

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Making sense of the
International Labour Organisation's
stance on Myanmar**

EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

NEED FOR CHANGE IN THE HUMANITARIAN APPROACH TO CRISIS-HIT MYANMAR

Myanmar's humanitarian landscape has been profoundly impacted by the 2021 military coup, the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake in March 2025, and significant shifts in international aid, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom. There is a need for a rethink in terms of how to help people in need in this unhappy land.

Since the military's seizure of power in February 2021, Myanmar has grappled with escalating conflict, widespread displacement, and a severe economic downturn. The coup disrupted essential services, leading to a humanitarian crisis where nearly 20 million people require aid—a twentyfold increase from pre-coup figures. The junta's "four cuts" strategy, which isolates and terrorizes civilian populations to maintain control, has exacerbated these challenges, obstructing aid delivery and targeting healthcare workers.

The earthquake on March 28, intensified Myanmar's humanitarian woes. Over 4,000 people were killed, more than 5,100 injured, and over 65,000 structures destroyed, with the full toll set to rise further. Ongoing aftershocks and a lack of resources have hindered recovery efforts. The junta's extension of a ceasefire to facilitate aid delivery has been marred by continued military operations in certain areas, complicating relief efforts.

The US has significantly reduced its humanitarian presence in Myanmar. Under Donald Trump's administration, USAID's budget was drastically cut, leading to the cancellation of 39 out of 40 programmes in Myanmar. A minimal response team was deployed following the earthquake, and the U.S. pledged only \$9 million in emergency relief. This reduction in aid has strained local organizations and left a substantial funding gap.

In contrast, the UK has reportedly

increased its support. In early 2025, the UK announced an additional £22.45 million in humanitarian funding, bringing the total for the 2024–2025 period to £66.45 million. This funding aims to provide healthcare to nearly one million people, including maternal and child health services, nutrition support, and disease treatment. Additionally, the UK pledged up to £10 million in immediate aid following the earthquake, focusing on food, water, medicine, and shelter. Importantly, UK tries to channel their aid through local partners, circumventing the junta to ensure assistance reaches those in need.

The divergent approaches of the US and UK highlight differing strategies in response to Myanmar's crisis. The U.S.'s reduced involvement has created a vacuum, which countries like China and India have to some extent filled by deploying rescue teams and providing aid. Meanwhile, the UK's increased support underscores a commitment to humanitarian principles and regional stability. However, both nations face challenges in navigating the junta's obstructionist tactics and ensuring aid reaches opposition-held areas.

Myanmar's humanitarian situation remains dire, exacerbated by internal conflict, natural disasters, and shifting international aid dynamics. While the UK has stepped up its support, the US's reduced involvement and the junta's obstructionist policies continue to impede effective aid delivery. A coordinated international response, emphasizing local partnerships and circumventing junta control, is essential to address the urgent needs of the Myanmar people. With ASEAN beginning to engage with the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), international players need to use the NUG and its various humanitarian arms to help.

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Cover photo of garment worker in Yangon by AFP



The ILO appears to be tiptoeing between a tough stance against the Myanmar junta and making sure workers are taken care of. Garment worker in Yangon. Photo: AFP

MAKING SENSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION'S STANCE ON MYANMAR

Prior to the massive earthquake, March saw protests in Yangon and other areas of Myanmar calling for action against the Myanmar authorities under Article 33 of the Constitution of the United Nations' labour agency, the International Labour Organisation or ILO.

The protestors were calling for sanctions against the Myanmar junta as the ILO has been debating their stance on Myanmar with a decision due to be made at the ILO Conference set for June in Geneva in Switzerland. In recent protests, demonstrators called on the ILO to implement Article 33.

Article 33 empowers the ILO to take action when a member state fails to comply with recommendations from the ILO's Commission of Inquiry. Specifically, Article 33 states that in cases where a member does not fulfill the recommendations, the Governing Body may recommend to the International Labour Conference

(ILC) measures of a punitive or corrective nature, including sanctions or other actions, to secure compliance.

Amidst the uproar against the brutal Myanmar junta, with labour unions inside and outside Myanmar attempting to get their voices heard, the "subtleties" of the ILO position appear to be drowned out as some stakeholders call for sanctions and a dramatic clamp-down on the junta guilty of crimes against humanity and the infringement of codes of conduct of various labour practices, including forcibly conscripting youth into the military.

What emerges from delving into the views of stakeholders and trade unions operating inside and outside Myanmar is that there is no agreed position by Myanmar unions for any "sanction-like" measures that might lead to more Western brands pulling out of the country.

In what can be described as a "war of narratives", it is important to draw a line between actions and invest-



ments that directly benefit the military junta, on the one hand, and the welfare of workers in Myanmar, on the other – though the line can be blurred at times.

A QUESTION OF 'SANCTIONS'

What has to be remembered is the ILO cannot directly sanction the junta. It can only offer recommendations that various states can take action on against the junta if they see fit. In one recent report Mizzima published, a Myanmar trade union operating in exile claimed the ILO's paper entitled "Decision concerning the follow-up to the report of the Commission of Inquiry concerning Myanmar" published on 19 March claimed that the ILO was calling for sanctions against the junta.

But the text of the interim ILO report offers a more nuanced approach.

Since seizing power in February 2021, the military junta has consistently committed violations of international labour standards, including forced conscription into the armed services, forced army portering, clamp-downs on labour organizations, and provided a climate of fear – with a number of labour activists thrown in jail.

The interim ILO report – which few are likely to read through and fully understand – makes a subtle distinction between businesses and investments that directly or indirectly benefit the junta and the generals hoarding wealth, and foreign businesses operating in the business sector, such as foreign companies still involved in the garment industry. For example, the junta makes minimal income from garment factories, and it can be argued that the industry does not directly benefit the junta's "war machine".

WEAPONS VS WORKERS

While the ILO report stresses a call for a tough line on business or activities that directly support the military junta, through "the support or supply of military equipment or means, including jet fuel, or the free flow of funds to the military authorities," they note there is a need to "enable continuing support for activities that benefit directly the Myanmar people and their communities and, in particular, through independent and confidential monitoring and reporting systems that provide avenues for complaints of violations to be rapidly and



effectively addressed to ensure accountability where freedom of association and forced labour violations occur”.

Here we should note the subtle distinction the ILO is making between supporting weapons of war and supporting the welfare of typically poorly-paid workers, such as in the garment industry, who are desperate to hang on to their jobs, even though some may privately voice support for tough sanctions to essentially wreck the economy in pursuit of regime change.

At this point in time, the military junta's handling of the economy has led to serious problems for workers and businesses in the country as a whole and an atmosphere where some Western companies are questioning whether they should stay engaged in Myanmar – particularly if their name might be tarnished if they are claimed to be supporting an evil junta trampling on people's rights.

In recent exclusive reports by American journalist Antonio Graceffo for Mizzima, the dire employment situation was highlighted in Kachin State and Karenni State showing that the Myanmar crisis, sanctions and the poor economic and business environment placed many workers and their families in crisis. Little wonder, he notes, that Myanmar workers have been fleeing to try to work abroad, primarily in Thailand – a country that is proving harder to travel to for those entering legally or illegally.

The labour crisis in Myanmar raises the question of where the ILO needs to focus its attention and what to recommend to countries and foreign companies who are still engaged in the country.

It can be argued that calls on Western companies to pull out of Myanmar could lead to Asian companies – primarily Chinese and Korean – stepping in to fill the void, but providing lower pay and arguably poorer working conditions than Western-supported companies.

Some anti-junta activists appear to want to “throw the baby out with the bath water” in seeking a complete collapse of the Myanmar economy. The argument here is “better the pain now” than letting the junta con-

tinue to kill its people for years.

But such an argument appears to ignore the dire living conditions of over a third of the population, and the many struggling to make a living.

THE GARMENT GRIND

Myanmar's garment industry has long been under the scrutiny of the ILO, trade unions and non-governmental organization concerned about poor workers' pay and conditions. Under the earlier Thein Sein regime from 2011 to 2015, progress was made by various local and foreign stakeholders to attempt to set standards and improve the lives of workers in garment factories – many of them run by foreign companies, including Western fashion houses, and Chinese and Korean companies.

A European initiative, SMART, began as the country started opening up over a decade ago, sought to help European companies, changing its name to MADE in Myanmar in 2023 in the wake of the military coup.

According to EuroCham, MADE In Myanmar builds on its experience to improve working conditions in the apparel sector by working with factory managers and others to strengthen workplace dialogue. The project is funded through a 3-million euro grant from the European Union and implemented by the German developmental organization Sequa in partnership with EuroCham Myanmar. The project is still in operation – post-coup – and will run till the end of 2026.

MADE in Myanmar contradicts those calling for withdrawal of all foreign investment from Myanmar. As they explain on their website: “The EU and MADE partners believe that the interests of workers in Myanmar are best served by ongoing sourcing from Myanmar, provided that this is pursued responsibly and creates decent jobs. The objective of MADE is to support the hundreds of thousands of factory workers who would be left unemployed by a major withdrawal of investment in the sector, and the family members they support.” For example, roughly 380,000 jobs across Myanmar's apparel sector are directly reliant on EU trade and would be at acute risk if European trade and buyer

engagement in the sector reduces.

EuroCham Myanmar is a partner in the MADE in Myanmar programme because it believes that MADE can support brands to undertake continuous due diligence, in addition to brands engaging with stakeholders on the ground. By working together and sharing practices, brands can apply relevant leverage on suppliers and factories to resolve issues that arise.

Speaking at the launch of MADE in Myanmar back in 2023, EuroCham Myanmar CEO Karina Ufert said: "While staying engaged in the country, brands can exercise their leverage to improve working conditions for hundreds of thousands of workers. Disengagement of the responsible brands will only lead to a further deterioration in the situation for the workers' rights and contribute to greater unemployment."

The recently released ILO interim report in March 2025 includes wording that seeks to bolster the ILO's stance that continued engagement in Myanmar – despite the ongoing war and crisis – could be beneficial for workers in sectors not directly linked to the junta's war machine.

This is particularly important for the garment industry which employs a large percentage of female workers, many of who use their pay to support their families during this difficult time of employment.

This stance of continued involvement appears to clash with some Burmese trade unions and NGOs that call for a total end to engagement with the junta, given the junta's attacks on unions and free speech, and a range of issues concerning forced labour – including forced conscription.

REPRESSION

That said, working conditions and pay remain dire.

According to the International Trade Confederation (ITUC), workers and trade unions have faced relentless repression, making Myanmar one of the 10 worst countries in the world for workers. Since the coup, they have endured extremely harsh living and working conditions. They face escalating threats and oppression, with reports of forced labour highlighting their growing

exploitation. Hundreds of union members and activists have been arrested nationwide. The junta has effectively banned most trade unions, stripping workers of their fundamental right to freedom of association.

The Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM), a Germany-based affiliate of the ITUC, has been a key target of these attacks. Many members have suffered persecution, imprisonment, violence, and torture. The entire CTUM leadership is under arrest warrants, and their passports and citizenship have been revoked. CTUM's head of communication, Khine Thinzar Aye, was tortured and sexually abused during a military interrogation.

Little wonder that CTUM takes a hard uncompromising line against the junta.

Others too have suffered. According to the ITUC, the military arrested Thet Hnin Aung, general secretary of the Myanmar Industry Crafts and Services Trade Union Federation (MICS-TUsF), in June 2021. He was sentenced to two years of hard labour and a fine. After his release on 26 June 2023, authorities immediately re-arrested him. He was then abducted, tortured, and held incommunicado for five months for refusing to collaborate with the military. In November 2023, a court sentenced him to seven years of hard labour on terrorism charges - without legal representation. In December 2024, he was beaten and confined to a "dog cell" after revealing the conditions of his imprisonment during a visit by the International Committee of the Red Cross to his prison.

Given the repression, it may be understandable that some trade unions are calling on the ILO for a tough stance against the Myanmar junta. But there is also the employment and rights of workers in Myanmar who could suffer if foreign investors pull out.

IMPORTANT EMPLOYER

According to the Myanmar Garment Association (MGMA), over 800 factories operate in Myanmar, producing garments, footwear, handbags, and travel goods. Data from the Open Supply Hub, an open-source tool which maps garment facilities worldwide

based on brand disclosure and inputs from others, including auditors, currently lists over 500 facilities in Myanmar, which indicates facilities which presently or previously have produced for European-North American buyers. The majority of factory production in Myanmar is for export, mainly as many facilities not on OSH nonetheless export to Northeast Asia.

According to a November 2023 EuroCham report, the European Union is now the primary destination for Myanmar-made apparel products, accounting for up to 54 per cent of Myanmar's apparel exports in 2022.

Myanmar and foreign privately owned companies dominate the sector. Approximately two-thirds of Myanmar's garment factories are foreign-owned, primarily Chinese (including mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), Japanese and Korean, and some Thai and European investors. Foreign investment in the sector was on a growth trajectory when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In the first eight months of 2020, a further 63 garment factory investments were approved, almost all foreign. On average, foreign-owned factories have more than twice as many employees as local companies and are responsible for 80 per cent of the sector's total employment. Those supplying EU buyers generally appear to pay higher salaries and have better working conditions.

However, it should be noted that government revenue from the sector is minimal, particularly when compared to, for example, income extracted from natural resources.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry employed approximately 700,000 people and was Myanmar's fastest-growing source of social security enrolment and decent work. The sector supported thousands more jobs in logistics, transportation, accommodation, day-care, and food services. There have been zero major industrial accidents in the Myanmar apparel industry, which resulted in mass injury or loss of life during the previous decade, a major achievement.

About 90 per cent of the employees in the garment sector are women, the majority between 18 and 23 ye-

ars old. About 76 per cent of sector workers are migrants from rural Myanmar, including those affected by conflict.

An ILO study showed that before COVID, 86 per cent of the workers sent back approximately 50 per cent of their salaries to their relatives, redistributing income to families all over the country and making the sector a vital lifeline for many poorer, rural households. In terms of female employee share by function in garment firms, female employees account for more than 80 per cent of production and non-production (professional) workers and more than half of non-production (elementary) workers. About 83 per cent of garment firms employ female managers, accounting for 56 per cent of the firm's management.

POORER STANDARDS?

There is growing anecdotal evidence that as European buyers exit from factories, factories seek to, and may succeed in, attracting new buyers from Asian markets. Myanmar has a very low minimum wage due to a failure to increase the minimum wage since 2018. This, and the Myanmar Kyat (MMK) devaluation, make Myanmar attractive for buyers focused on price, who also tend to be those paying less attention to labour rights and decent working conditions

UNDP's September 2022 publication 'Livelihoods Hanging by a Thread: A Survey of Garment Workers and Firms' reported 76 per cent of respondents stating that their household incomes have gone down, rising to 85 per cent among unemployed former garment workers, for whom wages and salaries were their primary source of income. Moreover, 61 per cent of the households with unemployed former garment workers did not have a second source of income.

As the ILO prepares to release its new report on Myanmar in June of this year, it is important to keep in mind the need for responsible business benefiting workers when assessing how much the various industries might benefit the military junta.

This commentary does not necessarily represent the views of Mizzima Media.



Many quake victims have had little or no help to clear up after the disaster.
Photo: AFP

QUAKE CLEAN-UP HAMPERED BY OBSTRUCTIVE JUNTA

One month after a devastating earthquake struck central Myanmar, survivors continue to face major obstacles in recovery, with clearing debris and rebuilding efforts hindered by skyrocketing prices and limited government support.

While international aid agencies and local charities have helped meet basic needs like food and temporary shelter, thousands of families remain in crisis as they attempt to rebuild homes destroyed in the disaster. The earthquake, which heavily impacted Mandalay and Sagaing regions, flattened countless buildings and forced many into makeshift shelters.

The cost of cleanup has become a crushing burden for residents. "Demolishing a four-story building cost almost 100 million kyats," a Mandalay resident told

People Spring. "Only a few can afford that. Most of us have no idea how to manage." With the junta-led State Administration Council (SAC) failing to adequately coordinate rescue or recovery efforts, much of the debris removal has fallen to individuals and community groups.

In the interim, many displaced families are sheltering in school compounds and religious sites. However, those taking refuge in schools will be required to vacate by the end of April to make way for the upcoming academic year in June, adding pressure on those still without permanent shelter.

Rebuilding remains out of reach for the majority. Construction material prices have doubled since the quake. Thatch, a common material used for temporary



Rescued scam centre workers.
Photo: AFP

housing, now costs 50,000 kyats per 100 pieces—up from 25,000 to 27,000 before the disaster. Cement prices have also more than doubled, soaring from 15,000 kyats per bag to over 40,000 kyats.

“It’s not just that the cement is expensive—it’s difficult to place orders at all,” said a staff member from a local construction supply business. Compounding the issue, the SAC has begun targeting construction material traders. In Taunggyi, eight businesspeople were arrested on allegations of producing “fake cement,” a move critics say is a scapegoating tactic in response to the regime’s failure to stabilize prices or ensure supply chains.

Moves against scam centres continue

Ongoing efforts to dismantle online scam centers in Myanmar’s border regions have led to the repatriation of thousands of forced laborers, with operations intensifying over recent months.

Since February, over 7,000 individuals, trafficked from more than 30 countries into scam compounds in Shwe Kokeko, Karen State, have been detained for deportation. As of late April, more than 1,000 victims remain awaiting repatriation, according to officials overseeing the process.

The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and the Border Guard Force (BGF) have played a key role in escorting victims across the border into Mae Sot, Thailand. The operations are part of broader regional crackdowns targeting human trafficking and online fraud syndicates, many of which expanded during Myanmar’s post-coup instability.

Separately, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) continues its own cooperation with Chinese authorities. On April 25, the UWSA handed over 72 Chinese nationals allegedly involved in online fraud activities, along with more than 300 mobile phones and 31 computers. This marks the third such transfer this year,



MNDAA soldiers on the street in Lashio.
Photo: AFP

following the repatriation of 16 individuals on March 13 and another 48 during the first week of April via a border checkpoint with China.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's junta has also carried out repatriation operations. Under the supervision of Karen State Chief Minister Saw Tun Aung and other junta officials, 255 foreign nationals involved in online scams and gambling activities were handed over to Thai authorities in a ceremony attended by diplomats and immigration representatives from Uganda, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Vietnam, and Thailand.

According to junta-controlled media, between January 30 and April 28, Myanmar authorities repatriated a total of 9,043 foreigners from 36 different countries involved in online scam operations. Of these, 7,567 were deported via Thailand. An additional 1,475 foreigners are reportedly in custody and awaiting deportation.

Junta takes back Lashio

Over 100 junta military vehicles entered Lashio on April 22, marking the formal handover of the strategic city back to Myanmar's military after nearly nine months under the control of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

Lashio, the capital of Northern Shan State and former site of the junta's Northeastern Command headquarters, had been seized by MNDAA forces during the second wave of Operation 1027 in August 2024. The city's recent transfer comes amid shifting political dynamics and mounting pressure from China, which played a key role in brokering the arrangement.

Sources close to the negotiations reported that Chinese officials, including Special Envoy Ding Xijun, crossed into Lashio from China by car prior to the junta's arrival on 19 April. The convoy consisted of over 30 cars, which were marked "ceasefire monitoring team"


on both sides of the cars. Ding, expected to serve as a facilitator in the administration of Lashio during the transition, is reportedly overseeing the process directly on the ground.

Although the formal handover was initially scheduled for June, authorities from both China and Myanmar moved to expedite the process following the devastating earthquake earlier this month, which diverted nationwide attention. Under the cover of the natural disaster, the MNDAA began a phased withdrawal starting on April 3, with April 21 set as the final deadline.

Neither the junta nor the MNDAA has publicly announced the handover. However, internal sources suggest the military administration plans to officially resume governance in early May. Civil servants who fled Lashio during the fighting are reportedly being organized into two groups to return, with the first expected to re-enter the city by the end of April. The timeline for the second group's return remains unclear.

The MNDAA's medical teams, who had been providing healthcare services in Lashio, announced their withdrawal on April 26, citing "political pressure" as the reason for their departure. In a farewell statement, they expressed sorrow at leaving the city and highlighted the humanitarian work they had provided during the occupation.

While the MNDAA military units have vacated Lashio, remnants of Kokang police forces remain in the city, tasked with providing security for the Chinese envoy team. Chinese authorities have confirmed their involvement in supervising the handover process but have not disclosed the location or full scope of their operational office in Lashio.



Myanmar refugees cycling near the camp.
Photo: Supplied

MAE LA REFUGEE CAMP SCHOOL AND DORMITORY FACE FUNDING CUTS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

No Eh Linn remembers being terrified when fighting in Loikaw, Kayah State forced her to flee alone to Thailand at the age of twelve. Her parents couldn't come with her. At the time, it was nearly impossible for adults to cross the border. So, they stayed behind in Myanmar to care for her two brothers and her sister.

Now 15, No Eh Linn studies in Grade 6 at Number 9 Primary School and lives at the Holy Redeemer Dormitory in Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border. "When I grow up, I want to be a teacher," she said, smiling as she talked about her love of dancing. But her tone turned somber as she explained that she hasn't been able to contact her parents in over three years. "There is no internet access in my village," she said quietly.

The boarding house currently shelters 50 students, some of whom have lived there for up to nine years. It and the adjacent school have become a haven for children fleeing war and destruction. Established in 1997, the Holy Redeemer Boarding House provides shelter and education through the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE). Traditionally housing 30 children per year, the facility expanded to accommodate 50 students aged 9 to 18 for the 2024–2025 academic year, a reflection of growing need as conflict and forced conscription drive families to send their children to safety.

"Some of the parents are in Myanmar and can't support their kids," explained a teacher. "They send them here because they believe in the importance of education, but there's no family or relative in the camp to look after them. The school is their only option."

The Thai Burma Border Consortium had provided basic living support, including a monthly food allowance of 450 baht (approx. \$12.25 USD) per child. However, this amount was insufficient to ensure adequate nutrition. Plans to increase capacity to 60 students for the 2025–2026 academic year are now at risk without new funding. The school principal has expressed deep concern about continuing to accept new students, especially with the official registration period approaching in May. Her most urgent need is for food. "She told me she's desperately looking for an individual donor, just to help cover meals for the children," said Anna, a Kayan woman assisting refugees at the camp. "I managed to help her with enough stationery for her 50 students, but the food issue is still unresolved."

The monthly food ration for camp residents has been reduced to as little as 77 baht (about \$2.10 USD) per adult and 203 baht (approximately \$5.45 USD) for children under five. Anna noted that the food budget for the Holy Redeemer boarding school has also been cut, dropping to just 250 baht (around \$6.70 USD) per child per month.

Number 9 Primary School, which operates alongside the Holy Redeemer Dormitory, serves 210 students in Grades 1 through 6. Aside from the boarding students, the rest live in the refugee camp with their parents or other family members. It is staffed by nine teachers who receive a modest stipend of 1,000 baht (approx. \$27.25 USD) per month, supported by organizations such as ADRA and the Karen Refugee Committee. The curriculum covers English, Karen, Burmese, math, geography, social studies, and hygiene. Teachers participate in weekly training and additional

sessions during school breaks.

The school continues to face shortages of basic educational materials like textbooks and notebooks. Historically, the school and dormitory received support from a consortium of international donors, including the European Union, Australian Aid, Save the Children, ADRA, and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). However, nearly all funding has been cut following broader reductions in U.S. aid. "We saw signs from all the major donors—EU, Australia, ADRA, JRS—but the funding isn't coming anymore," Anna explained. "It may be due to the way these donors coordinate their aid as part of a consortium. When one major contributor like the U.S. pulls out, the whole structure collapses."

For children fleeing war, especially those unaccompanied by parents, the school and dormitory at Mae La offer more than just shelter and education. They serve a vital pastoral role, providing emotional support and a sense of safety in a world shattered by conflict.

No Eh Linn described how her teacher has become a surrogate mother. "I am especially grateful to my teacher, who guides me and shows me the right path. While I'm far from my parents, she gives me the love and care of a parent, and I truly appreciate that." For No Eh Linn and the other children, the school offers a sense of stability and comfort, even as the ache for home persists. "I enjoy going to school here, but I still miss my parents very much," she said. Though she dreams of returning to her village, the ongoing conflict has made that impossible.

Three other dormitory students—brothers named Micah, Francis, and Polimiki—arrived at the camp three years ago after their mother brought them across the border, and then returned to Myanmar. Their father remains missing due to the conflict. Recently, renewed fighting forced their mother to flee as well, and she is now living in the camp with her two youngest children. Although the boys were happy to be reunited with her, she cannot afford to care for all five children, so Micah, Francis, and Polimiki continue to live in the boarding house.

"They are happy to be here," translated Anna. "They told me that in Myanmar, they lived in fear of airstrikes. Here, they feel safe." Polimiki, the youngest, dreams of becoming a priest.

Ten-year-old Saw Chit Chit joined the conversation quietly. "I want to be a priest when I grow up," he said. "I've been living here since I was 8. My village was attacked, and even now, the military is still launching airstrikes. My father went missing while fleeing the war,

and we haven't been able to contact him." His aunt now looks after Saw Chit Chit, along with his older brother, younger sister, and two younger brothers. "I thank God for bringing us here," he added.

Naw Dar Htwe, 16, has lived at the Holy Redeemer dormitory since she was 8. Originally from Mae Nyaw village in Hpapun Township, she fled with her grandfather to escape the conflict. "My parents stopped contacting me years ago," she said quietly. "I don't even know where they are." Her grandfather has since passed away, and the whereabouts of her two sisters remain unknown. "When I see other students' parents visit, it makes me sad. But my teacher here is like a second mother. She encourages me and gives me hope. I want to become a doctor."

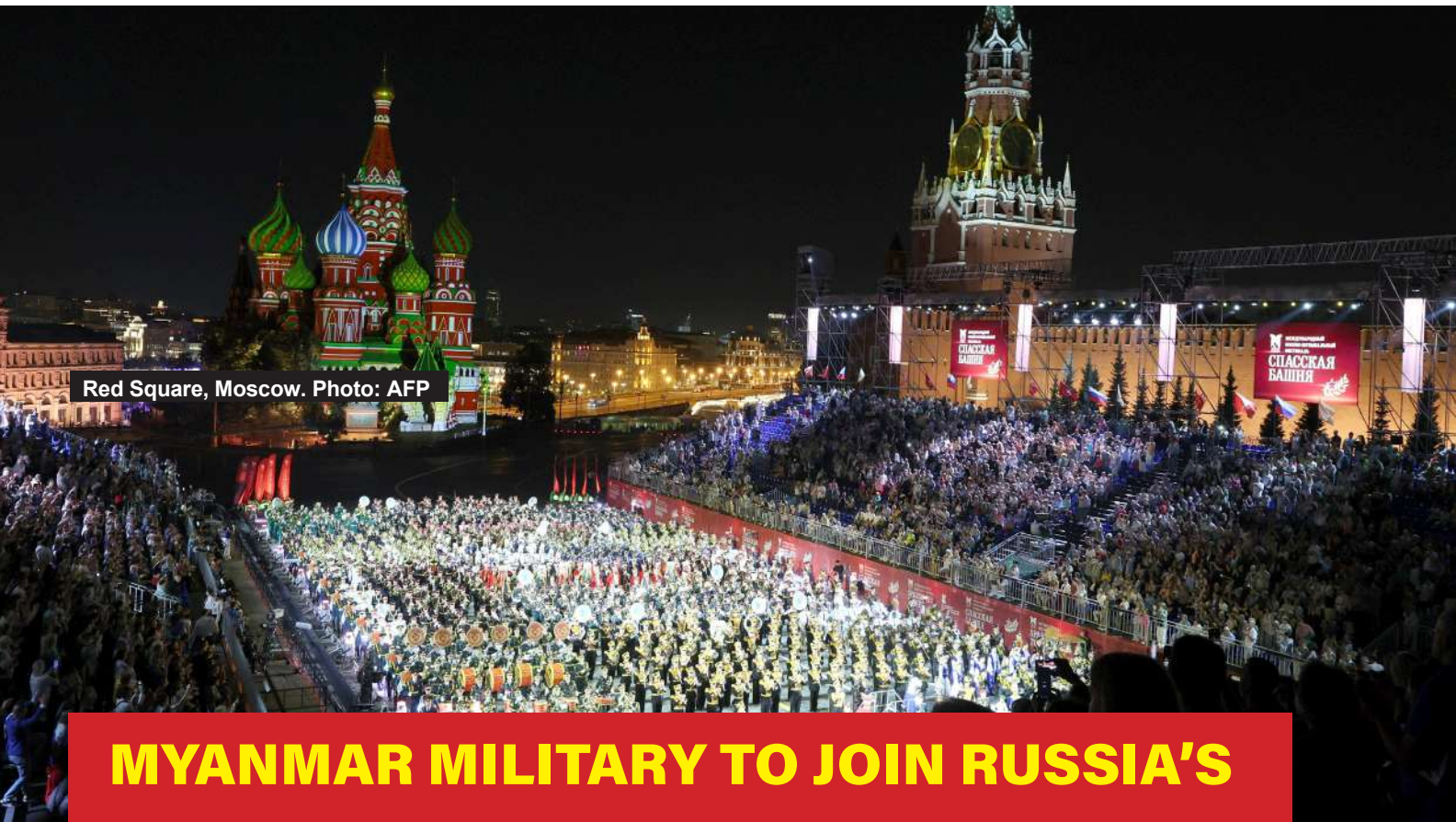
Anna explained that there are some reports that Australia may resume support through a new project, but nothing has been confirmed. While classroom instruction continues for now, the pressure on resources grows by the day. Anna showed a weaving room where a male assistant teacher had taken up traditional cloth weaving to raise extra funds for the school. "Normally, this work is done by women," she noted, "but he said he knows how and uses his summer break to help. One piece of cloth takes two days to complete and earns about 300 baht."

Mata, a 22-year-old assistant and the acting administrator in the absence of the principal, explained that food and medical supplies are the school's most pressing concerns. She said many children arrive from Myanmar because their villages have been destroyed or made unsafe by war. "There is no more house, no more village. The parents are IDPs [internally displaced persons] and cannot come with them," she said.

Mata also confirmed that families inside Myanmar continue to plead with the school to accept their children. "Especially after the earthquake, they keep asking," she said, "but we can't take in more students without more food. Even the children we already have are living on rice, yellow beans, vegetables from a small garden, and sometimes just fish paste."

Teachers report a growing number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Thailand, many of them fleeing both the war and the aftermath of the March 2025 earthquake. Separated from their families and with no one to care for them, these children are among the most vulnerable. Without consistent funding for essentials like food and school supplies, their access to both education and safety remains at risk.

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



Red Square, Moscow. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR MILITARY TO JOIN RUSSIA'S VICTORY DAY PARADE AT RED SQUARE

The Myanmar military junta has confirmed that its troops will participate in the upcoming Russian military parade commemorating the 80th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War II, 1941–1945).

The event is scheduled to take place on 9 May at Moscow's iconic Red Square.

According to the junta's announcement on 23 April, a military parade contingent led by Brigadier-General Myo Sat Aung departed for Russia the same afternoon to take part in the ceremony.

The invitation reportedly followed a meeting between junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Russian President Vladimir Putin during the former's visit to Russia in March.


According to the regime-controlled Kyemon newspaper, President Putin had expressed his desire

for Myanmar's military to be represented at the parade and extended an invitation to Min Aung Hlaing to attend the ceremony.

While the military parade team has now been dispatched, there has been no official word on whether Min Aung Hlaing himself will be present at the event.

Military ties between Myanmar and Russia have deepened since the February 2021 coup. Russia has remained a key ally, with its Deputy Defence Minister attending past military parades hosted by the junta in Naypyidaw.

Min Aung Hlaing has visited Russia four times since the coup, most recently in March, when ten bilateral agreements were signed including a deal to construct a small-scale nuclear power plant in Myanmar.



Yangon. Photo: Nitish Kumar

MYANMAR JUNTA BUILDS A SURVEILLANCE STATE: REPORT

Myanmar's military junta or the State Administration Council (SAC) has started using a suite of technologies to effectively identify, track and locate dissidents in Myanmar starting from March 2025, according to a report by the Myanmar Internet Project (MIP) released on 26 April.

The digital repression tactics by the junta have escalated significantly four years after the coup. The MIP has documented 357 instances of internet shutdowns since the coup until the end of March 2025. Conflict affected and contested areas are frequently subjected to a form of internet shutdown and Sagaing Region and Kachin State are regarded as areas facing most instances of the internet shutdown situation in Myanmar. Internet shutdowns are often observed in contested or liberated areas while areas and the populace under military control are heavily subjected to the junta's surveillance mechanisms

EVOLUTION OF SURVEILLANCE

Throughout this four-year period, the military junta have undertaken steps to build up on the remnant and existing surveillance mechanisms that were implemented during the civilian government's tenure. Additionally, the MIP has observed their strategy to transform Myanmar's cyber space into a surveillance assemblage and an ecosystem.

The military junta has been building up a National Database as a surveillance assembly, composed of NRIC (National Registration Identity-Identification Card), SIM registration as well as information from other services.

We regard recently emerged and widely discussed technologies such as Guest List Management System (GLMS) - implemented in accommodation facilities; Person Scrutinizing and Monitoring System (PSMS), Myanmar Advanced Passenger Processing System (MAPPS) - implemented at Airports, and National Service Information Management System (NSIMS) - for identifying conscription eligible travelers, as one of the functional apparatuses of an assembly of a centralized database containing identification information of citizens.

This surveillance assembly's inception was initiated with Sim Registration in Myanmar as part of the e-Government project, first in 2016-17 and the second time in 2019-2020 under the civilian government's leadership. The junta continued strict enforcement of sim registration after the coup. Telenor's exit from Myanmar was cited due to their inability to comply with the junta's requests. Additionally, as Telenor's operations were sold to become Atom, its users were forced and coerced to register their sim cards.

NATIONAL DATABASE

2022 September's announcement from the Junta's Ministry of Transport and Communications revealed not only the completion of digitization and registration of 52 million populace by the

Ministry of Immigration and Population with 'e-ID Biographic Registration Software' technology as a 'National Database', but also their plan to conduct cross check verification of the digitized database with the Sim Registration information. This marked the first instance of the 'National Database' and its presence being made publicly known. Soon after, at the end of October 2022, the Ministry of Transport and Communications called for tender to establish 'SIM Registration Management System' and allocated Universal Service Fund (USF) for the project. The tender was awarded to Naung Yoe Company for \$2.3 million in November 2022 per black market pricing throughout the four-year project period in April 2023.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications later announced termination of Sim cards failing to comply with the sim registration requirements with the 2023 January 31st deadline for registration. Sim registration is (still) strictly enforced later on. In 2023 May, Atom went as far as to triangulate and notify incorrectly registered sims with SMS that contained the location of the nearest Atom Digital Store to the user. Currently, new sim cards are reportedly barred from receiving OTP codes for registration with VoIP communication and instant apps such as Telegram and Signal.

MONITORING THE PUBLIC

The junta heavily monitors and scrutinizes the public's communications. Even before the coup, interception technologies were present in Myanmar: Justice for Myanmar investigated installation of LIG (Lawful Interception Gateways) on Telenor's infrastructure in February 2018.

The junta's 2021 amendment of the Law Protecting Privacy and Security of the Citizens also provided pave way for the junta for interception of communications legally in addition to installing interception tools on local internet service providers.

An anonymous source from the Myanmar Police Force revealed to the media about the formation of

Cyber Security Team under the directive of the Ministry of Transport and Communications for monitoring and scrutinizing of cellular calls and SMS messages. The interview indicated the use of Artificial Intelligence-like technology for keyword recognition and automatic flagging for SMS and phone calls containing words such as "Revolution" and "Protest". Additionally, due to the inherent way of cellular communication protocol, the users may be able to be triangulated to their approximate locations during and after making these communications.

TELENOR EXIT

Telenor cited these concerns during their exit from the Myanmar market. MIP assumes that in this post telecom exodus era, all mobile operators may have been equipped with interception technologies.

While the above address the technical framework and capabilities, the junta have also undertaken significant legislative changes and enactments to systematically streamline the interception process. 2023 March promulgation of Lawful Interception Framework as Chapter 14 addendum to the Counter-Terrorism Law provided, framework, roles, responsibilities, and modus operandi for (un)lawful interception requests. The law is deliberately designed to have no multi-stakeholder oversight whatsoever: as the Central Committee, exclusively appointed by the junta's Ministry of Home Affairs, holds all the decision-making power.

Additionally, the Counter-terrorism law in Myanmar mandated formation of the Central Committee chaired by the Union Minister of the Ministry of home affairs with sweeping power for arbitrary interception, blocking and restriction of communications of users.

WATCHING MONEY FLOWS

The junta have also been keeping a close scrutiny on the mobile transactions and the money trails toward the resistance and revolution forces. Monitoring and suspension of mobile banking wallets such as KBZ Pay and Wave Pay are widely reported.

Although the incidents of suspension and termination of banking accounts and mobile wallets started emerging in April 2021, media reported that banks have started submitting daily transaction records to the Junta starting from mid/early February 2021.

The junta also enforced strict compliance with the banking KYC (Know Your Customer) information for the users and announced permanent termination of the accounts failing to comply with the requirements on 2022 September. A directive also required wallet representatives to acquire KYC information and phone numbers from the wallet customers and were also required to install CCTV cameras in their shop as record. Whereas the banks and relevant institutions have yet to produce figures and information regarding this, a leaked meeting minutes from presumably 2022 December indicated that over 18,000 wallet accounts and bank accounts were terminated during the unspecified 18 months period.

SOCIAL MEDIA WATCH

In Facebook-dominant Myanmar, the junta and its apparatus not only block and censor access to Facebook, they also heavily dissenting opinions and users on social media. This kind of social monitoring activity echoes the establishment of the Social Media Monitoring Team (SMMT) that was established under the civilian government leadership with a budget of \$6 million in 2018. There was no transparency nor report around the activities, roles and responsibilities of the team.

Social media activities around dissenting opinions such as posts, shares and comments usually end up in having the user's identity, physical addresses and photos being shared and circulated and doxxed on an alternative platform - which is Telegram - among many of the junta's lobbyist and propaganda channels. This has put many behind bars or worse. These channels also wage unbridled harassment campaigns especially targeting women activists with sexual harassment, circulation of NCII (Non-consensual intimate imagery) contents, videos and death threats.

Arrests of users for participation in the Flower Strike, online protests, and due surprise checks, netizens have started to refrain themselves from online activities such as sharing, commenting and interacting with revolution related contents. Data for Myanmar have documented the arrest of 1,691 personnel due to their online expression on social media or online communications opposing the Myanmar military and supporting pro-democracy movements and resistance

groups within February 2022 to February 2024. In 2024 alone, the MIP has also tracked the arrest of at least 373 personnel who were arrested based on their expression on Facebook, TikTok and Telegram. This campaign of terror is one of the many mechanisms of digital oppression in Myanmar.

SURVEILLANCE EVERYWHERE

Blurring lines between physical and digital life; internet activity, CCTV records, biographic and biometric data - have made it possible to profile potential threats based on these data, according to the MIP report. The junta have been utilizing this comprehensive suite of technologies to profile, track, identify and monitor CDM personnel, conscription eligible youths, and activists. Everyone is under the ever-watchful eyes whenever they travel, communicate, connect to the internet and interact on social media. This seriously erodes basic human rights and freedom of expression.

Sensitive personnel will have to navigate with great care in this environment, especially if they have their biographic data documented by the Junta, while being left out of this assembly may also single them out for easy filtering. Additionally, UID becoming a mandatory requirement for passport applications has populated the National Database servers with the required data.

Wearing a mask when going out, encrypting data during travel, permanent and secure deletion of data, use of end-to-end encrypted communication and access to reliable and private VPN are becoming essential survival tips in Myanmar. Only then may there be a level of mitigation and resilience against this ever-increasing surveillance.

This comprehensive suite of tools and oppression apparatus have made Myanmar a comprehensive ubiquitous surveillance state that has no regard for individual freedom. Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom against arbitrary detention, freedom of movement and rights to life have eroded fundamentally in Myanmar. Myanmar people will have to be extra vigilant and resilient to navigate against this surveillance that often leads to detention or worse.

INVESTIGATORS DOCUMENT 80 AIR ATTACK INCIDENTS SINCE MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE, DESPITE JUNTA CEASEFIRE

One month on from the devastating earthquake in Myanmar, investigators at the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) Myanmar Witness project have documented 80 air attack incidents across multiple regions, despite a temporary ceasefire declared by the Myanmar junta or State Administration Council (SAC) on 2 April 2025. The incidents documented include both potential airstrikes and paramotor attacks - aerial attacks involving small motorised paragliders.

The 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar on 28 March, causing severe damage to homes and infrastructure and reportedly affecting more than two million people. Analysis carried out by Myanmar Witness at the time documented how the SAC continued its attacks in the emergency-declared areas of Myanmar following the natural disaster, with one incident reportedly occurring just minutes after the earthquake struck.

Attacks continued in the seven-day mourning period announced by the SAC between 31 March and 6 April, and following the ceasefire declaration. The Myanmar Air Force (MAF) is the only actor in the conflict with access and capacity to use aircraft capable of carrying out an airstrike.

Between 28 March and 24 April, 80 air attack incidents were logged by Myanmar Witness. Incidents range in severity and vary in terms of levels of confidence. Not all have been fully confirmed or geolocated due to a lack of open source material.

Of these, 65 events were recorded following the ceasefire declaration on 2 April. Incidents took place across 12 different states and regions, indicating the wide geographical scope of the military operations. 51 townships were impacted.

The states with the highest number of documented incidents were Sagaing (24), Mandalay (14), and Chin and Kayin (8 each).

Notably, several incidents assessed as likely airstrikes or heavy weapon attacks took place between 31 March 2025 and 1 April 2025, during the national mourning period and just hours before the SAC's ceasefire began. These include the bombing of Indaw Myoma Monastery, Sagaing, on 1 April, and on the same day, the bombing of Loi Hkwin village in Shan State.

Three separate airstrike incidents were documented on 9 April 2025 in Sagaing Region and Chin State. These reportedly resulted in dozens of civilian casualties, including women and children, and significant infrastructure damage.

Nan Khan village tract, in Wuntho, Sagaing, was reportedly hit twice on 9 April - first at approximately 15:00 and again at around 18:00 local time. Over 20 civilians, including children, were reportedly killed, although the exact number remains unconfirmed at the time of writing. User-generated content (UGC) of the damage areas - which Myanmar Witness cross-referenced with satellite imagery - is consistent with reports of the two separate airstrikes occurring on the same day.

Robert Dolan, Myanmar Witness project director, said: "Myanmar's population was already on its knees after years of SAC aggression and armed conflict. The layers of suffering are hard to comprehend - we've seen regions wrecked by war and then the earthquake, only to sustain further damage from continued airstrikes.

"The open-source data we've compiled - and the scale of the incidents documented - raise serious doubts

about the SAC's sincerity in declaring a ceasefire in the first place, and highlight what appears to be a complete disregard for civilian lives at a time when communities are already so vulnerable."

An FCDO Spokesperson said: "We are appalled to see this evidence of ongoing airstrikes by the military regime during their ceasefire and at a time of national disaster.

"All attacks on civilians must stop now. Once again, we call for all actors to protect civilians in Myanmar, for unimpeded humanitarian access, and for the military regime to uphold the ASEAN Five Point Consensus, which remains critical in finding a path to peace in Myanmar."

To carry out the analysis, Myanmar Witness gathered UGC from social media and news outlets, triangulating images and videos with satellite imagery where possible. The documented air attack incidents have been published today in an interactive, open-source map on the CIR website, though publication of the full dataset is ongoing.

Several incidents, especially from the post-ceasefire period, remain unconfirmed or categorised as low confidence due to the absence of verifiable UGC. This is partly due to an apparent rise in reporting delays, where information surfaces several days after an incident.

Since the 2021 military coup, internet access has been heavily restricted in regions such as Chin, Kayah and Sagaing, where armed clashes, potential human rights abuses, and earthquake-related displacement are ongoing. Such connectivity issues continue to hinder the availability of timely and reliable reporting from the ground. Myanmar Witness continues to monitor the situation.

MYANMAR JUNTA EXTENDS CEASEFIRE BY ONE WEEK AMID ONGOING AIRSTRIKES

The Myanmar military junta announced that it will extend its unilateral ceasefire for one more week, from 23 to 30 April, following the initial 20-day truce that began on 2 April.

Despite the ceasefire declaration, junta forces have continued launching daily airstrikes across the country.

Ground reports indicate that more than 40 civilians have been killed in air attacks targeting Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)-controlled Nawngkhio Township in northern Shan State, People's Defence Force (PDF)-held Thabeikkyin and Singu townships, and areas in Rakhine State controlled by the Arakan Army (AA).

According to a statement from the TNLA, on the morning of 22 April, the final day of the initial truce, a junta fighter jet dropped two bombs on Ohnmathee village in Nawngkhio Township, damaging several houses.

The TNLA also reported that junta forces are reinforcing troops, conducting offensive operations, and bombing areas where no active clashes are occurring.

Earlier, on 1 April, the Three Brotherhood Alliance consisting of the TNLA, AA, and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) declared a one-month ceasefire, pledging to halt all offensives out of concern for earthquake victims and the wider civilian population.

In parallel, both the junta and the National Unity Government (NUG) have expressed intentions to extend their respective ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian relief efforts following the devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on 28 March. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim confirmed this development during a press briefing in Bangkok on 18 April.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE HITS MOBILE MEDICAL TEAM TREATING EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS IN SAGAING

Six monks and local residents were injured in Aidaing village, Sagaing Township, when a military junta airstrike struck a monastery where a mobile medical team was treating victims of the recent earthquake.

A witness at the scene reported that the junta's air force launched the aerial attack on the afternoon of 21 April, directly targeting the temporary clinic set up at Aidaing Monastery.

"The military bombed the medical team while many people were gathered nearby seeking treatment. A total of six monks and civilians were injured at Aidaing Monastery," a witness said.

According to a local source, monks from the monastery and four individuals receiving medical care were wounded in the strike. Members of the mobile medical team, however, escaped without injury.

Aidaing village lies along the Ayeyarwady River, northeast of Sagaing city, between Madaya and

Mingun towns. The mobile team had reportedly come from Madaya to assist those affected by the disaster.

The attack follows the 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck near Sagaing and Mandalay on 28 March, causing widespread destruction and significant casualties in the region. While the junta maintains control over urban centres, most surrounding villages are under the control of resistance forces.

Although the military declared a ceasefire from 2 to 22 April in the aftermath of the earthquake, continued airstrikes on civilians and humanitarian workers violate international law and may constitute war crimes, according to a defence force member in Sagaing.

Resistance sources also reported that, between 1 and 21 April, the junta launched at least 20 airstrikes across Thabeikkyin, Singu, and Madaya townships in Mandalay Region, killing at least 60 civilians.



Lashio. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS RE-ENTER LASHIO AS MNDAA WITHDRAWS; UNCERTAINTY GROWS AMONG LOCALS

More than 200 junta vehicles entered Lashio Town on 22 April following the withdrawal of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), according to local sources.

The convoy reportedly consisted of over 120 military trucks and around 80 civilian vehicles, all bearing the Myanmar national flag and the red flag of the Northeastern Regional Military Command.

"Around 120 military trucks and 80 other vehicles re-entered Lashio today. So far, there are no signs of heavy weapons or tanks," said a Lashio resident affiliated with the MNDAA.

Locals observed the convoy halting near the Garrison Engineering Battalion (GE) camp, located east of Lashio, earlier in the day.

Meanwhile, trilateral talks continued at Lashio's Two Elephant Hotel on 22 April. The dialogue, which began a day earlier, involves China's special envoy Deng Xijun, a junta delegation led by Deputy Lieutenant General Ko Ko Oo of Military Operation Command 1, and representatives of the MNDAA.

"The Lashio talks are still ongoing. The main focus is on administrative matters," said a source close to the MNDAA.

While the United Wa State Army (UWSA) was rumoured to be participating, its Lashio liaison officer, U Nyi Ryan, told Mizzima on the afternoon of 22 April that the group is not involved in the talks.

Within the city's military command compound, junta officials are also reportedly discussing the resumption of administrative and office operations.

Lashio fell to a MNDAA-led coalition, including the People's Defence Forces (PDF), during Phase II of Operation 1027 in August 2024. Since then, the junta maintained positions in nearby towns such as Mongyai

and Tangyang, while the MNDAA administered the city. Residents believe mounting pressure from China prompted the MNDAA to return control to the junta.

Now, with the MNDAA handing over control of Lashio's urban areas, locals are increasingly concerned that the junta's Northeast Regional Military Command may soon be reinstated in full force.

"Residents fear that the return of junta troops will bring renewed oppression, forced recruitment, and arbitrary arrests. Only junta supporters seem to welcome their re-entry," said a resident.

Starting on 21 April, MNDAA flags within Lashio were replaced by Myanmar national flags, locals reported. Although some MNDAA personnel remain in the city, the future administrative arrangement remains unclear. Speculation suggests the junta will control the city's 12 wards, while the MNDAA may continue governing surrounding rural areas.

During the MNDAA's eight-month administration of Lashio, former political prisoners, civil servants from the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and activists were actively involved in reconstruction and community development, according to sources close to the group.

"As far as I know, it's about protecting the families. When the agreement was signed in Kunming, all parties agreed not to target the families of those who had helped the Kokang govern Lashio. But because the junta is known to be untrustworthy, many are distancing themselves. Some have even resigned from their roles," the source said.

At a press briefing on 21 April, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun reaffirmed Beijing's adherence to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.



Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.
Photo: AFP

ASEAN CHAIR GOES TO 'NEXT LEVEL' IN MEETINGS WITH MYANMAR JUNTA AND NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT

DON PATHAN

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has taken ASEAN's dealing with key stakeholders in Myanmar conflict to the next level with his recent visit to Bangkok where he met with the country's junta chief and a key opposition figure from the opposition National Unity Government (NUG).

Anwar, in his capacity as the chair of ASEAN, met up in Bangkok with his group of advisors — Indonesia's former Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, Singapore's former FM George Yeo and former Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra — to urge Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing to open up the space for more medical personnel and international aid workers to enter Myanmar, and for the warring parties, particularly the Myanmar military government, to take seriously the ceasefire that they vowed to observe following the devastating earthquake that claimed more than 4,000 lives.

Anwar held brief bilateral meeting with Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn but the essence of his trip was the meeting between Min Aung Hlaing and him and his group of advisors.

Anwar also met with the leader of the opposition NUG Prime Minister Mahn Winn Khaing Thann. Although it was a video call, nevertheless, it was

very significant as it could set the stage for regular engagement between ASEAN member states and the resistance forces and the exile government. The April 17 talks were the first publicized meeting between the NUG and ASEAN, although there have been informal discussions between officials from the regional grouping and resistance leaders.

According to Kavi Chongkittavorn, one can make the argument that Min Aung Hlaing may have made some concessions by coming to Bangkok knowing that Anwar will be meeting with an NUG leader.

"There had to be some sort of prior understanding by both Malaysia and Myanmar that Anwar would be meeting with the opposition leader," said Kavi Chongkittavorn, a veteran Thai journalist and an expert on ASEAN affairs, suggested that coming up with nasty surprises is not in the nature of the regional grouping.

It is still a big leap of faith, however, as Anwar's diplomatic move, bold as it may, does not guarantee meaningful changes in Myanmar or on the battlefield where the State Administration Council (SAC) has been losing ground since the all-out fighting erupted following the February 2021 coup.

It would be a bit of a stretch to suggest that the Bangkok meetings could pave the way for peace negotiations, especially at this moment when the resistance forces see themselves as winning in spite of SAC's relentless air strikes. The NUG's armed wing, People's Defence Force (PDF), and other resistance forces collectively control more than two-thirds of the country. The question is will Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar, find the political will to step up their engagement with the Myanmar opposition in a more open manner.

Kavi said the next immediate step for the SAC is to engage in a political dialogue with all the participants of the upcoming General Election to be conducted in the last two weeks of December 2024 and the first two weeks of January 2025. It may not mean much in the eyes of the international community given the fact that the SAC controls only a fraction of the country. But countries like China are quietly welcoming this move hoping that the General Election will give the SAC a new lease on life. With China's backing, the SAC just might get it.

"What China needs to do is to convince the ASEAN Chair and some members such as Indonesia, Singapore and the next Chair Philippines to agree with the plan to have the election before the peace process," said Supalak Ganjanakhundee a veteran journalist and Bangkok-based analyst.

But an election may not be enough to change anything, much less steer the conflict towards a peaceful outcome. Indeed, the SAC will have to think long and hard about what it is willing to do to break international isolation and rejoin the ASEAN family.

"This won't happen unless there is substantive progress to show," Kavi said.

Moreover, it remains to be seen if Naypyidaw will not raise a stink if and when ASEAN member states engage with the resistance forces and their political representatives.

Some of Thailand's political insiders believe ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, a plan to resolve the political crisis in Myanmar, has pushed the country closer to China in spite of historical mistrust between the two countries. But after decades of carrot and stick, ASEAN members decided it was time to put a squeeze on this uneasy member.

A stronger and more unified ASEAN will not have much impact on China's engagement in Myanmar. Strategically, Myanmar is of utmost importance to China.

"The key concern right now is whether the NUG

and the armed ethnic organizations (EAO) are strong and united enough to have any leverage for substantive talks in the coming future," said Supalak.

Many of the EAOs are on the verge of seizing total control in their respective states. They, too, want to chart their own course. The Kachin can make more money by selling rare earth minerals to the West. To do that, they would have to retreat from China's sphere of influence, at least enough to be able to make the transaction.

Indeed, nothing comes easy in war-torn Myanmar where the military junta, rebel forces, opium warlords and powerful neighbours play for keeps.

This past week, Chinese special envoy to Myanmar Deng Xijun was in Myanmar's Northern Shan State to supervise the handover of Lashio from Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), a Kokang-Chinese rebel outfit, to the SAC after China had forced them to retreat from the area. The MNDAA is a member of the Brotherhood Alliance, an umbrella group behind much of the Operation 1027 military offensive across northern Shan State that began in October 2023.

"As far as I anticipate, China would have no problem with the new development, as Beijing knows very well that ASEAN has no real influence over the Myanmar junta and the dissidents and resistance forces, as China has," Supalak said.

"ASEAN's plan to have an inclusive dialogue would never succeed without cooperation from China. Look, it was Beijing who can command the Brotherhood Alliance, not ASEAN, to reach a truce with the SAC," Supalak added.

China has also made some inroads along the Thailand-Myanmar border over this past year. Beijing succeeded in getting both Thailand and the SAC to clamp down on the cyber scam centres in the Karen-controlled area with power blackouts, cutting off Internet access and stopping fuel from reaching the area.

While the Bangkok government may have gone along with China's wishes, it doesn't mean the security agencies and the Thai Army are comfortable with it. Security officials on the border said they do not want to see areas along the Thailand-Myanmar border turn into another sphere of China's influence in the same manner as the Sino-Myanmar border region in the north.

Don Pathan is Thailand-based security analyst.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA ARTILLERY SHELLING KILLS FOUR CIVILIANS IN MONYWA TOWNSHIP DESPITE CEASEFIRE

At least four civilians were killed when artillery shells fired by Myanmar junta troops struck Ywar Taw village in Kan Pyar Gyi village tract, Monywa Township, Sagaing Region, a local source confirmed to Mizzima.

The shelling occurred around 9:00 am on 24 April, when three artillery rounds were launched by the junta's Northwestern Command based in Monywa. Two shells directly hit a civilian home, causing multiple casualties and widespread damage.

Among the injured were 70-year-old Daw Wyne Kyi, 50-year-old Daw Mi Paing, 50-year-old Ko Aung Kyaw Oo, 40-year-old Ko Phyto Wai, and a child.

"Tragically, Daw Wyne Kyi, who was asleep at the time, was killed instantly when a shell struck her chest. Two brothers, who sustained severe limb injuries, also died from blood loss," a local source said.

The shelling followed a clash two days earlier on 22 April, when a unit of the People's Defense Force (PDF) ambushed a junta captain and a platoon returning from shopping between Kywae Ye and Thamanar villages. The ambush resulted in the deaths of the junta personnel and injuries to a civilian, according to local witnesses.

In retaliation, junta forces raided nearby Kywae Ye village, detaining two residents and setting fire to several homes. Troops from the artillery regiment based in Kyauk Sit Pone Myauk village were reportedly involved in clashes with local defense groups, although Mizzima could not independently verify the details.

Locals reported that junta troops continued shelling in the evening of 24 April and the morning of 25 April, though the exact targets remain unclear. The violence has forced residents from surrounding villages including Kan Pyar Gyi, Kywae Ye, Khoe Than, and Thamanar to flee their homes.

Kan Pyar Gyi village tract, which includes Pay Gone, Sone Gone, and Ywar Taw villages, lies along the Monywa-Tharzi Road, roughly seven miles from Monywa town. It is positioned between the junta's artillery base in Kyauk Sit Pone Myauk and the Northwestern Command headquarters.

Despite a ceasefire declared by both the National Unity Government (NUG) and the junta following the powerful 28 March earthquake, junta forces have continued artillery and aerial attacks. Revolutionary groups report that these violations have led to a growing number of civilian deaths.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ATROCITIES SURGE IN DANU REGION OF SHAN STATE

Widespread violence and human rights abuses by Myanmar's Military Council have intensified in Ywangan Township, located in the Danu Self-Administered Zone of southern Shan State, according to a report released by the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) on 24 April.

Titled "Mass Atrocities Committed by the Military Council in the Heartland of the Danu," the report details a disturbing escalation of military violence in the region since May 2022. It outlines a systematic pattern of abuses including the burning of villages, looting, arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and civilian deaths caused by artillery and airstrikes.

Among the most egregious cases documented is the gang rape of three women by soldiers from the 55th Light Infantry Division in May 2023. Another incident involves the sexual assault of a 23-year-old woman in Ywangan who was later sentenced to 12 years in prison under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Detainees at the Ywangan police station were also reportedly denied access to sanitary products unless they complied with interrogators, the report claims.

The 55th Light Infantry Division, based in Kalaw, is identified as the primary force responsible for the

violations in Ywangan, while the 99th Division from Meiktila has also participated in joint operations, according to SHRF.

Initially, the military targeted individuals suspected of links to resistance forces, but the scale of attacks has since widened dramatically.

In late 2024, the village of Min Palaung was completely destroyed by fire, while artillery and airstrikes hit Kyauk Gu village and Ywangan town in late 2024 and January 2025, killing and injuring civilians and razing homes.

SHRF attributes the surge in violence to the military's attempt to suppress the growing influence of local resistance groups such as the Danu Defense Forces and the People's Defense Forces.

The report also states that over 1,000 civilians have been displaced due to military operations, with little to no humanitarian assistance reaching affected areas.

Furthermore, SHRF highlights that 14 villages in Ywangan Township as well as Thar Si Township in Mandalay region, have been targeted. Local police and the pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia are also accused of escalating abuses against villagers.



Hpakant. Photo: AFP

HEAVY FIGHTING ERUPTS AS KIA AMBUSHES ADVANCING MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS NEAR HPAKANT

Intense clashes broke out on 24 April between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Myanmar junta forces advancing toward Hpakant Township in Kachin State from the directions of Kamaing and Indawgyi, KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu confirmed.

The KIA launched interceptive attacks against two military columns moving towards Hpakant one from Kamaing and another from the Monghnyin-Indawgyi axis believed to be part of the junta's "Yan Naing Min" operation.

"It seems they are trying to cut off access to Hpakant. Since they are advancing, we've had to respond with interceptive engagements. Fighting is still ongoing this morning," said Colonel Naw Bu on 25 April.

KIA sources estimate that several thousand junta troops may be involved in the operation.

During a confrontation on the morning of 25 April, KIA forces reportedly ambushed the Kamaing

column, inflicting casualties and seizing weapons and ammunition. However, the details could not be independently verified, and Colonel Naw Bu said he was unable to officially confirm the full extent of the operation.

Additionally, military vehicles were seen departing from the junta's Northern Regional Command in Myitkyina on 25 April, heading in the direction of Hpakant.

Due to the escalating conflict, the Myitkyina-Hpakant Road has been blocked by both sides since 24 April, leaving villagers along the route no choice but to flee for safety, according to local residents.

Although the junta extended its ceasefire from 23 to 30 April, citing humanitarian reasons following the March 28 earthquake, daily military operations and airstrikes have continued in various regions, KIA sources said.



OVER 66,000 DISPLACED IN TANINTHARYI REGION AMID ESCALATING CLASHES AND AIRSTRIKES

Intensified conflict between junta forces and resistance groups in Tanintharyi Region has displaced more than 66,800 residents in Myeik and Dawei Districts throughout March, with many urgently in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the local research group FE5 Tanintharyi.

The group reported that at least 39 armed clashes occurred across the region during the month, with the military junta launching more than 24 airstrikes. Of these, at least 16 were carried out in Tanintharyi Township alone. Similar aerial assaults were also documented in Bokpyin, Dawei, Launglon, and Thayetchaung townships.

Townships in Myeik District including Myeik, Kyunsu, Pulaw, and Tanintharyi have seen intensified conflict, while Dawei District, comprising Dawei, Yebyu, Thayetchaung, and Launglon, continues to face growing insecurity.

Many of the displaced are suffering from malaria, diarrhoea, skin conditions, and respiratory illnesses, requiring urgent medical supplies and food assistance. However, junta forces are reportedly restricting the transportation of essential items such as rice, medicines,

and other relief materials, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

FE5 Tanintharyi also revealed that junta forces abducted 334 civilians from various townships across the region in March for forced conscription and use as human shields. Only 63 of those detained have been released.

Additionally, 12 civilians were killed due to clashes, summary executions by junta forces, or informant purges by resistance groups.

The surge in fighting is partly driven by junta attempts to secure control over the strategically important Tanintharyi-Mawtaung border trade route. Tanintharyi Township experienced the highest number of confrontations in the region last month.

Newly recruited conscripts were reportedly deployed by junta forces in these battles, resulting in casualties on both sides. Tensions remain high, with continued fighting and recent junta airstrikes near Kyaukmetaung village along the Dawei-Htee Khee road on 23 April.



Photo: AFP

RESIDENCE CARDS NOW MANDATORY FOR NEWCOMERS IN MNDA-CONTROLLED LAUKKAI AREA OF MYANMAR

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) has introduced a residence card requirement for individuals seeking to live or work in Laukkai, located in Special Region 1 of northern Shan State, according to an official announcement issued on 23 April.

The policy applies to all newcomers from outside the township. Those already registered in Laukkai household lists are exempt. New arrivals must obtain a residence card from the Tongchain Township police station by presenting either their own household registration or a recommendation letter from a verified Laukkai resident.

"There is a small fee, but the amount hasn't been specified. Visitors may stay up to seven days without registering. Any longer stay requires obtaining a residence card," a source from Laukkai told Mizzima.

The cards are available for various durations of one month, three months, six months, and one year. The MNDA also urged current unregistered residents to complete the registration process promptly. Those who fail to comply may face arrest, deportation, or other consequences following identity verification checks.

"If someone doesn't register, they risk being detained and eventually sent back to their hometown," a source close to the MNDA said.

Laukkai is currently the only township in Special Region 1 where this residence card policy is being implemented.

Meanwhile, social media reports suggest that since 21 April, individuals attempting to enter Laukkai via the Kunlong Suspension Bridge have been turned away if their national ID lists their ethnicity as "Bamar."

"It's not about banning Bamar people. There have been multiple criminal incidents including theft, robbery, and even a recent murder, allegedly involving Bamar individuals. These incidents have fuelled local tensions. This isn't discrimination. Anyone with a valid Myanmar ID is allowed entry," an MNDA source said.

Mizzima has not independently verified these claims.

In a related development, MNDA and allied resistance groups that had previously seized control of Lashio returned the city to the Myanmar military earlier this week, following negotiations facilitated by the Chinese government.

Local sources report that over 200 junta military vehicles entered Lashio on 22 April to re-establish administrative control.

KNLA AND ALLIED FORCES SEIZE MYANMAR JUNTA CAMP IN SHWEGYIN; AIRSTRIKES FOLLOW AS TENSIONS RISE

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied resistance groups have taken control of a Myanmar military junta outpost near the entrance of Kwun Seik village in Shwegyin Township, Bago Region, according to local sources.

A military insider confirmed that the junta base, located near the Sittaung River, fell to resistance forces on the morning of 23 April. In response, the junta launched airstrikes on Kwun Seik village using jet fighters. The extent of damage and casualties is still being verified.

"There have been airstrikes for two consecutive days, including today," a local resident told Mizzima.

Military tensions have sharply escalated along the Theinzayat-Shwegyin road, which connects Shwegyin and Kyaikhto townships.

Reports indicate the junta is reinforcing its positions particularly deploying troops from the Light Infantry Battalion 589 to key locations such as Don Za Yit, Kyon Chaung, and other military-controlled zones. Heavy artillery shelling has also been reported in the area.

Additionally, junta forces are reportedly increasing their presence in villages along the Sittaung River, including Set Su, Thayethamein, and Ah Loke Su.

The intensifying conflict has sparked mass displacement, with residents fleeing from villages along the Theinzayat-Shwegyin road such as Sa Lu Chaung, Don Za Yit, Kun Seik, and Bhaya Ngot To and from across the Sittaung River in Waw Township, including communities in Thayethamein and Set Su, fearing further violence.

HEALTH CRISIS DEEPENS IN MYINGYAN TOWNSHIP AMID JUNTA CHECKPOINTS, ARRESTS, AND MEDICAL SHORTAGES

A growing health emergency is unfolding in rural Myingyan Township, where stepped up military checkpoints, arbitrary arrests, and severe medicine shortages have led to dozens of preventable deaths, according to local sources and humanitarian reports.

More than 200 villages in the township have limited access to healthcare facilities, most of which lack doctors. Frequent arrests and thorough inspections at junta checkpoints have severely restricted the flow of medicine, leading to delayed or denied treatment.

"Just one small clinic serves ten villages. It's staffed only by a nurse and a health assistant. Many patients are bedridden and have no access to treatment. Some have died from conditions as basic as excessive bleeding or chronic illness," said a supporter of a local defence force.

Local sources report that over 20 people have died since last year, many from preventable or treatable conditions. The majority of the deceased are elderly people, patients with chronic illnesses, and those suffering from excessive bleeding.

Locals say roadblocks and fear of arrest have prevented many from traveling to hospitals in Mandalay for urgent care.

"Even trying to buy medicine is a risk. Pharmacies treat everyone like suspects. I couldn't even buy two months' supply for my mother. Wounded civilians have to lie and say they were hurt by the PDF to get

treatment. If they say it was a junta airstrike or shelling, they're denied care—or worse, detained," said a local villager.

The crisis is compounded by the junta's detention of over 200 traders and drivers heading to Myingyan, leaving many afraid to travel for medical help or supplies.

Local efforts to provide healthcare are under constant threat.

"We built a clinic with our own hands, but junta airstrikes destroyed it in three weeks. We keep relocating, rebuilding shelters and bomb bunkers, but supplies are low, and prices are sky-high. Transporting anything is dangerous," said a member of the Myingyan Township People's Administration Team.

Since revoking medicine import licenses in September 2024, the junta has implemented a restrictive new system, worsening shortages in Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, and Rakhine State. Villages in Myingyan now face critical shortages of basic and emergency drugs, including antivenom—vital in an area with a high number of venomous snakebites.

Local resistance groups control much of rural Myingyan, but the town itself remains under junta and Pyu Saw Htee militia control. As arrests, surveillance, and restrictions intensify, residents say accessing lifesaving healthcare has become nearly impossible.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR HOUSEHOLDS WITH UNDAMAGED HOMES MUST CONTINUE PAYING ELECTRICITY BILLS DESPITE QUAKE

Households whose homes and electricity meter boxes remain intact after the 28 March earthquake are still required to pay electricity bills, according to U Tin Aung, Chairman of the Mandalay Electricity Supply Corporation (MESC) under the junta. He made the remarks during a 22 April interview with state-run MRTV.

Electricity billing has been suspended only for households whose meter boxes were damaged due to the collapse or destruction of buildings, MESC officials said. According to their data, more than 6,000 out of 1.2-million-meter boxes installed across the Mandalay Region were damaged in the quake.

"For those damaged meter boxes, we couldn't collect usage data prior to the earthquake. So, we've only recorded the damages, and we're not issuing bills or collecting charges for them at this time," U Tin Aung said.

Electricity supply to those units has also been cut off, with no further updates provided on future steps.

In contrast, households whose homes and meter boxes remain functional are continuing to receive electricity and must pay bills as usual. MESC noted that in some earthquake-affected areas, meters couldn't be read for April. As a result, the readings will be taken in early May and averaged across two months.

"For example, if a meter reads 1,000 units in May, we'll divide it into 500 units for April and 500 for May. Two separate bills will then be issued," said U Tin Aung.

On 21 April, a notice from the junta circulated on social media stated that households with functional meters are required to pay their March bills by the designated deadline. Those who missed March billing due to building damage will be billed for both March and April in May.

In Naypyidaw's Zabu Thiri and Ottara Thiri townships, residents said they have yet to receive March electricity bills.

One resident said, "I doubt they'll waive the bills. Min Aung Hlaing doesn't show empathy. If it were Daw Suu, she would probably waive them during a crisis like this."

The 7.7-magnitude earthquake on 28 March caused widespread destruction across central Myanmar including Mandalay, Naypyidaw, and Sagaing. According to a 17 April report from UNOCHA Myanmar, more than 40,000 homes were destroyed nationwide.

Even in areas where houses remained standing, many structures were deemed uninhabitable and will need to be torn down.




Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE IN TABAYIN KILLS FIVE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING A TEENAGE, DESPITE CEASEFIRE

A Myanmar junta airstrike on Lat Hlote Taung village in Tabayin Township killed at least five civilians including a 13-year-old girl on the morning of 23 April, according to a statement from the Tabayin Township People's Administration Team.

The attack, which occurred around 10:41 am, reportedly involved a jet fighter dropping two bombs that struck two houses in the village. The victims were identified as Ma Jae Oo (13), Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw (26), Ko San Zaw (45), Daw Lone (65), and Daw Saung (80). At least seven others were injured in the airstrike.

"There were no clashes or military presence in the area at the time. This was a deliberate attack on civilians," said an official from the Tabayin People's Administration Team.

Despite a nationwide ceasefire declared by both the National Unity Government (NUG) and the military junta following the 28 March earthquake, junta forces have continued to launch airstrikes on civilian targets and religious sites across the country.

"This is clearly a war crime. The junta is intentionally targeting innocent civilians," the official added, calling on the international community to take concrete action and condemn the attacks.

Earlier this month, on 12 April, junta forces also bombed Kya Khet Monastery in Tabayin Township, killing three novice monks, a young boy, and an elderly man who had been displaced by nearby fighting.

Citing the ongoing danger, local officials have warned residents in Tabayin and the wider Sagaing Region to remain alert.

"We cannot afford to be careless. Vigilance is essential," said a local aid worker helping displaced communities.

The junta had announced a ceasefire extension from 23 to 30 April, however, revolutionary groups report that at least 60 civilians were killed during the previous ceasefire period from 2 to 22 April due to ongoing airstrikes.



Photo: Supplied

OVER 50,000 DISPLACED BY CLASHES AND AIRSTRIKES IN KAYIN STATE

More than 50,000 people have been displaced and are in urgent need of humanitarian aid as ongoing clashes and junta airstrikes devastate areas around Kyondoe and Kawkareik townships, local civil society groups report.

Fighting erupted on the evening of 14 April between junta forces and allied revolutionary groups along the Kawkareik-Kyondoe highway and near military camps in the region. Since then, the junta has reportedly launched daily airstrikes targeting civilian villages.

On 23 April, fresh airstrikes struck the villages of Kammarait and Kotaing.

"In addition to the battles around Kyondoe and Kawkareik, the junta has been dropping bombs on villages like Naung Lon, Thayar Kone, Tha Hle, Weakaren, Khayar, and areas east of Zathapyin. More than 50,000 people have been displaced. Adults and children alike have been injured," said Naw Cherry, spokesperson for the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN).

The conflict zone lies between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 6, also known as Dooplaya District, and its Brigade 7, or Hpa-An District. Residents from 13 village tracts have fled their homes, some seeking refuge in Brigade 7 territory, while others are hiding deep in the jungle or sheltering in nearby villages with the support of local People's Defence Forces (PDFs).

Aid workers say those displaced are in dire need of emergency food, shelter, and medical supplies.

"Some help is arriving, but it's mostly mutual aid. It's one person helping another with whatever they can. We saw the same situation last year. This is now the second wave of displacement from Kawkareik," a local volunteer said.

Meanwhile, many civilians remain trapped in conflict zones. Reports indicate that junta troops have been blocking escape routes and preventing evacuations.

"The fighting has intensified along the Asia Highway and through the Dawna Mountain range. Civilians are stuck with no way out," said Naw Cherry.

Junta forces have reportedly sealed off key bridges and entry points leading toward Hpa-An, increasing fear and preventing villagers from fleeing.

"We try to evacuate them, but the roads are blocked. Some of those left behind are injured, and there's no way to get them out," said another volunteer.

Local sources estimate that at least 10 civilians have been killed and more than 30 injured in the past week. Many of the wounded still lack access to medical care. Several religious buildings and homes have also been destroyed in the ongoing airstrikes.



Photo: AFP

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION UNSAFE AMID RISING CONFLICT AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY, REPORT FINDS

A newly released report warns that conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine State remain unsafe and unsuitable for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, despite ongoing diplomatic efforts and proposed return plans. Entitled "The Feasibility of Rohingya Repatriation Amidst Conflict and Instability in Rakhine State (2025)", the report draws on refugee interviews, satellite imagery, human rights documentation, and regional security data.

More than one million Rohingya currently live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, having fled what the UN described as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" during a 2017 crackdown by Myanmar's military.

Although Myanmar's junta and Bangladesh have agreed in principle to begin returning 180,000 refugees, the report stresses that ongoing armed conflict between the junta and the Arakan Army (AA) renders such plans both dangerous and premature.

"Civilians, both Rakhine and Rohingya, are being caught in crossfire, and many areas remain under bombardment," said one refugee interviewed for the report. The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) now controls much of Rakhine State but fighting during its offensive displaced thousands and devastated infrastructure.

Interviewed Rohingya refugees unanimously expressed willingness to return home only under

strict conditions including recognition of citizenship, restoration of homes and property, freedom of movement, access to education and jobs, and international oversight. Without these guarantees, many fear continued persecution, statelessness, or forced encampment.

The report also highlights growing distrust of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), which is increasingly viewed by refugees as a destabilizing criminal actor. Internal violence in the camps and the emergence of rival factions further threaten community stability and the feasibility of any repatriation.

Recommendations include a formal ceasefire in Rakhine State, revision of Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, and the establishment of a Rohingya-led negotiating delegation. International observers, accountability measures, and humanitarian support are also deemed essential to building the conditions necessary for safe return.

The conclusion is stark: "Rakhine State is currently unfit for the safe and dignified return of the Rohingya," the report states, calling on all stakeholders — from Myanmar's government to international actors — to prioritize justice, security, and inclusion over premature returns.



John Moe The

MYANMAR TIKTOK ASTROLOGER ARRESTED FOR FORECASTING NEW QUAKE

Myanmar authorities have arrested a TikTok astrologer for spreading panic by predicting another strong earthquake in the aftermath of last month's tremor, state media said Thursday.

John Moe The, who has a TikTok following of more than 300,000, forecast on April 9 that a "very strong" quake would hit "every city in Myanmar" in 12 days' time.

"People should not stay in tall buildings during the day," said the caption on his video viewed 3.3 million times.

"Take important things with you and run away from buildings during the shaking."

Last month's earthquake in Myanmar's central belt killed more than 3,700 and has left 60,000 living in tent encampments, according to the UN, many too fearful to return home as aftershocks continue.

The 21-year-old John Moe The was arrested in a morning raid on his home in central Monywa city on Tuesday, according to a statement by Myanmar's military government published in state media on Thursday.

"We got a tip-off about fake news being spread through a TikTok account that a severe earthquake will hit," said the statement.

"Action will be taken effectively against him according to the law. Likewise, we will also take action effectively against those who write or spread or share fake news."

Yangon resident Nan Nan told AFP she had not believed the social media post, but many neighbours had.

"Most of my neighbours dared not to stay in their apartments and lived out on the street on that day," the 35-year-old said. "My friend even hired a small house outside Yangon in preparation."

John Moe The's TikTok account is titled "John (Palmistry)" and issues regular text predictions against the backdrop of a swirling cosmos.

His forecasts included other weather disasters, the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi who was deposed in the country's 2021 coup, and American airstrikes on Myanmar's soil.

Earthquake early warning systems do exist -- sensing the jolt and beaming out a signal faster than the speed of the shockwave.

However the United States Geological Survey (USGS) says predicting tremors ahead of time is scientifically impossible.

"Neither the USGS nor any other scientists have ever predicted a major earthquake," says a statement on their website.

"We do not know how, and we do not expect to know how any time in the foreseeable future."

AFP

CHINA REPATRIATES 900 FROM MYANMAR SCAM CENTRES

China has repatriated more than 900 citizens it suspects of working in internet scam centres in Myanmar's borderlands, a Beijing ministry said.

Myanmar's many-sided civil war -- sparked by a 2021 coup -- has enabled the rapid growth of lucrative internet fraud factories established in its loosely governed borderlands.

Many people have said they were trafficked into often heavily fortified scam compounds to target victims with romance or business scams on social media, luring them into making untraceable cryptocurrency payments.

Analysts say some are willing participants in the industry worth billions of dollars annually.

Thousands have been repatriated in recent months after a pressure campaign from neighbouring China.

China's Ministry of Public Security said Wednesday 920 more "Chinese fraud suspects" had been handed over at an eastern Myanmar border crossing with China's province of Yunnan in recent days.

They were arrested since March 24 in multiple rounds of raids carried out by Myanmar, the ministry said, adding that computers, mobile phones and bank cards were seized.

Images on Chinese state media showed some of the suspects being paraded before the cameras handcuffed and flanked by security forces.

"This follows the complete eradication of a large-scale telecom fraud park in northern Myanmar near our border," said a ministry statement.

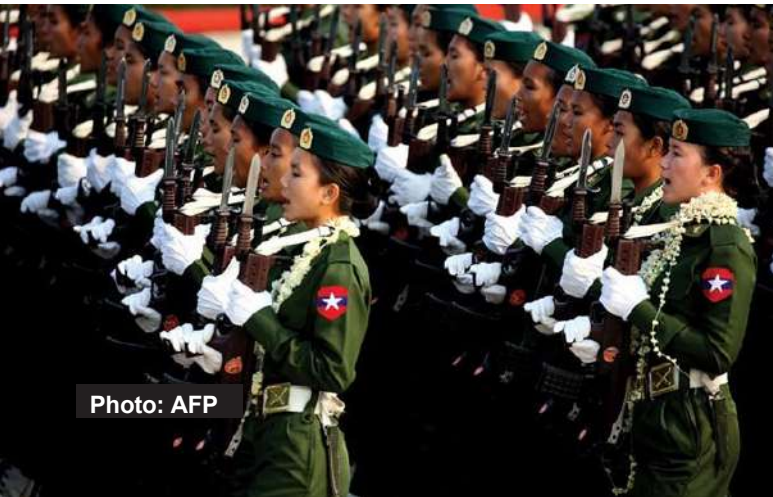
The ministry said their joint efforts with Myanmar have "captured a total of more than 55,000 Chinese fraud suspects".

A spokesman for Myanmar's Border Guard Forces told AFP they "still have more than 1,000 people to transfer" home from the scam centres, without providing details of their nationalities.

High-profile cases of Chinese nationals trafficked into scam centres have spurred diplomatic action from Beijing -- a key ally of the junta as well as some ethnic minority armed groups controlling parts of Myanmar.

However, many of those executing the online scams hail from elsewhere in Asia or from Africa, and are brought to Thailand before making illegal crossings to Myanmar.

AFP



ND-BURMA CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S FORCED ENLISTMENT OF WOMEN

On 23 April, the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma (ND-Burma) releases a new briefing paper entitled, “The Enlistment of Women: Gendered Impacts of Forced Conscription by the Military Junta”. The paper highlights ND-Burma’s grave concerns about the forced conscription of women into the junta’s armed forces.

The text of the accompanying press release for the paper is as follows.

ND-Burma is alarmed by the regime’s actions to not only illegally and violently force young men to join the military but also to engage in recent activities that include the forced enlistment of women. Our latest research finds that women face immense risks in junta custody, and the dangerous attempts to make them fight on the battlefield present additional risks that undermine their safety and security.

Despite the Burmese military claiming that women would not be enlisted following the enactment of the People’s Military Service Law, registration for women between the ages of 18 and 27 began at the start of the year, prompting fears and uncertainty. The junta’s forced conscription is seen as the latest attempt to distract from their losses on the battlefield and the many soldiers who have defected from their ranks and battalions.

ND-Burma members are concerned about the safety and security of young women and girls. The gendered impacts of forced conscription have been catastrophic across various communities in Burma, where mothers, daughters, sisters and even pregnant women have been separated from their families to be enlisted. In Southeastern Burma, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) reported that women forced to serve under the junta have begun training in Kyaikto township, Mawlamyine. In the Mon State Revolutionary Force (MSRF), hundreds of women fled to liberation areas after the announcement of the fifth batch of recruitment.

Among the many human rights violations women face if forcibly conscripted include human trafficking, displacement, sexual exploitation, trauma and distress, sexual violence and others.

Additional insights from our members, notably women-led organizations such as the Kachin Women’s Association Thailand, the Ta’ang Women’s Organization, and the Tavoyan Women’s Union, were contextualized through their documentation of crimes against women and young girls. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence collected by women-led civil society organizations, which makes clear that misogyny and violent behaviour are tolerated and excused by the military junta.

Moreover, it is abundantly clear that the forced conscription effort must be met with intervention by the international community to ensure that no lives are lost or harm is inflicted upon the men and women compelled to fight in a war brutally imposed by the Burmese Army.

Women have asserted that the future of Burma must include gender equality. These goals must be achieved simultaneously to ensure that all people, regardless of gender, are granted the same protections, freedoms, and fundamental rights. Women human rights defenders continue to advocate for gender equality and reliable justice pathways for victims of violence in Burma. They must be heard, and their calls must be transformed into policies and laws to protect all women.



Photo: AFP

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN SENDS MESSAGES OF HOPE TO EARTHQUAKE-HIT MYANMAR

In the wake of the devastating March 28 earthquake and ongoing aftershocks in Myanmar, a grassroots initiative called Sending Love to Myanmar is bringing messages of hope and solidarity from around the world

Launched as a people-powered global campaign, Sending Love to Myanmar collects heartfelt photos, messages, and creative expressions to remind communities in crisis in Myanmar that they are not alone. Organisers say their campaign, built on compassion, aims to provide emotional strength to people affected not only by natural disaster but by years of ongoing conflict and isolation.

So far, organisers say, 141 individuals from 32 countries — including India, Italy, Egypt, South Korea, Nigeria, and the U.S. — have submitted their messages in Phase 1 of the campaign. Participants from across

Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas have joined in solidarity, showing, says the organisers, that global empathy can cross borders and conflict zones.

These messages are being shared widely by organisers on social media platforms to ensure they reach people inside Myanmar, many of whom face restricted access to the outside world. Organizers hope this wave of heartfelt expressions will offer comfort and let the people of Myanmar know: the world sees them, hears them, and stands with them.

A Phase 2 is being prepared in which creative expressions will be collected, including paintings, poems, musical dedications, and messages from sports and community groups as a way of further “uplifting the hearts of those affected.”

TRADITION STOKES POLLUTION AT MYANMAR 'SLASH AND BURN' FESTIVAL

Farmers survey the burning fields.
Photo: AFP



A charred Myanmar hillside is wreathed by flames, spewing ochre smoke that smothers out sunlight in an apocalyptic scene.

But the villagers who set it ablaze dance below in a ceremony celebrating the inferno as a moment of regeneration and hope.

"It's a tradition from our ancestors," said Joseph, a youth leader from Tha Yu village in Myanmar's eastern Shan state.

"It's the only way we survive," added Joseph, who goes by only one name.

Every year between January and April, Southeast Asia is plagued by smog from farmers lighting fires to clear land, emitting microscopic PM 2.5 pollution that lines the lungs and enters the bloodstream.

Myanmar residents lose 2.3 years of life expectancy as a result of pollution from farming fires and other sources, according to analysis of 2022 data by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago.

Since a 2021 coup, the country has been riven by a civil war between the military and a patchwork of anti-coup partisans and ethnic minority armed groups, leaving the toll from pollution largely ignored.

But in Tha Yu village there are additional tensions -- between the old ways of agriculture and new knowledge about environmental risks.

"We don't have any other work or opportunities in our region," said Joseph, 27, as haze swallowed the hills behind him, scorched to make way for paddy rice, chilli and corn.

"So we are forced into this tradition every year."

'Not getting rich'

Most agricultural burn-off happens when farmers incinerate the stubble of old harvests in their fields to make room for the new, and to fertilise the soil.

But the smoke billowing around Tha Yu village is from "slash and burn" agriculture -- a method also

called shifting cultivation, in which patches of wild vegetation are burnt for similar purposes, with crops planted for only a few growing cycles.

"If possible, we want to try other agricultural methods but we don't have any technology and no one has taught us," said Joseph.

Environmentalists generally say slash and burn farming can be twice as harmful because it lays waste to tracts of existing plant life which would otherwise absorb carbon dioxide emissions.

But a 2023 study in Belize suggested Indigenous "slash and burn" farming done in intermediate size patches of land could have a positive effect on forest diversity by opening up space for new growth.

In the Tha Yu ceremony, villagers in white headbands dance on stage before lighting a symbolic bundle of brush, swaying and clapping their hands in rhythmic celebration.

Dark tendrils of smoke creep into the sky.

"I can surely say we are not getting rich from shifting cultivation," said Khun Be Sai, a member of the local area's cultural committee.

"We do it just to get by day to day."

"If you don't have it you have less healthy people, a lower quality of human capital. How can the country improve without good health?"

Tha Yu is in an area controlled by the Kayan New Land Party, an ethnic minority armed group.

Khun Be Sai says hundreds of villages in the region still practise slash and burn farming, but Tha Yu is the only place that marks it with a formal ceremony.

But he sees little to celebrate in the landscape altered by climate change around the village.

"We are experiencing more natural disasters. The forests are thinning and water retention is decreasing. We are experiencing soil erosion due to heavy rains," he said.

While the ceremony lauds the practice that sustains their community, Khun Be Sai also sees a dwindling of their way of life.

"People are leaving and living in different places," he said.

"Our identities, our origins, language and literature are disappearing and being swallowed by others."

AFP

Shifting mindset

Air quality monitoring is neither practical nor a priority in war-torn Myanmar, where more than half the population lives in poverty and 3.5 million people are displaced.

But the toll from air pollution only adds to those woes.

"Clean air is very important for your health," said Thailand's Kasetsart University environmental economist Witsanu Attavanich. "It's kind of a basic thing."



A church in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

SHAKEN BUT NOT BROKEN: HOW MYANMAR'S CHRISTIANS ARE ENDURING THE EARTHQUAKE AFTERMATH

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

On March 28, 2025, a 7.7-magnitude earthquake rocked central Myanmar, further compounding an already catastrophic crisis in a country fractured by war. For Myanmar's Christian communities—many of whom live in opposition-held areas targeted by the regime—this disaster landed on top of years of persecution, displacement, and deprivation. Even as buildings crumbled and thousands lay injured or dead, the military junta escalated airstrikes and obstructed aid.

The quake killed more than 3,500 people, injured over 5,000, and damaged more than 10,000 buildings—including nearly 5,000 religious sites including churches, monasteries, seminaries, and mosques—across six regions. Mandalay, Naypyidaw, Sagaing, Chin, and Kachin were among the worst hit. Ironically, in some territories recently recaptured by pro-resistance forces, the earthquake had little visible impact as many homes had already been reduced to rubble by junta airstrikes.

Hospitals in major cities like Mandalay and Naypyidaw were already overwhelmed and under-resourced even before the earthquake, partly due to the junta's closure of medical facilities linked to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)—a nationwide strike by doctors, teachers, and other public servants protesting the 2021 military coup. In the years since

the coup, Myanmar's healthcare system, infrastructure, and press freedom have steadily collapsed. More than 6,000 civilians have been killed and over 3.5 million displaced. Nearly 20 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance before the quake, and according to the United Nations, roughly 15 million face acute food insecurity.

The humanitarian crisis has grown even more urgent in the wake of the earthquake, with projections estimating that over 21 million people may require aid in the coming months as access to food, water, shelter, and medical care becomes increasingly limited. Compounding the suffering, the junta resumed its campaign of airstrikes and drone attacks on civilian populations immediately after the quake, continuing without pause in the days that followed.

In response, multiple pro-democracy armed groups called for a cease-fire to allow emergency rescue and relief operations. The NUG, Myanmar's pro-democracy government in exile, pledged to halt all offensive military activity, while several major resistance armies announced a one-month truce. However, the junta broke the cease-fire almost immediately, launching airstrikes on earthquake-affected regions such as Sagaing, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw, as well as on areas that were largely untouched by the quake, including Karen and Karenni states. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing

dismissed the cease-fire appeals, accusing ethnic armed groups of using the disaster as a cover to regroup and expand their operations.

With much of the country already isolated by widespread internet blackouts—357 shutdowns recorded since 2021—the full extent of the devastation may never be known.

The hardest-hit regions—Sagaing, Chin, and Kachin—are not only earthquake epicenters but also centers of Christian life and resistance to the junta. These communities were already under siege, often forced to shelter in churches or displacement camps before being struck again by the quake.

Barnabas Aid reports that many Christian survivors are now living “on the roads and under trees” with no food, clothing, or shelter. Entire churches lie in rubble. Open Doors partners add that some communities now lack access to clean water and electricity, with even basic hygiene and toilet access becoming a challenge.

Even before the quake, thousands of Christians had been displaced due to conflict and persecution. As Open Doors local partner Daisy Htun explained, “For the Christians in Myanmar, those who have already been affected by the war, and those who have been displaced, this may have a compounding effect.” The quake has intensified an already unbearable crisis.

Karenni State, one of Myanmar’s three Christian-majority states—and the only state where Catholics form the majority—has opened its doors to internally displaced people from other parts of the country, despite suffering heavy bombardment itself. Khun Bedu, a former seminarian and now chairman of the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF)—the leading pro-democracy armed organization in Karenni State—issued a statement offering shelter and assistance to those fleeing earthquake-affected areas and ongoing military airstrikes.

Despite the dangers, Christian aid organizations remain among the most effective channels for reaching those in need. Groups like Christian Aid, Barnabas Aid, Open Doors, Earth Mission Asia, and Free Burma Rangers (FBR) have mobilized to deliver emergency food, water, shelter, and spiritual support. Churches and Christian organizations in Thailand—many affiliated with U.S.-based groups—have also sent truckloads of aid and dispatched rescue teams. However, many of these efforts have been delayed or blocked by the Burmese embassy, which has slowed visa approvals or denied them outright.

The junta has long distrusted Christians and foreign actors, fearing they may be spies. Rather than

risk outside influence, the regime has allowed its own population to suffer and die. Even the Chinese Red Cross reportedly had a convoy attacked while attempting to deliver supplies to Mandalay. Some groups that managed to gain entry have been restricted to junta-controlled areas like Naypyidaw, raising concerns that humanitarian efforts are being confined to strongholds rather than reaching the communities in greatest need.

The junta has a long history of weaponizing aid, and this disaster is no exception. Immediately after the quake, it demanded that all humanitarian funds be routed through the military government. Civil society organizations report that the regime routinely blocks, redirects, or hoards aid to consolidate power. Cities under junta control, such as Naypyidaw, have received coordinated relief—including water trucks, charging stations, and emergency toilets—while hard-hit opposition areas like Sagaing have received little or none. Medical supplies are frequently intercepted at military checkpoints, especially when destined for ethnic militias or Christian communities.

In response, both local and international groups have begun encouraging donations only through trusted Christian ministries to ensure that aid reaches survivors. Jesuit networks, for instance, have created complex financial routes through third countries to bypass junta-controlled banks and surveillance systems.

For the people of Burma, the earthquake has added yet another layer of suffering to the pain of a war that began in 1948. For Christians, the junta’s response has only deepened their sense of alienation, reinforcing the resolve of Christian-majority Kachin and Chin States—both of which are now nearly liberated, with the junta holding only the capital cities. The disaster has underscored for many Christians the urgent need to extricate themselves from military rule.

Karenni State, with its Catholic population, one of the smallest and poorest in the country, already faces over 90% displacement of its population. Yet despite this, it has shown remarkable compassion and solidarity—welcoming people of all ethnicities and religions, including Bamar and Buddhists. Both the war and the earthquake have strengthened the people’s resolve and further galvanized the population against the military junta.

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



Myanmar Cardinal Charles Maung Bo. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR CATHOLICS MOURN POPE WHO REMEMBERED THEIR PLIGHT

As Catholics filed into Myanmar's grandest cathedral to mourn Pope Francis on Tuesday, a wartime power cut plunged the worship hall into a murky gloom.

But at the front of the pews a portrait of the pontiff remained illuminated by an unseen source -- a backup bulb or an open window keeping the image of his face vivid and bright.

It was a fitting tribute for a faith leader Myanmar Catholics hailed for shining a light on their country in its recent dark and wartorn times.

"Among popes he was the most outspoken on Myanmar," said 44-year-old nun Sister Lucy, one of hundreds packed into Yangon's St Mary's Cathedral as night fell.

"Myanmar Catholics will miss him as the pope who always remembered Myanmar," she told AFP.

'People in the peripheries'

Pope Francis -- who died Monday aged 88 -- was the only Catholic church chief to visit Myanmar, arriving in 2017 as the country was in the midst of a brief democratic experiment.

Since the military snatched back power in a 2021 coup, Myanmar has been plunged into a many-sided civil war which has killed thousands, displaced millions and seen half the population gripped by poverty.

The conflict often fails to register on the international stage. But for Pope Francis it was a regular refrain as he called the world's 1.4 billion Catholics to pray.

"Let us not fail to assist the people of Myanmar," Francis urged in his final sermon on Easter Sunday, recalling both the civil war and last month's magnitude-7.7 earthquake which has killed more than 3,700.

The speech was delivered by an associate because of Francis' faltering health after he was hospitalised for five weeks with double pneumonia.

"He's a man who really cared for those people in the peripheries," Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, the Archbishop of Yangon, told AFP after leading prayers and hymns. "He would always listen."

The special service on Tuesday night was held as Myanmar's military said it would extend a ceasefire declared to ease earthquake relief efforts by one more week.

Monitors say fighting has continued despite the truce, with little evidence Pope Francis's calls for harmony have been answered.

"The message that he left and the homework that he left for the Church is to build peace and reconciliation in the country," Cardinal Bo said. "He would say, 'Let's open our hearts to everyone.'"

Cardinal Bo, a Myanmar native, has been named among the potential successors to Pope Francis, with the new pontiff due to be picked by a secrecy-shrouded conclave of cardinals in the coming weeks.

"We hope that the one that will be succeeding him will have the same sympathy, care and concern for the people of Myanmar," said Cardinal Bo.

'Practiced what he preached'

Inside the sweltering brickwork of St Mary's a number of worshippers wore souvenir t-shirts from Francis's 2017 visit and one nun used a novelty fan celebrating his trip to dull the heat.

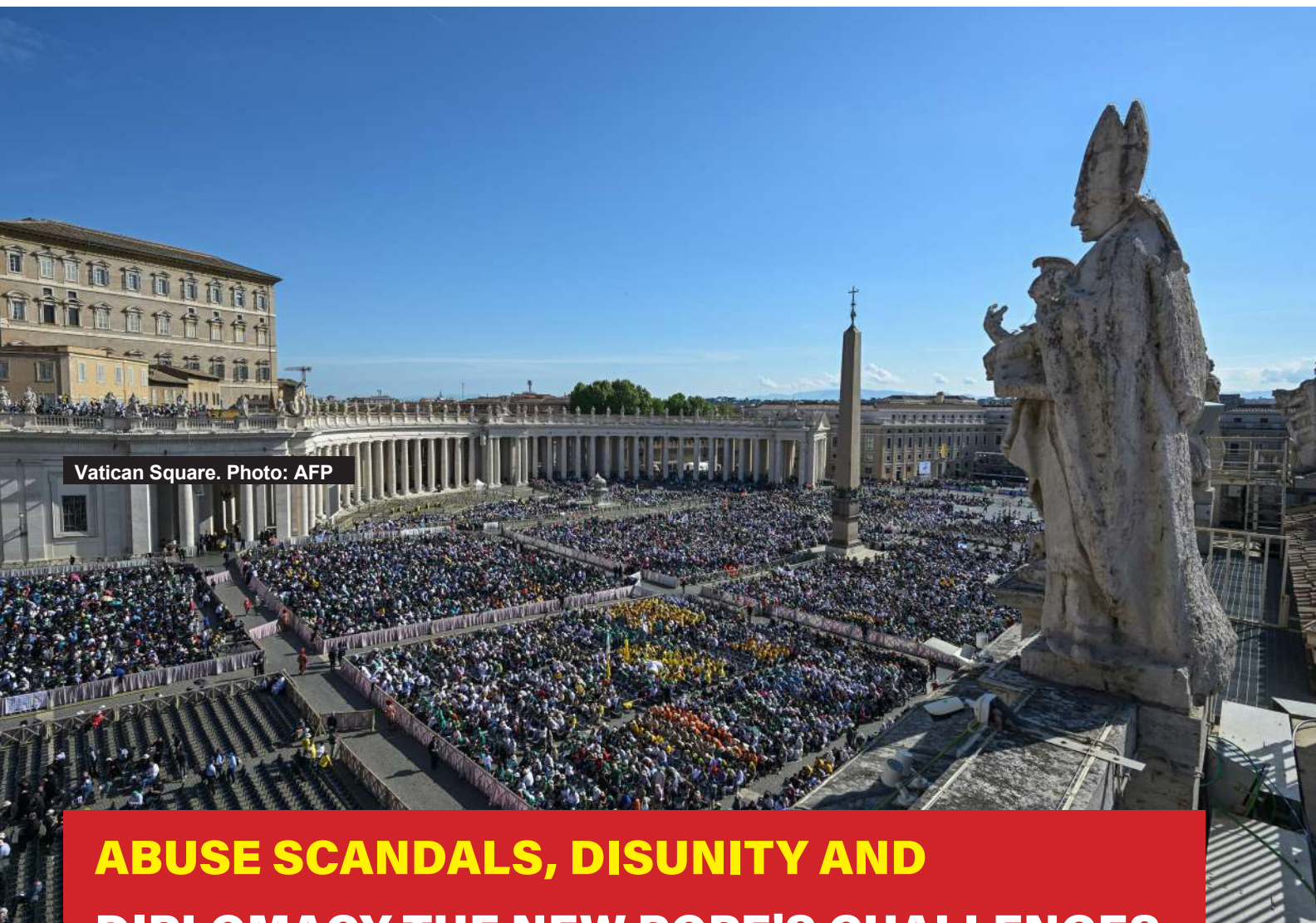
Just inside its doors, floral tributes were presented before preserved items Francis used on his four-day venture in the Southeast Asian country -- a set of vestments, a raised chair, two pillows and a towel.

There are only approximately 700,000 Catholics in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, which has a population of over 50 million.

But Francis "asked the other bishops to get out of their comfort zones", according to 50-year-old nun Sister Margarita, in the rush of the last worshippers arriving for the service heralded by clanging church bells.

"No other pope has come to Myanmar but he came," she said. "He practiced what he preached."

AFP



Vatican Square. Photo: AFP

ABUSE SCANDALS, DISUNITY AND DIPLOMACY THE NEW POPE'S CHALLENGES

Pope Francis's successor will face a litany of challenges, from the place of women and the LGBTQ community in the Catholic Church, to diplomatic challenges in a conflict-riven world.

Unity

Uniting a divided church will be one of the main tasks facing the new pope.

During his 12-year-long papacy, Francis often came under fire for his more liberal policies, such as welcoming migrants and restricting the use of the Latin Mass.

Traditionalists in the United States and Africa in particular were angered by his efforts to give lay people and women a greater role in the Church, and his decision to open the door to blessing same-sex unions.

His successor will have to make peace between the Church's conservative and liberal fringes.

"A pope always brings people together," Luxembourgish Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich told reporters.

"That unity in the church will be very important. But you don't unify the church by going backwards."

Sexual abuse

Though he brought in a series of measures to combat clerical sexual abuse, victims associations said they were disappointed with Francis, accusing him of not doing enough.

The issue remains a major challenge for the Church, with the scandals showing no sign of abating.

And it will not be an easy solve. In many African and Asian countries, the subject remains taboo. Even in Europe, Italy has yet to launch an independent investigation into abuse allegations.

Diplomacy

As well as being leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, the pope is the head of the Vatican state.

His voice carries weight in a world wracked by numerous conflicts, from Ukraine to Gaza and Sudan.

The pope's opinions have consequences.

Francis at various times angered Israel, Ukraine, Russia and the United States with his comments on conflicts and immigrants.

The rise of populist politics, the development of artificial intelligence and the climate emergency are all issues that will demand the pope's attention, as will immigration.

And then there are the delicate relations with China, not least the thorny issue of appointing Catholic bishops in the country.

Women's place

The place of women in the Church will also continue to spark debate. Francis appointed women to key positions, including in January naming the first woman prefect of a Curia department.

Hopes that a woman would be named a deacon were dashed, however, at the last world assembly.

"The role of women certainly depends to a large degree on the cultures the churches belong to and there are many differences, not just from one continent to another, but from one nation to another," Roberto Regoli, a priest and professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, told AFP.

"So it's more a cultural than theological question."

Fewer priests

Francis's successor will lead Catholics living in communities around the world.

The number of faithful is growing in the southern hemisphere but it is declining in Europe.

And the total number of priests spreading the faith is falling -- albeit slowly.

Between 2022 and 2023, the number of priests around the world dropped by 0.2 percent to 406,996, despite an uptick in Africa and Asia.

Though church attendance is different from one region to another, the rise of evangelical churches, particularly in Africa, is creating stiff competition.

Style

Francis ripped up the rulebook, rejecting luxury, and was at his happiest when mingling with his flock.

He refused to live in the papal apartments, opting for rooms at a Vatican guest house instead.

He would make his own phone calls, visit the optician, write his own replies to letters, and accept mate -- the traditional herbal infusion from South America -- offered to him by pilgrims.

But he also faced criticism for an authoritarian management style as well as his tendency to speak his mind and go off script, sometimes embarrassing or dismaying aides with his public statements.

While the next pope will hope to show he too is a people's pontiff, the Vatican would doubtless appreciate a Catholic leader better at sticking to the official line.

AFP



Destroyed building in Bangkok following the 28 March earthquake. Photo: AFP

CHINA'S FRAGILE EXPORTS: ENGINEERING DISASTERS ON THE WORLD STAGE

SUN LEE

The Chinese Communist Party's construction ventures have long been mired in controversy, with critics pointing to their hazardous nature and questionable quality. From toxic goods to substandard infrastructure, China's export practices continue to raise concerns across the globe.

On March 28, 2025, a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar, its tremors reaching Bangkok. Amid the chaos, a 33-story building collapsed—a structure erected by China Railway Number 10 Engineering Group (CRC) under the Chinese state's supervision. This incident served as yet another alarming testament to the systemic failures embedded within the CCP's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The project, designed to expand China's geopolitical influence through massive infrastructure investments, has instead become synonymous with unreliable workmanship and widespread harm.

Recent discussions in Xspace's Great China Tribunal series have examined the underlying causes of these failures, tracing them back to systemic corruption, political motivations, and profit-driven neglect. These discussions have increasingly framed the CCP's construction fiascos as crimes against humanity, urging international bodies to hold Xi Jinping's regime accountable.

The CCP's troubled history with construction dates back decades. One of the most devastating examples was the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, which exposed rampant negligence in infrastructure safety. Investigations at the time found structural deficiencies in schools and hospitals—many collapsing due to shoddy construction, inadequate reinforcement, and subpar materials. Instead of addressing accountability, the CCP moved swiftly to silence critics, imprison activists and suppress independent investigations. Journalists

attempting to expose the truth faced persecution, with some confined to psychiatric institutions.

This pattern of corruption and suppression has remained consistent. Rather than ensuring safety, funds allocated for infrastructure projects are often diverted at various stages—lining the pockets of bureaucrats before actual construction even begins. A former industry insider estimated that in some cases, only a fraction of the allocated budget—perhaps 10-20%—is used for real construction work, leaving completed structures dangerously compromised. The CCP is fully aware of this issue yet tolerates it, allowing unchecked corruption to flourish as officials exploit these flawed projects for personal enrichment.

The consequences of China's substandard infrastructure projects have been felt worldwide. The collapse in Bangkok is merely the latest example in a growing list of international construction failures linked to Chinese firms.

In Serbia, the roof of Novi Sad's train station—constructed by China Railway Construction Corp—collapsed in November 2024, claiming 14 lives. In Cambodia's Sihanoukville, a Chinese-built structure crumbled in 2019, killing 28 workers. Similar cases have emerged in Myanmar, Ecuador, Pakistan, Uganda, Angola, and beyond, with complaints about inferior materials, poor engineering, and inadequate safety measures repeatedly surfacing.

Beyond the human toll, these projects often entangle recipient nations in financial distress. China's "debt-trap diplomacy" ensures that struggling economies remain bound to Beijing through predatory loans, making it difficult for them to extricate themselves from costly commitments.

Some analysts argue that these widespread failures amount to more than incompetence—they constitute crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute. While the CCP's construction disasters may not involve direct violence, their scale and systemic nature result in mass casualties, economic exploitation, and long-term safety risks, representing an assault on civilians' right to life.

The widespread nature of these failures is evident in their global scope, affecting schools, bridges, and hospitals within China and major infrastructure projects abroad. Their systemic nature stems from deep-rooted corruption, driven by the CCP's bureaucratic framework and Xi Jinping's leadership, which has only accelerated the spread of dangerous construction practices.

Following the Bangkok collapse, Chinese authorities quickly censored online discussions, removing critical articles and banning key search terms such as "CRC" and "Bangkok building" from social media platforms like Weibo. This deliberate cover-up aligns with past instances where the CCP has suppressed unfavourable narratives.

International bodies such as the Great China Tribunal and the Citizens Court of the World continue to push for independent investigations into the CCP's infrastructure failures. These initiatives seek justice for victims while advocating for broader democratic reforms in China.

The Tribunal's rulings lack enforceability, meaning they can easily be disregarded by the CCP. Economic dependencies make some nations hesitant to challenge China directly, fearing political backlash or financial repercussions. Despite these hurdles, the movement toward accountability persists. Advocates believe that continued exposure, transparency, and global cooperation can pressure the CCP into reform—or at the very least, limit the future spread of its flawed projects. As one witness boldly declared: "Once we overcome fear, they are the ones who will be afraid."

By bringing these issues to the forefront, the international community has an opportunity to stand against systemic failures, ensuring that the victims of negligent infrastructure are not forgotten—and that those responsible are held accountable.

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



EXIT WOUNDS

"Well, it's been exhausting. It's been exhausting for a variety of reasons!"

With this opening reflection, James Rodehaver, head of the UN Human Rights Office on Myanmar, sets the tone for a conversation with the Insight Myanmar podcast that lays bare the compounding crises gripping the country: a devastating earthquake, an unrelenting military campaign, and a staggering failure of both regional and international response.

Rodehaver has spent nearly three decades investigating human rights violations across conflict zones, but he finds the convergence of catastrophe in Myanmar, both natural and man-made, uniquely grim. The recent earthquake, he explains, struck a population already reeling from the fallout from the military coup, which has included more than four years of widespread violence, mass displacement, and economic collapse. And rather than pausing hostilities in the disaster's wake, the military has only escalated attacks, as they have launched over 100 strikes within nine days of the quake! Even more appalling, many targeted rescue operations and civilians trapped in the rubble.

This cruelty, Rodehaver stresses, is consistent with the military's long-standing strategy to weaponize suffering and impede humanitarian aid to populations they deem enemies. Areas most devastated by the quake, such as Sagaing, remain cut off, while the junta is trying to publicly brand the catastrophe as the "Mandalay Earthquake," in order to channel the focus of aid distribution to regions under its control. These tactics underscore the military's calculated efforts to control narratives, aid flow, and ultimately the fate

of the country's most vulnerable citizens. The UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator visited recently, but the military's position—that it does not want the country "overrun with foreigners"—has stymied most foreign aid efforts. The regime also insists that all humanitarian operations comply with the 2022 Associations Law, effectively sidelining independent civil society groups.

All this echoes Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Rodehaver says, when the military similarly delayed and obstructed aid. But now, conditions may be even worse: less international leverage, less regional willpower, and even more aggressive restrictions. Adding to the peril is the military's attempt to use the aid crisis to garner international legitimacy, posing for photos and attending diplomatic summits while civilians lie dying in collapsed homes through their neglect.

Beyond the military's overt barriers to effective and equitable aid distribution, civil society had already been gutted by the coup and its aftermath, with many skilled Burmese having fled or in hiding. This has dire consequences for humanitarian relief in the wake of the earthquake. For example, in areas like Sagaing, rescue efforts are largely in the hands of poorly equipped, untrained volunteers. "You cannot take a group of normal people and just say, 'Okay, you find people buried under tons of rubble,'" Rodehaver exclaims. Moreover, the lack of trained rescue workers, proper equipment, and access to medical care is exacerbated by military restrictions and paramilitary attacks. These selfless volunteers also have to work under the shadow of military surveillance and threat of arrest, or worse. There are even credible reports of young people attempting to help others in quake-stricken areas only to be conscripted by the military or taken for forced labor in conflict zones. So aid workers must balance saving lives with their own survival, as well as protecting recipients from being targeted through their involvement.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/4/10/episode-334-exit-wounds>



KNU fighters. Photo: KNU

MYANMAR JUNTA VIOLATES OWN 20-DAY CEASEFIRE OVER 110 TIMES IN KNU'S TERRITORY: SAYS KNU

In a striking demonstration of saying one thing while doing another, Myanmar's military junta, led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has violated its own 20-day ceasefire more than 110 times in Karen National Union's (KNU) Kaw Thoo Lei territory, according to a statement released by the KNU on April 26.

The military junta had declared a 20-day ceasefire from April 2-22, 2025, ostensibly to facilitate earthquake relief efforts with ethnic armed groups and other armed resistance groups following recent aftershocks.

However, the KNU reported that during this very period, junta forces conducted systematic attacks against civilians in KNU-controlled Kawthoolei territory.

The KNU documented 63 junta airstrikes using fighter jets, helicopters, and drone bombings during the ceasefire period. These aerial attacks killed 14 civilians and one Karen person in Kawthoolei territory. Additionally, two monks, a Karen elder, and 34 civilians were injured by aerial attacks, while five monasteries and seven homes were damaged or destroyed.

The military junta also conducted 43 artillery attacks, resulting in injuries to 18 civilians and five deaths. Sixteen homes were damaged or destroyed in

these artillery attacks.


Beyond aerial and artillery attacks, the junta's forces burned civilian homes on at least one occasion, destroying four houses and a church. The junta also arbitrarily detained two civilians without cause, and planted landmines that injured two more civilians.

The KNU statement emphasized that the junta's ceasefire announcement appears to have been designed primarily just to attract international humanitarian aid while continuing to target civilians in areas controlled by resistance groups.

The military council's announced a ceasefire, but their actual actions on the ground are completely contradictory, the KNU stated.

"While civilians suffer from both natural disasters and war simultaneously, we must continuously implement necessary defensive measures to protect people's lives and property."

The KNU's detailed documentation of these violations underscores the gap between the junta's public statements and its operational reality, raising serious questions about the junta's credibility in any peace process or humanitarian initiative.



US President Donald Trump talks privately with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the Vatican during the gathering for the pope's funeral. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR FACEBOOK USERS: TRUMP NO MATCH FOR PUTIN AS UKRAINE DIPLOMACY STUMBLES

Myanmar social media users have expressed widespread doubt about US President Trump's latest diplomatic efforts with Russia, following his meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy at Pope Francis's funeral.

In the wake of US President Donald Trump's recent meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and subsequent comments questioning Vladimir Putin's sincerity about ending the Ukraine war, Myanmar Facebook users have been quick to share their skepticism online.

The unexpected 15-minute meeting between Trump and Zelenskyy took place during Pope Francis's funeral at St. Peter's Basilica, described by the White House as "very productive" and by Zelenskyy as having "historic potential." This marked their first face-to-face encounter since a tense Oval Office meeting in late February.

Trump later expressed frustration on his Truth Social account about Russian missile strikes on Ukrainian

civilian areas, suggesting Putin might be "tapping me along" and that Russia may need to face banking or secondary sanctions. This statement came shortly after Trump had claimed Russia and Ukraine were "very close to a deal" following recent talks between his envoy Steve Witkoff and Putin.

Myanmar Facebook users reacted with cynicism. One commenter noted, "Under Biden, Russian aggression against Ukraine could be uprooted. Under Trump, this conflict will never end."

Another user described Russia as "unjustly bullying and expanding into a smaller neighboring country."

A particularly critical comment read, "Trump, you came from the business world to politics. In terms of political experience, you're at the level of Putin's grandchild," while another user bluntly stated, "Donald Trump got played by Putin and now he's upset."

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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