll likely to rise.

The natural disaster has compounded Myanmar's existing humanitarian crisis, exposing severe challenges in relief and rehabilitation efforts, given the political instability and military obstruction.

The ongoing civil conflict in the wake of the 2021 coup has the country fragmented which complicates crucial aid distribution in the wake of the quake.

The ruling junta has been accused of obstructing relief efforts in opposition-held regions, diverting aid to areas under its control, and continuing military operations despite declared ceasefires, which are not worth the paper they are written on.

The earthquake caused extensive damage to infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and hospitals. In Naypyidaw, for example, damaged roads have hampered rescue missions, with travel times from Yangon to Mandalay increasing from eight to thirteen hours. In Mandalay, rescue workers have been overwhelmed by the scale of destruction and lack of proper equipment.

Hospitals in affected areas are overwhelmed with injured patients and are in urgent need of medical supplies and blood donations. The destruction of medical infrastructure and the influx of casualties have strained the healthcare system, leaving many without adequate care.

International aid has been insufficient, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies receiving only 10 per cent of the \$122 million needed for relief efforts, according

to media reports. The United States has pledged \$9 million in emergency relief, but cuts to USAID have limited its capacity to respond effectively – with American relief workers notable by their absence.

The destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure, coupled with overcrowded shelters, has heightened the risk of communicable disease outbreaks, including cholera, respiratory infections, and vector-borne diseases like dengue fever. The current heat – with temperatures hovering around 40 Degrees Centigrade, and the recent heavy rain, have exacerbated these health risks, with the monsoon set to arrive soon.

Over 200,000 people are currently homeless, many of whom are sheltering outdoors due to the destruction of their homes. The lack of adequate shelter and the impending monsoon season pose significant challenges to the safety and well-being of displaced populations.

Communication blackouts and limited internet access have hindered coordination among relief agencies and volunteers. In some areas, residents have resorted to social media platforms like Facebook to appeal for donations and assistance.

Myanmar's recovery from the March 28 earthquake is impeded by a complex interplay of political, infrastructural, and humanitarian challenges. Addressing these issues requires coordinated international support, transparent aid distribution, and a commitment to overcoming political divisions to ensure that assistance reaches all affected populations. Unfortunately, the junta is showing limited willingness to allow the free distribution of aid. On the contrary, they are using aid as a weapon of war.

EDITORIAL

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**Mizzima Weekly is
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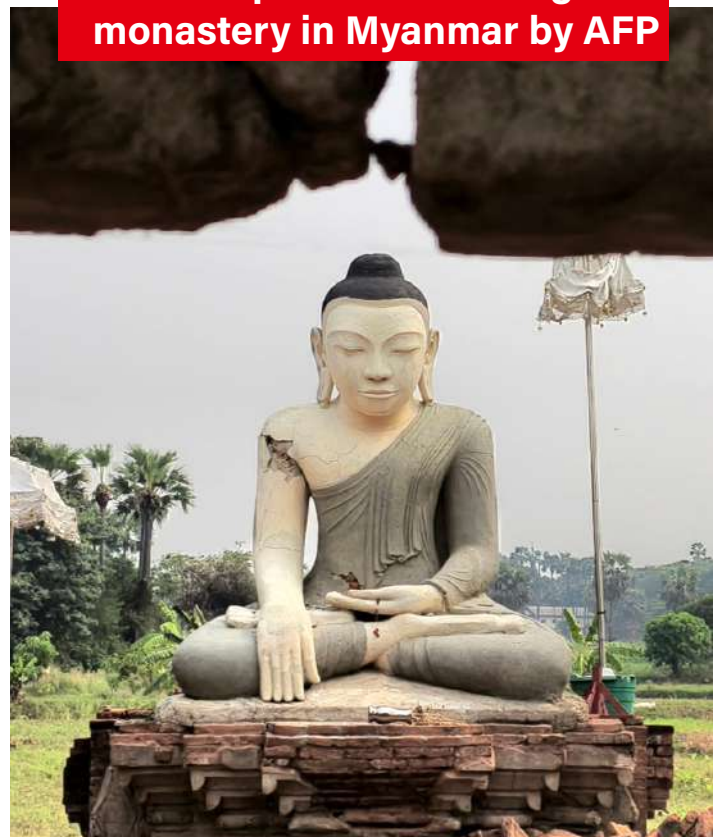
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Cover photo of a damaged monastery in Myanmar by AFP





A Buddhist monk takes a photo of the collapsed Ava or Inwa Bridge. Photo: AFP

BURMA'S CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY: EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE EXPOSES THE REGIME

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

"**M**in Aung Hlaing has proven himself time after time as one of the world's most brutal tyrants, with overwhelming evidence to support accusations against him of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide," said Benedict Rogers, a longtime Myanmar expert and senior director at Fortify Rights.

In the wake of the devastating March 28 earthquake, the Burmese junta's response has been widely condemned as both brutal and inadequate. Instead of mobilizing relief, the regime withheld aid from resistance-held areas, funneled assistance to military strongholds, and escalated airstrikes—bombing villages already ravaged by the disaster. Reports have emerged of the military blocking medical supplies, looting relief convoys, as well as using the crisis as a pretext for forced conscription and imposing crackdowns.

In light of these abuses, Burmese civilians and foreign experts were asked whether the junta's handling of the crisis warrants recognition by the international community as the country's legitimate government.

Most Burmese respondents requested anonymity out of fear of reprisal against themselves or their families—but their response was clear: an overwhelming no.

Many Burmese argue that the regime's failure to respond to the earthquake reflects not just incompetence, but a deliberate prioritization of power over people. Driver, a man from the Pa'O ethnic group, said the junta's actions "raise serious concerns about their governance priorities," criticizing the military for focusing on consolidating control rather than aiding survivors. He questioned why the international community continues to recognize a regime that has so consistently failed to provide even basic humanitarian relief. In his view, aid sent through official channels is "largely ineffective," with only a fraction reaching the affected population. Instead, he urged donors to work with trusted local civil society groups capable of delivering help directly. "Diplomatic legitimacy," he added, "should be tied to a regime's ability to meet its most basic responsibilities."



Monks offer a ceremony following the deaths of people due to a collapsed building in Mandalay. Photo: AFP

Nan Nan, a tertiary school director from Karenni State, offered a similarly damning account. She said the State Administration Council (SAC) diverted emergency funds to further their strategic ambitions, even as more than 3,500 civilians were killed in the disaster. "Instead of conducting rescue operations, the military focused on launching aerial and ground attacks on civilians in EAO-controlled areas," she said. Restrictions on rescue efforts left many trapped under collapsed buildings without help, and those pulled from the rubble often died due to a lack of medical care. Nan Nan also cited reports of junta forces arresting members of the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) who were engaged in rescue missions in Sagaing. "For all of these reasons," she concluded, "the world should focus on rescue, humanitarian assistance, and rehabilitation for the helpless earthquake survivors."

Several voices from Myanmar's younger generation, resistance forces, and aid workers echoed the

same concern: that international engagement with the junta prioritizes political convenience and economic interest over human lives.

Speaking under the pseudonym "DB," a 19-year-old university student from Yangon, argued that the international community continues to engage with the junta not because of legitimacy, but because "they need something from them." Whether it's access to gas pipelines or special economic zones, he said, "they care too much about their personal gains to consider the loss of human life." In his view, global diplomacy has become a trade-off where the suffering of Myanmar's people is weighed against profit.

A spokesperson for the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) acknowledged that some foreign governments responded to the junta's earthquake appeal out of a desire to help victims—but emphasized that such action should not be confused with political recognition. "That doesn't mean they accept the SAC



as the legitimate government of Burma," he said, framing these engagements as acts of humanitarian solidarity rather than endorsements of the regime.

Teresa, a woman from Karen State who works with an aid organization supporting displaced people, said the disaster exposed deeper ethical and political dilemmas. While some argue that recognition can be a tool for engagement, she warned that legitimizing a regime responsible for atrocities undermines democracy and human rights. "The junta's response to the earthquake reveals its broader failures," she said, noting that while resistance groups paused fighting to prioritize relief, the military escalated its bombing campaign. "Recognition shouldn't just be about geopolitical interests—it should reflect a commitment to human rights and the well-being of the people of Myanmar." For Teresa, as for many others, it's time for the international community to reassess its stance—and stand with those who are fighting for a freer Burma.

Expanding on his earlier remarks, Rogers said the junta's response to the earthquake only further underscores its criminality. "Within hours of the disaster," he noted, "the regime launched at least 11 new airstrikes against people in earthquake-affected areas. What kind of government bombs victims of an earthquake?" Although the junta has since appealed for international aid and announced a 20-day ceasefire, it has simultaneously barred foreign journalists from entering the country—restrictions Rogers sees as a calculated effort to suppress independent reporting. He warned against mistaking the junta's aid appeals as a sign of legitimacy. "This is not a regime that deserves any recognition at all," he said. "It overthrew a democratically elected government and continues to wage war on its own people." In his view, Min Aung Hlaing should be prosecuted in The Hague for mass atrocities and crimes, rather than being courted by world leaders.

Another foreign expert, Ashley South, a Senior Research Fellow at Chiang Mai University, called the junta's response to the earthquake "appalling—and typical." Rather than accepting a humanitarian ceasefire proposed by the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the National Unity Government, the SAC renewed airstrikes and drone attacks on civilian areas, he said. South noted that assistance is still being blocked to vulnerable populations in Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, where many of the earthquake's victims remain without food, shelter, or medical care.

"There are growing calls for a humanitarian truce in Myanmar," he said, "but while it is right to put suffering victims at the center of our concerns, we must not create a false moral equivalency between the SAC and the anti-junta forces." In his view, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) and People's Defense Forces (PDF) are fighting for human rights and democracy, while the generals are "desperate to hang on to power at any cost—including making war against civilian communities devastated by the earthquake." South urged the international community and regional powers to cut ties with the junta and offer full support to Burma's resistance movements.

Saw Aung, a respondent from Burma, urged the international community to stop engaging with the junta entirely. "International communities and organizations must be strongly discouraged from dealing with the Myanmar junta," he said, emphasizing that since its formation, the National Unity Government (NUG) has declared itself the country's legitimate government. "But some countries don't seem to take that seriously," he added.

He pointed to the junta's airstrike on Naung Cho—launched just hours after the earthquake struck Mandalay and Sagaing—as proof of its inhumanity. "It's absurd and absolutely inhumane," he said. Despite the rising death toll and continued military aggression, neighboring countries still invited the junta's leader to a regional summit. That decision, Saw Aung said, has left many Burmese "confused and heartbroken," as it appears to legitimize a regime actively bombing its own people in the midst of a national disaster.

"Concerns must be raised," he concluded, "about whether these countries are simply ignoring the junta's actions—or refusing to intervene because they see no benefit in doing so."

For the people of Myanmar, the earthquake was not just a natural disaster—it was another test of the junta's willingness to protect its citizens. And for the international community, it has become a test of conscience. The world must now decide whether to stand with a regime that bombs the vulnerable, or with those risking everything to build a just and democratic future.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert who has reported extensively on Burma.



Family and friends celebrate the release of prisoners outside Insein Prison. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA RELEASES PRISONERS AT NEW YEAR

The Myanmar military regime released 4,893 prisoners across the country on April 17 as part of its annual amnesty marking the Myanmar New Year, but only a small fraction were political detainees, drawing criticism from human rights groups and former prisoners.

According to Theik Tun Oo, an executive member of the Political Prisoners Network - Myanmar (PPNM), just 378 of those released—slightly over seven per cent—were political prisoners. Among them was Han Tha Nyein, co-founder of the independent Kamaryut Media outlet.

Bo Kyi, a spokesperson for the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), told The Irrawaddy that the release of political prisoners serves as a "barometer of the political process." He emphasized that meaningful progress must include the release of high-profile political detainees, which the junta has largely avoided.

Critics argue the amnesty is a strategic move by the junta to ease prison overcrowding following recent earthquake damage and to improve its image ahead of regional diplomacy. A former political prisoner noted that the gesture appeared more focused on reducing the prison population than addressing political injustices.

The timing of the release coincided with a meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the current ASEAN chair, who reportedly noted releasing the prisoners during his meeting with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. Observers say the large-scale amnesty served to bolster the junta's standing in diplomatic discussions.

Despite the headline figure of nearly 5,000 releases, the junta's amnesty order specifically excluded individuals convicted of serious crimes such as drug trafficking, murder, rape, bombings, illegal weapons possession, and corruption.



The Arakan Army continues to press its offensives.
Photo: AFP

Political analysts have condemned the move as a symbolic gesture lacking substance, with the majority of political prisoners remaining behind bars amid ongoing repression.

Update on the Arakan Army's military moves

The Arakan Army (AA) and allied resistance forces seized a junta outpost in Pandawgyi village, Lay Myat Hnar Township, Ayeyarwady Region, on April 17, despite an earlier ceasefire declaration by the group following the devastating earthquake in late March. In Pandawgyi village, the battle escalated on April 15 and culminated in the capture of the junta outpost two days later. A resident of Lay Myat Hnar town noted, "We are not worried about the AA's offensive, but about the junta troops torching villages. AA and PDFs don't burn property unless it's for security reasons."

Following the loss of their outpost, junta forces withdrew and regrouped in Sisonegone village, which

lies two miles from Pandawgyi and ten miles from Lay Myat Hnar town, to establish a new defense line. Resistance forces are reportedly active across Lay Myat Hnar, Pathein, Yekyi, and Thabaung townships, with frequent clashes continuing in the region.

Although major hostilities had subsided after March 28 due to the earthquake, locals report that junta troops staged artificial skirmishes in at least three locations in Lay Myat Hnar Township. One resident told People Spring, "They arrived in three military trucks wearing commando uniforms, jumped out, laid down on the road, and started shooting aimlessly. We had no idea what they were trying to do."

The AA had announced a ceasefire with its alliances, MNDAA and TNLA, until the end of April to allow for humanitarian efforts in quake-affected areas. However, the group accused the junta of violating its own ceasefire by launching airstrikes and ground operations on April 5. In response, resistance operations resumed in several areas.



Critics are unhappy about the ASEAN chair hosting a meeting with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

Fighting has also intensified in Rakhine State, where AA forces are reportedly advancing on the junta's No. (32) Police Battalion base in Kyaukphyu. Clashes erupted during the traditional Thingyan water festival, with junta forces deploying drones, paramotors, and navy vessels in an effort to fend off the AA offensive.

A local military source told Narinjara News, "There have been many casualties and surrenders from the junta side. That's why they've been using drones and paramotors at night, and even the navy."

A resident of Kyaukphyu added, "Despite trying to launch counter-offensives during the water festival, some junta soldiers were reluctant to fight and surrendered to the AA. I heard that about 30 soldiers surrendered."

The recent escalation in fighting highlights ongoing instability in both Rakhine State and the Ayeyarwady Region, as resistance forces push forward despite the military's intensified use of air and naval firepower.

Fallout from Min Aung Hlaing's meeting with Malaysian PM Anwar as ASEAN chair

The recent meeting between Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Myanmar junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has sparked backlash among pro-democracy groups and former regional officials, who say the engagement risks undermining ASEAN's policy toward Myanmar.

The meeting, held in Bangkok on April 17 and reportedly arranged by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, came as a surprise to many, especially amid ASEAN's continued exclusion of the Myanmar military regime from high-level meetings due to its failure to implement the bloc's Five-Point Consensus.


Former Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah called the meeting a "step in the wrong direction," criticizing the absence of engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and other key

stakeholders. He also warned that the junta could exploit the recent earthquake crisis to restore international ties and divert humanitarian aid for military use.

Observers and resistance actors alike have raised alarm over the possible shift in ASEAN's stance. While the bloc previously sidelined the junta for its failure to stop violence and engage in dialogue, Anwar's meeting may signal a softening approach—one that could legitimize the military regime, according to critics.

"The junta will certainly use this opportunity for political gain," said a representative of the Karen National Union (KNU), one of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) aligned with Myanmar's broader resistance movement. The spokesperson also noted that revolutionary diplomats have been in quiet communication with ASEAN countries, but warned that one-sided engagement with the junta risks sidelining the democratic forces.

The NUG and EAOs have jointly cautioned ASEAN to avoid recognizing only the junta, emphasizing that resistance forces now control significant portions of Myanmar's territory. With the junta continuing to violate the spirit of ASEAN's peace roadmap, Myanmar's pro-democracy movement remains deeply concerned that any shift toward normalizing relations with the military regime would set back efforts to resolve the crisis and embolden the generals.



ASEAN chair Anwar Ibrahim. Photo: AFP

ASEAN CHAIR URGES MYANMAR JUNTA TO HONOUR QUAKE TRUCE

Malaysian Prime Minister and ASEAN chair Anwar Ibrahim said Friday he had urged Myanmar's junta leader to respect a post-earthquake ceasefire in backroom talks in Bangkok.

Junta officials have been barred from summits of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) over lack of progress on a peace deal since Myanmar's military snatched power in a 2021 coup and sparked a civil war.

But junta chief Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Bangkok on Thursday to meet Anwar, who holds the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN, on the sidelines of his talks with Thai officials.

Myanmar's military declared a ceasefire until April 22 after last month's magnitude-7.7 earthquake killed at least 3,700 people. Conflict monitors say fighting has continued, including regular junta airstrikes.

"I told him it's important to cease fire," Anwar told reporters in Bangkok. "It's important to allow for humanitarian efforts to cover all of Myanmar, irrespective of where they are or what political position they take."

"That assurance was given," he said.

A Myanmar junta statement on Thursday night made no mention of Anwar's overtures for peace. It said the talks had focused on "cooperation for rehabilitation after the Myanmar earthquake disaster".

Ease relief efforts

The March 28 quake has left 60,000 people living in tents, according to the United Nations, and pushed two million people into "critical need of assistance and protection".

When the military government declared the truce to ease relief efforts it warned adversaries it would still retaliate to their offensive operations. A junta spokesman this week accused armed groups of attacks across the country.

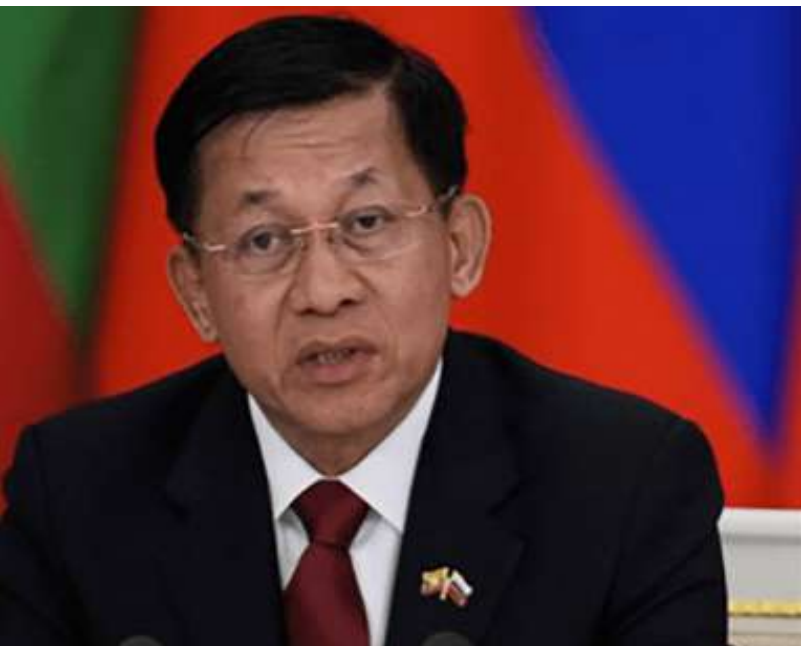
Anwar also called on Friday a senior leader from Myanmar's opposition "National Unity Government", Mahn Winn Khaing Thann. Myanmar's junta has announced plans to hold an election around the end of the year.

But the NUG has urged the public and political parties to boycott any poll organised by the military government which jailed the country's last civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Analysts say it could not possibly be a genuine democratic exercise with the country split between the military and hundreds of factions of ethnic armed groups and anti-coup fighters.

"We do express ASEAN's concern," said Anwar. "We are not pushing this too fast because we want this sort of consensus... to ensure there is fair and free elections."

AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MEETS ASEAN CHAIR AFTER YEARS OF BEING KEPT AT A DISTANCE

DON PATHAN

The meeting between Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Chairman of the State Administration Council (SAC), Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in Bangkok marked the first time that the chair of the ASEAN Standing Committee met with the Myanmar junta chief after years of keeping him at a distance.

"The meeting comes at a time of uncertainty and at the same time provide opportunities for Myanmar stakeholders to work and converge on the common objective on humanitarian support for the quake victims. Thailand and Malaysia will work closer on this and both would like to see progress on the ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus," said Kavi Chongkitavorn, a veteran journalist and an expert on ASEAN affairs.

Anwar insists that he is not abandoning ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus as the basis for regional grouping's engagement with Myanmar but maintains that the meeting is being held purely on humanitarian grounds. He will be looking to advance the ceasefire between rebel forces and SAC troops.

"With just one phone call, he (Min Aung Hlaing) agreed to meet in Bangkok, despite April 17 being a major religious holiday in Myanmar. This reflects both respect for Malaysia and their willingness to engage in

dialogue," Anwar said.

Instead of thanking Min Aung Hlaing, it makes more sense that the Myanmar junta chief thanks Anwar for the invitation. After all, this is something that the junta chief has been looking for and something that the resistance movements have been dead against — legitimizing the status of this junta chief who pay lip service to humanitarian issues but continue to bomb civilians, not necessary as part of a military strategy but to terrorize them into submission.

SAC's decision to renege on the promise to halt offensives to facilitate humanitarian aid to area affected by the earthquake reflects the fragility of Anwar's peace initiative.

If nothing concrete comes out of the meeting, Min Aung Hlaing can always say that he did not hesitate to engage with regional leaders to address Myanmar's humanitarian crisis.

Indeed, one cannot overlook the political underpinnings of tomorrow's meeting in Bangkok. It is not clear if Thaksin Shinawatra and his daughter, Prime Minister Paetongtarn, will join the meeting. Thaksin was appointed advisor to Anwar.

Malaysia may be chairman of ASEAN. But it doesn't mean its policy and strategy are confined to humanitarian initiatives. Thousands have lost their lives because of the earthquake and the ongoing conflicts. Access to medical support is extremely limited.

But with the current humanitarian drive following the massive earthquake, ASEAN members and Myanmar's neighbouring countries may have just found a new way to work toward resolving the crisis inside the country. Min Aung Hlaing is using it to heighten his standing internationally. There is no reason why Thailand and other ASEAN member states cannot do the same thing — using the crisis to reach out to Myanmar's resistance forces and EAOs to push for a more robust ceasefire and conflict resolution.

Thailand employed the same humanitarian argument when it pushed through the humanitarian coordination effort to bring aid across the border to villagers in Karen State. Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) warned against it, saying the effort did more to help legitimize the SAC. They said the design was flawed as it reached only a handful of people. Such concerns still exist today.

Anwar said the ceasefire was crucial as it allows humanitarian aid to reach victims of the recent earthquake in Myanmar. Yes, that may be true. But one has to keep in mind that much of the areas along the Myanmar border are controlled by EAOs and resistance forces. The question is whether Malaysia, Thailand, and ASEAN will have the political courage to engage these forces or will they stick to the status quo for fear of offending the SAC, the fancy name that the Myanmar junta has given itself.

Anwar said assistance would only be offered if military operations were suspended. "The people are suffering... so I asked for a ceasefire. Two days later, Myanmar announced a truce in place until April 22. Although not solely due to our efforts, Malaysia has at least taken a clear stand on behalf of ASEAN. Insha-Allah, during my meeting with him on April 17, I will push for the ceasefire to be extended," he added.

The Red Cross Society of Thailand, an outfit that coordinates its humanitarian efforts with state agencies, has consistently provided aid and medical supplies to

Burmese internally displaced persons (IDPs) through civil authorities closely aligned with EAOs such as the Karen National Union (KNU) and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). Perhaps the government could learn from their examples.

Indeed, the fragmentation in Myanmar has forced bordering countries to adjust their stance and policy. But balancing engagement with Naypyidaw and the opponents of the regime has not been easy. There have been suggestions in Thai government circles that Thailand should become a place where discussions and debates about Myanmar can be conducted safely. But such ideas have not gained serious traction at the policy level. Again, for fear of offending the SAC, Thailand does not seem to want to be too open about their interactions with opposition forces and prefers to keep them as local, unofficial arrangements.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) and other opposition groups issued a statement expressing their concern about the meeting between the Myanmar junta chief and the ASEAN chair. The statement warned about the dangers of the meeting being held under the guise of trying to help with humanitarian aid. The junta has not adhered to the Five-Point-Consensus and continues to attack civilians — despite the desperate need to help quake victims.

The statement points out that players other than the military junta need to be engaged during the humanitarian aid drive. They point out the dangers of unilateral engagement with a player who is considered a "terrorist". Such an approach undermines the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and fails to ensure aid is delivered according to need.

"Rather than supporting the people of Myanmar, these actions risk legitimizing the illegal military coup and reinforcing the regime responsible for their suffering. Therefore, we firmly reject to any such decisions," the statement says.

Don Pathan is a Thailand-based security analyst

Updated story, initially filed just before the meeting.



People take shelter on open land following the earthquake. Photo: AFP

UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES: BURMA'S EARTHQUAKE TRIGGERS HEALTH AND FOOD CRISIS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

In addition to the thousands dead and wounded, the recent Burma earthquake and ongoing government bombing campaigns are having unforeseen impacts on public health. Hospitals, already inadequate before the disaster, are now overwhelmed. IDP camps are being forced to absorb people fleeing both the earthquake and Burma army attacks, creating unnatural and unsafe concentrations of people in small areas where water was already a problem.

In one temporary camp, just 14 toilets served 1,200 people, while damaged electric pumps left water sources contaminated, raising the risk of disease. The disaster has intensified public health challenges, particularly for women and girls, who face unsafe and inadequate sanitation facilities—especially during menstruation, pregnancy, and postpartum recovery.

"Hundreds of wells in IDP communities around Naypyidaw, south of Naypyidaw, and in Tongyi have been damaged by the earthquake. As a result, there is now a severe water shortage, along with a rise in skin diseases and gastrointestinal problems. The destruction of these wells has had a significant impact on the people in those areas. We're now helping to dig

new wells," said David Eubank, head of Free Burma Rangers (FBR), a faith-based aid group working on the frontlines in Burma.

He added, "Another form of destruction that hasn't yet caused an immediate impact—but soon will—is the damage to irrigation pipes and channels that supply rice fields. That could affect hundreds of thousands of people. And that's just from the earthquakes. On top of that, the Burma Army is still shelling and shooting in these same areas—firing mortars, launching drone attacks, and conducting airstrikes—even as people are already suffering from broken wells and disrupted irrigation systems."

While most attention has focused on the earthquake's destruction in urban centers like Mandalay, Sagaing, and Naypyidaw, rural areas across Burma are facing severe and largely overlooked secondary effects. In Karenni State and other conflict zones, seismic activity has contaminated water sources, worsening already critical WASH conditions—referring to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene—for displaced populations. Heavy rains following the quake have further deteriorated conditions for hundreds of

thousands now living in makeshift shelters or open areas without access to clean water or sanitation.

In eastern Sagaing's Ywar Naing ward, health workers have reported a diarrhea outbreak among earthquake survivors, while respiratory infections, skin diseases, and mosquito-borne illnesses like dengue are also on the rise. Oxfam Ireland has warned of a looming waterborne disease outbreak, and medical supplies—particularly rehydration salts—are urgently needed. The junta's health ministry has advised residents to boil water and seek treatment for wounds, but access to both clean water and healthcare remains limited. Drug-resistant malaria has surged by 1,000% in some regions, and Myanmar now faces one of the world's highest rates of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis—over four times the global average. Military blockades have further restricted the flow of medicine and vaccines into ethnic and border regions, accelerating the spread of preventable diseases such as measles, diphtheria, and even polio.

Since the 2021 coup, Burma's health system has become a battlefield. More than 1,500 attacks on medical personnel and infrastructure have been recorded, with at least 135 health-care workers killed. Hospitals have been shelled, bombed by jets, and targeted with drones. Even before the conflict, the country faced a severe shortage of health professionals—just 17.8 per 10,000 people, less than half the WHO's recommended threshold. The war has only deepened this crisis, forcing medical staff to flee and leaving those who remain traumatized and overwhelmed.

Even before the earthquake, Myanmar was already grappling with severe food insecurity, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Chin, Kachin, Rakhine States, and Sagaing Region. Nearly one-third of the population, around 20 million people, was expected to need humanitarian assistance this year, according to the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan.

Armed conflict, restricted access to aid, economic collapse, and recurring climate-related disasters had already pushed hunger to record levels. More than 3.5 million people had been displaced by violence, with that number projected to rise to 4.5 million in 2025 as fighting spread to new areas. Food was already the most urgent need, yet inflation had driven up the cost of basic staples—rice, beans, oil, and salt—by 30 percent over the past year, making them unaffordable for many. Although some food was available in markets, widespread poverty had left people unable to purchase even the essentials. With the earthquake now devastating farmland and water infrastructure, these pre-existing food security challenges are expected to worsen dramatically.

Initial assessments indicate that approximately 3.7 million hectares of farmland and over 3.6 million head of cattle and buffalo were affected, with many of the hardest-hit areas forming the backbone of the country's maize, rice, and livestock production. Nearly 200 irrigation canals and dams were destroyed, especially in the central dry zone, threatening the upcoming planting season and long-term agricultural recovery.

With half the population relying on agriculture for their livelihood, this damage poses a severe threat to food security and rural stability. The disruption of Mandalay's role as a key trading hub has also weakened national supply chains, compounding the country's fragile economic and food situation.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert who has reported extensively on Burma.



Photo: Duc Trinh

CZECH TECH FIRM UNDER FIRE FOR SOFTWARE SUPPLY TO MYANMAR JUNTA, DENIES SANCTIONS BREACH

A Czech technology firm is facing scrutiny after an investigation revealed it supplied mobile phone data extraction software to the Myanmar junta, raising questions about compliance with European Union (EU) sanctions. The software, developed by Prague-based Compelson, enables authorities to extract detailed information from smartphones — a capability that human rights activists say has been used by the junta to target, interrogate, and imprison pro-democracy activists.

The Czech Broadcasting Company (Radiožurnál) uncovered a trove of email communications showing that Compelson continued to correspond with Myanmar police agencies after the military seized power in a February 2021 coup. These emails include technical support instructions and license renewal notices for MobilEdit Forensic PRO — a forensic tool that can extract contact lists, messages, call histories, and even deleted files from a smartphone.

Dušan Kožušník, the owner of Compelson, defended the company's actions, arguing that the software provided did not breach EU sanctions because it could not hack passwords or retrieve deleted data. These functions, he claims, are found only in more advanced versions. "These versions cannot hack phones," Kožušník told Radiožurnál. "They cannot do anything that a camera cannot do."

Yet testimony collected by Radiožurnál paints a grim picture of how mobile phone data has been weaponized by the Myanmar junta to carry out sweeping crackdowns. One protester told Radiožurnál how he was arrested after participating in anti-regime demonstrations, and described being tortured during a ten-day interrogation where soldiers examined his phone and used its contents to build a chain of arrests targeting fellow activists. Another former civil servant recounted to Radiožurnál how soldiers used photos and chat messages from his confiscated device to

justify two and a half years of imprisonment.

Shin Shin, a rights defender still operating clandestinely in Yangon, related to Radiožurnál how authorities routinely extract data from Telegram, Viber, and Signal during interrogations — including deleted conversations and photos. She noted that since 2022, surveillance efforts have become more precise. “Arrests are no longer random, but precisely targeted,” she said, describing how investigators now combine phone data with CCTV footage to identify and capture junta opponents.

Myanmar-based activists have called on the European Commission to investigate potential breaches of the EU’s embargo, which prohibits the export of “communications monitoring equipment that could be used for internal repression.” But Czech officials appear to be passing the buck. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Radiožurnál it would have opposed the export if consulted, but confirmed that Compelson never applied for a license. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Industry and the Financial Analytical Office declined to comment, citing confidentiality rules.

Kožušník insists the export occurred before the 2021 coup and emphasized Compelson’s public support for Ukraine as evidence of its moral standing. “We are a company that fights against evil, against injustice,” he said. However, email records obtained by Radiožurnál contradict this timeline, showing the company was still in active contact with Myanmar police months after the junta seized power.

Sinologist and analyst David Gardáš from the Sinopsis project warned Radiožurnál that legal ambiguity around dual-use technologies — civilian tools that can be misused for military or repressive

purposes — leaves loopholes that unscrupulous actors can exploit. “We must be aware of how these tools can be misused and take more decisive action,” Gardáš said.

While Kožušník maintains that the software version supplied does not fall under EU export restrictions, he told Radiožurnál that Compelson has since blocked access to future updates for Myanmar users, a move critics say is too little, too late.

As the civil conflict in Myanmar continues to escalate, with thousands killed and millions displaced, this case underscores the urgent need for stricter oversight and accountability in the global trade of surveillance technology. The supply of such tools, even under seemingly legal circumstances, can have devastating consequences in the hands of authoritarian regimes.

This article is based on an investigative report by the Czech Broadcasting Company (Radiožurnál), with support from the Independent Journalism Foundation (Nadací fond nezávislé žurnalistiky).



Photo: AFP

JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL AT LEAST 12 CIVILIANS DURING THINGYAN FESTIVAL DESPITE CEASEFIRE DECLARATION

Despite the junta's public announcement of a ceasefire during Thingyan, Myanmar's traditional New Year celebration, the junta carried out aerial attacks on at least 13 townships across the country over the five-day holiday, killing at least 12 civilians including a novice monk and injuring many more.

From 13 April, the eve of the Thingyan festival, through 17 April, the first day of the New Year, airstrikes were reported in several townships: Mogok, Thabeikkyin, and Natogyi in Mandalay Region; Kani, Indaw, Taze, Kawlin, Wuntho, and Ayadaw in Sagaing Region; Kyauktaw in Rakhine State; Mindat in Chin State; and Kawkareik and Kyondoe in Karen State.

On 13 April, two civilians, a man and a woman, were killed, and eight others injured when fighter jets bombed Chaunggyi village in Thabeikkyin Township, according to the Pyin Oo Lwin People's Defence Force. That same day, a woman died in an airstrike that struck a monastery in Lema village, Taze Township. Additional bombings injured several civilians in Kawlin and Wuntho townships in Sagaing Region, Kyauktaw in Rakhine State, and Mindat in Chin State.

On 14 April, known as A-kya, or the Day of Descent, air raids on Kani Township's Thaminchan Monastery and Muhtaw village killed a novice monk and a woman. Elsewhere, in Indaw and Natogyi townships, two monks and a civilian were severely injured in separate monastery bombings.

The following day, 15 April (A-kyat, or Day of Eclipse), saw one of the deadliest incidents when junta forces bombed Kanni San Pya village in Kawkareik Township, Karen State. Six civilians including three children under 10, two women, and a man were killed, and 15 others injured, including ten monks.

On 16 April (A-Tet, or Day of Ascent), further bombings struck Sit Si village in southern Ayadaw Township, as well as nearby areas in Kawkareik and Kyondoe in Karen State.

On 17 April, the first day of the new year, one man was killed and two children injured in a bombing in Thayet Taw village, Kawkareik Township. The same morning, another village near Kasote in Mogok Township was hit by airstrikes.

In total, at least 12 civilians were confirmed killed over the Thingyan period: one novice monk, three children, five women, and three men. These casualties have been independently verified by Mizzima, though local sources fear the real toll may be higher.

Additionally, on 12 April just before the festival began an airstrike targeted Kyakhet village in Depayin Township, Sagaing Region, killing three temporary novices and three civilians sheltering in a monastery.



NUG ACTING PRESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGES SETBACKS, CALLS FOR UNITY AND FINAL PUSH IN MYANMAR IN 2025

In his New Year's message delivered on 17 April, National Unity Government (NUG) Acting President Duwa Lashi La admitted to public dissatisfaction and acknowledged the government's shortcomings over the course of the four-year Spring Revolution.

"As this revolution aims to eradicate all forms of military dictatorship and its ideology, we must realistically accept the many hardships that come with it," he said in his broadcast.

He highlighted the formation of strong political and military alliances with revolutionary forces and emphasized that the junta is facing unprecedented losses in its history fuelled by nationwide resistance and public support.

Duwa Lashi La stated that field data shows the junta now controls less than 25 percent of the country.

Looking ahead, he urged all revolutionary groups to remain united and push for a decisive breakthrough and ultimate victory in 2025.

The Acting President also officially named the 28 March earthquake as the "Sagaing Earthquake" and extended wishes for a speedy recovery to those affected.

He condemned the junta for exploiting international aid for political gain and emphasized the urgent need for unhindered humanitarian assistance to reach those impacted by the disaster.

MYANMAR'S ONGOING STRUGGLES: EARTHQUAKE ADDS BURDEN TO DECADES OF SUFFERING

THWIN LINN AUNG

On March 28, 2025, just before 1:00 PM, a magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck central Myanmar, devastating the region. The epicenter, located near Myanmar's second-largest city, caused widespread destruction, with buildings collapsing across multiple regions. At present, over 4,000 people have been confirmed dead, with many still missing. The true extent of the disaster remains unclear due to the military coup, which has imposed a media blackout, and there are growing concerns that the number of casualties is even higher than reported.

While the scale of the disaster has drawn international attention, especially from figures in the arts, sports, and global communities, many outside Myanmar had previously been unaware of the country's ongoing challenges. The earthquake, though tragic, has inadvertently illuminated Myanmar's struggles and raised awareness of its long-standing political and social issues. This global recognition, despite the tragedy, could be seen as a silver lining in the midst of the devastation.

The Heavy Stone: Myanmar's Longstanding Struggles

In Eastern thought, there is a parable about a man burdened by a heavy stone. As he struggles with the weight, another person places another load upon him, further compounding his difficulty. After some time, another person removes the additional burden, and although the stone remains, the man feels a sense of relief, mistakenly believing the weight has been lifted. This illusion of ease, despite the ongoing challenge, is a metaphor for Myanmar's current situation.

The recent earthquake is the visible burden placed upon the country, drawing the attention of the international community. However, once the immediate impact of the earthquake fades, the original, long-standing burden — the political oppression, military dictatorship, and human rights abuses — remains. It is crucial that the world does not forget the deep-rooted issues that have long plagued Myanmar, even as it responds to the disaster.

Myanmar's Struggle for Federalism and Democracy

Myanmar's political history has been marked by struggles for self-determination, equality, and federalism. Following its independence from Britain in 1948, Myanmar was supposed to be built on a federal system that ensured equal rights for all ethnic groups. However, the country's vision of a Federal Union has never been realized. Conflict began almost immediately, and in 1962, the military seized control, dismantling democratic structures and suppressing ethnic autonomy. The military, under the guise of representing the majority Bamar ethnic group, pursued a policy of Bamar chauvinism, oppressing ethnic minorities across the country.

Over the decades, the military has brutally suppressed various movements, from protests to armed resistance led by students and ethnic minority groups. Civilians in conflict areas have suffered arbitrary detentions, torture, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of homes. The military's actions have forced millions of Myanmar's citizens to flee the country in search of safety, creating a refugee crisis.

The Rohingya genocide in 2017 highlighted the military's brutal tactics, as thousands of Rohingya Muslims were killed, and hundreds of thousands were displaced in what many international bodies have condemned as ethnic cleansing.

The 2021 Coup and the Youth Uprising

In 2021, Myanmar's military seized power once again, citing widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election. This move sparked nationwide protests, with young people leading the charge. The military responded with extreme violence, killing over 7,000 protesters and arresting tens of thousands. Despite the brutality, the resistance has persisted, with many young people taking up arms in defiance of the military junta.

As a result of widespread support for the anti-coup movement, the military now controls only around 20% of the country. The armed resistance, though severely outnumbered and under-equipped, has been sustained by public donations and the unyielding determination of Myanmar's youth. Over the past four years, the military has been weakened, facing defeat after defeat on the ground, though airstrikes remain one of its last sources of power.

Escalating Airstrikes and Continued Violence

Since the coup, the military has conducted over 4,000 airstrikes, primarily targeting civilian areas such as villages, schools, and hospitals. These attacks, aimed at breaking the resistance, have resulted in the deaths of over 2,000 civilians, including many women and children. The military's ruthless airstrikes show no signs of abating, and as their grip on the country weakens, they have increasingly targeted civilian populations to maintain control.

Even following the devastating earthquake on March 28, 2025, the military continued its airstrikes. In the two weeks following the quake, approximately 160 airstrikes were carried out, 47% of which occurred after the military had announced a ceasefire in the aftermath of the disaster. Hundreds more civilians lost their lives in these attacks, compounding the suffering already caused by the earthquake. The international community's call for ceasefire and humanitarian aid has not deterred the junta from its violent campaign.

The International Community's Responsibility

The international community's response to Myanmar's ongoing tragedy is crucial. While the earthquake has brought much-needed global attention to the country, it is essential that the world does not turn away once the immediate impact of the disaster fades. Myanmar's struggles are far from over, and the long-standing oppression of its people must remain a focal point of global advocacy and intervention.

Myanmar's youth continue to risk their lives in the fight for democracy, equality, and freedom. They are determined to break free from the cycle of oppression

that has defined their country for over seven decades. Despite the overwhelming odds, their resistance has grown, and the military's control has dwindled. However, without international support, the junta's continued violence — particularly airstrikes targeting civilians — remains a significant threat.

A Call for Continued Solidarity

The recent earthquake in Myanmar has added a new burden to the already immense suffering of the Myanmar people. Yet, amid this tragedy, there remains hope — hope that the global community will not forget the ongoing fight for freedom in Myanmar. The strength and courage of Myanmar's people, particularly its youth, continue to inspire, and with continued international support, there is hope that the military dictatorship can be brought to an end.

In conclusion, while we deeply appreciate the outpouring of support from the international community in response to the earthquake, we must not lose sight of the enduring struggle for freedom in Myanmar. The military junta's tyranny has lasted for over 70 years, and only through global solidarity and sustained pressure can Myanmar hope to break free from its oppressive regime. The journey is far from over, and the people of Myanmar continue to bear the weight of their struggle — both the heavy stone of military oppression and the newly added burden of natural disaster. It is our collective responsibility to help lift that burden and support Myanmar's journey to freedom.

(The author is a councilor of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and a leading committee member of the General Strike Committee (GSC), but this article reflects the author's personal views only.)

MYANMAR JUNTA'S NEW YEAR AMNESTY FREES 4,893 PRISONERS, BUT ONLY 301 ARE POLITICAL DETAINEES

Photo: AFP

The Myanmar Military Council released 4,893 prisoners to mark the traditional New Year on 17 April, but only 301 of them were political detainees, according to the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM).

Among those released were 165 male and 135 female political prisoners from 31 prisons across the country. However, no releases were reported from certain regions, particularly prisons in Rakhine and Chin States.

"There are prisons where not a single political prisoner was released. Based on the information we've gathered, even if the final number increases slightly, it will not exceed 400 political prisoners," said Ko Thaik Htun Oo, a steering committee member of PPNM.

The release of political detainees amounts to just six percent of the total amnesty recipients, highlighting the limited scope of the junta's gesture, the PPNM stated.

The Military Council announced on 17 April that the amnesty applied to both male and female inmates serving time in prisons, detention centres, and labour camps across the country.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, this year's ASEAN chair, responded to the announcement on social media, saying, "We welcome the recent steps to ease tensions."

Despite this, critics argue the amnesty is largely symbolic. Rights groups and civil society organizations point out that the majority of those released were not political prisoners but individuals convicted of other crimes.

According to data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a total of 29,030 people were arrested between 1 February, 2021, and 11 April, 2025, in connection with the military coup. Of those, 22,197 remain behind bars.

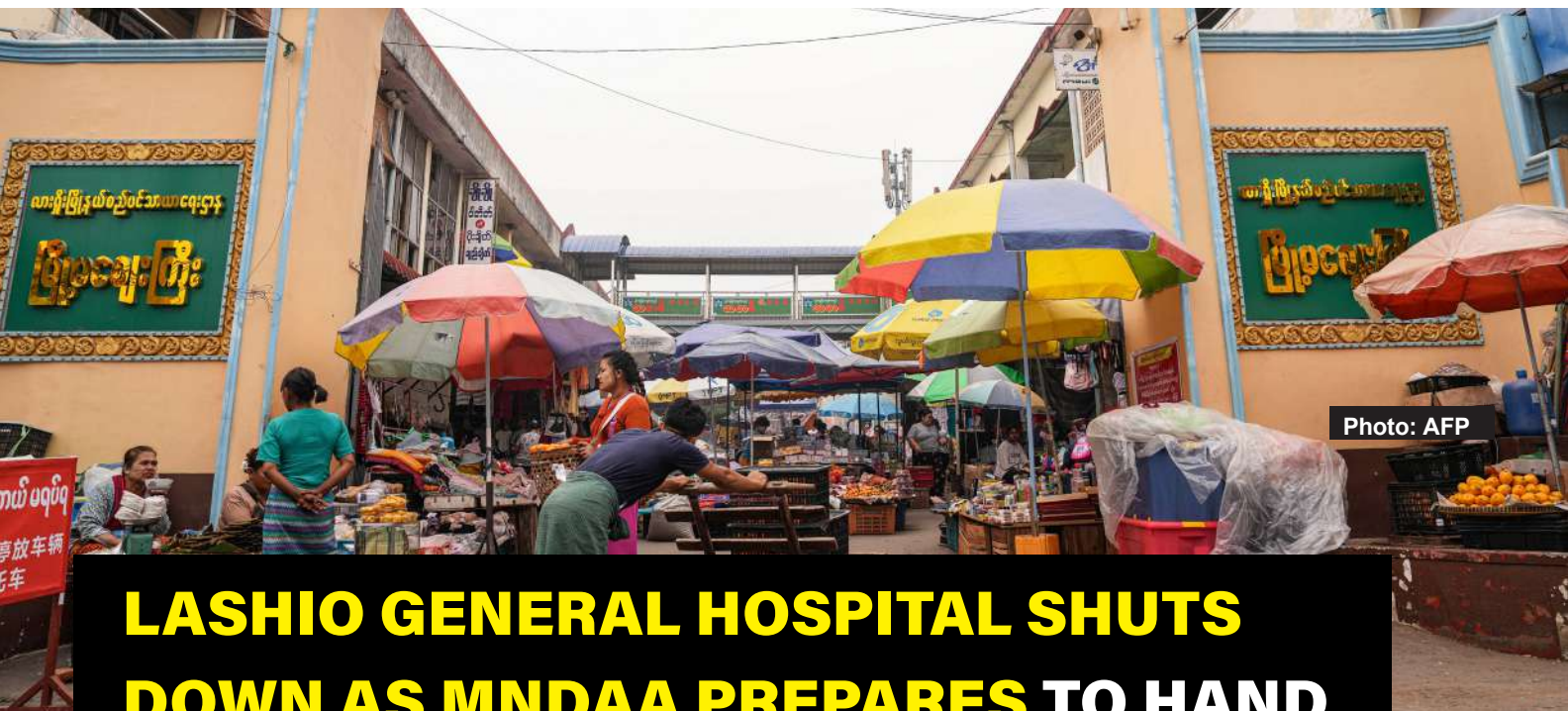


Photo: AFP

LASHIO GENERAL HOSPITAL SHUTS DOWN AS MNDAA PREPARES TO HAND CITY BACK TO MILITARY JUNTA

Lashio General Hospital officially ceased operations on 17 April, amid reports that the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) is preparing to hand control of the city back to the military junta, according to local sources.

The hospital, once a critical healthcare facility in northern Shan State, has been vacated, and medical equipment and documentation are reportedly being relocated ahead of the anticipated military re-entry.

"It was still functioning on 16 April, with people going in and out. But now, the entire compound is quiet, the main gate is closed, and no services are available. If there's an emergency, we have to go to Hsenwi," a Lashio resident told reporters on 17 April.

MNDAA forces are expected to complete their withdrawal by 21 April. Hospital staff have been gradually transferring equipment and files since March. Critical patients have already been moved to Hsenwi Hospital, while others were discharged in recent days.

"Even those who weren't due for discharge have now left. Only local clinics remain open for minor ailments. Anyone needing real hospital care must go to Hsenwi," said a local woman.

Healthcare workers affiliated with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), along with other

personnel from health-related departments, were previously moved to MNDAA-controlled territories.

Meanwhile, concerns over security have prompted many of the 213 political prisoners released after Lashio was captured last year to flee the city ahead of the junta's return.

"Some have already left, while others are still around," said a former political prisoner.

Sources close to the MNDAA confirmed that administrative offices of the Military Council are expected to resume operations in Lashio by the end of April, with military troops to follow soon after. However, the MNDAA will reportedly retain a limited presence in the form of a liaison office, a military unit, and a police post, though the size and scope of these units remain unclear.

Lashio, the largest town in northern Shan State, was taken by the MNDAA and allied revolutionary forces in July 2024 during the second phase of Operation 1027. After nearly 10 months of administration under the MNDAA, the group is now preparing to cede control back to the Myanmar military junta following negotiations.



TWO POLITICAL PRISONERS KILLED AS JUNTA OPENS FIRE DURING MAGWAY PRISON CONFRONTATION

While the police battalion opposite Magway Central Prison was under attack, a tense confrontation also erupted inside the prison between guards and inmates, during which junta soldiers opened fire, killing two political prisoners, local sources reported.

On 13 April, the eve of Thingyan, known as a-kyo day, the allied resistance fighters launched an attack on Police Battalion No.25, located opposite Magway Prison on the Magway-Yenangyaung Road, using heavy weapons and rockets. One of the rockets struck the central guard tower of Magway Prison, according to a source.

While shootings were taking place outside the prison, tensions also escalated inside Magway Prison, where shooting broke out between prison staff and inmates, according to reports.

During the incident, prison guards opened fire from the prison gate and watchtower, killing two inmates including political prisoner Saw Shwe Aung, who was in the prison's prayer room, according to the Political Prisoners Network-Myanmar (PPNM) official.

In addition, at least five prisoners including political detainees are receiving medical treatment, with many others injured. Some prison staff members were also reportedly wounded.

"We're aware that some confrontations took place, but there are also reports of investigations and

prosecutions. What we know for sure is that at least two political prisoners have lost their lives," said Thaik Htun Oo, a member of the steering committee of the PPNM.

He said the sound of gunfire can give prisoners hope that someone is coming to rescue them, and that political prisoners hold on to the belief that they will be freed if the revolution succeeds.

Therefore, Thaik Htun Oo urged resistance groups to carefully consider all aspects of the situation, emphasizing the need to account for the safety and well-being of political prisoners.

Following these incidents, since 14 April, the military officials has been carrying out beatings and interrogations of political prisoners in prison, with some prisoners suffering serious injuries.

Local sources say that police officers were injured in the attack on the police battalion across from Magway Prison, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Among the political prisoners detained in Magway Prison are Magway Region Chief Minister Dr. Aung Moe Nyo, Magway Region Parliament Speaker U Tar, Taungdwingyi Township Parliament representative U Win Myint Hlaing (also known as Ko Hlaing), National League for Democracy (NLD) member Ko Aung Khant Oo (also known as Palay), and a member of the Beikthano People's Defense Force.



Photo: Supplied

RESIDENTS SAY MYANMAR TOWNS HIT BY FIGHTING DESPITE QUAKE TRUCE

Two Myanmar towns on a lucrative trade route to Thailand have been besieged by fighting despite a truce declared after last month's massive earthquake, residents told AFP on Thursday.

A 2021 coup sparked a multi-sided civil war between Myanmar's military, pro-democracy guerillas and ethnic rebel groups that have long been active in the country's fringes.

Four years of conflict have spurred mass displacement and poverty, and much of the fighting has focused on trade routes where combatants run tollgates to bolster their war chests.

The junta and numerous opposition groups declared a ceasefire to ease relief efforts after a 7.7-magnitude quake hit central Myanmar on March 28, killing more than 3,700 people.

However, three eastern Myanmar residents told AFP fighting has been raging for days around the junta-held towns of Kyondoe and Kawkareik, which sit on a highway leading to the western Thailand border town of Mae Sot.

A resident from an outlying village, who asked to remain anonymous, said the towns had been under attack by "combined forces" from different rebel groups since before Sunday.

"There were air strikes and artillery shots around our village since two days ago," they added. "We have no place to hide."

A resident living a short distance from Kyondoe said their village had been occupied by members of the anti-coup People's Defence Force.

"We are hearing the sounds of air strikes and

artillery shooting. We cannot flee to other places now," they said. "We are really scared."

A third resident from Kyondoe, 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the Thai border, said they fled two days ago alongside many neighbours from surrounding villages "to avoid heavy fighting".

The junta said after the earthquake that it would honour a truce until April 22, but would still retaliate against attacks.

As many as 60,000 people are living in tent encampments after the quake, according to United Nations figures.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun accused several rebel groups on Wednesday evening of breaching the truce in recent days, including near Kyondoe and inside Kawkareik.

AFP could not reach Zaw Min Tun for further comment on Thursday.

Monitors agree that the post-quake truce has not held but junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is reportedly due to make a rare trip abroad on Thursday to meet Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and discuss an extension.

Malaysia is this year's chair of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc. ASEAN has in the past barred junta officials from its summits over lack of progress on a peace plan.

However, Anwar said he would meet Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok to discuss prolonging the ceasefire beyond Tuesday to protect Malaysian teams working on quake relief efforts.

AFP



Photo: Supplied

ABOUT 200 KAREN FLEE MYANMAR TO THAILAND, THAI OFFICIALS SAY

Around 200 ethnic Karen people fled fighting in Myanmar and crossed the border into Thailand, Thai border officials said Saturday.

Fighting has been raging in Myanmar's eastern Karen state, which borders Thailand, with local ethnic militias battling the military junta that seized power in a 2021 coup.

Four years of conflict across Myanmar have spurred mass displacement, driving tens of thousands across the border into neighbouring Thailand.

About 200 ethnic Karen people fled to the kingdom on Friday and Saturday due to bombing and civil unrest a few kilometres from the border on the Myanmar side, Major General Maitree Chupreecha, commander of the Thai military's Naresuan Force border unit, told AFP.

The people there were frightened by a drone bombing operation targeting military troops, he said, leading some to cross the Moei border river to Tak province.

"Approximately 200 people... started to arrive yesterday afternoon," he said, adding that they were ethnic Karen people.


Those who crossed are being held in a temporary shelter by the Ratchamanu Task Force, he said, which was confirmed by a post on the Thai Army unit's official Facebook page.

Maitree warned that there could be more people crossing into Thailand and that authorities intended to repatriate them when security improves.

The junta and numerous opposition groups declared a ceasefire to ease relief efforts after a 7.7-magnitude quake hit central Myanmar on March 28, killing more than 3,700 people.

However, Myanmar residents told AFP this week that there has been fighting in Karen towns on a major highway leading to the western Thailand border town of Mae Sot.

AFP



Civilians take shelter in dug-out tunnels.
Photo: Ko Hlwan Moe

LIFE UNDER FIRE: ANYAR REGION FACES RELENTLESS AIRSTRIKES

MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KO HLWAN MOE

As spring settled in, the calls of koels echoed through the air, accompanied by the gentle breeze scattering dry leaves. One evening, on the front veranda of her home, Ma Khaing Wah (name changed for privacy) was sweeping up fallen leaves from the Badum and Neem trees when her family faced an unexpected tragedy.

At around 2:30 pm on 18 February, bombs dropped by a paramotor deployed by the Northwestern Region Military Command exploded near Ma Khaing Wah's house.

"When I heard the sound of the paramotor, my husband stepped outside to check. As soon as we saw it turning toward us, I tried to pull him back into the house. Just then, I felt a sharp, burning sensation in my hand and he collapsed instantly," Ma Khaing Wah recalled.

The attack occurred in Chaungma village, situated along the Monywa-Yargyi road in Kani Township, around 30 miles from the Northwestern Region Military Command headquarters in Monywa.

The bombing claimed the lives of five people, including Ma Khaing Wah's husband, Ko Chit Oo, who had been undergoing treatment for a brain aneurysm. Ma Khaing Wah herself lost two fingers and is currently receiving medical care.

"A father means everything to his children. He spent hundreds of thousands trying to recover from a

brain aneurysm and the military ended his life with a single bomb," she said.

According to Mizzima's local sources, the junta conducted nearly 40 airstrikes in Kani Township between January and April 2025, resulting in at least seven deaths.

Natgyi and Muhtaw ferry crossings along the Chindwin River were the most heavily targeted areas, forcing most residents to flee and live in the forests to escape ongoing air assaults by the military.

Getting news in conflict zones

Since the military junta's seizure of power, the central Myanmar region of Anyar, home to the majority Burmar ethnic group, has faced severe communication blackouts. Internet and phone services have been cut off, isolating residents from news updates and hampering their ability to communicate with the outside world. Myanmar tourism guide

In response, revolutionary forces have begun installing satellite-based systems in liberated areas. These systems provide 24/7 aviation alerts and air defence updates through specialized communication devices.

"We have air surveillance systems that deliver real-time information about aircraft types, flight paths, altitude, and attack zones," said an official from the Vatican satellite base station.

As the revolution gains momentum, the demand for communication equipment has surged. However, limited transportation options and rising costs have made it difficult to supply and maintain this infrastructure.

"A TYT machine costs around 3 million kyats, and an ICON communication device is priced at 4 million kyats. It's hard to meet demand under current conditions," explained Ko Lin Yone from the Vatican satellite station.

To broaden the reach of aviation alerts and revolutionary news, the Yin Mar Bin District People's Defence Organization (PDO) is working with the National Unity Government (NUG) to launch an FM radio broadcasting system.

"We're developing a radio platform to broadcast revolutionary updates and emergency aviation alerts. Timely information is crucial, so we're pushing to launch it quickly," said an official from the aviation office based in Yin Mar Bin.

The urgency of such efforts is underscored by the toll airstrikes have taken in the region. Between March 2021 and January 2025, air attacks in Sagaing Region killed 478 civilians and injured 532.

The deadliest townships include: Kantbalu: 155 deaths, Minkin: 37 deaths, Htigyaing: 34 deaths, Kalay: 29 deaths, Tamu: 25 deaths, Pale: 24 deaths and Depayin: 23 deaths.

In a time when conventional communication channels have been silenced, these underground networks and innovative broadcasting efforts are becoming lifelines for survival and resistance.

Defending against junta airstrikes

Under the glow of the full moon during Tabaung (March 2025), the sound of stone striking stone echoed through the night. With scorching heat during the day and farming duties occupying their time, residents in Myanmar's Anyar region have turned to digging bomb shelters at night, relying on moonlight for visibility.

"We have to dig bunkers. Junta jet fighters fly over our village four or five times a day. When they fly low, it gets even scarier. They don't just bomb conflict zones, they strike anywhere, so no place feels safe," said a local woman from Kani Township.

Families have begun constructing underground shelters to protect themselves from frequent air raids. Larger households dig bunkers up to 2 or 3 yards in size, while smaller families dig 1 to 2 yards.

Building even a basic bomb shelter costs over 100,000 kyats, and not everyone can afford it, said Daw Mya Yin, a resident.

"I had to pay 40,000 to 50,000 kyats to hire someone to dig, since I couldn't do it myself. Even covering it with cheap palm wood costs another 50,000 for transport and labour. It's nothing like the stronger concrete shelters others have," she added.



Civilian bomb shelter.
Photo: Ko Hlwan Moe

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

In some western townships of Sagaing Region, villagers have been forced to flee to nearby forests at night due to ongoing airstrikes and artillery attacks.

"This area used to be lively. But since the airstrikes by helicopters and paramotors, our village feels deserted. Only some people stay back to care for livestock in the afternoon," said a resident of Nat Gyi village in Kani Township.

Following the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake on 28 March, which killed 3,145 people and injured 4,589, the National Unity Government (NUG) suspended offensive operations from 30 March to 12 April. The Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) also declared a ceasefire from 1 April to 30 April, limiting their actions to defensive measures.

Despite the earthquake crisis, the military junta continued to launch airstrikes in 13 areas including Kani, Chaung-U, and Singu townships, killing at least 50 civilians and injuring 49, according to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC).

In response, locals are increasingly relying on bunkers at night, as military surveillance drones and helicopters remain active across the Anyar region. On the evening of 6 April, four civilians were killed in Budalin and Chaung-U Townships due to attacks by paramotors deployed by the Northwestern Region Military Command.

"Jet fighters come out as the evening cools. They search for places to bomb. There are many nights when we're forced to sleep in our bunkers," said a resident from Chaung-U Township.

Between 28 March and 8 April, the junta carried out a total of 92 airstrikes and artillery attacks across multiple regions and states, including Kachin, Chin, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Shan, Karenni, Kayin, Bago, Rakhine, and Ayeyarwady. As a result of these attacks, 72 civilians were killed, including six children under 18 and 30 women, while 93 others were injured.

Airstrikes continued on 9 April, targeting Wuntho, Kawlin, Mindat, and Tedim Townships. With these additional attacks, the total number of fatalities rose to 115, with 107 confirmed deaths.



PDF members provide aid to civilians.
Photo: Ko Hlwan Moe

Photo: Supplied

YANGON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION URGES SHIFT TO UNIVERSITY-BASED ADMISSIONS INSTEAD OF RE-SITTING EXAMS IN QUAKE-HIT REGIONS

Rather than forcing students to retake junta-administered Grade-12 exams in areas where answer sheets were destroyed by recent earthquakes, the Yangon University Students' Union called on 14 April for a change to a university-based selection system, one that evaluates students based on each university's specific requirements.

This response follows the announcement made by the junta's Education Office of Ngazun Township, Tada-U District of Mandalay Region on 11 April, which revealed that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, during his visit to Mandalay on 29 March, instructed officials to re-administer the exams. This decision came after a fire, triggered by an earthquake, destroyed the Grade-12 answer sheets of students from Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, Kachin States, and Naypyidaw.

The Students' Union criticized the re-examination directive as both "irresponsible and unfair," pointing out that affected students are already dealing with the psychological and economic toll of the disaster. Forcing them to re-sit the exams would only worsen their stress.

"The uncertainty surrounding Grade-12 results, while the country is still reeling from an earthquake, is like adding fuel to the fire," the Union said.

Although no official directives have been issued to basic education schools so far, anxiety is growing among teachers and parents in the affected regions over reports that students may have to take the exams again.

On 28 March, while answer sheets were being processed at Mandalay University's main building, an earthquake caused the structure to collapse and catch fire. As a result, the answer sheets of 62,954 Grade-12 students from Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, and Kachin State were destroyed. The junta confirmed the loss in a statement released on the night of 29 March. In Naypyidaw, the earthquake also damaged multiple departmental offices.

Mizzima attempted to contact the respective regional education offices in Mandalay, Sagaing, Kachin, and Naypyidaw for further information on the plans to re-conduct the Grade-12 exams, but no responses were received from the Mandalay, Sagaing and Kachin offices.

The 2024–2025 academic year Grade-12 exam took place from 17 to 22 March, with 208,889 students from 817 examination centres, both domestic and international, participating.



Photo: AFP

NUG SAYS LEGAL ACTION WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST JUNTA COMMANDER AND SOLDIERS CAPTURED DURING INDAW BATTLE

The commander of the junta's Light Infantry Division (LID) 77, Brigadier General Aung Thet Oo, and soldiers who were captured while fleeing the Japanese Cave military base in Indaw Town, Upper Sagaing Region, are being investigated and will face legal action, said U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) Prime Minister's Office.

He said, "Currently, the captured prisoners of war are being detained in accordance with prisoner of war policies, and interrogations are underway. Judicial proceedings will proceed accordingly based on their testimonies and investigation findings."

He made these comments in a public information program released on 15 April.

At 9 pm on 7 April, the junta commander and soldiers from the Japanese Cave base in Indaw abandoned their post and retreated when they could no longer withstand the sustained pressure from resistance forces after being surrounded and cut off for a long time.

Subsequently, resistance forces fully captured Indaw Town, and the fleeing commander and soldiers were apprehended by the People's Defence Forces near the entrance of Katha Township.

The resistance forces began attacking Indaw Town in August 2024 and successfully captured the towns

after eight months of prolonged fighting, according to the NUG's Ministry of Defence.

Indaw Town served as the frontline headquarters of the junta's LID 77 and directly commanded by the division commander.

During the battle for Indaw, resistance forces seized significant quantities of weapons, including two howitzers, two 120mm mortars, as well as various heavy and light weapons, ammunition, and explosives, as reported by the NUG Ministry of Defence.

According to the official statement, the Indaw battle was led by the NUG Ministry of Defence under the command of Military Region No. 1, with participation from multiple resistance units, including People's Defence Force (PDF) battalions from Katha District (Battalions No. 1, 2, 3, and 4), Katha District Special Operations Unit, Special Operations Battalions 1 and 10, People's Defence Organization (PDO) from Indaw, Banmauk PDO, and Katha PDO, Shwebo District Command, Pyin Oo Lwin District Battalions 1, 2, 509, 510, and 512, All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) Battalions 11 and 14, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) Brigade 9 Special Column, Monghnyin Kachin PDF, Kalay District Battalion 10, Rocket Unit, Drone Joint Force (including NUG's MOD Drone Force, ABSDF, K2, SR-1, Battalion 1849 Drone Unit, and Kanbalu District Drone Unit), Katha District Heavy Artillery Unit, and Myingyan District Commando Unit.

Hanthar Nyein

KAMAYUT MEDIA CO-FOUNDER HANTHAR NYEIN RELEASED AFTER OVER THREE YEARS IN DETENTION

Hanthar Nyein, co-founder and executive producer of Kamayut Media, has been released from Yangon's Insein Prison, according to fellow co-founder and Editor-in-Chief Nathan Maung.

The veteran journalist was arrested in March 2021 alongside Nathan Maung, who was released just a few months later in June of that year.

Speaking to Mizzima, Nathan Maung confirmed Hanthar Nyein's release and said, "He called me after getting into the car. I didn't get a chance to see him or take a photo just spoke to him over the phone."

A year after his arrest, Hanthar Nyein was sentenced on 21 March 2022, to two years in prison under Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code by the Insein

Prison Court. Later, on 26 December 2022 just months before his expected release, he received an additional five-year sentence under Article 33(a) of the Electronic Transactions Law.

His release came on 17 April as part of a nationwide amnesty announced by the military junta to mark Myanmar's New Year.

A total of 4,893 prisoners were granted release across the country. However, according to the Political Prisoners Network-Myanmar (PPNM), only a small number of political detainees were included in the amnesty.



YEOMANRY DEVELOPMENT PARTY LEADER SENTENCED TO FIVE YEARS IN PRISON OVER CASES FILED BY JUNTA-BACKED USDP

Michael Kyaw Myint, a pro-junta figure, has been sentenced to a total of five years in prison following three lawsuits filed by the junta-allied Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), according to his family.

The convictions were handed down as follows: two years by the Mayangone Township Court in Yangon Region on December 6, 2024; two years by the Zabuthiri Township Court in Naypyidaw on February 20, 2025; and one year by the Dekkhinathiri Township Court, also in Naypyidaw, on 28 March 2025. All charges were brought under Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.

"These may be laws, but filing multiple charges for a single offense is not legal. Yet in this case, three separate lawsuits were filed for one incident, and three sentences were issued. I no longer understand the law," a family member said.

The charges stem from a press conference held by Michael Kyaw Myint on 28 March 2023, during which he accused the niece and grandson of USDP chairman Khin Yi of operating two labour export companies—Star High and 7 Star High—that sent workers to Thailand and Malaysia. He also referred to Khin Yi as "that prick" in a social media post. The USDP subsequently filed three complaints under Section 66(d) of the Communications Act, beginning on 5 April 2023, in three different jurisdictions.

On 19 April 2023, Michael Kyaw Myint filed a counter-complaint at the Dekkhinathiri Myoma Police Station in Naypyidaw, alleging that the USDP had falsely claimed to be a valid political party while it was

still in the registration process. He urged authorities to take legal action against Khin Yi and members of the USDP's central executive committee.

The junta-controlled Union Election Commission only officially registered the USDP as a political party on 20 April 2023, assigning it registration number (1) under Section 9 of the Political Parties Registration Law. Sources indicate that police did not act on his complaint.

Additionally, Michael Kyaw Myint's Yeomanry Development Party was dissolved. In a separate action, the Naypyidaw City Development Committee confiscated his home in Zabuthiri Township, citing alleged unpaid financial obligations.

"They dissolved his party. Then they seized his home, first claiming he was money laundering. When he proved that wasn't true, they said it was due to unpaid taxes. It's all fabricated," said a family member.

The USDP, led by former military officers, is a staunch supporter of the current military regime.

Ironically, Michael Kyaw Myint has been a vocal supporter of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Under the former civilian government, however, he was jailed for inciting religious unrest by targeting Muslims and had publicly declared plans to build a memorial honouring Min Aung Hlaing.

Following the 2021 military coup, he actively organized pro-junta rallies nationwide and was involved with "Blood Comrade," a group formed by junta-sponsored Pya Saw Htee militias.



Photo: WFP

WHO SUPPORTS LOCAL HEALTH PARTNERS PROVIDE AID TO QUAKE VICTIMS IN MYANMAR'S SAGAING

"He approached the health team and, overwhelmed by grief, broke down in tears."

That's how one health worker described a devastating moment to local health workers in the days following the magnitude 7.7 and 6.4 earthquakes that struck Myanmar on 28 March, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in a report on 17 April.

The man had lost seven members of his family. All the health workers could offer was psychological first aid – listening, staying with him, bearing witness to the pain.

"This kind of encounter is not rare," the health worker said. "Every day, we listen to people's pain. Sometimes, just listening helps – but it also takes a toll on us as frontline workers."

To date, more than 3,600 people across Myanmar are confirmed dead. An estimated 4,800 are injured and almost 150 remain missing – the full tally has yet to be revealed.

The UN estimates that over 17.2 million people live in affected zones, with 9.1 million exposed to the strongest tremors, and about 2.4 million in need of health care.

Sagaing Region – located in the country's

northwest and riven with conflict – is among several of the regions hardest hit, along with Mandalay Region, Naypyidaw Union Territory and southern Shan State. There, villages were flattened. Roads, schools and health services were damaged or destroyed.

But amid the destruction, WHO-supported local health partners continue to deliver essential care to displaced communities with no other options. WHO has so far mobilized almost 140 tonnes of medicines, medical devices and supplies from within Myanmar and from global stockpiles. This can meet the basic health needs of an estimated 450,000 people for around three months.

The bulk of the supplies has already been delivered to local, on-the-ground partners operating in exceptional conditions – delivering babies in makeshift shelters, conducting emergency surgeries amid searing heat, and ensuring effective, ongoing management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

Some health partners have enough stock for now – but only just. A WHO health partner in Sagaing estimates they have about 20 days' worth of supplies left under current conditions. Logistics remain a critical challenge. With roads damaged and transport prices soaring, it has become both costly and time-consuming

to restock from Mandalay, the nearest major city.

Health needs continue to grow. Acute watery diarrhoea has been reported. Risks of malaria, dengue, TB, HIV and vaccine-preventable diseases are rising – especially in places like Sagaing, where only 6 of 37 townships have adequate coverage of the pentavalent 1 vaccine, and 22 townships fall below 50% coverage for measles-rubella vaccine.

Noncommunicable disease patients – those who rely on daily medication – are also at serious risk if supply chains buckle, or appeals go unfunded.

“This is not just a natural disaster – it’s both an acute and chronic health emergency, layered on top of an already protracted humanitarian crisis,” said Dr Thushara Fernando, WHO Representative to Myanmar. “Our partnerships with local health teams allow us to reach patients who would otherwise have nowhere to go. For the efforts of our partners, we are immensely grateful.”

In addition to supporting local health partners, WHO has deployed and is coordinating 14 WHO-

classified Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) – a core WHO function in acute health crises. The EMTs have since provided life-saving emergency and primary care, conducted rapid health assessments, and supported local health authorities to manage the influx of patients. The emotional burden on health workers is immense.

Many are beginning to show signs of mental fatigue after weeks of intense service. But they keep showing up – listening, treating, carrying supplies and trying to hold the line. WHO is urgently appealing for US\$8 million to continue to deliver critical health assistance where it is needed most. The WHO Foundation’s Myanmar Earthquake Appeal continues to raise urgent funds from individuals, businesses and philanthropic institutions.

Visit <https://www.emergencies.who.foundation/> to learn more or donate.

In places like Sagaing, the emergency is far from over. But for now, the health workers remain – tired, steady and still listening.



Photo: WFP



INTENSIFIED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN MYANMAR FOLLOWING DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) released a statement on 15 April, highlighting the extremely difficult conditions in which organisations are working to meet humanitarian needs in Myanmar following the devastating 28 March earthquake.

The text of the statement is as follows.

Humanitarian efforts are intensifying despite difficult conditions in Myanmar. IFRC rapid response teams and specialists have joined hundreds of staff and volunteers from the Myanmar Red Cross during what is normally the country's most joyful time.

On the ground, conditions are challenging. It has been raining heavily, flooding streets and camps, and more downpours are forecast. There have also been over 400 aftershocks, one of which registered 5.5 on the Richter scale on Sunday morning and caused buildings to collapse in Mandalay city and the surrounding areas. Temperatures have reached forty degrees Celsius and the start of the monsoon season is only weeks away.

The Thingyan festival, which started on Tuesday, normally celebrates Myanmar's new year with water-splashing rituals, symbolising cleansing and renewal. Instead, those worst affected by the earthquake continue to live in the open, close to the ruins of their homes, schools and hundreds of pagodas, monasteries, churches and mosques reduced to rubble. Aftershocks

are causing widespread fear. As a result, hundreds of families continue to live outside their homes, fearing the remaining buildings may collapse.

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS), alongside IFRC and other National Societies have been on the ground across Sagaing, Mandalay, Naypyidaw, Bago and Southern Shan, to distribute prepositioned supplies that were already in country while new supplies are being dispatched. They are providing shelter, food, safe drinking water, relief items specific to young children and pregnant or lactating women, hygiene items, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, and health care through mobile health clinics and psychosocial support.

A humanitarian airbridge from Kuala Lumpur has also enabled the Red Cross and its partners to coordinate and facilitate the provision of 150 metric tonnes of additional supplies. In the first week since the earthquake, eight charter flights and six cargo shipments - equivalent to 50 fully loaded trucks and a convoy stretching over 1.2 kilometres - were facilitated. Since, a total of 150 metric tonnes of goods, including hygiene kits, jerry cans, tents, tarpaulins, blankets and mosquito nets have arrived in country

"Since the first hours of this response, generous individuals, national actors and those who are part of the affected communities have provided the most impactful and rapid support. What I am witnessing is an extraordinary spirit of solidarity and humanity where organisations such as the Myanmar Red Cross and their incredible volunteers are working flat out to ensure needs are met, as fast as possible. This is normally a time for celebrations. Instead, it is a time of mourning and loss. The energy, selfless dedication and determination of these individuals and humanitarian workers are a beacon of hope to these communities who have lost everything," said Nadia Khoury, IFRC Head of Delegation for Myanmar. She is currently with the IFRC and Myanmar Red Cross rapid response teams and local volunteers in Mandalay and Sagaing regions.



Photo: Supplied

TWO ABSDF FIGHTERS KILLED, SIX WOUNDED IN CLASHES AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS IN SOUTHERN KALAY AND NORTHERN GANGAW

Two fighters from the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) Battalion 3 were killed and six others injured during nearly two months of military operations in southern Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, and northern Gangaw Township, Magway Region, the battalion announced on April 16.

On 12 February, ABSDF Battalion 3 joined allied resistance forces in a major operation led by the Chinland Defence Force-Kalay-Kabaw-Gangaw (CDF-KKG) under the command of the Chin National Army (CNA).

That same day, the joint resistance forces launched an attack on Kamparni Camp, one of the junta's strongest bases in southern Kalay Township, successfully capturing it and seizing a large cache of weapons and ammunition.

However, ABSDF Battalion 3's deputy commander, Ka Naung (also known as Thae Ko Aung), was killed in the battle.

On 15 February, allied resistance forces attacked junta-controlled bases in the villages of Myan Taw, Aung Tharyar (West), and Aung Tharyar (East), located between Kalay and Gangaw townships.

In the early hours of 11 April, allied resistance forces launched an assault on the junta stronghold of Kyan Thar village along the Kalay-Gangaw road. By

afternoon, the village was fully under their control, and a significant cache of ammunition had been seized by resistance forces.

ABSDF Battalion 3 reported that a platoon commander, Mya Aung, also known as Lincoln, was killed in this fighting.

The junta launched 19 counterattacks in an attempt to retake lost territory and repeatedly carried out airstrikes on civilian targets.

According to the ABSDF, the airstrikes killed at least 15 civilians and wounded more than 40.

Around 20,000 residents were also forced to flee their homes as a result of the attacks.

The fighting involved multiple resistance groups, including the CNA, CDF-KKG, CDF-Hakha, CDF-Thangtlang, CDF CDM-Siyin, the Yaw Region Liberation Front [CDF-Senthang and Dragon Brothers, the Kalay Southern Revolutionary Force, the Gangaw Township Hanthawaddy People's Defense Organization (Hanthawaddy Pa Ka Pha), PDF-Vokok, RKDF, and ABSDF Battalion 3.

ABSDF Battalion 3 will continue to collaborate with allied forces in operations like the CDF-KKG's major operation, the statement added.



Photo: UNHCR

UNHCR PROVIDES LIFE-SAVING RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS IN MYANMAR

On 16 April, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released a statement announcing the arrival of a critical humanitarian supplies via airlift in Yangon, Myanmar.

The text of the UNHCR statement continues below.

The UNHCR-chartered flight, supported by Dubai Humanitarian, carried over 40,000 kilograms of life-saving aid for nearly 16,000 people affected by the deadly earthquake on 28 March. The plane took off from Dubai earlier today and arrived at the international airport in Yangon at 5:32 p.m. local time (1:02 p.m. Geneva time).

Today's flight brought tents – critically needed for sheltering displaced families – and household items to support quake survivors in Myanmar.

UNHCR has declared a humanitarian emergency in the aftermath of the 7.7-magnitude earthquake.

"We have been racing against time to help affected populations since day one by deploying staff and humanitarian supplies," said Noriko Takagi, UNHCR Representative in Myanmar.

The death toll has risen to over 3,000 people, with more than 5,000 injured and hundreds still missing. A staggering 17.2 million people have been impacted by the quake, including 2.1 million who were already displaced due to the ongoing conflict.

The earthquake severely damaged many cities, including the second- and third-biggest, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw. Overall, the UN estimates 41,000 houses collapsed. Critical infrastructure was severely damaged or destroyed and widespread destruction of businesses and farmlands has left people destitute and in need of immediate humanitarian support. Survivors are facing dire conditions, lacking adequate shelter, food and clean water. Unseasonal rains and extreme heat have also heightened the risk of disease outbreaks.

To date, UNHCR has distributed most of its in-country stocks for some 50,000 survivors in Mandalay, Sagaing and Bago Regions, as well in Nay Pyi Taw and parts of Shan State (South). The agency co-leads the response on shelter, emergency relief items, camp coordination, and protection as part of the inter-agency response.

UNHCR has appealed for \$16 million to assist 1.2 million affected people as we expand our emergency relief efforts, manage displacement sites and support vulnerable people in six affected regions until the end of the year.

This funding will allow us to replenish stocks urgently to meet the massive needs in areas suffering from the impact of the earthquake on top of four years of conflict and displacement. These relief items are critical for people who have lost everything.



Photo: AFP

DOWNPOURS DRENCH HOMELESS SURVIVORS OF MYANMAR QUAKE

Hheavy rains have lashed the Myanmar region stricken by last month's earthquake, aid officials said Wednesday, drenching homeless survivors and bogging down relief efforts.

Some 60,000 people are living in tent encampments in central Myanmar, according to the UN, three weeks after a 7.7-magnitude tremor damaged and destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 3,700 people.

Downpours around 7:00 pm on Tuesday flooded streets and camps in and around Mandalay, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said.

The city -- Myanmar's second most populous -- suffered heavy damage in the March 28 disaster with apartment blocks collapsed, religious institutes demolished and hotels razed by the shallow quake.

AFP journalists in Mandalay over the weekend saw hundreds of people living under plastic gazebos and draped tarpaulins, perched on cardboard in makeshift homes that offered little protection from the elements.

"When these downpours happen the conditions just get really worse," IFRC Myanmar delegation chief Nadia Khoury told AFP.

Myanmar is in the midst of its Thingyan festival which typically celebrates the new year with water-

splashing rituals symbolising cleansing and renewal.

But celebrations have been muted as the nation mourns, while relief workers and homeless families are fretting over the summer's oncoming monsoon season.

"The conditions are challenging. We are worried about the rains arriving," said Khoury, who has visited the worst affected sites -- where the IFRC is working with the Myanmar Red Cross -- for the past two days.

"This effort needs to be as fast as possible, to get people into some form of permanent shelter, with good sanitary facilities and drinking water."

Myanmar's central belt is blanketed by at least two and a half million tonnes of debris, according to the UN, which says two million people have been pushed into "critical need of assistance and protection".

Many homes remain standing but have suffered cracks, with families too fearful to return as the region is still rattled by regular aftershocks.

Daytime temperatures have soared as high as 44 degrees Celsius (111 degrees Fahrenheit), piling more misery on survivors in the country which is also beset by a brutal civil war following a 2021 coup.

AFP



The damaged Sinthay diverting weir on 29 March.
Photo: Sanpya Volunteer Social Service

AFTERSHOCKS TRIGGER FURTHER COLLAPSE OF SINTHAY DAM'S DIVERTING WEIR IN NAYPYIDAW

The diverting weir of Sinthay Dam in Tatfone Township, Naypyidaw, which was damaged by a powerful earthquake, collapsed again on the night of 11 April due to aftershocks, according to local residents.

Aftershocks continue to occur in the region. According to a statement from the junta's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, a 4.4-magnitude earthquake struck at 8:47 pm on 11 April, with its epicentre located about nine miles west of Tatfone.

Earlier that day, at around 3 pm, a magnitude 4.0 earthquake struck approximately nine miles southwest of Tatfone.

"The upper reservoir is still in good condition. It serves as a large reservoir, and water is released from there to the lower reservoir. From there, the water is then distributed to farmers through the left and right irrigation channels," said a social worker in Tatfone.

He explained that the diverting weir of the lower reservoir had initially broken due to the earthquake, but authorities had repaired it to resume water supply to the fields. However, a subsequent quake caused the diverting weir to break again, diverting the water into

the old Sinthay Stream. Fortunately, no villages were affected.

Locals reported that the current rupture of the diverting weir could delay the flow of water to the fields, potentially leading to water shortages.

According to a report from the junta on 7 April, over 5,500 acres of summer crops are being cultivated along the dam's left main irrigation system, while approximately 3,000 acres are being grown along the right main irrigation system.

A powerful earthquake caused minor damage to four of the 12 reservoirs in Naypyidaw, as announced by the junta-controlled MRTV on April 13.

In addition, according to a 29 March statement, out of the 12 diverting weirs downstream of the reservoirs, approximately 150 feet of the Sinthay diverting weir—which is 930 feet wide and 20 feet deep—was reported damaged.

The powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck on 28 March caused widespread damage across central Myanmar, including Naypyidaw. It also damaged 198 reservoirs, Min Aung Hlaing said on April 5.



Photo: Supplied

FORMER JUNTA DEPUTY MINISTER OF PLANNING AND FINANCE ARRESTED ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

Maung Maung Win, former junta Deputy Minister of Planning and Finance, along with some directors general from the Central Bank and the Ministry of Planning and Finance, were arrested and charged with corruption by the junta in the last week of March, according to Mizzima's investigation.

Former Deputy Minister Maung Maung Win is currently detained in Naypyidaw Prison and has been charged under Section 55 of the Anti-Corruption Law.

Alongside him, Min Han Soe, Director General of the Central Bank, and a Director General from the Ministry of Planning and Finance have also been charged under Section 56 of the Anti-Corruption Law by the junta.

The case involves loans and deposits handled by the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) in Yangon under the Financial Institutions Law during the military coup period, according to a source familiar with the matter who spoke to Mizzima.

"He [Former Deputy Minister Maung Maung Win] had the authority to make decisions regarding loans and deposits, and the Managing Director implemented

these decisions. There were some irregularities in how these operations were conducted. They've charged him with corruption, claiming he failed to provide proper oversight. But legally speaking, lack of oversight doesn't necessarily constitute corruption. Nevertheless, they're proceeding with the corruption charges," the source said.

Maung Maung Win previously served as Deputy Minister of Planning, Finance and Industry under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government and was reappointed to the same position following the military takeover. In May 2024, the junta announced his dismissal from the post.

A judge from the Mandalay Region High Court is currently in Naypyidaw to preside over Maung Maung Win's case.

In July 2024, reports surfaced that the junta had arrested Kay Thi, managing director of the state-owned MFTB Bank, on charges of embezzlement.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS NOVICE MONK AND WOMAN; INJURES THREE IN SAGAING REGION

On the morning of 14 April, the junta carried out an airstrike targeting Thaminchan village and Muhtaw village in Kani Township, Sagaing Region, killing a novice monk and a woman.

The junta launched the aerial attack using jet fighters, Y12 aircraft, paramotors and military helicopters after cutting off phone lines in Kani township, according to a local resident.

"They (the junta) were firing as if there was ground battles going on. These days, there is no ground fighting in Kani township. Today, they were opening fire continually," he added.

The junta airstrike reportedly began around 7 a.m., with the Y12 aircraft dropping about 20 bombs at around 8 a.m., resulting in casualties.

"At first, the junta aircraft dropped bombs on the monastery. As a result, a young novice who had joined the Buddhist order during the Thingyan (Water Festival) period was killed and another three novices were seriously injured. There were unexploded bombs there as well," according to a local resident from Thaminchan village.

"I can't get the sound of the planes out of my ears. I no longer even dare to observe the Buddhist precepts

on these holy days because of the airstrike on the monastery. I fear that they will drop bombs once more in crowded areas," said a local resident.

In a separate incident on the evening of 12 April, three novice monks were killed when the junta launched an airstrike on a monastery in Kya Khet Wyne village in Depayin Township. Five people were killed, and six others were injured in that attack.

Despite the junta's announcement of a ceasefire from 2 April to 22 April, airstrikes have continued while resistance forces have not launched ground offensives, according to members of the People's Defence Force in Sagaing Region.

While people are still reeling from a powerful earthquake on 28 March, the junta carried out 102 aerial and artillery attacks between that date and 11 April, killing 111 civilians and injuring 132 more, according to the opposition government National Unity Government (NUG).

More recently, the junta conducted airstrikes on Thabeikkyin Township in Mandalay Region, Mindat in Chin State, Kyauktaw in Rakhine State, and Kani, Wuntho, Kawlin and Taze in Sagaing Region on 13 April and 14 April.



Photo: Han Htoo Zaw

MYANMAR WORKERS TRAPPED IN EXPANDING ONLINE MONEY LAUNDERING OPERATIONS IN BORDER AREAS

MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW

For nearly a decade, powerful Chinese criminal syndicates have been running massive online money laundering and fraud operations along Myanmar's borders with China, Laos, and Thailand.

These illicit enterprises, often disguised as legitimate businesses, have been thriving under the protection of local armed groups and continue to exploit vulnerable Burmese workers.

The core of these operations involves online investment scams, where unsuspecting victims from across the world—including China, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Kenya, India, and Pakistan, are lured into fraudulent schemes and defrauded of substantial amounts of money.

These scams are run by Chinese mafia groups, who establish fortified compounds and infrastructure with the assistance of local militias, turning border towns into hubs of international cybercrime.

At the heart of these operations are thousands of Myanmar nationals who serve as low-level workers.

Many of them are reportedly trafficked, forced into labour, and subjected to abuse if they attempt to resist.

In some cases, foreign nationals are also kidnapped or deceived into working for these criminal networks, only to find themselves trapped in inhumane conditions.

Myawaddy, a key town in Karen State on the Thai-Myanmar border, has become a major centre for these fraudulent activities.

Online scam operations there have flourished with the backing of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), an armed group that has been accused of allowing such businesses to operate under its protection.

In response to mounting pressure, the BGF claims to be cracking down on human trafficking rings linked to the scam industry.

According to statements from the group, efforts are being made to arrest traffickers and rescue victims.

However, doubts remain about the sincerity and effectiveness of these actions, as the scale of the operations appears undiminished.

INVESTIGATION

This ongoing investigation seeks to uncover the reality behind these claims—examining the current state of the smuggling industry, the conditions faced by trafficked individuals, and the plight of Myanmar workers who are often caught in the middle of a ruthless international criminal network. The main aim is to tell the story through the testimonies of people involved in these illegal networks.

Many of the Chinese criminal syndicates involved in online money laundering schemes have established their bases in Myanmar's border regions. For nearly a decade, these syndicates have been running large-scale scams—posing as legitimate online investment platforms to gain victims' trust, only to defraud them of significant sums. These operations span the border zones of China, Laos, and Thailand, where Chinese mafia groups have been able to set up sprawling compounds with the backing of local armed groups.

Though controlled by Chinese mafia networks, most of the low-level labour in these enterprises is carried out by Burmese nationals.

Victims lured into these operations come from a wide range of countries, including China, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Italy, several European nations, Kenya, India, and Pakistan. Once deceived, many are forced into roles involving human trafficking, torture, and other forms of cruel and exploitative labour.

KAREN STATE CENTRES

In Myawaddy, Karen State, a key border town, online fraud networks have taken deep root, operating with the support of armed groups.

In territories under the control of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), led by Colonel Saw Chit Thu, at least 15 locations have been running online scam operations since 2016. These include Shwe Kokko Myothit, Wan Kha, 100 Acres, KK Park, AA Park, Apollo, Yolong Bay, Dongmei Park, UK Casino, and Hengsheng Casino.

Recruitment is done primarily through platforms like TikTok and Telegram, where Myanmar citizens are enticed with promises of high-paying jobs. Applicants are typically instructed to report to places such as Myawaddy Hotel, Union Restaurant, and Shwe Ya Nant Restaurant to finalize arrangements.

From there, vehicles operated by the scam companies—accompanied by armed BGF personnel—arrive to collect the recruits and escort them under security to the compounds where the operations are based.

According to one employee: "From Yangon, I had to travel to Myawaddy. Once I arrived in Myawaddy, I had to contact the HR department. After getting in touch with them, they instructed us to go to a specific location for the interview. They sent cars to pick us up. When we got there, we met with the driver and were taken to their company. Once we arrived, we had to go through an interview with their Chinese staff and translators."

EXPERIENCED OPERATIVES

Kyaw, a pseudonym, who worked for two years in online scam operations, reaching the "killer" level (KK Park, Shwe Kokko) explained.

"At UK Casino, they test your writing skills first—they check your spelling. Then comes the speaking test.

They recheck the writing to see what you've written and then evaluate how fast and accurately you can type. After that, there's a verbal assessment where you have to repeat what the other person says, word for word."

Htin, a pseudonym, who worked for 1.5 years in the scam industry operation and became a security officer at UK Casino, Hengsheng, said: "If you look at the cars used in Shwe Kokko and KK Park, most of them are Alphard vans. These Alphards usually have VIP stickers—one on each side and another in the middle. The vehicles with those specific VIP stickers are the ones used by online scam operations.

They're used to transport staff. And when Chinese bosses want to go out into the town or to a clinic, they use those same cars."

Kyaw outlined a recent call for staff. "There's a vacancy for a Chinese interpreter, and they also need an accountant. The requirements include reading, writing, and speaking Chinese, all three skills must be tested and passed. The main focus is on writing, particularly handwriting, and typing in Chinese. If you pass that, you get the job. The starting salary is 8,000 yuan, which is around 40,000 baht. I'll be starting at 40,000 baht. The job also offers regular bonuses, allowances, and living expenses. If you want more details, contact Phway on Telegram. I only need two people: one interpreter and one accountant."

A recruitment agent on TikTok, hiring for online scam companies, said: "Myanmar nationals applying for these jobs must be able to type at least 40 words per minute. These scam job ads often look for people with English, Chinese language ability, and familiarity

with various social media platforms.

"The online scam operations are typically structured into three phases: First, identifying a victim. Second, persuading them to invest money. And third, defrauding them until a target amount is received.

"In job listings, these roles are categorized as M1, M2, and M3 levels.

"Positions range from Chinese-Burmese interpreters and personal assistants to accountants, female hosts for voice or video chats, security staff, cooks, and cleaners.

"The salaries for these roles range from a minimum of 12,000 baht to as much as 80,000 baht, depending on the position.

"At the current exchange rate, this is equivalent to about 1.5 million to 100 million kyats in Myanmar currency."

According to one disillusioned Burmese worker: "The job was supposed to be 8 hours a day, and the salary was 12,000 baht. But after deducting expenses like rent, water and electricity, and food, I was left with only 5,000 to 6,000 baht. The salary they promised was not what I actually received. Even after I started the job, I wasn't allowed to go outside. Even on off days, they didn't let us leave the premises. If I needed something, I had to order it to be delivered—I couldn't go out to buy anything myself."

Htin explained the backdrop to the demand for employment.

"Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, widespread job shortages, travel restrictions, and the enforcement of the military conscription law have created immense pressure on the country's youth. With forced military service looming and no clear future, many young people have been driven into the shadowy world of online scam operations commonly known as Kyar Phyant gangs.

"After the 2021 coup, things kept getting worse. By 2024, they brought in the conscription law around the latter half of the year.

"Many young people tried to leave the country, but getting a passport wasn't as simple anymore. It cost a lot, and the process took forever.

"And for those tied to military service, getting a passport became almost impossible.

"I couldn't find a legal way out. I didn't want to be conscripted, but I also couldn't go abroad. That's when I ended up in the scam business. I didn't know where

else to go.

"Even if I managed to go overseas, the pay wouldn't be that different. I started to realize, 'If I'm stuck here anyway, I might as well earn this kind of money.

"People are scared of conscription. With soaring prices and no good jobs, many look back at their lives and end up taking low-level scam work just to survive."

Zaw, who worked for three months in a scam syndicate in Laukkai, outlined the situation concerning Burmese workers.

"By the second half of 2022, the number of Burmese workers in these online scams really shot up.

"A lot of them were originally from Shan State, working in Yangon or Bago. But when life there got harder—unsafe housing, no secure jobs—they had no choice.

"For many, it wasn't even accidental. They knew it was scam work, and they took it anyway."

Kyaw explained why the industry was in the news.

"In January 2025, the rescue of Chinese actor Wanxing, who had been trafficked into a scam compound in Dongmei Park near Myawaddy, caught international attention.

"Following this, the Chinese government officially launched Operation Zin Yaw, a crackdown on scam networks based in Myawaddy.

"Simultaneously, the Thai government imposed a ban on 12 categories of exports—including electricity and fuel to five known scam-linked locations in Myawaddy, Three Pagodas Pass, and Tachilek in Shan State, citing the need to curb the spread of online fraud operations.

"Soon after reports emerged that Thai authorities were preparing to issue arrest warrants for three senior figures from the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), including its chief Colonel Saw Chit Thu. He publicly vowed to crack down on scam centres within BGF-controlled territories. He promised arrests, shutdowns, and deportations of those involved in money-laundering and scam activities.

"Since the announcement, 621 Chinese nationals linked to the scam operations have been extradited to China, and over 3,000 foreigners, including Chinese nationals, are expected to be extradited.

"The BGF claims to be cracking down on online scam operations in Myawaddy, but reports on the ground show some discrepancies.

"The Shwe Kokko Myothit Job Search telegram channel continues to post job advertisements until February 26."

CONTACTING SCAM PLAYERS

When Mizzima contacted a recruitment agent, posing as a job seeker to investigate operations within the scam industry, the agent claimed that only Chinese nationals were being targeted for trafficking and assured that Burmese workers could continue working without fear of arrest.

According to a scam centre human resources worker, replying to the query:

"The position we need is for English typing. When you're done, please add an Indonesian person on Facebook and Instagram. Both Facebook and Instagram are already set up. That's all. Just search for and add a person from there—a 30-year-old Indonesian male.

"You can find such people in car showroom and real estate business groups. If you add a person around 30 years old, you'll find them. This is what the interview asked for.

"And they should have a good mindset. Here, if you can type, you'll be hired.

"The basic salary is 15,000 baht, with a daily allowance of 1,500 baht and a monthly allowance of 1,000 baht. Additionally, Yatai needs to be paid for security at Shwe Kokko.

Mizzima, posing as a job seeker, asked: Do we have to pay anything to the company?

The HR worker said: "Yes, a specific amount must be paid to Yatai Company, which goes toward the police and security forces guarding the scam compound.

"As for arrival, once you're in Myawaddy, you'll need to go to Shwe Yanant Restaurant and wait there. We will pick you up by bus. Call the number we gave you when you arrive.

"If you pass the interview, transportation costs are covered. But if you fail, you'll have to pay for the taxi.

"For example, the ride from Myawaddy to Shwe Kokko costs 800 baht, but if you're returning because of a failed interview, the total round-trip cost is 1,300 baht.

Mizzima asked: "I'm worried about the arrests happening in Shwe Kokko. Will I be okay? I can't go back to Myanmar.

The HR worker said: "No need to worry. Burmese workers aren't being arrested—only Chinese nationals involved in human trafficking have been arrested and

deported.

Mizzima asked: "So Burmese people are safe?

The HR worker said: "Yes, Burmese workers are safe. Our company allows freedom of movement after working hours. If you're coming, just call us once you reach Myawaddy."

DIFFERENT REALITY

While recruiters promise freedom of movement and no binding contracts, the reality inside these scam sites is very different. Upon starting work, workers are forced to surrender their ID cards and sign contracts often in English or Chinese, not Burmese. These documents typically bind them to work for at least six months up to two years, and if they want to leave early, they must pay a 60,000 Thai baht penalty.

One scam centre worker explained:

"You're required to work here for two years. If you want to quit early, you have to pay 60,000 baht.

Many young workers face extra restrictions and are subjected to torture, pressure, and other abuse.

The contracts are not written in Burmese. They're in English and Chinese, which many can't read.

"Even those who understand what's written don't warn others.

"I lived near the boss and had some privileges. I didn't speak out. The main focus was always on bringing in new workers.

"The boss told me to find new recruits. I asked for a 'smart fee' (a broker's cut), and I got it. But once the job started, no one explained the contract—people just signed it. Those who tried to leave later couldn't escape."



Rescued workers. Photo: AFP



Kim Aris with his mother, Aung San Suu Kyi, in 2011. Photo: AFP

KIM ARIS CONCLUDES U.S. TOUR WITH RENEWED CALL TO ACTION FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND MYANMAR PEOPLE

Kim Aris, the youngest son of Myanmar's imprisoned democratic leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has concluded his powerful eight-city advocacy tour across the United States, capping off a deeply moving journey aimed at rallying global attention and support for Myanmar's ongoing struggle against military rule, according to a press release dated 20 April.

Throughout the tour, Aris met with members of Congress, civil society leaders, international organizations, and more than 5,000 members of the Burmese diaspora and allies in New York, Boston, Washington D.C., Fort Wayne, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sedona, and Austin.

In addition to raising awareness, the tour helped

generate more than \$400,000 in contributions. The funds will go toward providing critical aid to those most affected by the recent Sagaing earthquake, as well as supporting organizations working on the frontlines of Myanmar's humanitarian crisis and ongoing pro-democracy efforts.

The tour has been a deeply personal mission—not only to spotlight Myanmar's worsening humanitarian crisis and call for international action to end military atrocities and free political prisoners, including his mother—but also to express his growing concern for Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains in isolation with no communication or access to proper medical care.

"Though I am not a politician, I continue to speak out—for her, for the release of all political prisoners, and for the people of Myanmar. As her son, I can't stop until

the job is done,” Aris said. “As I conclude my journey across the United States, I reflect on the incredible people and conversations that shaped this experience,” he continued. “I’m leaving with deep gratitude, renewed purpose, and unwavering resolve—deeply moved by the strength, compassion, and solidarity I’ve witnessed in every city.”

6 Key Messages from the Tour

Urgent Call for the Release of Political Prisoners

Aris emphasized the urgent need to free over 20,000 political prisoners unjustly detained by the junta, including his mother, who at age 80 has been held in solitary confinement without due process. “I can’t let my mother languish in prison in silence,” he said. “She deserves dignity. They all do.”

Amplifying Myanmar’s Humanitarian Crisis

He brought attention to the massive scale of suffering in Myanmar: - Over 3.5 million people displaced - 15 million facing food insecurity - 20 million in urgent need of aid “Myanmar is one of the world’s largest humanitarian disasters—yet too many still look away.”

Urging International Action

Aris called on the U.S. and its allies to: Expand sanctions against military leaders and their enablers; Pressure countries supplying arms to the junta; Support cross-border humanitarian aid channels; and Defend and fund independent media and civil society.

Empowering the Diaspora and Allies

“If governments won’t act, then the people must push them,” he said. “Democracy is built on people showing up.”

A Journey Rooted in Humanity and Hope

Throughout the tour, Aris shared heartfelt reflections on his experiences: “The warmth, kindness, and generosity of people moved me beyond words. I witnessed firsthand the unshakable love you carry for the motherland, the strength of your roots, and your passionate commitment to seeing freedom and justice return to Burma.” “Growing up, I learned about Burmese traditions and spirit through my mother and our relatives. But this journey brought those stories to life—I’ve now seen it. I’ve felt it. I’ve lived it—through you.” “This is more than a movement. Our flame-like strong determination must never be allowed to be snuffed off.”

The Struggle Continues

As his U.S. tour ends, Aris leaves the country with a message of resolve and unity: “Together, we carry the hopes of a nation—and the legacy of those who’ve sacrificed everything. The struggle continues. Our voices are united. And together, we will make a difference.” “For her, we can. For Myanmar, we must.”



A PARTNER IN CRISIS, BETTER BURMA DRIVES EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORTS

In the aftermath of the devastating, 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28, killing over thousands of people and displacing millions, civil society groups have mobilized in response. In catastrophes such as this, the overwhelming need for immediate relief efforts is obviously front and center, but there is an equally important, but often under-supported need: longer-term community resilience beyond the initial period of recovery. The non-profit organization Better Burma is one of the few organizations focused on addressing both of these challenges.

Within the first few, chaotic days following the quake, Better Burma was among the first international organizations to coordinate emergency funding directly with Burmese-led, grassroots responders on the ground. This is especially important because major donor organizations tend to work through official channels, which in Myanmar's case means the junta, which has a history of theft and using relief aid for military purposes.

Working with trusted local teams and networks, Better Burma has focused on hard-to-reach communities that often receive the least support, particularly those in conflict-affected areas, rapidly distributing basic

necessities and emergency equipment: food, clean water, mosquito nets, tents, baby formula, medicine, first aid kits, mobile toilets, generators, fuel, charging stations, solar-powered lights, and equipment used to retrieve bodies and rescue survivors trapped in rubble. And with an eye towards those longer-term needs, Better Burma is distributing water purification systems for villages, the reconstruction of household toilets destroyed in the quake, and solar lighting for temporary shelters.

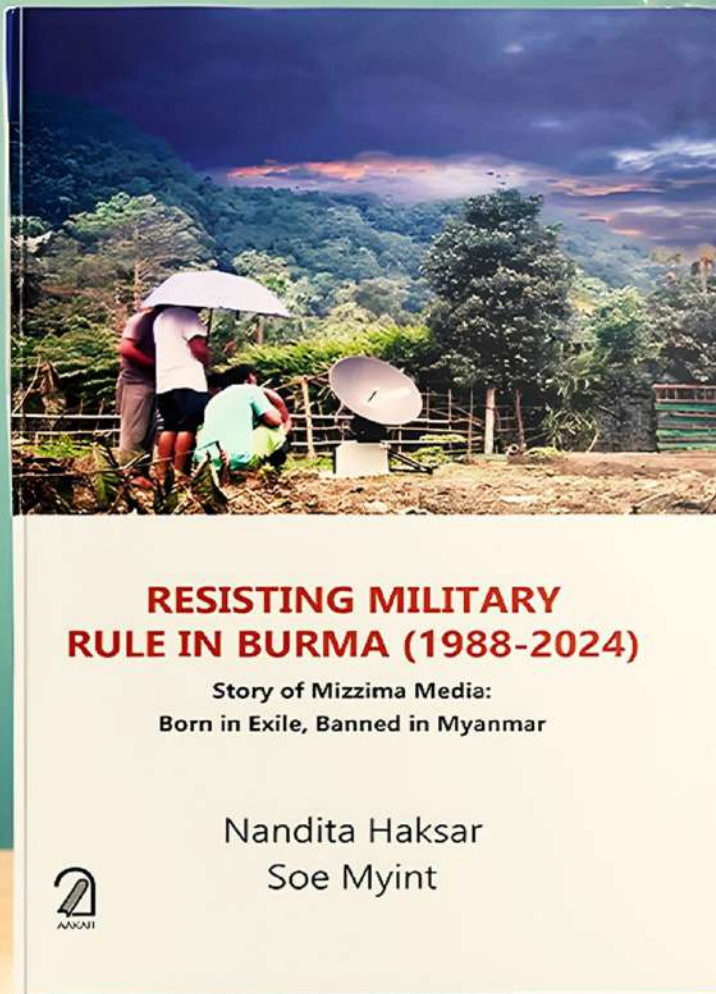
However, the needs remain immense! With disrupted supply chains and limited international attention, sustained support is critical to helping affected communities recover and rebuild.

For those seeking to support trustworthy, people-centered relief, Better Burma offers a direct channel to communities in need. The crisis in Myanmar is far from over, but with the right support, it's possible to meet urgent needs today while strengthening local resilience for tomorrow. Better Burma encourages donors to give through its secure platform at <https://www.betterburma.org/>

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA: BORN IN EXILE, BANNED IN MYANMAR

by *Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

Nandita Haksar
Soe Myint



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Rescue workers at the site of the collapsed building in Bangkok. Photo: AFP

THAILAND'S INFRASTRUCTURE WOES RAISE DOUBTS ON CHINA'S BRI

SUN LEE

A high-rise under construction in Bangkok collapsed following Myanmar's 7.7 magnitude earthquake, raising concerns about poor building standards and possible corruption tied to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Despite minimal damage elsewhere in the Thai capital, the 30-floor skyscraper crumbled, exposing alleged structural flaws in its steel reinforcements. The disaster killed at least 15 workers and left 72 missing. Investigations into construction practices, materials, and oversight are underway, fuelling scrutiny of China's expanding influence on infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra expressed shock after reviewing multiple clips showing the collapse of the building from different angles. Drawing from extensive experience in the construction sector, she acknowledged that such an incident was unprecedented. Given the substantial budget allocated for the project and the extended deadline for its completion, she emphasized the need for a thorough investigation. The inquiry began under unusual circumstances when, two days after the March 28 earthquake, four Chinese men were recorded hastily

collecting construction-related documents and fleeing the site.

The individuals were briefly detained, questioned, and later released by the police. Following the incident, China's embassy in Bangkok held undisclosed discussions with Thailand's influential interior ministry regarding the skyscraper's collapse. Beijing's reputation remains crucial for its standing among Thais. For decades, both Washington and Beijing have vied for influence in Bangkok, leveraging financial aid, investments, tourism, education, and ancestral connections to shape the city's diplomacy, economy, politics, and military landscape.

Amid the rubble of the collapsed skyscraper, investigators uncovered two types of steel reinforcing bars, or re-bars, intended to strengthen the building's concrete pillars. Following the earthquake, tests conducted by the Iron and Steel Institute of Thailand reportedly revealed deficiencies in the rebars' composition, mass, and stress endurance. Images released by authorities and local media showed markings on one of the extracted re-bars, allegedly tied to a Chinese steel manufacturer operating in Thailand,

as reported by the 'Bangkok Post' on April 2.

The collapse of the unfinished skyscraper has amplified concerns about China's growing influence in Thailand, particularly as some locals' voice unease over Beijing's expanding reach. The earthquake's impact extended beyond the disaster site, dealing a blow to Thailand's economy, high-end tourism sector, and lucrative real estate market. Experts estimate financial losses exceeding \$1 billion. Meanwhile, officials declared at least 30 Bangkok high-rises unsafe for habitation, underscoring the quake's broader ramifications across the city's infrastructure and development landscape.

Tourism and Sports Minister Sorawong Thienthong emphasized that efforts would be directed toward reinforcing confidence in Thailand's safety for travelers. Meanwhile, public and media scrutiny has intensified over the failure of government institutions to address structural flaws in the high-rise before the disaster. Concerns have been raised about oversight in construction regulations and anti-corruption policies. Adding to the irony, many noted that the only building to collapse was the State Audit Office's new headquarters—a body responsible for ensuring transparency in government-linked projects.

Following widespread criticism and allegations of corruption surrounding the collapsed building, the Facebook page of the State Audit Office became inaccessible on April 2, according to 'Khaosod English'. More than 70 construction workers remained unaccounted for as scrutiny intensified. The project was jointly managed by China Railway No. 10 Engineering Group and Italian-Thai Development (ITD), a major infrastructure firm in Southeast Asia. ITD, established in 1958 through a Thai-Italian partnership, has played a significant role in the region's large-scale construction projects.

Italian-Thai Development (ITD) has expanded its presence across various regions, including South and Southeast Asia, as well as Madagascar. One of its notable projects in Thailand was the construction of a passenger terminal at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport in 2006. Meanwhile, China Railway No. 10 Engineering Group operates under China Railway Engineering Corp (CREC), a global leader in infrastructure development. Prime Minister Paetongtarn emphasized the need for thorough investigations into the company's involvement in other projects across Thailand.

Ensuring that all buildings in Bangkok adhere to legal standards and prioritize safety has been emphasized as a key concern. In Thailand, China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) and Railway No. 10 play a significant role in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious international development strategy driven by Chinese investments and loans. CREC has undertaken major infrastructure projects, including high-speed railways in China and Africa. In Thailand, it has contributed to railway expansion, aiming to establish a direct high-speed connection between Beijing, Bangkok, and Singapore.

CREC played a key role in constructing one of Bangkok's underground metro lines and was actively bidding for additional projects. Meanwhile, investigations were reportedly launched by the Commerce Ministry, Royal Thai Police Economic Crime Suppression Division, and Revenue Department into multiple projects in Thailand allegedly linked to CREC and China Railway No. 10. Prior to the earthquake, CREC had promoted the Bangkok SAO skyscraper as its first high-rise construction for the bureau overseas. Following the disaster, references to the project were reportedly removed from CREC's website.

As part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China Railway 10th Bureau expanded into the Asia-Pacific region, positioning Thailand as a gateway for broader market access in Southeast Asia. Among its notable projects was the National Audit Office of Thailand's high-rise, the largest single-building construction undertaken by the bureau. Meanwhile, delays plagued a \$20 million airport terminal project in Narathiwat. A hospital in Songkhla, designed to withstand earthquakes, faced scrutiny over material quality. Investigators are now examining potential fraudulent contracts involving Chinese and Thai construction firms.

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

The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.



PHNOM PENH 1975 - Khmer Rouge fighters enter the capital. Photo: AFP

SILENT KILLING FIELDS 50 YEARS ON FROM KHMER ROUGE ATROCITIES

Cambodia marked on Thursday the 50th anniversary of the Khmer Rouge's march into Phnom Penh, though survivors of its genocidal rule were forbidden from praying before victims' skulls.

On April 17, 1975, soldiers of the ultra-Maoist Khmer Rouge rolled into the capital astride tanks, toppling the US-backed republican army of Lon Nol and starting a four-year communist government.

To remember victims, a Cambodian opposition party asked for authorities' permission to hold a memorial at Choeung Ek -- the most notorious of the Khmer Rouge's "Killing Fields" -- in the capital Phnom Penh.

But the city refused to greenlight the event, citing issues of "public order" and safety, and warned that the group would be held legally responsible, according to a letter seen by AFP.

"Victims of the Khmer Rouge genocide should not be banned by any rule if they wish to memorialise this very difficult time in Cambodian history," said Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), which researches and records atrocities of that period.

City hall could not be immediately reached for comment.

Survivors were absent at the Choeung Ek wartime museum Thursday, though dozens of tourists visited the site and took pictures of the skulls displayed in glass cases.

Outside Choeung Ek, survivor Sum Rithy, 72, recalled the Khmer Rouge were initially given a cautious welcome by Phnom Penh's war-weary residents when they entered the city, their distinctive red-chequered

scarves fluttering behind them.

But soon enough cadres began to evacuate the city of two million people at gunpoint, in one of the largest forced displacements in recent history.

"It was a day of nationwide bloodshed... the Khmer Rouge chased people away from homes everywhere," Sum Rithy said.

He said his father and three siblings were killed, while he was starved and jailed for two years on allegations that he was a member of the CIA.

There was "no happiness, no smiling, but there was only sadness and suffering", he told AFP. "I will never forget this."

Tribunal

The Khmer Rouge drove Cambodia -- once known as the "Pearl of Asia" for its music, culture and French colonial architecture -- back to "Year Zero" through an agrarian peasant revolution.

By the time the tyrannical rule of Pol Pot was ousted four years later, an estimated two million Cambodians had been killed by execution, starvation or overwork.

Only after the Khmer Rouge was forced out by Vietnamese soldiers in 1979 did the scale of its atrocities emerge, with the bones of thousands of victims -- including children -- uncovered at mass graves across the country.

Pol Pot died in 1998 without facing justice.

A special tribunal sponsored by the United Nations convicted three key Khmer Rouge figures before ceasing operations in 2022, but other former cadres continue to live freely.

Former prime minister Hun Sen -- an ex-cadre who ruled Cambodia for nearly four decades -- was against pursuing further cases at the tribunal, claiming it would plunge the country into instability.

Last month Cambodia enacted a law -- at the request of Hun Sen -- that forbids denying the Khmer Rouge's atrocities, but which rights advocates and academics warn could also be used to stifle legitimate dissent.

AFP



AGAINST THE WIND

"The challenging times that we are facing reveal more than what we should do—they reveal who we should be."

In a deeply personal and thought-provoking conversation, Jeshua Soh, a Singaporean entrepreneur who has spent the last several years building a life and business in Myanmar, joins the Insight Myanmar podcast. His journey is marked by a belief in the power of human agency, values-driven entrepreneurship, and a firm commitment to service, even in the face of overwhelming political instability and humanitarian crisis. He traces the arc of his unlikely connection to Myanmar, starting with a teenage school trip in 2012. Captivated by what he calls its "time-capsule-like" quality, and similarities to his own country—both former British colonies with shared legal and educational structures—he felt a subtle but growing pull to return. "It was an incremental thing...a seven-year journey," he recalls, noting that it also included volunteer work at an orphanage, solo backpacking, and serendipitous connections with the Myanmar diaspora in Singapore.

Jeshua admits that he has not followed the typical path of a Singaporean youth. He bypassed national exams through direct admissions, and then dropped out of one of Singapore's most elite junior colleges to pursue filmmaking—a field few of his peers considered. "That sort of huge deviation was the beginning of many deviations," he says. Another was his decision to become an entrepreneur, which began partly out of necessity, and partly out of serendipity. After a period of freelance media work where he collected a bunch of video equipment, Jeshua realized he wouldn't be

able to use it during his upcoming period of mandatory national service. So he started a video equipment rental business, which eventually led to founding a second company focused on video production for startups, a shift that exposed him to the world of tech innovation.

The immediacy of needing to hire people for his business eventually pushed Jeshua to explore new options. He had already experienced high turnover among both global freelancers—many of whom quickly left for better-paying jobs—and local staff in Singapore. By that point, he had traveled to Myanmar multiple times, developed personal ties through volunteering and friendships with Burmese people, and had grown to believe in the local talent. So he decided to experiment by opening a small office in Yangon and hiring local staff—an experiment that proved highly successful.

There, he found employees to be hard working and committed. As the team stabilized and thrived, word spread among Jeshua's network, especially among startup founders who faced the same challenges he had. Because Jeshua had become a valuable bridge between foreign companies and local Burmese talent, they started contacting him in higher numbers, saying, "Hey, since you are in Myanmar, you have a small office, why not we put a few people in your office, and you help me take care of them?"

Before long, the staff working in his Yangon office for other companies outnumbered those working on his own projects! That prompted Jeshua to found a dedicated, HR-as-a-service company, Crosswork, which offers recruiting, office management, payroll, and support for international companies wanting to hire in Myanmar. His company has grown from an original 13 to now over 120 staff.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/4/8/episode-333-against-the-wind>



Photo: Supplied

JUNTA AIRSTRIKES TARGET VILLAGE IN MANDALAY REGION'S SINGU TOWNSHIP, INJURING 5-MONTH-OLD BABY AMONG 4 CIVILIANS

In yet another unprovoked aerial assault on civilians, Myanmar's military junta launched airstrikes on Lower Zeekone village in Singu Township, Mandalay Region, injuring four civilians including a 5-month-old infant, according to local resistance news sources.

The attack occurred on the evening of April 21, when junta aircraft bombarded the village despite no ground fighting taking place in the area. Among the four wounded civilians, a woman in her 60s is reportedly in critical condition.

This incident follows a pattern of escalating airstrikes by the junta, which has increasingly relied on aerial bombardment tactics as it loses ground in conventional warfare across the country. The military regime has

become notorious for conducting indiscriminate airstrikes against civilian targets, including schools, monasteries, churches, and hospitals.

According to Progressive Voice, a regional pro-democracy advocacy network, the scale of junta airstrikes has been increasing year on year since the February 2021 coup attempt, with 2,504 airstrikes recorded throughout 2024.

As of the end of 2024, Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica has verified 2,224 civilians as killed by junta airstrikes, although the actual numbers are likely far greater.

Singer Lynn Lynn

Singer: Lynn Lynn
 Title: ဘုရားပေးတဲ့လက်ဆောင်
 (The Gift from God)



BACKLASH ERUPTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AFTER SINGER LYNN LYNN'S CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT ABOUT MILITARY FAMILIES AT US CONCERT FOR MYANMAR AUDIENCES

Myanmar singer Lynn Lynn faces intense social media criticism after telling military supporters and relatives of military personnel to leave his fundraising concert for Myanmar audiences in Maryland, USA, sparking a heated debate about inclusivity in Myanmar's resistance movement.

The controversy ignited when the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) activist and asylum-seeker made the remarks during his performance, which was intended to raise funds for Myanmar's anti-junta resistance. Social media quickly erupted with condemnation, with many pointing out that numerous relatives of military personnel are active participants in the revolution against the military dictatorship that seized power in 2021.

"There are many people related to the Myanmar military who are part of the revolution. Some have abandoned their families and are fighting armed resistance in the jungle against the junta. This is unlike

you who speak carelessly from the safety of a foreign country where no soldier can threaten you," wrote a Facebook user in a scathing criticism.

Another user questioned the logic behind Lynn Lynn's statement, "Does having military connections mean you can't participate in the revolution? Can we choose our blood relations? So should we continue the revolution or stop it?"

A few supporters attempted to defend the singer, with a Facebook user writing: "I understand what Lynn Lynn meant. He couldn't have been referring to military relatives who are already part of the revolution. It must have been a miscommunication."

Critics also brought up Lynn Lynn's past, noting that before the 2021 coup, he allegedly supported the military during its operations against minority groups including the Rohingya.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



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