

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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ANGER

Human rights groups
blast Myanmar junta
for its continuing
attacks on health
workers despite
devastating quake

EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

JUNTA CONTINUES TO PLAY GAMES

The Myanmar military junta has systematically obstructed earthquake and humanitarian aid, exacerbating the suffering of civilians in the aftermath of the 28 March earthquake.

Over a month on, and despite international calls for unimpeded assistance, the junta continues to severely hinder relief efforts and humanitarian help.

Following the earthquake, the junta declared a temporary ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian aid. However, despite the "ceasefire" rhetoric, military operations, including airstrikes and artillery shelling, continued during this period. Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the United Nations reveal that at least 172 attacks occurred during the ceasefire, with 73 in quake-affected areas. These attacks resulted in civilian casualties and further damaged critical infrastructure, impeding relief efforts.

The junta has imposed stringent regulations on humanitarian organizations, requiring them to register and obtain approval for aid delivery. This includes submitting detailed information on funding, materials, and proposed projects. Failure to comply can result in severe penalties, including imprisonment. These bureaucratic hurdles delay aid distribution and discourage organizations from operating in affected regions, according to Human Rights Watch.

Humanitarian workers have been subjected to harassment, arrest, and even violence. In some instances, aid convoys have been blocked or diverted, and supplies have been seized. Aid convoys have been attacked. Such actions not only violate international humanitarian law but also deter potential aid providers from entering the country.

The junta has restricted access to certain regions, particularly those controlled by opposition groups. For

example, in Rakhine State, despite initial approval, the junta revoked permission for aid organizations to operate, leaving many without essential assistance. Bangladesh's call for an aid corridor into Rakhine is unlikely to be allowed, at least in the areas the junta controls.

The junta has imposed internet and communication blackouts in several regions, hindering coordination among aid agencies and preventing timely dissemination of critical information. These blackouts exacerbate the challenges faced by both relief workers and affected communities, according to NGOs.

There are reports of the junta diverting humanitarian aid for political purposes, such as distributing supplies to areas with military support while neglecting opposition-held regions. This selective distribution not only violates principles of neutrality and impartiality but also deepens divisions within the country.

The Myanmar military junta's deliberate obstruction of earthquake and humanitarian aid has compounded the suffering of its citizens. There should be little surprise – in the wake of Cyclone Nargis and Cyclone Mocha the junta behaved the same.

By continuing military operations, imposing bureaucratic barriers, targeting aid workers, denying access to affected regions, enforcing communication blackouts, and misusing aid for political gain, the junta has demonstrated a blatant disregard for international humanitarian standards. Immediate international intervention and pressure are essential to ensure that aid reaches those in need and that the junta is held accountable for its actions.

EDITORIAL

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

Managing Editor
Thaw Zin Tun

Network Engineer
Wai Min Han

Video and Graphics Editor
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

General Manager
No No Lin

**Mizzima Weekly is
published by
Mizzima s.r.o**

Address:
Salvatorska 931/8,
Stare Mesto, 11000,
Praha 1, Czech Republic

Contact email:
sm@mizzima.com

Phone/Signal/WhatsApp
+420 608 616688

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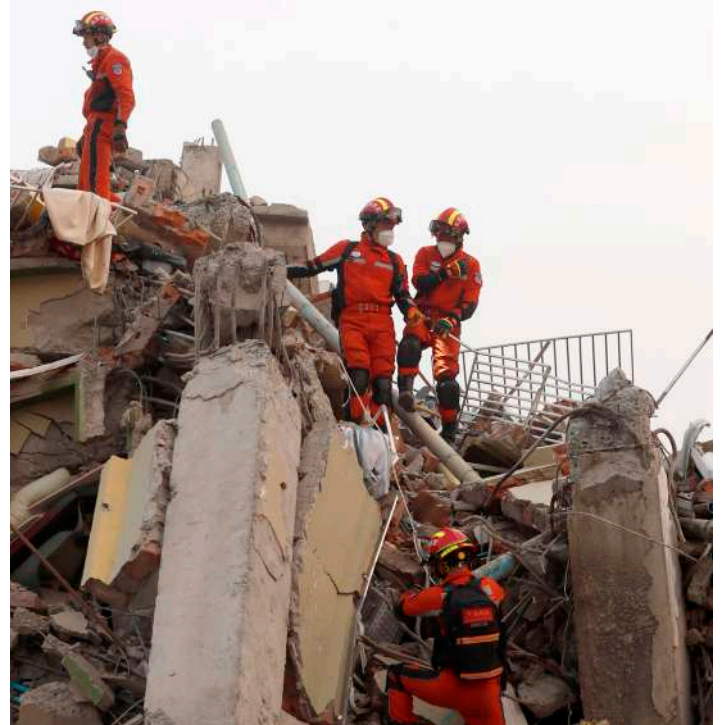
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Cover photo of earthquake rescue workers in Mandalay by EPA





A family sits in temporary shelter near their collapsed house in Mandalay. Photo: AFP

ANGER

**HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS
BLAST MYANMAR JUNTA FOR
ITS CONTINUING ATTACKS ON
HEALTH WORKERS DESPITE
DEVASTATING QUAKE**

Human Rights Watch (HRW) together with Physicians for Human Rights issued a news release on 28 April documenting the impact of the Myanmar junta's attacks on health workers and hospitals since the 2021 coup and the effect on responses to the devastating 28 March earthquake.

Over a month has now passed since the quake and the junta continues to block access to lifesaving assistance in resistance-held areas and during military operations.

The text of HRW's press release continues below:

The junta's arrests and prosecutions of over 872 health workers affiliated with the anti-coup movement and the closing of private hospitals that hire them has drastically reduced healthcare operations in quake-affected areas. The military and associated forces have attacked at least 263 healthcare facilities and killed at least 74 health workers since the coup, according to Insecurity Insight, a Swiss nongovernmental organization.

"Since the 2021 coup, the Myanmar military has been attacking the healthcare system in opposition areas, exacerbating an already serious public health crisis," said Lindsey Green, deputy director of research at Physicians for Human Rights. "Governments supporting the earthquake response should call on the junta to cease airstrikes and other unlawful attacks targeting healthcare facilities and health workers and release all those wrongfully detained."

TALLIED DEATH TOLL RISES

Media reports tally over 5,350 deaths from the 7.7 magnitude earthquake, although US Geological Survey estimates suggest that the final count could reach 10,000 or higher. The United Nations estimates that 2 million people need assistance, in addition to the nearly

20 million who already needed aid.

Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights spoke with five health workers providing emergency relief in Mandalay and Sagaing regions, in addition to health workers who had fled Myanmar and other humanitarian actors. They described an emergency response effort severely hampered by years of military attacks on health care.

The worst affected regions, Mandalay, Sagaing, Naypyidaw, Shan, and Bago, have long been subject to abusive military crackdowns. In just these areas, Myanmar armed forces had carried out at least 125 attacks on hospitals, arrested at least 258 health workers, and killed at least 32 since the coup, according to Insecurity Insight.



HEALTHCARE WOES

Myanmar's healthcare system is severely under capacity, with many health workers having fled the country to escape the military's campaign of arbitrary arrests and attacks on anti-coup health workers. A health worker who has remained outside the country since the coup due to safety concerns told Physicians for Human Rights that many who participated in emergency response training have since fled the country because of the junta's assault on health care. Losing these colleagues has "drastically limited the effectiveness and timeliness of response," the health worker said.

In Sagaing, more than 70 percent of health workers had fled since the coup. One doctor working in a mobile clinic said that the junta's crackdown had left some areas without any staff, making it impossible to assess post-quake healthcare needs. Several health workers reported medicine shortages, which they said stemmed from restrictions on pharmaceutical imports that the junta has refused to lift since the earthquake. The junta has long imposed internet blackouts that are limiting information and emergency response, particularly in opposition and contested areas.

Remaining public hospitals have been unable to provide the care needed, the organizations said. A doctor in an emergency response team in Mandalay described multiple cases in which patients developed rotting wounds due to delays in treatment at the public hospitals.

UNDER PALL OF FEAR

Several health workers said they were afraid to operate in junta-held areas. A doctor in Sagaing said that he and other doctors affiliated with the anti-coup movement cannot safely pass through junta checkpoints to provide care where it was needed most because they fear being arrested. "It is heartbreaking," he

said. "It is unimaginable even to think that I cannot go help. Many of my friends lost their family members, and I can't go help." Another doctor in Sagaing said that he and others cancelled plans to visit a district because they considered it too risky since they had an anti-coup doctor on their team.

Since the coup, Myanmar's junta has been responsible for numerous war crimes in conflict areas and crimes against humanity against anti-junta protesters. Military operations have continued, with the junta launching at least 160 aerial attacks since the quake, without facilitating relief efforts or access for aid workers. One doctor said he and his colleagues had turned back from a quake-affected area because of ongoing hostilities.

Response teams from donors and humanitarian organizations said the junta has restricted their access by delaying visas or limiting their work to major cities and junta-controlled areas. An April 2, 2025, internal UN document says that the junta is restricting access in areas outside its control, leaving them "largely devoid of external assistance."

JUNTA ACTIONS

A doctor in Sagaing said that junta authorities have confiscated medicine being transported to opposition-held territories. The UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said he "received reports of humanitarian workers being stopped, interrogated and extorted at military checkpoints."

Following an April 5 junta announcement that "rescue teams must request prior authorization and cannot independently act without approval from the relevant authorities," support from local aid groups in some areas dwindled, given the risks of registering personal information with junta authorities that have criminalized local aid. Junta-affiliated militia reportedly blocked

local rescue teams from recovering bodies.

Humanitarian agencies have warned that landmines dislodged by the quake pose a serious risk, with at least 32 of the 58 worst-hit townships contaminated.

Prior to the earthquake, aid blockages and a lack of access to medical care had already exacerbated malnutrition, waterborne illness, and preventable deaths, with over one million children missing vital vaccines. Hostilities and conscription by the Myanmar military has also led to mass displacement of over 3.2 million people and a rise in communicable diseases like tuberculosis and cholera.

Tens of thousands of people have been sleeping outdoors, exposed to extreme heat reaching 44 degrees Celsius and without access to clean water. This increases the risk of heat-related illness and waterborne diseases, especially for older people, people with disabilities, pregnant people, and children. Women and girls have reported increased sexual and gender-based violence.

DROP IN FOREIGN FUNDING

Foreign funding has fallen drastically. The UN is appealing for US\$241.6 million in additional aid, but the broader \$1.14 billion response plan is only 7.5 percent funded. The sharp decline stems in part from the US government's abrupt dismantling of foreign aid, reducing its share of support from 30 percent in 2024 to 3 percent in 2025. The three USAID workers sent to Myanmar to assess the earthquake were fired days after arriving.

China, Russia, India, Turkey, and ASEAN member states have sent response teams. Other countries have pledged aid, including a promised \$137 million from China. These funds should be channeled through independent humanitarian actors to ensure aid reaches those most in need, the groups said.

The junta is obligated under international human rights law to uphold the rights to life, health, and shelter. Under international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflict areas, Myanmar's military and opposition armed groups are prohibited from deliberately attacking civilians and civilian objects, including medical facilities and health workers. They are obligated to facilitate rapid and unimpeded impartial humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need and cannot withhold consent for relief operations on arbitrary grounds.

CALL TO THE UN

The UN Security Council should hold an open meeting on Myanmar and pass a resolution calling on the junta to immediately facilitate humanitarian relief efforts without obstruction and cease attacks on healthcare facilities, transportation, and health workers, the organizations said.

"Myanmar's junta has spent four years destroying the country's healthcare system and chasing away healthcare professionals," said Julia Bleckner, senior health researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Concerned governments should urgently increase humanitarian assistance and engagement with local partners and networks to ensure that aid reaches everyone who needs it."



Local people try to put out a fire caused by a junta air attack in Thaibeikkyin Township. Photo: AFP

BREAKING THEIR PROMISE - JUNTA CONTINUES ATTACKS DESPITE 'CEASEFIRE'

Despite declaring a nationwide ceasefire in the wake of a devastating earthquake, Myanmar's military junta has continued launching airstrikes, artillery shelling, and ground offensives across the country, according to reports from local sources and the National Unity Government (NUG).

The junta has been playing games – carrying out attacks while claiming a ceasefire. It further stretched credibility on Tuesday this week when it declared a new post-earthquake truce, days after the expiry of a previous humanitarian ceasefire it was accused of violating with a continued campaign of air strikes.

The NUG released updated casualty figures on May 4, stating that at least 276 civilians have been killed and 456 injured since the 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck. The military's continued aerial assaults reportedly

occurred in every region except Yangon, with the highest number of fatalities in Sagaing and Mandalay regions, where over 80 and 60 deaths respectively were recorded. Both regions were among the hardest hit by the quake and are still struggling to recover.

In Rakhine State, junta troops launched an assault on Arakan Army (AA) positions in Kyauk Phyu Township on April 25. The attack was met with fierce resistance, forcing junta forces to retreat after suffering casualties. However, the military returned with reinforcements, and fighting in the area has since intensified.

In Bago Region, approximately 70 junta soldiers launched an offensive on Hsarchyaung village in Minhla Township on April 27. They were confronted by local resistance groups and reportedly lost 10 soldiers and multiple weapons during the clash.



A family in their temporary shelter in Mandalay following the earthquake. Photo: AFP

In southern Shan State, the junta is attempting to reclaim Moby town, which has been under the control of the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) for over a year. Simultaneously, in the northern part of Shan, the military is advancing toward Naungkhio, reaching within 16 miles of the township. Local sources allege that the junta has employed chemical bombs during battles in the Taungkham area, where heavy fighting is ongoing.

In Kachin State, the military has launched a major offensive to reclaim territory lost last year in Hpakant Township, an area known for its lucrative jade mines. Columns of over 600 junta troops advanced into Namya village, which lies on the strategic route to Hpakant and is currently under the control of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The junta is attempting to recapture positions seized by the KIA during previous operations.

These offensives highlight the junta's continued use of force despite its public commitment to a ceasefire in the aftermath of a national disaster.

Is international aid being freely distributed to quake survivors?

Myanmar's military junta is facing growing criticism over its handling of international humanitarian aid following the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake, with multiple sources reporting that essential supplies have been left stockpiled in warehouses in Naypyidaw instead of being delivered to the hardest-hit regions.

Shortly after the quake, the junta's leadership announced that all rescue and relief operations must be conducted under its supervision. State Administration Council (SAC) Vice Chairman Soe Win stated that no organization is permitted to carry out independent relief efforts without official permission and coordination with the junta.

However, independent media outlets and volunteer sources report that thousands of tons of international aid are now being warehoused in government buildings

and sports stadiums in Naypyidaw, far from the quake-stricken areas such as Sagaing and Mandalay, which have received little to no assistance.

According to a volunteer cooperating with the junta, who spoke to Yangon Khit Thit media, over 3,000 tons of aid are currently held by the SAC but remain largely undistributed.

"The supplies are being stored at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and Naypyidaw Council offices. Some were kept at the airport for a few days before being moved to government facilities and a stadium," the volunteer said. "Only a small portion has been distributed within Naypyidaw. Areas hit hardest by the earthquake, like Mandalay and Sagaing, haven't received anything."

The volunteer added that some of the supplies are perishable and require timely distribution or specific storage conditions, warning that poor management by the junta could lead to spoilage or misuse.

Meanwhile, the junta's state-run media has attempted to portray a functional aid response, publishing lists of donated items and claiming successful distribution to victims. These reports, however, stand in stark contrast to what volunteers and opposition groups are observing on the ground.

Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), also criticized the junta, accusing it of blocking both international and domestic humanitarian efforts and mismanaging the supplies.

"Aid provided by ASEAN's AHA Center has been seen improperly stored without adequate protection in Naypyidaw," Kyaw Zaw said. "Some items have even appeared in local markets. The junta is not distributing them to victims as claimed."

He further called on the international community to establish a monitoring mechanism to oversee aid delivery in Myanmar, stressing the urgent need for

transparency and accountability in relief operations.

What do we know about the private ASEAN meeting with Min Aung Hlaing?

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, serving as the current chair of ASEAN, has come under scrutiny following a private meeting with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok—an encounter brokered by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The meeting, which reportedly focused on facilitating humanitarian aid and brokering a ceasefire after the March 28 earthquake, has drawn criticism from both domestic and regional actors for potentially legitimizing Myanmar's military regime.

Anwar later said the purpose of the meeting was to ensure a ceasefire that would allow humanitarian aid to flow unhindered, warning, "There will be a ceasefire without unnecessary revokes. Otherwise, the whole humanitarian aid process will fail." The meeting coincided with the junta's release of about 5,000 prisoners to mark Myanmar's traditional New Year, an act Anwar publicly welcomed.

However, Anwar did not publish any record or photo of his meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, though he openly posted about a separate meeting with representatives of the National Unity Government (NUG). This omission was noted by observers in Myanmar, with one Yangon resident telling the Myanmar Pressphoto Agency: "It's clear. He only wanted to facilitate humanitarian aid. Not posting any photo of the junta meeting means he doesn't recognize Min Aung Hlaing politically."

A Thai government official involved in the meeting said Thailand played a limited intermediary role, describing the Bangkok talks as a "constructive first step" for ASEAN to re-engage with Myanmar. Yet, this approach has drawn concern over whether it signals a shift in ASEAN's previously cautious stance toward the junta.

International relations expert Parniton told the Bangkok Post that the meeting marked a departure from ASEAN's previous policy of avoiding direct engagement with the military regime, warning it could be seen as a softening of the bloc's position.

Resistance forces, including the NUG and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), issued a joint statement condemning the engagement, warning that talks with a regime accused of war crimes and controlling only a fraction of the country risk undermining the revolutionary movement.

A spokesperson for the Karen National Union (KNU) added: "Meeting with war criminals is unethical. ASEAN must acknowledge that revolutionary forces now control large swaths of territory. The junta holds barely 20 percent of the country."

Former Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato Saifuddin Abdullah also denounced Anwar's meeting with the junta leader, saying: "This is a misstep. The junta is not invited to ASEAN summits and now controls less than 30 percent of the country. Letting them use an earthquake to restore international legitimacy is dangerous—they will use aid as a weapon."

Meanwhile, Thai opposition members criticized their government for inviting Min Aung Hlaing to Bangkok twice within one month, calling it a flawed diplomatic move that risks legitimizing a regime widely condemned for its brutal crackdown on civilians.

The controversy underscores deep divisions within ASEAN on how to approach Myanmar's crisis, as the regional bloc continues to struggle with balancing humanitarian imperatives against political legitimacy.

Khin Ohmar

A COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKE IS THE ONLY ANSWER

The people of Myanmar are not passive victims. They are leading their own resistance, organising their own relief and recovery, and envisioning and striving for their own future.

Khin Ohmar

The devastating Sagaing earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28 added yet another layer of devastation to a country already in crisis. For many around the world, it may appear as the latest in a string of natural disasters. But for the people of Myanmar, it is another wound torn open in a nation already bleeding from the violence and oppression of a brutal military junta.

Any attempt to respond to this catastrophe must begin with a fundamental recognition: this is not simply a humanitarian emergency—it is a political one. There can be no effective, ethical recovery if the architects of the suffering are allowed to control the response while they continue to destroy lives through bombings and killings.

And yet, some proposals—like the one recently published in The Jakarta Post by William Sabandar—suggest entrusting the military junta with a central role in recovery, so long as it demonstrates “transparency and accountability.” This is not only naïve; it is dangerous.

Aid must not flow through the junta

Since 2021, the Myanmar military has carried out a campaign of terror against the people, in the form of collective punishment, for categorically rejecting its illegal coup attempt.

It has bombed schools and villages, burned homes, targeted medics, and blocked humanitarian access as a weapon of war. No amount of technical oversight or good intentions can sanitize aid delivered through this junta.

We have seen this before. During Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the then-junta initially blocked international aid and manipulated the crisis to consolidate power while Nargis aid allowed the military families and cronies to personally profit and accumulate personal wealth.

The difference today is that this junta is a criminal entity fighting against the legitimate government of Myanmar and the people.

Sabandar argues that the junta must be engaged in disaster recovery and that “transparency and accountability” can ensure effectiveness. But Myanmar’s resistance movement and civil society know better.

True transparency is impossible under a junta with an endemic history of corruption that murders children, rapes women, jails journalists, bombs civilians, and imprisons elected government officials.

What the country needs is not engagement with the junta—it is a redirection of aid to where it is most

effective: the community-based organisations, ethnic health providers, and cross-border humanitarian networks that have operated under fire for years and still manage to reach those in need.

ASEAN is not the answer

Calls for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to lead a regional recovery effort echo a familiar but failed strategy. Since the 2021 illegal coup attempt, ASEAN has invoked its Five-Point Consensus repeatedly while taking no meaningful action to enforce it.

It has refused to recognise the root cause – the Myanmar military and instead, has given the illegal junta false legitimacy and undeserved space on the regional stage.

ASEAN's ineffective consensus marked four years of failure on April 24. To now propose ASEAN as the lead actor in Myanmar's earthquake response is to ignore four years of failure.

Worse, it risks legitimising a junta that the people of Myanmar have staunchly and overwhelmingly rejected. A regional "leadership role" in this context would serve as cover for the military's continuation of atrocity crimes and weaponization of aid.

ASEAN is not neutral—it has been complicit in the junta's atrocity crimes. Even during and after the ASEAN chair met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok, both ground and aerial attacks against civilians continued in quake-hit areas and beyond, completely discounting the ASEAN call for a ceasefire.

Since the earthquake, the junta has conducted at least 207 attacks, including 140 airstrikes and 24 artillery barrages, deliberately targeting civilians.

Since its own "ceasefire" declaration on April 2, the junta has killed at least 161 people and injured nearly 300 more. Given the military's long standing disregard for human life, it could not be clearer that this junta has absolutely no genuine political will for effective aid delivery or sustainable peace.

ASEAN, alongside the wider international community, must not exploit the earthquake disaster to normalize relations with the junta, lend it false legitimacy, endorse its sham election plan, or push forward attempts at 'inclusive dialogue' that will allow the re-legitimization of the military and prolong the crisis.

Instead, ASEAN must provide aid through border-based channels directly through community-based organizations and frontline humanitarians in collaboration with civil society organizations, or CSOs,

the NUG, and EROs.

Additionally, ASEAN and the wider international community must take immediate concrete action to end the junta's ground and aerial attacks through a comprehensive global arms embargo, including aviation fuel and dual-use goods.

If we are serious about supporting Myanmar's recovery and rebuilding, we must look beyond ineffective regional diplomatic formulas and listen to the people risking everything for their future.

If ASEAN truly aims to achieve a long-term solution for Myanmar, the only way forward is to fully support the people's tireless efforts to achieve a peaceful and sustainable future that is free from military tyranny....

You cannot build back better under bombs

Sabandar suggests drawing lessons from Indonesia's post-tsunami recovery in Aceh or its response to the 2005 Nias earthquake. But these comparisons are deeply flawed.

Indonesia then had a functioning, legitimate government, willing to work with both domestic and international actors in good faith.

Myanmar today is not ruled but ruined by a junta that is not only illegitimate but actively committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the people.

The phrase "build back better" has meaning in a post-conflict or post-disaster environment where peace and stability exist. In Myanmar, the bombs are still falling.

Entire communities are being displaced not by natural forces, but by airstrikes and ground assaults constantly and deliberately carried out by the junta.

There can be no rebuilding—no better future—until the violence stops and the root cause of suffering is addressed.

Obstruction and weaponization of aid by the junta

The weaponization of aid by the junta cannot be judged by whether there are junta soldiers blocking the road with guns or taking away aid shipments. It is not as simple and straightforward as how Andrew Nachemson portrays it in Foreign Policy.

It can be seen in many forms. By withholding aid, unfair distribution, restrictions, arresting aid workers, seizing or threatening to seize aid, extortion, and blocking information are all part of obstruction and weaponization.

Eyewitness accounts of the obstruction, manipulation, or weaponization of aid by the junta can vary depending on who has experienced or witnessed it, depending on different backgrounds of those individuals and organisations' status, and most importantly who is willing to speak out.

In this case, primary beneficiary or impacted communities' experiences and accounts need to be seriously considered. We cannot superficially judge and state that the junta "may not be standing in the way of disaster aid, despite its poor track record" as the sub-headline of Nachemson's article stated. Some in Sagaing and Mandalay have even spoken out about not receiving any aid.

We also cannot set aside the junta's weaponization and blocking of aid to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are fleeing from its airstrikes and artillery attacks.

To those saying that the military is not blocking earthquake relief, I ask: What about the emergency lifesaving aid to those IDPs fleeing from the bombings in the quake-hit areas such as in Sagaing?

According to local reports, junta authorities in some areas have specifically instructed not to distribute aid to IDPs who fled from conflict areas.

We are seeing netizens sharing posts on social media and media reports including photos of quake-affected communities living in temporary sites where locally-produced tents, which are not meant for disaster relief, are distributed by local aid groups.

Meanwhile we are seeing international relief tents being provided to survivors of the collapsed Sky Villa condo due to their high economic and social status.

Even the U.N. agencies are posting photos of people living under those locally used tents on their social media. Now the question should be asked: Where are the relief tents donated by the international community?

The junta's foreign affairs ministry has constantly posted about international earthquake relief donations both in cash and kind such as from Japan and the E.U. Should we not have the right to ask why our people are not receiving those donations?

Calling for transparency and accountability, including fair and equal distribution of aid is not to make the matter worse as some might narrowly think but to ensure aid is delivered to the affected communities as intended to and should be.

There is also bias and discrimination by international

aid actors in their approach to local stakeholders. While these international agencies lack, or are afraid to put in place, monitoring mechanisms to ensure aid handed over to the junta is not exploited and manipulated.

This means these agencies unfairly make presumptuous decisions that aid going through the NUG, or CSOs, and community-based organizations, that are independent from the junta, will be utilized for other non-relief purposes. This approach is already breaching the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality.

As 270 CSOs wrote in a statement, "We emphasize that these disaster relief efforts, through any implementing partners, must not be exploited, manipulated, or weaponized by the military junta for its political and military gain. We urge the U.N., neighbouring countries, and the wider international community to remember Myanmar's painful history of the military's manipulation of aid in times of natural disasters, and act resolutely to protect affected and vulnerable communities from exploitation and further suffering. The people of Myanmar deserve aid that alleviates suffering—not aid exploited in their name or weaponized against them."

A people's response, not a junta-led recovery

So, what does a just and effective response look like?

It begins with recognition of who truly represents the people of Myanmar: the democratic resistance movement led by the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council, Ethnic Resistance Organisations, women's groups, youth leaders, and civil society actors. These are the voices that must shape recovery—not the generals who created the crisis.

For our civil society groups, human rights defenders and activists, we don't wait; we mobilised ourselves and launched emergency relief missions in our people-to-people solidarity approach immediately within the first 24 hours of the quake, while we also alerted the international community and advocated solutions for effective response.

In the CSO joint statement, it recommended that aid be channelled through community groups, EROs, and the NUG, simply because most of the affected areas are under effective control of the resistance while the most severely hit cities like Naypyidaw, Mandalay, and Sagaing are under the junta control; some nearby areas are controlled by both.

"Severely or significantly damaged" by earthquake

cannot be measured by high fatality rates and how many high-rise buildings collapsed such as what the world saw in Mandalay or in Naypyidaw, where information about the destruction was blocked by the junta but later reported by brave citizen journalists and independent media.

The point here is not which areas are hardest hit, but that areas beyond junta-control still experienced the earthquake, and international aid cannot and will not reach these areas through the junta. That is where we see the need for international aid to be channelled through local aid groups.

International aid must be redirected through trusted local humanitarian networks that operate independently of the junta. Especially for the aid to reach communities in the affected areas under resistance control, the international aid actors must collaborate with the NUG, EROs and the People's Defense Force (PDF) as many areas hit by the Sagaing earthquake beyond Sagaing and Mandalay cities are not under the junta's control, but under control of the resistance movement with people-led administrations.

Border-based ethnic service providers and local CSOs have proven time and again that they can deliver help efficiently, ethically, and with dignity.

Diplomatically, the international community must stop hedging. It must provide formal recognition to the NUG and increase support for mechanisms that hold

junta leaders accountable—through sanctions, legal action, and referral to international justice processes like the International Criminal Court (ICC). A failure to act decisively is not neutrality; it is complicity.

This moment demands moral clarity

In the wake of such devastating geological disaster, it is natural to want to help—to rebuild, to heal. But in Myanmar, healing cannot come without justice; recovery cannot be done without accountability. Rebuilding cannot happen while the rubble is still being created by this junta.

The people of Myanmar are not passive victims. They are leading their own resistance, organising their own relief and recovery, and envisioning and striving for their own future.

It is time the international community follows their lead—not the lead of the generals who brought this disaster upon them.

Khin Ohmar is a Myanmar human rights activist who was involved in organizing the 1988 nationwide pro-democracy uprising. She is also the founder of Progressive Voice, a Myanmar human rights organization.

This article was originally published in DVB on April 28, 2025.



UN HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR ISSUES STATEMENT TO MARK ONE MONTH SINCE THE 28 MARCH QUAKE

On 28 April the UN Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. for Myanmar issued a statement marking the one-month mark since the destructive 28 March earthquake in Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

One month after two powerful earthquakes struck Myanmar on 28 March, millions of people are still struggling to cope with the devastating impacts. Although international attention has faded, for the communities shattered by the earthquakes and the front-line workers continuing to assist them, the emergency for most is far from over – it is another crisis on top of the challenges already facing the people of Myanmar.

In Mandalay and Sagaing, I met families who had lost some loved ones, some lost their homes, some lost everything. Across some of the hardest-hit areas, people told me they are too afraid to go back into their homes, worried they could collapse at any moment with the ongoing aftershocks. And the families I met are not alone – at least 55,000 homes were damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes. One month on, countless people continue to live in the open, some in makeshift tents, exposed to harsh weather and serious protection

risks. This earthquake has pushed those already vulnerable – among them women, children, physically disabled, the elderly and marginalized communities – even deeper into crisis.

Humanitarians, alongside local organizations, are working tirelessly to deliver life-saving assistance to those who need it the most. Since the earthquakes, we have together provided at least 600,000 people with safe water, sanitation and hygiene support – vital for their survival. Nearly half a million people received food assistance, and at least 117,000 people received emergency shelter and non-food item assistance.

But this is still not enough. More than 6.3 million people are in urgent need of support in the areas most affected by the earthquakes. Humanitarian organizations are making every effort to reach people impacted by yet another crisis. At this critical moment, additional and quick disbursement of resources and sustained access to all communities are vital to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate even further for people already living with severe needs. I call on the international community to stand with them – and to support their right to live in safety and dignity.



URGENT REPAIRS NEEDED FOR QUAKE-HIT VILLAGES ON ALLUVIAL ISLAND IN THE AYEYARWADY RIVER AHEAD OF RAINY SEASON

Some villages on an alluvial island in the Ayeyarwady River in Patheingyi Township, Mandalay Region, suffered severe damage from the earthquake and urgently need support to rebuild before the monsoon season begins, according to local residents.

Several villages, including Thanbokyun village in Patheingyi Township, were damaged by the 28 March earthquake and are now in need of assistance.

These villages are situated on an island in the middle of the Ayeyarwady River and face annual flooding as the river rises during the rainy season.

The alluvial island is home to villages such as Hinywatsu, Nyaungpinthar, Phoehlagon, Dammakya, Gyainggyi, and Kyunsin.

A rescue worker reported that the fault line from the 7.7-magnitude earthquake, which struck near Sagaing on 28 March, cut through the eastern part of Thanbokyun village, causing roads to crack and houses to collapse.

Villages on the alluvial island were devastated, with Thanbokyun village suffering the worst damage. The ground collapsed, opening cracks as deep as a man's height, and 38 houses were reportedly destroyed.

"Normally, the area floods during the rainy season. Now, with the earthquake causing landslides, the water is coming in even more. We need to fix the damage before the rains start," said a local resident.

A rescue worker stated that they plan to fill the cracks in the collapsed soil with sand and are in need of machinery and financial assistance.

Some aid workers have arrived in villages affected by the earthquake, including Thanbokyun, and locals are beginning to rebuild on their own. However, with the rainy season approaching, there are growing concerns among the community.

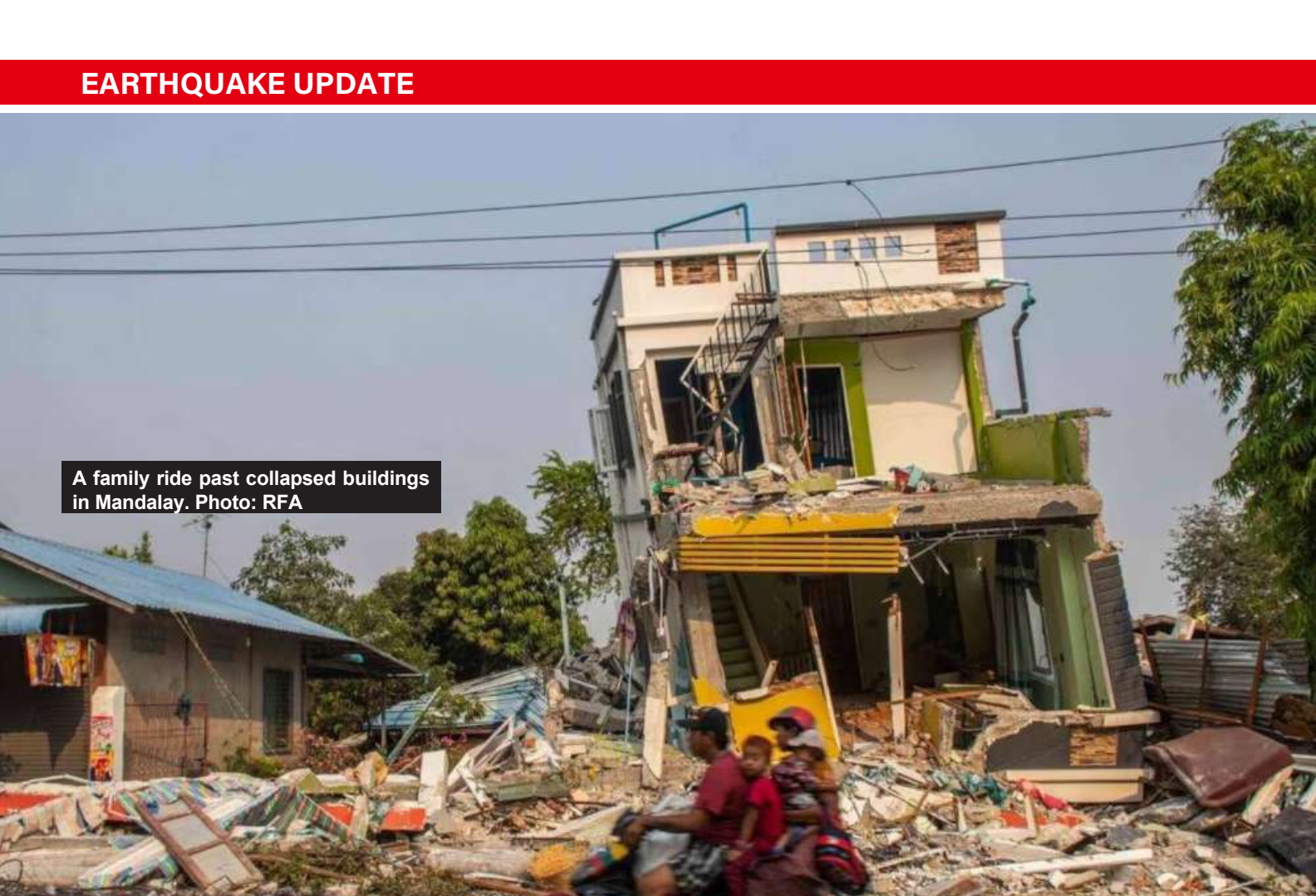
The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology has issued a warning for heavy rain and isolated downpours in central and upper Myanmar, including Mandalay Region, starting at the end of April.

Additionally, social relief organizations have cautioned that if the rain persists, the Ayeyarwady River will rise, leading to flooding along its riverbanks.

The rainy season is expected to begin in mid-May, and social relief groups emphasize that earthquake-affected areas must be restored before then, with affected individuals urgently needing shelter.

The earthquake that struck on the afternoon of 28 March caused widespread damage across Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Naypyidaw, and Bago regions, and northeastern Shan State with rescue efforts still underway in some areas.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has reported that over 4.3 million earthquake victims require food and shelter assistance.



A family ride past collapsed buildings in Mandalay. Photo: RFA

ONE MONTH ON, MYANMAR'S QUAKE VICTIMS SEE 'NOT EVEN A WATER BOTTLE' IN AID

RFA

Some families have waited one month, hoping to receive critical aid in the aftermath of Myanmar's earthquake, which killed over 3,700 people, victims and aid groups told Radio Free Asia.

Myanmar's military has been accused of hampering aid efforts by preventing international and local rescue groups from entering earthquake-stricken areas and demanding that groups distribute essential items like food and temporary shelter through junta officials.

One resident in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city and close to the epicenter of the earthquake,

said he hadn't received any aid since his house collapsed.

"Because of the aftershocks, we can't go back. Up until today, we've been sleeping on the side of the road. Yesterday, there were more aftershocks and we've been on edge," he said, declining to be named for fear of reprisals.

"I want to say especially that we have not gotten any type of help listed from officials at the ward, township or district level. We haven't gotten even one bottle of water or one wafer of biscuit – that's the honest truth."

Recovery from the March 28 earthquake has been hampered still further by hundreds of airstrikes by Myanmar's military, which have killed over 160 people across the country, according to data compiled by Radio Free Asia..

Residents sleeping outdoors have also been subject to monsoon rains, extreme heat and unpredictable weather, adding to the predicted public health crisis.

In crowded areas, aid groups who have been permitted entry don't have enough food for all the victims, said the Mandalay resident.

Aid organizations from 29 countries were operating in Myanmar until April 20, providing more than 3,700 tons of relief supplies, said junta spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun on state-owned broadcaster MRTV.

All available supplies, except for "a few shelters and raincoats" had been distributed in earthquake-affected areas of Naypyidaw, the country's capital, as well as in Mandalay region, Sagaing region and Shan state, he said on Wednesday.

On the ground, victims have only been able to receive aid from the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP, said one volunteer who was himself affected by the earthquake in Mandalay region's Pyawbwe town.

"UNDP is the only one who arrived with household items, shelters, power banks, solar lights, canned fish, red beans, clothing, women's items and medical kits," he said, refusing to be named for security reasons.

He said the junta collected lists of the dead and those affected by the earthquake, but victims haven't received any help. Rescue teams reported at least 300 people died in Pyawbwe town alone.

Residents in other areas of Mandalay region and Sagaing region, as well as parts of the country with a strong junta presence, like Shan state's Inle region and the capital of Naypyidaw, also say they have faced limited aid as a result of poor systematic distribution, rescue committee volunteers said.

But the junta denied claims of mismanagement.

"For those who have faced destruction, the amount must be assessed and aid will be apportioned based on what's decided by government organizations," said Lay Shwe Zin Oo, director of the Disaster Management Department of the military's Ministry of Social Welfare.

"If they haven't gotten it yet, they should contact their general administrators and negotiate an amount of aid," she said, adding that many victims had not registered for aid yet.

Over 5,100 people were injured in the earthquake and more than 100 are still missing, according to the latest data from Myanmar's military. As of April 24, nearly 64,000 houses were destroyed, affecting some 629,000 people.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Many historic buildings were damaged in the earthquake. Photo: AFP

LOST TO HISTORY: MYANMAR HERITAGE FALLS VICTIM TO QUAKE

When a massive earthquake hit Myanmar last month, centuries of sacred history tumbled down -- towering Buddha idols, sky-scraping stupas and the pure-white pagoda where 83-year-old Khin Sein has prayed for most of her life.

The magnitude-7.7 tremor razed Nagayon Pagoda in the central city of Mandalay, Myanmar's last royal capital where ancient heritage was decimated in the disaster which claimed more than 3,700 lives.

For around 200 years, the temple was adorned with a carving of a sacred serpent said to have shielded the Buddha from the elements after his enlightenment.

The quake that struck one month ago on Monday reduced it to a heap of shapeless masonry, half burying the snake's bowing head.

"I cried out to pray that Nagayon Pagoda would save me when the quake started," said Khin Sein. "But my son told me that the pagoda was already gone."

"I don't think any bricklayer or architect could rebuild it the same as it once was," she told AFP, her eyes welling with tears as she paced the perimeter of the temple where she had prayed for 51 years.

"I want the original back but I know it's not possible."

'Old things are most valuable'

The March 28 quake has left more than 60,000 people living in tent encampments, according to the United Nations, and pushed two million people into "critical need" in a country already devastated by civil war since a 2021 coup.

As the ground sheared up to six metres (20 feet), more than 3,000 monasteries and nunneries were destroyed alongside more than 5,000 pagodas, the ruling junta says.

Myanmar's second city of Mandalay and the adjacent cities of Sagaing and Inwa, dotted around the quake's epicentre, are all ancient seats of power, steeped in history and now pockmarked with ruins.

Cultural capital Mandalay was where the British captured the country's last king in 1885, beginning colonial rule of the whole nation.

The Royal Palace's crenellations have crumbled in places with ornate bastions collapsed askew.

A one-kilometre colonial-era bridge has collapsed into the Irrawaddy River towards Sagaing, where the horizon was once prickled with pinnacles of pagodas and stupas now contorted or simply gone.

Inwa served as capital for nearly 360 years until it was abandoned after a magnitude-8.2 quake struck in 1839.

Three quarters of the historic buildings inside its ancient cultural heritage zone were damaged in this year's jolt, officials say.

Thu Nanda has come to visit what remains of Me Nu Brick Monastery.

Built in 1818, entire portions of its gleaming north and west wings have been devastated, its gold filigree exterior cracked with terracotta-colour innards spilling out.

"The old things are the most valuable," said Thu Nanda, a 49-year-old monk. "The loss of historic heritage is breaking our hearts."

"Even if we are able to repair it, people will not be able to feel it in its original form. Old is just old. It cannot be restored," he said.

"I think the loss of our heritage affects not only our country but also the world."

Blessed by survival

Myanmar is still grappling with the recovery of human remains from the ruins and the oncoming summer monsoon season. Heavy rains are already forecast this week as thousands mark one month camped outside.

While surveyors have investigated damage to historic buildings, reconstruction efforts are focused on aiding the living victims with little thought yet for the restoration of heritage landmarks.

Myanmar has seen more than its fair share of destruction. The four-year war has made air strikes and sieges of urban centres commonplace.

Thousands have been killed, 3.5 million are displaced and half the population now live in poverty.

Nonetheless Thein Myint Ko, surveying the three-centuries-old Lawka Tharaphu Pagoda, says: "I have never experienced such tragedy in my 65 years alive".

He serves on the board of trustees of a building largely ruined by the force of the quake.

Its gold stupa was cracked like eggshells, and now volunteer workers from a nearby village spade at the dusty remnants beneath.

"I feel devastated," said Thein Myint Ko.

But what was left unscathed has become more precious to the annals of Myanmar.

Somehow a monumental eight-metre marble statue of the Buddha is largely undamaged -- its gold halo shattered and a crack at its base, but its serene expression unperturbed.

"No one was injured and the Buddha image survived," said one man clearing rubble at the feet of the statue. "It is such a blessed pagoda."

AFP



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CALLS NEW CEASEFIRE AFTER QUAKE

Myanmar's junta declared a new post-earthquake truce on Tuesday this week, days after the expiry of a previous humanitarian ceasefire it was accused of violating with a continued campaign of air strikes.

The March 28 magnitude-7.7 quake near the central city of Mandalay killed nearly 3,800 and has left tens of thousands homeless as the summer monsoon season approaches.

Monitors say junta aerial bombardments breached the first truce in April -- with the Britain-based Centre for Information Resilience logging 65 strikes, many in quake-hit regions.

A statement from the junta information team on Tuesday said the new armistice "to continue the rebuilding and rehabilitation process" would last until the end of May.

The military -- which seized power in a 2021 coup -- warned the array of ethnic armed groups and anti-coup fighters it is battling that it would still strike back against any offensives.

"We have to protect the towns and people's lives by using air strikes," a military officer in the eastern state of Karen told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We are sorry that residents have to flee from their

towns and villages because of fighting," he added.

"Locals know very well which groups are threatening their lives."

Some armed opposition groups have also announced ceasefires as Myanmar recovers from the strongest quake with an epicentre on its landmass since 1912.

However, some have continued their offensives, according to residents in combat zones.

A member of a junta-allied militia in Karen state said "armed groups could reach agreement for a ceasefire for the sake of the people" but they were being pressured to fight by pro-democracy activists.

"It's difficult to go against their pressure," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Throughout the truce junta forces have been battling opposition groups for towns on a key Karen state trade route to Thailand.

"Although we haven't lost our homes like quake victims in Mandalay, we still cannot go back home because of fighting," said Phaw Awar, a resident of the besieged town of Kyondoe.

"We are afraid of air strikes," she said.

AFP



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE CUTS CEMENT PRODUCTION BY OVER 40%, PRICES SOAR NATIONWIDE

The recent powerful earthquake that struck Myanmar has slashed local cement production by more than 40%, causing widespread shortages and soaring prices, according to the junta.

Before the quake, nine cement factories across the country were producing 30,700 tons of cement per day—equivalent to 614,000 bags. However, production has now fallen to 17,100 tons (342,000 bags) daily, with only six factories still operational.

The update was delivered by junta Industry Minister Dr. Charlie Than during a disaster preparedness meeting in Naypyidaw on 25 April, as reported by the state-controlled Kyaw Mon newspaper the following day.

Dr. Charlie Than said efforts are underway to increase daily production to 22,100 tons (442,000 bags) by mid-May, with a goal of reaching 32,100 tons (642,000 bags) by September.

According to a junta statement released on 10 April, the earthquake damaged five major cement plants—one in Naypyidaw and four in the Mandalay Region. The affected sites include Double Rhinos Cement, No. 33 Large Cement Plant in Kyaukse, Alpha Cement, Sinmin Cement, and the Naypyidaw Cement Plant (Taungphila).

The production decline has triggered a sharp increase in domestic cement prices. Prior to the disaster, a single bag of cement was priced at just over

15,000 kyats. Prices have since doubled now ranging between 30,000 and 40,000 kyats in some areas. In Mandalay, where reconstruction is urgently needed, prices currently hover around 26,000 to 30,000 kyats per bag.

"Reconstruction is essential, but the soaring cost of materials has forced many to focus only on immediate repairs," an engineer in Mandalay said.

To address price manipulation, the junta announced on 28 April that it had inspected over 300 construction material outlets in major cities, including quake-hit areas. Authorities reportedly took legal action against 62 stores for selling goods 10–15% above the official rates.

From 5 to 12 April, the junta also summoned importers and distributors of construction materials, urging them to avoid hoarding and excessive pricing. The junta has since instructed operating factories to sell cement at a fixed rate of 17,000 kyats per bag though it remains unclear whether that price applies at the wholesale or retail level.

A construction supply store in Mandalay said the ongoing price spike is largely due to reduced factory output. The store added that most materials are now purchased through brokers, with rising transportation costs further inflating prices.

Myanmar's cement shortage predates the quake. Since the 2021 military coup, cement prices have been volatile due to factors such as factory closures, fuel shortages, power cuts, and an overreliance on imported raw materials. Earlier this year, prices had already risen to between 20,000 and 30,000 kyats per bag, compared to just over 9,000 kyats in the post-coup period and around 5,000 kyats before the coup.

In 2021, Dr. Charlie Than noted that Myanmar had 19 cement plants, 16 privately owned and three state-run, capable of producing between 7 and 9 million tons annually. Despite this, the country continues to import around 1 million tons each year to meet its annual demand of 10 to 11 million tons.

To stabilize supply, the Ministry of Commerce announced on 21 April that cement imports will be permitted during this period, with ships carrying cement expected to arrive weekly.

MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS FACE CRISIS AMID JUNTA ATTACKS, AID OBSTRUCTION

One month after a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck central Myanmar and parts of Thailand, killing at least 3,600 people and injuring thousands more, survivors are now battling a dual crisis - the destruction caused by the quake and continuing attacks from the country's military junta.

According to a new report by the Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma (ND-Burma), *Beneath the Cracks: Devastation and Destruction by the Junta in the Earthquake Aftermath*, the military has launched nearly 300 attacks in quake-affected areas since the disaster on March 28. These include airstrikes and artillery bombardments in Sagaing and Mandalay Regions and Chin, Karen, and Kachin States, even during periods when the junta claimed to observe a ceasefire.

The report documents deliberate strikes on churches, monasteries, schools, and aid convoys, including the shelling of a Chinese Red Cross mission. On April 10, an airstrike in Chin State killed six civilians, including four children. In Karen State, multiple villages were bombed during the Myanmar New Year, killing at least 14 people.

While civil society groups and the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) have called for aid to be distributed through local networks, the junta has restricted access and demanded that relief groups be approved by the junta. The report accuses the military of weaponizing humanitarian assistance and turning disaster response into a tool of control.

With over 17 million people in urgent need of aid, survivors face mounting challenges—extreme heat, water shortages, disease risks, and displacement. Women's groups warn of heightened vulnerability for women, children, and minorities.

ND-Burma's report urges the international community to impose sanctions, support local responders, and reject the junta's role in relief efforts, calling for "a dignified recovery that values the lives of all people."



Photo: Supplied

UNFPA LAUNCHES \$12 MILLION APPEAL TO AID 680,000 WOMEN AND GIRLS AFFECTED BY MYANMAR EARTHQUAKES

The United Nations Population Fund released a recent statement appealing for aid for women and girls affected by the devastating 28 March earthquake in Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, has launched a flash appeal for US\$12 million to provide life-saving assistance to 680,000 people, particularly women and girls, affected by the devastating earthquakes that struck central Myanmar on 28 March, 2025.

The powerful earthquakes, measuring 7.7 and 6.4 magnitude, have resulted in widespread destruction and displacement across multiple townships. Thousands have lost their lives, many more are injured, and countless families are living in overcrowded makeshift shelters with limited access to essential services. The destruction of health facilities and the collapse of protection systems have intensified risks of unsafe births, poor menstrual hygiene and increased exposure to gender-based violence.

"It has been one month since the earthquakes, yet the situation remains critical," said Jaime Nadal, UNFPA Myanmar Representative.

"Pregnant women are struggling to access lifesaving maternal healthcare, and the risk of gender-based violence is alarmingly high in overcrowded temporary shelters. We must act now to protect the health, rights, and dignity of the most vulnerable," he continued.

UNFPA's appeal focuses on scaling up essential sexual and reproductive health services, including safe deliveries, antenatal and postnatal care, and family planning. The response also prioritizes gender-based violence risk mitigation and response, including the establishment of safe spaces for women and girls and the provision of mental health and psychosocial support to address trauma and distress.

"We are deeply concerned about the impact of this crisis on women and girls," Nadal added.

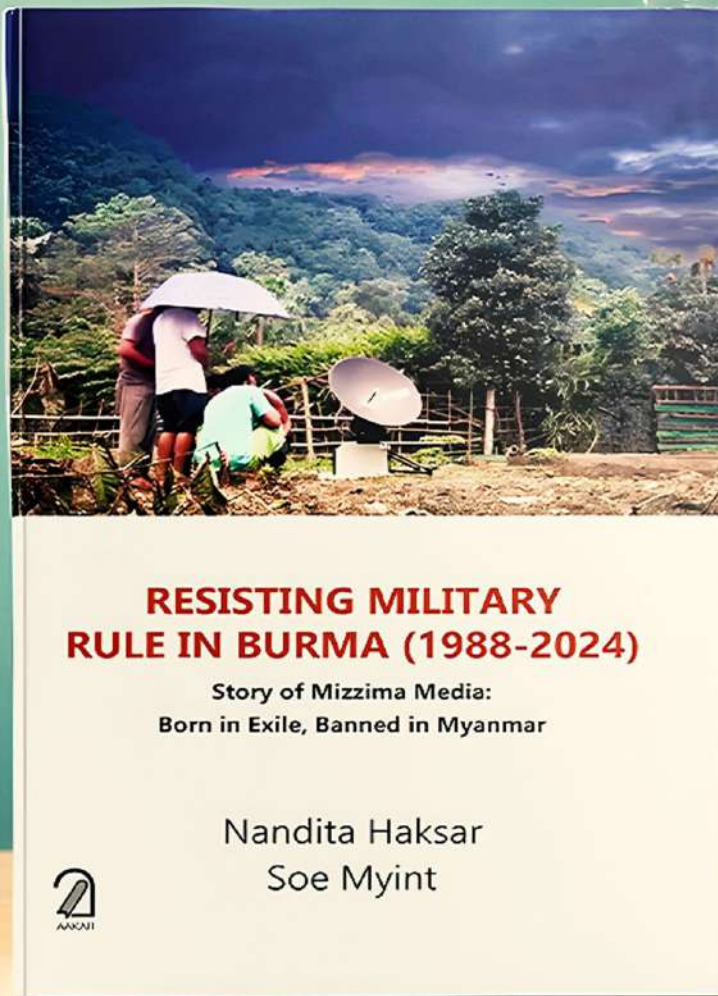
The \$12 million appeal will enable UNFPA to restore essential services, reduce protection risks, and support affected communities over the next five months.

UNFPA calls on the international community to stand in solidarity and urgently contribute to this appeal, ensuring that women, girls, and vulnerable populations in Myanmar receive the essential support they need.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



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Photo: Supplied

DIARRHEA OUTBREAK SPREADS ACROSS MYINGYAN VILLAGES AMID SEVERE TREATMENT SHORTAGES

A diarrhea outbreak that began over ten days ago is worsening across multiple villages in Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, as access to treatment remains critically limited, local sources told Mizzima.

According to residents, the outbreak has affected nearly 60 people across six villages, with each village reporting nine to ten cases on average. The majority of those infected are adults over the age of 50, including individuals aged 60 and above, many of whom are now in critical condition.

"People are falling ill because they are forced to defecate in the open while fleeing conflict zones. There are no toilets or clean water, and even those clutching medicine bottles are still suffering. We have no doctors and barely any medicine, only nurses and aides. Children and elderly people are getting sick, and it seems contagious. There is real fear it could spread to entire villages," a resident from Myingyan explained.

Sources report that at least 20 patients are in life-threatening condition. The names of affected villages have been withheld for security reasons, as many displaced people are sheltering nearby.

Worsening the crisis are junta checkpoints, which restrict movement and access to medicine. Many

patients are reportedly dying due to lack of medical care. Myingyan Township, with over 200 villages, has very few functioning dispensaries.

Locals say only one clinic exists for every ten villages, and most are staffed solely by nurses or aides without trained doctors.

Residents now living in the jungle due to ongoing junta offensives face extreme hardship. Schools and monasteries are no longer safe, and makeshift shelters offer little protection. Hygiene is nearly impossible, with no proper toilets and extreme water shortages due to the risk of junta presence near water sources.

"There's barely enough water to wash our hands, we have to reuse it. We can't go near wells because it's too dangerous. Now, even the old toilets are off-limits," said a displaced person hiding in the jungle.

Recent heavy rains have compounded the crisis, destroyed fragile palm-leaf shelters and forced people to remain exposed during storms.

While local resistance forces hold the rural areas of Myingyan Township, the junta army and Pyu Saw Htee militias maintain control over the town. Civilians are not only battling illness and displacement but also live under the constant threat of arrest, airstrikes, and artillery attacks.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA TO RESUME CLASSES FOR STUDENTS RETAKING MATRICULATION EXAM AFTER EARTHQUAKE BLAZE

Teachers began conducting lessons on 2 May for students from Naypyidaw, Mandalay, Sagaing regions, and Kachin State whose matriculation exam answer sheets were destroyed in a fire caused by the 28 March earthquake, junta-run newspapers reported.

Junta-appointed Education Minister Dr. Nyunt Pe made the announcement on 30 April during a meeting in Naypyidaw with university and college instructors assigned to teach the affected students.

"A total of 1,076 teachers from various universities and colleges have volunteered to teach students preparing to retake the matriculation exam. These teachers will be received at airports and bus terminals by designated local officials," Dr. Nyunt Pe said.

The earthquake on 28 March caused the collapse of Mandalay University's main building, triggering a

fire that destroyed the exam papers of 62,954 students from Mandalay and Sagaing regions, as well as Kachin State, according to a junta statement issued on 29 March.

As per junta-controlled media reports on 22 April, affected students are required to retake the matriculation exam on 16 June. They must collect their exam ID cards from exam supervisors at designated centres between 6 and 15 June.

Only students who sat for all subjects during the original March exam will be eligible to retake the test. The list of approved candidates will be posted at local education offices and exam centres, according to the junta.

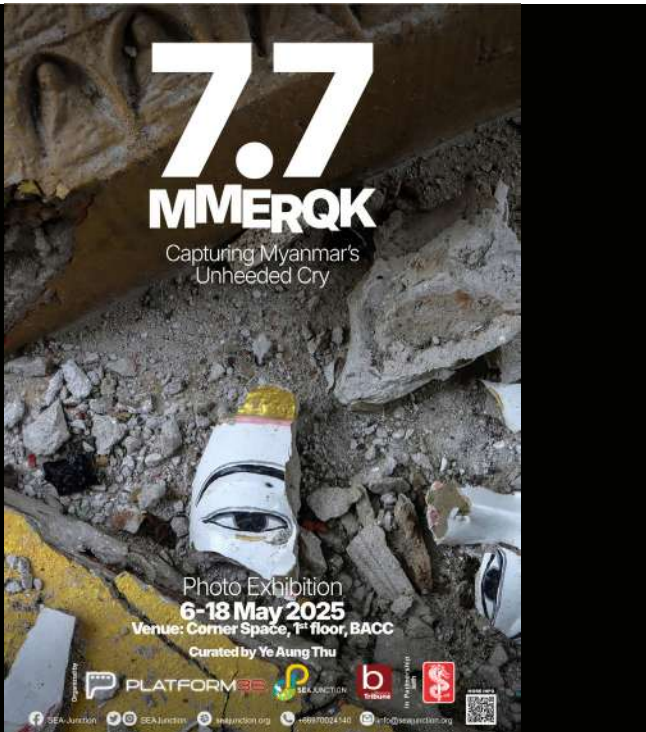


PHOTO EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS MYANMAR QUAKE CRISIS

SEA Junction will be hosting a Photo Exhibition "7.7 MMRQK; Capturing Myanmar's Unheeded Cry" organized by Platform 36, in collaboration with SEA Junction and Bangkok Tribune News and in partnership with CMB on 6-18 May 2025 on the Corner Space, 1st floor, BACC in Bangkok.

The exhibition will showcase photos of the disaster's impact, presenting powerful visual documentation of earthquake-affected areas near Mandalay and Sagaing, where significant damage has been reported. The display will also highlight surrounding regions such as Nay Pyi Taw, Bago, Magway, and parts of Shan State.

The objective is to raise funds for the earthquake-affected communities.

Myanmar recently experienced its most devastating earthquake in a century, a magnitude 7.7 event that struck the central region of Myanmar on March 28, 2025. This earthquake is among the most powerful globally in recent years and resulted in significant casualties. As of April 20, the disaster in Myanmar has left 3,735 dead, 5,108 injured, and 120 missing. In response, the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) announced that anti-junta militias under its command would pause all offensive military actions for two weeks. However, the regime continues to launch airstrikes, including in affected areas.

Urgent action is needed to provide relief to affected communities and to support long-term recovery efforts.

A group of concerned citizen photographers from Myanmar, organized in Platform 36, is putting on an exhibition in collaboration with SEA Junction and Bangkok Tribune News and in partnership with CMB.

The exhibition will showcase photos of the disaster's impact, presenting powerful visual documentation of earthquake-affected areas near Mandalay and Sagaing, where significant damage has been reported. The display will also highlight surrounding regions such as Naypyidaw, Bago, Magway, and parts of Shan State. Whenever available, "before" images of these post-earthquake scenes will be included alongside photo captions. Besides aiming to increase public awareness, the objective is to raise funds for earthquake-affected communities.

Platform 36, Bangkok Tribune, and SEA Junction are all working pro-bono and SEA Junction is shouldering the costs of the exhibition fully as part of the CMB-supported program "Staying Resilient Amidst Multiple Crises in Southeast Asia" in the sincere hope that many will donate. All funds will be entirely used toward medical supplies and healthcare services via trusted local and civil society organizations working on the ground. For those interested, the photos as well as postcards and booklets will be on offer for donations.





Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S FGWM DEMANDS 20,000-KYAT MINIMUM DAILY WAGE, END TO FORCED LABOUR ON INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY

On the occasion of the 135th International Workers' Day, the Federation of General Workers Myanmar (FGWM) called for a minimum daily wage of 20,000 kyats for factory workers in Myanmar excluding overtime pay alongside other key demands aimed at improving labour rights and protections.

In a statement issued on 1 May, FGWM urged factory and workshop owners to adopt an 8-hour workday with fair pay, ensure access to proper healthcare in the workplace, and immediately abolish all forms of forced labour.

Additional demands include the free monthly provision of sanitary pads for female workers, an end to the formation of sham labour organizations that do not represent workers' interests, and a stop to the junta's suppression of labour unions through forced registration and the collection of union leaders' personal data.

FGWM highlighted the dire conditions faced by workers, noting that many are subjected to over 12 hours of labour daily while earning wages that fall short of basic needs. It described domestic industrial zones as highly exploitative, with widespread instances of forced labour, child labour, and crackdowns on unionization efforts.

The group also condemned the persecution of labour leaders involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), many of whom have been arrested, killed, or targeted for their resistance to military rule. It added that even legal-age workers who fled conscription under the junta's Civil Service Law to seek jobs abroad remain vulnerable to abusive employers, foreign policies, and continued repression by the military regime.

FGWM emphasized that the only way to resolve the ongoing crisis is to end the military dictatorship. The organization pledged to collaborate with the international labour movement to restore democracy in Myanmar.

It urged global labour and human rights organizations to pressure the junta to halt the forced conscription of industrial workers and returnees. It also called for international support to help domestic and migrant workers form independent, worker-led unions and to ensure safe, lawful employment conditions. Additionally, FGWM appealed for assistance to CDM participants and efforts to strengthen civil service unions.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON MAGWAY REGION VILLAGE KILLS FOUR CIVILIANS, INCLUDING YOUNG GIRL

A military airstrike on Anyarkatin village in Saw Township, Magway Region, killed four civilians including an eight-year-old girl on 1 May, according to the local resistance group Yaw A Lin Tan.

At around 10:55 am, a fighter jet from the Tada-U Air Force Base dropped two 250-pound bombs near the village school, the group reported.

"One bomb hit the road next to the school, while the second exploded about 100 yards away, destroying homes on both sides of the road," a local resident said.

Yaw A Lin Tan stated that there was no fighting in the area at the time of the strike, accusing the junta of deliberately targeting civilians. The victims were identified as Daw May Kyi Lay (56), Daw Tin Tin Khaing (52), Daw Pyar Thar (38), and Ma Khon Set Cho, a girl just eight years old.

Local reports confirm that five houses were destroyed in the bombing, along with the village school building.

Some residents fled the area in the aftermath of the attack, while local groups have begun clearing debris and working to secure the village.

Yaw A Lin Tan also warned that the junta has intensified air assaults across the Yaw region, urging residents to remain alert and ready for further attacks.

According to the group, the junta carried out at least seven airstrikes across various townships in the Yaw region in April alone, inflicting damage on civilian communities.

NINE MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN CHIN DEFENCE FORCE AMBUSH IN MAGWAY'S NGAPHE TOWNSHIP



Photo: Supplied

Nine junta soldiers were killed in an ambush by the Chin Defence Force – Asho in Ngaphe Township, Magway Region, according to a statement released by the group on 1 May.

The clash occurred around 8:00 am on 30 April, when a junta unit of roughly 20 soldiers from the Pazee village outpost came under attack during a road security operation, the statement said.

The Chin Defence Force – Asho reported that the fallen troops belonged to junta's Defence Industry No. 13. The resistance group claimed to have seized nine MA-series rifles, along with ammunition and other military gear.

The junta forces were reportedly stationed at a monastery in Pazee village, serving as a guard post for the Nat Yay Kan Air Defence Base. Around 130 troops from Light Infantry Division (LID) 99 and Myanmar Defence Industries No. 2, 10, 13, and 14 had been deployed there.

The Chin Defence Force – Asho also accused junta troops in Pazee of looting and selling off property belonging to local villagers.

Earlier in February, the group announced it had captured 23 junta soldiers who had deserted their posts at the Nat Yay Kan Air Defence Base, along with their weapons and ammunition.



Photo: AFP

SSPP SEEKS DIALOGUE TO EASE TENSIONS WITH MNDAA IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

The Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) announced that it intends to resolve rising military tensions with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) through dialogue between the leadership of both groups.

The announcement follows a series of armed clashes between the two sides near Nam Ma village, located between Lashio and Hsipaw townships, in northern Shan State.

According to the SSPP, eight clashes and 24 incidents of close-range fighting occurred on 28 and 29 April. The conflict reportedly escalated after the MNDAA demanded that SSPP forces withdraw from Nam Ma and Kon Paung villages.

The following day, when MNDAA troops entered Nam Ma, SSPP units opened fire, resulting in a half-hour skirmish. Casualties were reported on both sides, according to local sources.

In its statement, the SSPP blamed the flare-up on movements during the second phase of Operation 1027, alleging that MNDAA troops had advanced into areas under SSPP control. As of now, the MNDAA has not released a statement regarding the recent hostilities.

Both groups are members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), which also includes the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Arakan Army (AA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Ongoing territorial disputes exist between several of these groups, including between the KIA and TNLA, KIA and MNDAA, and TNLA and MNDAA.

Currently, tensions between the SSPP and MNDAA remain high in areas around Sein Kyawt village in Hsipaw Township and Han Nar village in Lashio Township, prompting residents to flee in fear of renewed fighting.



UN Secretary General visits a Rohingya refugee camp.
Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH BACKS UN AID CORRIDOR PROPOSAL TO MYANMAR'S TROUBLED RAKHINE STATE

Bangladesh's interim government said Tuesday it was open to a UN aid corridor through its territory to reach starving civilians in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

But the proposal, raised by United Nations chief Antonio Guterres on a visit to Bangladesh in March, has also sparked widespread criticism by politicians in Dhaka.

Around a million members of the persecuted and mostly Muslim Rohingya live in squalid relief camps in Bangladesh, most of whom arrived after fleeing a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

Bangladesh, and the UN, want to provide stable conditions in Myanmar for Rohingya to eventually return -- but in their old homeland in Rakhine state, the rebel Arakan Army (AA) stands off against junta forces.

On Monday Myanmar marked one month since suffering its fiercest earthquake in more than a century, with military bombardments unabated despite a humanitarian truce in the four-year civil war, as thousands of survivors camp in makeshift shelters.

"Our position is that should there be a UN-led humanitarian support to the state of Rakhine, Bangladesh would be willing to provide logistic support," Khalilur Rahman, the interim government's adviser on Rohingya issues, told AFP.

"We believe that the UN-supported humanitarian aid would help stabilise Rakhine and create conditions for the return of the refugees."

But Rahman said the aid route was only at a "consultation stage" and would require consensus among multiple groups.

"We are in touch with the UN and other concerned parties in this regard," he said.

Touhid Hossain, foreign affairs adviser in the interim government, said on Sunday that Dhaka would consider a "humanitarian passage", provided the UN agrees to certain conditions.

But that prompted worry among some powerful Bangladeshi political parties.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the key Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), said the interim government must consult with others.

"A humanitarian passage through Bangladesh is intertwined with the independence and sovereignty of our country, as well as regional peace and stability," Fakhrul told a rally.

Jamaat-e-Islami chief Shafiqur Rahman said his party was concerned about related "security issues".

Louise Barber, from the UN office in Bangladesh, said the proposal required the approval of the authorities in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

"Any humanitarian support, or supplies across the border from Bangladesh to Myanmar, will first need to be agreed between the two governments," Barber said.

AFP

KAREN COMMUNITIES REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN SALWEEN BASIN

Indigenous Karen communities in the Karen National Union (KNU) Mutraw District have reaffirmed their dedication to wildlife conservation through the release of the Way Boo Hta Declaration, a renewed statement of commitments aimed at preserving biodiversity and indigenous stewardship traditions in the Salween River Basin.

The declaration was issued following a two-day community gathering on April 17–18 at Way Boo Hta village, Butho Township, Mutraw District. Mutraw District is also known as Hpapun Township, Karen State.

Convened under the theme “Promotion of Karen Traditional Knowledge, Practices of Wildlife Conservation and Management in the Role of Community Rangers”, the event brought together 91 participants, including representatives of the Salween Peace Park Governing Committee and its working groups, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 5, KNU district leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), and local community members.


Organized to preserve the Eastern Landscape of the Salween Peace Park and protect endangered wildlife through the revitalization of Karen indigenous

knowledge and increased community engagement, the gathering reaffirmed the cultural and ecological significance of the region. It also emphasized that enforcement alone is not enough. Traditional beliefs and collective participation are key to long-term conservation.

Participants reviewed previous commitments made in the 2022 Wah Klay Hta Declaration and adopted eight new action points. These include expanding ranger recruitment and training, designating non-hunting zones, banning electro-fishing and the hunting of animals crossing rivers or entering villages, restoring degraded forests, and enhancing collaboration to prevent uncontrolled fires.

The Salween River Basin, home to species such as the tiger, Chinese pangolin, and Eastern hoolock gibbon, is a globally significant biodiversity hotspot. Karen communities view the protection of these species as both an environmental imperative and a reaffirmation of their identity and traditions.

Through the Way Boo Hta Declaration, the communities call for increased cooperation to ensure both people and wildlife can continue to coexist and thrive in the Salween Peace Park.



Major General Saw San Aung, Chief of Staff of the DKBA. Photo: Han Htoo Zaw

DKBA ACCUSED OF TORTURE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS AT MYANMAR ONLINE FRAUD COMPOUND

HAN HTOO ZAW

A disturbing video showing the torture of a handcuffed man with electric shocks by an individual in camouflage pants went viral on social media in February, drawing widespread condemnation.

The 4-minute and 22-second clip shows three Burmese-speaking men, one of whom is seen torturing a foreign national. The victim was later identified as Umer Asif, a 27-year-old Pakistani man who was allegedly trafficked into Myanmar by a Chinese-led online money laundering syndicate.

The incident reportedly occurred at an illegal online scam operation site known as the "Jogi Park compound," located among rocky hills near Paletdo village in Myawaddy Township, a region under the control of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). The site is reportedly run by a Chinese mafia network.

Umer Asif was among 261 foreign nationals rescued from the operation and handed over to Thai authorities by the DKBA on 12 February.

Drugged, trafficked, and forced to work

Asif travelled to Thailand in October 2024 from Dubai, intending to vacation with his cousin, lawyer Raees Abbasi. However, shortly after landing at a Bangkok airport, he was drugged by a taxi driver who offered him two cans of what appeared to be energy drinks. Upon regaining consciousness, he found himself in Karen State, Myanmar, deep inside DKBA-controlled territory.

According to Asif, he was sold to a company called "Zongfa" which specialized in online scams and money laundering.

"They beat us brutally. We were locked in dark rooms. After a few days, they forced us to perform online tasks related to money laundering. When we refused, they shocked us with electricity. We were beaten daily and forced to work more than 18 hours a day. The food was terrible. Only some foul-smelling Chinese meals," he said.

He further claimed that the abuse came not only from Chinese handlers but also from DKBA soldiers and local security personnel.

Video evidence of torture emerges

In the video clip, Asif is seen with his hands cuffed behind his back inside a toilet. He is struck repeatedly with a stick by a man in a DKBA uniform, while two other uniformed men stand nearby. One of them, armed with a firearm, communicates via a walkie-talkie-style device (believed to be an ICON radio) with a superior.

"Sir, we are in the second room near the dormitory and the intersection garage," the man says. His superior replies that he will arrive shortly.

The man then requests for his superior to meet him in the garage for a briefing. Immediately after the call, Asif is beaten and kicked for more than three minutes before another individual intervenes and pulls him out of the bathroom.

The footage appears to have been secretly recorded from the ceiling of the toilet. Asif can be heard apologizing in English, though the torture continues unabated.

DKBA accused of brutality and torture at online scam facilities

The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) is facing serious allegations of human rights abuses after

reportedly providing security for, and participating in, the torture of trafficked individuals held in online money laundering compounds in Myanmar's Karen State.

The heavily guarded facility is enclosed by high walls with four watchtowers and staffed by two types of security: local personnel dressed in black and armed with Tasers and batons, and DKBA soldiers, identifiable by their uniforms and firearms.

"The DKBA soldiers are the most brutal. They'll do whatever the boss tells them for money. DKBA soldiers are paid 4,000 baht per month, with bonuses for capturing escapees up to 45,000 baht," said the source, identified only as Ko Naing, a former security guard who worked at one such site.

Footage and photographs obtained by Mizzima show individuals in DKBA uniforms assaulting trafficked victims. One of the most graphic incidents involved the



torture of Pakistani national Umer Asif, who was beaten around 4 am on 19 December.

"The DKBA guards the scam sites for the Chinese mafia. If the Chinese order it, the DKBA beat us and shock us with electricity. They are merciless. People are dying in there, and the DKBA feels nothing. They're worse than the Chinese," said Asif, who was held captive for four months.

DKBA denies allegations

In a phone interview, DKBA Chief of Staff Major General Saw San Aung denied any official involvement in the abuse.

"If you have evidence such as photos or video, bring it forward and we will take action. We don't tolerate

human rights violations," he said, but refused to answer further questions and hung up.

While the DKBA claims it only provides security for Chinese businesspeople, a Mizzima journalist who visited the region confirmed that DKBA forces were guarding the compound facilities directly.

The DKBA held a press conference in March claiming to have rescued victims of trafficking, yet despite this, interviews with survivors suggest otherwise. A Mizzima reporter was able to interview four victims of human trafficking who attended the press conference.

In the interview, it was stated that DKBA soldiers themselves were involved in the torture, but due to security reasons, the interviewee was not allowed to reveal his nationality.

Deaths reported amid torture in human trafficking networks

It has been reported that several victims of human trafficking have died as a result of brutal torture.

"Two Chinese nationals died. They were beaten and subjected to electric shocks by both Chinese mafia members and DKBA soldiers throughout the night. They died the next morning. Some Pakistani victims have gone missing. Please help us. Many people are still being beaten daily and have yet to be released," said Umer Asif.

According to accounts from victims, those who fail to follow the orders of Chinese criminal syndicate members faced horrific abuse. Methods of torture included beatings, electrocution, bone fractures, knife wounds, starvation, and confinement in dark rooms. These acts were allegedly primarily carried out by DKBA troops and affiliated security personnel.



Video clip of Umer Asif being tortured.



DKBA soldiers guard outside an online money laundering facility in the Kyauk Khat area.
Photo: Han Htoo Zaw

Victims who sustained serious injuries were sometimes treated by medical professionals assigned by the DKBA. However, several individuals have reportedly suffered permanent physical disabilities.

"Some of the victims are no longer able to walk due to broken legs and arms. They are covered in injuries, some were scalded with hot water, and others had their fingernails ripped out," said a former resident of the Kyauk Khat area, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

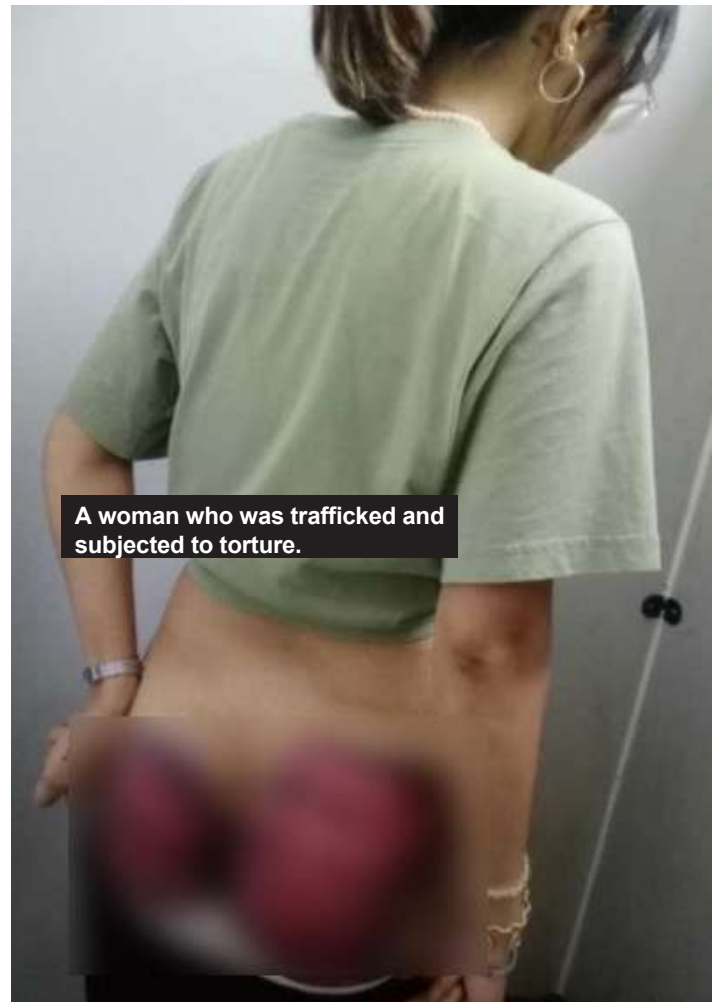
It is estimated that over 10,000 individuals from countries including Ethiopia, Cameroon, Ghana, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Uganda, Indonesia, the Philippines, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Burundi, Malaysia, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Laos, Liberia, and South Africa are currently trapped at scam centres in DKBA-controlled territory.

Amid growing pressure from China and Southeast Asian nations to curb online money laundering, Thailand has imposed a ban since February on the export of over 20 categories of goods, including electrical appliances and fuel, to Myawaddy in Karen State, the Three Pagodas region, and Tachilek in Shan State where scam centres are located.

In response, DKBA and Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) forces reportedly rescued and repatriated some foreign nationals held in online scam compounds through the Thai authorities. However, recent on-the-ground reports suggest that a large number of

individuals remain detained in ongoing online fraud operations still active in several locations.

Since 2019, the rise of online money laundering operations in Waley Myaing village under DKBA control has enabled Chinese criminal groups to expand their presence in areas such as Kyauk Khat, Paletdo, Minletpan, Thae Phyu Chaung, and the Three Pagodas region in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, and near Myawaddy.



A woman who was trafficked and subjected to torture.

Photo: AFP

YANGON'S ICONIC NO. 54 MANSION FAILS TO SELL AT FOURTH AUCTION DESPITE PRICE CUTS

The fourth auction of the high-profile No. 54 property on University Avenue Road in Yangon ended unsuccessfully on 29 April, as no buyers came forward despite a further price reduction, a source close to the court confirmed.

The latest auction, held in front of the property, listed a starting price of 270 billion kyats lowered at the request of Aung San Oo's legal team. However, the price drops still failed to attract any bidders.

A court auction officer is expected to submit a report to the judiciary on the outcome of the failed sale, the source added.

The property has now gone unsold through four consecutive auctions. Previous attempts were held at court-set floor prices of 315 billion kyats, 300 billion kyats, and 297 billion kyats, all of which failed to draw interest from potential buyers.

Legal experts told Mizzima that the law permits repeated auctions of the property, with adjusted floor prices, until a successful sale is achieved.

Plot No. 54 registered in the name of Daw Khin Kyi covers nearly two acres and features two residential buildings. In a 2016 ruling by the Yangon Western District Court, the two-story house and half the land were awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi, while the remaining land and the single-story house were assigned to her brother, Aung San Oo.

Aung San Oo has since sought to overturn the division through multiple appeals, aiming to auction the entire estate and divide the proceeds equally. In 2022, under the military junta, the Supreme Court ruled in his favour.

Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team has consistently objected to the handling and proposed auction of the property.

Currently, the National Unity Government (NUG) has designated Plot No. 54 as an interim national cultural heritage site. The NUG has warned that any action involving the sale, possession, or destruction of the property will result in legal consequences.



Photo: AFP

OVER 72,000 MIGRANTS DEAD, DISAPPEARED GLOBALLY SINCE 2014: UN

More than 72,000 deaths and disappearances have been documented along migration routes around the world in the past decade, most of them in crisis-affected countries, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Last year saw the highest migrant death toll on record, with at least 8,938 people dying on migration routes, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

"These numbers are a tragic reminder that people risk their lives when insecurity, lack of opportunity, and other pressures leave them with no safe or viable options at home," IOM chief Amy Pope said in a statement.

The report by her UN agency found that nearly three-quarters of all migrant deaths and disappearances recorded globally since 2014 occurred as people fled insecurity, conflict, disaster and other humanitarian crises.

One in four were "from countries affected by humanitarian crises, with the deaths of thousands of Afghans, Rohingya, and Syrians documented on migration routes worldwide", said the IOM's Missing Migrants Report.

The report said that more than 52,000 people died while trying to escape from one of the 40 countries in the world where the UN has a crisis response plan or humanitarian response plan in place.

Pope urged international investment "to create stability and opportunity within communities, so that migration is a choice, not a necessity".

"And when staying is no longer possible, we must work together to enable safe, legal, and orderly pathways that protect lives."

The Central Mediterranean remains the deadliest migration route in the world, with nearly 25,000 people lost at sea in the past decade, IOM said.

More than 12,000 of those had been lost at sea after departing from war-torn Libya, with countless others disappearing while transiting the Sahara Desert, the report said.

More than 5,000 people died while trying to leave crisis-ravaged Afghanistan in the past decade, many of them since the Taliban retook power in 2021.

And more than 3,100 members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority had died during the period, many in shipwrecks or while crossing into Bangladesh.

"Too often, migrants fall through the cracks," warned Julia Black, coordinator of IOM's Missing Migrants Project and author of the report.

"And due to data gaps – especially in war zones and disaster areas – the true death toll is likely far higher than what we've recorded," she said in the statement.

Soe Thi Ha for Mizzima

US CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING HIGHLIGHTS CRITICAL RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN BURMA

The Congressional Briefing titled "Burma: Humanitarian Crisis and Violations of Religious Freedom and Human Rights," held on April 28 at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C., focused on the ongoing humanitarian and religious crisis in Burma

The briefing was organized by the Burma Research Institute (BRI) in collaboration with other advocacy groups. Speakers included Senator Chuck Grassley, Senator Chris Van Hollen, Duwa Lashi La, Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG), Aung Kyi Nyunt, chairman of the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Susie Gelman, US Commission on International Religious Freedoms, Wai Wai Nu, executive director of the Women's Peace Network, and Zo Tum Hmung, president and CEO of the Burma Research Institute.

The briefing discussed the range of challenges faced in protecting the people of Burma in the wake of the 2021 military coup, and the fallout from the recent March earthquake that killed over 3,900 people and destroyed large amounts of infrastructure in the central part of the country.

Ms Gelman outlined the current challenges of holding the Myanmar junta accountable and protecting Myanmar people of various religions, including Myanmar citizens taking refuge in the USA under the new US government administration. Wai Wai Nu called for help for the Myanmar people and those who suffered as a result of the recent earthquake.

The briefing tackled the ongoing humanitarian crisis and military atrocities perpetrated by the Burmese junta. The military junta's "four-cuts" strategy has led to widespread destruction, including the burning of civilian structures and denial of humanitarian aid, resulting in over 17.6 million people requiring assistance. Since the 2021 coup, nearly 1.5 million people have been displaced, and over 4,000 individuals have been killed by military forces.

Senator Grassley pointed out the challenges in trying to stop the brutal junta war given the Myanmar junta is supported by the Chinese government. He pointed out the Chinese Communist Party's attacks on religion, noting that photos – distributed to attendees of the briefing – show destruction by the junta of religious buildings, particularly churches and mosques. If there is a strategy to target religious institutions and leaders,

the United State's government needs to "stand behind" religious leaders and institutions, he noted. They need to back the BURMA Act and recognize "we are back in the Cold War" only "this Cold War is hot. It is hot in the Middle East, it is hot in Ukraine and it is hot in Burma. This isn't a Cold War situation, there are people being shot and bombed every day." Hence, it is a hot war.

"We will win Burma if we don't neglect it," Mr Grassley said. He said they have the winning hand as the Burmese junta only holds about a third of the country. He also raised the question as to whether the USA should be allowing China to use Burma as a gateway to the Indian Ocean, noting the strategic importance of the country on the geopolitical stage.

The main focus of the gathering was on the humanitarian crisis and the challenges to religious freedom in Burma.

Ethnic and religious minorities, including Rohingya Muslims and Chin Christians, continue to face systemic discrimination and violence. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that Burma be designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" due to ongoing violations.

Reverend Elijah Brown told the briefing that the junta was targeting Baptist churches in Myanmar, noting there are 1.7 million Baptists in Myanmar and over 5,000 Baptist churches. Prior to the 2021 military coup, the Baptist Church in Myanmar was the second-fastest growing Baptist Church in the world, he said. This rapidly-growing Baptist Church has faced the horrors of brutal bombing. Since the coup, the junta has targeted seminaries, arrested key leaders, and attacked churches, shot and killed pastors and forced thousands as individuals to flee as internally displaced or refugees.

One of the displays at the venue included photos of Mindat Baptist Church in Chin State that was bombed on Palm Sunday.

"Civil and religious freedoms have been dismantled, with the Tatmadaw launching a campaign of violence, particularly against religious minorities, including Christians, the great majority of whom are Baptists," Reverend Brown said.

"Our concern is for Christians, Rohingya Muslims and all the people of Myanmar," Reverend Brown said. "How can we sing the song of joy if freedom is shackled and chained?"

The briefing highlighted ongoing international efforts to hold the Burmese military accountable, including cases at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

Advocacy groups are calling for increased sanctions targeting Burma's financial sector to cut off resources fueling the military's operations. And as Mr Grassley pointed out, there is a need to implement the BURMA Act.

"My concern is, this situation is blowing up, people are dying, and something needs to happen," he said, in response to a question from a journalist.

Mr Van Hollen echoed the call for the Donald Trump administration to implement the BURMA Act and implement sanctions on the military junta.

Since Trump administration took power in January this year, the US government's stance on Burma and the military junta is unclear.

NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La told the briefing, speaking online, that prior to the earthquake the Myanmar people were already facing a serious humanitarian crisis. He outlined the key challenges the country faced, including the attacks on civilians, and the targeting of religious buildings and minorities, as the opposition presses for a free, democratic federal union.

The briefing underscored the urgent need for international intervention to address the escalating crisis and support the people of Burma in their struggle for human, religious and democratic rights in the wake of the 2021 coup and March 2025 earthquake, the latter bringing further destruction to the country.



WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2025 FOCUSES ON THE PROS AND CONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

World Press Freedom Day 2025 on 3 May presents a crucial opportunity for the global community to reflect on the multifaceted impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the press and the media, the evolving role of journalism, and the transformative potential of AI-driven technologies in shaping reliable information ecosystems.

The theme for this year is: "Reporting in the Brave New World: The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Press Freedom and the Media."

As AI reshapes media landscapes worldwide, the marking of World Press Freedom Day 2025 provides an opportunity to explore how AI can both support and challenge the flow of information, enhance press freedom, and contribute to democratic consolidation and sustainable development in a rapidly changing digital world, according to a Concept Note published by UNESCO.

As the Concept Note explains, this day serves as a vital opportunity for all stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to freedom of expression, press freedom, access to information, and the safety of journalists and media workers.

The commemoration holds particular significance in Myanmar, where the media continues to face grave challenges and repression under the jackboots of the military junta. Now more than ever, it is crucial to raise our collective voice in support of a free and independent press, given the difficulties the press face reporting a country at war.

This year's theme encourages thoughtful reflection on how technological advancements - particularly AI - is reshaping journalism and the media landscape. It highlights both the opportunities and risks these developments pose to freedom of expression and the integrity of the press.

CONFERENCE

On May 5-7, 2025, Romania and UNESCO will co-organize the World Press Freedom Day Global Conference.

While the media landscape has changed significantly since the UN General Assembly proclaimed World Press Freedom Day (WPDF) in 1993, the unprecedented use and development of AI systems are now playing a transformative role in journalism, media, and human rights with unforeseen consequences, according to the Concept Note.

Despite these changes, the core values of a free, independent, and pluralistic media, as stated in the landmark Windhoek Declaration of 1991 as well as the ideals of Information as a Public Good stated in the Windhoek+30 Declaration of 2021, remain as crucial as ever.

SUGGESTED AI BENEFITS

As part of the emergence of AI, advanced machine learning systems have become widely used tools capable of supporting tasks once exclusive of humans, such as content generation, information analysis and presentation, and alternatives to internet search tools. This technological revolution is reshaping how information is gathered, organized, processed, produced, disseminated, and accessed.

It introduces new challenges and trends related to ethics, accountability, misinformation, disinformation, bias, trust, and the practice of journalism.

Artificial Intelligence can be used to offer immense potential to enhance freedom of expression by democratizing access to information, opening up new ways to gather facts, synthesize information and data, empowering individuals to share their perspectives,

and fostering creativity across global digital platforms. AI tools, such as language translation software, content creation assistants, and real-time data analysis, can enable journalists to reach wider audiences, breaking down barriers of language, geography, and technical skills.

POTENTIAL DANGERS

However, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression has highlighted that while AI can accelerate the global sharing of information and ideas - an extraordinary boon for freedom of expression - it also presents new dangers. In this regard, the recently published Global Digital Compact as a companion document to the Pact for the Future agreed by UN member states in September 2024, emphasizes the urgent need to address violence amplified by technology, including sexual and gender-based violence, hate speech, misinformation, cyberbullying, and child exploitation, while protecting privacy and freedom of expression. It calls for promoting integrity, tolerance, and respect in the digital space, and strengthening international cooperation to combat online misinformation and hate speech in alignment with international law.

AI is increasingly shaping public policy, consumer behaviour, lifestyles, and professions, creating significant tensions around freedom of expression and journalism as we know them. This is the reason why, without concerted efforts to mitigate risks and harness the opportunities AI presents, these challenges could worsen.

This year, World Press Freedom Day 2025 seeks to understand the benefits and delve into the risks and challenges to freedom of expression and the right to information, the threats that are arising and the opportunities for a better governance of AI and to ensure AI is designed, used and deployed in alignment to international human rights standards.

RISKS FOR MEDIA

AI affects how users seek, receive and impart information globally. On the one hand, algorithms are tailored for user engagement, prioritizing content based on reliable sources. They can also provide users with automated fact-checking and content moderation tools to avoid the spreading of false narratives and to promote healthier public discourse.

AI has the potential to transform freedom of expression, amplifying access to information and ideas on an unprecedented scale and enabling the automated generation of human-like content. In the media, AI-driven tools can influence the quality and diversity of information available, bringing societally relevant stories to light and supporting new, data-driven investigative journalism. These tools also help broaden representation by diversifying perspectives, including socially marginalized groups such as Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities, and fostering mutual understanding within society. AI-driven tools are becoming a key factor in the future of media, offering both opportunities for innovation and challenges in maintaining journalistic integrity and human oversight.

AI opens up opportunities for journalists. One of the key advantages is the ability to interact efficiently with enormous amounts of information, allowing for advanced data processing that makes information more accessible. AI can analyze and select from a wide range of different sources, including social media, which broadens the scope of search and reporting.

This is assuming the original data is correct, which is not always the case.

In addition to improving information retrieval, AI enhances content creation through automated fact-checking, data visualization, translation services, and summarization of news articles. These features not

only streamline the journalistic process but also enable journalists to present information in a more engaging manner – assuming the journalists carefully check the generated material.

The downside, however, is the potential for media job losses, according to critics.

‘ENRICHING’ REPORTING

The use of transparent algorithms increases access to reliable sources, thereby enriching the quality and diversity of reporting. While these advancements provide journalists with an expanded toolkit, it is essential to address the legal implications surrounding access to big data. Establishing clear legal frameworks for information access will ensure that the benefits of AI in journalism are realized while upholding ethical and legal standards.

One of the challenges is the potential for unintended plagiarism, with contents lacking suitable credits, according to critics.

When it comes to misinformation, disinformation, and online hate speech, AI plays a dual role. On one hand, it helps media identify and combat potentially harmful content through fact-checking, reverse image searches, and pattern recognition to detect false narratives and abusive language. On the other hand, AI tools can amplify such content when exploited by ill-intentioned actors for targeted propaganda or when algorithms prioritize engagement over accuracy, spreading rumours or hatred to journalists lacking adequate digital competencies.

This "double-edged sword" effect of AI underscores the need for ethical AI use and improved media and information literacy.

AI tools have also enabled new forms of censorship. Some powerful actors use AI for mass surveillance

of journalists, citizens, and communications without adhering to due diligence processes or aligning with international human rights standards. This creates a chilling effect, discouraging those who seek to expose information for the public interest.

Some actors are also promoting policies to incentivize digital platforms to use machine learning to suppress disfavoured political, social, and religious speech, further complicating the situation.

In parallel, private actors, such as search engines and social media platforms, increasingly use AI to filter and moderate content by identifying, removing, or deprioritizing specific information. They also curate content by ranking and disseminating tailored information based on user profiles built from behavioral data. These social media platforms and other internet intermediaries have become gatekeepers of information, exerting a form of editorial control over the content we consume. This is a serious challenge.

DANGERS OF HOMOGENIZATION

It is not hard to see the trend of AI contributing to the homogenization of the global media landscape. AI amplifies popular content through recommendation algorithms, standardizes storytelling styles with content automation, and favours larger media organizations with advanced AI capabilities. This has the potential to reduce diversity in perspectives and cultural expressions, marginalizes smaller outlets and disadvantaged populations, and concentrates influence among a few dominant players, ultimately limiting the plurality of voices in the global media ecosystem.

This action on policies and legal frameworks should also be complemented with user empowerment. As algorithms and automated systems influence information flow, media and information literacy can help individuals assess sources' credibility, identify misinformation, and understand AI-generated content mechanisms, fostering an informed citizenship,

enabling responsible digital engagement and decision-making. Prioritizing media literacy can mitigate risks associated with AI while enhancing information quality and diversity.

FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD?

Finally, technology-based threats, such as disinformation and algorithmic bias, necessitate technology-based solutions, at the crossroads between advanced technical skills, an approach based on human rights, and a logic of open access and promotion of information as a public good. Relevant actors should cooperate to develop advanced AI-driven tools for detection and mitigation of misinformation, and the creation of secure, ethical digital ecosystems, according to the Concept Note.

The pros and cons of AI will affect the media landscape globally. But what this means for media in Myanmar is unclear at this stage, according to independent media in the country.

What is sure is the Myanmar military junta is already using technology to crack down on “free and independent media” and seek out and arrest journalists operating undercover in the country – with the help of technicians supplied by China and Russia, to name the most important countries involved. It is therefore obvious the junta will use AI – when applicable – in their information war. This could pose further threats to freedom of expression in the badlands of Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

'ALARMING DETERIORATION' OF US PRESS FREEDOM UNDER TRUMP, SAYS RSF

Media rights group RSF warned Friday about "an alarming deterioration in press freedom" in the United States under President Donald Trump as well as "unprecedented" difficulties for independent journalists around the world.

Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, which has been tracking press freedom for the last 23 years, said its main index had fallen to its lowest-ever level.

"For the first time in the history of the index, the conditions for practising journalism are poor in half of the world's countries and satisfactory in fewer than one in four," an annual review of media freedom globally by the charity concluded.

RSF editorial director Anne Bocande highlighted the role of economic pressures in undermining fact-based reporting, with many independent outlets having to close because of funding difficulties.

Although spending on online advertising was still rising -- hitting \$247.3 billion in 2024, according to RSF -- a growing share is captured by online giants Facebook, Google or Amazon rather than media companies.

"When journalists are impoverished, they no longer have the means to resist the enemies of the press -- those who champion disinformation and propaganda," Bocande said in a statement.

'Authoritarian shift'

RSF highlighted how Trump had made difficult conditions worse by axing US financial support for state-backed broadcasters such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), as

well as US foreign development aid that assisted media outlets overseas.

After a fall of 11 places in 2024, the United States declined another two to 57th place on the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, one behind formerly war-torn Sierra Leone in west Africa.

The index, calculated according to the number of violent incidents involving journalists and other data compiled by experts, was topped by oil-rich Norway for the ninth year in a row. Estonia and the Netherlands were second and third.

"In the United States, Donald Trump's second term as president has led to an alarming deterioration in press freedom, indicative of an authoritarian shift in government," RSF said.

"His administration has weaponised institutions, cut support for independent media, and sidelined reporters."

Large parts of the United States were now "news deserts," RSF said.

Trump signed Thursday an executive order to cut public funding for National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), accusing the news outlets of being biased.

On Wednesday, he announced that he was considering legal action against The New York Times.

He is also suing media group Paramount over a pre-election interview last year of his Democratic rival Kamala Harris on its CBS channel.

Trump alleges it was edited to remove an embarrassing response, although many legal analysts view the case as baseless and likely to be dismissed or fail due to constitutional protections for freedom of the press.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a media watchdog, also warned Wednesday that press freedom in the United States was declining and it urged newsrooms to form a united front against the "rising tide of threats" facing them.

Other countries that have suffered major declines in press freedom over the last year include Argentina (down 21 places to 87th) under right-wing Trump ally Javier Milei, and Tunisia (down 11 places to 129th).

RSF also again highlighted the plight of Palestinian journalists seeking to report on Israel's devastating bombardment of Gaza.

"In Gaza, the Israeli army has destroyed newsrooms, killed nearly 200 journalists and imposed a total blockade on the strip for over 18 months," it said.

Israel meanwhile had dropped a further 11 places to 112th and "continues to repress its own news media".

AFP



Radio Free Asia
www.rfa.org

RADIO FREE ASIA SHUTS LANGUAGE SERVICES AFTER TRUMP CUTS

Radio Free Asia said Friday it will lay off almost all of its staff and close production in several languages, including a rare Uyghur service, after President Donald Trump cut off funding.

Radio Free Asia -- created by the United States with a mission to deliver news in countries without free media -- said it will terminate 280 staff members in Washington, accounting for more than 90 percent of its US-based workforce, as well as 20 positions overseas.

It said it would no longer produce original content in Uyghur, in what it described as the world's only editorially independent news service in the language of the mostly Muslim people centered in China's northwestern Xinjiang region.

The United States has described China's treatment of Uyghurs as genocide, a charge strongly rejected by Beijing.

Radio Free Asia will also terminate services in Tibetan, Burmese and English. It will maintain production in Mandarin, Cantonese, Khmer and Vietnamese.

"We are in an unconscionable situation," Radio Free Asia president and CEO Bay Fang said in a statement.

"We are losing journalists who broke the news about the (Chinese Communist Party's) genocide against the Uyghurs, who risked their lives covering a civil war in Myanmar, who exposed human trafficking networks in Southeast Asia and who brought to light the crackdown on religious freedom in Tibet," she said.

The Trump administration in mid-March said it was ending financing for US government-funded broadcasters, including Voice of America, even though Congress had approved the money.

A federal court last week issued a preliminary order to the government to restore funding, saying a legal challenge by Radio Free Asia as well as US-funded Arabic media was likely to succeed.

The Trump administration has not complied and another court Thursday temporarily stayed last week's order pending court procedures.

Voice of America, which was administered more directly by the government, shut down production after the funding cutoff but is also challenging the Trump move in court.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty -- created to reach inside the Soviet bloc during the Cold War -- remains operational, with the Czech government stepping in to keep it afloat.

In an additional show of support, rockers R.E.M. reissued their 1981 single "Radio Free Europe" on Friday to benefit the broadcaster in advance of World Press Freedom day.

Trump has long bristled at media coverage of him and complained about an editorial "firewall" that prohibited the government from intervening editorially in taxpayer-funded media.

AFP

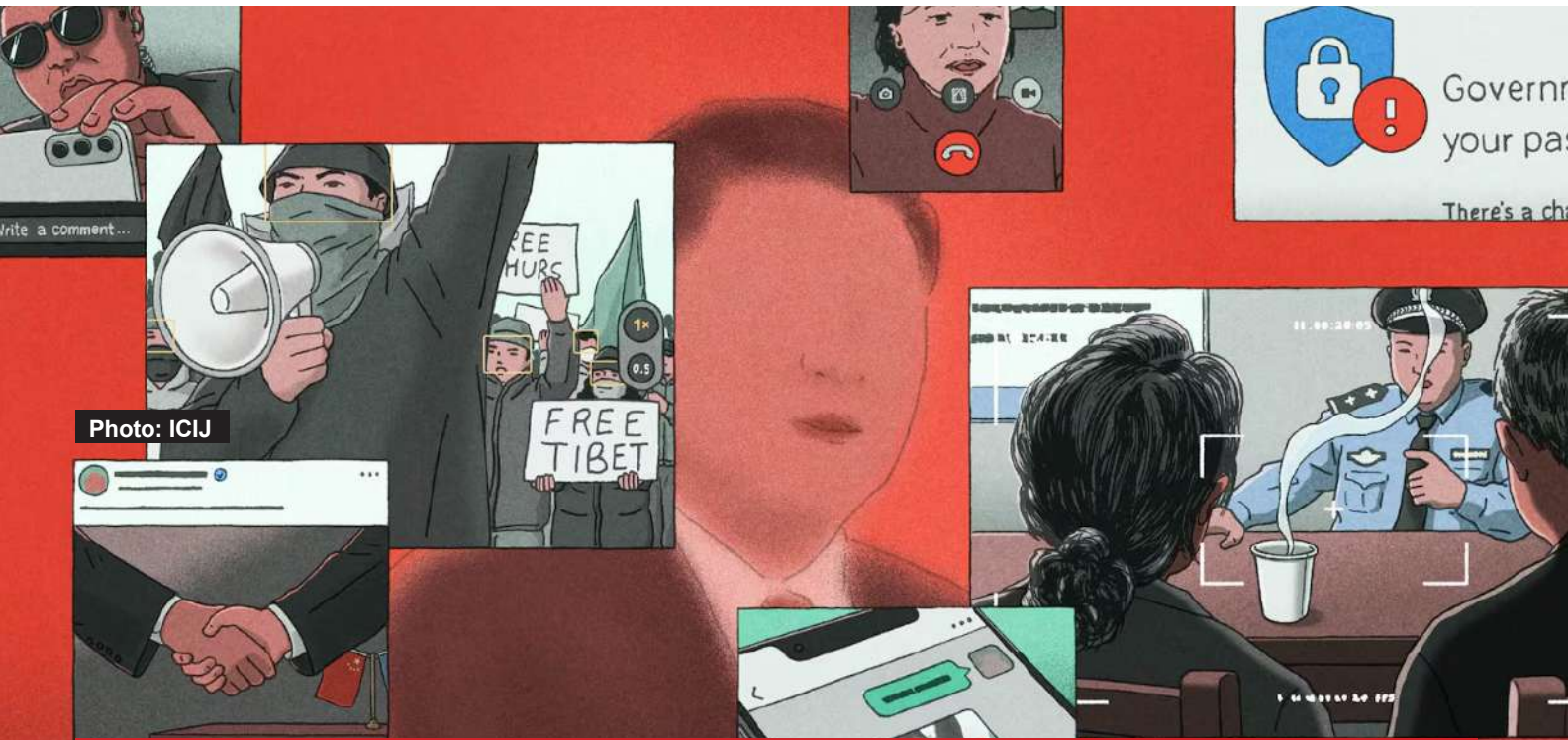


Photo: ICIJ

INVESTIGATION EXPOSES CHINA'S GLOBAL CAMPAIGN OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

RFA reporting with International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reveals how Beijing uses global institutions to silence critics abroad.

Jane Tang for RFA and ICIJ

An international investigation involving dozens of news organizations has revealed how Beijing is exploiting global institutions - from Interpol to the United Nations - to silence critics and expand its authoritarian reach worldwide.

Led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), the project, China Targets, brought together more than 100 journalists from 42 media organizations, including Radio Free Asia.

Over a 10-month period, reporters interviewed 105 individuals across 23 countries who had been pursued, harassed, or threatened by Chinese authorities - often for merely expressing dissent online or engaging in peaceful activism.

Targets include pro-democracy advocates from China and Hong Kong, as well as Uyghur and Tibetan exiles. Many described experiences of digital surveillance, threats to family members still in China and transnational pressure campaigns carried out through diplomatic or legal channels.

China Targets documents how protests were suppressed during Chinese leader Xi Jinping's foreign

visits. Since 2019, at least seven of Xi's 31 trips saw local police detain or harass protesters.

The investigation also found that Beijing has weaponized international organizations such as Interpol - abusing its Red Notice system to target dissidents - and co-opted parts of the United Nations to surveil and intimidate human rights advocates, particularly those speaking out about abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet.

In one high-profile case, documents reviewed by RFA show that Chinese authorities enlisted billionaire Jack Ma to try to personally persuade a Chinese businessman whose extradition was being sought from France to return to China.

The revelations come amid mounting international concern over Beijing's efforts to reshape global norms and institutions in line with its political interests. Critics warn that these moves are undermining international frameworks originally designed to protect fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Photo: AFP

MILLIONS OF CHILDREN TO SUFFER FROM TRUMP AID CUTS

When he grows up, five-year-old Ahmad wants to be "stronger than Spider-Man".

But his dream clashes with a harsh reality -- the Jordanian boy has a serious disability, and major US aid cuts mean he will likely miss out on vital care.

Like him, millions of children around the world are suffering from the sweeping cuts ordered by US President Donald Trump.

All are grappling with hardship in one form or other: war, crime, global warming, poverty, disease and more.

Ahmad, who has a spinal malformation, cannot hold his torso upright and is paralysed from the waist down.

The boy was receiving physiotherapy sessions from Handicap International "to strengthen his upper limbs and enable him, later on, to walk with crutches," said his father, Mahmud Abdulrahman, a 30-year-old day labourer.

Abdulrahman said the non-governmental organisation was also due to provide orthotics and prosthetics to straighten Ahmad's lower limbs -- none of which he could afford on his meagre salary.

Now, none of that will happen.

The Wehdat Rehabilitation Centre they attended in Jordan's capital Amman was one of the first victims of Trump's aid cuts.

More than 600 patients found themselves deprived of care overnight.

Prosthetics already specially designed for around 30 children, as well as wheelchairs, could not be delivered to them, on Washington's orders.

"The movement that was taught will be forgotten," said Dr Abdullah Hmoud, a physiotherapist who worked at the centre, describing the potential losses as "catastrophic".

There is also emotional suffering.

When he realised he would no longer see his physiotherapist, "Ahmad stopped eating for three days. He didn't want to get up," said his father.

With the closure of his rehabilitation centre, "I feel like they want to kill me," the boy said in a hushed voice.

Global fallout

Ahmad's story is one among many in a wave of horror accounts surfacing from the humanitarian sector since the United States said it was cutting 83 percent of its aid.

USAID -- which the Trump administration has dismantled -- had supported 42 percent of all aid distributed globally, with a \$42.8 billion budget.

At a refugee camp in Bangladesh, home to a million Rohingya Muslims who fled persecution in Myanmar, half of them children, Save the Children has been forced to ration food.

The NGO fears desperate families could be pushed to hand over daughters to traffickers or send sons on dangerous sea crossings to Malaysia for work.

In Mozambique, Solidarites International had to shut down a programme providing food and water to internally displaced people, including tens of thousands of children.

In Malawi, similar numbers will no longer receive free school meals, according to another NGO which requested anonymity for fear of US reprisals.

Without food, many children will drop out of school -- all the more galling, the NGO said, as millions of meals are reportedly left to rot in warehouses due to the US decision.

"It's like the rug is being pulled out from under their feet," said one staff member.

'Last lifelines'

Women and girls are often the first to lose out, with their education traditionally sacrificed first.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said it will have to "significantly reduce" aid to women and girls in Afghanistan because the US funds paid for many of the female staff who worked with them.

"The very last lifelines for many women and girls will be taken away," said Camilla Waszink, a director at the organisation.

Malnutrition already affects 150 million children under five, and the numbers could surge.

"Millions of additional children will suffer stunted growth" and impaired brain capacity, said Kevin Goldberg, director of Solidarites International.

In another blow to children, Washington is expected to drastically reduce funding for vaccination programmes in poor countries.

Sania Nishtar, CEO of the Vaccine Alliance, warned the cuts -- if confirmed -- could result in "an estimated 1.3 million children dying from vaccine-preventable diseases".

AFP



Photo: AFP

BRICS BLAST 'RESURGENCE OF PROTECTIONISM' IN TRUMP ERA

China, Brazil and other members of the BRICS grouping on Tuesday slammed the "resurgence of trade protectionism" at a meeting in Rio de Janeiro dominated by US President Donald Trump's tariffs blitz.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov were among the top diplomats of the 11-country grouping attending two days of talks on issues ranging from Trump's trade war to the push for peace in Ukraine.

Mauro Vieira, the foreign minister of Brazil which holds the rotating BRICS presidency, said the bloc underscored its "firm rejection" of protectionism, without explicitly referring to Trump.

Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has hit dozens of countries with a blanket 10 percent tariff, but China faces levies of up to 145 percent on many products.

Beijing has responded with duties of 125 percent on US goods.

BRICS, which was founded by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 and now also includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, has become a major counterweight to Western-led groups such as the G7.

It now makes up nearly half of the world's population, and 39 percent of global GDP.

The meeting in Rio came at a critical moment for the world economy after the International Monetary Fund slashed growth forecasts over the impact of Trump's sweeping levies on imports.

The ministers did not issue a joint statement.

Brazil instead settled for a declaration summarizing the discussions.

Vieira said there was "absolute consensus" on the subject of "trade conflicts and tariffs."

DDD

Some BRICS members have avoided Trump's trade fury.

Brazilian exports to the United States are subject to 10 percent tariffs, a fraction of those imposed on China.

And while Latin America's biggest economy has been hit by Trump's tariffs on steel imports -- Brazil is the second-biggest supplier of steel to the US -- President Luiz Inacio Lula's government has declined to retaliate and sought to negotiate with Washington instead.

Brazil has however made no secret of its frustration with European Union regulations on some of its agricultural exports, imposed over Amazon deforestation.

Vieira hit out Tuesday at the use of "non-tariff" trade barriers, deployed under "environmental pretexts."

The group trod more carefully on the issue of non-dollar transactions among BRICS members.

At a summit last year in Russia, BRICS leaders discussed boosting such transactions, eliciting a swift rebuke from Trump who threatened them with 100 percent tariffs if they undercut the US currency.

Brazil said the ministers this week had "underlined the importance of greater use of local currencies."

Climate ambitions in jeopardy

"Multilateralism" and "cooperation" were the watchwords of the meeting, which also discussed the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

The BRICS ministers called for a "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza, terming Israel's more than 50-day aid blockade of the territory "unacceptable."

They had less to say about the war in Ukraine, which is at a critical juncture, with Washington threatening to end its efforts to broker peace in the absence of a breakthrough.

As in the past, Russia's BRICS partners stopped short of condemning Moscow's invasion of its neighbor, while calling for a "lasting peace deal."

The growing global polarization is of particular concern to Brazil as it prepares to host the annual, often fractious UN climate conference in November in the Amazon.

On Tuesday, Brazil warned that the international "fragmentation" was jeopardizing global "climate action ambitions."

AFP



HEAR ME NOW

“It was super hard to cope with, and I got very emotional.” These are the words of Mia Kruska, who works in the Asia Division at the Foundation of the Green Party. She speaks with the Insight Myanmar Podcast about the raw impact of the earthquake that struck amid Myanmar’s overlapping political, economic, and military crises.

Mia has strong personal and emotional ties to Myanmar. Her first trip there was in 2014 when she was just 19; initially a backpacking adventure that turned into a kind of monastic-led pilgrimage, it soon turned into a lifelong commitment. Returning to Germany, she specialized in Myanmar studies in her undergraduate and graduate work, in particular topics related to the Shan. After her academic career, she became an active member—and for a time, the first chair of the board—of the Myanmar Institut, an academic organization based in Germany. There, she helped navigate post-coup research ethics and fostered academic exchanges.

Mia recounts how she first learned about the recent devastating earthquake, which in the early hours mainly featured stories covering the toll in Bangkok. “I remember waking up in Germany on a Friday morning...I checked it, and then I found out, actually, the epicenter

is in Myanmar!” After quickly messaging her Burmese friends, the enormity of the tragedy overtook her. She instinctively understood what the human cost would be, knowing the fragility of Myanmar’s infrastructure and absence of meaningful state support. She also began to struggle with feelings of helplessness as the heartbreaking images of total devastation began to surface.

Rather than joining in the compulsive sharing of distressing images on social media, Mia chose, instead, to first reflect deeply on what she had learned from Myanmar’s people as a guide to her own response. One memory stood out for her in particular: her early travels across the country with a group of monks and nuns. She recalled her astonishment at how the Burmese viewed giving, not as a burden or moral duty, but as a source of gratitude. That worldview, in such stark contrast to the Western world’s capitalist individualism, left a lasting impression on her. And that reflection became the heart of her social media posts in the aftermath of the quake: to honor Myanmar not just by mourning, but by giving.

Mia resists the all-too-common framing of Myanmar as mainly a place of tragedy and challenge. In her trips to the country, she saw beauty and hope amid the complexity, especially in how grassroots communities were building local infrastructure, engaging in critical reflection, and pushing for inclusive political representation. “Especially seeing how many democratic forces are standing for a better change... especially in the younger generation who are also reflecting on how they are influenced by different ethnic national thinking.”

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:
<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/4/10/episode-335-hear-me-now>



Russian honour guard.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING PROCEEDS WITH MOSCOW VISIT DESPITE SECURITY CONCERNS

Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing has flown to Moscow to attend Russia's Victory Day parade despite Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's statement that Russian President Vladimir Putin cannot guarantee the safety of foreign officials attending the celebrations, according to Naypyidaw sources.

Tensions escalated after Zelensky rejected Putin's proposed 72-hour ceasefire coinciding with the May 9 celebrations, dismissing it as a "theatrical performance" designed to create a "pleasant atmosphere" for Putin to escape isolation.

The Ukrainian leader warned that his Ukrainian government "cannot take responsibility for security inside Russian territory" and expressed concern about potential Russian-staged provocations.

Despite these concerns, Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has not altered his plans. During his March meeting with Putin, the Russian president announced

that Myanmar would send a military contingent to participate in the parade marking the 80th anniversary of the World War II victory.

A source in Naypyidaw indicated that while security concerns were discussed in an emergency meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing remains determined to fulfill his commitment to Putin, viewing it as vital for strengthening Myanmar-Russia relations.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has also confirmed his visit to Russia from May 7-10, alongside other expected attendees including Belarus's Lukashenko and Venezuela's Maduro. Slovakia's Prime Minister Fico reportedly remains the only EU leader accepting an invitation.

The Myanmar junta has consistently supported Russia's position on Ukraine, with Min Aung Hlaing previously expressing full support for Russia's "special military operation" and confidence in Moscow's eventual victory.



TNLA fighters. Photo: AFP

TNLA REVEALS CHINESE PRESSURE NOT TO FIGHT MYANMAR JUNTA NEAR CHINA BORDER, TRIGGERING MYANMAR PUBLIC OUTRAGE

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has officially disclosed that China is pressuring them not to fight Myanmar's military junta in areas along the Chinese-Myanmar border and around the strategic China-Myanmar gas pipeline project. This revelation comes amid China's ongoing efforts to protect its economic interests in Myanmar, including the strategically important gas pipeline connecting Myanmar to China's Yunnan Province.

The oil and gas pipelines, which run through Mandalay, Pyin Oo Lwin, and Namhkam before entering China at Ruili, are critical infrastructure for China, allowing delivery of natural gas from Myanmar's offshore fields with an annual capacity of up to 12 billion cubic meters.

The TNLA's announcement has sparked significant backlash among Myanmar Facebook users, who have condemned China's position as supporting the Myanmar military regime over the people's struggle.

A Facebook user wrote, "China is not standing with the Myanmar people but is fully supporting a handful of dictators. I condemn China for disregarding the suffering and grievances of Myanmar people."

Another user warned: "The resistance forces and ethnic armed organizations thought they were defeating the junta, but now China is interfering."

A third user expressed solidarity: "The entire Burmese revolutionary public stands with the TNLA."

According to the TNLA, China has been implementing checkpoint-style blockades along border areas since June 2024, severely impacting local populations. Civilians in TNLA-controlled areas are reportedly facing significant hardships due to these restrictions, with difficulties accessing essential supplies, conducting trade, and maintaining their livelihoods.

The TNLA is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance that launched Operation 1027 on October 27, 2023, which has become the biggest challenge to Myanmar's generals since their 2021 coup.

In April, Chinese-brokered talks between the TNLA and the junta failed to reach an agreement. The TNLA had demanded a ceasefire with the junta ending airstrikes and artillery attacks, while the junta demanded the return of towns seized by the TNLA including Namhkam, Kyaukme, Nawngkhio, Mongmit, and Hsipaw.

Colonel Tar Parn La, TNLA's Joint Secretary-General (2), said that negotiations will continue in August, but warned people to remain vigilant as the junta's attacks have intensified.

Analysts suggest China initially supported the Three Brotherhood Alliance to crack down on border crime that the junta failed to address, but has grown increasingly alarmed at the rapid deterioration of Myanmar's military, which it still views as a guarantor of stability.

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.