

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



WELCOMED IN MOSCOW

Myanmar's reviled junta chief attends special 80th World War II anniversary

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.

ODD MAN OUT AT GRAND CEREMONY

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing may have been one of 29 VIPs to attend Moscow's Red Square celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II, but his reception and his meetings will have done little for his dismal international political standing.

Min Aung Hlaing has faced significant international diplomatic challenges since seizing power in the 1 February 2021 coup. His overthrow of the elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi and his brutal war against the people of Myanmar has been met with widespread condemnation and has plunged Myanmar into international isolation.

One of the most prominent issues he faces is the lack of recognition from much of the international community. Key democratic nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, members of the European Union, and others have refused to acknowledge the junta as Myanmar's legitimate government. This was reinforced when the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the coup and calling for an arms embargo. Moreover, Myanmar's ambassador to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun, who publicly opposed the junta, has been allowed to retain his position – despite a challenge last week – symbolizing continued recognition of the civilian government and not the military regime.

Within Southeast Asia, the crisis has placed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in a particularly difficult position. Although ASEAN generally follows a policy of non-interference in internal affairs, the bloc agreed to a Five-Point Consensus in April 2021, which demanded an end to violence and inclusive dialogue. Min Aung Hlaing's refusal to honour these commitments led to ASEAN excluding him from high-level summits, a rare and significant diplomatic rebuke within the group – though he was recently invited twice to Bangkok, during the ASEAN chairmanship of Malaysia, acts that raised a few eyebrows.

The junta has also been the target of extensive international sanctions. The United States, European Union, and United Kingdom have all implemented targeted sanctions against Min Aung Hlaing and top military officials, freezing

their assets and banning travel. Broader economic sanctions have hurt Myanmar's access to international markets and reduced foreign investment, particularly in sectors like energy and natural resources. Meanwhile, arms embargoes and restrictions on defense-related technology have attempted to curb the regime's ability to continue its military campaign against strong internal opposition.

Human rights abuses have further worsened the junta's global standing. Since the coup, Myanmar's security forces have committed widespread atrocities, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and violent crackdowns on peaceful protests. These actions have prompted multiple international human rights organizations and UN investigators to accuse the regime of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The junta's shocking response to the humanitarian crisis following the 28 March earthquake has further blackened their name.

Compounding this is Min Aung Hlaing's prior role in the military's campaign against the Rohingya minority in 2016-17, for which he faces legal scrutiny at the International Court of Justice under allegations of genocide.

Geopolitically, the junta is in a precarious position. While countries like China and Russia have continued engagement and blocked harsher measures at the UN Security Council, even they have expressed concerns about the instability in Myanmar. For example, China is wary of the threat to its infrastructure projects and investments under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor.

In sum, Min Aung Hlaing's grip on power has come at the cost of diplomatic isolation, economic penalties, and reputational damage on the global stage. His harsh response to domestic dissent and failure to comply with international norms have alienated both traditional allies and regional partners, leaving Myanmar diplomatically adrift and increasingly reliant on a narrow group of supportive states including Russia and China.

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Cover photo of Russian army band in Red Square by AFP





Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing sits with other VIPs during the Moscow event in this Facebook photo showing him circled in red.

WELCOMED IN MOSCOW

MYANMAR'S REVEILED JUNTA

CHIEF ATTENDS SPECIAL 80TH

WORLD WAR II ANNIVERSARY

Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing received VIP treatment on 9 May when he was among 29 foreign leaders attending the World War II Victory Day military parade in Moscow, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Other guests included heads of state from Indonesia, Cuba, Ethiopia, Egypt, and several Central Asian countries.

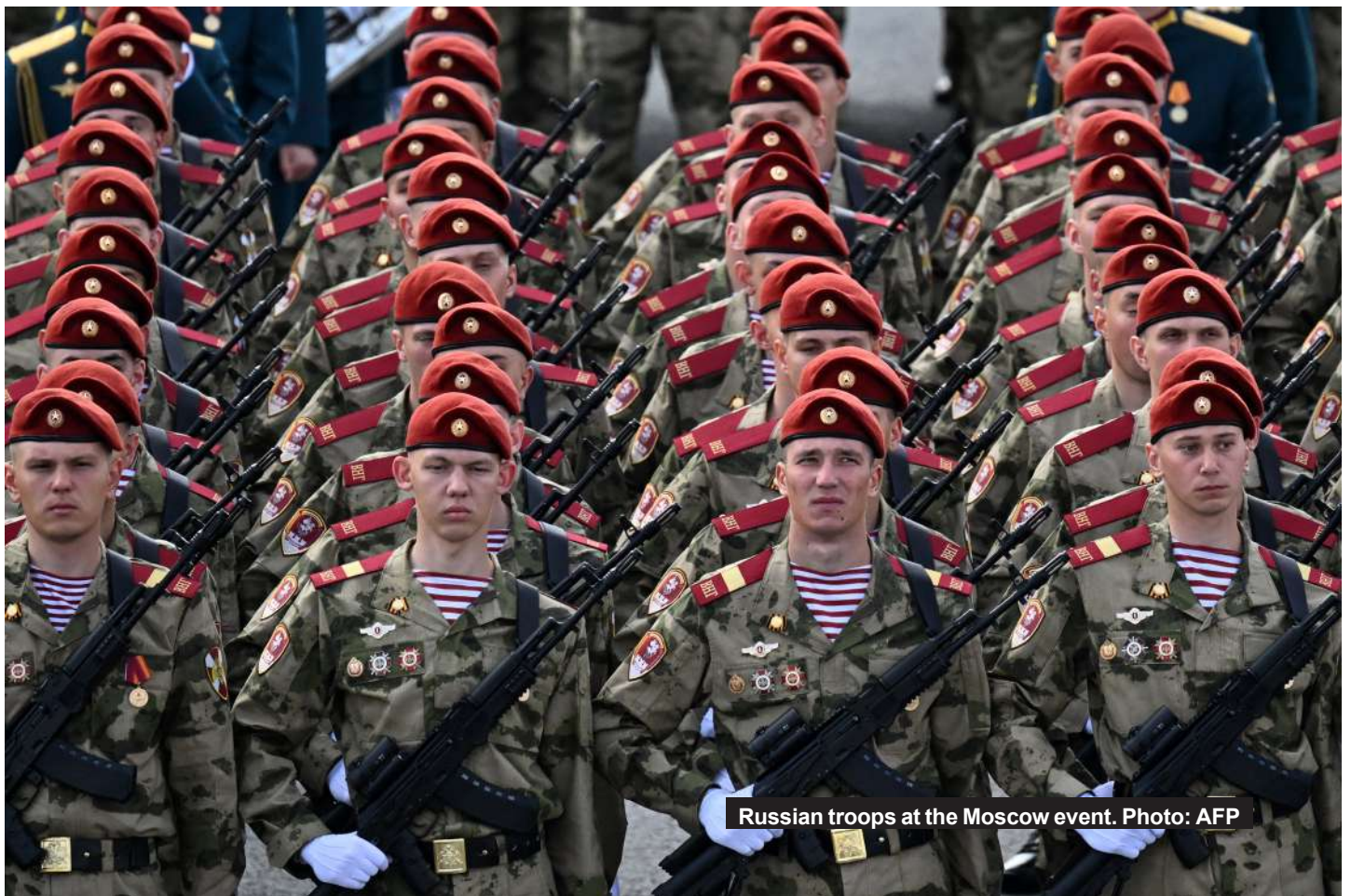
The event marked the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the "Great Patriotic War" (1941–1945), a celebration echoed as VE Day in the UK, USA and other countries around the world – marking the end of World War II, the most devastating war of the 20th Century.

A military unit from Myanmar also participated in the Moscow parade. A contingent led by Brigadier General Myo Sat Aung departed for Russia on 23 April and had been engaged in rehearsals alongside troops from 13 countries, including China, Vietnam, Egypt, and several former Soviet republics.

SHAKING HANDS WITH PUTIN

On the evening of 8 May, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended a state banquet hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin Palace, joining a number of foreign dignitaries invited for the Victory Day celebrations. President Putin personally extended greetings to each leader in attendance, including the Myanmar junta chief.

This visit marked Min Aung Hlaing's fifth trip to Russia since the military coup in February 2021, and his second in 2025. The repeated visits underscore the deepening relationship between Myanmar and Russia – both facing increasing international isolation – as they pursue expanded strategic and military cooperation. Both are facing international criticism – Min Aung Hlaing over his war against the Myanmar people and Putin for his "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine, what he claims is a defensive war against the encro-



Russian troops at the Moscow event. Photo: AFP

achment of NATO, a conflict that has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian troops and civilians.

TALKS WITH XI

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with the Myanmar junta leader in Moscow on 9 May, according to Chinese state media outlet CRI Myanmar.

This marks their first in-person meeting since the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar.

During the meeting, President Xi expressed condolences for the recent earthquake that struck Myanmar and pledged China's support for the country's rebuilding and recovery efforts. He also noted the 75th anniversary of China-Myanmar diplomatic relations, reaffirming Beijing's commitment to supporting Myanmar's development, sovereignty, and pursuit of peace, according to a junta statement.

Xi promised continued Chinese assistance in Myanmar's economic and peace processes, and called for the protection of Chinese investments and assets in Myanmar.

In response, Min Aung Hlaing thanked Xi for his condolences and acknowledged the timely arrival and efforts of the Chinese rescue team, which reached Myanmar 18 hours (Golden hours) after the 28 March earthquake. He highlighted the critical role they played during the early stages of search and rescue operations.

Min Aung Hlaing also reiterated plans for holding a general election by the end of this year, stating that preparations are underway, including arrangements to invite international observers to monitor the electoral process.

Following their meeting, both leaders attended the military parade in Moscow commemorating the 80th



Fireworks explode over Red Square. Photo: AFP

anniversary of Russia's Victory Day at the end of World War II.

MEETING WITH THE KAZAKH LEADER

The day before the Moscow parade, Min Aung Hlaing held a bilateral meeting with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in Moscow.

The meeting, held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, centred on bilateral cooperation and recent humanitarian concerns. President Tokayev offered his condolences to the people and government of Myanmar for the loss of life and property caused by the recent earthquake. He expressed confidence that Myanmar would overcome the crisis through united efforts in recovery and reconstruction, according to junta-affiliated media.

In response, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing thanked Kazakhstan for its support and the official message of condolence. Both leaders also discussed avenues to

strengthen bilateral ties across various sectors. Min Aung Hlaing reaffirmed Myanmar's commitment to enhancing cooperation with Kazakhstan, according to junta-affiliated media.

Also in attendance were SAC Joint Secretary General Lt-Gen Ye Win Oo, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Swe, and Myanmar Ambassador to Kazakhstan Thit Linn Ohn. President Tokayev was accompanied by senior Kazakh officials.

GRANDSTAND FOR PUTIN

The Victory Day celebrations in Moscow provided a grandstand for the Russian leader to attempt to consolidate his position on the world stage. Putin vowed at the event that Russia would win in Ukraine as the Soviet Union had in World War II, aiming to rally Russian support at the Moscow military parade put on in front of key allies.



A Russian soldier on parade. Photo: AFP

Putin sat with China's Xi Jinping watching processions of thousands of troops - some of whom fought in Ukraine - and an array of weapons like new tanks and drones to mark the defeat of the Nazis.

Since launching the Ukraine offensive in 2022, Putin has evoked the Soviet war effort for his own military campaign that has killed many thousands and left Moscow occupying a fifth of its neighbour.

"The whole country, society and people support the participants of the special military operation," Putin said, addressing the parade. "We are proud of their bravery and determination, of the fortitude that has always brought us only victory."

The ex-KGB spy, who has led the country for 25 years, also said: "Russia has been and will remain an indestructible barrier against Nazism, Russophobia and anti-Semitism."

One of the reasons Moscow claims it launched its offensive on Ukraine was to "de-Nazify" the country - narratives rejected by Kyiv, the West and some independent experts, but understood by other experts.

At home, Russia has banned criticism of its offensive and hundreds of thousands of Russians have fled their country since.

SECURITY FOR THE EVENT

Security was tight ahead of the parade, with Moscow fearing it could be targeted by Ukraine. Snipers were positioned on a luxury shopping mall that runs alongside Red Square and mobile internet was jammed.

"Russia! Russia!" the crowds chanted as Putin walked in front of the stands, escorted by several bodyguards.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing shakes hands with the event host Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo: AFP

Around 1,500 troops that had fought in Ukraine were among 11,000 marching on Red Square, state media reported.

After the procession, Putin greeted heavily decorated North Korean commanders who had led Pyongyang's forces that helped Russia recapture its western Kursk region from Ukraine.

"All the best to you and all your troops," Putin said. Chinese troops took part in the parade, with Putin and Xi holding talks a day earlier.

Putin has long said that the Soviet Union and primarily Russia were the main victors in WWII and called his nation Friday the "heirs of victors".

Olga Zhuravleva, whose father and grandfather fought in WWII, decried US leader Donald Trump for saying the war was "mostly accomplished because of us."

"Complete nonsense," she said, adding that she feels "great" pride for her country.

The Soviet Union lost more than 20 million civilians in WWII - including Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Central Asians and other peoples.

Under 25 years of Putin's rule, the Kremlin has promoted a patriotic vision of WWII - praising military feats, while glossing over the earlier Soviet-Nazi Pact and their combined 1939 invasion of Poland, which sparked the conflict in the first place.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP, Myanmar media, Chinese media

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Aid has been slow to come. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA RESTRICTS EARTHQUAKE AID

Residents in central Myanmar are facing significant obstacles in rebuilding their lives after powerful 7.7 and 6.4 magnitude earthquakes struck the region on 28 March, with accusations mounting against junta-controlled municipal authorities over alleged corruption, delays, and pressuring survivors.

The earthquake, which hit with a shallow depth of just 10 kilometers, caused widespread destruction across six townships in Mandalay, damaging an estimated 4,000 homes. Despite the scale of devastation, local authorities under the State Administration Council (SAC) are reportedly pressuring homeowners to erect corrugated zinc plate fences around damaged properties to improve the appearance of their yards, with orders issued as recently as May 10.

The Mandalay Municipal Department has instructed homeowners whose houses were severely damaged or leaning to file a formal application for demolition — three months in advance. This delay has raised serious

safety concerns among residents, especially as the monsoon season approaches. “Partially collapsed and leaning buildings pose a real threat to passersby and neighbouring homes,” said a local resident. “The rain will weaken the soil and increase the risk of further collapse.”

Structural collapses have already occurred. On April 15, a three-story building that had been leaning since the quake collapsed during heavy rainfall. On May 4, an eight-story building in Mandalay gave way, crushing its lower two floors.

Meanwhile, reports of corruption and preferential treatment have fueled public frustration. According to a resident speaking to Yangon Khit Thit, municipal officials are prioritizing demolition approvals based on bribes rather than urgency or safety. “The Sein Pan condominium in our ward was severely tilted. We applied to demolish it, but the municipal told us to wait at least three months. Another applicant from a



different ward got immediate approval after paying a bribe," the resident said. "The developer is refusing to take any responsibility, and those who pay bribes are being prioritized over others."

As survivors struggle to secure safe living conditions, observers warn that delayed responses, mismanagement, and corruption could worsen the humanitarian situation in the quake-affected region.

Arakan Army continues its offensives

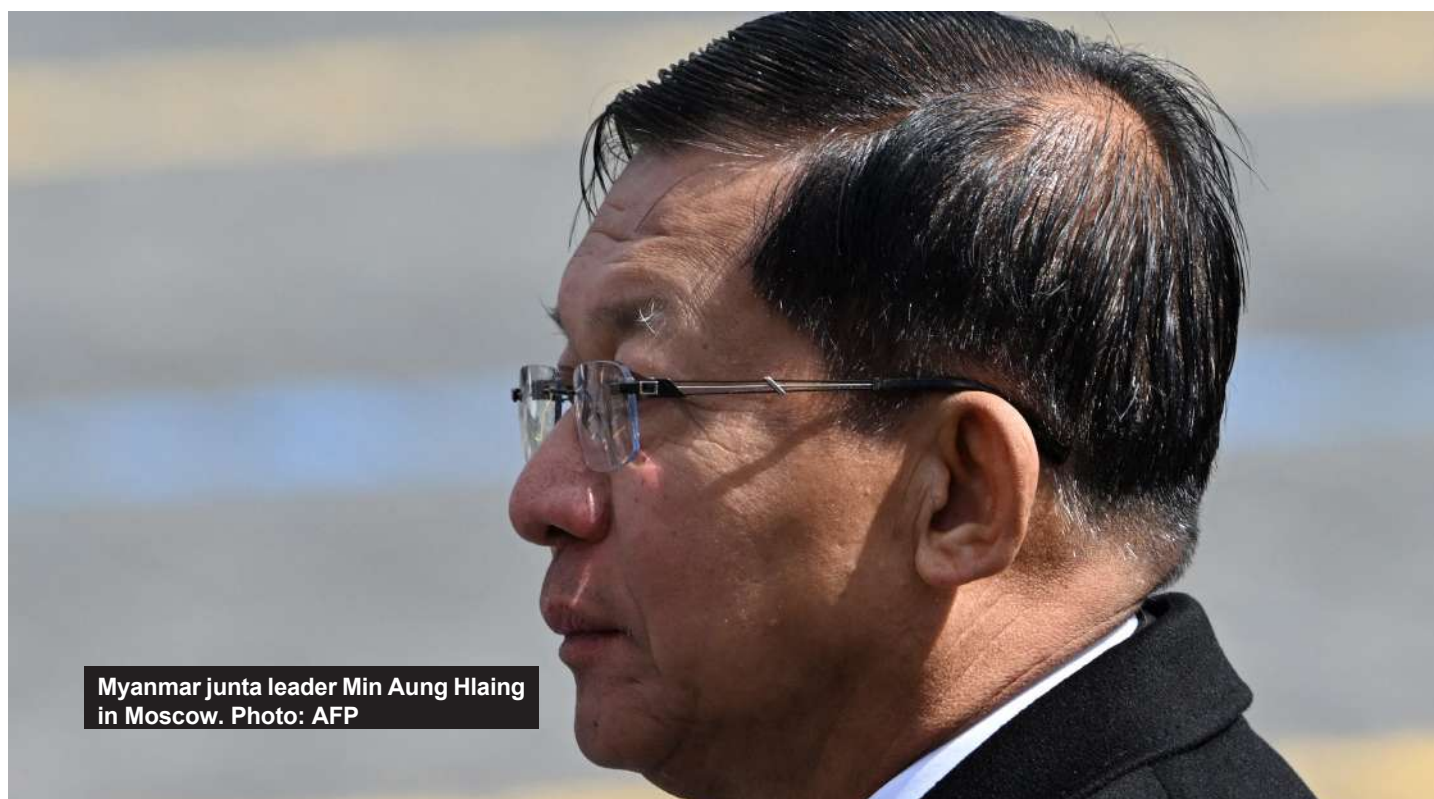
The Arakan Army (AA) has launched a significant series of offensives against junta forces in both Rakhine State's Kyaukphyu Township and Myanmar's Bago Region, intensifying its nationwide campaign against the military regime.

In Kyaukphyu, AA forces carried out a major assault during the last week of April and early May, successfully seizing the junta's Mintettaung defense post, according to local sources. Junta troops reportedly began retreating from the position on May 4 and 5, heading toward the No. (32) Combat Police Battalion base. The retreating column is believed to have suffered casualties, though exact figures remain unclear.

Since the seizure, the military has responded with drone strikes targeting the Mintettaung post and former tactical positions. A local resident told Narinjara News, "Some [junta soldiers] were killed and some injured. Some soldiers are still at the post, as the AA paused its operation."

Separate reports suggest a junta column of about 80 personnel lost communication with its command unit. A military source said the group had been split, with 50 soldiers based at the post and 30 patrolling the surrounding area. The AA has not yet issued an official statement confirming the capture of the Mintettaung post.

Fighting has also flared around other key military sites in Kyaukphyu, including the Danyawaddy naval base and the No. (32) Combat Police Battalion. Several reports indicate the AA may have seized additional junta positions, but the group has not publicly confirmed these gains. As a result of the intense fighting, wounded junta soldiers have been evacuated to Sittwe for treatment. A local source said, "Sittwe hospital is treating soldiers wounded in the Kyaukphyu battles. Civilians are not allowed into the ward, and some are also being treated at the military hospital."



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Moscow. Photo: AFP

In the Bago Region, clashes have escalated near Nyaungchehtawk village, close to the No. (6) Defense Products Industry compound. The AA and allied resistance forces had seized the nearby Nyaunggyo post in April. Earlier this month, junta troops attempted to retake the post but were repelled. The resistance forces have since renewed attacks on the Nyaungchehtawk post, located approximately seven miles from Oakshitpin town.

The continued operations in both Rakhine and Bago underscore the AA's strategic shift toward nationwide coordination and deeper offensives into military strongholds beyond its traditional base.

Monitoring Min Aung Hlaing's Moscow visit

Myanmar junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing traveled to Russia with a high-level delegation comprising both military and civilian officials, aiming to secure arms deals and gain international recognition for his loyal generals. The trip also featured symbolic military participation in Russia's Victory Day parade and an apparent effort to gain support from China regarding Myanmar's internal conflict.

Accompanying Min Aung Hlaing were two trusted members of his State Administration Council and the junta-appointed foreign minister from the civilian administrative wing. From the military side, three top generals — Chief of General Staff Gen. Kyaw Swar Lin, Chief of Military Intelligence Gen. Ye Win Oo, and Defense Minister Gen. Maung Maung Aye — joined the delegation. According to military sources, the trip's purpose includes introducing these generals to the international stage and negotiating weapons purchases.

In a show of military cooperation, a Myanmar military company comprising 70 soldiers, led by Brigadier General Myo Set Aung, marched in Russia's Victory Day parade on May 9 — a rare public appearance for Myanmar troops on a foreign stage.

While the visit was hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin, sources indicate that Min Aung Hlaing's main diplomatic objective was to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Junta-controlled media claimed the Chinese government expressed support for Myanmar's planned election. However, official Chinese news coverage of the meeting omitted any reference to Myanmar's electoral process, raising questions about the extent of China's endorsement.

A military analyst told DVB, "Min Aung Hlaing is likely seeking China's help to regain control of towns lost to resistance forces in northern Shan State."

The visit also drew attention to activities by Min Aung Hlaing's wife, Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, who held meetings in Moscow with prominent Russian women leaders. She met with Valentina Matvienko, Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, to discuss women's protection and empowerment. She also met with Anna Nesterova, Chairperson of the Russian Chapter of the BRICS Women's Business Alliance, to discuss women's participation in politics and business at the upcoming BRICS Forum.

Critics, however, noted the contrast between these diplomatic engagements and ongoing military violence in Myanmar. While Daw Kyu Kyu Hla discussed women's rights abroad, the Myanmar military — under her husband's command — continues airstrikes in rural areas, resulting in civilian deaths, including those of women and children.



Families mourn their children killed in the Myanmar junta attack. Photo: Facebook

AT LEAST 24 DEAD, OVER 50 INJURED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON SCHOOL IN SAGAING'S DEPAYIN TOWNSHIP

A junta airstrike targeting a school in Oehteindwin village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Region, on the morning of 12 May has left at least 24 people dead including students and two teachers and over 50 others injured, according to the Depayin township brotherhood. The death toll is expected to rise.

A local resistance source told Mizzima that a military jet dropped bombs on the Oehteindwin village secondary school around 9:40 am while students were sitting for exams.

"Many children and teachers were killed or injured. Some had their eyes gouged out, the situation is horrific," said the source, who was at the scene shortly after the strike.

A Depayin Township People's Administration official confirmed the death toll, telling Mizzima the youngest is an 8-year-old 1st grade student and the eldest a 17-year-old eleventh grade student. The official said their mobile clinic is on standby to provide medical

aid, but transporting the wounded to treatment centres remains a serious challenge due to ongoing insecurity.

This is the fourth junta-led airstrike in Depayin Township since April. Previous attacks have also resulted in civilian deaths, including the 23 April bombing of Lethloke village that killed five people. The S&C Group provided aid to those victims on 11 May, just a day before the Oehteindwin bombing, according to the Depayin Township People's Administration.

A local resistance source states that although local communities were warned of possible air raids in Depayin through a tip-off from a military informant, they were unaware of the exact targets. "We knew an airstrike was coming, but no one expected it would hit a school," he said.

The Depayin Township People's Administration has called on residents to remain alert and take precautions, as the junta appears to be intensifying its aerial campaign in the region.



The school bags of children killed in the junta attack. Photo: Facebook

NUG CONDEMNS SAC AIRSTRIKE ON SAGAING SCHOOL

On 12 May, the Ministry of Education under the National Unity Government (NUG) released a strongly worded statement condemning a deadly airstrike carried out by the military junta targeting a school in Oehteindwin village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Region.

The statement is as follows.

On May 12, 2025, at 10:00 AM, an aerial bombing attack was carried out by the terrorist SAC military on the school in Oe Htein Twin Village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Region. According to preliminary reports, two female teachers and twenty children were killed instantly, and over forty individuals were severely injured.

All individuals implicated in the commanding, execution, or collusion of deliberate air strikes against innocent children, students, and educators shall be subject to stringent judicial repercussions. No avenue

for impunity shall be permitted. Every responsible party will be pursued without respite, unequivocally identified, held accountable and subjected to stringent punitive measures under the full force of the law. This mandate of justice shall persist indefinitely, without attenuation or absolution, ceaselessly until the end of the world.

We call on the international community to impose effective sanctions against the military junta and support the creation of safe educational environments where children can learn without fear.

We, the Ministry of Education, vow to seek justice and to continue fighting, side by side with the people of Myanmar, until the downfall of the military dictatorship and the full restoration of federal democratic union.



RECOGNIZE THE REAL BURMA: A CASE FOR STATE-TO-STATE ENGAGEMENT WITH BURMA'S ETHNIC AUTHORITIES

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The current government of Burma or Myanmar, the State Administration Council (SAC), was not elected, it seized power in a military coup in 2021. That single fact should be enough to dissuade the international community from recognizing it as the country's legitimate government. Tragically, the SAC is only the latest in a long succession of unelected military regimes that have ruled Burma for seven decades. It is not only undemocratic but is actively waging war on its own population, committing widespread human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. The SAC has been officially condemned by the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, and it is under heavy sanctions from much of the international community. Given this broad consensus, shared by the G7, EU, UN, and the U.S. - it is illogical for the world to continue channeling its Burma engagement through the SAC.

As much as 80% of Burma's territory is now controlled by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EOs) and their corresponding civilian governments. These groups are not only holding territory. They are also administering services, defending their communities, and building democratic, civilian-led institutions. This stands in stark contrast to the SAC, which continues to bomb civilian areas, imprison opposition leaders, and bar political opponents from elections.

At this point, the more rational and principled course of action would be for the international community to recognize and engage directly with these de facto governments as legitimate political entities. With international recognition and state-to-state engagement, including aid, formal agreements, and diplomatic representation, these emerging administrations could deliver a far better standard of

living than the junta ever could, and certainly more than the ongoing conflict allows.

Ashley South's recent work, especially in "Revolutionary Regimes: Emerging Forms of Governance in Post-Coup Myanmar and Failing Assumptions" and the "Post-Myanmar Turn", supports this urgent call for a change in diplomatic posture. He documents how Burma is no longer functioning as a single, centralized state. Instead, across wide swathes of territory not controlled by the SAC, a variety of governance systems have emerged, many of them democratic, locally accountable, and civilian-led.

South and co-author Ardeth Thawnghmung describe five general categories of governance now operating in areas outside junta control. These include direct EAO governance, typically centered around a single ethnic nation, such as the United Wa State Army or the Arakan Army. There are also new post-coup administrations that incorporate both resistance forces and civilian actors, such as the Karenni State Consultative Council. Transitional models exist as well, like the Kawthoolei Governing Body established by the Karen National Union, which is evolving from a military command structure toward a more inclusive and democratic administration. Other areas, especially in central Burma, have seen the rise of local resistance governments loosely aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG), such as the Pa Ka Pha and Pa La Pha. In still other regions, organic forms of indigenous governance have emerged at the village and township level, including initiatives like the Salween Peace Park, which emphasize grassroots participation, environmental protection, and cultural autonomy.

These models are not without their challenges, but they represent credible alternatives to the junta - alternatives that already provide basic services such as health care, education, and community security.

More importantly, they are expressions of bottom-up federalism and democratic self-determination that align closely with the values the international community claims to promote. What's remarkable is that these governing bodies have been formed in the middle of an ongoing war, without formal outside support or recognition. With proper diplomatic recognition, technical assistance, and direct funding, they could significantly expand their capacity to serve their people and stabilize the regions they control.

Although the SAC seized power in a military coup and has been widely condemned for its actions, the United Nations continues to allow it to hold Burma's seat, effectively maintaining its international recognition as the representative government. ASEAN also continues to engage with the junta in various diplomatic formats, even while sidelining it from some high-level meetings and issuing public criticisms. This continued engagement constitutes a form of implied legitimacy, even if contested. It also ignores a critical fact: the actual interests of the Burmese people, particularly those in resistance-held and ethnic areas, are far better represented by the civilian-led governments and ethnic administrations now operating on the ground. These emerging governments are delivering services, building democratic structures, and defending their communities, often under conditions of war and aerial assault. They deserve international support - not diplomatic exclusion.

In another essay, South takes the argument further by challenging the very assumption that "Myanmar" is still a coherent nation-state. He describes what he calls the "post-Myanmar turn" - a growing recognition in academic and policy circles that the idea of a unified Burmese state is no longer viable. He argues that the Burmese state was created through violence and has never held legitimate authority over many of its citizens, especially ethnic minorities. Today, EAOs and

community organizations in many areas provide the services and governance that the state has abandoned. The collapse of central government functions following the 2021 coup has exposed just how hollow the concept of a functioning union has become, and further disintegration seems inevitable.

South also notes that Burma was never a natural union. It was assembled through conquest during the Konbaung Dynasty, reinforced by British colonialism, and later reshaped by decades of military dictatorship. Promises made at the second Panglong Conference in 1947 to grant ethnic nationalities meaningful autonomy were abandoned after the assassination of General Aung San. The current crisis simply accelerates what has been a long-running rejection of centralized Burman-led rule by the country's diverse ethnic communities.

Given the reality on the ground, South argues, and the facts support, that any future political solution will likely involve a voluntary union of independent or semi-sovereign ethnic states such as Kawthoolei, Kachinland, Monland, or Karenni. These entities have proven themselves more resilient, more democratic, and more capable of protecting their people than the junta or any imagined return to a centralized government.

Dr. South's position is consistent with my own experience on the ground in Burma. Years ago, I frequently heard leaders of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) calling for full independence. Today, I more often hear them calling for federal democracy, a loose union of ethnic states where the federal government would be elected by the people and have authority over certain national policies and international engagement. Meanwhile, the ethnic states would maintain their own democratic governments and enjoy significant autonomy. Among other key provisions, they would be allowed to preserve their languages and cultures,

including incorporating their ethnic languages into school curricula.

The March 28 earthquake should have been a wake-up call for the international community. For decades, global actors have extended some form of recognition to Burma's military juntas, hoping the generals would eventually relinquish power, hold elections, and transition the country to a representative democracy. That strategy has failed repeatedly. Today, countless voices, including aid organizations, religious leaders, and civil society groups, are urging donors not to deliver aid through the junta, warning that it will be misappropriated and will not reach those most in need. Yet many countries and major international organizations maintain policies that allow them to deliver aid only through the internationally recognized government, which remains the junta.

After so many years of failed engagement, it is time for a new approach. The international community should align its policy with the facts on the ground. It continues to recognize the junta through existing diplomatic channels, but that recognition has produced neither peace nor democratic progress. Countries like the United States, members of the European Union, and regional democracies should begin engaging directly with Burma's ethnic governments and resistance administrations. Delivering aid through formal agreements and recognizing these actors as legitimate political counterparts would support the only governing bodies currently striving to build democracy, protect human rights, and represent their people. This type of state-to-state engagement could also be a first step toward building a new, inclusive, democratic Burma from the bottom up.

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

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS REPORTEDLY FLEE TO THAILAND AS KNLA ATTACKS INTENSIFY AT STRATEGIC BASE

Joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) have launched sustained attacks on Htee Khee Strategic Camp along the Dawei–Htee Khee road in Dawei Township, Tanintharyi Region, prompting junta soldiers and police officers to reportedly flee across the border into Thailand.

According to Padoh Saw Eh Na, District Secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU) Mergui-Dawei District, the offensive began in the third week of April. The junta has since relied heavily on airstrikes and aerial resupply missions, as ground routes to the camp have been cut off.

More than 30 personnel—including nine police officers—were said to have fled to Thailand during the first week of May. While exact figures have not been independently verified, sources report that the troops escaped in small groups, with some allegedly taking weapons with them.

“The escape didn’t happen all at once. They left in stages. I heard some of the escapees were police who took arms. Fighting is still ongoing, but I can’t share more details,” a source close to the military said.

Clashes continue near the Htee Khee strategic area. On the morning of 7 May, resistance forces also attacked a junta checkpoint at Pauk Taing Bridge, the

main entryway to Dawei town, resulting in reported casualties. In response, junta troops have tightened security and increased checkpoints in the area.

The KNU has been contacted for further updates on the Htee Khee offensive and surrounding developments.

Previously, on 19 April, the KNLA Brigade 4 reported that joint KNLA forces had seized the Htee Hta strategic camp located just over five miles from Htee Khee along the Dawei–Htee Khee road near the Thai-Myanmar border. Weapons and ammunition were captured during the operation.

According to the KNU, a junta Tactical Operations Commander was captured alive during the assault on Htee Hta but was later executed due to what was described as hostile conduct.

Following that loss, the junta began reinforcing Htee Khee and nearby outposts—including Nga Rang Ni and Bodhi camps—while also bolstering positions at Taung Tone Lone and Kyauk Mae Taung between Dawei and Myitta townships. These reinforcements have been delivered through both air and land routes.



Photo: AFP

SAC-M STATEMENT ON CHINA'S PRESSURE AND MNDAA WITHDRAWAL FROM LASHIO

On 5 May, the Special Advisory Council-Myanmar (SAC-M) issued this statement in response to China's self-serving moves in northern Shan State at the expense of lasting peace and stability for the Myanmar people. Specifically, the withdrawal of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) from Lashio on 23 March 2025 under Chinese pressure should raise questions about China's repeated claims of a non-interference policy.

The statement is as follows.

China's intervention in Myanmar's northern Shan State shows that it continues to put its own interests first, at the expense of genuine peace and stability for the Myanmar people, despite its repeated claims of a non-interference policy.

On 23 March 2025, under intense pressure from the Chinese Government, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) agreed to withdraw from Lashio city in northern Shan State, according to local media reports.

Lashio, home to the military's northeastern regional military command, was captured in a major coordinated offensive by the MNDAA, the Bamar People's Liberation Army and the People's Liberation Army in August 2024. It was one of the most significant defeats ever inflicted on the Myanmar military, though it came at a heavy cost for revolutionary forces. At least 500 resistance troops were killed and 1000 wounded during the month-long siege, according to reports.

The victory in Lashio was part of a series of

nationwide offensives that saw revolutionary forces seize control of vast swathes of territory from the junta, including lucrative international trade routes, key Chinese-backed infrastructure, dozens of towns and cities and hundreds of military outposts.

The MNDAA's decision to hand Lashio back to the Myanmar military junta is a betrayal of the sacrifices made by hundreds of revolutionaries who gave their lives to liberate the city. It sets a dangerous and destructive precedent that undermines the MNDAA's stated commitment to the revolutionary struggle and to achieving total victory against the junta — a commitment it made to the Myanmar people and all other revolutionary forces. It also places Lashio city residents — scores of whom have already been killed in targeted junta air attacks — at greater risk of junta reprisals and atrocities.

China used coercive measures to pressure the MNDAA into ceasing its military operations against the junta and withdrawing from Lashio city. Chinese authorities shut border crossings and cut electricity and internet service to MNDAA-controlled areas. China has also supplied the junta with fighter jets used to carry out relentless airstrikes on towns and cities across Myanmar, including Lashio and others under MNDAA control. China's interventions give the lie to its regular assertion of the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other states.

The surrender of Lashio is the Chinese Government's most direct intervention in the Myanmar conflict since the junta's attempted power grab in February 2021. Over 19 and 20 April, China's Special Envoy to Myanmar led a Chinese delegation to Lashio to oversee the return of junta troops to the city and monitor the ceasefire, according to local media reports.

While China might be seen as hedging its bets in Myanmar, it is acting against its own interests in backing the junta. The junta has plunged Myanmar into a political, humanitarian and economic crisis that has destabilised the region. These crises have derailed Chinese projects and business interests in Myanmar. What is more, the junta has repeatedly conducted aerial attacks in border regions with China, in some cases impacting Chinese territory. Last month, in a reckless display of a shoot-first policy, junta troops opened fire at a Chinese Red Cross convoy providing earthquake relief in Shan State.

Events in Lashio have further exposed how weak the junta has become after four years of revolution. As its losses continue to mount, the junta is now totally dependent on foreign intervention to regain nominal control of key strategic assets it has lost and surrendered to revolutionary forces.

China's military support for the brutal junta and its brazen intervention in Myanmar is a misplaced bet. It will not save the junta, it will only prolong the suffering of the Myanmar people and delay the arrival of genuine peace. And when the junta finally falls – as it inevitably will – the people of Myanmar will remember exactly where China stood.



Kyaw Moe Tun

MYANMAR ARMY'S PICK AS UN ENVOY RESIGNS IN DIPLOMATIC POWER STRUGGLE

Myanmar's newly-appointed ambassador to the United Nations has resigned, saying that his predecessor -- who was fired by the military junta -- continues to represent the country, a UN spokesman said Thursday last week, the latest twist in a diplomatic row.

The military, which ousted Myanmar's civilian leaders and seized power on February 1, 2021, had fired Kyaw Moe Tun on the previous Saturday, a day after he spectacularly broke with the junta and pleaded with the General Assembly for help to restore democracy.

The generals appointed his deputy, Tin Maung Naing, in his place.

But on Thursday last week UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Myanmar's mission had sent a communication informing the body that Tin Maung Naing "has submitted his letter of resignation ... recalling that Mr Kyaw Moe Tun remains the permanent representative of Myanmar to the United Nations."

The move came after a stand-off which saw Kyaw Moe Tun write to the president of the UN General Assembly on Monday to insist the coup was "unlawful" and therefore the military had no authority to remove him.

"I wish therefore to confirm to you that I remain Myanmar's permanent representative to the United Nations," he added.

On Tuesday, Myanmar's foreign ministry sent a note verbale to the UN, claiming Kyaw Moe Tun had been removed.

That day Dujarric said the UN was taking a look at the two "contradictory" letters, as the body stressed the unusual nature of the situation and said UN accreditation and protocol committees would look into the issue.

They could ultimately refer it to the General Assembly for a simple majority vote.

The decision is far-reaching because it means whether or not to recognize who wields power in Myanmar.

Since Tuesday, Kyaw Moe Tun has held meetings with his counterpart from the European Union and the representative of the United States, who reiterated their support.

AFP



Bagan. Photo: AFP

HISTORIC MURALS IN BAGAN PAGODAS UNSCATHED BY RECENT MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE

The recent earthquake that struck Myanmar caused only minor damage to the Bagan region's ancient monuments. Crucially, the historic mural paintings inside the Apeyadana and Culamani pagodas remain intact, according to the Archaeology Branch of the National Museum Department.

The inspection teams from the Archaeology Branch of the National Museum Department checked the structural integrity of the temples, and specialists assessed the condition of the mural paintings, according to the Archaeology Branch of the National Museum Department.

Bagan is the site of over 3,822 pagodas and temples recognized by UNESCO for their cultural significance. Among the most visited are Shwezigon, Ananda, Alotawpyae, Thatbyinnyu, Htilominlo, Gadawpalin, Hngetpyittaung, Bu, Maha Bodhi,

Culamani, Dhammayangyi, Shwesandaw, Mya Zedi, Lawka Nanda, Dhamma Razaka, the Tooth Relic, and Pyathetgyi—none of which sustained serious damage in the latest quake.

Although the Bagan region has experienced structural damage in the past due to earthquakes and seasonal rains, swift restoration efforts have allowed it to remain a valuable cultural site for both domestic and international visitors.

A source from the Archaeology Branch of the National Museum Department reaffirmed that the historic Thanaka-themed murals from the 11th century at Apeyadana and Culamani pagodas survived the 28 March earthquake and are currently under continued preservation.



Photo: AFP

JUNTA BOMBS NORTHERN MYANMAR AFTER REBELS REJECT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

RFA

Myanmar's military launched attacks on four villages in northern Myanmar controlled by an insurgent group, according to a statement published by rebels on Friday last week, despite both armies agreeing to a ceasefire extension only days earlier.

A junta plane attacked villages in Shan state's Nawngkhio township, bombing Ya Pyin and Tha Yet Cho from Monday to Thursday, according to a statement from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, or TNLA, which controls the area.

International rights groups and insurgents have criticized junta forces for repeatedly violating their own ceasefire declared on April 2 and extended until May 31 to aid in earthquake recovery. The junta troops have reportedly killed more than 200 civilians and destroyed homes and a hospital since the March 28 quake.

While the Three Brotherhood Alliance, comprising the TNLA, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, or MNDAA, and Arakan Army, also declared a ceasefire until May 31, each has individual tensions with junta forces over contested territories.

The MNDAA agreed to transfer the city of Lashio in Shan state back to the military, but the TNLA has staunchly refused pressure from both the military regime and China during peace talks on April 28 and 29 to return territories acquired after the 2021 coup, including Nawnghkio and several parts of Mandalay region.

The move will severely cost TNLA, as junta attacks seem to be increasing, said a military analyst, who declined to be named for security reasons.

"They will be under less pressure if they accept the junta's demands. If they don't accept them now, they will suffer more. The [junta] military has a high chance of success," the analyst said.

Heavy artillery targeted a wedding ceremony in Tha Yet Cho village on Thursday, killing 4 civilians including a five-year-old child, and injuring seven more. During a battle between TNLA forces and junta soldiers in nearby Nawnng Len village, the junta used drones to drop eight bombs and five gas bombs, and fired 31 explosives into residential areas.

Junta soldiers also targeted Ong Ma Ti and Taung Hla villages, where TNLA troops were stationed.

The TNLA did not release any information on the gas bomb attacks, and Radio Free Asia could not confirm their effects on residents.

Junta forces also targeted Mandaaly region's Thabeikkyin township, bombing TNLA-controlled Hpawt Taw village with a fighter jet.

The TNLA has urged the public to be vigilant and protect themselves against airstrikes.

RFA tried to contact junta spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun for more information on the release, but he did not respond.

The next round of peace talks between China, Myanmar's military junta and the TNLA will be in August.

"They [the junta] want to pressure the TNLA before the August discussions," Thailand-based political analyst Sai Kyi Zin Soe told RFA.

"The military wants to reclaim the territories they lost in 2023."

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



TWO POLITICAL PRISONERS SEVERELY BEATEN BY PRISON GANG AT MYANMAR'S TAUNGKALAY, SUFFER SKULL FRACTURES

Two political prisoners held at Taungkalay Prison in Hpa-an, Karen State, suffered serious injuries after being brutally assaulted by a gang of criminal inmates, according to a statement released by the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) on 7 May.

The victims have been identified as Ko Kyaw Kyaw Myint, currently serving a 15-year sentence, and Ko Min Thu Soe, serving a four-year term.

The assault occurred on 30 April when the two were instructed by a trusted aide of Deputy Warden Thet Naing to enter the prison dormitory to explain a delay in the distribution of fish curry. There, they were attacked by a group of 12 criminal prisoners known as the "Barcode Gang."

The gang, reportedly established under former deputy warden Soe Moe Aung to intimidate political prisoners, comprises around 100 inmates identifiable by barcode-style tattoos on their necks.

As a result of the attack, Ko Kyaw Kyaw Myint sustained a fractured skull, multiple lacerations, facial swelling, and bruising on his elbow and forearm. Ko Min Thu Soe also suffered a fractured skull requiring

seven stitches, a severe cut above his left eyebrow, and heavy bruising and swelling across his body and face.

Despite the assault taking place directly in front of the dormitory officer's office, officials including Lieutenant Aung Ye Naing, Corporal Win Maung, and Corporal Thein Than Oo (aka Phyaung Gyi) allegedly failed to intervene, the PPNM stated.

A Departmental Enquiry (DE) led by the Karen State Director is currently investigating the incident. The two victims are reportedly preparing to file an external lawsuit. Of the 12 assailants, only five have so far been placed in solitary confinement, according to PPNM.

Political prisoners and fellow inmates are closely watching how the prison authorities and judicial system handle the incident.

PPNM further emphasized that since the 2021 military coup, political prisoners across Myanmar have routinely faced systemic abuse, both by prison staff and criminal inmates, often with impunity. In addition to physical abuse, many have suffered or died due to grossly inadequate medical care and the confiscation of medicine sent by family members.

From January to April 2025 alone, nine prisoners—eight men and one woman—died in detention across Thayawaddy, Daik-U, Myaungmya, Obo, and Katha prisons. PPNM states that while two deaths were linked to pre-existing conditions, most were due to a lack of timely medical treatment.

"One inmate with kidney stones died because the water in the prison was unclean, and they received no proper care. Even healthy young detainees died after being denied regular medication or given expired drugs. Medicines sent from outside were often confiscated, leaving them dependent on untrustworthy prison staff," said Ma Khin Yaung Ni Lynn, PPNM's information officer.

The actual death toll may be higher, as many cases go unreported. The military junta has released little to no information on these incidents, or on the broader pattern of human rights abuses within the prison system.

As of 6 May 2025, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports that 29,116 people have been arrested since the 1 February 2021 coup, with 22,199 still in detention and 10,792 sentenced to prison.



AT LEAST 15 CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON BHAMO MONASTERY AMID ONGOING BATTLE

At least 15 civilians were killed and over 30 others injured when Myanmar's military junta launched an airstrike on Kanna Yeiktha Monastery in Bhamo, Kachin State, at around 5 pm on 8 May, according to local sources.

"The airstrike directly targeted the monastery, which was sheltering only civilians. The military was well aware of this. Since the revolutionary offensive to take Bhamo began, junta troops have remained stationed along Strand Road. This was a deliberate attack," said a Bhamo resident.

Rescue operations are still underway, and details on the victims' identities and the full extent of the injuries are yet to be confirmed.

Fierce clashes have continued in recent weeks between junta forces and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), with the military increasingly resorting to airstrikes due to blocked ground supply routes.

Colonel Naw Bu, spokesperson for the KIA, said that their forces are now concentrating efforts on

seizing the junta's Military Operations Command 21 headquarters in Bhamo. "The junta is fiercely resisting," he added.

With land routes cut off, the military has been forced to rely on air transport for reinforcements, ammunition, and supplies to its remaining bases.

Junta-controlled military facilities still in operation include the Military Operations Command 21 headquarters, and the camps of Infantry Battalion 47, Engineering Battalion 914, Supply and Transport Battalion 933, Military Battalion 11, and several battalions under Light Infantry Division 88.

Despite ongoing clashes, the KIA and its allies have reportedly gained control over much of Bhamo, including the camps of Armoured Battalion 7006, a Tank Battalion, Artillery Battalion 366, and the Bhamo Airport.

The offensive to capture Bhamo began on 4 December 2024, and the fighting shows no signs of slowing.



AT LEAST 30 MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS, INCLUDING MAJOR, KILLED IN INTENSE CLASHES NEAR KYONDOE, KAREN STATE

At least 30 junta soldiers, including officers, were killed in ongoing clashes near Kyondoe town in Kawkareik Township, Karen State, according to a statement by the Mon Liberation Army (MLA) released on 8 May.

Among the dead were Major Soe Min Htet, deputy commander of the Light Infantry Battalion 432 based in Bokepyin under the Coastal Command, and Captain Nay Ye Aung of the Light Infantry Battalion 208 based in Kyaikmaraw. The battle took place on 30 April near Nwa Chan Kone village, and the body of Major Soe Min Htet has been recovered, confirmed an official from the MLA's press department.

Clashes have intensified along the Kawkareik-Kyondoe section of the Asian Highway since mid-April. Around 6,000 residents from villages such as Kawlewar, Naungtaman, Winpya, Yay Pu Gyi, Lay Daing, Nga Daing, Koe Daing, Wizza Kone, Mala Kone, Tha Lwe Htaw, Kammarait, Kan Ni, and Thayet Taw have fled their homes due to escalating violence.

"Fighting is breaking out in multiple areas. Villagers along the Asian Highway and around Kyondoe

continue to flee, as military aircraft carry out repeated airstrikes," said a female member of the MLA's News and Information Department.

Displaced civilians are in urgent need of food, medicine, and other emergency aid, according to local humanitarian groups.

The fighting involves joint revolutionary forces – including the Mon Liberation Army (MLA), New Mon State Party (Anti-Military Dictatorship) (NMSP-AD), and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)-led coalition forces such as the Swallow and Lion Battalions – battling junta troops for control of key territory along the strategic highway.

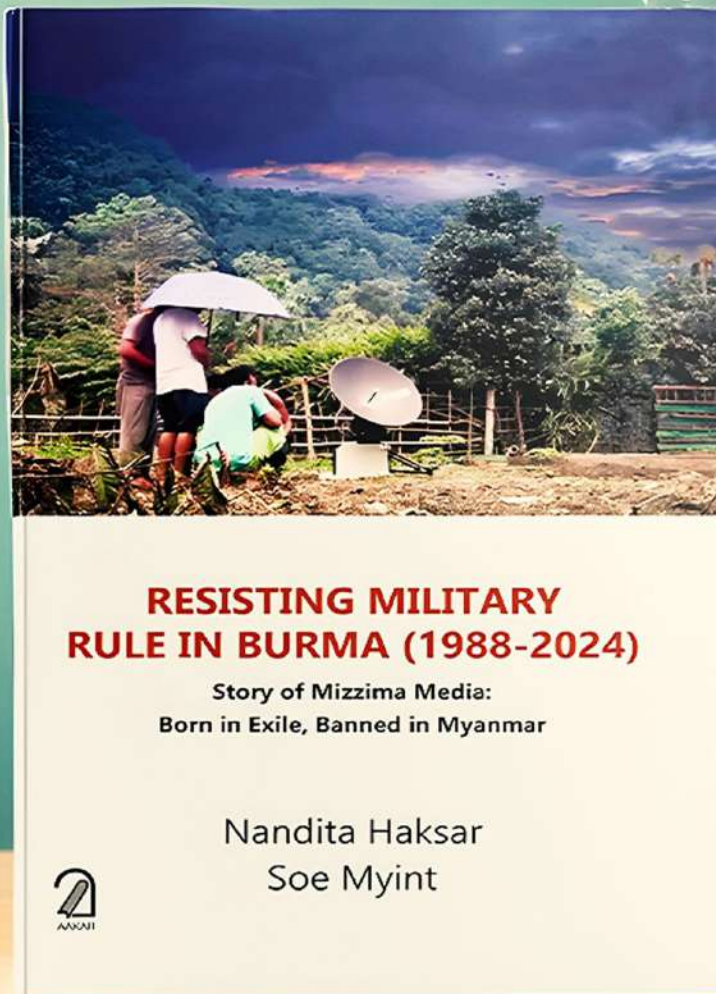
On 15 April, the junta launched an airstrike on Kanni Sanpya village, killing six civilians and wounding around 20 others, including nine monks observing the Thingyan fast.

Resistance groups are urging residents in conflict-affected areas to stay alert and seek shelter in safe zones to avoid the risks posed by ongoing air and artillery attacks.

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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KNLA JOINT FORCES CAPTURE STRATEGIC BORDER POST IN MYANMAR'S TANINTHARYI REGION

Joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) successfully captured the strategic Htee Khee border post in Dawei Township, Tanintharyi Region, at around 9:00 am on 9 May, according to military sources.

The Htee Khee post, the nearest junta-controlled position to the Thai border along the critical Dawei-Htee Khee trade route, had been under siege since April. Clashes escalated in early May, with KNLA and allied resistance forces launching near-daily assaults.

Despite fierce resistance, including junta-led airstrikes and artillery bombardments, the post fell to the KNLA coalition, said Ko Star, Operations Commander of the Tanintharyi Regional Military Command under the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence.

"We have confirmed the successful capture of the camp," Ko Star said.

Details regarding casualties, seized weapons, and the full aftermath are still under investigation, according

to Mizzima.

Though over 100 junta troops, including reinforcements from the nearby Htee Hta outpost, were reportedly stationed at the post, more than 50 soldiers and police are believed to have fled into Thailand earlier this month amid the intensified fighting, said Padoh Saw Eh Na, District Secretary of KNU Mergui-Dawei District.

The Htee Khee seizure follows the 19 April capture of the Htee Hta outpost located about five miles away, where KNLA forces seized arms and ammunition, the Karen National Union (KNU) reported.

With the fall of Htee Khee, remaining junta positions along the Dawei-Htee Khee corridor include strategic camps at Myitta, Ngayant Ni, Bawdi, Taung Thone Lone, and Kyauk Mei Taung, according to military sources.



FLASHBACK TO 2020 ELECTION

SNLD REAFFIRMS DECISION NOT TO REGISTER WITH MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTION COMMISSION

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), one of Shan State's major political parties, has once again decided not to register with Myanmar's junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC), according to a source close to the party speaking on 8 May.

The UEC had set a registration deadline of 9 May for those wishing to establish or re-register political parties. Amid speculation that the SNLD might reconsider its position, internal discussions were reportedly held in recent days.

"The party will not register. That's the final decision. While some members expressed support for registration, the party allowed everyone to voice their opinions. This decision reflects the will of the majority," the source said.

The military junta enacted a new Political Parties Registration Law in January 2023, requiring all political

parties to re-register under its framework. Two months later, the UEC dissolved 40 parties including the SNLD and the National League for Democracy (NLD) for failing to comply.

At the time, the SNLD stated it could not re-register due to the absence of a clear election roadmap from the junta and the inability to consult its members amid escalating conflict and instability.

Founded over 36 years ago, the SNLD commands broad public support in Shan State and won the third-largest share of votes nationwide in the 2020 general election.

The junta's UEC has said the next election is expected in December, and all the party formation, registration, and mergers must be finalized ahead of that time.



Karen IDPs

KAREN ORGANISATIONS RELEASE JOINT STATEMENT ON SEVERE CUTS TO FOOD AID TO REFUGEES

A collective of Karen organisations worldwide released a joint statement on 7 May calling urgent attention to the imminent humanitarian crisis facing Karen and Karenni refugees as food rations slashed to a mere 10 US cents or less per day.

The text of the statement continues below.

108,000 refugees—predominantly Karen and Karenni people—living in camps along the Thailand-Burma border now face an imminent humanitarian crisis following devastating cuts to their already meager food rations.

The situation has become dire: rations for children under 5 years old will be reduced to just 53 Thai Baht (approximately \$1.50) per month—a mere 5 US cents per day for food. Those over 5 years old will receive only 87 Thai Baht (about \$2.40) monthly, equating to 8 US cents daily per person. Even before these drastic reductions, food provisions were already below the minimum required for survival.

Over the past 15 years, donors have been cutting or reducing funding for refugees in Thailand. As a result, this humanitarian emergency stems from a long-term

reduction in international aid. New cuts in international aid, including US AID, are also expected to severely impact food assistance for internally displaced people (IDPs) throughout Burma, including over 1 million displaced persons in Kawthoolei (Karen areas) and neighbouring regions—the highest number in Karen history.

To prevent mass starvation among refugees and IDPs, we call for immediate action:

The USA and other donors must reverse long term aid cuts to refugees in Thailand;

Existing donors must increase funding for both refugees in Thailand and IDPs;

Thailand must grant refugees legal work authorization; and

Thailand must lift restrictions on cross-border aid delivery to areas not controlled by the Burmese military, for example, in territories administered by the Karen National Union and Karenni Interim Executive Committee.

Urgent efforts must be made to address the fundamental causes of forced displacement that have created refugees and internally displaced persons. The Burmese military must face stronger sanctions cutting off revenue, arms, and equipment. A complete coordinated global embargo on jet fuel supplies to Burma must be implemented, as airstrikes are driving displacement and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis as well as creating an economic crisis. Demining programs in Karen homeland are essential to enable safe return and agricultural self-sufficiency.

The vast majority of refugees desperately wish to return home and live in peace. Our people do not want to depend on aid indefinitely. Until safe repatriation becomes possible, refugees seek the right to work legally in Thailand, where they can contribute positively to their host country.

These aid reductions could not come at a worse time. The Burmese military continues to target homes, schools, plantations, religious sites, and medical centers with airstrikes and artillery. Beyond the humanitarian crisis and human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burmese military, our people also face natural disasters. In March, some of our Karen areas were affected by Burma earthquake. Last year's planting season was devastated by widespread flooding and crop diseases throughout Kawthoolei, further intensifying this year's food insecurity.



Internally displaced people take shelter.
Photo: Supplied

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN AREAS OF BURMA UNAFFECTED BY THE EARTHQUAKE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

More than a month after the March 28 earthquake in central Burma, survivors in Sagaing and Mandalay continue to suffer. Entire communities have been reduced to rubble, with homes and schools destroyed, families living under plastic tarps, and parents still searching for missing children. Access to clean water, food, electricity, and internet remains limited or nonexistent. Hospitals have been damaged or collapsed entirely, leaving many without urgent medical care, even as airstrikes and drone attacks continue.

But in many parts of Burma, people have been living under these same conditions for the past four years. A prime example is Karenni State, where the humanitarian situation is especially dire. Field observations and local testimonies indicate that virtually the entire population is now displaced. While international organizations estimate displacement at 80%, aid workers and resistance forces on the ground say the real figure is closer to 100%. The discrepancy likely stems from differing definitions of “displaced.”

The United Nations defines internally displaced persons (IDPs) as individuals who have been “forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence... and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”

In practice, however, only those who have been officially registered, verified through formal assessments, or who reside in recognized displacement camps are often counted in the statistics. On the ground, we see a different reality: many civilians have been displaced multiple times—fleeing to the jungle, sheltering temporarily in churches, schools, or makeshift camps, and then returning home briefly before being forced to flee again. This cycle of fleeing and returning has repeated itself for many of these people since the 2021 coup, leaving them in a state of prolonged instability and uncertainty. Even those living rough in forest areas or hidden enclaves, with no ability to safely return home, are often invisible in official counts.

Most cities now resemble ghost towns, with rows of abandoned homes overrun by weeds. Since the 2021 coup, there has been no maintenance, no public services, and no return to normal life. The regime has placed landmines in and around many of these homes. It's common to see large numbers of people living in makeshift bamboo shelters covered with plastic tarps, right beside empty houses they no longer enter for fear of mines and booby traps.

The cycle of repeated displacement is dramatically reshaping the demographic landscape of Karenni State. Communities that once held a few dozen families before the war have ballooned into settlements housing hundreds or even thousands of displaced persons. One such village, previously home to just 50 families, now shelters over 5,000 people. These large concentrations have resettled in resistance-controlled, liberated zones, overwhelming limited local resources and creating severe overcrowding. The junta's State Administration Council (SAC) government provides no essential services, and none of these camps are supported by the United Nations or major international NGOs. Large global organizations provide aid either to Burmese refugees in Thailand or through the SAC government in Naypyidaw, ensuring that virtually no assistance reaches internally displaced people in resistance-held areas.

What limited services do exist, such as education, health care, and food distribution, are being delivered by the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC), local civil society organizations, and small-scale efforts from the Catholic Church and several Protestant groups.

The regime has cut off electricity across the state, and there is no running water. Clean water is especially scarce during the dry season, when rivers and streams begin to run dry. Residents are forced to boil water over open fires fueled by wood. The combined need to collect wood for fuel and build shelter has led to widespread deforestation, which is contributing to flooding in the lowlands and drought in the hills. Meanwhile, farmland

once cultivated by the displaced remains unplanted, worsening food shortages. Most camps receive just one food distribution per month, usually 16 kilograms of rice per person, the UN's minimum survival threshold. In some cases, camps report receiving just 16 kilograms per family.

Secondary distributions, including soap, oil, and protein sources, are rare or nonexistent. In many camps, people live on rice alone. This formerly agricultural region is now heavily reliant on food imports from neighboring Thailand, which have become prohibitively expensive due to the war and the difficulty of transporting goods on bombed and unrepaired roads. Most travel now takes place on foot or by motorcycle through jungle trails and narrow mountain passes, as paved roads are either impassable or too dangerous to use, with junta forces frequently targeting main transport routes.

Hygiene is a growing concern in the camps, as many residents lack access to soap or sanitary products and are forced to wash with only cold water. These unsanitary conditions are contributing to a worsening health crisis. Nearly every hospital in Karenni State has been destroyed by airstrikes, with only two remaining partially operational. Staffing is dangerously low—some hospitals operate with just one doctor and a few nurses, many of whom are volunteers with little formal training. IDP camps, even those housing thousands, often have no access to medical care at all. Schools and churches, like hospitals, are also frequent targets. In one incident in February 2025, airstrikes hit both a school and a nearby area where a hospital was located. Fortunately, there were no casualties, but such attacks have become a daily reality in Karenni State and much of Burma. After that strike, one of the two remaining hospitals closed and relocated to a remote site, where it now sees only a limited number of emergency patients.

With no functioning electrical grid, residents rely on solar-powered or rechargeable flashlights at night. Cell phone service has been cut off, leaving Starlink satellite internet as the only available means of communication. But not everyone has Starlink,

as it is prohibitively expensive for more than 90% of the population, who have no regular income. A small number of resistance outposts, churches, and private businesses have Starlink connections, and some shops offer access by the hour for a small fee. The lack of reliable communication complicates aid distribution and efforts to avoid airstrikes. During missions, resistance teams and aid workers often travel in military trucks with no way to call for help or warn each other of incoming airstrikes. The Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF), under the leadership of Khun Bedu, is working to develop a basic early warning system to alert civilians when aircraft are spotted and airstrikes are imminent. However, the absence of cellular and internet infrastructure has made implementation nearly impossible.

The resistance forces now control large swaths of territory, and Khun Bedu has expressed a desire for people to return to their original homes, resume farming, and possibly open small factories to produce soap, fertilizer, and animal feed—reducing reliance on imports and allowing these essential goods to be distributed more affordably within the population. However, without proper demining equipment, many of these areas remain unsafe and unusable. Clearing them could take years and is further complicated by international prohibitions on importing demining equipment, as well as the inability of trained instructors to legally enter the country.

Insecurity shapes every aspect of life in Burma. Drone attacks are becoming increasingly common. Residents, adults and children alike, are now conditioned to flee into bomb shelters at the sound of engines overhead. Every structure in Karenni, no matter how crude, includes a bomb shelter. Even bamboo huts with plastic tarps for roofs have dugouts nearby. One priest running schools for displaced children explained that he had divided his students into multiple small groups and relocated them to scattered sites to avoid making them easy targets for airstrikes.

Teachers, doctors, and soldiers serving with the

resistance receive no pay. They continue working and risking their lives purely out of commitment to their people. Life-saving resources such as communication devices, demining equipment, and medical supplies are costly and must be purchased from a meager state budget—one that receives no income tax revenue. Resistance leaders are painfully aware that every piece of equipment purchased comes at the cost of food that could have fed hungry families. In stark contrast, the junta is well-funded and well-supplied by China and Russia. Its forces have access to fuel, aircraft, and modern weapons.

The March earthquake briefly reignited international interest in Burma, but that attention is already fading—even though earthquake-related suffering continues. Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis triggered by the 2021 coup has persisted for over four years, with no international intervention. The broader civil war has been ongoing since 1948. Yet global attention continues to shift, from Ukraine to Gaza, to Syria, and now to tariffs, while the humanitarian disaster in Burma deepens, largely ignored by the outside world.

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



Photo: Supplied

MANSAT VILLAGERS URGE TNLA TO ADDRESS UNLAWFUL SILICON MINING, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL HARMS

Residents of Mansat village in Namhkam Township, located in a Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)-controlled area of northern Shan State, are calling on the TNLA to take decisive action against ongoing silicon rock mining by Myanmar Golden Crop Co., Ltd. (MGC), which they say is operating without proper public consent and has caused environmental and social damage.

Despite strong opposition from the community, MGC has continued mining operations in Ward 8 of Mansat village. The village is home to around 500 households, mostly of Ta'ang and Palaung ethnicity.

Villagers allege the company obtained approval through a non-transparent process, relying solely on a signature from the village administrator without broad community agreement. The company, they say, has failed to disclose its operating model or engage with local residents.

Hundreds of villagers marched to the MGC mining site on 5 May in protest, accusing the company of damaging farmland and contributing to rising social issues, including rape and drug trafficking—crimes allegedly involving company employees that have gone unpunished.

"Only the community suffers the consequences," one resident told Mizzima, highlighting that those responsible for the abuses have not been held accountable.

Community members claim they initially wrote to MGC seeking transparency and resolution over land

disputes, but the company failed to respond. They also question the legitimacy of the contract signed on 12 April 2025, granting MGC permission to continue mining, asserting it was approved only by the village administrator without full consent from local leaders or the wider community.

Although the TNLA maintains control over the area, locals say current Namhkan district chief Tar Taung Tan, who reportedly authorized the mining arrangement, is acting independently and without clear affiliation to the TNLA. Residents are calling for TNLA's central leadership to investigate, noting that local TNLA authorities have underreported the number of active mining blocks in official reports.

"We're coordinating with civil society organizations to prepare a formal petition and report the situation directly to the TNLA headquarters," said a Mansat villager.

According to the Mansat Farmers' Committee, MGC has been mining silicon in the area since 2014, exporting it to China for use in advanced plastics, metals, and electronics. While the company's official permit expired on 31 December 2024, extraction has reportedly continued without interruption.

Mizzima is seeking comments from TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo and Myanmar Golden Crop Co., Ltd. regarding how both the PSLF/TNLA and MGC plan to respond to mounting concerns from the Mansat community.



Photo: Supplied



HUNDREDS FLEE ACROSS THAI BORDER AFTER ATTACK ON MYANMAR MILITARY IN KAYIN STATE

More than 300 Myanmar people fled into Thailand to seek refuge following an assault on the military by ethnic armed groups, Thailand said Thursday, days after the junta extended a post-earthquake ceasefire.

Myanmar has been mired in civil conflict since a military coup in 2021, with the junta battling a coalition of ethnic armed organisations and pro-democracy resistance forces.

Wednesday's attack by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its allied Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) targeted a military base in Kayin state, about 2.5 kilometres (1.5 miles) from the Thai border, according to the Thai military.

"The attack involved a close-range encirclement of the base and the use of armed drones to continuously drop explosives throughout the day," a statement said.

By Thursday, 327 Myanmar nationals had crossed into Thailand and were sheltering in two temporary sites, including a temple, with Thai military and police providing security and humanitarian aid, officials said.

Thai forces have ramped up patrols along the border in Tak province to prevent what officials described as a potential "breach of sovereignty by foreign armed forces".

Myanmar's military government and various armed groups opposed to it announced a ceasefire after the March 28 quake to help relief and recovery efforts.

The truce has been repeatedly broken by air strikes by the junta and attacks by armed groups.

The magnitude-7.7 quake near the central city of Mandalay killed nearly 3,800 and left tens of thousands homeless.

AFP

US BLACKLISTS MYANMAR WARLORD AND ETHNIC ARMY LINKED TO SCAM CENTERS

RFA

The U.S. Treasury Department on Monday last week blacklisted a Myanmar militia group, its leader Saw Chit Thu and his two sons for facilitating cyber scams from territory they control on the Thai-Myanmar border.

The Karen National Army, or KNA, formerly known as the Karen Border Guard, was designated as a "significant transnational criminal organization" that is barred from holding property in the United States and conducting transactions with U.S. persons.

The two other individuals affected by the action are Saw Htoo Eh Moo and Saw Chit Chit, who are sons of Saw Chit Thu.

The Treasury Department said in a statement said Americans suffered financial losses from sophisticated cyber scams emanating from Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries, amounting to over \$2 billion in 2022 and \$3.5 billion in 2023.

"Treasury is committed to using all available tools to disrupt these networks and hold accountable those who seek to profit from these criminal schemes," Treasury Deputy Secretary Michael Faulkender was quoted as saying.

KNA is headquartered in Shwe Kokko, in Myawaddy township, which lies just south of the main crossing point between eastern Myanmar and Thailand. The militia was formed by fighters who broke away from the anti-military Karen National Union insurgent group in the 1990s. It became one of several military-backed Border Guard Forces in 2009.

Since 2017, Shwe Kokko, on the banks of the Moei River that defines that part of the Myanmar-Thai border, has become the site of a glitzy construction binge –

fruits of a joint venture called Yatai International Holding Group Company Limited involving She Zhijiang. He is a naturalized Cambodian born in China who owns property and gaming ventures across Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines. He was arrested in Thailand in 2022.

Treasury said the KNA has leveraged its former role as a Border Guard Force allied with the Myanmar military "to facilitate a trans-border criminal empire." Although the group changed its name in March 2024, it has continued its cooperation with the Burmese military as recently as September 2024, it said.

Treasury said the KNA profits from cyber scam schemes "on an industrial scale" by leasing land it controls to other organized crime groups, providing security and providing support for human trafficking, smuggling, and the sale of utilities used to provide energy to scam operations.

The statement said scammers, who are often themselves lured or trafficked into prison-like call centers or retrofitted hotels and casinos, are forced, with threats of physical violence and humiliation, into scamming strangers online.

Treasury described Saw Chit Thu as "a key enabler of scam operations in the region." His sons Saw Htoo Eh Moo and Saw Chit Chit are officers in KNA and both have served in key roles in the KNA criminal enterprise, the statement said.

Saw Chit Thu and the KNA could not immediately be reached for comment Monday.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Photo: NUG

NUG OPENS FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICE IN U.S., APPOINTS REPRESENTATIVES IN ASEAN AND EIGHT COUNTRIES

The National Unity Government (NUG) has announced the opening of its Foreign Ministry office in Washington, D.C., as part of its expanding diplomatic outreach. According to its four-year performance report, the NUG has also appointed official representatives in eight countries to bolster its international engagement.

These countries include member states of ASEAN, as well as the United Kingdom, Australia, the Czech Republic, India, Japan, South Korea, Norway, and France.

Additionally, the NUG has established a diplomatic office in Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, where a deputy chief of mission has been assigned.

The report reaffirms that U Kyaw Moe Tun continues to serve as Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, representing the democratic aspirations of the Myanmar people and maintaining active communication with international organizations and foreign governments.



PDF fighters

NUG SAYS NEARLY USD 25 MILLION PROVIDED TO PDF BATTALIONS SINCE 2021

The National Unity Government (NUG) announced on 7 May that it has provided nearly USD 24.9 million in logistical support to People's Defence Force (PDF) battalions and other units across the country since their formation in 2021.

This support has been distributed 27 times over the four years from the establishment of the NUG's PDF battalions in 2021 until May 2025, and allocated to over 300 battalions and other units under the NUG's Ministry of Defence across the country.

The NUG revealed that 90 percent of the funds—approximately USD 22.5 million—were raised through

the People's Revolution Fund (PRF) initiative, a public contribution program launched by the Ministry of Defence. The PRF enables individuals to donate at least 30,000 Kyat per month to support the resistance movement.

The NUG began forming its PDF battalions on 5 May 2021. As of 5 May 2025, the initiative marks its fourth anniversary.

NUCC AIMS TO FINALIZE FEDERAL TRANSITIONAL CONSTITUTION FOR MYANMAR BY LATE 2025

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) is working to complete a federal transitional constitution by August or September 2025, according to NUCC member U Toe Kyaw Hlaing, who spoke with Mizzima.

"The NUCC has outlined its strategic priorities for 2025. We are currently drafting a unified political agreement and are also working to reach consensus with the remaining key revolutionary stakeholders, so we can formally ratify it. These are among our top objectives this year," said U Toe Kyaw Hlaing.

A coalition of ethnic organizations first announced the start of the drafting process on 12 February.

The aim is to establish a federal democratic union in Myanmar. The announcement was made jointly by the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF), New Mon State Party (Anti-Dictatorship) (NMSP-AD), Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC),

Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC), Mon State Federal Council (MSFC), Ta'ang Political Consultative Committee (TPCC), and the Women's League of Burma (WLB). All of these organizations are part of the NUCC.

According to the NUCC, the federal transitional constitution will serve as a guiding framework during the revolutionary struggle and throughout the transitional period.

On 4 May, the NUCC also released a list of its member organizations and their respective council representatives. However, U Toe Kyaw Hlaing clarified that this announcement was administrative and unrelated to the council's current strategic direction.

Earlier, on 19 September 2024, nine ethnic armed groups and civil society organizations declared their commitment to building a federal democratic union through a "Bottom-Up Federalism Approach," under the slogan "Strong States, Strong Union."



Damaged monastery in Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

AFTER THE QUAKE: MANDALAY'S FIGHT FOR AID AMID WAR AND WEATHER

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Standing amid the rubble in Mandalay, 21-year-old medical student May Min Thone, a U-Reporter for UNICEF, issued an emotional appeal to the international community. "There is no electricity, no clean water supply, and very poor connectivity," she said. "We've been struggling to contact our families and friends since the day the earthquake struck."

Thone, who is volunteering at Mandalay General Hospital, the largest in the region, spoke about the growing desperation around her. "We just lost our classmate. A powerful collapse struck during the quake and killed her," she said. "Although I have suffered myself, I'm trying my best to support my local community."

She now coordinates blood donations and distributes food and water alongside local volunteers. In much of Burma, where electricity is unreliable or nonexistent, refrigeration is rare, making it difficult or impossible to store large amounts of blood. As a result, whether responding to battlefield injuries or natural disasters like the earthquake, donors must be located and matched with patients in real time. Severely injured victims often require more blood than multiple donors can provide, turning each case into a frantic, life-threatening scramble. In a mass casualty situation like this, with tens of thousands potentially in need, the shortage becomes critical. Despite the tireless efforts of volunteers and donors, May Min Thone says it's not enough. "A lot of people are in need, and the local community can't hold on much longer," she warned, referring not only to the urgent demand for blood, but also for medicine, nutrition, and shelter.

Across Burma, communication has been a challenge since the 2021 coup, with large swaths of the country cut off from cell networks and internet access. Like every other aspect of people's suffering, the earthquake has only made things worse.

"Families are sleeping on the open ground. Parents are looking for their missing children. Children are looking for their missing parents," Thone said. Survivors described homes collapsing around them, family members crushed under rubble, and the constant fear that loud noises might signal another quake, or another government airstrike.

With health infrastructure damaged and many displaced families now living in tents or open areas, the risk of dehydration, mosquito-borne diseases, and waterborne illness is steadily rising. "People are staring at the ruins of their homes on empty stomachs. There's a shortage of food, water, and electricity," she added.

As the monsoon season approaches, worsening weather is already complicating relief efforts in the Mandalay Region. On April 27, strong winds near Inle Lake tore through Kyartaw Village, ripping the remaining roofs off quake-damaged homes and flattening temporary shelters. In Patheingyi Township, seven villages located on islands in the Irrawaddy River face a high risk of flooding, while persistent rainfall is degrading road conditions and making aid delivery increasingly difficult.

Her voice breaking, she ended with a direct plea: "We need urgent assistance. Every second matters—"

for our friends, our families, our community, and our future.”

The earthquake pushed thousands of people across the Mandalay Region into deeper crisis, especially in rural and peri-urban townships already strained by economic hardship, conflict spillover, and climate extremes. While displacement in Mandalay has not reached the scale seen in Sagaing, localized movements have occurred in areas like Madaya and Myingyan, driven by proximity to conflict zones, fear of forced conscription, and earthquake-related destruction, complicated further by heavy rains.

Even before the disaster, half of Mandalay's households relied on a single income source, and 56% were living below the Minimum Expenditure Basket. Rising inflation and stagnant incomes had made food and essential goods unaffordable for many, particularly in rural areas. Though 84% of households report access to electricity, the average daily supply is only 7.9 hours, undermining productivity and access to services.

Environmental shocks have compounded the suffering in Mandalay. In April 2024, a severe heatwave led to over 900 heat-related deaths. Later that year, Typhoon Yagi brought widespread flooding, affecting more than 396,000 people, nearly 6% of the region's population, and submerging 40,000 hectares of farmland. At the same time, extreme inflation has gripped the country, with Mandalay seeing a 141% rise in rice prices since 2021, while agricultural output has dropped sharply. Between 2020 and 2023, rice-growing areas declined by 30%, weakened by drought, soil degradation, and supply chain disruptions tied to regional conflict. Though Mandalay remains a major trade hub, continued instability in surrounding areas has disrupted supply routes and weakened local food systems.

These systems are now highly vulnerable to both climate and political shocks, highlighting the urgent need for investment in climate-resilient agriculture and the recovery of rural livelihoods. As a result of these overlapping crises, the area is currently classified as Phase 2 – “Stressed” under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system—meaning households are just meeting minimum food needs by sacrificing essential assets or basic services like healthcare and education. Without additional support, many risk slipping into Phase 3 – “Crisis,” where hunger intensifies and malnutrition spreads.

Access to education and healthcare is similarly uneven. While urban centers retain functioning schools and clinics, rural areas face severe staffing shortages and crumbling infrastructure. Nearly 18% of children were out of school during the 2023–2024 academic year, with rural schools particularly under-resourced.

Youth in these areas also lack access to the internet and digital devices, further widening the education gap.

Mandalay's strategic location between multiple conflict zones has made it especially vulnerable to spillover violence. At least six townships, including Madaya and Myingyan, are classified as conflict-exposed. Military conscription and junta raids have intensified fear, particularly among young men in semi-urban areas. Between March 28 and April 24, Myanmar Witness documented at least 14 government attacks in Mandalay Region.

On April 19, a military airstrike struck Yae Htwet Village in Thabeikkyin Township, killing at least 32 civilians, including women and children, and injuring over 45 others. Just two days later, on April 21, the junta bombed a monastery in Aidaing Village that was serving as a shelter and mobile medical clinic for earthquake victims, injuring six people, including monks and local residents. These attacks occurred despite the junta's self-declared ceasefire and amid ongoing recovery efforts, adding a new layer of fear and trauma to a population already reeling from disaster.

Aid delivery remains severely constrained by bureaucratic delays, junta obstruction, hoarding of supplies by the generals, and damaged infrastructure, especially in rural areas where roads hit by the earthquake remain unrepaired. While the urban core of Mandalay remains accessible under State Administration Council (SAC) control, assistance is slow to reach peri-urban and outlying areas due to both physical destruction and deliberate interference. Even amid widespread devastation, the junta continues its strategy of obstruction and intimidation and neglect.

In the early weeks of the crisis, civilian humanitarian efforts came under attack, with some local aid organizations forced to suspend operations due to threats, interference, or direct violence. Volunteers reported being harassed, beaten, or forcibly conscripted by junta-backed militias. More recently, in the near-total absence of government aid, civilians have stepped up to lead relief efforts. Members of the Burmese diaspora are also playing a crucial role, organizing fundraisers, amplifying voices from inside the country, and helping international donors bypass junta channels. These grassroots efforts have become the backbone of both aid distribution and public awareness. Civilian responders, though lacking funding, protective gear, or secure transport, continue their work undeterred. Meanwhile, the junta persists in punishing the population, whether by denying aid, launching new attacks, or both.

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



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with officers.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CALLS NEW CEASEFIRE AFTER QUAKE

Myanmar's junta declared a new post-earthquake truce on Tuesday last 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



Clearing up. Photo: AFP

THE EARTHQUAKE THAT EXPOSED A JUNTA'S FRAILTY: WHY MYANMAR'S REVOLUTION CANNOT BE STOPPED

JAMES SWE

The 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28, 2025, did more than shatter buildings—it shattered the junta's illusion of control. While international observers speculate about the disaster's geopolitical implications, the truth is clear: the earthquake has accelerated the military regime's collapse, exposed its moral bankruptcy, and galvanized a resistance movement that refuses to surrender.

1. Nay Pyi Taw: The Junta's Crumbling Fortress

Nay Pyi Taw, the junta's sprawling capital built to project invincibility, lies in ruins. Government ministries collapsed, staff housing units crumbled, and the presidential palace's gold-lined staircase now dangles over debris. Designed as a "fortress city," Nay Pyi Taw's destruction is symbolic: a regime that cannot protect its own seat of power cannot govern a nation. Over 4,000 housing units were destroyed, forcing bureaucrats

and soldiers' families to sleep in tents without water or electricity. Even the secret underground command center flooded, paralyzing military operations[1].

This is not just physical damage—it is a spiritual reckoning. In a country where natural disasters are seen as omens, the earthquake has fueled whispers of divine retribution against a regime steeped in superstition and brutality.

2. Ceasefire Lies and Aerial Terror

The junta's post-earthquake "ceasefire" was a grotesque charade. Despite pledging to halt hostilities on April 2, the military launched 243 attacks in the following weeks, including 171 airstrikes. In Naungcho, northern Shan State, junta jets bombed a village just three hours after the quake, killing seven. On April 16, a pregnant woman shielding her children died in a Karen State airstrike during Burmese New Year celebrations. Satellite data confirms at least 22 villages

were bombed during the ceasefire period, with junta air attacks increasing by 27% compared to prior months.

The junta's reliance on Russian and Chinese fighter jets-tools of terror, not governance-underscores its moral bankruptcy. As UN envoy Tom Andrews noted: "Dropping bombs while claiming to facilitate aid is nothing short of incredible"

3. International Aid: A Double-Edged Sword

China's Coercive "Compassion"

Beijing rushed \$13.7 million in aid and 30 rescue teams, but its generosity was strategic. Chinese workers operated in both junta-held areas and territories controlled by ethnic resistance groups like the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), showcasing Beijing's dual influence. Yet, China also strong-armed the MNDAA to retreat from Lashio-a city resistance forces had liberated-by threatening border closures and freezing bank accounts. This betrayal reveals China's priority: stability for its Belt and Road investments, not Myanmar's people.

ASEAN's Paralysis

While Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim pushed for ceasefire extensions, ASEAN's aid channels through the junta legitimized its obstruction. Junta checkpoints blocked aid to resistance strongholds like Sagaing, forcing communities to rely on grassroots networks like the Sagaing Forum.

India and Thailand's Balancing Act

India sent naval ships and 625 tons of supplies, aligning with its "Neighborhood First" policy but risking complicity in junta crimes. Thailand, hosting

junta leader Min Aung Hlaing at a regional summit, quietly allowed cross-border aid to resistance zones-a tacit nod to the revolution's inevitability.

4. The Resistance: Defying Bombs and Blockades

Kachin State: Rare Earth and Resilience

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allies seized Indaw after an eight-month battle, capturing 300 junta bases since 2021[13][8]. Despite relentless airstrikes, they control rare-earth mines vital to China's tech industry-a strategic thorn in Beijing's side.

Arakan Army: Marching Toward Victory

The Arakan Army (AA) now governs 14 of 17 townships in Rakhine State, besieging Sittwe and Kyaukphyu-home to Chinese energy projects. Their control of the Kaladan River corridor threatens junta supply lines.

Chin State: Sacrifice and Solidarity

In Falam Township, Chin resistance forces lost 89 fighters in a five-month offensive but secured a symbolic victory on their movement's fourth anniversary. With AA support, they've liberated 14 towns, isolating junta holdouts like Hakha.

Karen State: Cutting the Junta's Lifeline

Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and PDF forces severed the Asia Highway, trapping junta troops in Kawkaeik. "They've encircled the town," admitted a defected sergeant.

5. The Junta's Last Gasp

The earthquake exposed the regime's fatal flaws:

- **Resource Collapse:** The junta faces a \$5 billion reconstruction bill for Nay Pyi Taw while starving survivors of aid.
- **Diplomatic Isolation:** Its rare plea for international help-a sign of desperation-changed no minds. The UN estimates 17 million need urgent aid, yet junta checkpoints block 70% of deliveries.
- **Moral Bankruptcy:** Bombing mosques, monasteries, and displacement camps, the junta has alienated even its Buddhist base.

To the People of Myanmar: Your Power Is Unmatched

The junta wants you to believe it thrives in chaos. Do not be fooled. Every cracked ministry in Nay Pyi Taw, every stolen aid truck, every lie to the world is a sign of their fear.

You have survived coups, airstrikes, and torture chambers. Now, you face nature's fury-and still, you endure. Your hospitals are in caves, your schools in tents, your armies farmers with rifles. Yet, you hold the moral high ground.

To the World: Stand with the Resistance, Not the Regime

The junta's "stability" is a myth. China, India, and ASEAN must choose: prop up a collapsing regime or align with Myanmar's people. The National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic resistance groups have

proven their ability to govern - without executions, airstrikes, or stolen aid.

The UN Security Council must impose an aviation fuel embargo now. Every Russian jet and Chinese bullet enables the junta's terror.

Conclusion: The Earthquake Didn't Save the Junta-It Hastened Their End

History shows tyrants fall when their failures outpace their propaganda. The 2025 earthquake did more than destroy buildings-it exposed the junta's rot to the world and reminded Myanmar's people of their indomitable strength.

To the resistance: Keep organizing. Keep resisting. The junta's time is borrowed.

To the world: See clearly. The revolution will win-not because the earthquake doomed the junta, but because the people of Myanmar refuse to be doomed.

The fortress has fallen. The future is yours.



Protestors in Pakistan burn an effigy of Indian PM Narendra Modi. Photo: AFP

PULLING INDIA AND PAKISTAN BACK FROM THE BRINK: CRISIS GROUP

India and Pakistan are embroiled in their most dangerous confrontation in decades, writes the International Crisis Group in a report released 8 May. With further escalation looming, it is imperative that these nuclear-armed adversaries seek an off-ramp and, with outside help, explore ways to ease bilateral tensions, they say.

The following is their report:

India and Pakistan are caught up in their most serious hostilities since last waging war on each other in 1971. Two weeks after militants massacred 26 tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir, India launched Operation Sindoor in the early hours of 7 May – a series of cross-border missile strikes on nine sites that New Delhi branded “terrorist infrastructure” in Pakistan’s Punjab province and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Pakistani authorities denounced an “act of war”, saying India had killed 31 people, including women and children, and promising reprisals. Pakistan’s military also said it had downed five Indian fighter jets in India’s Punjab state and Indian-administered Kashmir, though it has offered no proof of these claims. India, for its part, acknowledged the loss of at least two warplanes inside its borders, but it did not elaborate on what caused them to crash. Heavy artillery fire continues across the Line of Control that divides the Indian- and Pakistani-

administered parts of Kashmir, leaving scores of civilians killed and wounded on both sides. As night fell on 8 May, there were unconfirmed social media reports of drone attacks by Pakistan on various northern Indian cities.

With further escalation between these nuclear-armed adversaries looming, it is crucial that both shift to showing restraint and, with international backing, explore avenues to dial down the tensions between them.

India’s Case for Strikes

New Delhi insists that strikes on Pakistan were fully justified following the UN Security Council statement on the 22 April Pahalgam attack, in which the 26 tourists were killed. Government officials highlighted the resolution’s call “to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice”. Having long accused Pakistan of sponsoring and harbouring anti-India militant groups, New Delhi presented the decision to hit targets deep inside Pakistan territory as a response not just to the Pahalgam massacre, but also to a string of terrorist acts dating as far back as the attack on the Indian parliament in 2001.

Officials asserted that Operation Sindoor was “focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature”,

exclusively targeting “terrorist infrastructure” connected with Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Hizbul Mujahideen, groups at the forefront of attacks on India over the last two decades, rather than any Pakistani military installation. All nine sites hit on 7 May were “terror camps”, according to New Delhi, which were “carefully selected to avoid damage to civilian infrastructure and loss of civilian lives”. This account is at variance with reports from Pakistan indicating that the strikes destroyed mosques and other buildings, killing a number of civilians.

Expectations that the Indian military would mount an attack on Pakistan were high after the massacre of mainly Hindu tourists in Pahalgam. With most victims shot at point-blank range in front of their families, the killings stirred a public outcry throughout India. Immediately afterward, senior officials in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government blamed armed groups backed by Pakistan. Since then, the neighbours have traded diplomatic punches, frozen bilateral trade and closed their shared border. India also suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, which has governed the sharing of water from the Indus River basin between the two countries since 1960. The ceasefire to which both countries recommitted in 2021 lies in tatters, with forces on both sides firing and shelling across the Line of Control every day since the bloody Pahalgam events.

Modi has repeatedly declared that India will pursue and punish the Pahalgam perpetrators, as well as those who orchestrated the massacre, and said he has given the Indian military free rein to decide on the best way to achieve these objectives. After spending much of the past decade projecting himself as a strongman at home, and India as a robust Asian power, the prime minister has been under intense pressure from his support base to respond forcefully. By naming the operation Sindoor, his government appears to have had appeasement of this audience in mind: sindoor, the Hindi word for vermillion, refers to the red powder Hindu women wear on their foreheads as a sign of marriage, thereby associating the strikes with revenge on behalf of the widows of the Hindu men killed in Pahalgam.

Pakistan’s Possible Responses

Islamabad responded to news of the Pahalgam attacks by rejecting allegations of involvement, expressing condolences for the victims while describing the killings as the work of homegrown Kashmiri militants. India’s operation, however, represents a definitive displacement of bilateral tensions into the domain of military hostilities, with little certainty as

to what the repercussions for international peace and security may be. A combination of bellicose rhetoric, domestic agitation and the remorseless logic of military one-upmanship have heightened the risks of escalation, particularly because for some time there was no diplomatic communication between the sides.

For now, it seems that Pakistan will answer the 7 May strikes with at least some military action of its own. Pakistani officials have warned that India’s violation of Pakistani sovereignty gives Islamabad the right “to respond appropriately at a time and place of its choosing” in self-defence. Reports that Indian fire hit mosques and killed civilians have undoubtedly bolstered anti-India sentiment across Pakistan and spurred calls for a riposte in kind. On 8 May, Islamabad claimed to have shot down twelve Indian drones in various locations, and that evening, reports came in of Pakistani drones hitting sites in India.

While the temptation to strike back is undeniably strong, doing so would bring huge risks. The heights reached in the current conflict are already much greater than the last flare-up of tensions between India and Pakistan in 2019, when the two countries came dangerously close to all-out war after India blamed a suicide bombing that killed 40 of its soldiers on Pakistan-based militants, bombing an alleged militant training camp in response. On that occasion, however, despite claims and counterclaims by both sides, the escalation did not lead to civilian casualties or destruction of civilian property. Furthermore, the fighting involved aerial combat along the border, at some distance from populated areas.

Islamabad was seemingly prepared for Operation Sindoor. In the days leading up to the 7 May strikes, Islamabad launched a diplomatic offensive in major capitals, including Washington, as well as at the UN Security Council (of which it is currently a member). It said it had intelligence pointing to imminent Indian strikes, calling for efforts to restrain New Delhi and warning of retaliation should its arch-rival hit Pakistani territory. But foreign powers appear to have been somewhat indifferent to the prospect that two states with nuclear weapons and a long history of conflict might march into war. Aside from their preoccupation with the multitude of other crises unfolding around the world, many foreign capitals may also have feared contradicting themselves after having expressed support for India’s prerogative to “fight terrorism” following the brutal Pahalgam killings.

The Question of Blame

Islamabad, meanwhile, has rejected outright Indian claims of culpability and called for an independent inquiry into the Pahalgam attack. Pakistani officials have said the Indian missile strikes were driven by domestic frustrations, exacerbated by New Delhi's anger at seeing its claims of having restored peace in Indian-administered Kashmir repudiated. Without doubt, political conditions in the Himalayan region have become increasingly volatile in the wake of New Delhi's decision in 2019 to abolish its special status, reclassify it as a union territory run by the federal government and remove safeguards for locals such as restrictions on the sale of land to non-Kashmiris. Fear is widespread among Kashmiris that New Delhi is trying to engineer demographic change by bringing more Hindus into India's only Muslim-majority region. Several emergent militant groups have explicitly fed off this anxiety, declaring that they will resist any such changes forced by New Delhi. Indian authorities, for their part, insist that these new outfits are proxies of older organisations such as the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, which have been waging an armed campaign in support of integrating Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan.

New Delhi bases its allegations of Pakistani responsibility for the Pahalgam attacks on Islamabad's history of backing militant groups in Kashmir. Even so, there is still little clarity as to the perpetrators' identity, with media reports claiming that they were a mix of locals and Pakistanis. So far, in any event, no alleged culprits have been arrested. The same day that India launched its strikes, its National Investigation Agency made a public appeal to anyone who might have information, including photographs or video footage of the killings, in an effort to gather more clues.

Defusing the Dangers

India and Pakistan should both recognise the perils of further escalation. Defusing bilateral tensions and reducing the risks of worsening conflict will require sustained back-channel communications, preferably far from the public eye. The re-establishment of contact between the Indian and Pakistani national security advisers on 7 May is a promising first step. That link could now foster the discreet discussions that are urgently needed to ward off more salvos of fire. While Pakistan should rethink the risks of retaliation, India should respond to any sign of restraint on Islamabad's part by ending its suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty.

All foreign powers with sway over New Delhi and Islamabad should swiftly exert pressure on both sides to de-escalate. The U.S., but also Gulf Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, are well positioned to help the two sides find an off-ramp. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reportedly nudged the two national security advisers to make contact and has also discussed ways to de-escalate tensions with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. U.S. President Donald Trump's most recent comment was simply that he hopes the crisis "ends quickly". Washington has a major role to play in easing Indian-Pakistani tensions, as it has done on several previous occasions, and it should urge both parties to step back from the edge immediately. Given the level of animosity between the parties and the domestic pressures they both face, the quiet involvement of countries that they consider trusted interlocutors could be key to preventing the outbreak of a full-blown war that neither India nor Pakistan can afford.

The Indian government, meanwhile, should take heed of these dangers and act with prudence in Kashmir. Immediately after the Pahalgam massacre, many Kashmiris, including the region's entire political class, spontaneously denounced the attack, holding rallies and candlelight vigils in honour of the victims. New Delhi's heavy-handed approach in the investigation, in which authorities have arrested more than 2,000 Kashmiris – many under stringent anti-terror laws – and demolished homes belonging to suspected militants (at least some of whom were plainly not involved in the Pahalgam attack), has offset local anger at the perpetrators and instead redirected it at India. Handling with care the resentment festering in Kashmir is crucial, but the immediate imperative should be for the two nuclear-armed nations to back down from the brink of war and, with international support, seek bilateral avenues to defuse the tensions between them.



THAILAND SHUTS SCENIC VIEWING SPOT AFTER LAOS CLASHES

Rare armed clashes in Laos believed to be linked to drug smuggling have forced Thailand to close a popular mountain viewing point on the border and prompted a security warning from the United States.

Thai national park officials said on Monday last week that the Phu Chi Fa scenic spot, on the border with Laos in northern Chiang Rai province, has been closed until further notice.

The US embassy in Vientiane urged Americans thinking of travelling to Bokeo province to reconsider after reports of "clashes between the Lao army and unidentified armed groups".

"Local officials have requested raised security levels, which will include an increase in military checkpoints and troop presence," the embassy said on its website.

Unrest is rare in communist Laos but the country forms part of the Golden Triangle -- covering the border areas with Myanmar and Thailand -- that has been a hub for Southeast Asia's lucrative drug trade for decades.

State-run Lao National Radio reported on Tuesday that a border patrol clashed with drug smugglers in Bokeo on Saturday and arrested four suspects.

The report said that some border patrol officials were killed and wounded in the clashes, without giving details.

Police in Laos did not respond to AFP's request for comment.

Suphakorn Phromcharoen, the police chief in Thailand's Wiang Kaen district, across the border from the location of the clashes, told AFP that at least one stray bullet had hit a house on the Thai side of the border.

Thai authorities estimate that at least one soldier may have been killed and more than a dozen wounded.

AFP



Photo: AFP

US AID CUTS PUSH BANGLADESH'S HEALTH SECTOR TO THE EDGE

Bangladesh hoped to celebrate progress towards eradicating tuberculosis this year, having already slashed the numbers dying from the preventable and curable disease by tens of thousands each year.

Instead, it is reeling from a \$48 million snap aid cut by US President Donald Trump's government, which health workers say could rapidly unravel years of hard work and cause huge numbers of preventable deaths.

"Doctors told me I was infected with a serious kind of tuberculosis," labourer Mohammed Parvej, 35, told AFP from his hospital bed after he received life-saving

treatment from medics funded by the US aid who identified his persistent hacking cough.

But full treatment for his multidrug-resistant tuberculosis requires more than a year of hospital care and a laborious treatment protocol -- and that faces a deeply uncertain future.

"Bangladesh is among the seven most TB-prevalent countries globally, and we aim to eradicate it by 2035," said Ayesha Akhter, deputy director of the formerly US-funded specialised TB Hospital treating Parvej in the capital Dhaka.

Bangladesh had made significant progress against the infectious bacteria, spread by spitting and sneezing, leaving people exhausted and sometimes coughing blood.

TB deaths dropped from more than 81,000 a year in 2010, down to 44,000 in 2023, according to the World Health Organization, in the country of some 170 million people.

Akhter said the South Asian nation had "been implementing a robust programme", supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

"Then, one fine morning, USAID pulled out their assistance," she said.

Starving children

More than 80 percent of humanitarian programmes funded by USAID worldwide have been scrapped.

Tariful Islam Khan said the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) had, with US funding, carried out mass screening "improving TB case detection, particularly among children" from 2020 to 2024.

"Thanks to the support of the American people... the project has screened 52 million individuals and diagnosed over 148,000 TB cases, including 18,000 children," he said.

Funding cuts threatened to stall the work.

"This work is critical not only for the health of millions of Bangladeshis, but also for global TB control efforts," he said.

Growing rates of infectious diseases in one nation have a knock-on impact in the region.

Cuts hit further than TB alone.

"USAID was everywhere in the health sector," said Nurjahan Begum, health adviser to the interim government -- which is facing a host of challenges after a mass uprising toppled the former regime last year.

US aid was key to funding vaccines combatting a host of other diseases, protecting 2.3 million children against diphtheria, measles, polio and tetanus.

"I am particularly worried about the immunisation programme," Begum said.

"If there is a disruption, the success we have achieved in immunisation will be jeopardised."

Bangladeshi scientists have also developed a special feeding formula for starving children. That too has been stalled.

"We had just launched the programme," Begum said. "Many such initiatives have now halted"

Pivot to China

US State Department official Audrey M. Happ said that Washington was "committed" to ensuring aid was "aligned with the interests of the United States, and that resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible".

Bangladesh, whose economy and key garment industry are eyeing fearfully the end of the 90-day suspension of Trump's punishing 37 percent tariffs, is looking for other supporters.

Some Arab nations had expressed interest in helping fill the gap in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

China, as well as Turkey, may also step into Washington's shoes, Begum said.

Jobs are gone too, with Dhaka's Daily Star newspaper estimating that between 30,000 and 40,000 people were laid off after the United States halted funding.

Zinat Ara Afroze, fired along with 54 colleagues from Save the Children, said she worried for those she had dedicated her career to helping.

"I have seen how these projects have worked improving the life and livelihoods of underprivileged communities," she said, citing programmes ranging from food to health, environmental protection to democracy.

"A huge number of this population will be in immediate crisis."

WHO official Salma Sultana said aid cuts ramped up risks of "uncontrolled outbreaks" of diseases including cholera in the squalid refugee camps.

Faria Selim, from UNICEF, said reduced health services would impact the youngest Rohingya the hardest, especially some 160,000 children under five.

Hepatitis C, with a prevalence rate of nearly a fifth, "is likely to increase in 2025", Selim said.

Masaki Watabe, who runs the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Bangladesh working to improve reproductive and maternal health, said it was "trying its best to continue".

Closed clinics and no pay for midwives meant the risk of babies and mothers dying had shot up.

"Reduced donor funding has led to... increasing the risk of preventable maternal and newborn deaths," he said.

AFP

Rohingya babies dying

Those with the least have been hit the hardest.

Less dollars for aid means more sick and dead among the Rohingya refugees who fled civil war in their home in neighbouring Myanmar into Bangladesh since 2017.

Much of the US aid was delivered through the UN's WHO and UNICEF children's agency.



EMERGENCY DECLINED

"[The quake] revealed the tragic disconnect between the government's understanding—or perhaps, willingness to communicate—the severity of the disaster and the actual level of risk facing the population."

Professor Dean Kyne, a disaster management expert at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, presents a detailed critique of Myanmar's disaster response capacity in the wake of the country's recent, devastating earthquake. His analysis is informed by decades of data that demonstrate how military rule in Myanmar has continually prioritized authoritarian control over public welfare, making effective disaster management nearly impossible.

Kyne first explains that Myanmar is very vulnerable to cyclones, floods, landslides, and earthquakes due to its geography, but that despite recurring natural disasters, lacks both the infrastructure and political will to manage such crises. He uses the catastrophic 2008 Cyclone Nargis as an illustrative example of massive incompetence and state failure: the military government ignored 48-hour early warnings, withheld risk communication, and downplayed the storm so it could carry out its planned constitutional referendum (which then tentatively moved the country towards some degree of democratization while simultaneously solidifying the military's political power). The human toll—over 138,000 dead—was magnified by the entrenched system of secrecy, mismanagement, and obstruction.

Kyne argues that rather than learn from the Nargis catastrophe and build domestic disaster response capacity, the junta has only further weaponized management. He says bluntly, "Their goal is to weaponize the disaster and to enhance their power and control over the country." Kyne explains that, under authoritarian regimes, saving lives is not the goal—control is. Consequently, capacity building for preparedness, mitigation and recovery has not occurred. For example, he recounts the experience of a humanitarian responder, Kiran Verma, whose relief convoy, equipped with medical staff and supplies, was stopped at gunpoint and barred from entering the hardest-hit regions. This wasn't logistical failure, Kyne stresses, it was "humanitarian suppression under authoritarian rule."

According to Kyne, the three basic, essential actions of effective humanitarian response are: the immediate deployment of trained rescue teams; the use of helicopters to evacuate the injured; and logistical coordination for medical aid. Yet after the earthquake, the military government employed not one of these! Moreover, corruption remains rampant. He relates that "community leaders who support the junta stole the aid, repurposed it for profit, and did not distribute it to the affected people." But it is much worse than just complete negligence, incompetence and corruption: Kyne affirms credible reports that the regime used the crisis to forcibly recruit young male relief workers into the army. Legitimate aid workers have been restricted in their movement, denied access to opposition-controlled zones, seen their supplies confiscated, and subjected to intimidation by pro-junta paramilitaries such as the Pyu Saw Htee.

CATCH THE PODCAST

To read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast, click here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/4/19/episode-338-emergency-declined>

Photo: AFP

JUNTA'S FIRE BRIGADE DAY MARKED AMID QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIEF RESTRICTIONS AND ARMY ARSON

The junta's Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung attended the 79th anniversary of Myanmar Fire Brigade Day in Yangon on May 5, where participants observed a one-minute silence for victims of the recent Mandalay earthquake.

During his speech, the minister highlighted that approximately 18,000 fire incidents occurred across Myanmar between 2015 and 2024, resulting in estimated losses exceeding 192 billion Kyat.

While the junta has publicly praised its Fire Services Department's rescue efforts following the March 28 earthquake, which reportedly saved 653 survivors, human rights organizations have documented severe restrictions imposed by junta authorities on relief efforts.

In Sagaing Region, one of the areas most affected by the earthquake, local authorities required community members to seek authorization before responding to the disaster by submitting lists of volunteers and items to be donated, according to Human Rights Watch.

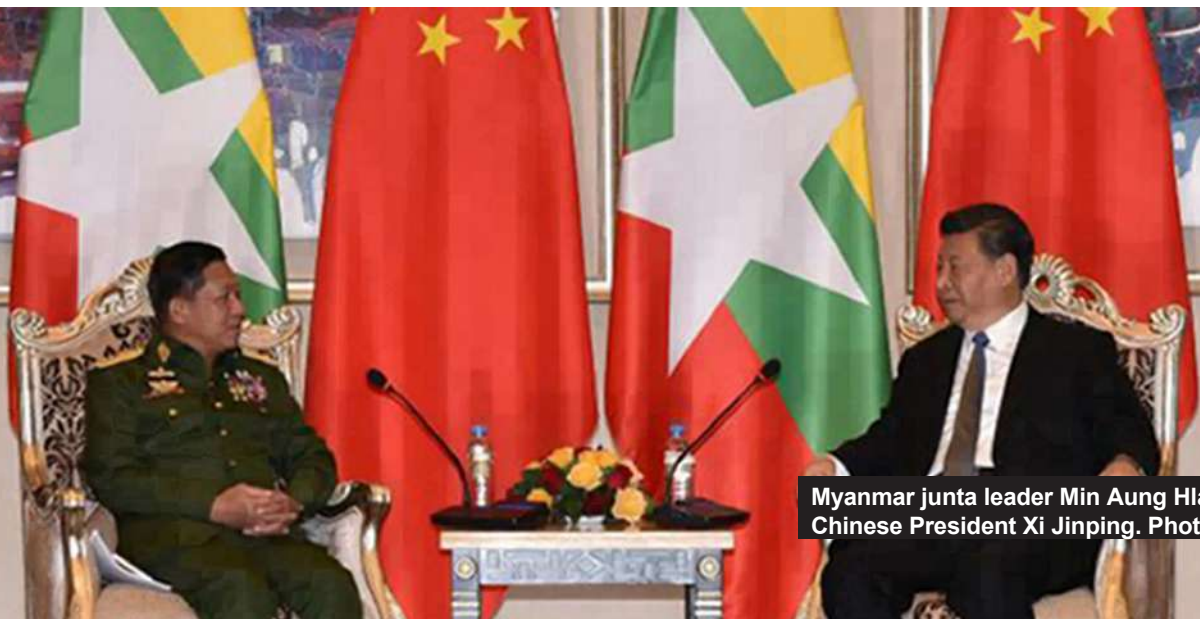
The military junta has been selectively accepting international aid, welcoming assistance from allies such as China, India and Russia, while rejecting Taiwan's

126-member rescue team. This pattern mirrors the junta's response after previous natural disasters, where it prioritized political control over humanitarian needs.

Human rights observers have noted a stark contradiction between the Fire Brigade's celebrated role in disaster response and the junta's documented history of deliberately setting fires as a weapon against civilian populations.

The junta has conducted systematic arson campaigns in areas with strong resistance presence, particularly in Sagaing Region, where monitoring group Data for Myanmar reported more than 69 percent of all homes burned in Myanmar since the 2021 coup have been destroyed. The monitoring organization estimated that more than 103,000 homes have been targeted by junta army's arson attacks across Myanmar in just four years.

At the Fire Brigade ceremony, Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung's call for strengthening the department "through manpower, equipment, and technology" stands in stark contrast to the reality faced by many civilians in conflict zones.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR SOCIAL MEDIA USERS REACT WITH FURY AS MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF PLEDGES TO PROTECT CHINESE PROJECTS

Myanmar's social media users have responded with sharp criticism to reports that junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing promised Chinese President Xi Jinping he would make every effort to ensure the safety of Chinese projects and personnel in Myanmar, during their recent meeting in Moscow.

The meeting took place in Moscow on May 9, on the sidelines of celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory in the Great Patriotic War. During their Moscow discussions, the Myanmar junta chief conveyed to Chinese President Xi his dedication to strengthening economic and trade partnerships with China, particularly in the energy sector, while pledging maximum efforts to safeguard Chinese investments and workers operating within Myanmar's borders.

The promise comes at a time when Myanmar is engulfed in a brutal civil war that has raged since the Myanmar military seized power in February 2021.

Social media users in Myanmar were quick to condemn the junta leader's pledge, with many suggesting it shows his prioritization of Chinese interests over the wellbeing of Myanmar citizens.

A Myanmar Facebook user criticized: "Min Aung Hlaing is an evil entity who would even sacrifice his life for Chinese interests, pocket all the money for himself, and trample on the people."

Another user blamed China for the Myanmar military's brutal tactics, writing, "The military council's (junta's) increasingly cruel and savage actions, targeting civilians with airstrikes, heavy weapons, and village burnings are happening because the Chinese government is supporting and helping the terrorist military council."

Some social media commenters went as far as suggesting the China-Myanmar gas pipeline should be targeted, while others accused China of wanting a compliant government in Myanmar that would serve as a Chinese proxy.

The Moscow meeting marks a significant diplomatic breakthrough for Min Aung Hlaing.

Chinese investment in Myanmar includes major energy infrastructure and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, projects that have faced disruption due to the ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar.

Min Aung Hlaing's diplomatic isolation has been gradually easing in recent months, particularly following a devastating earthquake that struck Myanmar in late March, killing nearly 2,900 people. The natural disaster opened new diplomatic channels as leaders including Xi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim extended aid and held conversations with the junta chief.

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.