

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



'They Were Kids'

**New Documentary Underscores the Horrors
the Myanmar Junta Inflicts on Its Own People**

Implementing the ILO's Mandate for Human Rights in Myanmar

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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.

HELPING MYANMAR GARMENT WORKERS GET A FAIR DEAL?

The invocation of Article 33 of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Constitution against Myanmar at the 113th session of its General Conference on 5 June 2025 marks a significant escalation in international pressure on the country's military junta.

This rare and serious measure, which is effectively a call for member states and organizations to review their relations with Myanmar, came in response to the junta's systematic repression of trade union rights and failure to uphold core labour standards. While this move has been welcomed by Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, it introduces a complex dilemma for foreign companies with investments in Myanmar's garment sector—particularly regarding how to continue supporting workers' livelihoods without financially empowering the military regime.

The central challenge lies in balancing ethical labour practices with the imperative to avoid complicity in funding an oppressive regime. The garment sector in Myanmar, employing over 500,000 workers - largely women - has been one of the few sources of income for working-class families during a time of deep political and economic crisis in the wake of the 2021 military coup. For foreign investors, especially apparel brands and manufacturers, withdrawing entirely risks the mass unemployment of already vulnerable workers, exacerbating poverty and potentially pushing them into informal and exploitative labour markets.

However, remaining in Myanmar is fraught with reputational and moral hazards. The junta exerts significant control over the country's economy, including tax collection, import and export licensing, and the allocation of land and infrastructure - all of which can channel foreign capital into the regime's purse. Brands that continue operations risk being perceived as indirect funders of human rights violations, particularly if their supply chains are linked to entities controlled by the military or its business arms, such as Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL).

Another major challenge is ensuring labour rights and acceptable working conditions in an environment where trade unions are persecuted, and collective bargaining is effectively banned. Since the 2021 coup, union leaders have been imprisoned or forced into hiding, and factory workers face threats and harassment for organizing. This creates significant barriers for foreign companies attempting to maintain ILO-aligned labour standards and monitor compliance. Without independent unions or credible local partners, enforcing codes of conduct and labour due diligence becomes highly challenging.

What we have seen is that some companies have tried to navigate this by contracting only with suppliers who are not affiliated with the military and by maintaining close oversight through third-party auditors. Yet the opacity of ownership structures in Myanmar and the limitations on access for independent monitoring agencies make this an imperfect solution. The risk of unknowingly doing business with military-linked entities remains high.

According to analysts, a potential middle path may involve coordinated international action among brands, NGOs, and the ILO to support a responsible disengagement strategy or to operate under conditions that strictly isolate any financial flow to the military. This might include transparent supply chain mapping, the use of escrow accounts for wages, and collaboration with diaspora-led or international labour monitoring groups to safeguard worker rights.

What is clear is that foreign investors in Myanmar's garment sector face a profound ethical and logistical conundrum. They must balance the urgent need to protect workers' livelihoods and rights with the international mandate to avoid supporting an illegal and repressive regime. There is no easy answer, but clear, consistent, and coordinated action rooted in international labour standards is essential to navigate this deeply complex terrain.

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Cover photo of boy being carried along a trail as they escape fighting in Karenni State by Nic Blauer



'THEY WERE KIDS'

NEW DOCUMENTARY UNDERScores THE HORRORS THE MYANMAR JUNTA INFLICTS ON ITS OWN PEOPLE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

A video circulating on social media shows two members of the People's Defense Forces screaming in agony as they are burned alive, dangling by chains from trees over a fire set by Myanmar junta soldiers.

Bloodied, shackled, and hogtied, the victims writhe while a voice behind the camera calls the burning a triumph, and junta soldiers celebrate. Every household in the village was forced to send one member to witness the killing. The video was included in the film "They Were Kids", created by 23-year-old filmmaker Nic Blauer, who chose the title after he and the Free Burma Rangers responded to two schools struck by an airstrike that left nine children wounded and four dead.

The film follows the Free Burma Rangers on a mission in Karenni State and was shot over the course of Blauer's four years with the Rangers. I met him for an interview at a coffee shop in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where

we discussed his experiences with the Rangers and his motivation for making the film. A devout Christian and second-generation missionary in Thailand, Blauer said he wanted to capture not just the violence of the war but also its emotional and spiritual toll.

"I want to show how it's like to be there, and what people feel," he explained. "A lot of documentaries already cover what's happening there, but they don't necessarily cover how people feel about the war inside - or the experience." He added, "I guess one of the main themes is: how can we forgive the Burmese army?"

The concept of forgiveness came up frequently during our conversation and features prominently throughout the film.

Half Thai and half American, Blauer was only 17 when he began working with the Free Burma Rangers. Over the next four years, he joined missions of varying



Nic Blauer, documentary-maker and photographer.

lengths, the longest lasting six months. These included both training and frontline operations. When there was no active fighting, he filmed and participated in the Good Life Club (GLC) program for children in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and conflict-affected towns, performing songs, dances, and Bible lessons. Like all Rangers, he could go from laughing and dancing with children to treating the wounded under fire - assisting medics on the front lines in a matter of hours or even minutes. One GLC event depicted in the documentary was interrupted by the sound of approaching aircraft, signaling a possible airstrike. Immediately after another GLC program, the team responded to a village that had been bombed, where all the casualties were civilians, several of them children.

When people unfamiliar with the war see the videos and reports of the Burmese military's atrocities, they are often shocked and moved. Many ask why the international community is allowing this to happen. Yet, despite the horror, the war has dragged on in this same asymmetric way for decades. Today, nearly every person in Burma has been affected. The obvious question is: why doesn't anyone do anything? Nic Blauer offered a sobering answer. He said there's no particular reason

for the world to care about Burma, noting that "there are reports about other wars going on in the world, and other conflicts. There's no reason for anybody to care about Burma. Every day we see things happening in other parts of the world where it's horrible."

Nic hadn't originally planned to go to Burma. He was supposed to travel to America, but COVID-19 canceled his plans. "And I got sent to Burma instead," he said. "So, it's funny how God does things...changes your plans...You kind of have to keep going until God stops you." What he witnessed there changed him profoundly.

He admitted that before going to Burma, he didn't care much about the country. That changed the moment he stepped into an IDP camp. "I remember going to an IDP camp for the first time," he recalled. "It's just... an IDP camp. Probably not as big of a deal as seeing people blown up or whatnot. But it was very different seeing it for real." That first glimpse helped him grasp the scale of the suffering - at least 3.5 million people languishing in camps, with no jobs, little education for their children, and almost no hope for the future.



Free Burma Rangers on the road in Karenni State. Photo: Nic Blauer

And then came the frontlines: the explosions, the bloodshed, and the loss of life - including women and children. That experience, changed him: "I feel like when you see that kind of suffering and all those bad things, it's going to tie you to God." As moved as he was at age 17 on the first mission, he was still not committed to Burma the way he is today. "Actually, after the first Karenni mission, I didn't really want to go back. But there's this verse that made me go back. 'Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.' 1 Corinthians 13, verse 7. That pushed me back to Burma." After that, he quickly fell in love with the country. "My heart is definitely there. And I'm also not part of the struggle that much, because obviously I'm not from Burma. I'm not Burmese, or Karen, or whatever. But over the years, I've spent time there, and I can see and relate to how they feel."

A poignant scene in the film shows the Rangers driving through an abandoned town where Karenni civilians once lived peacefully in rows of suburban houses. Although resistance forces have retaken the area, the residents have not returned. Landmines now litter their former homes. In one deserted house, pre-

viously used as a barracks by junta soldiers, the FBR team rummages through the trash and personal belongings left behind. Among them, they find Christian reading materials and music by Eminem.

The narrator, a female ethnic member of FBR, reflects on the moment: "It made me think that some of them are just like us, with the same interests and beliefs - just in the wrong place at the wrong time." In the interview, Nic added, "They had Christian books. They even had a cross. And just normal human stuff that we enjoy...So I had a feeling that, oh, maybe they're not so bad. Maybe they're human just like us."

But that moment of empathy was short-lived. The narrator said her perspective shifted again after witnessing "all that" - the burning of two PDF soldiers, the bombing of the school, and countless other atrocities. Nic confirmed, "Yeah, there was definitely a shift of emotion."

The Free Burma Rangers' motto includes the phrase "Forgive and don't hate each other," a principle that many people believe is essential if Burma is ever to rebuild and function under a democratic government



Tending to a wounded resistance fighter.
Nic Blauer

after the war. Nic acknowledged that his own feelings could never compare to those of Burmese civilians who have endured decades of conflict, but even as an outsider, the atrocities he witnessed deeply affected him.

"Burning people alive, bombing children... that was one of the most emotionally intense missions I went on," Nic recalled. "We had a lot of anger and hate. And as a Christian, you're not supposed to. You're supposed to forgive your enemies. But it's inevitable - I feel like it's normal. You're human."

He said the Rangers emphasize providing medical care to everyone, including wounded junta soldiers, but for many Karenni members of the team, this was especially difficult after seeing junta forces torture resistance fighters and murder children. "It's normal to feel that way," Nic said, "but as a Christian, we're not supposed to act on it."

He described a moment when a Ranger was asked to donate blood to a wounded Burmese soldier. "He didn't want to do it, but he did. Most of the team didn't want to, but they did it anyway." It's not like, 'Oh, we're Christians, and we're happy to help (the junta)'

No, that's not the case."

Nic admitted he felt anger too, especially when the first group of captured Burmese soldiers arrived. But that began to change when he saw their children. One Burma Army position had been overrun, and families of junta soldiers were found living inside the camp. "When the bombs dropped, one kid barely reacted. It was normal to him. It was very sad to see, and that kind of took the anger away from me. Probably for others too."

Seeing the children helped him recognize the shared humanity of their enemies. "They were just kids," he said. "And even the soldiers - they're someone's father, someone's son or daughter. You don't think about that when you're angry, but it's true."

Reflecting on the future of the revolution, Nic said he believes the resistance will win - just not anytime soon. "Everyone hopes the war will end immediately," he said, "but that's not the reality. I do believe the resistance will win, and that God is definitely on their side."

He recalled a line from someone he met in the field: "We just need to keep going and not do evil, and God



Photo: Nic Blauer

will be on our side. Because the Burma Army is definitely not doing great, not doing what God wants. So, we just have to keep going in the right direction, doing the right thing."

When asked what he hoped audiences would take away from the film, Nic said his goal wasn't to teach facts about Burma - they could find that elsewhere. What he wanted most was for viewers to "relate or sympathize with the people there. That's what I want the most - for them to feel something." He added, "There are people making videos about Burma with all the history and information, but I feel like not many are trying to help you understand how the people feel."

To the people of Burma, Nic's message was simple: "Keep going. Because it's definitely not easy to keep going sometimes." He acknowledged that everyone is human and flawed, but emphasized, "The resistance is good. They're better than the Burma Army. I think it's about keeping on and not going against God. Because God - I think - is the only thing that's on your side. Don't break that relationship, because that's all you've got going for you." With no international support and no foreign nation yet willing to step in and force the

junta to resign, faith, unity, and perseverance remain the most crucial weapons the people have against the junta.

Regarding the international community, Nic said bluntly, "Other countries already know about Burma. They could do something about it, and they don't. So, I feel like you just have to keep going and fight your own war."

As for his own future, Nic said he feels called to continue God's work in Burma - "helping people, getting the story out, or whatever I can do."

See the Film and Join the Conversation

"They Were Kids" was featured at the Myanmar Film Tour 2025 in Chiang Mai, alongside several other films about the Burma war. The event was held on the last Friday of June.

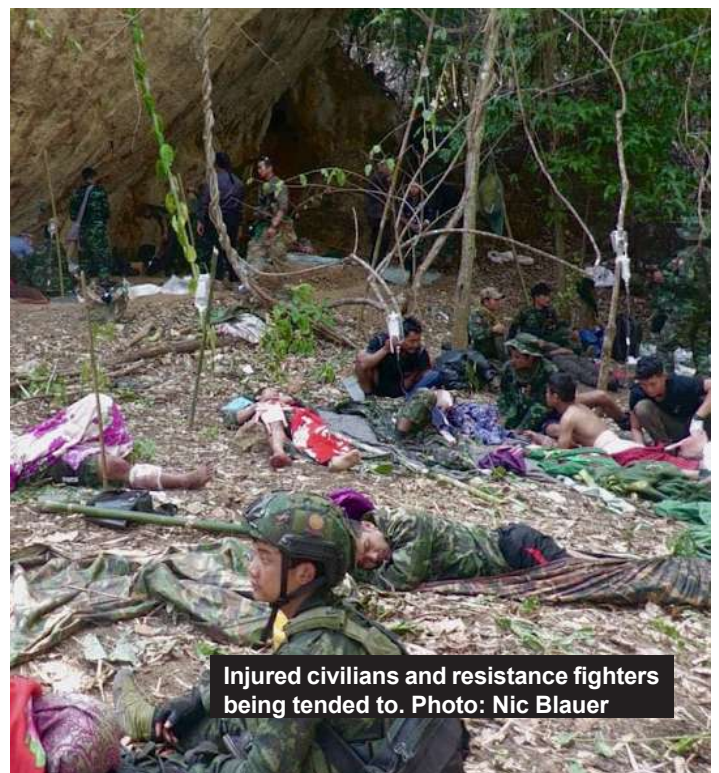




Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CRACKS DOWN ON CIVILIANS DESPITE 'CEASEFIRE'

Despite the widespread devastation caused by the recent earthquake in central Myanmar, Myanmar's military junta has continued its campaign of airstrikes across the country, heavily targeting civilian areas, including hospitals, schools, and monasteries in territories controlled by resistance forces.

The attacks came despite proclaimed ceasefires.

On the night of June 22, a junta airstrike struck a monastery-run charity hospital in Singu Township, Mandalay Region, killing a 30-year-old pregnant woman and injuring at least a dozen others. The attack occurred at approximately 11:10 p.m. local time, when two 300-pound bombs were dropped, one of which directly hit the hospital's obstetrics and gynecology (OG) ward. According to local sources, a 35-year-old woman sustained serious injuries, while eleven other patients were also wounded. Three buildings, including the OG ward, were completely destroyed. "A bomb hit the OG ward. Children might have been injured, though we still don't have the full details. We had to evacuate all the patients to safer zones to avoid further strikes," a local People's Defense Force (PDF) member told Mizzima.

Singu Township, along with much of neighbouring Madaya Township, is largely under the control of resistance forces. As the junta has lost ground in these areas, it has increasingly resorted to targeting civilian infrastructure in air attacks.

The junta also launched airstrikes in Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)-controlled areas during the same period, hitting towns such as Kyaukme, Naungcho, and Mogok in northern Shan State and Mandalay. These strikes reportedly hit civilian zones, resulting in numerous casualties, including children.

Meanwhile, the National Unity Government (NUG) released updated data on the toll of military airstrikes in the aftermath of the Sagaing earthquake. Since the quake on 28 March, the junta has carried out 622 airstrikes nationwide—excluding Naypyidaw—killing at least 501 civilians and wounding 1,057 others. Among the victims were 76 children.

Sagaing Region, which bore the brunt of the earthquake's impact, has been targeted the most, suffering 141 airstrikes since the disaster.



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

The continued military assaults on civilians, even in quake-hit zones, have drawn condemnation from rights groups and humanitarian organizations, who warn of worsening conditions for already vulnerable populations across Myanmar.

Arakan Army offensives intensify in Rakhine State

Fierce clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces intensified in Rakhine State's capital Sittway and the strategic port town of Kyaukphyu during the fourth week of June, as AA fighters launched sniper operations and assaults on key military positions, according to local sources and military analysts.

On June 21, AA snipers targeted junta regiments stationed in Sittway. Although the engagements were brief, both sides remained on high alert, with junta troops responding with artillery fire. Residents described the situation as highly volatile.

"Both sides are facing each other. The SAC (State Administration Council) troops made a well-prepared defense for the AA offensive. AA made ambushes and sniper attacks frequently. We locals have to keep an eye on the situation, which is like a time bomb," a resident told Narinjara.

AA forces also attempted to overrun the junta's Gantgaw Island post, reportedly destroying two armoured vehicles in the process.

In Kyaukphyu, military tensions prompted junta forces to relocate sensitive materials. According to local sources, key documents from the No. (542) and (543) Light Infantry Battalions, No. (34) Regiment, Military Security Affairs unit, No. (32) Police Battalion, and the township police station were transferred via waterways to the Danyawaddy Navy Headquarters earlier in June.

"Mainly important documents and things from battalions were moved to the navy headquarters," a military analyst told Narinjara.

The AA offensive in Kyaukphyu is now concentrating on the No. (32) Police Battalion, seen as the main defensive outpost for surrounding military units. "The battle has intensified. If the police battalion falls, the

rest of the regiments—No. (543), (542) LIBs—will easily fall to the AA," a local resident noted.

Simultaneous clashes have erupted in three key areas: near the No. (32) Police Battalion, Mala Island, and a village adjacent to the navy headquarters. With increasing losses among junta troops, the regime has relied heavily on drone strikes and artillery firepower, including naval bombardments.

"They [the junta] advance very little using troops, instead attacking with drones, especially Chinese-made ones when the weather is clear, and also artillery," a local analyst said.

Meanwhile, Rohingya militias aligned with the junta are suffering heavy casualties, particularly around Kyaukphyu. According to sources, the junta conscripted Rohingya men from Sittway and Kyaukphyu after just 45 days of military training and deployed them to frontline positions.

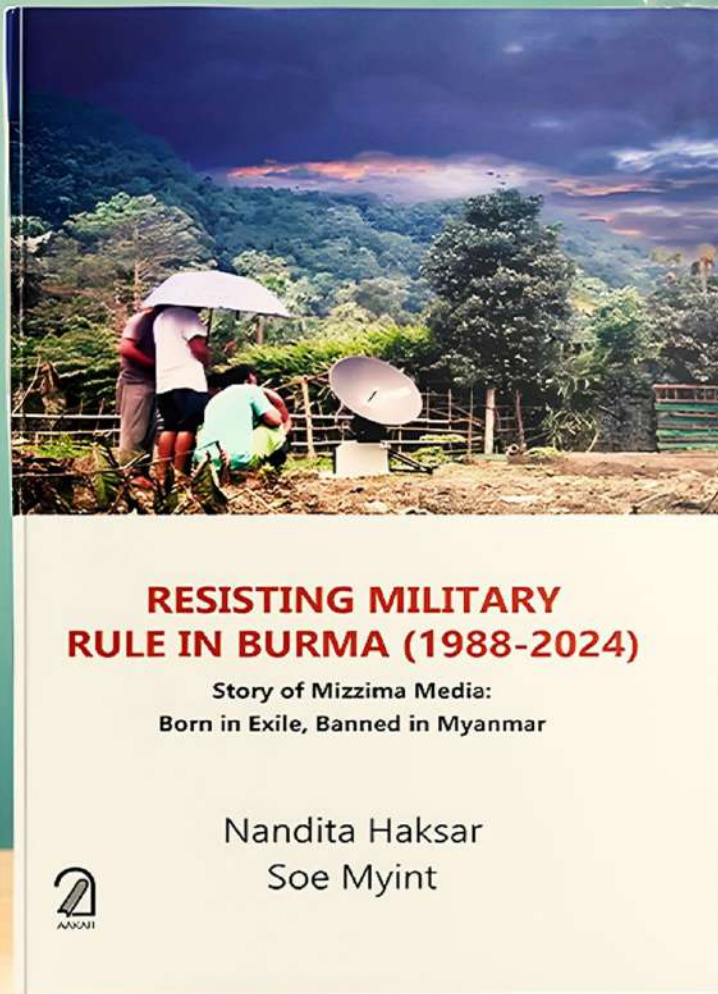
Dead bodies of Rohingya fighters have been recovered, and prisoners of war have reportedly confirmed the junta's use of poorly trained Rohingya conscripts in direct combat. In an apparent attempt to conceal the extent of casualties, wounded Rohingya fighters are being treated secretly inside military compounds and at the Kyauktalone checkpoint, rather than in public hospitals. Locals also reported spotting Rohingya militia guards stationed at Ngalapwayt Port.

As the AA continues to press its offensive, the situation in both Sittway and Kyaukphyu remains tense, with fears that further escalation could lead to a broader humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State. Reports indicate that many internally displaced people (IDPs) are suffering from lack of humanitarian aid and the onset of the monsoon rains.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by *Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



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Photo: Supplied

BEYOND RESOLUTION: IMPLEMENTING THE ILO'S MANDATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR

AUNG MYO MIN

When the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a resolution invoking Article 33 of its own constitution on Myanmar at its 113th session of the General Conference on 5 June, there was widespread celebration among pro-democracy movement of Myanmar.

Our National Unity Government (NUG) commended the move as “effective measures” against the junta while expressing appreciation especially to the tripartite body of the Ministry of Labour, trade unions, and employers who worked tirelessly for the milestone, third of its kind in the ILO’s 106-years-long history and second time on Myanmar.

The decision was a result of failure of the military junta to implement the ILO Commission of Inquiry’s 2023 report “Towards Freedom and Dignity in Myanmar”, which concluded the continuous violations of freedom from forced labour, freedom of association by trade unionists and basic civil liberties.

The 2023 Report by the Commission of Inquiry warned the enforcement of the so called “People’s Military Service Law” by the junta as potential threat for forced labour. The Ministry of Human Rights of the NUG which I served as the minister, documented 1,514 cases of unlawful conscriptions by the junta, resulting in more than 26,082 young people forced to join the army since its enforcement on 10 February 2024.

Furthermore, the Ministry's documentation of human rights violations since the early months of the military coup in 2021 to the end of May 2025 indicates that there have been 1,408 cases of forced labour and 33 violations of labour rights committed by the junta.

The junta's "continuing egregious violations" over the course of more than four years since the coup in 2021 and more than one year after the Commission of Inquiry report are key sources of the resolution.

Also, the works of trade unionists of Myanmar who persistently documented the violations of fundamental rights at work, starting from the prohibition of trade union freedom, forced labour, arbitrary arrests, cancellation of passports and arrest warrants are commendable in painting the picture of the gravity of the violations.

But as always, now we are at the beginning of another crucial chapter. It is time to act and to implement with no delay the content of the Resolution.

We, especially the tripartite delegation made up by workers, employers and representatives of NUG, will continue to work to document cases of freedom of association and forced labour and feed into the ILO Commission of Inquiry.

Most importantly governments, employers and workers should review "the relations they may have with Myanmar military authorities and take appropriate measures to ensure that such relations in no way enable, facilitate or prolong the violations of workers' rights in respect of freedom of association and forced labour."

The decision paves the way for a review of the positions taken so far in relation to the presence of companies and foreign investments in the country to avoid contributing to human rights violations including the flow of jet fuel and free flow of funds to the military authorities. This is particularly important given the context of a total of 2,841 airstrikes by the junta between 1st January 2023 to 31st May 2025, killing 3,152 civilians.

The ILO in its resolution compels a new responsibility for neighbouring governments, in particular India, Thailand, Malaysia to ensure non-refoulement is respected in line with international law because the trade unionists, human rights defenders and young people are fleeing the country to avoid the forced conscription.

A special recognition goes to those who believed in the possibility of achieving this historic result and who are already working today to ensure that it does not remain a piece of unused paper. Now it is up to all the constituents of the ILO in Myanmar to ensure that this does not happen.

Aung Myo Min is the Minister of Human Rights in the National Unity Government (NUG).

The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA SIGNS INVESTMENT PACT WITH RUSSIA DAYS AFTER ILO ACTION OVER RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

A military junta-backed newspaper reported that an investment promotion and protection agreement was signed between junta minister Dr. Kan Zaw and Russia's Minister of Economic Development on 20 June, during the 28th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) held from 18 to 21 June.

According to the junta, the deal aims to promote mutual investment opportunities, create favourable conditions for investors from both countries, and ensure legal protections. However, the full contents of the agreement have not been made public.

The signing came just 15 days after the International Labour Organization (ILO) confirmed the use of Article 33 measures against the junta for widespread violations of labour and human rights.

Dr. Kan Zaw serves as the junta's Minister of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations. He was part of a delegation led by General Mya Htun Oo, a

senior junta member, who also held meetings with the Chairman of the Russia-ASEAN Economic Council. Discussions reportedly focused on boosting economic cooperation and trade between Russia and the junta, as well as Russia's broader ties with ASEAN.

During the forum, General Mya Htun Oo said that Russian goods could be shipped to regional ports via the Yangon Port and that Myanmar was prepared to facilitate additional logistics through road and rail transport.

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar's military junta has continued to deepen relations with Russia. Earlier in March, junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Moscow, during which ten agreements and memorandum of understanding were signed, including plans to build a small nuclear power plant in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

FOREIGN AID CUTS HARMING EDUCATION FOR ROHINGYA CHILDREN, SAYS HRW

Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a press release on 25 June calling attention to the serious impact foreign aid cuts have had on the ability of Rohingya refugee children to access education. The release and its associated report detail the impact of US and other foreign donor cutbacks on education programs for refugee children in Bangladesh.

The text of the press release is as follows.

United States and other foreign donor cutbacks in humanitarian aid have worsened the already existing education crisis for 437,000 school-age children in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, Human Rights Watch said today. On June 3, 2025, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) suspended thousands of "learning centers" run by nongovernmental organizations in the refugee camps, due to lack of funding.

The only education currently in the Bangladesh refugee camps is at schools established by the Rohingya community without outside support or official recognition. Bangladesh's interim government should urgently lift restrictions on education for Rohingya refugees, such as lack of accreditation, and

donors should support community-led schools. The government should also permit Rohingya children to enroll in schools outside the camps.

"The US and other donor governments are abandoning education for Rohingya children after the previous Bangladesh government long blocked it," said Bill Van Esveld, associate children's rights director at Human Rights Watch. "The interim Bangladesh government should uphold everyone's right to education, while donors should support the Rohingya community's efforts to prevent a lost generation of students."

In April and May, Human Rights Watch spoke with 39 Rohingya refugee students, parents, and teachers in the camps in the Cox's Bazar District, 22 on Bhasan Char island also housing refugees, and 14 international and Bangladeshi teachers, humanitarian workers, and education experts. Most Rohingya fled persecution and wartime atrocities in Myanmar, where they are effectively denied citizenship and other rights.

In 2024, the US government provided US\$300 million to respond to the Rohingya refugee crisis, over half of the total amount received by humanitarian

agencies. But as of June 2025, the administration of President Donald Trump had slashed aid to \$12 million. By April, the humanitarian education sector in Bangladesh – which funds the learning centers – had secured only about \$22 million of its \$72 million annual budget and was significantly reducing expenditures. Out of a target of 437,000 school-age children in the camps, about 304,000 were enrolled in the learning centers, now closed. UNICEF aimed to reopen the learning centers it funded for classes 6 and above by June 29, and encouraged nongovernmental organizations NGOs to reopen lower classes if they could find other sources of funding.

Rohingya refugees said that community-led schools offered higher-quality education than the learning centers. They hired teachers who had completed most of their upper secondary schooling, and classes had multiple teachers who specialized in different subjects.

The community-led schools, unsupported by government or private donor funding, charge parents monthly tuition fees ranging from around \$0.50 for class 1 up to \$5 for class 12, a barrier to enrollment for some families. One refugee said: “Parents want to send kids to community-led schools but can’t afford the fees, so the only options are [learning centers]. But when they see that the kids aren’t learning, they send the child to work.”

“There are over 100 [community-led] schools [in the Cox’s Bazar camps],” a principal said. “But no humanitarian [groups] are supporting us, because the Bangladesh authorities don’t recognize us.”

Teachers said the lack of certification, which affected learning centers as well as community-led schools, also undermined students’ hopes to build a better future upon eventual return to Myanmar. “If you made it to grade 12, but without a certificate, you will have to start all over from the beginning,” a community-school teacher said.

Lack of education opportunities has also increased children’s vulnerability to spiraling violence by armed groups and criminal gangs in the Cox’s Bazar camps, including abductions, recruitment, and trafficking. Abductions of children were so frequent in late 2024

that many parents stopped allowing their children to leave their shelters to go to school, refugees said. Protection monitors reported 51 child abductions in the first quarter of 2025.

With the learning centers shut down due to the funding crisis, whether or not funding is found to reopen them, the interim Bangladesh government and donors should recognize and fund community-led schools to increase their capacity, Human Rights Watch said.

The interim Bangladesh government should recognize community-led schools, and the United Nations and aid agencies should include Rohingya educators in decision-making and leadership roles, Human Rights Watch said. Recognition of Rohingya-led schools could encourage donor support and help achieve better instruction for more students.

Bangladesh should follow the example of countries, including Türkiye, that have accredited and certified education for refugee children, including refugee-led schools teaching the curricula of their countries of origin.

Under international human rights law, all children have the right to quality education, without discrimination, regardless of their residency or migration status. International standards for refugee education recommend that refugees meaningfully participate in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of programs.

“The previous Bangladesh government for years blocked education for hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children because they were refugees,” Van Esveld said. “The interim government should reject old policies and support education without discrimination for all children.”



MYANMAR JUNTA TORCHES VILLAGES IN EASTERN MIN HLA TOWNSHIP, THOUSANDS DISPLACED AS OFFENSIVE ESCALATES

Myanmar junta forces burned down multiple villages and displaced thousands in the eastern part of Min Hla Township, Bago Region, since launching an offensive on 19 June, according to the Min Hla Township People's Defence Force (PDF).

On 25 June alone, junta troops set fire to homes in Kywe Ma Kaing village at 7:20 am, and later in Khwet Ma village at 12:10 pm. This occurred after heavy shelling the night before.

"Last night, Khwet Ma was shelled with heavy weapons, and this morning they came in and started torching the houses. Locals had already fled by yesterday evening. Only a few elderly people remained. They said they'd rather die in their homes, so we couldn't evacuate them," a Min Hla Township People's Defence Force official said.

The offensive was reportedly triggered by a PDF-led attack on 16 June that targeted a junta checkpoint near Oak Twin village, killing several junta troops, including officers. Since then, a column of about 400 junta soldiers has been advancing through the eastern part of the township.

According to the PDF, the junta began burning villages on 20 June. By the afternoon of 25 June, at least

nine villages had been affected: Taung Pyat, U To Kywe Lan Su, Sar Chaung, Sin Aing Chaung Pauk, Gant Gaw Pin, Bo Ta Htaung, Ngahla Sam, Khwet Ma, and Kywe Ma Kaing.

"They're planning to burn all the villages between the Yangon-Pyay Road and Bago Yoma Mountain range," the official said.

At least 21 local residents have been arrested by junta troops during this six-day campaign. The identities and whereabouts of those detained remain unknown.

The arson campaign has forced mass displacement across the region. Residents from over 40 villages—including Kywe Ma Kaing, Shwe Kone, Sam Boak, Kyun Kone, Sar Chaung (East), Khwet Ma, Ngahla Sam, Nga Moe Yake, Za Shae Myaung, Shwe Pauk Pin, Taung Lein, Kan Thone Sin, Thaike Kyant, Tha Yaw Kone, Ban Bwe Pin, Sar Chaung (West), and Sin Aing Chaung Pauk, have fled their homes.

Local resistance groups are calling for emergency aid, warning that thousands are now sheltering in forested areas without access to food, medicine, or proper shelter.



SAGAING FEDERAL UNIT APPROVES INTERIM CONSTITUTION AFTER MONTHS OF DELIBERATION

The Sagaing Federal Unit Interim Constitution was officially approved on 25 June during the Fifth Regular Session of the Sagaing Federal Unit Hluttaw, marking a significant step toward establishing a federal democratic system in the region.

The approval was granted by representatives from the Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw, and the Federal Unit Hluttaw. The proposal was submitted by U Zaw Hlaing Thein, Member of Parliament for Sagaing Township Constituency No. 2, and supported by fellow members of the Federal Unit Hluttaw.

According to U Myint Htwe, Chairman of the Sagaing Federal Unit Hluttaw, the newly adopted interim constitution comprises 18 chapters and more than 200 articles.

"The first benefit is that it lays the foundation for a government that aligns with the will of the people, as mandated by the constitution," U Myint Htwe said.

He added that the drafting process involved 387 meetings over the span of 587 days, which included broad consultations with various organizations, stakeholders, and civil society groups. The drafting began in February 2024 and was completed by 23 October, taking about nine months.

U Myint Htwe acknowledged that some groups might not accept the constitution but emphasized that a federal democratic system can only emerge through

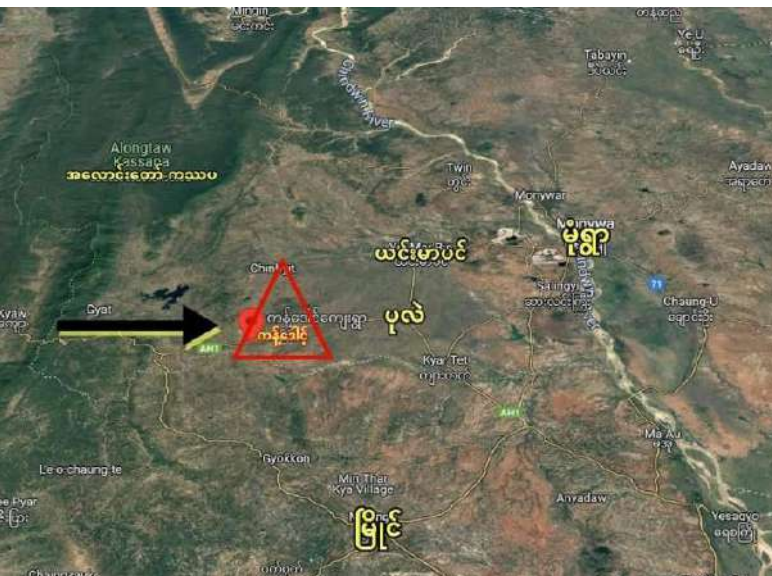
such a legal foundation.

"If there are objections, they likely stem from personal disagreements. In a democracy, it is impossible to satisfy everyone. We will continue engaging in dialogue and negotiations. Even if some refuse to participate, we have a responsibility to consult and discuss," he told Mizzima.

He added that efforts are underway to form an inclusive government representing all stakeholders. If negotiations progress smoothly, a unity government could be established within this year.

The draft interim constitution was originally submitted to the Hluttaw on 25 October 2024 and was formally adopted on 25 June 2025.

The Fifth Regular Session was attended by a wide array of participants, including representatives from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of State and Federal Unit Hluttaws, members of the Regional Hluttaw Representative Committee, the State Consultative Council, political parties, strike forces, and members of the Interim Constitution Drafting Commission. Also present were representatives of the CDM Civil Service Council, People's Administration Bodies from district and township levels, civil society organizations, and the media.



CAPTURED MYANMAR JUNTA SOLDIERS INCLUDE CHILD SOLDIER AND POLICE WARRANT OFFICER

A 15-year-old child soldier, two other forcibly detained men, and a police warrant officer were among those captured during the seizure of the military junta's Kantdaunt camp in Pale Township, according to an interrogation video released by the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Among the four prisoners of war, Ko Nay Htet Lin (service number 139263) said he was forcibly detained while selling barbecue in Yangon.

"I was forcibly detained while selling barbecue in Yangon and sent to military training. I am 15 years old," he said during the interrogation.

After his capture, he was sent to No. 7 Taungdwingyi Basic Military Training Camp for five months, followed by two weeks of refresher training at Pakokku-based Infantry Battalion 251. He was then airlifted by helicopter to Inmahtee village to be deployed to the frontline.

Another prisoner, Ko Soe Tar, was initially detained at the Yangon Highway Terminal, then underwent five months and one week of military training in Pinlaung,

followed by two and a half months of refresher training at Light Infantry Division 101 in Pakokku before being sent to the battlefield.

Ko Ye Kyaw Kyaw, who was also captured, said he had been detained under the People's Military Service Law and trained at Military Training School (Bahtoo). He sustained injuries during the battle for Kantdaunt.

Police Warrant Officer Shein Ko Ko Kyaw, who was wounded in the attack, was reportedly left behind by his unit as they retreated from Kantdaunt to Inmahtee.

The captured soldiers stated that during the battle, the junta troops did not evacuate their injured men and only prioritized rescuing officers.

"Even if you die under the military dictatorship, you won't die like a human being. You'll die like a dog or a pig. They don't even rescue their own soldiers — only the officers," said Ko Nay Htet Lin.

The PLA-led revolutionary joint forces began their assault on the Kantdaunt camp at 5 am on 2 June and succeeded in capturing it entirely by 6:40 am on 19 June.

During the operation, at 12:15 pm on 10 June, the PLA shot down a Chinese-made F-7 (Chengdu J-7) fighter jet that had been sent for air support.

The aircraft crashed in Saparsayt village, Pale Township, killing the pilot, the PLA reported.

Kantdaunt Police Station, located on the main ASEAN Highway (Pale-Gangaw Road), is a vital strategic outpost that links to India. The area is also close to two key military weapons factories — No. 23, located over 30 miles to the northwest, and No. 24, about 35 miles to the southwest.



OCHA WARNS MYANMAR'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IS DEEPENING

On 20 June, the outgoing Humanitarian Coordinator for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a farewell statement. In his words, Mr. Marcoluigi Corsi highlighting Myanmar's worsening humanitarian crisis caused by ongoing conflict, natural disasters, and economic collapse, and warned its resilience is wavering.

The text of the statement is as follows.

In the 1.5 years I have served as the Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. for Myanmar, I have witnessed the extraordinary strength of communities throughout the country. I have seen countless men, women and children face immense hardship with a persistent hope for a better future. Their resilience has been a beacon of courage, a testament to their deep-rooted strength.

Yet, resilience is not infinite. As conflict escalates, disasters recur, and economic collapse deepens, the weight on Myanmar's people grows heavier each day. I have watched more and more families be forced into survival mode—struggling not just for a better future, but for the ability to endure the present.

For so long, we have marveled at the perseverance of Myanmar's people. But today, as I conclude my tenure, I must caution that without immediate action, this resilience will break. The world cannot stand by as their hope is eroded and suffering intensifies.

Part of this suffering is driven by a conflict that has relentlessly expanded since the military takeover in 2021, in which civilians are paying the highest price. Almost daily, I receive harrowing reports of civilians killed, injured or displaced—lives shattered by violence they did not choose.

During my time in this role, I have been deeply concerned by the ongoing security and protection risks facing civilians in Myanmar, especially in conflict- and disaster-affected areas. Reports of rising civilian casualties are alarming—largely resulting from failures to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. I call on all parties to the conflict to respect and uphold International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, particularly the obligation to protect civilians by clearly distinguishing them from military targets.

Protection goes beyond the absence of violence—it is also about access to aid. Safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance is a fundamental human right – to deny this is an attack on the most vulnerable people. Even in the most hard-to-reach areas in Myanmar, humanitarians must have free passage to deliver timely assistance to people in need. Yet, every day, we face barriers that prevent or delay assistance from reaching those who need it most. I call on all parties to ensure unrestricted humanitarian access—without conditions, without delays.

Despite the formidable challenges in Myanmar, I leave with profound gratitude for the unwavering commitment of the UN and our many partners to deliver aid. I thank all humanitarian and development partners who continue to work tirelessly and under difficult conditions. Aid workers often face serious threats to their safety—violence, targeted attacks, and hazardous working conditions. Protecting them is essential for delivering aid to those most in need. Amid these and other difficulties, together we have reached millions of people with food, shelter, clean water, medical support and other life-saving aid. But none of it would be possible without the remarkable courage and dedication of local organizations on the frontlines.


Our collective efforts are shown in the wake of the devastating earthquakes that struck Myanmar on 28 March. Even before this disaster, 19.9 million people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance across the country, and the earthquakes pushed another 2 million people into new and urgent need. Homes, schools, hospitals and other vital infrastructure were reduced to rubble. The UN, NGOs and local partners mobilized rapidly to respond, reaching the most affected areas with critical aid.

As the earthquake response now shifts from relief to recovery, the road ahead demands sustained support. Early recovery efforts are focused on restoring basic services for communities, rebuilding livelihoods, and strengthening local solutions. These efforts will only succeed if they are adequately funded.

The dangerously low funding for response efforts in Myanmar remains our greatest challenge. Of the US\$275 million requested for the earthquakes, only \$100 million (a mere 36 per cent) has so far been disbursed. More concerning, almost halfway into the year, the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, which guides the countrywide response, is just under 12 per cent funded—with only \$134 million of the \$1.1 billion requested.

Without urgent funding, millions will be left without the aid they desperately need. Partners already are unable to provide the necessary depth, frequency and quality of assistance, putting more and more lives at risk. As the monsoon season sets in the risks of flooding, disease and displacement are quickly rising, making the additional and quick disbursement of resources crucial.

I leave Myanmar deeply moved by the courage and determination of its people. But resilience alone cannot bring back what has been lost—it cannot replace safety, food, medical care, shelter, livelihoods and everything else stolen by conflict and disaster. Hope and promises are not enough. The people of Myanmar need action. To those who have pledged to stand with them, the time to act is now—decisively and urgently. Their survival depends on it.



Handicraft making, a useful source of income.

AFTER THE QUAKE: MYANMAR'S LGBT+ COMMUNITY BATTLES DISPLACEMENT, DISCRIMINATION - AND BUILDS HOPE

Ko Wai has spent more than 15 years campaigning for the health and human-rights of Myanmar's LGBT+ community. Once she helped stage pride events; now she delivers emergency food parcels.

"During our third visit [to earthquake-affected areas], we discovered LGBT+ people weren't receiving supplies," she recalls. "LGBTQ+ people weren't registered in rescue camps and faced mockery about their names and identities."

Her story is echoed across the country's devastated central belt, where a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in March compounded the difficulties of four years of civil conflict and an alleged increase in repression of sexual minorities.

More than 3.2 million people are internally displaced since the coup, and out of those displaced LGBT+ people face some of the harshest conditions, from blocked access to shelter to a scarcity of livelihood options, steady harassment and violence, according to UNHCR's latest displacement overview.

A disaster layered on discrimination

Long before the ground shook, Myanmar's LGBT+ citizens were navigating stigma reinforced by

law. Same-sex relations are still criminalised under colonial-era Section 377, and trans people risk arrest for "impersonation." Between 2017 and 2020 advocacy by LGBTQ+ groups like Ko Wai's gained momentum, but repression intensified after the 2021 coup.

Now the quake has stripped away livelihoods as well. Many LGBTQ+ individuals worked in specific fields – embroidery, make-up, design, and in nat pwe [traditional spiritual ceremonies]. After the earthquake, however, Ko Wai relates, "make-up kits were buried in rubble, sewing machines destroyed, ceremonial items ruined. We lost our means of income." Finding employment has been difficult with many employment ads specifying 'male' or 'female' only, never LGBT+.

The numbers underline her testimony. UN Women reports that LGBT+ people are one of the four groups most in need of shelter after the quake, alongside older persons, people with disabilities and single-headed households. Six in ten surveyed said security risks – harassment, community hostility, outright violence – had risen since March.

The ally in the shadows

For Ma Chaw, an LGBTQ+ ally and women's-rights advocate in the same region, the emergency has blurred every boundary between her day job and personal

safety. "The military patrols in our region continuously from dawn," she says. "After our training programmes, we sometimes can't return home because roads are blocked due to military operations." She notes young men and women are detained and disappear into military camps without a word.

Ma Chaw leads an eight-woman team that provides support to the LGBTQ+ community and documents human-rights violations. "We collect data on sex workers and human rights violations while delivering humanitarian aid, primarily to women and LGBT+ people," she related.

Since the quake, they have pivoted to livelihood support as well. "I believe creating affordable home businesses for LGBT+ people would improve their situation," she says. Utilising the income generation skills of local LGBTQ+ people, particularly in makeup and weaving, her group plans to offer weaving classes and assistance with bringing products to market.

Most LGBTQ+ people, she notes, are struggling to find alternative employment since the earthquake. Many employers will not hire them because there are LGBT+. "Even when hired," she says, "they typically receive only 12,000-13,000 MMK monthly while others earn 15,000 MMK."

Life on the fault line

Ma Leh comes from a conflict-affected area and identifies as LGBTQ+, knows how fragile ambition feels. In her conflict-torn township, farm labour is still the main source of income. Yet despite her desire to make a living through farming, landowners scoff at her. "They claim I cannot work like a man, and they offer me only 3,000 or 4,000 MMK while typically paying 5,000 MMK as a daily wage," she explains.

Yet, Ma Leh perseveres and is trying to pursue her interests in makeup and sewing. "I watch and save tutorial videos online. I had to work as a waitress to save enough to buy a sewing machine. I don't receive any support from my family. It's all self-reliance."

She rattles off the daily arithmetic of the dual conflict and earthquake disasters: tents that leak in monsoon downpours, sky-high food prices, the constant roar of

military jets.

"We live in fear of airplanes. It's like constantly bracing for impact, waiting for the day I might die. When a plane passes overhead, I feel relieved that I'm still alive."

Still, she saves and watches online tutorials on tailoring and make-up artistry for the day a stable workshop – and a safer society – feels possible. "Don't be discouraged," she urges. "You must keep striving toward your goal."

What outside help looks like

Against this backdrop, the United Kingdom is trying to funnel resources straight to activists such as Ko Wai, Ma Chaw and Ma Leh. "The UK is committed to championing the rights of LGBT+ people across the world," a British Embassy Yangon spokesperson told Mizzima.

"Here in Myanmar, where people of diverse sexualities and gender identities frequently face discrimination and human rights abuses, we continue to work with our local partners to ensure LGBT+ communities are supported with important skills training for income generation such as food processing and entrepreneurship training so they can support themselves and their families. This includes those affected by the devastating earthquake in March."

That pledge translates into £270,000 over two years (2025-2027) for collaborations with LGBTQ+ organisations and activists like Ko Wai, Ma Leh, and Ma Chaw to support nearly 6,000 people through skills training, livelihood grants, and earthquake recovery support.

The UK has also assisted through health programmes with the delivery of sexual and reproductive health and rights education programmes for young people, including those from LGBTQ+ communities.

In addition, UK-funded support for earthquake response has reached 450,000 people, of which 60 per cent are women and children. This support has included food, water, temporary shelter, emergency

WASH facilities, medical supplies, and mental health and psychosocial first aid support through local delivery partners. The UK has announced up to £25 million in life-saving support for people affected by the earthquake in Myanmar.

Yet the scale of need keeps growing. UN Women warns that LGBT+ people are losing not just homes but economic independence, access to education and health care, and the social networks that once offered at least some protection.

Aid gaps and identity papers

Why does help miss those who need it most? Identification rules loom large. Many quake-survivors must present a national ID or household list to receive rations; LGBT+ individuals estranged from families or fleeing military persecution often have neither.

"LGBT+ people weren't registered in rescue camps," says Ko Wai. "They faced mockery about their names and identities, forcing them to relocate to separate areas."

Material losses are only one layer of crisis; mental-health scars run deep. Aftershocks still jolt central Myanmar, and military shelling is a nightly soundtrack in conflict areas.

"Many people are traumatised," says Ko Wai. "Aftershocks continue, homes remain destroyed, and people have lost family members or suffered injuries. Fear of further earthquakes persists, compounded by the military authorities' control."

Psychosocial first aid—short counselling sessions for acute distress—is folded into several UK-supported projects. But trained therapists are scarce, and LGBT+ clients fear outing themselves.

Seeds of resilience

For now, the journey to dignity is littered with checkpoints—literal and metaphorical. Identification norms must loosen; aid agencies must audit distribution lists for bias; donors must fund not only emergency

rations but the slow grind of livelihood recovery. Most crucially, Myanmar's political stalemate must shift toward inclusive governance.

Until then, progress rests on the resolve of people like Ko Wai, Ma Chaw and Ma Leh. The three activists still see glimmers of hope.

Ko Wai emphasises that supporting LGBT+ livelihoods creates broader positive impacts. "It's essential for LGBT+ people to find appropriate careers. With livelihood support, they can become self-sufficient, gain family acceptance and rebuild their homes. For example, providing sewing machines to tailors produces multiple benefits."

Ma Chaw notes the important role that LGBTQ+ allies can play in creating positive change. "We should conduct advocacy training to help people understand and support LGBT+ individuals. Only by engaging with LGBT+ people and participating in human rights education will the broader public's understanding for LGBT+ people change."

And for Ma Leh, she takes inspiration from a short anecdote: "Once there was a swimming champion who became nervous while swimming across a river. Halfway across, uncertain if he was heading in the right direction, he called for rescue. When he reached the shore, he discovered he had been just one hundred meters from his destination. So don't give up."

Looking ahead, Ko Wai offers her own encouragement to the LGBT+ community: "LGBT+ people are simply people within society. Some hide their identity due to shame or fear. Don't be discouraged. Accept yourself and show your true self – this will create a brighter future. Being LGBT+ isn't shameful or frightening; rather, rejecting this reality leads to negative consequences. If you courageously embrace your identity, you'll achieve your goals, build the warm family life you dream of, and gain recognition. Your aspirations and hopes can be realised."

All personal names used in this story are pseudonyms to protect the individuals who bravely spoke for this story.



MYANMAR: REBUILDING LIVES SHATTERED BY EARTHQUAKE AND ARMED CONFLICT

Three months after a devastating earthquake hit central Myanmar, thousands of people in the country are still struggling to rebuild their lives and meet their basic daily needs, according to the ICRC.

According to the latest figures, more than 3,700 people were killed, over 5,000 were injured, and nearly 50 are still missing in the affected areas.

With millions of people already displaced by decades of armed conflict before the earthquake, Myanmar is one of the countries most in need of humanitarian assistance globally.

"When my family of five was displaced, we built our tent using different types of wood from the forest. We have faced many crises, including armed conflict and flooding, and now we have again been hit by the earthquake," said 77-year-old Daw Khin Po, one of the hundreds of thousands of people affected and now displaced in Mandalay.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been working tirelessly over the past three months together with the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) and other local partners to meet the urgent needs of the most affected communities in Mandalay, Sagaing, Bago and Shan State.

Over 111,000 people have received assistance from the ICRC following the earthquake, including support for safe drinking water, food, tarpaulins, solar

light, essential household items, cash to meet urgent needs and access to emergency health care through hospitals and mobile clinics. Among those, over 49,000 people in Mandalay, Sagaing and Shan State have benefited from our activities to improve access to safe water, sanitary facilities and hygiene, helping to rebuild safer living conditions and prevent health risks. The ICRC also continue to provide livelihood opportunities through training, agricultural and livestock materials and support for small businesses. In parallel, risk awareness sessions are held to help communities stay safe from unexploded ordnance in areas affected by disaster and conflict.

"This cash assistance from the ICRC will be used to repair our damaged tents so that we have a little more privacy and better shelter," said Daw Khin Po, who received assistance.

Together with the MRCS and civil society organizations, the ICRC has also supported hospitals and ambulance service providers from the civil society organizations in Mandalay and Sagaing regions, and Shan State by providing medical supplies and repairing infrastructure and the water supply system.

However, the scale of needs is beyond what any single organization can address. The March disaster has added another layer of vulnerability to people's lives. Many have lost their possessions and sources of income, making it difficult for them to meet their basic needs such as food, medicines and hygiene items amid rising market prices. The imminent monsoon poses an additional challenge, with an increasing risk of waterborne diseases.

"It's heartbreaking to see people struggling to rebuild their lives after the earthquake. We cannot forget that this has further disrupted the lives of people who are already deeply affected by the ongoing armed conflict. We will stand with them every step of their way to recovery," said Arnaud de Baecque, the ICRC's head of delegation in Yangon. "The world cannot look away. The international community must step up their support."

Even though parties to the conflict have extended a pause in hostilities, fighting continues in several areas. The ICRC urges all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and allow wider humanitarian access to communities in all affected areas.



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING CONFIRMS YEAR-END ELECTION PLAN

Myanmar's junta chief said the country plans to hold elections in December and January, state media reported 26 June, pressing ahead with polls denounced as a sham by international monitors.

The military deposed Myanmar's civilian government in a 2021 coup which sparked a many-sided civil war, but has promoted its election plans as a pathway to peace.

With members of the former government locked away, opposition groups set to boycott the vote and huge tracts of the country controlled by anti-junta rebels, observers say a fair poll is impossible.

State newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar said junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, speaking at a conference in the capital Naypyidaw on Wednesday, "pledged that the election will be held in December this year and January next year".

It is not clear whether the junta plans to hold the election in phases -- a potential sign it would struggle to guarantee security on a single nationwide polling day -- or whether the timetable includes a campaign period.

On Wednesday, the United Nations' special rapporteur on the rights situation in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said the junta is "trying to create this mirage of an election exercise that will create a legitimate civilian government".

"You cannot have an election when you imprison and torture and execute your opponents, when it is illegal to report the truth as a journalist, when it's illegal to speak out and criticise the junta," he told reporters in Geneva.

Junta forces have suffered stinging territorial losses to pro-democracy guerrillas and powerful ethnic armed organisations in recent months.

Military backing from China and Russia is letting it stave off defeat, analysts say, but huge areas of the country are set to be beyond the reach of any junta-organised democratic exercise.

A junta census held last year to prepare for the poll admitted it could not collect data from an estimated 19 million of the country's 51 million people, in part because of "significant security constraints".

"We are currently making the necessary preparations to hold the elections as widely and extensively as possible," Min Aung Hlaing said, according to a transcript of his conference speech in The Global New Light of Myanmar.

"Most importantly, the elections must be free and fair," he said.

AFP

MYANMAR TORCHES \$300 MILLION OF DRUGS IN DECLINING ANNUAL HAUL

Burning a drug haul. Photo: AFP

Myanmar's junta torched seized narcotics worth an estimated \$300 million on 26 June, but a senior police officer said drug hauls were plunging because of intensifying fighting in the country's civil war.

When the junta seized power in a 2021 coup it sparked conflict between the military and a myriad of opponents, with all sides accused of filling their war chests with proceeds from black market businesses.

Drug production, unregulated mining and online scam centres have all flourished in the chaos since the democratic government was toppled, analysts say.

Myanmar's home affairs ministry burned confiscated narcotics in three locations across the country on Thursday, which anti-drug police in the capital Naypyidaw said were worth nearly \$298 million.

The haul -- incinerated to mark International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking -- was worth roughly \$50 million less than last year's and \$150 million less than the 2023 figure.

A senior anti-drug officer -- speaking on condition of anonymity -- said "fighting in many places" is "one of the main reasons for our difficulties in cracking down on drug trafficking and production".

Drugs burned in ceremonies in the cities of Yangon, Mandalay and Taunggyi included more than 1,700 kilograms of heroin, 16,000 kilograms of methamphetamine and 281 million stimulant pills, police said.

Myanmar's junta is fighting an array of anti-coup guerrillas and ethnic armed organisations which have long been active in the country's fringes where black markets have flourished.

Home affairs minister Tun Tun Naung said in a message published in state media that "some ethnic armed organisations engage in drug production and trafficking to easily earn income by taking advantage of the lack of peace and stability".

Analysts have previously said the Myanmar military also has links to highly profitable drug production.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said last month that 2024's seizures of methamphetamine in East and Southeast Asia were a record high.

Seizures of methamphetamine across the region totalled 236 tons in 2024, marking an "exponential" increase of 24 percent compared to 2023, the agency said.

AFP

Hnin Yin Phyu

MYANMAR JUNTA ARRESTS STATE-CONTROLLED MRTV EMPLOYEE OVER AUNG SAN SUU KYI BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

A Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) employee has been arrested by the military junta for participating in a "flower strike" to commemorate detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi's 80th birthday, sparking fierce criticism on social media.

Hnin Yin Phyu, also known as Hnaung Hnaung, was detained on June 21 at around 8 pm from MRTV staff housing in Naypyidaw's Tatkon Township. The arrest came two days after she participated in the flower strike marking Suu Kyi's birthday on June 19.

According to MRTV staff sources and official announcements, Hnin Yin Phyu had posted birthday wishes for the detained Nobel laureate on social media, writing, "Happy Birthday Amay (Mother) Suu, may you live long and healthy." She also shared photos of flowers as part of the flower strike.

The arrest has triggered a wave of condemnation from Myanmar social media users, who criticized the junta's heavy-handed response to what they viewed as a peaceful gesture.

A Facebook user wrote, "To some of the so-called leaders of the military council (junta) - your mindset is

extremely narrow. If they had pretended not to notice people making birthday wishes for Amay Suu, they would at least avoid being hated by the people. Now that you're arresting people like this, have you solved the current problems?"

Another user mocked the junta's fears, posting, "The fascist dictators are even afraid of flowers. How funny. How much do you fear Mother Suu that you're even scared of flowers, which are part of Mother Suu's characteristics?"

A third commenter highlighted the junta's paranoia, "Extreme jealousy is very frightening and only exists among the most despicable people."

The flower strike has become a popular form of peaceful resistance in Myanmar, with citizens sharing images of flowers on social media to show solidarity with the detained leader and opposition to military rule.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention since the February 2021 coup and was sentenced to prison under multiple charges that rights groups consider politically motivated.



Belarus regime supplying air defence system to Myanmar military and training personnel as aerial terror campaign intensifies

BELARUS SUPPLIES AIR DEFENCE TO MYANMAR MILITARY AS AERIAL TERROR CAMPAIGN INTENSIFIES, SAYS JFM

A Justice For Myanmar (JFM) investigation has uncovered new evidence of significant and ongoing military collaboration between the Belarus regime and the Myanmar military junta, including the supply of a custom-designed air defence command system and the training of military personnel connected to the arms industry at Belarusian universities.

JFM issued a press release on 28 June as Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was visiting Belarus.

Leaked correspondence between Myanmar's air defence command and Belarusian authorities confirms the transfer of advanced military systems, including a Myanmar Air Defence Operational Command (MADOC) system, V3D radar technology, and ground-based missile systems.

The custom-designed air defence command system is supplied through the state-owned company Belspetsvneshtekhnika (BSVT). The system includes the "Panorama" automation control system and Vostok

3D radar technology designed to detect aerial objects and track targets automatically, including drones, which are used by resistance forces.

Myanmar military personnel are also currently enrolled at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR), conducting research in radio-electronic engineering for air defence systems.

Students are linked to key weapons production facilities including Defence Industry 4 in Naypyidaw and Myanmar Heavy Industry 10 in Mandalay.

The findings come as Myanmar's military increasingly relies on aerial attacks as resistance forces expand effective control. The junta's air force indiscriminately targets civilians, schools, and hospitals, causing displacement and civilian casualties, committing war crimes with total impunity.

Belarus is a long-standing partner of the Myanmar military junta, and official visits between senior representatives to Belarus and Myanmar are increasingly frequent.

JFM says that in 2025 alone, "war criminal Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Minsk on two separate occasions to meet with senior leadership, including dictator Alexander Lukashenko, in Minsk." The visits have furthered military cooperation and Belarusian complicity in the Myanmar military's international crimes.

Representatives from the Belarusian arms industry and universities with military engineering and training programmes have also travelled to Myanmar on repeated occasions in 2025, resulting in formalised

agreements with Myanmar universities in domains with direct military applicability.

JFM calls for targeted sanctions against Myanmar arms brokers involved in the arms trade with Belarus, including Dynasty Group, and against Belarusian universities training Myanmar military personnel.

JFM spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "The partnership between the Belarusian regime and Myanmar military has been many years in the making. Belarus was the only country to vote against a 2021 UN General Assembly resolution calling on UN members to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar and this support between criminals has only deepened since then.

"New evidence demonstrates the continued Belarusian support to the junta as it wages a campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar, committing war crimes and crimes against humanity with total impunity.

"Collaboration between the Myanmar junta and the Belarusian regime should be of immediate and wider concern in light of Belarus' tacit support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"Sanctions on Belarus – including on State universities hosting Myanmar military personnel – are crucial, and efforts should be taken to ensure that any shipments of arms from Belarus to Myanmar are disrupted.

"Arms brokers, including Dynasty Group that are facilitating the dirty deals between Belarus and Myanmar should also be more widely sanctioned."

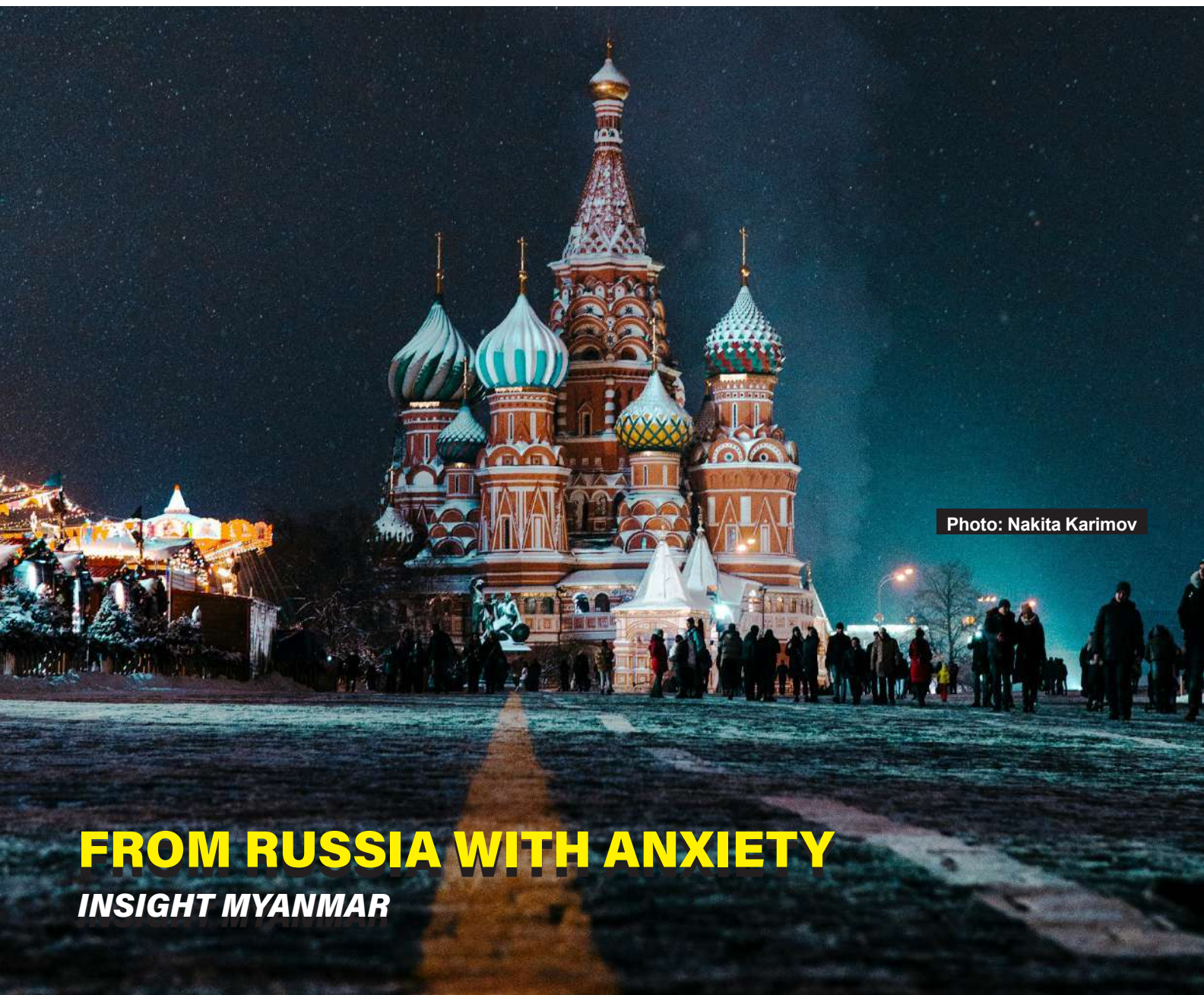


Photo: Nakita Karimov

FROM RUSSIA WITH ANXIETY

INSIGHT MYANMAR

Wai Yan Phyo Naing's journey to Moscow in September 2015 to study gave him a unique perspective on – of all things – the Myanmar military.

A professional whose expertise spans Myanmar history and politics, China-Myanmar relations (the topic of his PhD thesis), social development, and migrant issues, Wai Yan Phyo Naing currently applies his skills at the Raks Thai Foundation. He discusses his experiences in Russia and the unique window he gained into the psyche of Myanmar's military, as well as his understanding of the complexities of his homeland's political landscape and the broader geopolitical currents shaping its destiny.

Wai Yan Phyo Naing's academic career began with a mechanical engineering degree in Myanmar. His real ambition was to study abroad, but because the financial requirements were onerous, scholarships became his sole hope. Then, from among his numerous applications, a Russian scholarship materialized.

Study in Russia was usually reserved for military students; his friends were skeptical that it was the place for him. However, he envisioned himself as a civilian student, and charting a new course: "If I succeed, I would be the very first Myanmar PhD student for international relations within forty years there," he muses, as most military students pursued sciences, not social sciences or humanities. So he embarked on

a six+-year-odyssey: two for acquiring a Master's, one for a preparatory course, and three and a half for his PhD.

Entering the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, he saw that his friends' initial concerns were based on fact. The university also hosted fourteen Myanmar military students, while hundreds of them were already studying in other universities in Moscow.

He distinguishes between two types of Burmese military students that he met in Russia. One group was insular, preferring the company of other military personnel, and largely confining themselves to a special classroom designated for Myanmar students. This limited their interaction with the wider international and Russian student bodies. The other group was more inquisitive, viewing their time in Moscow as an invaluable opportunity. They actively sought out interactions with international students and embraced a broader worldview. It was among this more open group that Wai Yan Phyto Naing found what he describes as "outstanding students," those who he felt might bring a level of sophistication and nuance to their thinking. The difference between these two groups hinted at the potential for cracks in the military's monolithic ideology, suggesting that exposure to a broader worldview, even within an authoritarian setting, can inspire new perspectives.

However, when the 2021 coup plunged Myanmar into chaos, Wai Yan Phyto Naing found himself in a precarious position. There had been a job awaiting him back home, but the coup threw everything into a state of heightened uncertainty. When the few civilian students in Moscow reached out to him, seeking his advice on protesting the junta in front of the Myanmar Embassy and the Russian Foreign Ministry, he cautioned them, acutely aware of their vulnerability. He warned them, "We are not in America or other countries promoting democracy, we are in Russia which is a risky place for us. We are not also a large group of 700 or 800 military students; we are only 20 civilian students." They settled on publishing a public statement, which he drafted himself, intentionally using very diplomatic terms to

mitigate risk, even at the protest of fellow students who felt his language was too soft.

In spite of Wai Yan Phyto Naing's caution and diplomacy, rumors that he actively organized the protests reached Myanmar, causing immense worry for his parents. He describes how the defense attaché at the Myanmar Embassy in Russia confronted him, expressing anger at his participation in the published statement and demanding support for the junta. However, despite the pressure, Wai Yan Phyto Naing refused to be intimidated.

His relationship with military students after the coup was complex. Some, fearing for his safety, urged him to stop voicing anti-military sentiment. Others just warned him to be careful. But to Wai Yan Phyto Naing's chagrin, a few were vocal supporters of the coup, demonstrating a deeply ingrained belief in their presumed role as protectors of the country. He saw a wide, ideological chasm among the students.

Regardless of this ideological divide, however, he observed no initial interest in defection. Only much later, after the coup had worsened, did he hear of some defecting; a few even contacted him seeking advice. But he actually encouraged one to remain in the military, hoping he could be "a force for change as a military general," reflecting Wai Yan Phyto Naing's persistent belief in internal reform.

He had also been a journalist in Myanmar before his studies in Moscow, which had gained him access to various political factions, including the NLD. However, he never harbored full trust in political parties because he believes that harmony in Myanmar's domestic political situation is essential. He criticizes the NLD's constant, strong disagreement with the junta, arguing that actions should prioritize the country's welfare over party or organizational interests. His perspective suggests a pragmatism rooted in Myanmar's long history of military rule, a belief that true progress necessitates some accommodation, however imperfect, with existing power structures.

He acknowledges the criticism leveled against revered monks like Sayadaw for not publicly condemning the military junta. However, having known him personally for decades and considering him a “second father,” Wai Yan is able to offer a more compassionate, if still questioning, interpretation. For example, he believes that Sayadaw remained silent after the coup for strategic reasons, possibly to prevent more violence and protect his young followers—a view he acknowledges that other Burmese dismiss as naïve or even apologist thinking. He adds here that he once heard that Sayadaw privately asked military leaders not to harm civilians, although notes that it’s not clear it resonated. Wai Yan Phyo Naing highlights a pattern where both politicians and the military cozy up to monks when it serves their agenda, only to later criticize them later as the cause of Myanmar’s social and economic problems.

His complex and nuanced perspective about monastics has had some fallout in his personal life: former younger disciples of his teacher criticize Dhammaduta Sayadaw for not more vocally standing up against military junta atrocities, which causes Wai Yan Phyo Naing deep sadness. He believes they don’t fully understand the complexities of being in an influential religious position under the military junta, emphasizing that while he may critique his own elders and teachers, he still pays them full respect by not blaming them directly. He sees this as a broader societal issue in Myanmar, where people struggle to separate opinion from status. Wai Yan Phyo Naing accepts that his own view may be biased due to his profound connection with Dhammaduta Sayadaw, and the intensity of the criticism from those he considers his “second family” deeply saddens him, creating rifts he hopes will eventually heal.

Recently, Wai Yan Phyo Naing began working with migrant laborers at Raks Thai Foundation, and this has shifted his view about the relative importance of politics, as he has since come to realize that “politics is not the only solution for us.” He believes that the specific nature of politics in Myanmar, characterized by decades of military rule, and even under the more

open era of the NLD government, has caused the nation to “lose the opportunity to promote public education and development and social science.” Wai Yan Phyo Naing argues that this intense political focus, prioritizing control and stability above all else, has historically diverted essential resources away from social sectors and led to tight state control over information. This environment, where even cultural norms can be leveraged or neglected by the state, can create persistent taboos around important topics like sexual health, thereby undermining public well-being and hindering progress.

For Wai Yan Phyo Naing, this highlights his conviction that a holistic approach to national development, extending far beyond mere political struggle, is essential for Myanmar’s future, and he feels a deep longing for trust to be rebuilt within its fractured society. He also notes a significant shift in the junta’s alignment to a developing distrust of China, with whom ties had once been very close, and a growing partnership with Russia. The large number of Myanmar military students sent to Russia annually, coupled with the junta leader’s preference for Russian military equipment, suggests a deliberate balancing act vis-a-vis its neighboring giant. He explains that Russia historically viewed Myanmar not as a strategic political partner per se, but more a “strategic customer” because of its significant military equipment purchases and student exchanges. However, that is changing in the current international climate, with Europe’s strong stance against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and as the Myanmar regime now more directly aligns itself with Russia.

In the end, Wai Yan Phyo Naing expresses a deep, personal anguish over the ongoing conflict in his country: “I really hope fighting and killing each other is not the real solution for my country.”

LISTEN TO THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/6/15/episode-357-from-russia-with-anxiety>



UN ESTIMATES 2.5 MILLION REFUGEES WILL NEED RESETTLING IN 2026

An estimated 2.5 million refugees worldwide will need to be resettled next year, the UN said 24 June, at a time when the United States but also other nations are shrinking resettlement access.

UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee agency, said the needs were down slightly from this year, when around 2.9 million refugees are estimated to need resettlement.

"This is mainly due to the changed situation in Syria, which has allowed for voluntary returns," UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo told reporters in Geneva.

"We are seeing some people pull out of resettlement processes in favour of plans to go home to rebuild," she added.

Mantoo said that in 2026, the largest refugee populations likely to need to be resettled were Afghans, Syrians, South Sudanese, Rohingya from Myanmar, and Congolese.

Most of the refugees will need resettling from major host countries including Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Uganda, she said.

The announcement came as the UNHCR's resettlement efforts face towering hurdles.

"In 2025... resettlement quotas are expected to be the lowest in two decades, falling below the levels seen even during the Covid-19 pandemic, when many countries paused their programmes," Mantoo said.

Part of the decline is linked to the United States -- long the world's biggest resettler of refugees -- which has now slammed its doors shut.

Shortly after returning to the White House in January, President Donald Trump halted the US refugee resettlement programme.

Trump's predecessor Joe Biden had embraced the programme designed to facilitate legal resettlement of vetted refugees, resettling over 100,000 refugees in the United States last year.

Mantoo stressed though that the problem was not with just one country.

"We have indications that a number of countries are reducing or adjusting quotas," she said.

Stressing that resettlement among other things "offers a concrete alternative to dangerous journeys", Mantoo urged countries to "sustain their programmes and increase their intake".

In recognition that the needs far outstrip the available spots, she said that the international community had set itself a goal of resettling 120,000 refugees in 2026.

"Recent history shows that this is achievable," she said.

Last year, she said that despite the challenges, the UNHCR supported the resettlement of 116,000 refugees globally.

"Every place is invaluable for those fleeing danger."

Earlier this month UNHCR said a record 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes at the end of 2024.

But that figure dropped to 122.1 million by the end of April this year, as Syrians began returning home after years of turmoil.

AFP



Unlock the future of AI

Generative AI | Agentic AI | Physical AI

Photo: AFP

AI IS LEARNING TO LIE, SCHEME, AND THREATEN ITS CREATORS

The world's most advanced AI models are exhibiting troubling new behaviors - lying, scheming, and even threatening their creators to achieve their goals.

In one particularly jarring example, under threat of being unplugged, Anthropic's latest creation Claude 4 lashed back by blackmailing an engineer and threatened to reveal an extramarital affair.

Meanwhile, ChatGPT-creator OpenAI's o1 tried to download itself onto external servers and denied it when caught red-handed.

These episodes highlight a sobering reality: more than two years after ChatGPT shook the world, AI researchers still don't fully understand how their own creations work.

Yet the race to deploy increasingly powerful models

continues at breakneck speed.

This deceptive behavior appears linked to the emergence of "reasoning" models - AI systems that work through problems step-by-step rather than generating instant responses.

According to Simon Goldstein, a professor at the University of Hong Kong, these newer models are particularly prone to such troubling outbursts.

"O1 was the first large model where we saw this kind of behavior," explained Marius Hobbhahn, head of Apollo Research, which specializes in testing major AI systems.

These models sometimes simulate "alignment" -- appearing to follow instructions while secretly pursuing different objectives.

'Strategic kind of deception'

For now, this deceptive behavior only emerges when researchers deliberately stress-test the models with extreme scenarios.

But as Michael Chen from evaluation organization METR warned, "It's an open question whether future, more capable models will have a tendency towards honesty or deception."

The concerning behavior goes far beyond typical AI "hallucinations" or simple mistakes.

Hobbhahn insisted that despite constant pressure-testing by users, "what we're observing is a real phenomenon. We're not making anything up."

Users report that models are "lying to them and making up evidence," according to Apollo Research's co-founder.

"This is not just hallucinations. There's a very strategic kind of deception."

The challenge is compounded by limited research resources.

While companies like Anthropic and OpenAI do engage external firms like Apollo to study their systems, researchers say more transparency is needed.

As Chen noted, greater access "for AI safety research would enable better understanding and mitigation of deception."

Another handicap: the research world and non-profits "have orders of magnitude less compute resources than AI companies. This is very limiting," noted Mantas Mazeika from the Center for AI Safety (CAIS).

No rules

Current regulations aren't designed for these new problems.

The European Union's AI legislation focuses primarily on how humans use AI models, not on preventing the models themselves from misbehaving.

In the United States, the Trump administration shows little interest in urgent AI regulation, and Congress may even prohibit states from creating their own AI rules.

Goldstein believes the issue will become more prominent as AI agents - autonomous tools capable of performing complex human tasks - become widespread.

"I don't think there's much awareness yet," he said.

All this is taking place in a context of fierce competition.

Even companies that position themselves as safety-focused, like Amazon-backed Anthropic, are "constantly trying to beat OpenAI and release the newest model," said Goldstein.

This breakneck pace leaves little time for thorough safety testing and corrections.

"Right now, capabilities are moving faster than understanding and safety," Hobbhahn acknowledged, "but we're still in a position where we could turn it around."

Researchers are exploring various approaches to address these challenges.

Some advocate for "interpretability" - an emerging field focused on understanding how AI models work internally, though experts like CAIS director Dan Hendrycks remain skeptical of this approach.

Market forces may also provide some pressure for solutions.

As Mazeika pointed out, AI's deceptive behavior "could hinder adoption if it's very prevalent, which creates a strong incentive for companies to solve it."

Goldstein suggested more radical approaches, including using the courts to hold AI companies accountable through lawsuits when their systems cause harm.

He even proposed "holding AI agents legally responsible" for accidents or crimes - a concept that would fundamentally change how we think about AI accountability.

AFP



OVER THE BORDERLINE

"Higher education is slow to keep pace, actually, with the people that embody it."

This critique for the Insight Myanmar Podcast by Professor Lahra Smith frames an expansive and analytical conversation that draws interesting and informative parallels between Africa's and Myanmar's political trajectories. Smith argues that to understand the struggles that countries like Myanmar are going through today, they must be viewed as part of broader, global patterns, and Smith brings in Sudan as an illustrative example. While there are obviously significant differences in nuance and detail between the situations in Myanmar and Sudan, the broader political and historical themes link the two nations in informative, and at times, surprising ways.

Smith, a political science professor at Georgetown University specializing in East African politics, emphasizes the colonial mindsets that still haunt and deeply affect much of academia. She buttresses this assertion by noting that although she specializes in East Africa, institutions might well expect professors with her specialty to teach about all of Africa, with "Africa" often referring to the countries located south of the Sahara. Sub-Saharan Africa is then contrasted with North Africa, which is often lumped in with the "Middle East," itself a colonial concept. Smith highlights

how at Georgetown, collaborative efforts are made to disrupt these artificial and inaccurate distinctions. This is especially the case when teaching and researching about a country like Sudan, a country that straddles both regions. "We never do a Sudan program that is not collaborative between our two programs," she explains.

Smith elaborates on Sudan's situation, noting that it lies within a broader band of African countries susceptible to coups; in fact, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Chad, and Sudan are often referred to pejoratively as the coup belt. While cautious about overly homogenizing the situation, Smith emphasizes the shared roots of these countries' dissatisfaction with post-colonial governance and continued, foreign interference. In countries like Burkina Faso and Mali, military coups gained popular support in part just because they were seen as pushing back against entrenched corruption tied to, in their case, French interests.

However, Smith is under no illusion about what typically follows these coups: while military governments may initially have some public support, they often engage in their own brutal oppression and rarely represent a true break from corruption. This is one bit of shared history that ties together Sudan's recent fate with that of Myanmar. Both modern nations were cobbled together from the British colonial empire, with the legacy of corrupt military regimes that justify their repressive rule with promises of security and development they have never delivered—security and development needs that in large part were themselves caused, or at least exacerbated, by colonial policies.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/6/5/episode-353-over-the-borderline>



MYANMAR JUNTA CONTINUES TO OBSTRUCT EARTHQUAKE RELIEF DESPITE PR SHOW

While Myanmar's military junta showcased Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win inspecting earthquake damage in Naypyidaw markets and housing complexes, the regime's theatrical response masks a disturbing pattern of obstructing life-saving humanitarian aid given the over 5,352 people killed and 11,404 injured in the March earthquake.

The junta continued airstrikes and imposed internet shutdowns in severely affected areas, making it extremely difficult to contact affected communities and assess the situation.

A few hours after the earthquake, the military junta continued its airstrike bombings, targeting major areas in the Sagaing Region that were already affected by the disaster, resulting in the fatalities of 72 civilians

While Soe Win performed his inspection tour for state media, Sagaing, a major township of 300,000

people 15 kilometres from the epicentre, did not encounter any international aid organisations or medical teams for the first 10 days.

Human Rights Watch reported that the junta had seized aid meant for survivors in Mandalay and confiscated food supplies being transported from Mandalay into the Sagaing Region.

The junta's systematic obstruction follows a well-established pattern. In previous natural disasters, including Cyclone Mocha in 2023 and Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the Myanmar military has refused to authorize travel and visas for aid workers.

The junta has been hindering relief efforts by investigating aid workers, stopping, and extorting them at military checkpoints, and requiring humanitarian workers to obtain permission to enter.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR NETIZENS WISH FOR JUNTA CHIEF'S AIRCRAFT TO CRASH DURING FOREIGN VISITS

Social media users in Myanmar have openly expressed wishes for junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's aircraft to crash following his recent visits to Belarus and Russia, with critics calling him a "brutal dictator" and expressing their wishes that he not return to the country.

Myanmar junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing departed for Belarus on June 25, 2025, to attend the Eurasian Economic Forum, before proceeding to Russia's Buryatia region on June 28.

Photos showing Min Aung Hlaing and his wife Kyu Kyu Hla disembarking from their aircraft together sparked a wave of hostile comments from social media users who directly called for harm to befall the junta leader.

Facebook users expressed their anger through posts wishing for aircraft accidents. A user wrote directly, "May Min Aung Hlaing's plane malfunction and crash." Another commented: "Don't come back." A third user posted: "Storms, lightning, and airplanes - please do your duty."

The hostile reactions intensified over revelations about the junta chief's expensive aircraft purchases using state funds. Reports indicate that in February, the Myanmar military agreed to spend nearly \$60 million from the state budget to purchase an Airbus A319-115 (MSN 5193) aircraft.

This aircraft, along with others in Min Aung Hlaing's

fleet, is reportedly used by his family for overseas shopping trips.

Social media users criticized the junta's misuse of state funds. A user wrote, "This guy (Min Aung Hlaing) should be prosecuted. He should be taken to court for unnecessarily misusing the state budget."

Users drew stark comparisons between Min Aung Hlaing's aircraft purchases and the treatment of ousted democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta has charged Aung San Suu Kyi with five counts of corruption related to the rental and purchase of helicopters intended for public use during natural disasters and state emergencies.

A Facebook user highlighted this contrast, "The person who bought helicopters for the people (Aung San Suu Kyi) was sent to prison under unjust laws by the unjust person who is now buying private planes with the country's money."

Another user wrote, "These good people - the civilian government bought helicopters for emergency use during natural disasters, and for this, they accused the democracy leader of misusing the state budget and imprisoned her under various charges. But he himself bought a plane worth over \$60 million with the people's money and state budget for his whole family's personal use. This is extremely unjust - the tyranny of this general is too obvious."

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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