

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Medicine, Resistance, and  
Compassion in Burma's Civil War**

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## DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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



# ASEAN FAILS TO GRASP THE MYANMAR NETTLE

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has faced significant criticism for its failure to effectively address the crisis in Myanmar following the February 2021 military coup and the recent ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Despite being the region's primary multilateral organization, ASEAN's response has been widely regarded as inadequate, undermining both its credibility and commitment to its own principles.

One of the most glaring failures is ASEAN's inability to forge a strong, unified response. The principle of non-interference, a cornerstone of ASEAN's diplomatic culture, has severely hampered collective action. While some member states like Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have called for stronger action, others - particularly Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos - have adopted more conciliatory or neutral stances. This division has allowed the Myanmar junta to exploit ASEAN's disunity and avoid meaningful consequences.

In April 2021, ASEAN brokered a Five-Point Consensus with Myanmar's military leadership, which included commitments to cease violence, engage in dialogue, allow humanitarian aid, and appoint a special envoy - with the junta signing on the dotted line. However, the junta has blatantly ignored these commitments, continuing its campaign of violence and repression - including attacks on civilians in the wake of the 28 March earthquake.

ASEAN's failure to enforce or follow up on the agreement illustrates the lack of mechanisms within the organization to ensure compliance. There are no binding enforcement tools or penalties for non-compliance, rendering the consensus largely symbolic.

ASEAN's diplomatic strategy has been slow and largely ineffectual. The

appointment of special envoys has been marred by delays, lack of access to key stakeholders, and limited engagement with the legitimate democratic representatives of Myanmar, such as the National Unity Government (NUG). ASEAN has continued to recognize the junta as the de facto authority, though there has been some recent engagement with the NUG and ethnic armed groups.

ASEAN's humanitarian response to the crisis has also fallen short. While the bloc has promised to deliver aid through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), it has done so with the cooperation of the military junta. This has raised concerns about aid being co-opted or manipulated by the military. Moreover, aid delivery has been sporadic and insufficient to meet the needs of millions of displaced and affected civilians - victims of the civil war and victims of the earthquake.

By failing to address the crisis effectively, ASEAN has damaged its reputation as a credible regional actor. The crisis has highlighted ASEAN's institutional weaknesses, particularly its consensus-based decision-making model, which limits decisive action. The organization's credibility as a mediator in regional conflicts has been significantly undermined.

Overall, ASEAN's response to the Myanmar crisis has been characterized by inaction, internal divisions, and an overreliance on diplomacy without enforcement. These failures not only embolden the military junta but also threaten the legitimacy and cohesion of ASEAN itself. Without significant reforms to its decision-making processes and a willingness to prioritize human rights and democratic principles, ASEAN risks further irrelevance in dealing with regional crises.

## EDITORIAL

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Cover photo courtesy of Earth Mission hospital





A woman gives birth in Earth Mission hospital. Photo: EM

# MEDICINE, RESISTANCE, AND COMPASSION IN BURMA'S CIVIL WAR

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

In a remote area of Karen State, an SAC bombing left seven civilians wounded. They were brought to one of Earth Mission's hospitals, the only surgical center for countless miles. According to the staff, one patient was in serious condition with a head injury. Another required surgery for wound debridement and finger amputation, while one would be referred to Thailand for treatment of leg fractures.

The journey to Thailand involves at least 10 hours of grueling travel by truck over broken or nonexistent roads. During the rainy season, it can take 14 hours, and sometimes the rivers overflow to such a degree that trucks cannot pass at all. If the patient can be loaded onto a motorcycle without causing further harm, that is one option. But more often, they must be transported by "bamboolance", a bamboo stretcher with a hammock, carried by medics. The trek on foot can take up to three days.

Earth Mission (EM) is a faith-driven humanitarian organization working in Burma's war zone to deliver healthcare, education, and training to some of the country's most underserved communities. Of its 89 staff members, 87% are from Burma and Thailand, including doctors, physician associates, nurses, teachers, logistics specialists, engineers, and more.

EM operates the only facility in the region providing surgical, obstetrical, and advanced medical care, as well as a frontline ambulance and medic service responding to injuries caused by airstrikes and fighting. The organization also runs multiple capacity-building programs to train local Karen youth as physician associates, surgical assistants, engineering technicians, and sustainable agriculture practitioners.

While many NGOs support refugees with temporary clinics and volunteer doctors, few are willing to enter active combat zones to serve internally displaced peo-



A nurse holds babies in the maternity ward in Earth Mission hospital. Photo: EM



ple or those in isolated villages who lack any access to healthcare. EM does both. But what truly sets the organization apart is its core mission of training local people. According to American, Dr. Mitch Ryan, the program director, most foreign doctors at EM serve primarily as teachers, helping build long-term medical capacity by equipping local staff with the skills and knowledge to sustain care in their own communities.

The engineering technicians' program is also essential because providing medical care depends on maintaining electricity and being able to repair life-saving machines and vehicles. The sustainable agriculture program serves to feed the students while also building long-term capacity to address food security in Burma, as improved agricultural techniques are gradually adopted across the region.

Dr. Mitch explained that upon graduation, the physician's associates would be paired with an engineering technician and they would go back to their home

village or town to serve as primary care physicians while the technicians would use their skills to keep the clinics operating and saving lives.

Dr. Gabriel (a pseudonym), a Karen man from Yangon who now teaches in Earth Mission Asia's advanced surgical physician associate program, explained the critical role these students play in combat. "They are really helpful in the frontline," he said. "They can do life-saving measures like amputation, bleeding control, chest tubes, blood transfusions, things like that."

His mention of blood transfusions highlighted one of the major challenges of providing care in the jungle: the lack of refrigeration. Without the ability to store blood, all transfusions must come from living donors. "So, we can only use the living donor during battle time," Dr. Gabriel explained. "Before battle, we collect a list of nearby villagers and soldiers, with their blood types. If we need them, we contact them and ask, 'Please come and give blood.'"



Medical students at Earth Mission hospital.  
Photo: EM



The maximum they can take from a single donor is 500cc, but patients often need much more. "It's very difficult. It's very difficult. It's a problem," he said quietly. "Sometimes people die because... no blood." He shook his head.

Dr. Mitch spoke of how overwhelming the needs in Burma can be, but emphasized that their team focuses on what they can do. He recalled advice from a good friend: "I do everything I can do. I pray. And I go to sleep. Then I wake up and do it again."

The realities of combat and working in remote conditions mean that some patients die who might have been saved elsewhere, but many are saved who would have died without Earth Mission. According to data published on their website, the organization has trained 114 students and graduates, served over 85,000 patients, performed 1,493 life-saving surgeries, and supported a population of more than 562,000.

"Now we're trying to make a small blood bank," said Dr. Gabriel. "Like a blood storage refrigerator. We have two refrigerators in the hospital now. But the problem is you need electricity 24 hours a day. And it can only preserve blood for about 20 days."

Like many of the doctors and instructors now working at Earth Mission's hospital, Dr. Gabriel was part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), a group of professionals who refused to work under the junta. "When we heard about the coup, we did not go to the hospital," he said. "And then we started to give medical cover to the protesters."

He described the early days of the revolution in Yangon: "So many young people were on the streets protesting. But the SAC used a lot of tear gas bombs." Soldiers also beat protesters with batons and rifle butts. "We followed behind them with the ambulance, like medics," he said. He also opened his clinic to treat



wounded protesters free of charge and later provided follow-up care at the hospital.

Another instructor in the program, Dr. Esther, also joined the protests as a medic. She recalled how quickly the violence escalated. "We heard they would shoot the protesters," she said. "But we didn't know. We had no experience with that."

This highlighted the stark difference between people from urban areas like Yangon and those from Burma's ethnic states. For most city dwellers and those from central Burma, war was something new. Many young people had no memory of previous crackdowns, and certainly no experience of regular violence like those in Karen and Shan States, where conflict has been ongoing for decades.

"My parents didn't want me to go to the protest," Dr. Esther said. "They told me, 'You'll be killed by the military guys.'" William, one of the technical instructors echoed the same realization: "Before, I didn't know about bullets and guns. I had no experience with that."

But after the military opened fire on protesters, the reality set in. All three of the instructors came to understand the full scope of the crisis. "They were searching for us," said William. Dr. Gabriel added, "After a few weeks, so many soldiers and police entered my house."

They fled the city separately and, through various contacts, eventually found their way to the Earth Mission hospital, where they now work together, devoting their skills to helping others.

"Especially because we are doctors and general surgeons," said Dr. Gabriel, "I prefer the clinical life. I can't do the military. I have no ability to do that. But I want to help people with my clinical skills. And here, I can help a lot. I'm really, really glad for that."

The doctors and instructors from the urban areas had to make significant adjustments to work under jungle conditions. Dr. Mitch explained, "They are people who had been practicing medicine in a hospital or clinical environment in the city, and now they have to learn how to do it out here. There are differences in how you practice, but also in what you see. Here, you're going to see a lot more infectious diseases and trauma, but not so much diabetes."

He noted that most of the students at Earth Mission come from rural areas similar to the one where the hospital is located, and they'll be returning to serve in those environments. This makes the hands-on training they receive especially relevant to the kind of medicine they'll be practicing.

At the same time, Earth Mission must continue providing support and professional development for the doctors and instructors already in the field, to ensure they remain in their home villages serving their communities. "You can't just put people in a remote place and then leave them and expect them to stay," Dr. Mitch said.

Western-trained medical practitioners, especially those who speak English, often have the option to leave for better opportunities. But by offering ongoing training and encouragement, Earth Mission hopes to keep them focused on their mission.

"They're going to be living in their home areas, hopefully for the rest of their lives," Dr. Mitch said. "There are studies that show people from rural areas are more likely to stay and serve in those areas. And if you train them in environments similar to where they'll work, they're more likely to continue. It just makes sense. After graduation, they're going home. If they've learned in that environment, they'll know the common issues well, and it won't be as stressful. But if you learn in the big city and then try to adapt to a rural setting, it's quite



stressful.”

Follow-up research suggests that the vast majority of graduates remain in their villages, and most have begun training their own students, further amplifying the impact of the program.

For many, the coup has been a learning experience, bridging the gap between ethnic groups and between rural and urban populations. Buddhists and Christians, Bamar and Karen, work side by side as part of a diverse team made up of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, along with a few foreign volunteers. Even for instructors who are Karen, living and working in Karen State’s remote jungle areas has been a new experience and a lesson in compassion.

“In the jungle, the people need a lot. There is no healthcare system,” said Dr. Gabriel. He explained that

before the coup, people living in cities like Yangon had little understanding of the conditions in rural areas. In the jungle, he said, there are soldiers everywhere, and people live under constant intimidation by the dictatorship. Many lack access to basic healthcare and education.

“When I came to live in the jungle and live together with them, it was really so surprising to me,” he said. “How is it possible for people to bully others so much? It’s terrible.” He shook his head. Dr. Gabriel’s words capture the heart of the organization’s mission. “Now I know this condition, the real situation. And now that I know it, I don’t want to leave them.”

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

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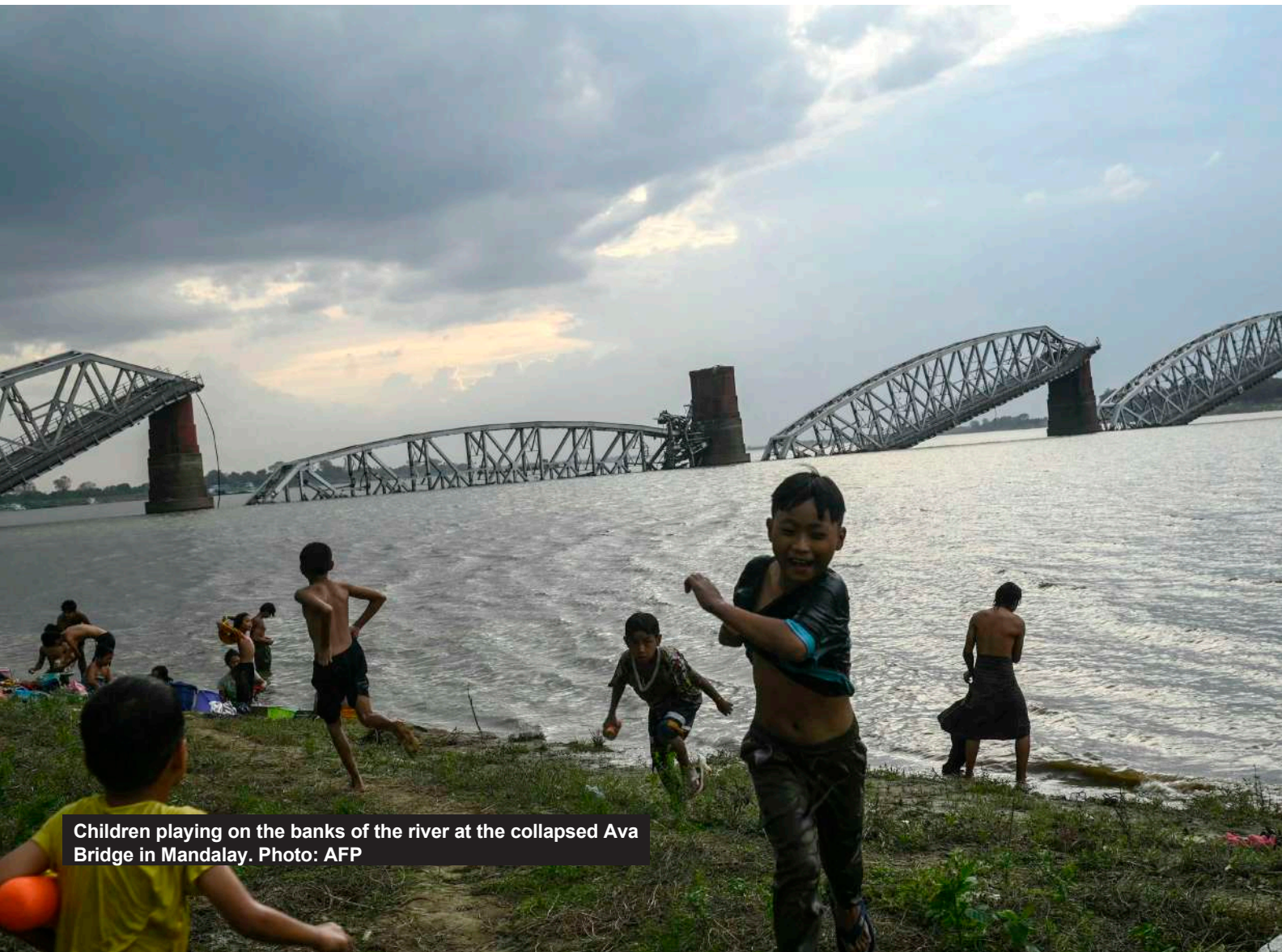
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Children playing on the banks of the river at the collapsed Ava Bridge in Mandalay. Photo: AFP

# SLOW RECOVERY FOR EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS



**M**ore than two months after the powerful earthquake that struck central Myanmar, survivors say they have received more assistance from private charity groups than from the military junta, which continues to control the flow of international aid.

While local donors and volunteer teams have reached communities across Mandalay and Sagaing regions, junta-controlled aid has mostly gone to government strongholds such as Naypyidaw and Meiktila. In many quake-affected towns, the recovery remains slow and disorganized.

In Mandalay, collapsed buildings remain uncleared, with debris merely fenced off using zinc sheets to maintain the city's appearance. Reconstruction has not yet begun. Some damaged buildings are still awaiting demolition approval, hindered by a lack of machinery and absent property owners.

As the new school year approaches, displaced residents who had been sheltering in schools and

monasteries have been relocated to open fields with the help of charity workers and firefighters. The onset of the monsoon season has worsened living conditions, with reports of snakes entering tents.

Although the junta claimed to have provided financial aid, residents say the support was inadequate and unevenly distributed. "They gave 50,000 kyats per family, but it didn't reach everyone," one victim told BBC Burmese. "Even families from the most severely affected areas were left out."

In Naypyidaw, victims who had taken refuge in three school campuses were forcibly relocated to monasteries after Vice Senior General Soe Win, the junta's second-in-command, reportedly expressed disapproval of the tents being visible on school grounds.

Meanwhile, local junta authorities at township and ward levels have demanded that private donors hand over all aid—excluding perishable food—so that they can distribute it "later." However, many residents say that distribution never happened. A Mandalay resident



Bombed buildings in Kyauktaw Township in Rakhine State.  
Photo: AFP

told Yangon Khit Thit Media that authorities at the ward level are deeply corrupt.

“Every ward is facing the same issue. Even if aid is delivered to the township office, it doesn’t reach the victims. Ward officials list their own relatives as victims when reporting to higher authorities. They’re also collecting money for the conscription. Instead of helping, they’re exploiting people,” the resident said.

As criticism mounts, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has proposed a 700-billion-kyat loan programme—worth about \$159 million—for earthquake victims. The loans would carry low interest rates and vary depending on whether recipients live in affected areas. However, economists and civil society groups have raised concerns that the junta may resort to printing more currency to fund the scheme, further fueling inflation in an economy already on the brink.

With reconstruction delayed, corruption rampant, and the rainy season now underway, many survivors remain in limbo, dependent on the continued efforts of private donors and volunteers.

## **Despite ‘ceasefire’ junta attacks continue**

Despite a declared ceasefire, the Myanmar military junta carried out at least 164 airstrike incidents across the country during May, killing 171 civilians and injuring 388, according to monitoring by Mizzima. The strikes hit not only areas of armed resistance but also regions recently devastated by a major earthquake, raising concerns over the junta’s continued targeting of civilian populations.

Among the attacks, seven schools, one clinic, one internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, and three monasteries were directly struck by air assaults.

The Mandalay and Sagaing regions, both severely affected by the recent earthquake, bore the brunt of the violence, accounting for approximately 45 and 27 incidents respectively. These attacks came even

after the junta issued a second announcement of a nationwide ceasefire during the same period.

On May 10, the airstrikes were particularly deadly. In Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, more than ten civilians were killed and eight others injured. On the same day, an airstrike hit a traditional religious gathering in Aneint village, Chaung-U Township, also in Sagaing. Another devastating attack that day occurred at Oeihtein Kwin village school, where 24 students and teachers were killed and over 100 sustained injuries.

Later in the month, on May 23, a junta airstrike on Mingin Township, Sagaing Region, killed 14 people, including seven children, and wounded over 20 others.

In the Mandalay Region, the junta focused on areas associated with resistance movements, including Myingyan, Taungtha, and Natogyi townships. Notably, the military launched its first-ever airstrike on Kyaukpadaung Township in May, killing four civilians and injuring six. Another significant attack occurred in Zayatkwinn village, Thabeikkyin Township, on May 10, killing an unspecified number of civilians. The village is known for its gold mining activity, and local sources suggest the junta aims to disrupt income flows to resistance forces.

May 10 stood out as the deadliest single day, with at least 14 separate airstrike incidents recorded nationwide.

Despite junta claims of a ceasefire, the junta’s escalating air campaign throughout May—particularly in quake-affected regions—has led to widespread civilian casualties and destruction of vital infrastructure.



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Medics treat injured guest at wedding that was bombed by the junta. Photo: Supplied

## EVEN WEDDINGS ARE TARGETS: CIVILIAN LIFE UNDER ATTACK IN BURMA

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

From her hospital bed, one of the survivors recalled the moment everything around her shattered. She had gone to the wedding to help with preparations, washing dishes alongside other women while music from the DJ's sound system blared in the background. The music was so loud they didn't hear the incoming aircraft. Then came the explosion. The women beside her collapsed where they sat. Dust, blood, and panic filled the air. She scrambled to her feet and ran, despite an injury to her ankle.

Among the women helping with the wedding was a mother who had brought her four-year-old son, unable to leave him alone at home. The child was killed instantly, his head blown off by a mortar round.

Several of the wounded were rushed to Earth Mission hospital, the only surgical facility for miles. According to the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), the airstrike killed more than 10 people and injured over 20. Among the dead was the bride, 21-year-old Naw K'mwee Paw, whose wedding day, meant to be the happiest of her life, became her last.

FBR teams, together with members of the Karen National Union (KNU) and local villagers, spent the day caring for the wounded and recovering the bodies. They reported that at least six homes were destroyed

in the attack.

This was not an isolated incident. In recent months, the junta has repeatedly turned weddings into scenes of death and destruction. On May 9, 2025, in Tha Yet Cho village, Nawnghkio Township, northern Shan State, shelling by junta forces killed at least four civilians, including a five-year-old child, and injured seven others. The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) identified troops from the junta's No. 902 Artillery Command as the perpetrators.

Just months earlier, on February 25, 2025, the Myanmar Air Force bombed a wedding ceremony in Son Kone village, Myaing Township, Magway Region. The couple being married were members of the anti-junta People's Defense Force (PDF). The attack occurred during morning refreshments at a local monastery, when a jet dropped two 500-pound bombs, killing at least 12 people and injuring over 20 more, many of them villagers helping with the celebration. Witnesses say junta forces followed up with machine-gun fire along nearby roads, indicating a coordinated attempt to strike both the wedding and the surrounding civilian area.

One of the most egregious crimes of the war occurred on May 12, when a military jet bombed a



school in Oe Htein Kwin village, Tabayin Township, Sagaing Region. The airstrike, which took place during morning classes, killed up to 22 people, including 20 students and two teachers, and injured more than 100. The school was run by the pro-democracy movement and located far from any reported fighting.

The following day, on May 13, a junta airstrike hit Htun Ya Wai village in Rathedaung Township, Rakhine State, killing at least 13 civilians and injuring over 20. Victims included a two-year-old girl, an 82-year-old woman, and several children between the ages of 2 and 10. The area, controlled by the Arakan Army (AA), saw residents flee in fear of further bombings. Several homes were destroyed, and internet and phone service were cut in AA-held zones.

In another attack, a junta jet bombed a crowded market in Let Pan Hla village, Mandalay Region, in March 2025. At least nine people were killed, including two children. The strike occurred in broad daylight, in a civilian area with no nearby military presence.

These attacks, carried out despite the junta's declared ceasefire from April 2 to May 31, are part of a broader campaign of terror, in which schools, homes, markets, and entire villages have become deliberate targets. In just the past week, Free Burma Rangers (FBR) teams documented a series of airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and mass displacements that reflect the military's escalating assault on civilians.

In Kler Lwee Htoo District, 363 families, more than 1,600 people, were forced to flee southern Hsaw Htee Township due to fighting and airstrikes. On May 11, a military jet bombed Thetkegon Village, injuring a man named Ko Thet Wei. Farther north in Taw Oo District, a junta aircraft dropped two 500-pound bombs on a village in Htaw Ta Htoo Township on May 13, killing one

villager and injuring three others. Just five days later, the Burma Air Force bombed Hsa Thoo Lay School in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, wounding the school principal, Saw Mya Win.

The pattern continued in Dooplaya and Doo Tha Htoo Districts. On May 14, artillery and mortar fire from Light Infantry Battalions 207 and 598 forced villagers to flee from Win Kan, Bawkahta, and Kyauk Yae Twin. The following day, a Y-12 aircraft bombed a monastery in Yae Kyaw Gyi Village, while junta soldiers disguised in civilian clothing were seen patrolling nearby Yae Kyaw Lay, digging trenches and preparing for further attacks.

On May 16, the Burma Army launched eight drone strikes on Tha Mine Gone Village in Kaw T'ree Township, dropping 60mm bombs that injured a KNLA soldier and displaced more civilians. FBR medics treated both resistance fighters and civilians, carried out emergency evacuations, and delivered care to 56 internally displaced people (IDPs) who had fled earlier artillery and air assaults in mid-April. These IDPs remain in urgent need of food, medicine, and hygiene supplies.

Since the March 28 earthquake, the regime has carried out 714 air and artillery strikes across Myanmar, 575 of them during the so-called "ceasefire," according to the Democratic Voice of Burma. These assaults have left at least 491 people dead and 1,058 wounded. The Free Burma Rangers and other groups have recorded a steady pattern of assaults on civilian targets, including schools, homes, and wedding ceremonies, underscoring the SAC's strategy of using fear and brutality to suppress resistance.

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



Medics take away the injured.



The deceased bride.



Photo: AFP

## ASEAN'S CEASEFIRE STATEMENT LACKS CONCRETE STEPS TO SOLVE MYANMAR CRISIS, SAYS APHR

On 29 May, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) released a public statement in response to the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on an Extended and Expanded Ceasefire in Myanmar, adopted during the 46th ASEAN Summit held on May 26–27.

The group highlights the lack of any enforceable mechanisms or independent monitoring provisions, concluding it fails entirely to address accountability.

The text of the statement continues below.

By definition, a ceasefire is an agreement to halt all military activities for a specified period within a defined area. It can be unilateral or negotiated between conflicting parties.

The ceasefire announced by ASEAN, appears to build on the three-consecutive temporary ceasefires by the authority in Myanmar and the other unilateral ceasefires by other relevant stakeholders, which offer no clarity on timelines, scope, or responsibilities. This absence of a firm framework risks reducing the ceasefire to an ambiguous gesture—one that allows Myanmar's military junta to exploit the language of peace while continuing its brutal campaign with impunity.

"The SAC has repeatedly demonstrated that ceasefire announcements mean little on the ground. Despite declarations, violence has only escalated, with increasing airstrikes, bombings, and killings—even in the aftermath of the devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake," said Mercy Chriesty Barends, APHR Chairperson and Member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia.



Following the earthquake in April 2025, Myanmar's military junta declared a 20-day ceasefire citing humanitarian needs and national unity. Yet, within 24 hours, airstrikes resumed. Between 2 and 5 April alone, over 60 attacks were recorded, killing at least 68 civilians, including women and children, and targeting displacement shelters in Kachin and Sagaing regions. For those enduring the conflict, it was clear: this was no ceasefire but a strategic ploy to consolidate power. Peace became yet another tool of oppression.

While ASEAN leaders may publicly commend the ceasefire, in practice the junta uses it as a shield to continue violence against the people of Myanmar and resistance forces. Barends added, "By endorsing these declarations without demanding concrete actions or accountability, ASEAN risks enabling this vicious cycle of abuse."

This situation underscores the urgent necessity for a clear, credible, and robust monitoring mechanism to ensure any ceasefire is not merely symbolic but genuinely upheld and enforced. "A ceasefire lacking a defined duration or independent oversight is no step toward peace—it is a political smokescreen," said Charles Santiago, APHR Co-Chairperson and former Member of Parliament from Malaysia. "There is no clarity on who will observe, verify, or respond to violations. The junta operates unchecked, while ASEAN congratulates itself on hollow gestures."

ASEAN must stop the use of vague language and weak declarations and demonstrate real political will. Empty statements without execution only embolden the atrocities of the junta and prolong the suffering of the people of Myanmar.

Despite repeated and documented violations of the Five-Point Consensus, the ASEAN Leaders' Statement continues to invoke it without consequence. More troubling is ASEAN's refusal to engage with Myanmar's legitimate political actors, including the National Unity of Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations, and civil society groups.

The ASEAN Leaders' statement's vague assurances of humanitarian aid also lack credibility. It remains silent on cross-border access—an urgent necessity to reach communities outside junta control—and offers no guarantee that aid will be free from political manipulation.

"We cannot talk about humanitarian assistance without addressing who controls access," said Rangsiman Rome, APHR Board Member and Member of Parliament from Thailand. "The military has repeatedly manipulated aid for its own purposes. ASEAN must back reliable cross-border humanitarian channels that operate independently of the junta."

Calls for "inclusive dialogue" lack credibility when democratic actors and ethnic resistance groups are excluded, leaving the junta free to dictate the terms.

"ASEAN's failure to establish monitoring mechanisms, protect victims, or hold perpetrators accountable reveals a deeper problem—its unwillingness to confront the brutal reality of Myanmar's military," said Arlene Brosas, APHR Board Member and Member of the House of Representatives from the Philippines. "A ceasefire without oversight is not a peace process—it is complicity in ongoing abuses."

APHR urges ASEAN to urgently translate rhetoric into a coordinated, concrete strategy. This must include formal engagement with pro-democracy and ethnic resistance groups, a clearly defined ceasefire timeline, independent monitoring, and unimpeded cross-border humanitarian access. Above all, ASEAN must demand accountability, not appeasement, from those responsible for mass atrocities.



Photo: AFP



# SAC-M CONDEMNS ASEAN'S ONGOING FAILURE ON MYANMAR CRISIS

On 29 May, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) released a strong statement criticizing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for its continued failure to take effective action on the crisis in Myanmar. The statement labels the 46th ASEAN Summit as another wasted opportunity to take meaningful action on Myanmar.

The statement continues as follows.

"That ASEAN continues to default to the redundant Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar shows an alarming lack of urgency, commitment and creativity in tackling the biggest regional crisis in half a century," said Marzuki Darusman of SAC-M.

On Sunday, while ASEAN Foreign Ministers were meeting in Kuala Lumpur, a Myanmar junta airstrike on a wedding in Kyaukkyi Township of Bago Region killed at least 10 civilians, including the bride and two children, according to reports. This attack came less than two weeks after the junta bombed a school in Depayin Township, killing 22 children and two teachers and injuring as many as 105 other civilians.

Despite widespread reporting on these and other junta atrocities, a new Statement from ASEAN leaders bizarrely expressed appreciation for the junta's non-

existent ceasefire and called for its extension and expansion. ASEAN leaders also continue to perpetuate a perverse equivalence between the junta's widespread and systematic atrocities against civilians and the resistance efforts of revolutionary forces.

"Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's relentless attacks on civilians make a sick mockery of ASEAN's claims that the junta has implemented a ceasefire or that it has any intention of doing so," said Yanghee Lee of SAC-M.

"If ASEAN is serious about stopping the violence, it should immediately request the UN Security Council to step in and impose a countrywide ceasefire in Myanmar with international monitors to enforce the junta's compliance," added Chris Sidoti of SAC-M.

ASEAN leaders claim in their new Statement that their 'sole objective' is 'restoring peace, stability and democracy through a Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led political solution, for the interest and well-being of the people of Myanmar.' Prime Minister Anwar as ASEAN Chair must therefore champion a new process on Myanmar that prioritises direct engagement with the National Unity Government, Ethnic Resistance Organizations, minority representatives and Myanmar civil society, and that replaces the redundant Five-Point Consensus.



# INDIA DETAINS AND DEPORTS MYANMAR ROHINGYA ACTIVIST AGAINST U.N. ADVICE

**F**ortify Rights issued a press release on 27 May calling out the Government of India for the arbitrary detention of Rohingya human rights defender Mohammad Arfat for over four years without due process, according to a ruling of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

The ruling was in response to a complaint filed by Fortify Rights in May 2024 and calls on Indian authorities to provide reparations to Mohammad Arfat, as well as prevent future violations and cooperate with the UN Refugee Agency to ensure his protection and potential resettlement.

The press release continues below.

More than 40 days after the Working Group issued its decision, Indian authorities defied the U.N. ruling, forcibly transferring Mohammad Arfat to another country, where he now remains in hiding due to ongoing threats to his security.

"India's prolonged and arbitrary detention of Mohammad Arfat was both unlawful and unconscionable. He should never have been detained, let alone forcibly transferred out of India following the ruling," said John Quinley, Director of Fortify Rights. "The U.N. Working Group's opinion reaffirms what we have known all along—India violated international law by detaining a recognized refugee for years, and then put him even further in harm's way."

In the published opinion, adopted during its 101st session, the U.N. Working Group determined that India's detention of Mohammad Arfat since 2018 was arbitrary, lacked any legal basis, and deprived him of due process. The opinion finds that his detention was based solely on his status as a Rohingya refugee and that India violated key provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)—to which India is a state party and legally bound to uphold— including Articles 9 and 14, which protect against arbitrary detention and ensure the right to a fair trial.

Upon his release from arbitrary detention, Mohammad Arfat told Fortify Rights:

I was beaten by Indian police when I was first detained. ...My health [after years] in Indian detention was not good, and I could not see a doctor. I became very sick over the years. ...Now [after my release and transfer] I feel mentally and physically unwell.

The U.N. Working Group is a body of independent human rights experts established by the U.N. Human Rights Council to investigate and provide opinions on cases of deprivation of liberty that are allegedly arbitrary or inconsistent with international standards.

Fortify Rights filed the 20-page complaint to the Working Group on May 30, 2024, along with an annex of more than 90 pages supporting Mohammad Arfat's case and his right to liberty. The U.N. Working Group's opinion in response to Fortify Rights' submission expressed grave concern for Mohammad Arfat and recommended that Indian authorities:

[E]nd the arbitrary detention of Mr. Arfat by immediately and unconditionally releasing him and to liaise with UNHCR to grant him protection and a remedy, befitting his status as an asylum-seeker, which could include resettlement in a third country.

The U.N. Working Group also recommended that the Indian government provide "compensation and other reparations, in accordance with international law," for the harm caused to Mohammad Arfat, and that those responsible for the violation of his rights be held accountable, urging the Government "to ensure a full and independent investigation of the circumstances surrounding the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Mr. Arfat and to take appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of his rights." Instead, India forcibly transferred Mohammad Arfat to another country shortly after the ruling.

In addition to Mohammad Arfat's case, beginning on May 6, 2025, Fortify Rights documented how Indian authorities carried out mass arrests of Rohingya refugees in New Delhi. The next day, the authorities forced at least 40 of them back to Myanmar, where the military junta has been carrying out a genocidal campaign and where the Arakan Army — an ethnic resistance army fighting the Myanmar military junta in an ongoing revolution — has also carried out atrocities against the Rohingya people. In this instance, the India Navy dumped the refugees into the sea near the Myanmar border, placing their lives at grave risk in violation of international law.

During the same crackdown, India also forcibly deported other Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh, which hosts more than one million Rohingya refugees in crowded and tightly controlled camps.

On May 15, 2025, Tom Andrews, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, called India's forcing Rohingya into the sea "unconscionable" and "outrageous" and, in response, he launched an inquiry. Andrews said in a statement that forced returns to Myanmar are a "serious violation of the principle of non-refoulement, a fundamental tenet of international law that prohibits states from returning individuals to a territory where they face threats to their lives or freedom."

Furthermore, on March 3, three U.N. experts, including Special Rapporteur Andrews, raised concerns about India's "widespread, arbitrary and indefinite detention of refugees from Myanmar" in a letter to the Indian government:

Conditions in places of detention are reportedly dire. Detainees from Myanmar, the majority of whom are Rohingya, are reportedly held in severely overcrowded cells, and do not receive adequate nutrition, clean water, or medical care. Facilities are reportedly unsanitary. Detainees lack clean clothes, bedding, and access to sunlight. Many detainees are reportedly suffering from illness, infections and other medical problems and are unable to access adequate medical care.

India must immediately end its arbitrary and indefinite detention of refugees and provide reparations to all harmed by the government's reckless and violent crackdown on their rights, said Fortify Rights.

India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol and lacks a domestic asylum law; however, it remains obligated to respect the international customary law principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the forced return of refugees to situations where they are likely to face persecution and other serious human rights abuses. India's forcible return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar—where they face grave risks of persecution, violence, or death—also violates several international treaties to which India is a state party, including the ICCPR (Articles 6, 7, and 9), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 6 and 22), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5).

Forcibly returning Rohingya refugees to Myanmar also violates the Genocide Convention, to which India is a state party, said Fortify Rights. By returning victims of genocide to a country where that genocide is ongoing, India may be failing in its obligation to prevent genocide under international law. Moreover, by knowingly contributing to the continuing genocide through the forced return of survivors, India risks legal complicity in the very crimes the Convention is meant to prevent.

"India has legal obligations to protect Rohingya refugees under treaties it willfully entered into," said John Quinley. "India should immediately and unconditionally free all refugees in detention and provide compensation for any harms inflicted."





Refugee camp in Mizoram.  
Photo: Supplied

## INDIA TO LAUNCH ONLINE PORTAL TO REGISTER MYANMAR REFUGEES IN MIZORAM

India's Union Ministry of Home Affairs is preparing to launch an online registration portal for Myanmar refugees currently taking shelter in Mizoram State, according to a 25 May report by the Hindustan Times, quoting Home Affairs Minister Amit Shah.

The announcement came during a meeting between Amit Shah and Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma in New Delhi, where the Union Minister emphasized the need for a systematic approach to refugee documentation.

"Such an online registration system will simplify the process of identifying Myanmar refugees in a methodical way, which will alleviate the difficulties and challenges," Shah was quoted as saying.

The Mizoram state government has confirmed that the registration process will include the collection of not only personal details but also biometric data, a move that has sparked concern among refugee communities.

Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, Mizoram state officials, led by district administrators, have issued temporary identification cards to refugees and maintained informal records. The planned biometric registration marks a significant shift in policy.

While some officials argue that the system could help address cross-border crime including drug trafficking, refugees worry that their biometric information could be compromised or misused, especially if shared with the Myanmar military junta.

"There's fear that giving biometric data might put our families in danger back home," said one refugee, citing the lack of transparency from state authorities about data protection and usage.

However, others see potential benefits. "If it aids in the capture of more drug dealers and traffickers, perhaps some Mizos who hold unfavourable opinions about the refugees will begin to rethink their stances," a refugee based in Aizawl told Mizzima.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, over 112 kilograms of heroin were seized in the state, according to data from Mizoram's Excise and Narcotics Department and the state police. Some local councils and youth organizations have responded by intensifying scrutiny of refugees, including confiscating registration cards and warning them against applying for Indian-issued identity documents.

According to the Mizoram Home Department, as of May 2025, a total of 33,023 Myanmar nationals have sought refuge in the state since the military coup in February 2021. Of these, 17,551 are living in 125 relief camps, while 15,472 are staying with relatives or renting homes in villages and urban wards.

The proposed registration system aims to streamline refugee management, but for thousands fleeing violence in Myanmar, questions remain over data security, privacy, and long-term protection.



## MYANMAR JUNTA ARTILLERY FIRE KILLS ONE, INJURES TWO IN SAGAING'S CHAUNG-U TOWNSHIP

**M**ilitary Council troops launched artillery strikes on villages in Chaung U Township, Sagaing Region, on 29 and 30 May, killing one civilian and injuring two others, according to the Chaung U Township People's Defense Force (PDF).

At around noon on 29 May, troops based in Nga Yan Village fired a 120 mm artillery shell into Than Min Kan Village, killing one local resident and injuring another, the group reported.

The following day, a shell fired by the Military Council exploded inside a monastery in Hmyan Cho Village, wounding a monk. Ko Thant, an information officer for the local PDF, said the attacks are part of a broader pattern of indiscriminate violence.

"There are many casualties from the heavy weapons being fired every day. We are still trying to gather information on those injured or killed in areas under their control," said Ko Thant.

Than Min Kan and Hmyan Cho villages are located in the eastern and southern parts of Chaung

U Township. According to the PDF, collecting accurate casualty figures has been difficult due to the presence of a Military Council column operating near the affected areas.

Ko Thant said that Military Council forces in Chaung U Township have intensified their campaign throughout May, carrying out daily airstrikes, shelling, arrests, and killings, resulting in over 20 deaths this month alone.

"The heavy weapons are fired daily and dropped from paramotors. They have paused recently due to bad weather. During their area sweeps, they kill anyone they encounter, with most victims being men," he added.

With relentless artillery fire and aerial attacks ongoing, local revolutionary groups continue to warn civilians in Chaung U Township to stay alert to the growing danger.





## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS ELDERLY WOMAN, INJURES TWO IN KAREN STATE VILLAGE

**A**n airstrike by Myanmar's military on Sone See Myaing village in Myawaddy Township, Karen State, killed an elderly woman and injured two others on 28 May, following a rebel ambush on junta reinforcements near the Thai border, according to local sources.

The attack came after joint revolutionary forces assaulted a military column sent to reinforce the junta's position at Thae Baw Bo camp, located near the Myanmar-Thailand border. In retaliation, the military launched an air raid on Sone See Myaing village at around 1:00 pm, locals reported.

"A bomb landed in the village and hit two houses. An elderly woman who made a living selling boiled beans was killed. A child and an adult were injured," said a relative of a Sone See Myaing resident.

Communication lines in the area remain unstable, making it difficult to confirm the full extent of civilian casualties or property damage.

Sone See Myaing is home to the headquarters of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), a group that has maintained a ceasefire with the junta.

The strike has raised concerns that the junta is now targeting areas associated with groups it had previously considered allied or neutral.

According to the Black Panther Column, one of the revolutionary groups involved, resistance fighters intercepted the junta reinforcements as they advanced through Waw Lay camp enroute to Thae Baw Bo. Several junta soldiers were reportedly captured, along with their weapons and ammunition.

Fighting remains intense across Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 6 territory, where resistance groups continue coordinated assaults on junta outposts in Thae Baw Bo, Waw Lay, Ukrithta, Bayint Naung, Kanelay, Maw Khee, and Htika Palae.

The latest airstrike underscores the growing risks to civilians caught in the escalating conflict, particularly in border regions where alliances have become increasingly fluid and unpredictable.



## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS BURN 18 HOMES IN NORTHERN SAGAING VILLAGE AMID ONGOING MILITARY OPERATIONS

**A**t least 18 houses were burned to the ground in Kimn village, northern Sagaing Township, after junta troops launched a raid on 28 May, according to local sources.

The Wetlet Information Network reported that a military column of around 200 troops advanced into the village from Mingun in the early hours and began setting fire to homes shortly after arriving. By the time the soldiers withdrew the following day, much of the village was left in ashes.

“They conducted clearance operations inside the village. The troops have now returned to Mingun. No villagers were arrested, as residents had already fled to safety before the troops arrived,” a local resident told the press at around 5 pm on 29 May.

Although local resistance forces were positioned for a potential confrontation, a member of the revolutionary groups said no fighting occurred, as the junta forces pulled out without incident.

The raid came two months after a powerful earthquake on 28 March damaged numerous pagodas, religious buildings, and homes in the Mingun area. Locals expressed frustration that junta authorities failed to provide any disaster relief and instead escalated military operations in the region.

“The army didn’t help us recover after the earthquake—they’re attacking and torching villages instead,” said a displaced resident from the Mingun area.

Tensions in Sagaing have continued to rise following fierce battles in late April between junta forces and resistance fighters near Mingun. Both sides reportedly suffered casualties, according to statements released by anti-junta groups.

Kimn village is the latest in a growing list of rural communities in the Sagaing Region targeted by arson raids, as the junta struggles to maintain control in one of Myanmar’s most active resistance strongholds.





Photo: KNLA

## KNLA-LED FORCES SEIZE KANELAY MILITARY CAMP IN MYAWADDY TOWNSHIP, KAREN STATE

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied resistance forces captured the junta's Kanelay military outpost in Myawaddy Township, Karen State, at around 10 pm on 28 May, marking another strategic blow to junta forces in the region.

A frontline source confirmed to Mizzima that the operation was carried out jointly by KNLA units, the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO) Battalion 8, and members of the People's Defence Force (PDF).

"Kanelay has been captured. The combined forces have successfully overrun the position after days of mounting pressure on junta-held camps across the area," the source said.

Details of the battle, including casualty figures and the full list of weapons seized, have yet to be released. However, another military source indicated that a 120 mm artillery piece was seized at the site and that several heavy weapons were destroyed during the assault.

"Kanelay was a temporary strategic outpost. It's not clear whether it belonged to an artillery unit or another division, but the seizure of heavy weaponry is a significant gain," the source added.

Since mid-May, KNLA's 6th Brigade and its allies have ramped up their offensives across multiple junta

bases in the region including Thae Baw Bo, Walley, Ukrithta, Bayint Naung, Maw Khee, and Htika Palae, tightening their control in the Karen National Union's (KNU) Doolaya District.

Just one day before the fall of Kanelay, a junta reinforcement column was ambushed near Sone See Myaing, close to the headquarters of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). The clash reportedly resulted in the deaths or injuries of junta soldiers, with ten taken captives by resistance fighters.

The military has responded with a series of airstrikes, targeting resistance-held areas and civilian villages alike, including a deadly bombing in Sone See Myaing that killed an elderly woman and injured two others on 28 May.

From March through May, KNLA-led forces have steadily captured multiple junta positions across both Brigade 6 and Brigade 7 territories, including significant outposts like Pulutu, Khalea Dae, Tha Kaw Boh Khee, Tar Lay, and Baledo.

With the capture of Kanelay, resistance forces continue to make gains in eastern Myanmar, where ethnic armed groups and PDFs are working in concert to erode the military's foothold.



## REVOLUTIONARY FORCES WITHDRAW FROM HSAUNG PYAUNG, BUT MYANMAR JUNTA ALIGNED PA-O MILITIA REMAINS, BLOCKING RETURN OF VILLAGERS

**A**fter 10 days of fierce fighting in Hsawng Pyaung village, Pinlaung Township, located in the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone of southern Shan State, resistance forces have withdrawn from the area, but the Pa-O National Army (PNA), aligned with Myanmar's military junta, remains in control preventing displaced villagers from returning to their homes, local sources reported.

The clashes began on 17 May, when joint forces led by the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) launched an offensive against the PNA. The fighting intensified throughout the week until the revolutionary forces pulled back on 26 May, a frontline source told the media.

The PNA publicly declared on 27 May that it had retaken Hsawng Pyaung village. As of now, an estimated 600 PNA troops remain stationed in the village, raising concerns among locals who have been displaced since the fighting began.

"PNA forces are burning houses in the village to destroy evidence and blame the resistance forces," a KNDF comrade on the ground alleged.

Hsawng Pyaung is home to roughly 1,000 households. Since the fighting broke out, thousands of residents have fled the area, seeking shelter in nearby villages or hiding in the surrounding hills.

During the clashes, KNDF and allied groups reportedly seized around 100 weapons from junta-allied forces, including five heavy .50 calibre machine guns and a 60mm mortar. Five prisoners of war were also captured, according to resistance sources.

Meanwhile, fighting remains active in Moebye, a strategic town on the border of southern Shan and Karenni states. Colonel Phone Naing, adjutant general of the Karenni Army (KA), confirmed that resistance operations are ongoing in the area.

In contrast, a temporary pause in combat has taken hold in Bawlakhe town, Karenni State, though both resistance and junta troops remain in heightened readiness. On 22 May, revolutionary forces captured the Ye Ni Pauk outpost of Light Infantry Battalion 429, reportedly killing at least 20 junta soldiers in the operation.

As resistance forces continue to challenge junta positions across southern Shan and Karenni states, the humanitarian toll is mounting especially in areas like Hsawng Pyaung, where civilians are caught between military occupation and scorched-earth tactics.





## DENMARK TO INVESTIGATE MYANMAR AIRCRAFT DEAL COMPLAINT

**O**n May 27, the Danish National Contact Point (NCP Denmark) released a public statement announcing the launch of an investigation into a complaint filed by Justice For Myanmar against Nordic Aviation Capital (NAC). The statement comes after the conclusion of a preliminary investigation into the matter.

The text of the statement is as follows.

NCP Denmark has concluded a preliminary investigation of a complaint by Justice For Myanmar against Nordic Aviation Capital. Based on the preliminary investigation, NCP Denmark cannot dismiss that non-observance of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct has taken place. On that background, NCP Denmark has decided to initiate an actual investigation of the complaint.

On 5 June 2024, NCP Denmark received a complaint regarding Nordic Aviation Capital (NAC) from Justice For Myanmar. Justice For Myanmar is of the opinion that NAC has failed to fulfil its obligations to carry out risk-based due diligence under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises in relation to sale, leasing and financing of ATR-aircrafts through NAC-subsiaries to buyers in Myanmar, including Air KBZ (now Air Mingalar). Justice For Myanmar alleges that, in the ongoing armed conflict in Myanmar, the sale, leasing and financing of ATR-aircrafts have severe adverse impacts on human rights.

NAC rejects the complaint and finds the allegations without merit and unsubstantiated. NAC denies that the group has not carried out sufficient and appropriate due diligence in connection with its ongoing operations, including with respect to customers in Myanmar.

Based on the preliminary investigation, NCP Denmark cannot, at this point, dismiss that non-observance of the OECD Guidelines has taken place. The complaint is centered around the OECD Guidelines chapter II on General Policies (paragraph 11 – 14), and chapter IV on Human Rights.

NCP Denmark emphasises that the preliminary investigation does not determine whether non-observance of the OECD Guidelines has in fact taken place. NCP Denmark is handling the complaint with support from NCP Ireland, as NAC was headquartered in Ireland, by the time the complaint was submitted. NAC has since been acquired by Dubai Aerospace Enterprise (DAE). The acquisition was completed 7 May 2025.

NCP Denmark has extended an offer of mediation between the parties, which DAE has declined.

Consequently, NCP Denmark accepts the complaint for further consideration.

NCP Denmark's complaints-handling consists of 5 steps:

Initial assessment, where formal requirements are assessed.

Bilateral dialogue between the parties to resolve the case without involvement of NCP Denmark.

Preliminary investigation, where NCP Denmark requests further information from the parties to determine whether it can dismiss that non-observance has taken place.

Mediation facilitated by NCP Denmark to help the parties involved find solutions that are acceptable to all parties through constructive and meaningful dialogue.

Actual investigation, including the preparation of a final statement where NCP Denmark assesses whether the OECD Guidelines have been observed and give recommendations if relevant.

After one year, NCP Denmark follows up with the parties.

NCP Denmark is the Danish National Contact Point to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. NCP Denmark is an independent non-judicial grievance mechanism established by law in 2012.



## DKBA VOWS TO BLOCK MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS FROM ESTABLISHING CAMPS NEAR ITS HEADQUARTERS

**T**he Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) has declared it will not allow junta troops to set up positions near its headquarters in Sone See Myaing, close to Myawaddy Township in Karen State, amid rising tensions along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Lieutenant General Saw Shwe Wah, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the DKBA, confirmed that more than 100 junta troops entered the area on 27 May via Thailand's Mao Ka Thai village, crossing into Sone See Myaing along the Myawaddy-Walley road.

"We absolutely will not allow it. Whether they enter our headquarters or fire heavy weapons at us, we won't accept it. They can't just enter our territory—we demand they return to where they came from," he told Mizzima.

Local residents reported that DKBA forces opened fire on the junta troops after their unauthorized entry. Drone strikes have also reportedly targeted the junta soldiers, although the DKBA leadership has not confirmed which group is responsible for the aerial attacks.

"They crossed a stream from the Thai side, passed the eastern side of our headquarters, and moved further in. They're now at the football field near Mingalar Bridge and are under attack," Lt. Gen. Saw Shwe Wah added.

As clashes intensified, civilians from Sone See Myaing and nearby Taung Ni villages began fleeing toward Thailand for safety.

"There are no villagers left in the village now. Some DKBA members stayed behind, but I saw armed vehicles from the headquarters evacuating quickly after the junta troops entered," a local resident said.

The situation follows the 23 May seizure of the junta's Bledo base by joint forces of the Karen National Union (KNU), People's Defence Forces (PDF), and other allied groups. That assault resulted in over ten junta soldiers killed, multiple surrenders, and at least 62 troops fleeing across the Moei River into Thailand.

The area, located within the Karen National Liberation Army's (KNLA) Brigade 6 territory, remains a flashpoint. It includes key military camps such as Thay Baw Boe, Walley, Ukaritha, Bayin Naung, Kanelay, Mawkhee, and Htekapale, many of which continue to face sustained offensives by anti-junta forces.

While the DKBA previously maintained a distance from some of the broader revolutionary coalitions, its leadership has made clear it will not tolerate encroachment by the junta near its base in Sone See Myaing. Junta forces had earlier fortified the village's Ration Hill, deploying heavy artillery in efforts to hold ground and repel further resistance offensives.



## MYANMAR'S JUNTA MAKES COURSE COMPLETION MANDATORY FOR NON-CDMS SEEKING PROMOTION

**O**n 27 May, the Myanmar junta amended the law to stipulate that personnel who did not participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) following the 2021 coup can be promoted only after completing courses prescribed by the Union Civil Service Board for their respective ranks, except in special cases.

According to reports in junta-controlled newspapers on 28 May, the third amendment to the Civil Service Personnel Law, which includes this provision, was signed into law by junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

Section 29 of the Civil Service Personnel Law previously stipulated that priority be given to those who had attended the courses when assessing qualifications for promotion. The junta has now replaced Article 29 with a requirement that personnel must have completed the designated courses for their respective ranks.

Recently, senior civil service personnel have expressed dissatisfaction with promotion practices in some ministries, as individuals with less experience but who have attended courses are being promoted over more experienced staff who have not completed the courses, according to the staff community.

The junta's amendment to Section 10, Sub-Section (h) also stipulates that, in addition to the courses specified by the Union Civil Service Board for the

relevant ranks, personnel must complete advanced courses offered by ministries and organizations for positions at the Head of Organization level.

The junta stated that exceptions for promotion in special cases will be based on the performance of the service personnel, and that the advanced course required for the position of Head of Service Organization refers to courses recognized by the Union Government.

The amended law also states that the term "Central Institutes of Civil Services" has been replaced with "State Service Academies."

Following the coup, military leader Min Aung Hlaing revealed in February 2024 that, in addition to teaching military subjects at civil service academies, senior civil servants were also being required to attend the National Defence College (NDC), which is traditionally reserved for senior military officers.

Numerous military officers were directly transferred to civilian ministries following the coup, assuming roles ranging from chief officers to directors-general and deputy directors-general.



Photo: Supplied

## OVER 400 HOMES TORCHED, SIX CIVILIANS KILLED DURING MYANMAR JUNTA RAID IN SALIN TOWNSHIP

Junta troops burned down more than 400 homes and killed six civilians during a 13-day military operation in Salin Township, Magway Region, according to a statement released by the Salin People's Defence Organization (PDO) on 27 May.

The operation, which ran from 13 to 25 May, targeted several villages including Sanay Chaung, Gwey Kone, Ohthe, and Nga Than Khaung. Elderly residents who were unable to flee were among those killed, said Ko Aung San, spokesperson for the Salin PDO.

"Gwey Kone was set on fire twice. Almost the entire village was destroyed. Many houses in the other villages were also torched. The victims were mostly between 50 and 80 years old, who couldn't escape. We don't yet have full details about them," he told Mizzima.

The extensive destruction has left hundreds of households displaced amid heavy monsoon rains, creating an urgent need for emergency shelter and food assistance, Ko Aung San added.

The attacking force included troops from Light Infantry Division (LID) 101 based in Pakokku, LID 88 from Magway, and Infantry Battalions (IB) 253, 254, and 255. On 13 May, two junta columns advanced south of Salin Creek – one from West Kanbaung village and the other from Myay Ni Kone – eventually linking up and moving through Aung Hlaing, Peinhnepin, and Nga Lin Pan villages.

Resistance forces positioned themselves on both banks of Salin Creek and engaged the junta in daily

clashes that lasted until 20 May.

On 21 May, the military launched five airstrikes before entering the northern villages of Nga Than Khaung, Gwey Kone, and Htanaung Kone. Gwey Kone was set ablaze that same day.

Fighting escalated on 22 May when local resistance forces attacked junta positions in Gwey Kone and Htanaung Kone. The military retaliated with seven airstrikes and again torched Gwey Kone.

By 23 May, junta forces regrouped and entered Sanay Chaung village, where further clashes occurred and the village was subsequently set on fire. The following day, the troops split into two groups and moved on to Ohthe village, where another intense battle broke out.

"We heard the junta suffered significant casualties. Many injured soldiers had to be carried during their retreat. On our side, one comrade was killed and another wounded," said Ko Aung San.

On 25 May, junta troops withdrew and returned to the Lin Zin police station. The next two days saw the dispersal of the troops as they began returning to their respective battalions.

The PDO has warned of continued threats to civilians and renewed offensives, while humanitarian concerns grow as displaced families face dire conditions with the onset of the rainy season.





Photo: Supplied

## HPAKANT RESIDENTS CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA AT UPCOMING ILO CONFERENCE

On 27 May, residents of Tarmahkan village in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, staged a public strike condemning the military dictatorship and rejecting the junta-led election as illegitimate and coercive.

Gathering under the slogan “Vote ILO Article 33 to Save Lives,” demonstrators voiced support for the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the People’s Defence Forces (PDFs), and the National Unity Government (NUG). They urged the international community to take concrete steps against Myanmar’s military junta during the upcoming International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, scheduled from 2 to 13 June 2025.

Protesters called on ILO member states to invoke Article 33 of the ILO Constitution, which allows for punitive measures against member countries that fail to comply with ILO standards. Activists argue that Myanmar’s junta has consistently violated international labour and human rights norms.

In their statement, the villagers demanded an end to the junta’s daily airstrikes targeting civilian populations, the halting of financial flows used to acquire weapons, and the protection of workers’ rights. They also called

for the abolition of forced labour, the recruitment of child soldiers, and the ongoing systemic violence that has claimed the lives of thousands, including women and children.

The protest also highlighted deep public opposition to the junta’s planned election, which critics say is aimed at legitimizing military rule and sidelining democratic and revolutionary forces.

“The election being organized by the terrorist Military Council is a sham and must be rejected by all. We call on the people, inside and outside the country, as well as foreign governments and international organizations, to oppose it,” said a representative from the protest.

Protesters reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the KIA, the PDFs, the NUG, and other revolutionary forces fighting to reclaim control of Myanmar’s territories and restore democracy.

The rally in Hpakant underscores the growing grassroots pressure on international institutions to act decisively against the junta’s continued violations of international law and human rights.



## **NUG URGES ASEAN TO ENGAGE WITH RESISTANCE FORCES FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN AID IN MYANMAR**

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) has acknowledged ASEAN's ongoing humanitarian aid efforts in Myanmar but stressed that effective delivery cannot be achieved if assistance is coordinated solely with the military junta.

During a public news message addressed to both domestic and international audiences, U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the NUG presidential office, said that humanitarian supplies sent by ASEAN's AHA Centre (ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management) have failed to reach civilians living in NUG-controlled areas.

He emphasized that unless ASEAN also coordinates with ethnic revolutionary organizations and the NUG, aid will continue to be obstructed and misdirected.

"Humanitarian aid does not reach the people who need it most because the junta controls the distribution. This must change," he said.

U Kyaw Zaw further criticized the junta for ongoing attacks against civilians, citing the deadly 12 May airstrike on a school in Oh Htein Dwin village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Region. The attack, carried out by a junta fighter jet, killed multiple civilians, including children, and destroyed the school buildings.


He said this assault clearly violated the very first point of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus established in 2021 — the immediate cessation of violence and urged ASEAN to take concrete action against the junta's repeated breaches.

"This is not just about failed commitments. These are war crimes. ASEAN must take urgent steps to stop further attacks and pressure international actors to end the sale of aviation fuel to the junta," he said.

Despite these concerns, the NUG expressed its support for ASEAN's efforts to foster inclusive dialogue. U Kyaw Zaw welcomed the initiative raised during the 46th ASEAN Summit, currently being held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and encouraged the bloc to broaden its engagement to include all stakeholders in Myanmar's political crisis.

The NUG has consistently advocated for a tripartite approach involving ASEAN, the junta, and resistance forces, warning that excluding key actors will only prolong the conflict and deepen the humanitarian crisis.





Aung San Oo. Photo: AFP

## AUNG SAN OO SEEKS TO SELL ONE-ACRE PORTION OF HISTORIC PLOT NO. 54

**A**ung San Oo, the elder brother of detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and son of independence hero General Aung San, has submitted a new request to the Kamaryut District Court to sell one acre of land from the historic Plot No. 54 on University Avenue Road in Yangon excluding Suu Kyi's residence, according to a source close to the case.

The court filing was made on 29 May. While it is not yet clear whether the sale will be conducted through an auction, the decision rests with the court, the source said.

Plot No. 54, officially registered in the name of Daw Khin Kyi, mother of Aung San Oo and Aung San Suu Kyi, covers 1.923 acres. Of that, 0.923 acres include Suu Kyi's iconic lakeside home, where she was held under house arrest for years. The remaining one acre—now the subject of the new petition—could be sold separately if the court approves.

The next court hearing is scheduled for 5 June, when Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team is expected to submit a written statement. However, she has been denied in-person meetings with her lawyers, raising concerns about her ability to defend her legal rights in this high-profile property dispute.

In 2016, the Yangon Western District Court ruled that Aung San Suu Kyi and Aung San Oo would share the land and structures on Plot No. 54, assigning the two-story main house and half the land to Suu Kyi, and the one-story house and remaining half to Aung San Oo.

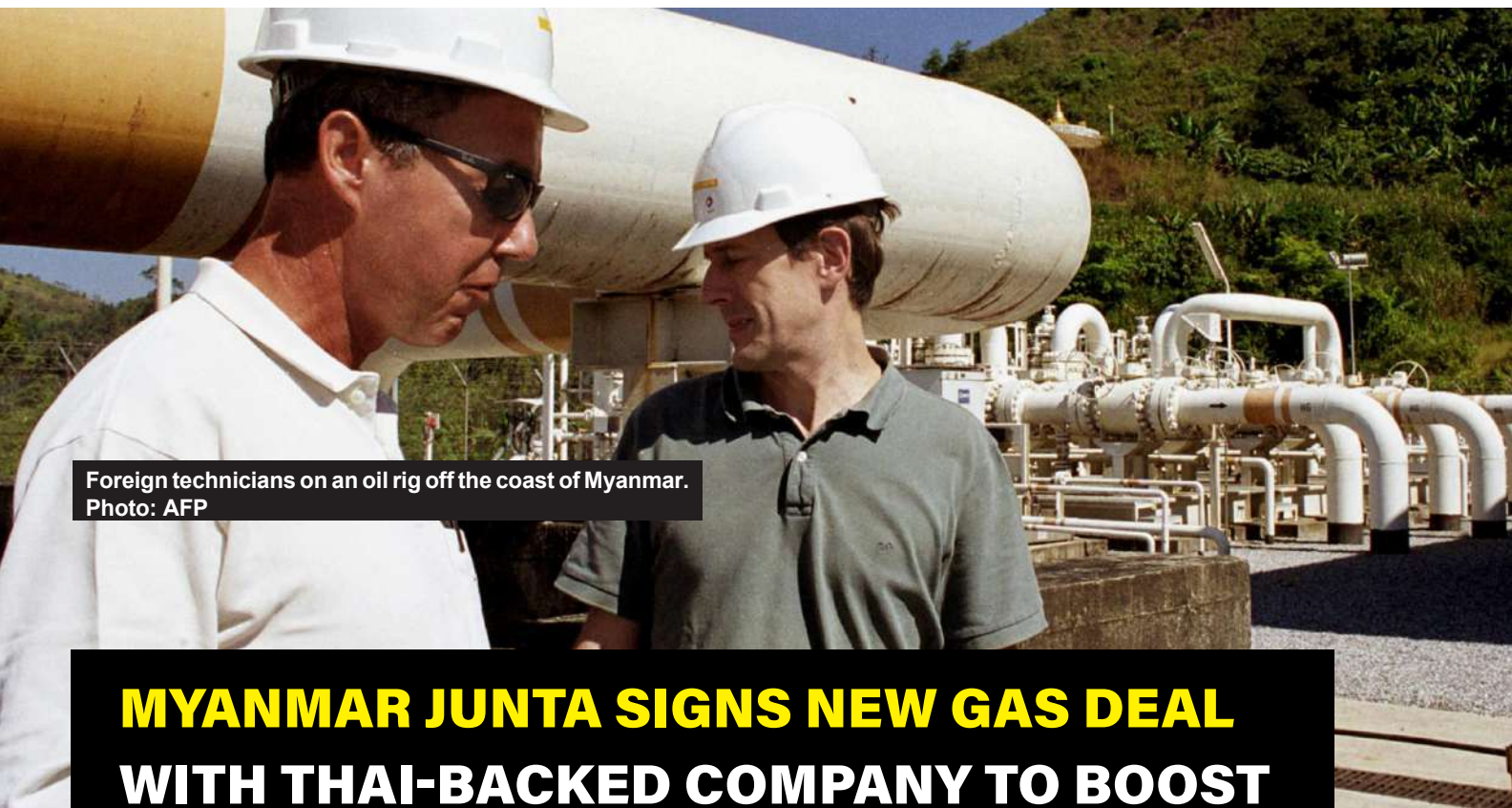
Dissatisfied with that ruling, Aung San Oo launched a series of legal challenges to auction off the entire property, including a portion of the land and a house that their mother had reportedly left to a nephew, Khin Maung Aye. Although his appeals were initially rejected, the Union Supreme Court reversed course in 2022, during the post-coup period, allowing him to proceed with efforts to sell the land.

Aung San Oo subsequently tried to auction the entire plot, gradually lowering the price from Ks 315 billion to Ks 270 billion, but failed to attract buyers during four attempts. On 22 May, the court rejected his request to fix the auction price based on Suu Kyi's share, prompting him to file a fresh request to sell just the one-acre portion instead.

Throughout the legal battle, Suu Kyi's legal team has firmly opposed the sale, arguing that the property holds historic and national significance.

The National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar's parallel civilian administration, has declared Plot No. 54 a national cultural heritage site. The NUG has warned that any attempts to sell, possess, or destroy the property will result in legal action.

The site remains a potent symbol of Myanmar's democratic struggle and the legacy of General Aung San, intensifying the political and emotional stakes surrounding its ownership.



Foreign technicians on an oil rig off the coast of Myanmar.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA SIGNS NEW GAS DEAL WITH THAI-BACKED COMPANY TO BOOST FOREIGN REVENUE

The Myanmar military regime signed a new production sharing agreement with Gulf Petroleum Myanmar, a Thai-backed company, for oil and gas exploration in Mottama's offshore Block M-10, potentially boosting its access to foreign currency despite international sanctions.

The agreement was inked in Naypyidaw on 29 May between the junta-controlled Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), under the Energy Ministry, and Gulf Petroleum Myanmar Co. Ltd. The state-run Mirror (Kyaymon) newspaper reported that the project—called the Min Ye Thu Project—is expected to begin gas extraction operations by 2028.

Details of the revenue-sharing structure were not disclosed. However, junta-appointed Energy Minister Ko Ko Lwin claimed at the signing ceremony that the project would bring several benefits, including increased foreign exchange earnings, new investments in the energy sector, job creation, and a partial offset to Myanmar's domestic energy needs.

"While the major offshore fields are seeing production decline, this project will support continued drilling and exploration in promising new zones," he said.

According to Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Gulf Petroleum Myanmar is part of the Northern Gulf

Petroleum Group, which operates in Thailand, Australia, and Singapore. The firm is reportedly linked to a Thai tycoon and former advisors to ex-Prime Ministers Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Thaksin Shinawatra. Kyaw Kyaw Hlaing, chairman of Myanmar's SMART Group of Companies, currently serves as chairman of Gulf Petroleum Myanmar.

In 2022, the company took over operations of the Yetagun offshore gas field and pipeline after acquiring it from a Malaysian-Japanese consortium, working closely since then with the junta's MOGE, which remains sanctioned by the US and EU for its role in financing the military regime.

The new Min Ye Thu project becomes Myanmar's seventh major offshore oil and gas venture, and the first initiated under the military junta since its coup in 2021. It joins existing fields such as Yadana, Yetagun, Zawtika, and Shwe.

Critics warn that the deal will likely channel significant revenue to the junta, helping it fund ongoing military operations against resistance forces and ethnic armed groups. Rights organizations, including JFM, have called for stronger international action to disrupt the military's revenue sources from the energy sector.





## A CONSCRIPTED SOLDIER EXPOSES HARSH FRONTLINE REALITIES UNDER JUNTA'S MILITARY SERVICE LAW

A conscripted soldier serving under Myanmar's military junta has spoken out about the harsh conditions faced by civilians forced into service under the recently enforced People's Military Service Law. His testimony, shared in a video circulating on social media since early May, has drawn renewed public attention to the human cost of the junta's conscription campaign.

The soldier, reportedly from Meiktila, claims he was drafted as part of the third batch of conscripts and deployed to Infantry Battalion 99, based in Langkho town, Shan State under the Eastern Central Regional Military Command. He is currently stationed near Mongshu Township, where his unit is engaged in regular clashes with resistance forces.

"There's not a single month without deaths in our battalion. At least three or four soldiers die every month. When someone dies, we each have to contribute at least 5,000 kyats to cover the funeral costs. They call it a 'merit payment.' This happens every month," he says in the video.

He adds that conscripts receive a basic salary of 310,000 kyats, but 30,000 kyats are automatically deducted for so-called personal savings. Additional unofficial deductions are made regularly, especially after combat fatalities.

"I have no hope of getting that money back. Our superiors take no responsibility," he says, visibly disillusioned. "If we lose a leg, an arm, or even our intestines, no one cares. We know our lives are already over."

The soldier's message reflects growing resentment among the ranks of conscripted civilians, many of whom were forcibly recruited under the junta's People's Military Service Law, which mandates compulsory military duty for men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27. After its sudden enforcement in February 2024, widespread panic and fear spread across the country, prompting thousands of young people to go into hiding, flee to areas under the control of ethnic armed groups, or seek refuge abroad.

His testimony sheds light not only on the physical dangers conscripts face but also on the emotional trauma and internal breakdown within military units. He accuses high-ranking officers of discrimination and abuse, describing a toxic internal hierarchy.

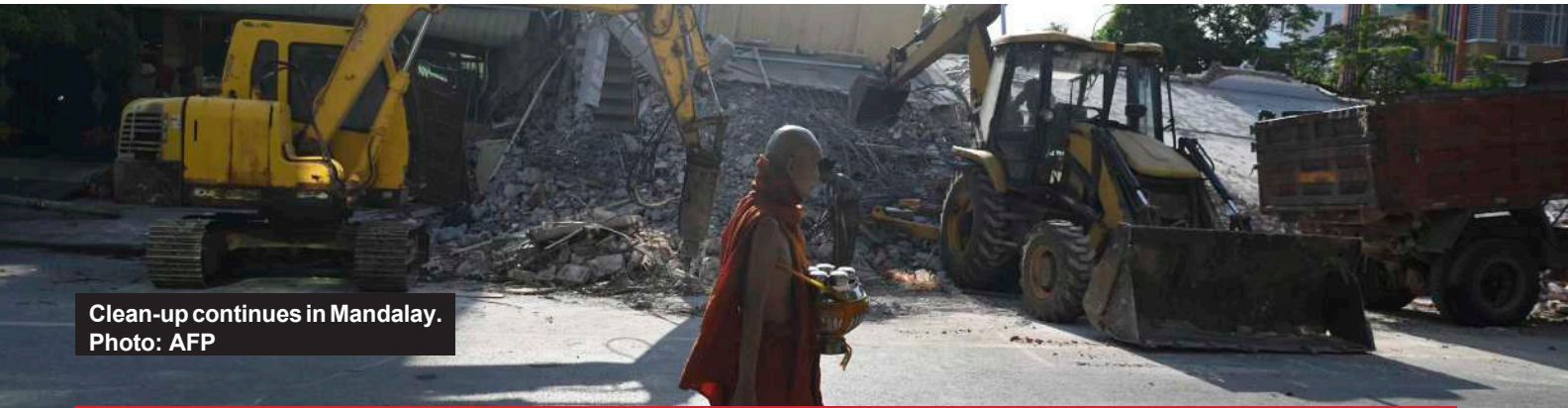
"Our service isn't for the country," he says in the video. "It's like being forced to fight each other. We're being exploited. Inside the military, we're treated with contempt by our superiors."

The junta has used forced conscription in an effort to replenish its manpower as it struggles against escalating offensives by the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) across the country. However, morale among troops, especially those newly drafted from civilian life, remains dangerously low.

Families of conscripts have also expressed concern. Some report receiving no updates about their loved ones since deployment, while others say they were misled about the nature of the "training programs" their sons or daughters were sent to.

Meanwhile, resistance groups have intensified campaigns urging youth to resist conscription and join community defence efforts instead. The National Unity Government (NUG) and allied forces have also launched hotlines and awareness programs to help young people escape forced military service.

As the video continues to spread online, many social media users have praised the soldier's courage for speaking out, despite the risks. However, questions remain about his current status and safety.



Clean-up continues in Mandalay.  
Photo: AFP

## **MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE RELIEF CONTINUES AS DEATH TOLL NEARS 4,000 AND DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT 3.8 TRILLION KYATS**

**H**umanitarian assistance from domestic and international donors continues to reach regions affected by the 28 March 2025 earthquake, which struck Mandalay and caused widespread destruction across the Naypyidaw Council Area, Sagaing Region, Mandalay Region, Magway Region, Shan State, and Bago Region.

Donations from Thailand, Sri Lanka, China, and India have included tents, generators, foodstuffs, electronics, medicines, and medical supplies. Medicines were handed over to the Ministry of Health, while food, household items, and kitchen utensils were distributed to affected areas in Naypyidaw, Sagaing Region, Mandalay Region, and Shan State, based on population needs.

An official update released on 21 May summarized support activities between 13 and 19 May, while additional aid distributions took place from 20 to 27 May, according to state media.

Speaking at a donation ceremony held on 29 May at the Bayinnaung Residence in Naypyidaw, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council and head of the Military Council said the initial damage assessment across 10 affected regions and states is valued at 3,804.549 billion kyats.

The earthquake affected 374 wards, 944 village tracts, and 2,081 villages, displacing 162,167 households and impacting a total of 506,069 people. According to the Military Council, 3,739 people were killed, 68 remain missing, and 5,104 were injured.

Reported damage includes 51,210 homes, 431 roadworks, 103 bridges, 83 railway damage sites, 11

railway bridges, 6,730 mobile communication stations, 10 power lines, 3,435 power poles, 594 irrigation canals, 6 embankments, 11,338 departmental buildings, 384 hospitals, 364 clinics, 166 ancient buildings and museums, 2,409 basic education schools, 72 higher education schools, 90 private schools, 6,469 pagodas, 5,588 monasteries, nunneries and other religious buildings, 344 private factories, 78.5 acres of crops, and 133,700 livestock.

In terms of material support, a fuel shipment from China - 11,930.505 tonnes of diesel and 2,940.055 tonnes of petrol - arrived at Thilawa Port on 23 March. The Junta's Ministry of Energy reported that it stored and used over 49,000 tonnes of fuel in rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

India donated 225 tonnes of cement (4,500 bags), which were handed over to the Yangon Region Chief Minister by the Indian Ambassador on 25 May for use in rebuilding infrastructure in the affected areas, the state media said.

China also donated 500 prefabricated office units, of which 340 arrived on 2 May and the remaining 160 on 24 May. These are currently being used as temporary administrative offices in quake-hit areas. All 4,500 prefabricated houses pledged by China have now arrived at Thilawa Port - 1,576 on 9 May, 1,804 on 13 May, and 1,120 on 24 May - and are being deployed for emergency shelter.

Junta Officials stated that a detailed inventory of aid distributed from 20 to 27 May is being maintained, and weekly updates on the distribution process will continue.





## UN WARNS OF 'CATASTROPHIC' HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN MYANMAR

On 26 May, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a comprehensive report ahead of an upcoming session of the Human Rights Council. The report calls attention to the worsening situation in the wake of the 2021 coup.

The text of the press release for this report is as follows.

In the years since, military forces have targeted civilian populations with airstrikes, artillery bombardments and other forms of violence, while anti-military armed groups have gained ground, particularly in Rakhine state.

"The country has endured an increasingly catastrophic human rights crisis marked by unabated violence and atrocities that have affected every single aspect of life," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk.

### Grim toll

The report documents a grim toll: military operations killed more civilians in 2024 than in any previous year since the coup.

In Rakhine, the Arakan Army seized control of most of the state, displacing tens of thousands, while Rohingya civilians were caught between warring factions, facing killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and widespread destruction of villages.

Some Rohingya armed groups have also been drawn into the conflict, according to reports.

### Economic crisis deepening

The escalating violence has had a cascading effect on Myanmar's economy, worsening already dire humanitarian conditions.

Myanmar's economy has lost an estimated \$93.9 billion since the coup, with the gross domestic product (GDP) not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels before 2028.

Inflation has surged, the kyat has lost 40 per cent of its value, and over half the population now lives below the poverty line, facing food insecurity and soaring prices.

The March earthquakes further exacerbated the crisis, leaving thousands more displaced, homeless and without basic services.

### Military control of revenue

Meanwhile, the military continues to control key revenue sources, including the central bank and state-owned enterprises, particularly in the extractive sector.

While targeted international sanctions slowed some revenue streams, the junta has maintained its financial lifelines through forced currency conversion, import restrictions, and a crackdown on informal money transfers.

Myanmar has also become the world's largest producer of opium and synthetic drugs, with transnational criminal networks thriving under military rule.

### Multifaceted approach needed

The report urged a multifaceted response to the crisis, including urgent humanitarian support, cross-border aid for displaced populations and increased political engagement with Myanmar's democratic forces and emerging governance structures.

It also emphasised the need for accountability through international justice mechanisms, including a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The report also identified key "constituents for change" in the country's future – women, youth, ethnic minorities, civil society and pro-democracy actors – and highlighted the work of communities who have established local institutions and forms of governance, often with increased participation from women.

### Hopes for a peaceful future

The report underscored the importance of planning for the day-after, ensuring human rights are central to a future Myanmar – from rebuilding systems to restoring fundamental freedoms.

"There are strong, resourceful and principled individuals and groups rallying and creating the conditions for an inclusive and democratic future," High Commissioner Türk said. "They are a shining example of hope for a peaceful future."



Veteran Burma reporter Dominic Faulder

## RANGOON CONFIDENTIAL

### AN INSIGHT MYANMAR INTERVIEW WITH JOURNALIST DOMINIC FAULDER

Colonel Thein Swe, a senior military intelligence officer, was intrigued by Dominic Faulder's evident interest in Myanmar.

"How many times have you been here?" he asked politely. "Is it two or three?"

"This is my 13th visit," Dominic replied.

Thein Swe was blindsided. How could this have been missed in a country where it is wise to assume every third person is a spy? The exchange took place in January 1989 in a decrepit suite at The Strand, reputed to be the finest hostelry east of Suez in its ancient British colonial glory days.

Dominic Faulder's vague awareness of Burma began long before he ever set foot there. As a child in the 1960s, his grandfather often mentioned Rangoon at Sunday lunches, and the sonorous name lingered oddly in his mind. His grandfather had a long overseas career with Dunlop Rubber, but was never anywhere near Burma. He was, however, in retirement a neighbor of Major General Sir Hubert Rance, the last governor, who interacted closely with Bogyoke Aung San, the pre-independence Burmese leader assassinated in 1947,

and father of Aung San Suu Kyi. The two old English gentlemen, with their canes, tweeds and brogues, took frequent walks in the Surrey countryside. The old governor would often ruminate on what had gone so badly wrong after World War II before independence in early 1948. Dominic had no idea he would one day develop a deep interest in this distant land – or the extraordinary interview opportunity that had passed him by.

Rance died in 1974. Dominic's first encounter with Burma in 1981 was almost accidental. After graduating from university, he traveled to Thailand, intending to explore Southeast Asia before settling into any serious employment. Bangkok did not appeal to him much, and he was about to leave. But matters took an unexpected turn with an attempted coup on April 1 – the so-called April Fool's Day Coup – that pretty much shut down bus services out of the capital for two days. During that brief window, he met a journalist from New Zealand who needed a photographer for a trip to Burma to cover the Thingyan festival in Mandalay. A new door opened.

Dominic's first impression of Burma at Mingaladon Airport with its five layers of immigration papers



was almost surreal. "It was like an aerodrome from the Second World War and complete bureaucratic mayhem," he recalls. "Nobody knew what was going on!"

That was the first of many journeys to Burma, initially severely constrained by seven-day visas. His plans changed completely, and he based himself in Bangkok for the rest of the year as a freelance journalist. He felt he had stumbled across a unique story waiting to be told. "Burma was this huge, forgotten country," he says. "The British colonial element made it interesting from my perspective and the wonderful scenery and culture were very intoxicating, very absorbing."

The country's political repression and isolation in a mid-century time lock were also enthralling. In May 1981, Dominic came across the aftermath of a massive fire in Mandalay that had razed a sixth of the city due to black-market fuel storage and official corruption. It struck him that a town of 100,000 could burn to the ground in Burma without anyone in the outside world ever knowing about it. A retired Burmese policeman working for the United Nations Development Programme confirmed that exactly that had happened in Taungdwingyi weeks before the Mandalay blaze, but nobody knew. "What else were they getting away with?" Dominic wondered.

Years later, when the first demonstrations in 1988 were starting, Dominic was there. "I'll never forget this," he recalls of August 3, when students staged a large flash protest from below Shwedagon pagoda. It was a trial run for the main event coming on August 8 – '8/8/88'.

Dominic was jammed into a three-wheeler stuck at a rare red traffic light. "Suddenly these students appeared from literally nowhere. Hundreds and hundreds of high school students, ordinary students. Then, the flying peacock was unfurled, the great symbol of the Student Union." They set off behind it down the road, racing into the city. The numbers in the end were just staggering. "My estimate would be at least 10,000 people that came through," he says. "I have never seen such a display of raw courage."

Dominic was on assignment to Asiaweek, the Hong Kong-based newsweekly, which pulled him out on August 6. He returned just two days after the military coup led by Senior General Saw Maung on September 18 that established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). On the apron at Mingaladon, he came across Tom White of the British Council struggling toward the terminal with bags filled with antibiotics. Because of that chance encounter,

within three hours of landing he found himself sitting in a room with Aung San Suu Kyi and her husband, Michael Aris.

Suu Kyi had returned to Rangoon from Oxford to care for her sick mother and got swept up in the vortex of Burmese revolutionary politics. The military had just gunned down hundreds of alleged looters on the city's streets, many of them children. Suu Kyi sat quietly in the darkened room, reflecting.

"This might be a slightly sensitive question," Dominic began. "Is your future in Burma or the UK?"

Suu Kyi bristled. "I've always made it perfectly clear that should my country need me, I will come back," she said. "Why is that such a sensitive question?"

Michael Aris shifted uncomfortably on the sofa when she said that. "Their lives had just changed irrevocably," says Dominic. "There was no way that anything was going to be normal again – and she was in for the duration."

In the following weeks, Dominic crossed paths with many of the other key political players, including U Nu, who had been overthrown by General Ne Win in the 1962 coup. The former premier declared that he was still the elected prime minister, and convened what remained of his ancient cabinet in a garden room at his home – a gathering of geriatrics and ghosts. He recalls how U Nu questioned him intently about his religion. "He was obsessed with Buddhism, and it muddled up his politics," Dominic recalls.

Another unforgettable, much more secret encounter was with Min Ko Naing, the main student leader whose nom de guerre can be translated as "Conqueror of Kings". Min Ko Naing knew his arrest was imminent when he gave Dominic an interview. He presented a list of demands that were later broadcast by the BBC before being photographed behind a bandana

"The agreement was the pictures of him with his face unmasked would not be released until he was captured," Dominic recalls, adding that he could release the masked-up images of Min Ko Naing in the meantime.

As a journalist, Dominic also wanted to try and make sure he captured the government's side of the story, and contacted the newly announced election commission. Back in Bangkok, Dominic also requested an interview with Senior General Saw Maung, the SLORC chairman. That was provisionally approved, and he was allowed to travel to Yangon in January.

"I remember arriving, and military intelligence had sent my minder to collect me in a little Mazda 323, so

I had my own car," he says. "I went through customs, and I opened the suitcase, and it had more film than anybody had ever seen, more recording equipment, TV and videos -- I'd got the whole thing covered. All these people looked, and their jaws just dropped. It was so flagrant -- they'd never seen anything like it."

After vetting by de facto Foreign Minister Ong Gyaw, Colonel Thein Swe and Brigadier General David Abel, the junta's economic czar, the big interview with Senior General Saw Maung was allowed to go forward in the defence ministry compound. David Ring, Asiaweek's chief of correspondents, had also flown in from Hong Kong. It was the first such interview with the foreign media since the 1960s, such had been Burma's isolation and xenophobia.

"It was much better than people might have expected, just to get the junta to talk -- which we can't do today in 2025," Dominic comments. "These people are completely impenetrable."

Being a journalist in Burma has never been easy. Getting caught could mean deportation or worse. Foreigners were restricted to just a week-long visa, which made travel very difficult. "Seven days was our absolute limit," says Dominic. "So, if you went in as a traveler, you couldn't go more than three and a half days from Rangoon -- you had to be back, and it was quite a serious issue."

Given these constraints, he describes how he managed to report on Burma undetected in the early days. "All that surveillance -- I got off because I never put my name on anything. I was a young kid who didn't look like much of a threat to anything. And I got away with it." In 1988, films, tapes and notebooks had to be smuggled out separately, usually by friendly diplomats, to ensure they were not confiscated. Photographs of student leaders were the biggest concern.

A solo official interview with the SLORC Information Committee about the 1990 election did end up nearly getting him into trouble, however. "What I didn't realize was that it wasn't as much of an interview as I [was] expecting," he says. "It was going to be my show trial." Soe Nyunt, the editor of the Working People's Daily (which is known today as the New Light of Myanmar) was keen to use the meeting to expose Dominic's journalistic failings and nefarious reports, and to get revenge. Dominic had filed stories to the Asian Wall Street Journal and the BBC's Burmese-language service revealing that Soe Nyunt was also Bo Thanmani ('General Steel'), the most acid-penned columnist at the WPD.

"What he had to tell me was a four-page denunciation of all my 'crimes' as a journalist and my failings," he says. "He finally got to my punishment, and that was that I had to write an apology and an



Dominic Faulder offered in-depth analysis of Burma over the decades



explanation for my journalistic sins in the Far Eastern Economic Review. Everybody in the room at that point just looked at each other because I didn't work for the Far Eastern Economic Review."

Times have changed greatly, and Dominic reflects on what it means to be a journalist in Myanmar today. "At the end of the day, for most people in the outside world, it's an incredibly complicated story. It's somewhere that's out of sight, and the terrible things that happen in Burma seem to repeat themselves," he says.

"I personally have a problem with journalists who come in and say, 'This is how a country should be run.'" For him, the role of journalists is to inform, not to instruct. "The job of a journalist is to go in and to get a story as accurately as possible -- to explain what they think is going on, and present that in an unvarnished, accessible way to whoever their audience is on television, whatever," he says.

While some people believe Burma has been forgotten, Dominic has a different take. "This idea that Burma is not getting the attention it deserves because the media are neglecting it -- I do not accept that at all," he says. "The problem is it's not being read and it's not on the agenda."

There is also a pattern of Burma always managing to fail on the international stage and being overlooked. It happened in the 1950s when membership of the British Commonwealth was shunned, and the country became involved with the non-aligned movement; in the 1960s with the economic insanity of Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism; and in the 1990s when other economies in Southeast boomed and crashed.

In August 1988, when a nationwide uprising finally made Burma the top global news story, some of the largest demonstrations ever seen on Earth were abruptly overshadowed by the spectacular in-flight assassination of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, the president of Pakistan.

"That just wiped the Burma story off -- it just disappeared," he recalls. "Burma always misses the boat."

Burma has had a tumultuous history, and Dominic believes that things should have turned out very differently for the Golden Land. "Everything you can see about the country is a disaster," he says. "Yet this should be one of the great success stories of Southeast Asia -- it's got everything for success potentially."

Dominic warns that observers who remain engaged with Burma are committing to something

of on an emotional roller coaster. There were times he also felt hopelessness, and this led to monitoring his own involvement. "I basically reduced all personal coverage of Burma in the early 90s because I found it so depressing," he says. "This story was just so difficult, so inaccessible and slow-moving."

On the other hand, the resilience and spirit of the people still animates him. "You see the most amazing things. Go back to the students in '88 and their passion, their idealism -- and just the sheer guts of going up against a security state, and a security apparatus as ruthless as that."

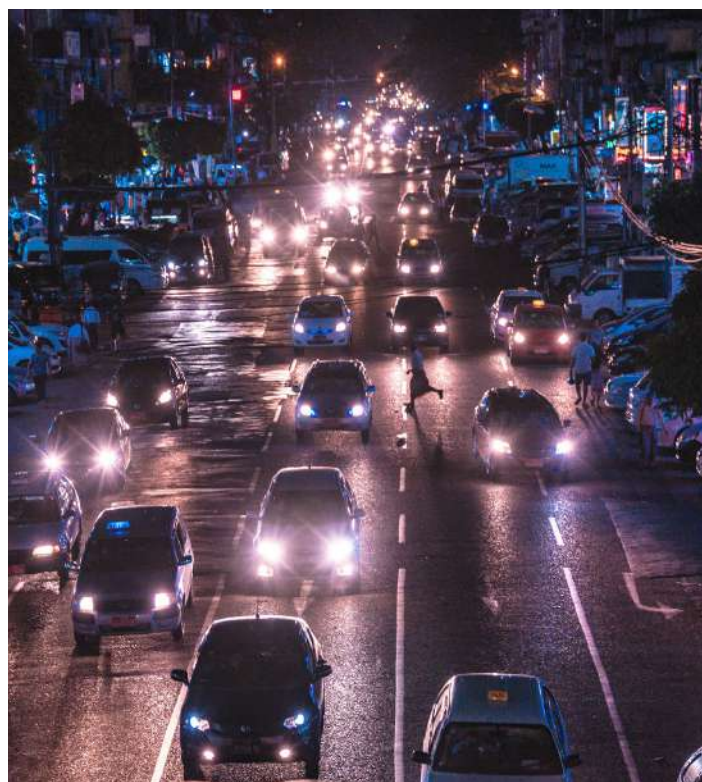
In closing, like many other past guests who have described their multi-decade relationship with the country, Dominic reflects on the pull that Burma exerts on those who come to be involved with its story. "Foreigners get involved with Southeast Asia and stay much longer than they ever anticipated. But Burma, it is the one story that you always go back to, [asking] what-ifs and why do you think that is?"

Yet, no matter the darkness, there is always optimism.

"[There is] always a lot of laughter, even in the most terrible situations," Dominic says.

#### CATCH THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST

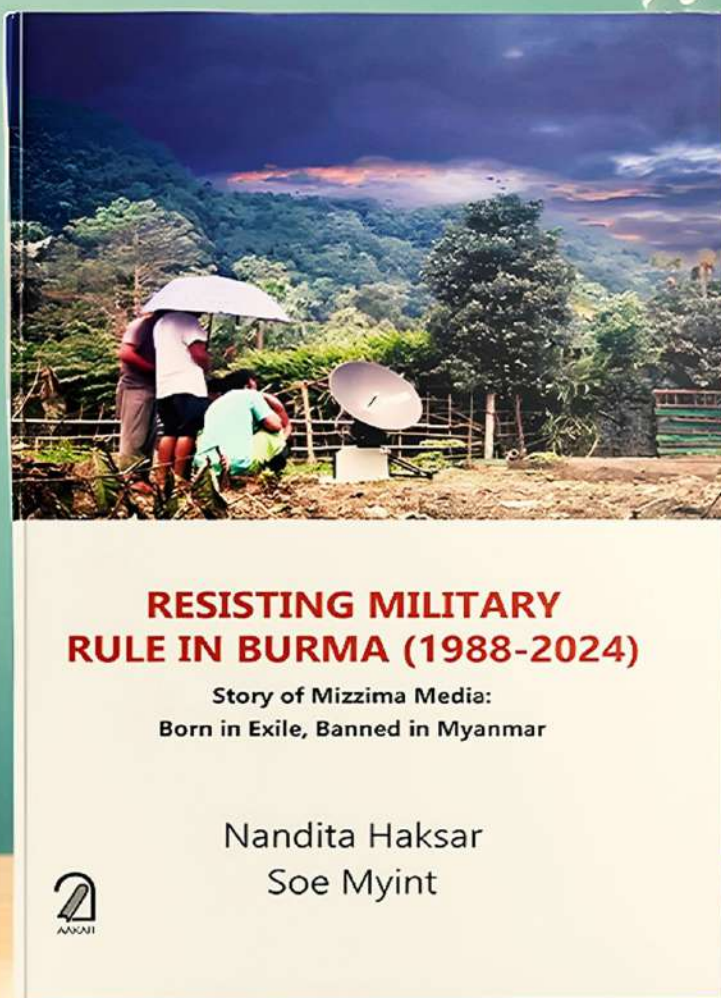
<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/5/7/episode-344-rangoon-confidential>



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

*by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



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US President Donald Trump seeks to improve US industry and the economy. Photo: AFP

## SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS EXPRESS 'DEEP CONCERN' OVER US TARIFFS

**S**outheast Asian leaders expressed "deep concern" over US tariffs Tuesday, as they held a summit last week with China and Gulf states hailed as "a response to the call of the times" in a geopolitically uncertain world.

The trade-dependent economies are looking to insulate themselves after US President Donald Trump blew up global trade norms by announcing a slew of levies targeting countries around the world, then paused most for 90 days.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) released a statement on Tuesday night expressing "deep concern over... the imposition of unilateral tariff measures, which pose complex and multidimensional challenges to ASEAN's economic growth, stability, and integration".

In another statement, the bloc stressed "our strongest resolve to stand together" in the face of the levies, and pledged to expand cooperation with other partners.

Earlier in the day Malaysia, which holds the bloc's rotating chairmanship, hosted the inaugural summit between ASEAN, China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) -- a regional bloc made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang told the meeting that "against the backdrop of a volatile international situation", the summit was "a pioneering work of regional economic cooperation".

"This is not only a continuation of the course of history, but also a response to the call of the times," he said.

ASEAN has traditionally served as "a middleman of sorts" between developed economies like the United States, and China, said Chong Ja Ian from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

With Washington looking unreliable these days, "ASEAN member states are looking to diversify".

"Facilitating exchanges between the Gulf and People's Republic of China is one aspect of this diversification," he said.

### 'Timely and calculated'

China, which has borne the brunt of Trump's tariffs, is also looking to shore up its other markets.

China and ASEAN are already each other's largest trading partners, and Chinese exports to Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam surged by double digits in April -- attributed to a re-routing of US-bound goods.

Premier Li's participation is "both timely and calculated", Khoo Ying Hooi from the University of Malaya told AFP.

"China sees an opportunity here to reinforce its image as a reliable economic partner, especially in the face of Western decoupling efforts."

ASEAN reiterated on Tuesday it would not impose retaliatory duties on the United States -- in contrast to China.

Beijing and Washington engaged in an escalating flurry of tit-for-tat levies until a meeting in Switzerland saw an agreement to slash them for 90 days.

Chinese goods still face higher tariffs than most though.

At dinner on Tuesday, Li urged ASEAN and the GCC to "persist in opening up".

### 'Centrality'

ASEAN has historically avoided choosing a side between the United States and China.

China is only Southeast Asia's fourth largest source of foreign direct investment, after the United States, Japan and the European Union, noted NUS' Chong.

At a press conference at the tail-end of the talks, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim vowed ASEAN would continue engaging both Washington and Beijing.

"The... ASEAN position is centrality," Anwar said, adding "it makes a lot of sense to continue to engage and have reasonably good relations" with the United States".

Anwar said Monday he had written to request an ASEAN-US summit this year, with his foreign minister saying Washington had not yet responded.

Closer alignment with Beijing presents problems of its own.

On Monday, Philippines leader Ferdinand Marcos said there was an "urgent need" to adopt a legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea.

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

Anwar raised the South China Sea with Li and the Philippines, saying: "I'm not saying all issues can be resolved now but there was real positive engagement."

AFP



Meth sample. Photo: AFP

## METH SEIZURES IN EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA AT RECORD HIGH: UN

Seizures of methamphetamine in East and Southeast Asia were at record highs last year, a UN agency said Wednesday, with a "combination of conflict and stability" in Myanmar driving illicit drug production.

Seizures of methamphetamine across the region totalled 236 tons in 2024, marking an "exponential" increase of 24 percent compared to 2023, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in a statement citing a new report.

The number represents "only the amount seized, and just so much methamphetamine is actually reaching the market", Benedikt Hofmann, UNODC acting representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, said in the statement.

The largest quantities of methamphetamine seized in the region were recorded in Thailand, the biggest destination and transit hub for the synthetic drug.

In neighbouring Myanmar, a "degree of stability" in areas of the country known for large-scale synthetic drug production combined with an ongoing crisis following a 2021 military coup had driven the "unprecedented" growth, Hofmann said.

The spread of ketamine production sites to most of the lower Mekong countries showed the agility of transnational drug trafficking groups in evading law enforcement, UNODC said in the statement.

"The trafficking route connecting Cambodia with Myanmar, primarily through Lao PDR, has been rapidly expanding," said Inshik Sim, lead analyst at the UNODC regional office, adding that maritime routes linking Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines had become another significant trafficking corridor.

AFP



## MENTAL DISORDERS, SMOKING, CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE, AND INJURIES TOP ASEAN'S HEALTH CRISIS, LANDMARK STUDY FINDS

A comprehensive new study published in The Lancet Public Health on 28 May reveals a stark public health crisis gripping the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, with mental disorders, cardiovascular diseases, smoking, and injuries now among the top causes of death and disability for its 671 million citizens.

The research, led by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, US and the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine), analysed health data from 1990 to 2021 across all 10 ASEAN member states. It marks the first region-wide breakdown of disease and risk factor trends over three decades.

Mental disorders have surged by 70% since 1990, now affecting over 80 million people, especially children, adolescents, women, and the elderly. Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent, with Malaysia reporting the highest overall rates. "Without immediate action from each of these countries, these preventable conditions will worsen," said Dr. Marie Ng, the study's lead author and Associate Professor at NUS.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) have also skyrocketed, with 37 million people suffering and 1.7

million dying annually making CVD the leading cause of death in the region. Risk factors include high blood pressure, poor diets, and tobacco use, with Laos, Indonesia, and Myanmar among the countries facing the highest death rates.

Smoking remains a major threat despite declining prevalence, with the number of smokers growing by 63% since 1990 to 137 million. Nearly half of ASEAN men aged 15 and over smoke, and youth smoking is spiking, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. Smoking-related deaths exceeded half a million in 2021, largely due to heart disease, stroke, and chronic lung disease.

Injuries, especially road accidents, continue to kill and disable millions each year. Road injuries were the leading cause of injury deaths in Thailand and Malaysia, while self-harm was the top cause in Singapore. Males aged 15–19 bear the greatest burden overall.

The study urges urgent regional collaboration and policy reforms to mitigate the rising toll. "Member states must work together to align on the best strategies to improve policies," said Dr. Xiaochen Dai, Lead Research Scientist at IHME.





# THE ART OF DOING NOTHING

**D**oes any engagement with the junta legitimize its brutality? ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's Moe Thuzar analyzes ASEAN's contentious role and argues diplomacy, rather than condemnation, is the path forward in this Insight Myanmar Podcast.

Moe Thuzar is a senior fellow coordinating the Myanmar Studies Programme at the research institute and former official at the ASEAN Secretariat's Human Development Unit. She holds a doctorate from the National University of Singapore, where her research focused on the execution of Burma's foreign policy between 1948 and 1988. She has co-authored and contributed to several books on ASEAN and Myanmar.

Moe Thuzar offers a nuanced viewpoint on the complex and often debated role of ASEAN in addressing the protracted crisis in Myanmar following the 2021 military coup. In this debate, the same questions keep arising. Does engaging with the military junta (SAC) constitute complicity, thereby legitimizing their rule? Or can ASEAN's diplomatic efforts—such as maintaining communication channels— exert influence, keep the regime in check, and ultimately advocate for the aspirations of the Myanmar people?

Moe Thuzar's analysis suggests that maintaining communication can serve as a strategic tool to navigate Myanmar's complex geopolitical landscape, potentially influencing the SAC while advocating for the broader interests of the Myanmar people. Her analysis is grounded in a deep understanding of the region and Myanmar itself. She points out the unique

position of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, noting that "not many countries in Southeast Asia have that benefit or privilege in having a dedicated country studies program under the umbrella of a regional research institute." Her insights are further informed by her extensive, ten-year experience within the ASEAN framework, and with the Myanmar Foreign Service.

A key point in Moe Thuzar's argument is the recognition of the fragmented reality within Myanmar. She notes that external perceptions often focus solely on Naypyidaw. Yet, the reality involves the existence of "multiple Myanmars in the peri-urban and central areas, the delta, the periphery. And now the resistances," she says, referring to the diverse actors, each with their own interests. "There's also Myanmar in the diaspora. There's Myanmar in the rural areas." This complex landscape, with its diverse resistance actors and aspirations, necessitates an "inside-out" approach that prioritizes the needs and desires of the Myanmar people, particularly their democratic will expressed in the 2020 elections and the urgent need to end the junta's violence.

She underscores the need of addressing the "tragedies of the [Myanmar] people with the mounting atrocities of the armed forces of the SAC." In contrast, she points out how the "ethnic armed organizations represent the aspirations of different communities and people in Myanmar broadly for change, for democratization, and for a more federal system of government." This is a view that encompasses these "many Myanmars," as Moe Thuzar goes on to reminds listeners that "the military really hasn't ever been in control of the whole country! There's always been this push back against this centralized, Bamar Buddhist type of centric assertion of control over what has always been a plural, multi-ethnic, interactive society."

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/5/7/episode-345-the-art-of-doing-nothing>



## JUNTA FORCES KILL 2 CIVILIANS IN SAGAING REGION'S KANBALU OPERATIONS

**M**yanmar's military killed two civilians and detained over a dozen residents, including children, during operations in Kanbalu Township, forcing thousands to flee their homes, according to local sources and news outlets.

The killings occurred on May 31 when junta forces launched a military column into Kangyi Village's western hills in Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region. Junta soldiers shot and killed two civilians and arrested several others who remained in detention.

While the exact number of detainees could not be confirmed, sources indicate more than ten people were arrested, with children among those taken into custody. The victims have not been released.

Local residents said the junta forces routinely arrest, kill, and loot from civilians in areas where they conduct operations. The junta forces faced resistance from People's Defense Force units, resulting in military casualties as well.

The junta's operation has displaced about 10,000 residents in Kanbalu Township, where junta troops and junta-sponsored Pyu Saw Htee militia have split into four separate columns for coordinated operations.

This incident adds to mounting evidence of systematic war crimes by Myanmar's military regime against civilian populations. Since the February 2021 coup, junta forces have repeatedly targeted non-combatants in rural areas as part of counterinsurgency operations against growing armed resistance.





## SOCIAL MEDIA USERS RALLY BEHIND MYANMAR RESISTANCE FORCES AFTER DEADLY CLASH IN MANDALAY REGION'S MYINGYAN

**S**ocial media users across Myanmar have voiced strong support for People's Defense Force (PDF) fighters following a fierce battle in Myingyan Township that left at least 20 junta soldiers reportedly dead and one resistance fighter killed.

The daylong clash erupted on June 2 at about 6:30 am when a combined force of around 70 junta army personnel and junta-sponsored Pyu Saw Htee militia fighters launched an assault on a PDF outpost near Tuywinboet Village in Myingyan Township. The fighting continued until around 5:00 pm, according to resistance sources.

While the battle resulted in significant casualties for junta forces, the loss of a PDF fighter and injuries to six others prompted an outpouring of sympathy and encouragement on Facebook. Users shared prayers for the safety of resistance fighters, with a user writing,

"May all revolutionary battles end in victory, may all our brothers remain safe from harm."

The fallen PDF soldier drew particular tributes, with social media users expressing condolences and hopes for his peaceful rest. "May the fallen brave brother reach a good rebirth, may the wounded brothers recover quickly and be free from pain," a user posted. Another simply wrote: "May the righteous fighters remain safe."

The coordinated attack was reportedly carried out by multiple resistance groups including Wolf Guerrilla Force.

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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.