

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Burma Junta Adopts China's
Digital Blueprint for Repression**

ASEAN MEET UPDATE

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

NOT JUST MYANMAR AND CHINA

As we examine in Mizzima Weekly's lead story this week, Myanmar is slipping into a dystopian world the likes of which author George Orwell warned us about in his frightening book, "1984".

But while our focus this week is on Myanmar and how the junta is using ideas and tools to crack down on its population, we should remind ourselves that the global proliferation of surveillance technologies poses significant threats to democratic freedoms, privacy, and civil liberties in many other countries in the world, including the USA and UK.

While China and Myanmar are prominent examples, numerous governments worldwide are gradually adopting similar measures to monitor and control their citizens. Therefore, it is wise for us to keep a close eye on these two countries.

In China, the government employs an extensive surveillance system that integrates facial recognition, biometric data, and AI-driven analytics to monitor public spaces and online activities – all under what is referred to as a "social credit system". This system is particularly pervasive in regions like Xinjiang, where it targets ethnic minorities under the guise of counterterrorism efforts. China's influence extends globally through the export of surveillance technologies and the promotion of digital authoritarian norms. At least 80 countries have adopted Chinese surveillance equipment, and Chinese firms like Huawei and ZTE have been involved in building critical digital infrastructure in various nations.

Myanmar's military junta, following the 2021 coup, has intensified its use of surveillance to suppress dissent. The regime has implemented spyware to monitor communications, blocked access to VPNs, and mandated device registrations. Additionally, Chinese-made

facial recognition systems have been installed in multiple cities to enhance state control over the population.

The dangers of this global trend are manifold. Firstly, the widespread use of surveillance technologies can lead to the erosion of privacy rights, as individuals' movements and communications are constantly monitored. Secondly, such systems can be exploited to suppress political opposition and dissent, undermining democratic processes. For instance, spyware like Pegasus has been used to target journalists and activists, infringing upon press freedom and stifling free expression. For example, the UK government has come in for criticism for its moves to monitor people's use of social media, with a sizeable number of people sent to prison for a troublesome meme.

Moreover, the export of surveillance technologies by authoritarian regimes can enable other governments – even in the West – to adopt similar repressive measures. This not only spreads digital authoritarianism but also challenges international norms regarding human rights, governance and freedom of speech.

In conclusion, the global embrace of surveillance technologies by governments presents a significant threat to individual freedoms and democratic institutions. It is imperative for international bodies and civil society to advocate for regulations that protect privacy and promote transparency in the use of such technologies.

Just remember – it is not just totalitarian regimes like China and Myanmar that pose a threat to people's freedom.

EDITORIAL

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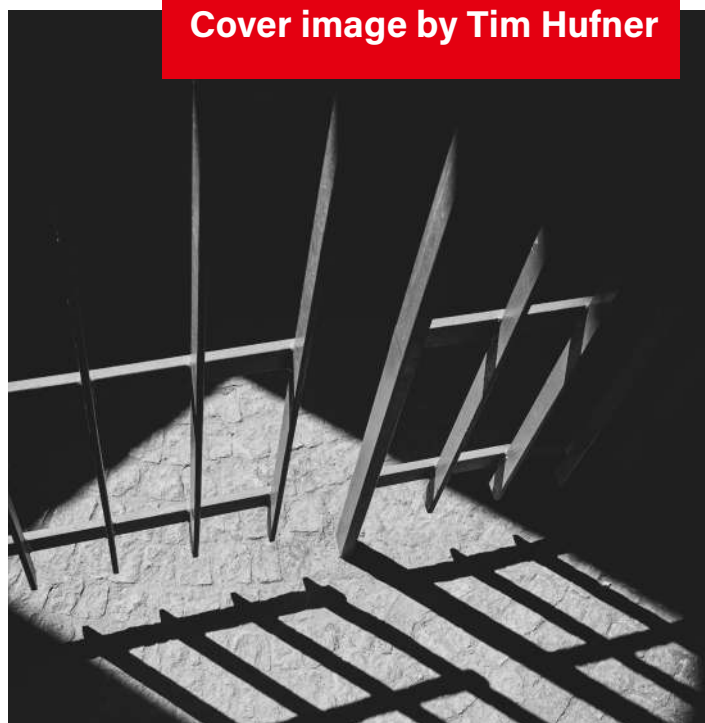
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Cover image by Tim Hufner





BURMA JUNTA ADOPTS CHINA'S DIGITAL BLUEPRINT FOR REPRESSION

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Burma's junta has constructed one of the world's most repressive digital control systems, criminalizing online speech, jailing thousands for digital expression, and shutting down internet access in resistance-held areas. Now in its fourth year, the regime's digital crackdown is powered by Chinese surveillance technology and biometric infrastructure. Cooperation between the junta and China has transformed Burma into a testing ground for twenty-first century digital authoritarianism.

China is widely recognized as one of the most digitally repressive states in the world. The government operates the "Great Firewall," one of the most sophisticated internet censorship systems globally, blocking access to foreign news, social media platforms, and search engines. China enforces strict real-name registration for online activity and uses facial recognition, AI-powered CCTV, and mobile phone surveillance to monitor its citizens in real time. These tools are combined with predictive policing, biometric databases, and movement tracking to suppress dissent and enforce state control across the population.

As part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has also promoted the Digital Silk Road, exporting surveillance technologies, data laws, and cyber governance models to authoritarian regimes along the route, including Burma, where the military junta has adopted

key elements of China's digital control infrastructure. According to Freedom House, China consistently ranks at the bottom of global internet freedom indexes, and under China's influence, Myanmar recently scored just 9 out of 100 in internet freedom.

Following the 2021 coup, Burma's military rapidly expanded its grip on the telecom sector, mandating the installation of surveillance systems across all major networks, including state-run MPT, junta-linked My-Tel, and Atom (formerly Telenor). While interception systems were quietly introduced at Telenor as early as 2018, the post-coup period saw full compliance become compulsory. Enabled by Chinese-modeled technology, these systems allow authorities to eavesdrop on calls, monitor private messages, and track user locations through cell tower triangulation. This data is routinely used to identify, locate, and arrest dissidents, with coordination between telecom providers, police, and military cyber units ensuring that surveillance feeds directly into repression on the ground.

High-level meetings between China's Ministry of Public Security and Burma's military officials have focused on strengthening security cooperation and facilitating the rollout of surveillance technologies and training programs across the country. Training sessions on biometric enrollment and UID management systems have been conducted in regions such as Loikaw, Shan



The Myanmar junta seeks the identity of people protesting against their rule.
Photo: Pyae Soe Htun

State, Magway, and Kayah, equipping local officials with the skills to manage biometric data collection effectively.

These efforts align closely with China's model of digital authoritarianism, where centralized biometric databases and real-time monitoring are used to suppress dissent and control the population. The systems now being implemented in Burma mirror those used in China's Xinjiang region, where mass surveillance is employed to monitor and repress the Uyghur Muslim minority through facial recognition, biometric tracking, and predictive policing.

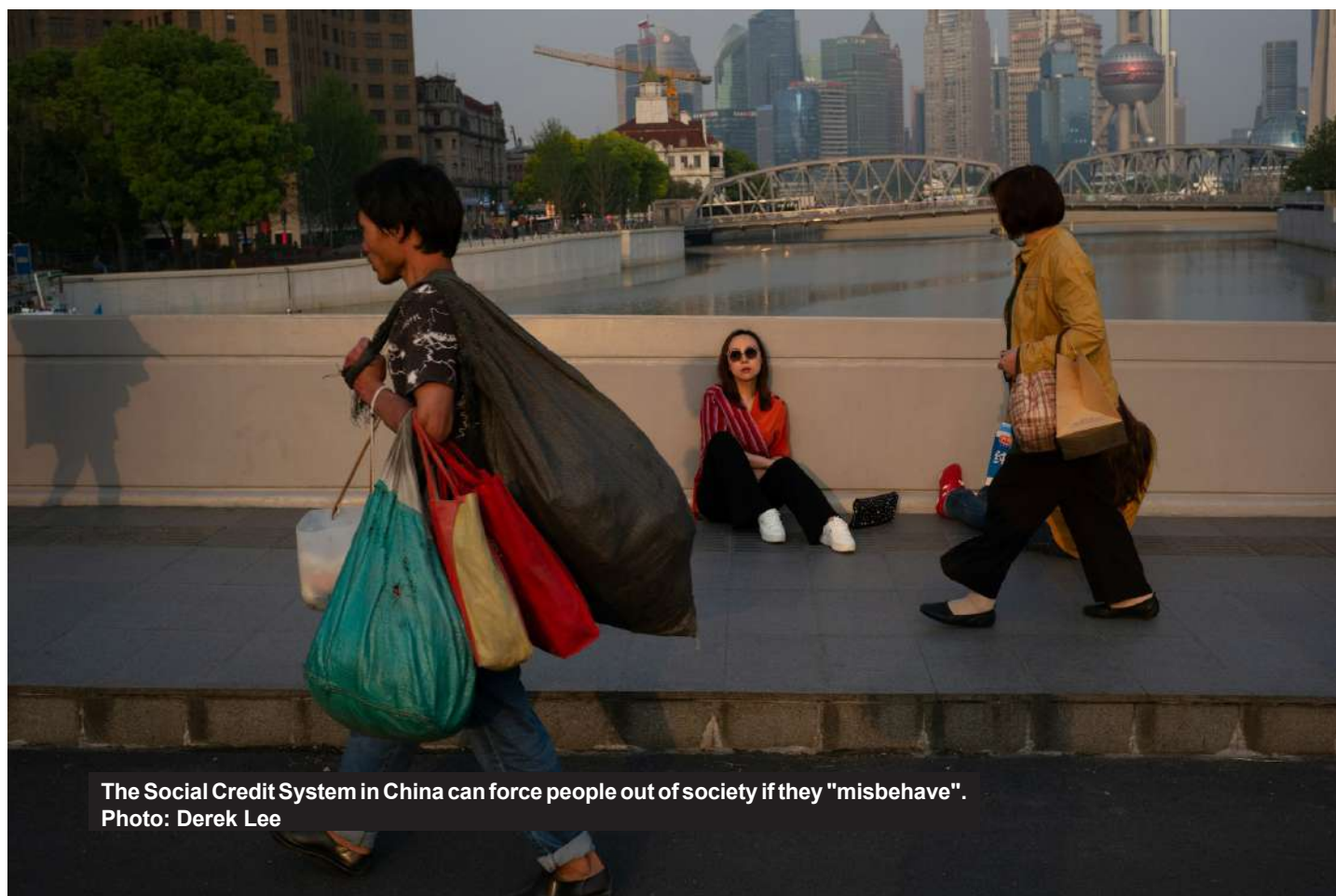
Registration in Burma's digital identity system is both mandatory (for many purposes) and dangerous. Under the junta's surveillance regime, being absent from the system is treated as suspicious, while being registered exposes individuals to constant monitoring and control. In 2023, the military launched a nationwide Unique Identification (UID) system based on a model similar to China's. While it is not confirmed that the software itself was developed by China, the junta has actively sought Chinese expertise regarding the UID, holding high-level meetings and visiting firms such as Beijing Hisign Technology, which specializes in facial and biometric recognition. The UID initiative is also likely complemented by Chinese surveillance techno-

logies, including AI-equipped CCTV cameras, which expand the system's capacity for real-time monitoring and data profiling.

The UID system collects and links personal and biometric data, including names, addresses, phone numbers, fingerprints, iris scans, palm prints, and facial features, into a centralized database. This data is cross-referenced across platforms such as SIM card registration, financial services, and travel documentation.

The biometric UID is now required for essential services, including passport applications, banking, and border passes. In April 2024, UID registration became mandatory for Temporary Border Passes, and by May 14, no passport applications were accepted without a UID. Those who try to circumvent the system face severe consequences. In November 2024, at least 23 people were arrested for forging UID cards.

The UID system is analogous to China's social credit system, which uses centralized digital records to monitor and control individual behavior. In China, social credit scores, linked to citizens' biometric IDs, can determine access to air and rail travel, banking, education, and government services. Those who fall afoul of state-defined norms may find themselves blacklisted and digitally isolated. Similarly, Burma's UID system links biometric data to daily necessities and govern-



The Social Credit System in China can force people out of society if they "misbehave".
Photo: Derek Lee

ment entitlements, enabling the junta to deny access or impose penalties based on perceived disloyalty or noncompliance, using data as a tool of political control.

The Burma regime has also weaponized this system against civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), issuing nearly 300,000 arrest warrants and using biometric cross-checking to block their escape. Citizens who fall afoul of the regime, whether through suspected disloyalty, digital absence, or forged documents, can be cut off from food, money, and communication.

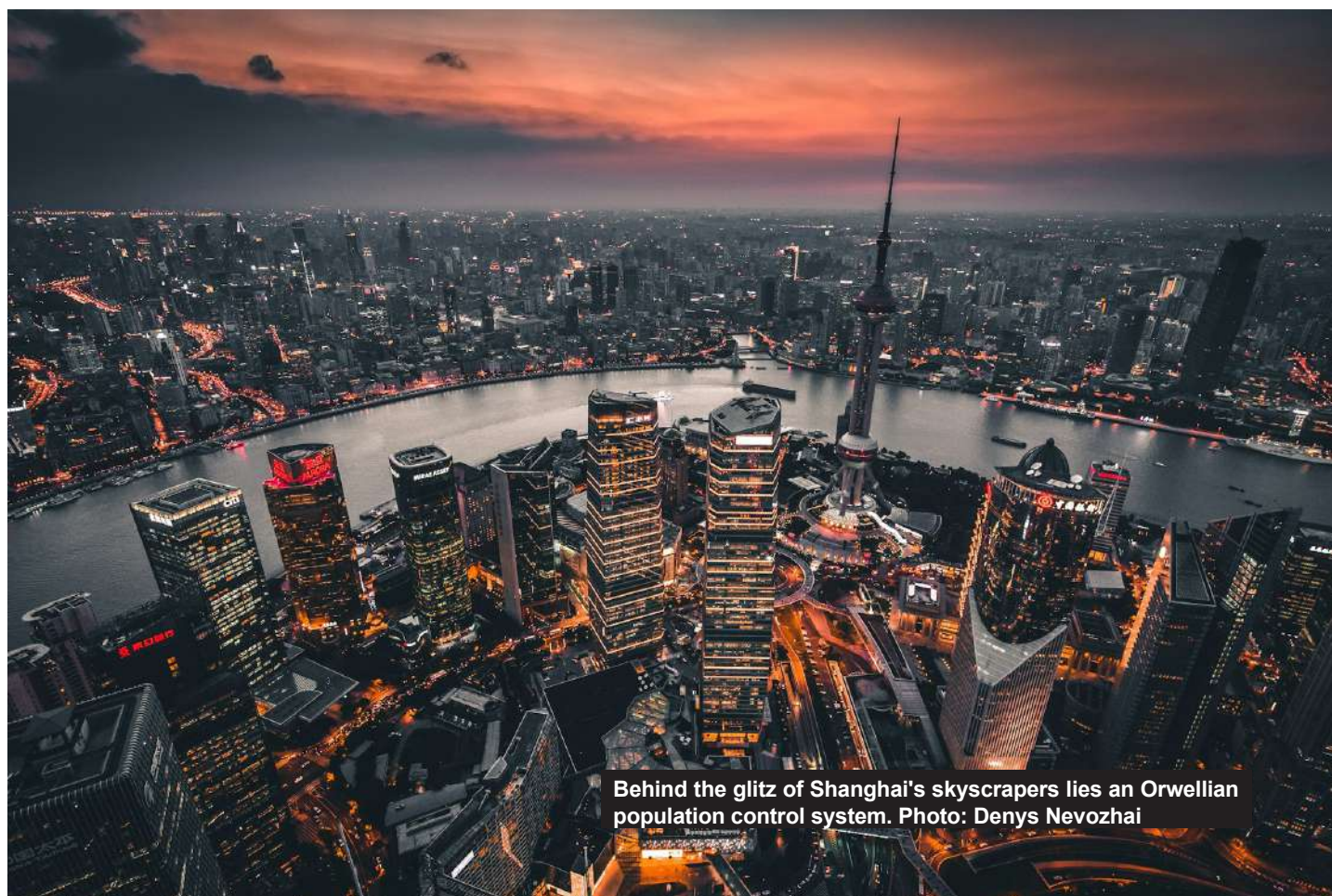
In tandem with biometric surveillance and data-based exclusion, the junta has also relied on internet shutdowns to control the flow of information. It has used these blackouts to prevent news from getting in or out of the country and to block citizens from organizing or communicating with resistance forces. At least 329 shutdowns have been imposed over the past four years, particularly in conflict zones like Chin, Sagaing, Rakhine, and Karenni. All 330 of the country's townships have experienced some form of communication blackout. These disruptions, often timed with airstrikes, have left communities disconnected and unable to report attacks.

According to Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition, Burma led the world in intentional internet

disruptions in 2024, with 85 documented shutdowns, 31 tied to human rights violations and 17 coinciding with military offensives. Compounding the repression, infrastructure destruction, fuel shortages, and power cuts have left nearly a third of the country in persistent digital darkness. In 2025, international pressure has mounted: calling for sanctions on military-linked telecoms like Mytel, Atom, and MPT; an end to technology transfers from China, India, and the West; and greater support for secure, censorship-resistant communications.

Burma's adoption of China's digital model has strengthened the junta's ability to suppress dissent and control the population, undermining the resistance revolution. As long as Beijing continues exporting these tools, digital repression in Burma will intensify, making resistance more difficult and an end to the war more distant.

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



Behind the glitz of Shanghai's skyscrapers lies an Orwellian population control system. Photo: Denys Nevozhai



Dozens of civilians have been killed in attacks under the "ceasefire".
Photo: AFP

JUNTA HAMMERS CIVILIAN TARGETS DESPITE CLAIMED CEASEFIRE

Myanmar's military junta has intensified airstrikes across the country, targeting civilian areas despite its public commitment to a ceasefire following the devastating earthquake on 28 March. As ground resistance stiffens, the junta increasingly turns to aerial assaults using warplanes, drones, and paramotors—attacks that have disproportionately hit civilians rather than resistance forces.

On 8 May, a junta airstrike struck Taunglaylone Monastery in Bhamo, Kachin State, where intense fighting between junta forces and KIA-led resistance groups has raged for five months. The monastery was sheltering civilians at the time. At least 15 civilians were killed, and more than 30 others were injured.

Two days later, on 10 May, the junta bombed Ywardawkone village in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region. The strike hit the village centre near a Starlink satellite service shop, which had become a vital communications hub for residents amid internet blackouts. The attack left 13 civilians dead, including a 13-year-old child, and caused severe injuries to several others.

On 12 May, junta aircraft bombed a school in Oe Htein Kwin village, Depayin Township, around 10 am. The attack killed 22 students and two volunteer teachers, and seriously injured around 100 students. At the time, 289 students were taking delayed school exams administered under the National Unity Government (NUG). A local education board member told Mizzima that the semester schedule had to be adjusted due to junta offensives, forcing the school to conduct its exams later than usual.

The following day, on 13 May, the junta launched another airstrike on Htunrawai village in Rathedaung Township, Rakhine State. The bombing killed 13 civilians and left over 20 others wounded.

These deadly strikes raise further concerns about the junta's disregard for civilian lives and international humanitarian law. The continued targeting of schools, religious sites, and populated villages contradicts its ceasefire announcement and underscores a pattern of deliberate attacks on non-combatants. The NUG is reported to have issued a statement that it is temporarily closing its NUG-sponsored schools as a result.



Update on the earthquake clean up

As Myanmar faces an early monsoon season, earthquake victims in Mandalay and surrounding regions are increasingly worried about the structural safety of damaged buildings and the slow pace of debris clearance. The situation has grown more urgent as the National Unity Government's Meteorological Department reported that the monsoon began on 13 May, earlier than the typical third week of May.

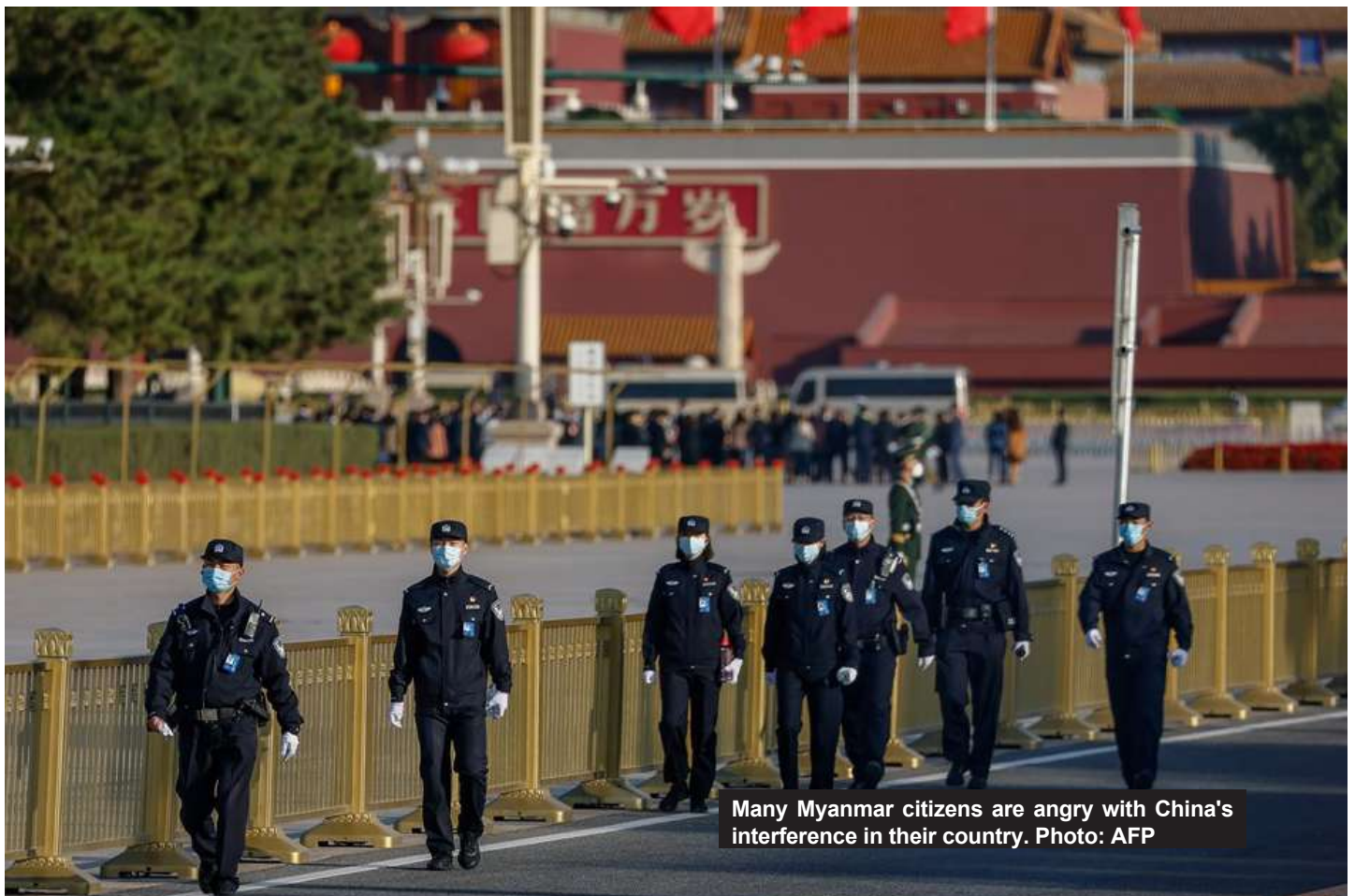
Many buildings damaged by the earthquake remain cracked, leaning, or partially collapsed, and are vulnerable to further destruction under heavy rainfall. Residents and volunteers have expressed growing concerns about the soil stability and flooding risks, especially in quake-hit neighbourhoods where cleanup and demolition have yet to begin.

Meanwhile, the junta authorities have ordered that all temporary camps for earthquake victims in Mandalay be closed by the end of May. Most of these shelters are housed in schools, monasteries, and sports stadiums. Some displaced residents have begun moving out, despite lacking stable housing.

"We haven't received much help from the government—most support came from private donors," one earthquake survivor told local media. "We want authorities to supervise demolitions systematically, but many damaged buildings can't be knocked down due to delayed permissions. Rebuilding is still a long way off."

According to Mandalay municipal officials, more than 4,000 buildings need to be demolished, in addition to roughly the same number that collapsed during the quake. The municipality has categorized damaged structures using a red-orange-green system, with red-marked buildings deemed unsafe and slated for demolition.

Demolition work has begun on red-category buildings along main roads, but structures in narrow streets remain untouched due to a lack of equipment. A city official told BBC Burmese, "We are focusing on demolishing buildings on major roads. We don't charge for demolition, but since the municipality runs on its own revenue, fuel must be provided by homeowners."



Many Myanmar citizens are angry with China's interference in their country. Photo: AFP

With many buildings continuing to collapse weeks after the quake, neighbors fear that unstable structures may pose lethal risks as storms set in.

Cleaning up debris remains a major challenge. Heavy machinery, dry weather, and manpower are in short supply. Most building owners cannot afford the high costs of hiring equipment and labour. While some volunteers and charities have stepped in to assist with demolition, the burden of clearing debris still falls on the affected families.

In addition, several lower-level earthquakes have been reported in Myanmar around 4 on the Richter scale over the weeks since the main quakes on 28 March.

As the monsoon intensifies, the lack of a coordinated and well-resourced recovery plan is leaving thousands exposed to worsening hazards.

Myanmar resentment grows over Chinese interference

Growing Chinese involvement in Myanmar's internal affairs has sparked widespread resentment among the public and diaspora communities, particularly after the junta regained control of Lashio in northern Shan State under an arrangement reportedly brokered by Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun confirmed during a press briefing that China played a key role in mediating a ceasefire agreement between the Myanmar junta (SAC) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), stating that "maintaining peace and stability in northern Myanmar serves the interests of both countries' people." He added that China respects Myanmar's sovereignty and had sent a team to monitor the ceasefire and witness the handover of Lashio to junta forces.

However, many in Myanmar view China's actions as a direct interference in the country's revolution and internal political struggle. The return of Lashio to junta control—without transparent agreements—has stirred discontent within MNDAA ranks. According to sources close to the armed group, there is internal disagreement over the terms, particularly regarding the recognition of MNDAA's claim to a No. (1) Special Region, which encompasses four districts and offers a

form of autonomy established under a previous military regime.

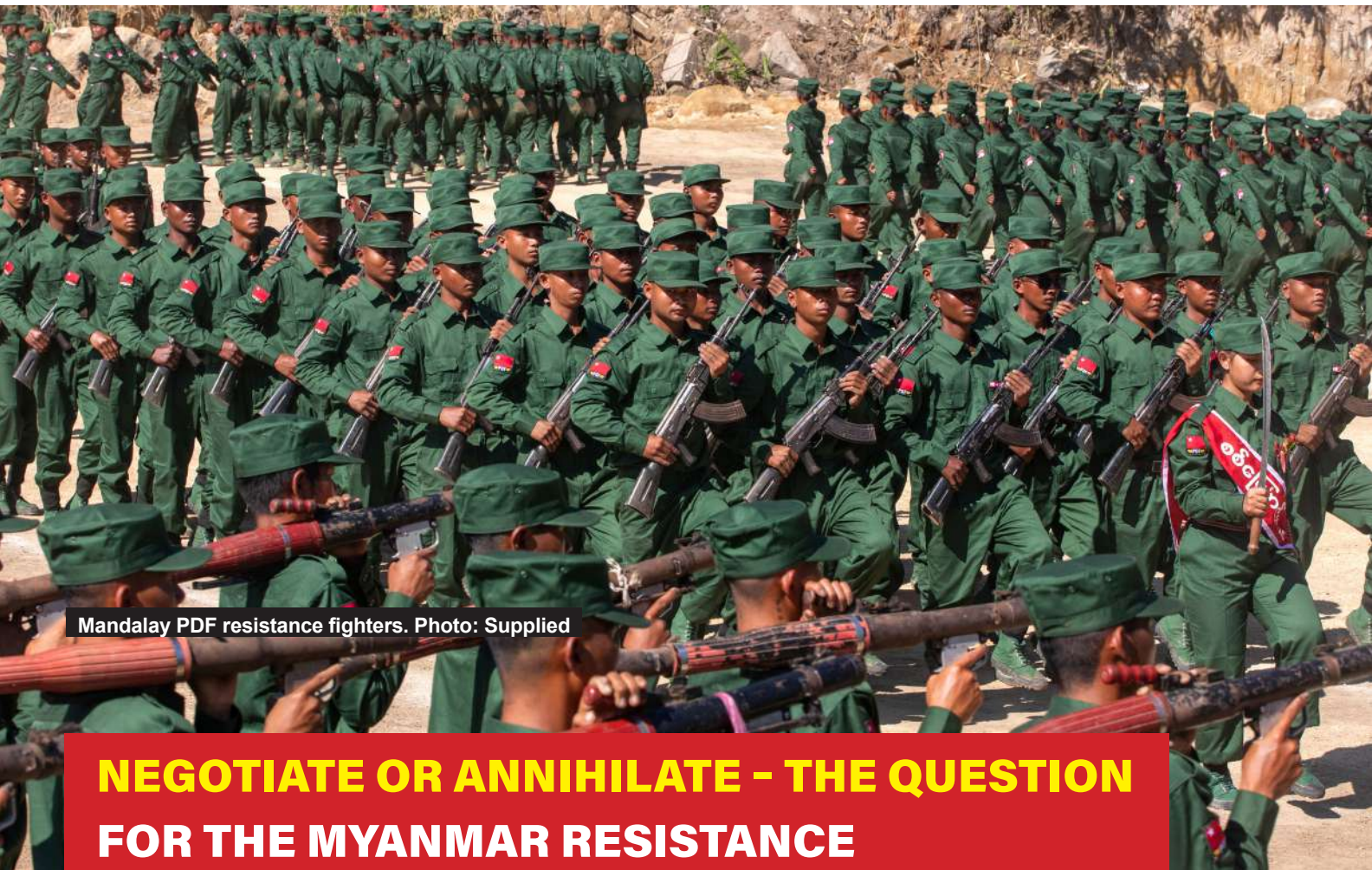
One medical worker affiliated with the MNDAA shared on the group's social media channel The Kokang that they had to leave Lashio due to political pressure, suggesting the withdrawal was not entirely voluntary or uncontested.

The developments have also fueled protests among the Myanmar diaspora, who accuse China of supporting the junta under the guise of promoting peace and development. On 3 May, demonstrators gathered in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., demanding an end to what they called Beijing's "economic-driven manipulation" of Myanmar's political future.

"This interference has gone too far," one protest leader said. "They claim to support peace, but giving Lashio back to the junta shows their real agenda—economic interests tied to control of strategic routes."

On 20 May, similar protests took place in London, where Myanmar nationals rallied outside the Chinese Embassy, denouncing Beijing's visible alignment with the junta. Protesters held banners rejecting Chinese influence and demanded an end to foreign-backed military entrenchment in Myanmar.

As China's role grows more prominent, Myanmar citizens—both at home and abroad—are voicing stronger opposition, viewing Chinese involvement not as neutral mediation but as a calculated effort to secure its own geopolitical and economic interests at the cost of Myanmar's fight for democracy and autonomy.



Mandalay PDF resistance fighters. Photo: Supplied

NEGOTIATE OR ANNIHILATE - THE QUESTION FOR THE MYANMAR RESISTANCE

JAMES SWE

As Myanmar's revolution enters a pivotal phase, the core dilemma facing the pro-democracy movement is stark: Should the resistance negotiate with the military junta now, or continue the fight until the regime is decisively broken? The answer is not simply a matter of battlefield tactics but a question of strategy, unity, and the long-term vision for a democratic, federal Myanmar.

The Stakes: More Than a Military Contest

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar's people have shown extraordinary courage, reclaiming territory, building local governance, and rejecting military rule at great personal cost. As Daw Zin Mar Aung, the National Unity Government's (NUG) Foreign Minister, recently wrote in the Bangkok Post, the revolution is not about vengeance. It is about transforming Myanmar's political system, ensuring civilian supremacy over the military, and creating a federal democracy that truly represents all ethnic nationalities.

Why Premature Negotiation Is Risky

Despite resistance gains, the junta still controls key cities, wields airpower, and pursues legitimacy through sham elections and alliances with China and Russia. Negotiating now, while the military retains significant leverage, risks entrenching its power and undermining the sacrifices made by millions. History and current events show that only sustained, multifaceted pressure—military, economic, political, and diplomatic—can force the regime to the negotiating table on terms acceptable to the people.

The International Arena: Divided, but Evolving

ASEAN and Regional Diplomacy

ASEAN's response remains inconsistent. While Malaysia and Indonesia have engaged with the NUG and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), others

prioritize stability or maintain ties with the junta. The upcoming ASEAN meetings in Kuala Lumpur will test whether the bloc can move beyond the failed Five-Point Consensus and support a truly inclusive process.

China, Russia, and the West

China and Russia continue to provide the junta with crucial support, but their interests are not unlimited. The NUG has signaled its willingness to cooperate with all international actors, including China, based on mutual respect and shared interests. Western governments have imposed sanctions and supported the NUG and CRPH at global forums, but their support must be matched by unity and effectiveness within the resistance.

The Role of International Legitimacy

Platforms like the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have helped delegitimize the junta and amplify the voices of Myanmar's elected representatives. Sustained international advocacy and strategic engagement with ASEAN and global forums remain essential.

The Imperative of Unity: Recommendations for the Resistance

1. Relentless Pressure on All Fronts

- Military: Consolidate and expand liberated areas, disrupt junta supply lines, and coordinate operations among NUG, EROs, and PDFs.
- Economic: Target the regime's revenue streams and expose foreign complicity.
- Political: Reject sham elections, build inclusive governance, and document abuses.
- Diplomatic: Engage ASEAN's progressive members, utilize international forums, and mobilize the diaspora for advocacy and humanitarian support.

2. Support the NUG as the International Leadership

The NUG is the only organized leadership with international recognition and the capacity to engage global actors. Constructive criticism is vital, but efforts to undermine the NUG only serve the junta. All resistance forces must support the NUG's legitimacy and work to strengthen its inclusivity and effectiveness.

3. Form a Transitional United Front

The NUG and EROs should urgently form a transitional body with proportional representation and clear mechanisms for consensus-building and conflict resolution. Such unity will greatly enhance the movement's credibility and bargaining power.

4. Foster Collaboration Among All Resistance Groups

People's Defense Forces (PDFs), political organizations, and civil society must prioritize communication, cooperation, and coordination with the NUG and each other. Disunity only benefits the junta. A united approach is essential to maximize both battlefield and diplomatic leverage.

5. Negotiate Only from a Position of Strength

Negotiations may eventually be necessary, but only when the junta is too weak to dictate terms. Any settlement must guarantee genuine federal democracy, justice, and civilian control of the military.

Conclusion: The Path Forward

The choice for Myanmar's resistance is not simply to negotiate or annihilate, but to build the strength, unity, and international legitimacy needed to force a genuine transition. The sacrifices of the people demand relentless pressure on the regime—militarily, economically, politically, and diplomatically—until it is too weak to dictate the future. Only then can negotiations lead to a truly democratic and federal Myanmar.

Let us seize this moment, not just to defeat a dictatorship, but to lay the foundations for a new Myanmar—just, inclusive, and representative of all its people.

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- Recent ASEAN and international policy statements
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SIGNING CEREMONY KUALA LUMPUR DECLARATION on ASEAN 2045: OUR SHARED FUTURE

26 MAY 2025



ASEAN LEADERS TALK TARIFFS, EAST TIMOR, AND MYANMAR TRUCE

Southeast Asian leaders met Monday in Kuala Lumpur for their first summit since US President Donald Trump's tariffs upended global economic norms, with the trade-dependent nations expected to issue a joint message of deep concern.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN's) strategy of nurturing diverse economic alliances was on full display as Chinese Premier Li Qiang was warmly welcomed along with Gulf state dignitaries for a lavish gala dinner ahead of talks on Tuesday.

Trump cast international markets into turmoil in April when he announced wide-ranging tariffs, before agreeing to pause them for most countries for 90 days.

In summit opening remarks given to media but not delivered in his speech, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said: "A transition in the geopolitical order is underway and the global trading system is under further strain, with the recent imposition of US unilateral tariffs."

"Protectionism is resurging as we bear witness to multilateralism breaking apart at the seams," he added.

Bilateral talks between the ASEAN member states and Washington are in progress, but the bloc is still presenting a united front, according to Malaysia, which holds the rotating ASEAN chairmanship this year.

According to a draft statement seen by AFP, ASEAN will express "deep concern... over the imposition of unilateral tariff measures", saying they "pose complex and multidimensional challenges" to the bloc.

But it said earlier this year it would not impose retaliatory duties.

Instead, it is looking at broadening its scope with other trading blocs, including the European Union, as well as beefing up trade between member states, Malaysia's trade minister said Sunday.

'Not just a photo-op'

Tuesday's talks with Li and the Gulf Cooperation Council -- a bloc made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- underscores this effort to maintain a broad network of trading partners.

"It's not just a photo-op. It actually demonstrates how ASEAN is attempting to engage strategically with various blocs, a strategy we might term multi-alignment diplomacy," said Khoo Ying Hooi from Malaya University.

Anwar said Monday he had written to Trump to request an ASEAN-US summit this year -- showing "we observe seriously the spirit of centrality".

His foreign minister Mohamad Hasan said Washington had not yet responded.

Despite smiles all round at Monday night's dinner -- and Premier Li donning a matching traditional batik shirt to the ASEAN leaders -- the bloc's relationship with China is a complicated one.

"Please be assured that whatever is being said, or circumstances and complexity, we are here as a friend of China," Anwar said at the dinner.

But on Monday, Philippines leader Ferdinand Marcos told his regional counterparts there was an "urgent need" to adopt a legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea.

Beijing has territorial disputes in the area with five ASEAN member states, with China and the Philippines having engaged in months of confrontations in the contested waters.

The adoption of the code should be accelerated "to safeguard maritime rights, promote stability, and prevent miscalculations at sea", Marcos said.

Myanmar conflict

ASEAN also has internal matters to deal with, including an attempt to increase pressure on member state Myanmar's military junta, whose leaders are

barred from summits over a lack of progress on a five-point peace deal agreed on by the bloc in 2021.

"One thing for sure that we agreed is that Myanmar's government... must comply with the five points consensus which they themselves agreed on as one of the signatories," Mohamad said Sunday.

ASEAN has led so far fruitless diplomatic efforts to end the conflict, triggered when the junta staged a coup deposing civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

Mohamad called Sunday for an extension and expansion of a ceasefire declared after a deadly earthquake, despite ongoing fighting bringing its effectiveness into question.

Also on ASEAN's agenda was the prospect of adding an 11th member state before the end of the year.

East Timor, Asia's youngest nation, "has made meaningful progress" for it to "hopefully" join the bloc by the next summit in October, Mohamad said.

After meeting leaders on Monday, East Timor's prime minister said he believed his country would become a full member this year.

"Because everyone supports. Everybody. It was incredible," Xanana Gusmao told reporters.

AFP

MYANMAR JOINS 46TH ASEAN SUMMIT, SIGNS 2045 DECLARATION

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has released an official statement concerning the participation of its delegation in the 46th ASEAN Summit and related meetings held on 26 May in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The statement is as follows.

Myanmar Delegation led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar attended the 46th ASEAN Summits (Plenary Session) and (Retreat Session) and participated in the ASEAN Leaders' Interface with Representatives of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), ASEAN Leaders' Interface with Representatives of ASEAN Youth, ASEAN Leaders' Interface with Representatives of ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) and Signing Ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, which were separately held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 26 May 2025.

Heads of State/Heads of Government from ASEAN Member States, ASEAN Foreign Ministers and ASEAN Secretary-General attended the said events, and Prime Minister of Timor-Leste also attended as an observer.

At the 46th ASEAN Summit (Plenary Session), the ASEAN Chair updated the priority deliverables under the three community pillars in 2025, reviewed the

progress of cooperation with dialogue partners and external partners.

At the ASEAN Leaders' Interface with Representatives of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), the Leaders discussed cooperation among parliaments of ASEAN Member States. Also, at the ASEAN Leaders' Interface with Representatives of ASEAN Youth, Leaders extensively discussed on enhancing the capacity and role of the youth. The ASEAN Leaders' Interface with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC) highlighted the need for sustained collaboration and commitment to achieve ASEAN's vision of shared prosperity.

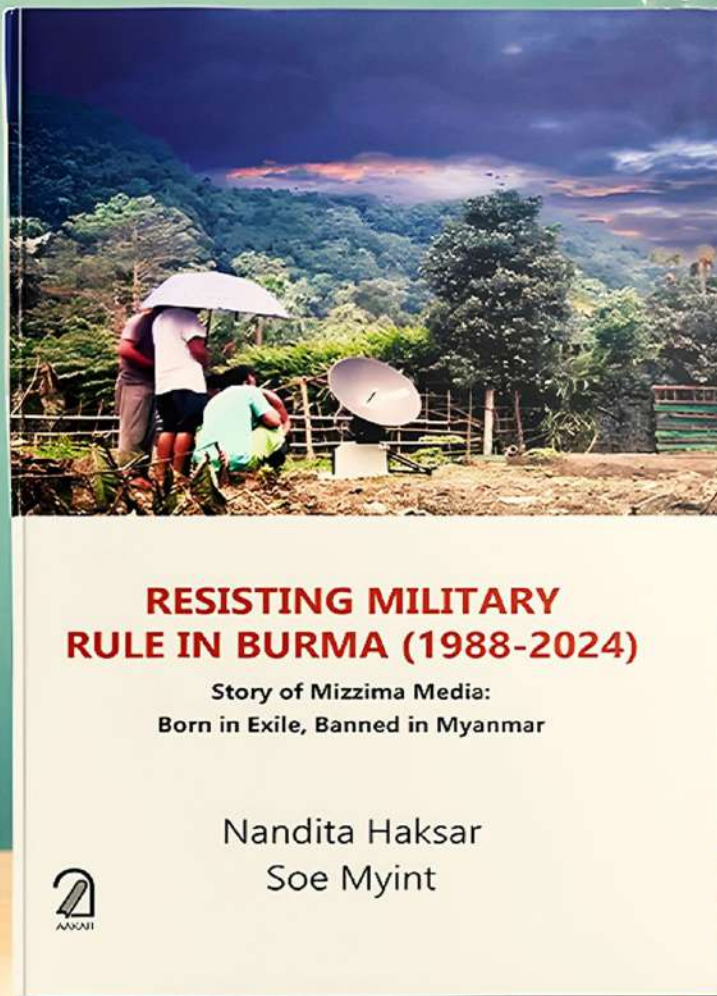
Afterwards, the Permanent Secretary participated in the Signing Ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future.

In the evening, the delegation led by the Permanent Secretary attended the Gala Dinner of the 46th ASEAN summit and related Summits hosted by the Prime Minister of the Malaysia and his spouse at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

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285 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON MALAYSIA TO LEAD ASEAN WITH PRINCIPLE

On 21 May, 285 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations released a joint open letter addressed to Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as Chair of ASEAN 2025. They called on him to lead ASEAN with principle and not hypocrisy concerning the ongoing crisis in Myanmar.

The open letter is as follows.

We—the undersigned 285 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations—write to you at the most critical juncture for Myanmar and for the credibility and efficacy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the region. As Malaysia chairs ASEAN and is set to host the 46th Summit later this month, we urgently call for your decisive leadership to unify and steer ASEAN to adopt a stronger, more principled stance and take concerted efforts to address the intensifying multifaceted crisis in Myanmar.

This should begin with ASEAN cutting all ties with the Myanmar military junta and shifting official engagement to Myanmar's legitimate stakeholders: the National Unity Government (NUG) and Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs).

We are compelled to express our condemnation of your recent meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, the architect of the ongoing terror campaign, and main

perpetrator of genocide against the Rohingya and war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Myanmar. This meeting, far from being a diplomatic necessity, is a grave misstep that further harms the people. It offers the junta a dangerous façade of false legitimacy at a time when it is desperately seeking to escape international isolation and accountability. Such engagement does not serve the interests of peace or justice for the Myanmar people, for which ASEAN allegedly strives. Instead, it once again emboldens an illegitimate military junta responsible for the most heinous crimes in Southeast Asia's recent history, and signals to the world that ASEAN is willing to compromise its credibility for the sake of hollow dialogue.

This is not an isolated error, but a symptom of ASEAN's broader failure since the military's illegal coup attempt in 2021. We note that this meeting—and in fact, each and every previous meeting—with junta representatives, has consistently empowered the military to continue its brutal attacks and airstrikes against civilians. For over four years, acting alone and within ASEAN, the region's leaders have clung to an approach that prioritizes engagement with the perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes over the rule of law, justice and accountability, and solidarity with victims and survivors. The perfunctory Five-Point

Consensus, repeatedly invoked but never effectively nor meaningfully implemented, has become a shield for the military to continue its campaign of terror with total impunity. The ongoing presence of junta representatives at ASEAN meetings at any level continues to undermine the bloc's credibility and betrays its founding commitment to democracy, peace, security, and respect for human rights.

Since its illegal coup attempt in February 2021, the Myanmar military junta has perpetrated a multitude of grave human rights violations and mass atrocity crimes, including massacres, torching and pillaging entire towns, and lethal airstrikes against civilians and places where they take refuge. Since February 2021, the military has conducted more than 4,000 airstrikes, exponentially escalating such attacks over the past two years. The military's widespread and systematic violence has so far internally displaced more than 3.5 million people—likely a gross underestimation of the true magnitude of displacement. Since your meeting with Min Aung Hlaing on 17 April, the junta has conducted at least 171 airstrikes, the vast majority on civilian areas with no intention other than to inflict harm and terrorize the people. The latest massacre in Depayin Township, Sagaing Region, on 12 May 2025, in which a junta airstrike on a school killed at least 22 children and two teachers, is yet another horrific testament to the military's utter contempt for human life and international law.

In light of these grave realities, we urgently call on Your Excellency to exercise the courageous and principled leadership that this moment demands. Malaysia must immediately and unequivocally sever all ties with the junta, and use its position as ASEAN Chair to unify and lead the bloc with the same courageous and decisive action, in support of Myanmar people's revolution to dismantle military tyranny and establish federal democracy. We expect that Malaysia recognizes the gravity of this call and will ensure no junta representatives are permitted to participate in any ASEAN meetings at any level—including the upcoming Summit.

ASEAN, under Malaysia's leadership, must recognize and engage with the legitimate representatives of the Myanmar people, the NUG and EROs, as well as Myanmar civil society. These are the actors who have demonstrated genuine commitment to finding a long-term sustainable solution in the best interests and desires of Myanmar's people: democracy, federalism, and human rights. ASEAN's engagement must be formal, meaningful, and conducted at the

highest levels—not relegated to unofficial channels in the name of quiet diplomacy or tokenistic side meetings. Engagement must be open and transparent to gain the confidence of the Myanmar people. Only then can the bloc move beyond the failed Five-Point Consensus and support a Myanmar-owned and -led solution, as it so often claims to do. ASEAN must stop clinging to empty rhetoric and prove its pledges with concrete, meaningful actions to stop the junta's violence—most urgently the airstrikes. Anything less will only prolong ASEAN's complicity in the cycle of military violence and impunity which has defined Myanmar over the past seven decades.

Furthermore, the humanitarian catastrophe intensifying in central Myanmar and its ethnic borderlands and regions demands an urgent and principled response, particularly following the devastating earthquake on 28 March 2025. The current approach—channeling aid through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)—has failed to deliver aid meaningfully and effectively, and has further allowed the junta to weaponize aid for its own advantage. We urge Malaysia to lead ASEAN in steering Myanmar's neighbors to collaborate with the NUG and EROs and directly support existing local civil society, networks, and community-based responders to do their important work without interference or bureaucratic obstacles.

Malaysia's Madani values of sustainability, respect, trust, and compassion provide a strong foundation for Your Excellency to lead ASEAN to adopt a bold, inclusive, and principled approach with decisive and pragmatic action to help resolve the Myanmar crisis. Your leadership as ASEAN Chair can restore ASEAN's regional relevance by responding to the threats posed by the Myanmar military and the multifaceted crisis it has caused and by demonstrating genuine commitment to democracy, peace, justice, human security, and development in the region.

Your Excellency, history will judge this most critical moment for the region by the choices you and your fellow ASEAN leaders make. We urge you to reject the path of hypocrisy and complicity, and instead chart a course grounded in humanity, solidarity, and respect for the rights and dignity of the Myanmar people.

We stand ready to support your efforts and urge you to seize this critical opportunity to lead ASEAN to support a Myanmar people-owned and -led political transformation process toward a just and lasting resolution in Myanmar.



ARAKAN ARMY BANS YOUTH FROM LEAVING RAKHINE STATE AMID ESCALATING CONFLICT

Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

As fierce clashes continue across Rakhine State, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) has announced a temporary travel ban on young men and women attempting to evade conscription.

In a statement released on 22 May, the AA said that males aged 18 to 45 and females aged 18 to 25 are prohibited from leaving Rakhine State until the situation stabilizes. The restriction falls under the National Defense Emergency Provision (NDEP), first issued by the group on 18 March, which mandates compulsory service during the ongoing state of armed conflict.

The AA said the move was necessary to prevent an increasing number of youth from fleeing to avoid recruitment. Only those with critical medical conditions that cannot be treated within AA-controlled areas, or individuals facing life-threatening emergencies, will be granted permission to leave, the group said.

Officials also warned against aiding illegal departures. Anyone caught smuggling people out of the state by land or sea in exchange for money will face legal action. The warning extended to traders of essential goods and livestock, as well as transport

operators, who were cautioned not to exploit the crisis for profit.

The directive, according to the AA, is also intended to protect civilians from various dangers. These include landmines planted by junta forces, forced conscription into the junta's army, trafficking for online scam operations, and threats such as crossfire, extortion, arbitrary arrest, detention, and enforced disappearances. The group specifically highlighted risks faced by holders of (11/) National Registration Cards issued by the junta.

The ULA/AA said a follow-up announcement would be made once the emergency restrictions are lifted.

Reaffirming its military objectives, the AA stated its ongoing operations are aimed at capturing cities "systematically" to bring all of Arakan under Arakanese control.

Currently, the group claims control over 14 out of 17 townships in Rakhine State, while battles continue in the remaining three, Sittwe, Mrauk-U, and Kyaukphyu.



Daw May Thu Win

WIFE OF MYANMAR JUNTA COMMANDER THANKS ARAKAN ARMY FOR HUMANE TREATMENT DURING CAPTIVITY

Daw May Thu Win, the wife of the junta's Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 540 commander based in Mrauk-U Township, has publicly expressed her gratitude to the Arakan Army (AA) for what she described as respectful and compassionate treatment during her time in captivity.

She was among 184 family members of junta personnel released by the AA on 19 May, according to Arakan Princess Media, which published a video of her remarks.

"Throughout our detention, the Arakan Army took great care of all of our family members, providing for our social needs, food, shelter, and healthcare without any shortcomings," she said in the video. "On behalf of the families, I would like to express our deep gratitude."

Daw May Thu Win also highlighted that the AA extended moral support to the prisoners of war from LIB 540, and that its medical team of doctors and nurses consistently looked after their well-being.

The AA overran the LIB 540 base in Mrauk-U in late January, seizing a large cache of weapons and military equipment. Since then, the group has continued releasing prisoners of war. According to reports by Arakan Princess Media, more than 1,200 junta troops and family members captured during clashes in Mrauk-U, Buthidaung, and Minbya were freed in April and May.

The releases come amid the AA's sweeping offensive launched in November 2023, which has resulted in the group seizing control of nearly every township in Rakhine State, except for Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Munaung, which remain under junta control.

The AA has yet to issue a formal statement on the reasons behind the mass releases, but the gesture is being viewed by observers as a strategic move to demonstrate the group's administrative capacity and adherence to wartime humanitarian norms.



MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES AIRSTRIKES TO RETAKE OUTPOSTS FROM ARAKAN ARMY NEAR KYAUKPHYU SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

Myanmar's junta has launched a series of airstrikes in Kyaukphyu Township in an attempt to retake small military outposts recently seized by the Arakan Army (AA), including positions near the Chinese-backed Special Economic Zone (SEZ), according to sources within the resistance and local residents.

The Arakan Army captured key junta positions over the past week, including outposts in Min Tat Taung village along the Kyaukphyu–Yangon highway and a camp at the Government Technical Institute. In response, the military began targeting these areas with jet fighter and drone attacks.

"The fighting in Kyaukphyu is intensifying day by day. While the AA initially focused on ambushing advancing junta columns, they've now begun seizing and holding outposts. The military has retaliated with fluctuating airstrikes and counteroffensives, creating a back-and-forth frontline. As of this morning, the AA is still holding ground, and clashes continue around an auxiliary police unit," said Captain Zin Yaw, a defector from the military now aligned with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

Residents confirmed heavy bombardment on the nights of 19 and 20 May.

"Junta warplanes came in late at night on the 20th. Fierce fighting lasted until about 8 p.m., and we heard two loud artillery rounds early this morning," a local from Kyaukphyu told Mizzima.

Fighting also flared near Madaya Island until 17

May, an area of strategic importance due to its oil pipeline and China-backed Onshore Gas Terminal (OGT) in Mala Kyun village. Junta troops have since taken defensive positions around those installations, reportedly avoiding escalation.

"There's clearly a level of restraint on both sides when it comes to Madaya Island. The AA seems cautious about launching full-scale attack there, and the junta avoids aggressive airstrikes. Neither side wants to jeopardize relations with China or risk damage to the deep-sea port and pipelines. It's a strategic balance," said Captain Zin Yaw.

Sources say fighting is intensifying near the Police Battalion 32 outpost, also known as Doe Tan Taung camp. Tensions are also high around Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 543 in Gone Chun village.

Kyaukphyu Township remains heavily militarized, with several critical installations including the Danyawaddy Navy Base, camps for LIB 542 and 543 and Infantry Battalion 34, Police Battalion 32 camp, and the Taung Maw Gyi Naval Substation.

The AA has seized control of 14 towns across Rakhine State, including the junta's Western Region Military Command headquarters in Ann. Kyaukphyu, along with Sittwe and Munaung, remains one of the last three coastal towns under military control.

Observers note that the battle for Kyaukphyu could become a geopolitical flashpoint, with both the junta and the Arakan Army manoeuvring carefully to avoid drawing Beijing into the conflict.

Photo: AFP

DISTRICT COURT REJECTS BID TO LET AUNG SAN SUU KYI SET AUCTION PRICE FOR YANGON PROPERTY

The Kamayut District Court has turned down a proposal to let detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi set the floor price for the auction of Plot No. 54 on University Avenue in Yangon, a property long tied to her family.

The decision was made on 22 May, according to a source familiar with the court's proceedings. The proposal was submitted by Aung San Oo, who is involved in the legal dispute over the property. He had requested the court to allow Aung San Suu Kyi, currently in detention, to determine the starting price for the upcoming auction.

Plot No. 54, a nearly two-acre site, has already been listed for auction four times but has failed to attract a buyer each time. In the most recent attempt on 29 April, the proposed floor price was reduced to 270 billion kyats—down from the original asking price of 315 billion kyats during the first round. The second and third rounds had floor prices of 300 and 290 billion kyats, respectively.

Despite these adjustments, the plot remains unsold.

The next hearing is set for 29 May, when Aung San Oo is expected to submit further arguments.

Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team has consistently opposed the auction, stressing that their client has been barred from meeting with her lawyers and that her legal rights are being violated. They have also raised objections in court about the auction being carried out without her consent.

Adding to the controversy, the National Unity Government (NUG) has declared the site a national cultural heritage landmark. The NUG has warned that any sale, transfer, or modification of the property without proper authorization will be considered illegal and could trigger legal consequences.



RETIRED MYANMAR BRIGADIER GENERAL SHOT DEAD AT HOME IN YANGON

A retired military officer, Brigadier General Cho Tun Aung, who held the honorary title “Wunna Kyaw Htin,” was shot dead at his residence in Yangon’s Mayangone Township on the morning of 22 May, according to a statement released by an urban guerrilla group.

The group, identifying itself as the Golden Valley Warriors, claimed responsibility for the targeted killing. They stated that Cho Tun Aung was shot four times in the chest at his home on A1 Street in Mayangone Township.

“He often boasted at social events and golf gatherings about receiving his honorary title from Min Aung Hlaing,” a spokesperson for the group told Mizzima. They also alleged that although the retired general was not directly involved in the junta’s conscription efforts, he had been advising on recruitment alongside other former military officers.

Cho Tun Aung had been serving as a lecturer at the National Defence College (NDC) in Naypyidaw, teaching courses on National Security, Counterterrorism, and

International Relations. He was also known to have previously served as Myanmar’s ambassador to Cambodia and held a regional leadership role in the Myanmar War Veterans Organization.

In 2023, he was awarded the “Wunna Kyaw Htin” honorary title by junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who also presented him with five ticals of gold in recognition of his service. He remained active in military circles, having participated in the 2025 Armed Forces Day parade in Naypyidaw. For that occasion, he was flown on a special military aircraft arranged by the Air Force base in Mingaladon.

Mizzima has not been able to independently confirm whether he died instantly or later from his injuries.

Photo: AFP

MILITARY JUNTA DETAINS NEARLY 20 YOUTHS IN YANGON TOWNSHIPS AMID INTENSIFYING MANHUNT

Nearly 20 young people have been arrested by Myanmar's military junta in a series of coordinated raids across three townships in Yangon Region, with search operations still ongoing, according to the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) and local sources.

The arrests took place between 16 and 19 May in Kungyangon, Kawhmu, and Twantay townships. Local resistance forces and residents believe the crackdown was based on leaked intelligence.

"These weren't random arrests. It looks like they were acting on specific information. Troops carried out multiple raids at all hours, morning, afternoon, and night. They're searching houses, forested areas, and roads, and have even set up military camps in some villages," said a representative from the RSN.

The RSN has withheld the names of those detained due to ongoing security concerns.

The mass arrest operation appears to have been triggered by an earlier raid on 15 May, when military forces stormed six huts between the villages of Ingalone and Htan Pin Chaung located between Kungyangon and Kawhmu and detained two members of an underground resistance group.

"A young woman reportedly opened fire when soldiers tried to apprehend her group. She and her partner were captured, but others fled. Some were caught later during forest searches. The junta also found ID cards in the huts and is now using them to track township officials," said a local source.

Reports circulating on social media suggest that the junta has designated Kungyangon, Kawhmu, and Twantay as "black zones." An estimated 2,000 troops are believed to be involved in the operation, though some resistance members say the actual number may be slightly lower.

"The two-battalion estimate might be high, but there's no doubt they've deployed a large number of forces," said an RSN member.

Currently, military units are conducting door-to-door searches in villages across the three townships and have established multiple checkpoints along main roads, tightening security in the area, according to local residents.

RSN data also indicates that at least 687 youths were arrested by junta forces throughout Yangon Region in April alone, reflecting a sharp escalation in targeted detentions.

Photo: AFP

MOST MYANMAR AIRSTRIKE VICTIMS DURING POST-QUAKE CEASEFIRE WERE IN BLACKOUT ZONES

A new report by the Myanmar Internet Project (MIP) has revealed that nearly all victims of junta-led airstrikes during a declared ceasefire period were in areas affected by internet blackouts.

The report, released on 21 May, found that 97.5% of those killed in airstrikes between 2 April and 30 April were located in regions where the junta had restricted internet access. The ceasefire was announced following the powerful earthquake that struck Myanmar on 28 March, but according to the report, military airstrikes and ground assaults continued unabated throughout the supposed truce.

During the one-month ceasefire window, the MIP recorded 137 airstrikes across 73 townships, many of which were either under blackout or designated earthquake disaster zones. Notably, 60.59% of these airstrikes hit areas severely impacted by the quake, and over 76% of those killed were in zones officially declared as earthquake emergency areas.

Despite the ceasefire announcement, the junta launched daily airstrikes, resulting in 201 confirmed

deaths and over 260 injuries. The report highlights 12 mass casualty incidents, including nine cases with at least five deaths and three with ten or more.

The Myanmar Internet Project, which monitors human rights abuses in areas cut off from internet access, compiled the data using reports from independent and local media. However, it warned that actual figures are likely much higher, as several incidents lacked precise casualty counts and could not be fully included in the statistics.

One particularly devastating example cited in the report occurred on 12 May, when the military bombed a school in Ohteindwin village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Region. The airstrike killed 22 students and two teachers.

The findings point to a deliberate pattern of violence targeting vulnerable, disconnected communities, even as the military publicly claimed to pause operations in the aftermath of a natural disaster.


 Khisa Khin

MISS MYANMAR HIGHLIGHTS PLIGHT OF CHILDREN LOST TO WAR AND DISASTER AT MISS WORLD 2025

Khisa Khin, the 17-year-old crowned Miss World Myanmar 2025, delivered an emotional message about the suffering of children in conflict- and disaster-stricken Myanmar during the Head-to-Head Challenge segment of the 72nd Miss World pageant in Hyderabad, India.

Representing Myanmar on the international stage, Khisa Khin recited a poignant poem titled "Our School," reflecting the innocence and hope of schoolchildren whose lives were cut short by war and natural disaster. The poem begins with the lines, "Flowers are about to bloom. The bud stems are bright. The sun rays are radiating like the lustre of gold. This is our school."

Speaking from the heart, she continued, "For all the kids, I recited this poem from the bottom of my heart. Both the civil war and the earthquake claimed the lives of children. Their school uniforms, their books and their bags are all covered in blood, and I wonder whether they even knew they were about to die. I am genuinely devastated by that thought. I hope they rest in peace."

Her words resonate deeply in Depayin Township, Sagaing Region, killed 22 schoolchildren and two teachers, and injured more than 100 people. Just weeks earlier, on 28 March, a powerful earthquake caused the collapse of a private preschool in Kyaukse Township, resulting in the deaths of 12 children and one teacher.

These incidents represent mass casualties among school-age children and bring tragic context to Khisa Khin's appeal. She also stressed the urgent need for humanitarian aid in Myanmar, where civilians continue to suffer under worsening conflict and natural disasters.

Khisa Khin is one of 108 contestants from around the globe participating in the Miss World 2025 competition, which is taking place from 7 to 31 May in Hyderabad, India.



MYANMAR MILITARY DELIBERATELY BLOCKS REINTEGRATION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, SAYS RIGHTS GROUP

Myanmar's military junta is deliberately preventing the reintegration of former political prisoners as part of a systematic campaign to marginalise dissent and suppress civic participation, according to a report by Human Rights Myanmar (HRM).

In its March 2025 submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), HRM outlines how the junta uses surveillance, legal ambiguity, and social ostracism to ensure that political prisoners remain isolated long after their release. The report asserts this is not a failure of policy but a deliberate strategy.

Since the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar has seen widespread arbitrary detentions targeting journalists, activists, and protestors. According to HRM, released political prisoners are subjected to severe restrictions, including forced agreements not to oppose the military and ongoing surveillance that stifles basic freedoms. Many are threatened with rearrest if they violate the ambiguous conditions of release.

The HRM makes clear that the military not only refuses to support reintegration, but it also actively

dismantles any chance of it through coercive practices such as family intimidation, property seizures, and discriminatory denial of healthcare for ex-prisoners. Women, in particular, face devastating personal consequences, often losing custody of children or being abandoned by spouses.

HRM notes that former detainees are routinely excluded from formal employment and face widespread social stigma, with friends and relatives distancing themselves to avoid reprisal. As many as 17 percent of political prisoners have had their homes confiscated, forcing some into homelessness.

The report concludes that the junta employs non-reintegration not as neglect but as a clear political purpose as a calculated form of repression to silence voices and prevent future opposition.

HRM calls on the international community to recognise the junta's non-reintegration strategy as a human rights violation and to impose targeted sanctions, while supporting civil society initiatives that offer vocational training, legal aid, and psychological support for former detainees.



Funeral pyre. Photo: Supplied

NUG URGES INDIA TO PROBE DEATHS OF 10 PDO MEMBERS IN TAMU DISTRICT

On 20 May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement calling on the Indian government to take responsibility by thoroughly investigating and ensuring accountability for the killing of 10 members of the People's Defence Organisation (PDO) in Tamu District along the Myanmar-India border.

The statement is as follows.

It has come to our attention that ten members of the People's Defence Organization (PDO), temporarily stationed in Kama Gyi Village, Tamu District, Sagaing Region, near the Indo-Myanmar border, went missing from their base on 14 May 2025. Subsequently, on 16 May 2025, the Assam Rifles (Battalion-1, based in Chandel District, Manipur State) coordinated the handover of ten deceased individuals.

The National Unity Government's Task Force for India, specifically established to address matters related to India, was immediately assigned the following responsibilities: (a) To verify the identities of the missing PDO members and confirm their status, while securing the return of the individuals and their remains within 24 hours of the initial report; (b) To release an initial investigative report within seven days; and (c) To undertake any further necessary actions. Based on preliminary findings, the Task Force has initiated engagement with relevant counterparts on the Indian side, and coordination efforts are ongoing to uncover the full truth behind this tragic incident.

From on-ground investigations, internal reports, and discussions, the National Unity Government observed that the circumstances of the incident differ significantly from narratives circulated in some Indian media outlets. Available evidence indicates that the ten PDO members based in Tamu District were not killed

in an armed encounter within Indian territory. Rather, they were reportedly captured, tortured and summarily executed by personnel from Assam Rifles Battalion-1, despite prior notification having been issued regarding their temporary presence in the area. Furthermore, during the body retrieval process, Myanmar officials were presented with a handover document containing contentious terms, including: (a) a statement alleging that the PDF members had crossed into Indian territory and initiated hostilities; and (b) an implied consent to ongoing border fencing activities. The return of the bodies was carried out only after the signing of this document.

In light of the findings of this investigation, the National Unity Government calls upon the Government of India to take the following actions:

- a) Publicly clarify the full facts surrounding the incident;
- b) Ensure accountability by conducting a transparent and thorough investigation, and by taking appropriate action against those responsible, especially in view of the fact that the deceased were not insurgents operating against the Government of India;
- c) Provide fair and adequate compensation to the families of the victims;
- d) Implement measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents; and
- e) Temporarily suspend unilateral border fencing activities in areas with unresolved border demarcation

The National Unity Government believes that this tragic event does not reflect the official policy or intent of the Government of India. We reaffirm our commitment to continued cooperation on border-related matters, consistent with the longstanding, neighbourly relations between our two nations. We

sincerely urge the Government of India to address this issue with the seriousness it warrants and to take the necessary steps toward justice and accountability. Without the full truth, it will be difficult to resolve rising concerns or prevent future complications.

In recognition of the ongoing cooperation between the National Unity Government and the relevant authorities of the Government of India regarding this matter, we respectfully urge all Myanmar citizens, both within Myanmar and in India, to refrain from any actions that could negatively affect bilateral relations. In particular, we strongly encourage revolutionary groups operating along the border to avoid any activities that may be perceived as unlawful. We further call for continued cooperation with relevant authorities to uphold the rule of law, including efforts to prevent the illegal trade and transportation of narcotics along the Indo-Myanmar border.

Through this statement, the National Unity Government informs the public of the steps taken in response to the killing of the PDO members and formally appeals to the Government of India for appropriate attention and cooperation in addressing this grave matter.

MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKES HIT KANBALU TOWNSHIP VILLAGES, KILL TWO CIVILIANS AND DISPLACE HUNDREDS

At least four villages in northern Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, came under aerial attack by junta forces on 21 May, resulting in the deaths of two men and injuries to a woman, according to local news outlet Kawlin Info.

Between 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm, Myanmar military forces deployed Y-12 aircraft to drop 39 bombs across the villages of Kangyi, Zawchaung, Thintaw, Paukseingon, and Aukte. A man from Paukseingon and another from Zawchaung were killed, while a woman from Thintaw sustained injuries in the strikes.

The airstrikes came as nearly 200 junta soldiers from Koehtaungbot and Chatthin military bases, accompanied by Pyu Saw Htee militia members entered Thintaw village on 18 May and were reportedly preparing to set up a permanent camp, local resistance forces said.


A member of a resistance force said that the bombings likely caused damage to civilian homes, but the full extent of destruction remains unverified.

The strikes have triggered a mass displacement of villagers. A representative from Kawlin Info reported that residents from Thintaw, Paukseingon, Aukte, Kangyi, and Watthaein are fleeing their homes as the military advances.

“The entire population of Thintaw village is fleeing, and some residents have already been arrested,” a representative said.

This latest attack follows a similar incident on 12 May, when junta forces and Pyu Saw Htee militia burned down Hngetpyawtaing village in the same township, destroying multiple homes and forcing more civilians to flee.

The military’s continued offensives have triggered widespread displacement across affected areas. These attacks highlight the junta’s persistent use of airstrikes against civilian communities, further deepening the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. International actors have strongly denounced the violence, urging accountability and an immediate halt to the assaults.



Junta Leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing addresses officials during the second day of a Military Council meeting held on 20 May in Naypyidaw.

MIN AUNG HLAING BLAMES OUTBOUND TRAVEL FOR RISING EXCHANGE RATES AS MYANMAR'S JUNTA TIGHTENS FOREIGN CURRENCY CONTROLS

Myanmar's junta chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has attributed the country's escalating foreign exchange rates to increased outbound travel and foreign spending, despite Myanmar running a trade surplus.

Speaking on 20 May during the second day of a Military Council meeting in Naypyidaw, the military leader claimed that foreign travel by citizens and organizations has significantly raised the demand for foreign currency, fuelling exchange rate volatility.

"In addition to trade-related transactions, foreign trips and their associated spending have become a major factor in the surge of foreign currency demand," Min Aung Hlaing said, defending the junta's recent economic restrictions.

In response to the pressure on foreign reserves, the junta has reversed earlier policies allowing tax-free imports of electric vehicles (EVs). The tax benefits had been introduced to promote EV usage and reduce the nation's heavy dependence on imported fuel, estimated at around five billion U.S. dollars annually.

Min Aung Hlaing reiterated his long-standing push for electricity-based transport during the meeting, saying the regime remains committed to developing electric cars and trains, despite the worsening nationwide electricity crisis following the 2021 coup.

However, critics note that EV imports have been largely dominated by businesses linked to the family of the junta leader. According to local media, Chinese-made electric vehicles are being imported through companies tied to Min Aung Hlaing's son, Aung Pyae Sone, and daughter, Khin Thiri Thet Mon, raising concerns about profiteering under the guise of policy.

At the same time, the regime has enforced strict foreign currency controls targeting ordinary citizens. Myanmar workers abroad are required to convert 25 percent of their foreign earnings into kyats at junta-fixed rates and are now subject to income tax on those remittances.

Economists and rights groups argue that the junta's monetary policies and deepening crackdown on foreign income are exacerbating public hardship and undermining economic recovery.

"It's not foreign trips by ordinary people that are destabilizing the currency, it's the junta's mismanagement, corruption, and monopolization of trade routes," said a Yangon-based analyst who requested anonymity for security reasons.

The kyat has seen significant depreciation since the coup, with informal exchange rates continuing to diverge sharply from official ones imposed by the military-controlled Central Bank.



PDF JOINT FORCE SEIZES MYANMAR JUNTA TOWER CAMP IN BAGO REGION FOLLOWING AMBUSH OF REINFORCEMENTS

A joint force of the People's Defence Forces (PDF) has seized the Thein Kone Tower Camp in Paungde Township, Pyay District of the Bago Region, marking a strategic victory against the Myanmar military in the south-central part of Myanmar.

The operation, confirmed by a spokesperson from Pyay District Battalion 3602, followed a series of coordinated assaults against junta forces in the area. The camp, maned by around 100 Myanmar military personnel, was captured on 19 May after junta troops abandoned it the previous evening.

According to the PDF, the lead-up to the seizure involved an ambush on 17 May targeting a military convoy of about 70 soldiers enroute to reinforce the camp.

"We intercepted them on the way. Three were killed and several others wounded in the attack," said Red Star, news and information officer of Battalion 3602.

"There are no longer any military camps stationed here. The nearest ones are closer to Paungde town. There's a Kyaukgyi Taung camp located between here and the town," Red Star said.

The takeover of Thein Kone Tower Camp was carried out by Battalions 3602 and 3601, operating under Military Strategy Command 21 of Sub-Military Region 2. They acted in coordination with the Pyay District People's Defence Organization, all under the broader command structure of the Southern Military Region of the PDF.

Following the seizure, reports indicate that junta forces who fled the camp are now being redeployed to front lines in the Rakhine Yoma and Magway Region via Pyay township.

Locals say that troops previously stationed at the Tower Camp were notorious for forced conscription of porters, killings of civilians, and burning down villages in the area, incidents that had long fuelled local resentment and resistance.

The capture of the camp signals growing strength and coordination among PDF units in central Myanmar, as resistance forces continue to push toward dismantling military strongholds across multiple regions.



ELDERLY FARMER KILLED, DOZENS OF HOMES BURNED IN SOUTHERN SHAN STATE OFFENSIVE

An elderly farmer was brutally killed and over 40 homes were torched in a series of violent attacks by joint forces of the Myanmar military junta and the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) militia in southern Shan State, according to the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF).

The incidents occurred in Chang Joi village, Nyaungshwe township, during the second week of May as over 200 junta and PNO troops were deployed to southern Nyaungshwe and neighbouring Hsihseng township. The area has seen heavy fighting in recent weeks due to operations by local People's Defence Force (PDF) units near the Phekhn Township border.

On 9 May, troops set fire to over 20 homes in Chang Joi village. That evening, 54-year-old hill farmer Loong Jing was arrested while tending his farm. His throat was slashed with a knife, killing him, and 9.7 million kyat stolen by the troops, SHRF reported.

More homes were torched on 10 May and again on 13 May, bringing the total to over 40 houses destroyed in Chang Joi, a village that once had more than 80 homes. Most residents had already fled following a previous military incursion in January 2024.

In addition to the ground violence, two separate airstrikes by the junta struck nearby villages. On 12 May, a strike on Lin Pok Daek damaged the local temple. Another air raid on 13 May damaged homes in Jang Leik and Na Gone villages.

The SHRF condemned the actions as part of ongoing military offensives targeting civilians in ethnic areas, warning of escalating humanitarian consequences.

Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS FOUR CIVILIANS AMID GROWING REGIONAL OFFENSIVE

Four civilians lost their lives when Myanmar's military junta carried out an aerial bombing on Kan Sint Village in Myingyan Township at midday on 19 May, according to local resistance fighters.

Red Dragon Guerrilla Force (Myingyan) active in the area, reported that the strike directly hit a residential zone and a nearby shop, claiming the lives of two elderly residents and two middle age adults.

"The bomb landed in the heart of the village. It wasn't a military target, it was homes and livelihoods that were destroyed," said a spokesperson for the Red Dragon Guerrilla Force (Myingyan).

While the exact number of injured remains unverified, several houses were reportedly reduced to rubble in the attack. The identities of the victims have not yet been confirmed.

This latest airstrike occurred amid a broader offensive launched by local resistance forces on 15 May, known as the "9/A Nyar Myae Operation." The campaign has seen simultaneous attacks on junta positions across multiple townships in Myingyan District, including Nyaung-U, Taungtha, Si Mee Khon, and Ngazun.

Spokespersons for the operation declined to disclose further details, citing strategic concerns.

Resistance groups have repeatedly accused the junta of targeting civilian areas from the air, even in places with no active armed resistance, a tactic they say is being used to instil fear and suppress community support for the anti-junta movement.

This strike closely follows another deadly air attack in Nwe Inn village, Pale Township, Sagaing Region, on 18 May. According to a representative from Yinmarbin District Battalion 12, that strike killed four more civilians including two young children.

Back in August 2024, during the Myingyan District Special Operation (MDSO), nearly all townships in the district came under heavy resistance attack, significantly disrupting military governance in parts of the region.

As aerial assaults continue, human rights observers and local forces fear a rising toll on civilians caught between the military's campaigns and the expanding resistance movement.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA CONDUCTS BACK-TO-BACK AIRSTRIKES ON LEIKKYA VILLAGE, KILLING ONE AND INJURING FIVE

Myanmar's military junta launched consecutive airstrikes on Leikkya village in Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Region, killing one civilian and injuring at least five others, according to a statement from the Pyin Oo Lwin District People's Defence Force (PDF).

The first attack took place on the evening of 18 May around 7:09 pm, injuring two men. A second, more destructive airstrike followed the next morning at approximately 10:20 am on 19 May, when a junta jet reportedly dropped a 300-pound bomb on a local gold mining site. The strike killed one man and wounded three more individuals.

According to the PDF, the explosion also destroyed three homes, a private car, and a motorcycle.

"There's no need to worry about the two men injured on 18 May. Their condition is stable," said a spokesperson from the Pyin Oo Lwin District PDF.

Leikkya village remains under the control of resistance forces, and the junta has so far failed to regain it. As a result, the military has intensified its air campaign in the area, with the PDF accusing them of deliberately targeting civilians.

Revolutionary groups operating in Thabeikkyin have urged locals to stay vigilant and construct bomb shelters at home, warning that further aerial assaults are likely.

This is not the first such attack. On 19 April, junta warplanes dropped bombs on a densely populated area of Leikkya, killing 13 civilians, including children.

The continued targeting of civilian areas by airstrikes highlights the escalating humanitarian toll in conflict zones across Myanmar, particularly in regions where the military struggles to regain territorial control.



KIA DOWNS TWO MYANMAR JUNTA HELICOPTERS IN BHAMO AS CLASHES ESCALATE IN KACHIN STATE

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) successfully shot down two helicopters belonging to Myanmar's military junta in Bhamo Township, Kachin State, on 20 May, according to Colonel Naw Bu, a spokesperson for the armed group.

Speaking to Mizzima, Colonel Naw Bu confirmed that the helicopters were part of a three-aircraft convoy transporting reinforcements to the Military Operation Command (MOC) 21 base in Bhamo.

"The shootdown happened around 1 pm near the MOC 21 base. Of the three helicopters, two were hit—one crashed, and the other was forced to make an emergency landing near Shwegu. The third helicopter managed to flee in the direction of Myitkyina," he said.

He added that the aircraft were targeted before they could land, disrupting the junta's plans to reinforce

its troops on the ground. The specific models of the helicopters have not yet been confirmed.

This marks a significant escalation in the conflict in Kachin State and adds to a growing list of military aircraft losses since the 2021 coup.

According to Mizzima's records, at least 16 junta aircraft – both planes and helicopters – have either crashed or been brought down since the coup began. The KIA alone has reportedly downed five of them.

The incident highlights the increasing vulnerability of the junta's air capabilities in contested regions, particularly in Kachin where resistance forces continue to maintain strong footholds.



Shwe Khaung Laung

CONTROVERSIAL PRIEST SENTENCED TO OVER 16 YEARS IN PRISON BY A MYANMAR JUNTA COURT

The Myanmar junta has sentenced Christian preacher Shwe Khaung Laung, widely known as Sai Aye or "Golden Bell," to 16 years and three months in prison on six charges, according to reports from sources close to the case.

The sentence was delivered on 15 May 2025, following a trial that lasted eight months and 13 days. Sai Aye was originally arrested in Taunggyi, eastern Shan State, on the night of 1 September 2024, for allegedly inciting religious unrest through controversial sermons shared on social media.

The news of his sentencing was publicly shared via a live broadcast on the Saiaye Song Facebook page by a woman claiming to be his wife.

"The priest has been sentenced to 16 years and three months. God bless. God has been exceedingly good to me," she said, without specifying the exact charges he was convicted of.

Authorities have reportedly transferred Sai Aye to Kengtung Prison in eastern Shan State. Mizzima is still investigating the details of the charges brought against him.

Sai Aye, believed to be around 50 years old and originally from Kan Nar Lone village in Kengtung, has long been a controversial figure. Locals claim he promoted Christian ideology by offering donations to the poor and setting up informal religious schools.

He previously lived in Thailand and conducted

missionary-style outreach across Shan State, the Wa region, Kachin State, the Naga region, and even parts of China. His activities drew widespread criticism from religious organizations. In 2012, the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) issued a formal statement banning him from preaching in its areas.

In a separate incident in 2013, Chinese authorities deported him after he reportedly burned Chinese banknotes in a border town, claiming the currency was haunted by evil spirits.

A civil society member from Hsenwi told Mizzima that his sentencing may reflect more than religious content.

"He was known to behave inappropriately with women and used religious platforms to engage in unacceptable social conduct. If he had simply practiced religion for its own sake, there likely would have been no issue," she said, adding that many locals view the punishment as justified.

Locals have also accused Sai Aye of exploiting vulnerable populations by bringing young girls and children from conflict zones to his school near Hsenwi and Kutkai, where alleged human rights abuses occurred.

Though seen by followers as a devout preacher, critics and civil society groups have consistently labelled his actions as exploitative, extreme, and harmful under the guise of a religious charity.



Inside Myingyan Prison. Photo: Supplied

MALNUTRITION AND PARALYSIS RISE IN MYANMAR PRISONS AMID FOOD RATION CUTS

The Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) reported on 19 May that budget reductions in military-controlled prisons are worsening conditions for inmates, with severe food shortages leading to rising malnutrition and health complications, particularly in Myingyan Prison.

According to PPNM, approximately 15 percent of the prison population in Myingyan, located in Mandalay Region, is now suffering from paralysis, especially in the lower limbs—a condition believed to be linked to prolonged nutritional deficiencies.

The report highlights that most prisoners across the country now receive only 14 meals per week, typically one in the morning and one at night. Of these, just four meals contain a single egg and three small, two-inch slices of fish. The remaining meals consist primarily of plain rice and lentil soup, offering minimal nutritional value.

“The food supply has been steadily shrinking. Where inmates once received three eggs, they now get only one. The prison population has increased, rooms are overcrowded, and conditions have worsened steadily over the past four to five months,” said a source familiar with the situation in Daik-U Prison.

Although families are still allowed to send food packages to inmates at Daik-U Prison, the source states that prison guards often confiscate or remove items from the deliveries.

PPNM’s documentation also includes harsh conditions in other facilities such as Meiktila Prison, Obo Prison, Patheingyi Youth Detention Centre, Loikaw Prison, Paungde Prison, and Patheingyi Prison.

Inmates across these facilities report being served either overly mushy or extremely hard food. Meals that include meat or fish are described as having an overwhelmingly unpleasant odour, while rice is often stale or undercooked.

Beyond food scarcity, Myanmar’s prison system continues to suffer from inadequate access to medical care. Since the 2021 coup, nine political prisoners have reportedly died between January and April of this year alone due to the lack of proper healthcare, PPNM stated.

The deteriorating prison conditions reflect the broader humanitarian crisis under the military regime, as overcrowding and neglect in detention centres persist unchecked.



Photo: AFP

FAMILIES WAIT FOR WORD OF ROHINGYA SAID TO HAVE BEEN ABANDONED AT SEA BY INDIA

As of this report it had been more than a week since Akbar, a Rohingya refugee in India, said he heard his niece's voice, the longest they have not spoken to each other.

She is among more than 40 Rohingya alleged by the United Nations, family and lawyers to have been forced off an Indian navy ship this month near the shores of war-torn Myanmar with only a life jacket.

"I got her out of the lion's mouth when we escaped Myanmar almost eight years ago. And now this has happened," Akbar, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, said of his niece, who is around 20 years old.

Myanmar's Ba Htoo forces -- opposition fighters battling the junta that took power in a 2021 coup -- say the group landed on May 9 on a beach in Launglon Township near southern Dawei city, a region that regularly witnesses gun battles and air strikes.

"We are helping them as human beings and we will let them go where they want if it is safe," a spokesman for the group said.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades, with many fleeing a 2017 military crackdown. More than a million escaped to Bangladesh, but others fled to India.

There are around 22,500 Rohingya in India registered with the United Nations refugee agency, according to the advocacy group Refugees International.

Two other Rohingya refugees told AFP their relatives were part of the group that was detained by Indian authorities.

Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, has called the repatriation an "unconscionable" act.

Andrews said he was "deeply concerned by what appears to be a blatant disregard for the lives and safety of those who require international protection".

New Delhi has not commented on the reports.

'Into the sea'

Family members say the group was summoned by authorities in New Delhi on May 6, allegedly to collect biometric data.

They were moved to a detention centre and then to an airport outside the Indian capital.

From there they were flown to India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, an archipelago that lies a few hundred kilometres southwest of Myanmar.

Two days after being detained, the refugees called family members back in Delhi saying they had been dropped off in the seas off Myanmar.

The Ba Htoo spokesman said one member of the group was a cancer patient, adding that the "rest of them just feel tired from the long trip".

AFP could not independently verify the claims.

Dilwar Hussain, a New Delhi-based lawyer representing refugees from the community, said they were "concerned about the safety and well-being of these refugees".

A petition filed in India's Supreme Court by two refugees whose family members are among the 43 people allegedly deported said it was carried out illegally.

India is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, which prohibits returning individuals to countries where they face harm.

However, New Delhi rights lawyer Colin Gonsalves,

who has challenged the group's detention and deportation, said India's "constitutional laws cover protection" of the personal liberty and right to life of non-citizens.

'Targeted attack'

This case is not the first to be reported.

Indian media reported this month that more than 100 Rohingya were "pushed back" across the northeastern border into Bangladesh.

India's Hindu nationalist government has often described undocumented immigrants as "Muslim infiltrators", accusing them of posing a security threat.

Yap Lay Sheng, from the campaign group Fortify Rights, said the deportation of the Rohingya group was a "targeted attack against anyone perceived to be Muslim outsiders".

Ramon, another relative of one of the deported group, said his brother told him he had been verbally abused.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, Ramon said the group was "accused of being involved" in the April 22 attack targeting tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir, in which gunmen killed 26 men. The attack sparked a four-day conflict between India and Pakistan.

"My brother asked me to leave India to avoid being in a situation like his," said Ramon, who has been in India for more than a decade.

Their mother has been inconsolable since receiving news of her son's deportation. Ramon struggles with sleepless nights over his brother's safety.

"They should have deported all of us and thrown us into the sea", he said. "We would have been at peace knowing we are together".

Photo: AFP

UN SAYS 427 ROHINGYA MAY HAVE DROWNED IN TWO SHIPWRECKS IN MAY

The United Nations said Friday last week that it feared that 427 Rohingya, Myanmar's persecuted Muslim minority, had perished at sea in two shipwrecks on May 9 and 10 off the Myanmar coast.

If confirmed, this would be the "deadliest tragedy at sea" involving Rohingya refugees so far this year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement.

The Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades. Thousands of them risk their lives every year by fleeing repression and civil war in their country by sea, often aboard makeshift boats.

"The UN Refugee Agency is gravely concerned about reports of two boat tragedies off the coast of Myanmar earlier this month," a statement read.

UNHCR said it was still working to confirm the exact circumstances surrounding the shipwrecks but preliminary information indicated that a first vessel carrying 267 people sank on May 9, with only 66 people surviving.

A second ship with 247 Rohingya on board capsized on May 10, with just 21 survivors, the UN agency said.

The Rohingya on board were either leaving Bangladesh's huge Cox's Bazar refugee camps or fleeing Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, the statement said.

Rakhine state has been the scene of fierce fighting between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group, over control of the territory.

"The dire humanitarian situation, exacerbated by funding cuts, is having a devastating impact on the lives of Rohingya, with more and more resorting to dangerous journeys to seek safety, protection and a dignified life for themselves and their families," said Hai Kyung Jun, who leads UNHCR's regional bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

In 2024, some 657 Rohingya died in the region's waters, according to UNHCR.

AFP



Photo: UNHCR

UNHCR UPDATES SHOW ONGOING CHALLENGES FOR DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS FOLLOWING MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued its seventh Flash Update on the earthquake that struck Myanmar on 28 March.

The update released on 22 May outlines the current challenges faced by displaced individuals, many of whom are still living in temporary shelters or relocating frequently.

Facilities and services at temporary accommodation sites still require improvements to ensure the safety and well-being of residents— especially children, single-headed households, and individuals with specific needs. Financial and other constraints are making it difficult for many to rebuild their homes or restore

their livelihoods. UNHCR continues to assess their needs and is actively collaborating with key partners to identify sustainable solutions.

To date, over 101,000 individuals have received assistance from UNHCR and its partners, while more than 111,000 people have already been assessed through Protection Monitoring and Assessment Tools, with ongoing assessments continuing to support the targeting of impacted communities with a focus on identifying most vulnerable and persons with specific needs.



Photo: AFP

BAN ON OUSTED EX-RULING PARTY DIVIDES BANGLADESH VOTERS

The banning of fugitive ex-leader Sheikh Hasina's party offers a sliver of justice for Bangladeshis demanding she face trial for crimes against humanity but also raises concerns about the inclusivity of elections.

"The government has taken the right decision," said Jahangir Alam, whose 19-year-old son was killed during the mass uprising that forced Hasina into exile in August 2024, ending the 15 years of iron-fisted control by her once all-powerful Awami League party.

"Because of her, the Awami League is now ruined," Alam said, demanding Hasina return from India to comply with the arrest warrant on charges related to the crackdown that killed at least 1,400 protesters.

"Who gave Sheikh Hasina the authority to kill my son?" said Alam, the father of Ibrahim Hossain Zahid, accusing 77-year-old Hasina of being a "mass murderer".

Bangladesh's oldest political party played a key role in the country's liberation war from Pakistan in 1971

and was once led by Hasina's late father, the nation's founding figure, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"People used to hang Mujib's photo over their heads," he said. "Because of Sheikh Hasina's wrongdoing, that photo is now under our feet."

'Democratic space may shrink'

Political fortunes rise and fall quickly in Bangladesh.

Hasina's government was blamed for extensive human rights abuses and protesters demanded that the interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus take action.

The South Asian nation of some 170 million people last held elections in January 2024, when Hasina won a fourth term in the absence of genuine opposition parties.

Yunus promises that inclusive elections will be held by June 2026 at the latest.

Among those demanding the Awami League ban was the National Citizen's Party made up of many of the students who spearheaded last year's uprising.

Others were supporters of the Hefazat-e-Islam group and Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist political party.

Jamaat-e-Islami was banned during Hasina's time in power and several of its leaders were tried and hanged. Unsurprisingly, its members were vocal supporters of the ban.

The government banned the Awami League on May 12 after protests outside Yunus's home, pending the trial of Hasina.

"The oppressed have begun becoming oppressors," said Latif Siddiqui, a veteran Awami League member and former minister, adding that the party was wider than Hasina alone.

"She is not the whole Awami League," he said. "Many loved the party."

Human Rights Watch issued stinging criticism on Thursday, warning that "imposing a ban on any speech or activity deemed supportive of a political party is an excessive restriction on fundamental freedoms that mirrors the previous government's abusive clampdown".

However, political analyst Farhad Mazhar, an ideological guru for many student protesters, said the ban was required.

"The democratic space may shrink, but the Awami League has shown no remorse," Mazhar said.

'Stripping the voting rights'

However, Jatiya Party chairman GM Quader said that banning any party stifled democracy.

"We believe in multi-party democracy," he said.

His party had been close with the Awami League under Hasina, Quader said, but it had also opposed the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami.

"We don't support banning any political party that... follows the rules," Quader said.

Jamaat-e-Islami supported Islamabad during Bangladesh's independence war from Pakistan in 1971. Rivals now question if it, too, should be restricted for its historical role.

"If the Awami League is banned for mass murder, then the question arises -- what will happen to those parties that were involved in genocide, directly or indirectly?" Quader said.

"In the history of Bangladesh, the most people were killed during the Liberation War."

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), widely tipped to win the elections when they happen, has taken a more pragmatic approach.

Key leader Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury has said there is no bar on former Awami League loyalists joining his party, so long as they had not previously worked to "suppress" the BNP.

Regardless, the upcoming vote will now take place without what was one of Bangladesh's most popular parties.

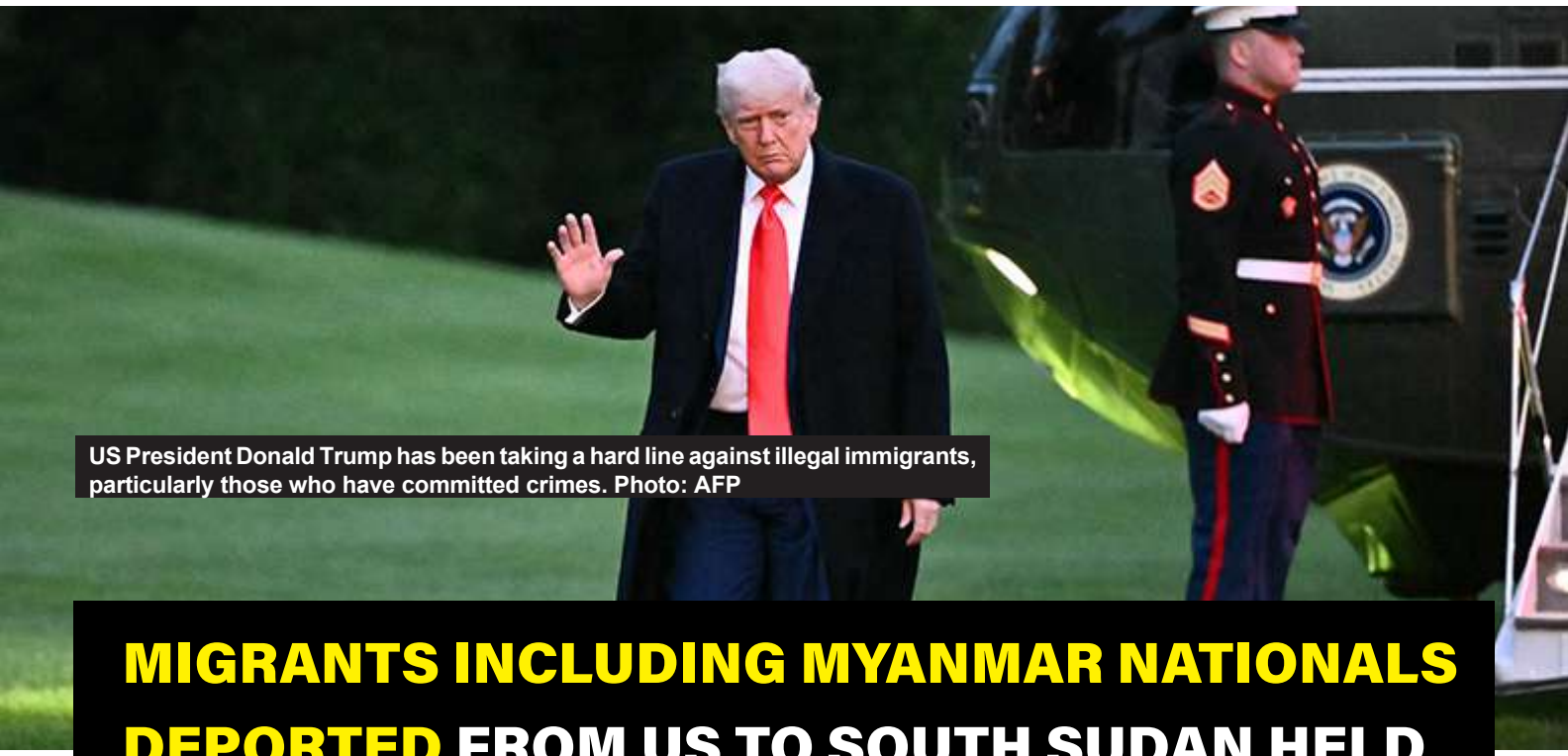
Mamun Al Mostofa, professor of political science at Dhaka University, pointed out the party had been "banned before and went through severe crises... but it made a comeback".

Shahdeen Malik, a Supreme Court lawyer and constitutional expert, said a strong opposition helped support democracy.

"AL had a vote bank of around 30 percent of the total electorate," Malik said, noting that Hasina escalated her grip on power after crushing opponents in the 2008 election.

"Due to their atrocities, they may have lost some of that support -- but it is still unlikely to drop below 20 percent," he said.

"Stripping the voting rights of this 20 percent won't benefit anyone."



US President Donald Trump has been taking a hard line against illegal immigrants, particularly those who have committed crimes. Photo: AFP

MIGRANTS INCLUDING MYANMAR NATIONALS DEPORTED FROM US TO SOUTH SUDAN HELD IN DJIBOUTI

A group of migrants deported from the United States towards conflict-torn South Sudan will be held for now in Djibouti after a court ruling, the Trump administration lamented Thursday last week.

The US government claims it expelled the eight migrants from a range of nations due to their past convictions for violent crimes.

The migrants left the United States on a flight Tuesday bound for South Sudan instead of their nations of origin, after Washington failed to obtain approval from their respective governments to take them back.

They are currently detained by the Department of Homeland Security in Djibouti, where there is a major US military base.

US District Judge Brian Murphy in Boston ruled Wednesday evening that the Trump administration had violated one of his previous orders, calling the timeframe given for the migrants to contest their expulsions to South Sudan "plainly insufficient."

South Sudan, an impoverished nation which has long grappled with insecurity and political instability, has an advisory against travel from the US State Department.

In his ruling, Murphy said that migrants had to receive greater notice and at least ten days to appeal the decision, as required by the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

He also ruled that six of the migrants were entitled to invoke, with the aid of a lawyer, their "fear" of torture or ill-treatment in the third country.

And if the Department of Homeland Security deemed the fear unfounded, it still needed to grant at least 15 days to appeal the expulsion procedure.

Trump took to his Truth Social platform on Thursday to decry Murphy's order, saying he "has ordered that EIGHT of the most violent criminals on Earth curtail their journey to South Sudan, and instead remain in Djibouti."

"He would not allow these monsters to proceed to their final destination," he continued, claiming that the courts are "absolutely out of control."

The White House identified the eight men as two citizens of Myanmar, two Cubans, a Vietnamese man, a Laotian, a Mexican and a South Sudanese citizen.

While the government said those scheduled for expulsion had ample warning, lawyers for the Vietnamese national and one citizen of Myanmar said in court filings that their clients only learned the night before or on Tuesday, when the flight left.

For their part, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday that South Sudan was not the "final destination" for the migrants.

AFP



ON THE WATERFRONT

"I literally thought the world was crumbling!"

Chloe, a young woman born and raised in Myanmar's picturesque Inle Lake region, speaks to the Insight Myanmar Podcast viscerally about surviving and responding to the devastating, 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28. The earthquake, the strongest the country had experienced in nearly a century, caused widespread destruction, with more than 5,300 deaths and over 10,000 injuries. Chloe, who works full-time at a social enterprise but has been volunteering on the ground in her home region since the disaster, shares both the trauma and determination that have defined the response efforts in her community.

Inle Lake, known for its floating gardens and villages built on stilts, is one of Myanmar's most iconic cultural landmarks. Its local economy is built around the lake, with many villagers working as fishermen, and before the 2021 military coup, it was a thriving area for tourism. But the peaceful life of Inle lake was violently shattered by the quake.

Chloe recounts how she was washing dishes at home with her family when the ground began to shake. Because of the country's violent recent history, she said, "I thought it was a bomb! But my mom was like, 'I don't think it's a bomb, I think it's an earthquake!' Then we just ran out of the house." Since the first hours after the quake, the only images she saw of the damage were of collapsed buildings in Sagaing and Mandalay, so she initially believed the Inle region had largely been spared. However, that illusion was quickly shattered as reports of family, friends and others began to trickle in; tragically, many of those stilt villages built upon the water had been destroyed.

Chloe went to assess the situation firsthand, and the scenes that met her eyes were beyond anything she had seen before. "Roofs floating in the lake and houses turned upside down like they had been literally picked up and then dropped!" The structural damage was severe, but what struck her more was the human toll. "I saw people crying for losing their family members... some people were just sitting silently in disbelief, in their temporary tents, staring at what used to be the homes."

So far, outside help has been minimal, and Chloe is also quite blunt in her assessment of the junta's level of help. "There's been no real support or assistance from the military government," she says angrily, adding that it would be "naïve" for anyone to believe that aid going through the military will ever reach the people who need it. Continuing her scathing critique, she explains, "We have no immediate response to this kind of disaster. We have no accurate plan. We have no rescue plan or anything like that!" The burden has fallen on untrained locals with no equipment. "It was very heartbreaking to see our local rescue teams suffering so much and they couldn't fulfill their duties." She stresses that both the authorities along with the people need training on emergency protocols, though she does not believe the current regime will take any such responsibility, even if offered.

In the face of all this, Chloe felt she had to do something, and so on March 30, just two days after the quake, she and some friends launched a grassroots fundraising campaign. They started by distributing small cash donations of 50,000 kyat per family. However, she quickly realized that there was an overwhelming need for reliable shelter. During previous disasters, like the 2024 floods, monasteries had served as temporary sanctuaries; this time, however, even those sacred places lay in ruins. She says, "There was nowhere safe to run... people completely exposed, physically and emotionally." She describes the emergency shelters that were hastily established as far from sufficient, as they represented just makeshift tents, some shared by more than one family. Chloe realized they would likely be unable to withstand heavy rains, an urgent concern with the monsoon season fast approaching. And what is more, even the minimal outside aid that was coming in was being used to address immediate, emergency needs. So she and her friends pivoted to the goal of helping families rebuild their homes.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/4/30/episode-343-on-the-waterfront>



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS 12 AT WEDDING CEREMONY IN VILLAGE OF BAGO REGION

Myanmar's military junta launched an airstrike on a wedding ceremony in Kyaukkyi village, Kyaukkyi Township, Bago Region, killing 12 civilians including the bride Naw Kamwee Hpaw and two five-year-old children, reported local news outlets citing a statement released by the Karen National Union (KNU).

The airstrike occurred around 9:00 am on May 25, when a junta fighter jet dropped two bombs on the wedding ceremony venue. The strike killed 12 people, including two young children aged five years and the bride, while injuring 37 others, including 13 minors, according to Human Rights Watch.

The bombing also destroyed 11 houses, a shop and a school compound.

Local residents said the junta deliberately targeted the civilian gathering in an area with no ongoing ground fighting or armed resistance presence.

The Myanmar military has increasingly used airstrikes to counter widespread armed resistance since seizing power in February 2021, with more than 6,000 civilians estimated killed by security forces, according to UN News.

This latest airstrike follows a pattern of systematic targeting of civilian gatherings by the Myanmar military. In January 2024, a junta airstrike killed 17 civilians, including nine children, at a church ceremony in Kanan village, Sagaing Region.

In April 2023, as many as 100 people were killed in a junta airstrike on a ceremony in Pazigy village.

Human rights organizations have documented numerous incidents of junta airstrikes targeting displacement camps, schools, and civilian areas, with attacks often using large unguided bombs that cause devastating casualties, according to Amnesty International.

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned such attacks and called for protection of civilians under international humanitarian law.

International organizations continue to urge the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Myanmar, particularly targeting aviation fuel supplies that enable continued airstrikes on civilians.



Photo: AFP



MYANMAR FACEBOOK USERS EXPRESS FRUSTRATION AS ASEAN CONSIDERS PERMANENT ENVOY

ASEAN foreign ministers have reached consensus on exploring the appointment of a permanent special envoy for Myanmar marking a significant departure from the bloc's current practice of annual rotations, according to Free Malaysia Today. The decision comes as Myanmar continues to face an escalating civil war and humanitarian crisis that has persisted since the February 2021 military coup.

The proposal for a three-year permanent envoy position received widespread support during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, with Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan announcing that "To us, every year we have to change the special envoy, then we have to start all over again and there's no end to it. So, we have agreed that we want to explore (this proposal) ... and nobody said otherwise. And it's just a matter of who is going to be the permanent special envoy, well, maybe for a three-year term," he said during a press conference on May 26.

However, the announcement has generated significant backlash on social media platforms among Myanmar Facebook users, who expressed frustration with ASEAN. The proposed permanent envoy system has drawn sharp criticism from citizens who view the organization as ineffective in addressing Myanmar's crisis.

A Facebook user remarked, "Many lives of Myanmar citizens have been sacrificed under ASEAN's ineffective management."

Another user expressed skepticism, writing, "Don't appoint anyone - nothing has been effective anyway."

The criticism reflects deeper concerns about ASEAN's approach, with one user saying, "ASEAN has proven from the beginning that it was established with ineffective organization. It has become clear that they have prioritized the stability of regional dictators rather than being able to achieve anything for the benefit of all people in the region."

A fourth user dismissed the entire initiative, writing, "No matter who the envoy is, it's useless for the Myanmar people."

Southeast Asian leaders were expected to endorse the appointment of a permanent special envoy for Myanmar at their summit, in a major shift from the bloc's current practice of rotating representatives annually and in recognition of the deepening crisis in the civil war-ravaged country.

The current special envoy system has seen five different appointees since Myanmar's military coup, with Malaysia's current chair appointing Tan Sri Othman Hashim as the latest envoy.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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