

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

● Rescued scam center workers
in Myawaddy, Myanmar

**BURMA'S CYBER
SCAM CENTERS**
A Global Security Crisis,
Now Targeting Americans

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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.

CHINA'S QUIET WAR AGAINST FREEDOM IN EMBATTLED MYANMAR

By mid-2025, Myanmar's brutal civil conflict shows no sign of slowing. While resistance forces continue to fight for democracy, they face a powerful and less-visible adversary: China. Though publicly neutral, Beijing has become the military junta's lifeline - arming it, funding it, and shielding it diplomatically. As the death toll climbs and resistance groups face worsening ammunition and food shortages, China's involvement is tipping the balance in favour of tyranny.

When Myanmar's military seized power in a 2021 coup, most of the world condemned the action. Not China. Beijing neither denounced the coup nor cut ties with the regime. Instead, it welcomed junta officials to international summits and quietly offered legitimacy. While Western powers imposed sanctions, China became the junta's economic and political safety net.

That support goes far beyond diplomacy. Chinese-made fighter jets, drones, and armoured vehicles are now key weapons in the junta's arsenal. These tools have enabled a relentless campaign of airstrikes against resistance-controlled areas, killing civilians and devastating infrastructure. Surveillance systems, reportedly supplied by Chinese firms, help the military track opposition networks in cities and along strategic border areas.

As one resistance fighter in Karenni State told a media outlet: "Every week, the junta sends drones overhead. We have no answer. The weapons they use - many are Chinese. The people suffer while Beijing pretends it is not involved."

The support isn't just military. China continues to pump billions into projects tied to its Belt and Road Initiative, including oil and gas pipelines and the massive deep-sea port in Rakhine State. These projects offer the junta much-needed revenue and legitimacy. In return, the military ensures Chinese assets

remain secure - even amid the wider collapse of law and order.

Ironically, China also maintains ties with some ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) opposing the junta. Groups like the Kachin Independence Army and the United Wa State Army have received Chinese arms and pressure to avoid attacks on Chinese infrastructure. In November 2023, Chinese envoys reportedly brokered a pause in resistance operations around key transport routes in northern Shan State. The move fractured coordination between EAOs and the civilian-led National Unity Government (NUG), which is struggling to unify opposition under one democratic banner.

The result? A resistance movement strained from all sides. Junta airstrikes have become more precise and deadly. Trade restrictions from China have tightened, cutting off fuel, medicine, and food to rebel-held areas. And ceasefires pushed by Beijing have disrupted joint offensives, allowing the military to regroup.

Beijing claims its goal is regional stability, but critics say it's propping up a war machine. China sees Myanmar through the lens of strategic assets - not human rights, and that is why it supports both sides, but ultimately favours the junta to protect its investments.

As the resistance holds on with dwindling resources, China's shadow looms large. The longer the conflict drags on, the clearer it becomes - without Beijing's support, the junta's grip on power might already be slipping. Instead, China's quiet war continues through the supply of helicopters, weaponry, trade deals and closed borders.

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CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

3 EDITORIAL

6 Burma's Cyber Scam Centers: A Global Security Crisis, Now Targeting Americans – Antonio Graceffo

10 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR
Analysis & Insight

14 JUNTA AFFAIRS

Letters to POTUS: Min Aung Hlaing's Attempted Diplomatic Coup

16 Myanmar's junta continues party approvals ahead of controversial planned election

17 Belarus signs deal with Myanmar to protect military secrets

18 JFM calls for boycott of Belarusian universities supporting Myanmar junta

19 Myanmar drifts toward crisis as junta gains diplomatic ground, ICG warns

20 Indian military intelligence chief meets Myanmar junta deputy chief amid cross-border tensions

21 Article about Tay Za's Daughter removed from Italian Vogue Magazine website

22 Suu Kyi barred from Martyrs' Day for 5th year as junta chief attends for first time since coup

23 COMMENTARY

To Negotiate or Not? It Depends When, With Whom, and About What – Igor Blazevic



25 CORE DEVELOPMENTS

- 25** National Unity Government calls on ASEAN to condemn Myanmar's military junta
- 26** NUG says 18 ministers and deputies operating inside Myanmar
- 27** SAC-M report accuses China of enabling Myanmar Junta's bomb production
- 28** Six Myanmar junta troops killed in ambush near Pakokku airport
- 29** DKBA-linked kidnapper killed, four others captured in Myawaddy ransom case
- 30** Defecting soldier says Myanmar junta officers executed retreating troops on Rakhine front line
- 31** Myanmar junta claims recapture of Nawngkhio town near military academy
- 32** Thousands displaced in Kani as junta flotilla moves up the Chindwin River accompanied by airstrikes
- 33** Arakan Rohingya National Council (ARNC) formed to reclaim identity and seek justice
- 34** Myanmar junta airstrike mistakenly hits own troops in Kyaukphyu, injuring at least 19 soldiers
- 35** PDF outpost falls in Gyobingauk as Myanmar junta advances across Thayarwaddy District
- 36** Ceremonies held across regions for People's Military Service Training 15
- 37** Myanmar junta airstrikes injure five in Mawchi as attacks intensify

- 38** Shelling by Myanmar military kills four, including CDM teacher and PDF member in Magway's Yesagyo
- 39** Fierce battles along Myanmar's Sittaung river leave 40 junta troops dead in Yedashe
- 40** Dengue outbreak infects over 30 Myanmar children in Sittwe relief camps
- 41** Earthquake strikes Mandalay early morning, sparking panic among residents
- 42** NGOs urge Thailand to allow Myanmar refugees to work legally
- 44** Myanmar organizations urge South Korea to reject junta's planned election
- 46 ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**
Over 11 million refugees risk losing aid because of funding cuts: UN
- 47** More countries become vocal against Chinese aggression in South China Sea
- 49 COLUMNS**
INSIGHT MYANMAR – The Ripple Effect

50 JUNTA WATCH

51 SOCIAL WATCH

Cover photo of rescued scam centre workers in Myawaddy by AFP





Rescued scam center workers in Myawaddy, Burma. Photo: AFP

BURMA'S CYBER SCAM CENTERS: A GLOBAL SECURITY CRISIS, NOW TARGETING AMERICANS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Against the backdrop of Burma's civil war, cyber scam centers have expanded across the country, becoming a major source of revenue for criminal networks and armed groups. These operations often occupy former casinos and hotels built by Chinese investors prior to the pandemic. When COVID-19 shut down cross-border travel and gambling, criminal groups shifted their focus to online fraud, repurposing the facilities as scam compounds.

Many workers are lured by fake job offers and trafficked into Burma, where they are held in brutal, prison-like conditions and forced, under threat of violence, to carry out online fraud. Using scripts and fake profiles, they build trust with victims over weeks or months before duping them. These operations, known as "pig butchering," rely on romance and investment scams to target victims globally. Last year, the United Nations estimates that at least 120,000 people were working in such centers in Burma. In 2023 alone, these scams stole an estimated \$64 billion worldwide, including more than \$5.5 billion from U.S. victims.

Chinese crime syndicates, often backed by junta officials and local militias, have expanded their operations across Burma's border regions with China, India, Laos, and Thailand. These areas, largely controlled by ethnic armed groups seeking autonomy, have become havens for criminal activity. In northern Shan State and Laos's Bokeo Province, lawless zones like Laukkai and Mong La have been transformed into city-sized scam compounds. Unregistered casinos, scam centers, and other illegal businesses now operate freely across this shared criminal zone, beyond the effective control of any country's government.

One example is the Shwe Kokko Project, a China-backed development zone in Karen State near the Thai border, originally promoted as a new city with casinos and real estate. It is now widely recognized as a hub for online scams, gambling, and human trafficking. The project is a joint venture between the Border Guard Force, now rebranded as the Karen National Army (KNA), and Yatai International, owned by Chinese-Cambodian national She Zhijiang, who is wanted by Beijing. The KNA



A security guard watches over rescued scam center workers in Myawaddy. Photo: AFP

reportedly controls the project and channels up to half of its \$192 million in annual revenue to the Burmese military. Other armed groups, including factions of the Karen National Union (KNU), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and local militias, also profit by taxing or protecting these criminal operations.

Burma's scam industry has undergone a major geographic shift since mid-2024 in response to growing international pressure. In May, the Kayin Border Guard Force (BGF), led by Saw Chit Thu, issued an order for all foreign-operated online businesses in Myawaddy Township to leave by October 31 or face prosecution. The BGF began distributing eviction notices to online casinos and scam centers.

Relocations began even before the deadline, with scam operations shifting to new hubs in Payathonzu (Three Pagodas Pass), Falu, Kyauk Khet, Min Let Pan, and Waw Lay. According to C4ADS and other sources, this migration was coordinated between ethnic armed groups: the BGF handled transport from Myawaddy,

while the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) assisted in securing land and housing. Reports indicate the DKBA and BGF charged roughly 100,000 baht (US\$2,800) per Chinese business owner and 30,000 baht per worker. Between May and June alone, around 2,000 Chinese nationals reportedly arrived in Payathonzu, including roughly 600 senior figures and staff from Shwe Kokko operations.

Since mid-2023, the DKBA has exercised de facto administrative control over Payathonzu, while junta forces remain confined to base. Chinese nationals residing in town are now reportedly required to pay the DKBA a monthly fee of 10,000 baht (about US\$285), which is shared between the DKBA, junta troops, and other local militias. Despite the DKBA's denial of involvement in human trafficking, at least three compounds in Payathonzu have been linked to abuse and forced labor, and human trafficking. Meanwhile, the October 2024 deadline passed with no mass exodus from Myawaddy, suggesting scam operations remain active in both locations. Rather than disappearing, the industry



Chinese nationals rescued from a scam center in Burma arrive in Thailand on their way home. Photo: AFP

appears to have adapted by dispersing into new zones under shifting local protection.

The Border Guard Force (BGF), now rebranded as the Karen National Army (KNA), continues to protect and profit from scam centers in Myawaddy and Shwe Kokko. Survivors from KK Park, one such center, reported that compound guards wore KNA insignia. Despite its 2024 rebranding, the KNA has maintained close co-operation with the Burmese military.

In recent months, joint crackdowns by Thai authorities, including coordinated electricity and internet blackouts, have led to the rescue of thousands of trafficked and coerced workers. Despite these efforts, scam compounds along the Thai-Burma border remain active, with estimates suggesting that up to 100,000 people are still trapped inside.

Scam syndicates have increasingly expanded into major cities, especially Yangon, as crackdowns intensified in areas like Shwe Kokko and Laukkai. Operating under names like Global Cyber 8 Co., these fraud networks disguise themselves as tech firms and run online scams from upscale housing estates such as Nawaday Garden in Hlaing Tharyar Township. The Irrawaddy has documented Global Cyber 8's operations there since October 2023. CNN similarly reported that earlier border crackdowns pushed these groups into the country's interior, where they have now established compounds in residential neighborhoods including Sanchaung, Thingangyun, Kamayut, and Mingalar Taung Nyunt.

Despite the involvement of individuals within its ranks, the KNU as an organization has maintained a formal no-tolerance policy toward casinos, drugs, and scam operations. Of the various armed groups in the region, it is considered the most resistant to organized crime. Earlier this year, KNU forces seized Htee Khee, a strategic trade hub in Tanintharyi Region near the Thai border. Htee Khee, located in Brigade 4 territory, was once the KNU's headquarters before it relocated in 2012. Known for its jungle casinos in 2019, the area is now reportedly drawing interest from opportunists and business groups following the seizure.

Scam centers increasingly target Chinese and American victims via messaging apps, using fake identities to pose as romantic partners or financial advisors before luring victims into fraudulent cryptocurrency investments. Some operations obtain WhatsApp numbers and personal data from foreigners, then sell the information to other syndicates. To staff these schemes, recruiters post deceptive job ads in Telegram groups, often seeking Chinese or English speakers. Base salaries start at 500,000 kyats (about \$142), but trilingual applicants can earn up to 3 million kyats (\$857), highlighting the value of English proficiency for targeting U.S. victims. One former worker fluent in English and Chinese said he was quickly promoted to trainer and translator.

On May 5, 2025, the U.S. Treasury Department designated the Karen National Army (KNA) as a transnational criminal organization, sanctioning its leader Saw Chit Thu and his two sons for enabling cyber scams, human trafficking, and cross-border smuggling from KNA-controlled areas along the Thai border. However, the sanctions will not stop the scam centers from operating. Despite territorial shifts during the war, these operations continue and, as one of the only businesses able to remain viable during the war, they are unlikely to be eradicated.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert with lengthy experience of reporting on Burma.



MYANMAR JUNTA STEPS UP USE OF FEARED DRONES AND PARAMOTORS

There has been an increasing trend of the Myanmar military regime using drones and paramotors to fight against People Defense Forces (PDFs) or Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) in what seems to have evolved into a different war tactic.

With the resistance movements becoming more powerful and mobile, the junta has resorted to use of low-cost aerial technology to ensure it retains control over disputed territories and also provide replacement to ground forces that are increasingly becoming small in number.

Drones have proved to be an essential gadget in surveillance, artillery organization, and pinpointed attacks. A lot of them come out of China, or they have been locally adapted, and they are already utilized in

the combat regions like Sagaing, Magway, and Kayah states. Other than direct attacks, frequent drone landings on villages aim at intimidating civilians to provoke displacement.

Motorised paragliders, called paramotors, have additionally been noted in such areas of mountains as Chin and Karenni, which enable the military to reach remote geography and carry out small surprise attacks. Yet, those are not effective due to weather conditions as well as exposure to resistance fire.

Contrary to this, the resistance forces have now started using anti-drone tactics, such as signal jamming, disguise, and home-made weapons.

Other groups have ventured as well into using drones in their personal encounters and in turn led to a burgeoning drone war in the skies. Although these



technologies have a tactical benefit to the junta, they also cause a high threat of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. As analysts have warned, such a technological armament may further extend the war, prolonging the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

Junta steps up pushback in Sagaing

The show of force by the Myanmar junta has escalated in the Sagaing Region in the past month through airstrikes, bombardment as well as crackdown on civil infrastructure. It continues to be a strong issue of resort as People Defense Forces (PDFs) continue to be embedded in the area. On July 11, a Buddhist monastery in Lin Ta Lu Village was struck by a junta air strike where at least 23 displaced civilians were killed, and more than 30 were injured.

Humanitarian groups criticized the assault terming it as the element of wider trend towards attacking civilian shelters. On June 21 a previous attempt by junta troops to take control of strategic roads between Sagaing and Shwebo also triggered fighting in the area near Yonepin Kan and Sar Taung that left hundreds of vehicles stranded and provided additional transport disruption.

There was also increased use of heavy artillery. During the middle of May, regime forces shelled Than Min Kan Village and a monastery in Chaung U Township killing one civilian and injuring a monk. Further into July, people were still attacked in non-military targets, which led to people being displaced and living in fear.

Meanwhile, the junta has stepped up its crackdown on civil society. In the beginning of May at least six aid



The lucky ones? Scam centre workers rounded up on the Thai-Myanmar border. Photo: AFP

workers were arrested on the accusations of supporting PDFs. The activities of local humanitarian organizations are now carried out underground, which makes it extremely difficult to transfer food, medicine, and shelter to thousands of internally displaced persons.

The situation of healthcare in Sagaing is on the brink of collapse, so the issue of attacks on clinics and hospitals is not a new phenomenon. Most medical workers have already escaped because of arrests and pressure, leaving civilian people without any treatment and in face of ongoing fighting and recent natural disasters.

Notwithstanding all this militancy, the analysts estimate that PDFs exercise control over up to 75 percent of the region with only a few towns and military bases remaining under the control of the junta. Far from consolidating power, the regime's actions in Sagaing are increasingly viewed as desperate

efforts to regain ground against a growing and resilient resistance movement.

Scam hubs relocating due to crackdown


Late January 2025, the authorities from Myanmar, Thailand, and China activated a multi-nation takedown of cyber scam compounds clustering in Myawaddy Township, Kayin State (host to infamous sites like KK Park and Shwe Kokko (Yatai New City)) centred on the border area. These venues had all transformed into a prime venue for romance and investment scam operations, human trafficking, and forced labour under militia jurisdiction, especially those of Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA).

Thai officials made a major contribution when they disconnected electricity, internet, fuel and gas

connections to major scam districts in the middle of February, which was prompted by bilateral pressure after a Chinese actor was kidnapped by traffickers. BGF and Myanmar authorities then issued reports of dismantling actions, and freed over 7,000 persons confined in these camps, some of whom were Asian and African migrants who were trafficked.

Although the key hubs have been taken down, professionals note that the fraud networks are merely relocating, becoming more obscure and technologically advanced. Satellite pictures prove that although compounds like KK Park and Shwe Kokko have been disturbed, syndicates have gone to places like Minletpan and other border enclaves complete with all the trappings of scam operations. According to critics, unless the financial and military supporters – the junta as well as the militias on their side – are dismantled, the scam networks will keep appearing in new areas.

Victims have been evacuated to Thailand before being. Others end up being detained in congested centres controlled by militias such as the DKBA with limited access to food, medical, and sanitary facilities. There are hundreds left stranded, some of whom are unable to go home because they do not have funds to travel or due to bureaucracy.



A letter from The White House to Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has stirred up diplomatic trouble. Photo: AFP

LETTERS TO POTUS: MIN AUNG HLAING'S ATTEMPTED DIPLOMATIC COUP

NICHOLAS KONG

On July 7, 2025, US President Donald J. Trump issued a series of standardized letters announcing new tariff policies to world leaders. Among the recipients—whether by protocol or oversight—was Min Aung Hlaing, the military junta leader and self-appointed chairman of Myanmar's State Administrative Council (SAC). What may have seemed like a bureaucratic formality became the first move in an attempted diplomatic heist.

Just two days later, on July 9, Min Aung Hlaing replied with a letter laced in propaganda, treating the president's message as de facto recognition of his illegitimate regime. In a grotesque twist, he likened his 2021 coup in Myanmar to the contested 2020 U.S. presidential election—an opportunistic and cynical comparison meant to bolster his standing among authoritarian allies and legitimize his ongoing reign of terror.

From Tariffs to Legitimacy

Excerpt from President Trump's Letter (July 7, 2025):

"Starting on August 1, 2025, we will charge Myanmar a Tariff of only 40% on all Burmese products sent into the United States, separate from all Sectoral Tariffs... We look forward to working with you as your Trading Partner for many years to come."

Excerpt from Min Aung Hlaing's Reply (July 9, 2025):

"We would like to propose to reduce the current tariff rates to the range of 10%-20%... Similar to the challenges you encountered during the 2020 election of the United States, we also experienced major electoral fraud and significant irregularities... Based

on the testimonies... appropriate legal actions were taken... I hereby respectfully request Your Excellency to reconsider easing and lifting the economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar... Myanmar and the United States can enhance the existing bilateral trade relations by balancing tariffs and removing barriers..."

Min Aung Hlaing's response was not mere diplomacy, it was a calculated political maneuver. By manipulating a routine economic message into a public display of international engagement, he sought to blur the lines between legitimate government and military dictatorship.

Letters from a Citizen: Rebuttal and Warning

In response, Nicholas Kong (NK) wrote directly to President Trump on July 8 and again on July 11, expressing deep concern as both a U.S. citizen and an advocate for Myanmar's democratic movement.

Excerpt from NK's letter (July 8, 2025):

"Min Aung Hlaing is not a head of state. He is a war criminal. Engaging with his junta undermines the values of democracy and justice... As you rightly affirmed in your Executive Order, the national emergency declared on February 10, 2021, in response to the military coup, must continue beyond February 10, 2025...The continuation of targeted sanctions would therefore have minimal impact on U.S. interests but immense value in supporting the Burmese people's democratic aspirations... The future Federal Democratic Union of Myanmar stands to be a reliable, fair-trade partner to the United States."

Excerpt from NK's follow-up (July 11, 2025):

"Min Aung Hlaing's attempt to draw parallels between your principled stance on the 2020 U.S. election and his baseless justification for a violent military coup is disgraceful... He has enriched himself by looting Burma's natural resources. Sixty years of military rule has reduced the country to one of the world's least developed countries... He is aligning with

China and Russia, trading Burma's sovereignty for weapons and political cover. His sham election is not a step toward democracy. To compare that charade with the democratic process of the United States is an insult... We, the people who believe in freedom and justice, respectfully ask that your administration reaffirm its clear position: the United States does not recognize Min Aung Hlaing or the SAC as the legitimate government of Burma, and it will continue to stand with the Burmese people in their pursuit of genuine democracy."

These letters are not partisan. They are patriotic. They call for moral clarity and strategic resolve in the face of authoritarian opportunism.

The Stakes of Silence

Diplomatic protocol may seem trivial in times of war and upheaval, but language matters. Recognition—implicit or explicit—carries weight, especially for regimes desperate to validate their power. Min Aung Hlaing has murdered thousands, jailed tens of thousands, and plunged Myanmar into civil war. For him, a letter from the U.S. president is a weapon—not of war, but of legitimacy.


The world must not confuse quiet diplomacy with moral neutrality. As the resistance inside Myanmar fights for survival and a vision of federal democracy, the U.S. must remain unequivocal: we do not negotiate with despots in disguise.

Let us not allow the language of diplomacy to become the language of betrayal.

This Op-Ed was first published in Eurasia Review on 17 July 2025:

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The views expressed in this Op-Ed do not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing hopes a planned national election will offer him legitimacy. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S JUNTA CONTINUES PARTY APPROVALS AHEAD OF CONTROVERSIAL PLANNED ELECTION

Individuals seeking to establish new political parties are continuing to submit applications to the junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC), despite widespread domestic and international rejection of the planned polls as illegitimate.

According to junta-controlled state media, a total of 27 groups have applied to register political parties under the junta's Political Parties Registration Law, a legal framework introduced following the 2021 coup to reshape Myanmar's political landscape.

On 18 July, the UEC announced that two groups — the Peace and Development Party and the New Generation Wamsanu Party — were granted official permission to form political parties after reportedly complying with the registration law and its related regulations.

In contrast, the applications of the People Power for Democracy Party (PPD) and the Li Shaw National Party were rejected. Junta authorities said that PPD failed to meet requirements under Section 4 of the law, while the Li Shaw National Party did not comply with Section 6. The rejections were formalized during the UEC's 30/2025 plenary meeting, using Form C under the Political Party Registration Rule.

To date, 21 parties have received formation approval, while five applications have been denied, according to junta-controlled state media.

Critics say the ongoing party registration process is part of a broader campaign to present a façade of democratic legitimacy as the military junta prepares for an election that many revolutionary forces, opposition parties, and the general public consider to be a sham.

The National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations, and multiple pro-democracy groups have long accused the junta of attempting to entrench military rule through controlled electoral mechanisms excluding key opposition figures and suppressing dissent.

Despite the continued violence and displacement in conflict-affected regions, the junta maintains that it is working toward a "multi-party democratic election," though it has failed to set a definitive date.

Observers note that party approvals granted so far appear to disproportionately favour entities aligned with military interests or formed under restrictive political conditions.



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

BELARUS SIGNS DEAL WITH MYANMAR TO PROTECT MILITARY SECRETS

The Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA) released a statement on 14 July, stating that President Aleksandr Lukashenko signed a law to ratifying an agreement with Myanmar to protect classified information.

The following is the text of the statement.

President Aleksandr Lukashenko signed the law "On ratification of the agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on mutual protection of classified information", BelTA learned from the press service of the Belarusian leader.

The agreement was made to protect state secrets and strengthen bilateral ties, following the official visit of Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing to Belarus on 7 March 2025.

The agreement is designed to ensure mutual protection of classified information and to strengthen friendly relations between the countries. This will create a legal basis for the protection of state secrets of Belarus in the course of bilateral cooperation with Myanmar in the military, military-technical, scientific and other avenues.



Min Aung Hlaing faces pushback over ties to Belarus. Photo: AFP

JFM CALLS FOR BOYCOTT OF BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITIES SUPPORTING MYANMAR JUNTA

On 16 July, Justice For Myanmar (JFM) called on the academic community and international partners to boycott Belarusian universities that are training junta officers and to oppose their complicity in the junta's brutal atrocities in Kyaukphyu.

The statement is as follows.

Belarusian State University signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Yangon and others to enroll Myanmar military students. BSU hosts 10 military personnel, offering programs in military faculties including military law, geo-information, and related subjects.

Belarusian State University of Informatics & Radioelectronics has hosted Myanmar military students researching radio-electronic engineering, especially

for air-defence systems. These students are linked to military factories in Myanmar—Defence Industry 4 (Naypyidaw), DI 20 (Magway), and Myanmar Heavy Industry 10 (Mandalay).

Belarusian State Technological University offers a military training department focused on ground-forces logistics and weaponry. In May 2025, BSTU's principal met Myanmar generals and 34 Myanmar students currently completing advanced military studies.

By providing technical expertise, these universities are aiding war criminals to kill more — not just handing out diplomas.

We call on academics and international partners to boycott these institutions and stand against their complicity in Myanmar junta's atrocities.

MYANMAR DRIFTS TOWARD CRISIS AS JUNTA GAINS DIPLOMATIC GROUND, ICG WARNS

Myanmar's military junta is exploiting shifting regional and global dynamics to consolidate diplomatic recognition despite worsening civil conflict and humanitarian conditions, the International Crisis Group (ICG) warns in a new report released Friday.

The report, "Myanmar's Dangerous Drift: Conflict, Elections and Looming Regional Détente," outlines how China's intervention to prevent regime collapse in 2024, declining Western engagement, and regional diplomatic fatigue are allowing Naypyitaw to regain ground on the international stage – even as it continues to lose territory at home.

The report cautions that geopolitical changes have emboldened the junta, creating dangerous momentum toward international normalization while Myanmar's crisis deepens.

After years of diplomatic isolation, the regime has scored high-level meetings with leaders from India, Thailand, and Malaysia. U.S. recognition of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing in recent tariff correspondence further reflects a shifting global posture. Meanwhile, the abolition of USAID under President Donald Trump and declining humanitarian funding have left Myanmar's population increasingly vulnerable.

ICG warns that the junta's planned elections in December will lack credibility, exclude major opposition parties, and likely spark further violence. Yet the polls may offer foreign governments a convenient pretext to normalize ties with a future nominally civilian, military-backed administration.

China's role is central. After greenlighting a rebel offensive in northern Shan State in 2023, Beijing reversed course in mid-2024, delivering arms and pressuring ethnic armed groups to halt advances. A ceasefire with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) included a Chinese-mediated return of Lashio to junta control, underscoring Beijing's influence.

The ICG notes how China's assertive diplomacy is stabilizing the regime, but at the cost of deepening its entanglement in Myanmar's internal crisis.

Despite some ceasefires, major fronts remain active. The Arakan Army (AA) continues to expand in Rakhine State, while the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) nears control of Bhamo in the north. Junta forces have struggled to retake key terrain and face low morale and overstretched capabilities.

The report urges diplomats to maintain multilateral coordination—especially through the UN and ASEAN—and resist legitimizing the upcoming elections. It also calls for innovative funding strategies to sustain humanitarian aid, including leveraging international financial institutions.

The ICG concludes that rather than drifting toward normalisation, the international community should prepare to seize any opportunity for inclusive peace. At the same time humanitarian aid and other programming should be sustained and conference of any legitimacy to the junta's planned elections avoided.



INDIAN MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF MEETS MYANMAR JUNTA DEPUTY CHIEF AMID CROSS-BORDER TENSIONS

Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Myanmar's junta deputy leader, met with a high-ranking Indian military delegation in Naypyidaw on 16 July, just days after India launched a drone strike on rebel camps inside Myanmar's territory, according to an official statement by the junta.

The Indian delegation was led by Lieutenant General Shrinjay Pratap Singh, Director General of Military Intelligence and Vice Chief of Staff (Intelligence) of the Indian Armed Forces. The visit came three days after the Indian army carried out a cross-border attack targeting United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) camps located in the Naga Self-Administered Zone in Myanmar's Sagaing Region near the India-Myanmar border.

During the meeting at Bayintnaung Villa, the two sides held discussions on strengthening cooperation for peace, stability, the rule of law, and border security, according to a junta report. Topics also included Myanmar's planned general election and India's humanitarian assistance following the recent earthquake in Mandalay Region. However, no further details were disclosed.

The Indian Vice Chief of Staff (Intelligence) was joined by Colonel Jaswinder Singh Gill, India's military attaché to Myanmar, and other senior Indian military officials. On the Myanmar side, General Ye Win Oo and senior officers from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army) were also present.

While the junta emphasized cooperation and bilateral friendship in its statement, it remained silent on India's 13 July drone strike that targeted insurgent camps inside Myanmar. The attack involved drones and rockets, reportedly struck rebel bases in the Naga-controlled area.

The visit and the absence of an official comment on the strike have raised questions over Myanmar's stance on foreign military action within its borders, particularly as the junta continues to face criticism for its own internal conflicts and crackdowns.

Following the meeting, Vice-Senior General Soe Win and Lieutenant General Shrinjay Pratap Singh exchanged commemorative gifts and posed for photographs with attending officials.



Italy: Investigate Rachel Tayza!

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ARTICLE ABOUT TAY ZA'S DAUGHTER REMOVED FROM ITALIAN VOGUE MAGAZINE WEBSITE

On 18 July, Justice for Myanmar (JFM) announced that Italian Vogue magazine removed an article page from its website featuring Rachel, daughter of Tay Za, who supports the military Junta.

The statement is as follows.

Leading fashion magazine Vogue Italia has removed an online feature showcasing US-sanctioned Myanmar crony Rachel Tayza (also known as Htoo Htwe Tayza), following a Justice For Myanmar letter to Vogue's parent company, Condé Nast.

JFM welcomes Vogue Italia's move, which is consistent with their responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and OECD Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct.

Rachel Tayza, daughter of Tay Za, plays a role in and profits from Htoo Group, which is complicit in the Myanmar military's campaign of terror against the people. Htoo Group has brokered arms deals and provides the military and its conglomerates with a source of revenue through land lease payments and other dirty deals.

By giving Rachel Tayza a platform, Vogue Italia had engaged in reputation laundering for a family aiding and abetting international crimes.

But the fight is not over. We are calling on the fashion industry to reject crony couture. The Myanmar military cartel must be dismantled.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing attended the Martyr's Day for the first time since the 2021 coup. Photo: AFP

SUU KYI BARRED FROM MARTYRS' DAY FOR 5TH YEAR AS JUNTA CHIEF ATTENDS FOR FIRST TIME SINCE COUP

Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of independence hero General Aung San, was once again barred from attending the Martyrs' Day ceremony, marking the fifth consecutive year since the military coup that she has been prevented from participating in the national commemoration.

The 78th Martyrs' Day ceremony, held on the morning of 19 July at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Yangon's Bahan Township, was broadcast live by MRTV, which is under the control of the Military Council.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the junta leader, laid a wreath during the event - his first attendance at a Martyrs' Day ceremony since seizing power in the 2021 coup.

The military leader was accompanied by high-ranking officials, including Joint Secretary of the Military Council General Ye Win Oo, members General Nyo Saw and Mahn Nyein Maung, and Coordinating Commander of the Army, Navy, and Air Force General Kyaw Swar Lin.

Last year, Aung San Suu Kyi's brother Aung San U attended the 77th Martyrs' Day ceremony. This year, his son Aung Ye Than represented the family, according to the Military Council.

Following the February 2021 coup, Aung San Suu Kyi has been held in military custody and has not been allowed to take part in Martyrs' Day events since.

The continued restrictions have drawn criticism from pro-democracy groups and members of the public who see her exclusion as a political move aimed at silencing a key symbol of resistance.

On 18 July, a day before the ceremony, Min Aung Hlaing also visited the General Aung San Museum in Bahan Township and the historic Secretariat Office in Yangon's Botahtaung Township - both significant sites tied to General Aung San's legacy.

Martyrs' Day commemorates the assassination of General Aung San and his cabinet members on 19 July 1947, and has traditionally been a day of national unity and remembrance.

Igor Blazevic



TO NEGOTIATE OR NOT? IT DEPENDS WHEN, WITH WHOM, AND ABOUT WHAT

IGOR BLAZEVIC

As Myanmar's crisis deepens, many voices in regional and international diplomatic circles argue that negotiations are the only viable path forward. But the question of negotiation is not so simple. It depends when negotiations are happening, who is negotiating with whom, and crucially, about what.

These questions require a realistic and strategic analysis grounded in power dynamics, political legitimacy, and the goals of the revolutionary movement.

Four Types of Negotiations in the Myanmar Context

1. The Junta's Fake Offer of 'Negotiations'

This is not a genuine proposal. What Min Aung Hlaing and the junta offer is nothing more than a demand for surrender — calling on revolutionary forces to abandon the liberation struggle and accept military dominance over Myanmar's politics, state, and economy.

As part of this deceptive "offer," the junta might promise token seats in parliament, minor roles in government, and access to legal or illegal business opportunities. But the real objective is to divide the revolutionary alliance — to fracture the NUG and EROs, Bamar and ethnic forces — and thereby weaken the

struggle for liberation.

Accepting such a deal would mean legitimizing the junta's control over key levers of power and allowing military cronies and generals' families to continue profiting from the country's most valuable assets.

No revolutionary force in Myanmar should feel tempted by such an arrangement. It amounts to trading heroism, sacrifice, justice and dignity for corrupt spoils.

2. Negotiations Promoted by ASEAN, Neighbors, and the International Community

These so-called "inclusive negotiations," promoted by ASEAN and supported by Myanmar's neighbors and the UN Special Envoy, are often wrapped in diplomatic language. But in substance, they differ little from the junta's own "offer" — they perpetuate military control over the central government under the guise of compromise.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN and the international community have done virtually nothing to reduce the junta's capacity to wage war. There is no serious effort to halt the import of jet fuel, no sanctions on financial flows, even though these pass through neighboring banking systems. The tools are there. The will is not.

Instead, what we see is pressure placed not on the junta, but on revolutionary forces — to accept

negotiations that amount to a soft surrender and entrenchment of military rule under a new label.

3. Internal Military Change Leading to Real Negotiations

A more promising scenario could emerge if the military itself removes Min Aung Hlaing and dismantles the SAC. The military could put Min Aung Hlaing in jail, like the Egyptian military did with Mubarak; or they could kill him, like the Romanian communist secret police executed Ceausescu; or they might allow him to escape abroad, like Marcos and Assad were allowed to do. In such a scenario, genuine negotiations with military representatives might become possible — under clear preconditions.

This would require an immediate halt to military operations, the release of political prisoners, and a full military withdrawal from politics.

If these conditions are met, revolutionary forces should be ready to engage — but only with clarity and unity. Currently, there is no formal agreement among revolutionary actors on who is authorized to negotiate, under what mandate, or within what framework.

There are some useful documents — like the joint statement from the NUG and K3C — that offer hints of the framework under which the revolutionary forces might be ready to negotiate. But more is needed. Will the NUG take the lead? Or will the negotiating team consist of some NUG ministers and some representatives of EROs? Should it be a broader, more inclusive team?

Even in the case of the collapse of the SAC, the military will most likely know who is negotiating on their behalf, and they will know exactly what they want to achieve. They will seek amnesty, institutional preservation, and protection of their interests. Revolutionary forces must be just as prepared — with a clear negotiating mandate, defined red lines, and unity of purpose.

What must be avoided at all costs is a situation where, at a critical moment, the revolutionary forces are divided over who is representing them in negotiations. That is why it is essential to establish clarity now — before such a moment arrives — about who holds the legitimate mandate to negotiate if the military removes Min Aung Hlaing and signals readiness to transfer power to civilian revolutionary forces.

4. Stalemate-Induced Negotiations

A fourth scenario could arise if the war drags on for another year or two, leaving both the junta and revolutionary forces exhausted, without a decisive

victory. In such a case, we could face a frozen conflict — where both sides control territory but neither can prevail.

This kind of negotiation does not bring peace — it freezes war. The Korean Peninsula, Cyprus, and other global examples show us what this looks like: long-term unresolved conflict with periodic instability, and no justice.

Negotiation Without Surrender: A Revolutionary Imperative

There are no simple answers regarding negotiations. Everything depends on timing, power balance, and outcome.

The first two types — the junta's fake offer and the internationally promoted "inclusive dialogue" — should be categorically rejected by the revolutionary forces. Accepting them would mean handing legitimacy back to a criminal and predatory dictatorship at the very moment when it is weakened and fractured.

If the junta is recognized through the fake sham elections — even if it controls only a fraction of territory — it will use that legitimacy to regain power and resources. It will rebuild, and when it does, it will claw back everything the Spring Revolution has won.

That is why negotiations must never be a shortcut to surrender.

Instead, the revolutionary movement must stay united, organized, and clear in its demands. If a real opportunity for negotiation emerges — one based on a full transfer of power and military withdrawal — it must be approached with a common framework, strategic discipline, and an agreed mandate.

There is no room for improvisation. There must be a well-prepared negotiating team, backed by the full weight of the revolutionary alliance, equipped with clear goals and non-negotiable principles.

Only then can negotiations be a tool for democratic and federal transition — not a trap for political defeat.

Igor Blazevic is a European democracy activist with many years of experience in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT CALLS ON ASEAN TO CONDEMN MYANMAR'S MILITARY JUNTA

On 16 July, the National Unity Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement expressing its position on the Joint Communiqué from the 58th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 9 July.

The statement is as follows.

The National Unity Government welcomes the inclusion of several references to the situation in Myanmar in the Joint Communiqué issued at the 58th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held on 9 July 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, under the theme 'Inclusivity and Sustainability'.

The National Unity Government acknowledges and appreciates ASEAN's collective response and swift action, through the AHA Centre, in facilitating relief operations and ensuring timely humanitarian assistance for the people of Myanmar affected by the devastating earthquake on 28 March 2025. The National Unity Government also welcomes ASEAN's decision to conduct a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus and to submit recommendations to the 47th ASEAN Summit, as well as the mandate given to explore new strategies to ensure continuity in the role of the ASEAN Special Envoy on Myanmar.

While the Joint Communiqué expresses deep concern over the escalating conflict and worsening humanitarian situation in Myanmar, and condemns

continued acts of violence against civilians and public facilities while urging all parties to take concrete steps to immediately halt such violence, the National Unity Government remains deeply disappointed by ASEAN's failure to explicitly denounce the military junta—responsible for grave and ongoing war crimes—or to adopt effective measures to hold it accountable.

Although ASEAN has repeatedly reaffirmed the Five-Point Consensus as its primary framework for addressing the political crisis in Myanmar, the military junta has continued to escalate its campaign of terror against the civilian population. On the very day the Joint Communiqué was issued, an airstrike was launched in the Sagaing Federal Unit, killing more than 30 innocent civilians, including children.

Under these circumstances, the military junta's attempt to forcibly organize a sham election represents a clear violation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, particularly its core commitment to ending violence. Yet, ASEAN has failed to issue any warnings or take preventive measures regarding this fraudulent election. The National Unity Government views this omission with deep concern, as it risks indirectly shielding the military junta from accountability.

Since assuming the role of ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy on Myanmar in January 2025, H.E. Tan Sri Othman Hashim has actively engaged with ASEAN Member States, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, neighboring countries, international and regional stakeholders, civil society organizations, humanitarian actors, and think tanks. However, the National Unity Government views the Special Envoy's limited success in exerting effective pressure on the military junta—particularly in securing access to Myanmar and meeting with the country's unlawfully detained legitimate leaders—as indicative of the significant limitations in ASEAN's capacity to effectively address the Myanmar crisis.

Therefore, the National Unity Government strongly urges ASEAN to fully acknowledge and empathize with the aspirations of the Myanmar people and the goals of the Spring Revolution in its efforts to genuinely and effectively resolve Myanmar's political crisis. ASEAN must recognize that the military junta's attempted coup in 2021 and its ensuing violence have severely undermined the vision of a cohesive, peaceful, and people-centred regional community. In this context, the National Unity Government calls on ASEAN to adopt and implement necessary strategies, including exerting pressure and taking concrete, proportionate measures against the military junta.

NUG SAYS 18 MINISTERS AND DEPUTIES OPERATING INSIDE MYANMAR

Eighteen ministers and deputy ministers from the National Unity Government (NUG) are now operating inside Myanmar, actively working in revolutionary strongholds across the country's north and south, according to U Htet Naing Oo, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

"Of the NUG officials, 10 are operating in the north and eight in the south," he told Mizzima, explaining that northern Myanmar includes Kachin State and Sagaing Region, while the south covers Kayin State, Mon State, and Tanintharyi Region. He also noted that six more officials are working in border areas.

Speaking at the launch of the "Aung Pyit Thit Se Bago Tanintharyi" campaign on 13 July, NUG Education and Health Minister Dr. Zaw Wai Soe confirmed that most ministers are directly involved in administering revolutionary territories and leading on-the-ground operations.

He added that some ministers have returned to Myanmar specifically to oversee public defence, civil administration, and community-based policing under the NUG's transitional governance structure.

According to U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Chief Minister's Office, eight of the NUG's 17 ministries are now actively operating in liberated areas. These include the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and Immigration, Health, Education, Federal Union Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, and Labor.

The NUG, formed on 16 April 2021 in the wake of the military coup, is composed of 17 ministries, with 17 Union Ministers and 14 Deputy Ministers. The leadership includes President U Win Myint, Acting President Duwa Lashi La, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and Union Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than.

This public statement follows mounting calls for reform from both revolutionary groups and civilians, who have criticized the NUG for perceived inactivity or delays in governance and military leadership.

At an internal online meeting on 26 November 2024, Acting President Duwa Lashi La emphasized the need for greater visibility and engagement inside the country, saying, "The government cannot be a government in exile."

On 10 June, the NUG also announced that Presidential Spokesperson U Kyaw Zaw, responsible for public communications, would step down from his role.

The NUG's Defence Minister was seen visiting the town of Pinlebu in October 2024, a territory now under resistance control – part of the NUG's ongoing effort to demonstrate active leadership within liberated areas.



SAC-M REPORT ACCUSES CHINA OF ENABLING MYANMAR JUNTA'S BOMB PRODUCTION

A new report from the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) accuses a Chinese state-owned arms manufacturer of enabling the Myanmar military to produce aerial bombs used in airstrikes targeting civilians.

According to SAC-M's investigation, China South Industries Group Corporation and its subsidiary, Hunan Vanguard, have played a critical role in establishing and maintaining bomb production at Myanmar's Defence Industry 21 (DI 21) in Magway Region.

The report, *Factory of Death: China's Support for the Myanmar Military's Production of Aerial Bombs*, states that DI 21 is operated by the junta's Office of the Chief of Defence Industries (OCDI) and manufactures a range of weapons including 250 kg and 500 kg general-purpose bombs, fuel air-explosive bombs, and cluster munitions.

SAC-M alleges that between 2014 and 2019, Hunan Vanguard provided on-site technical assistance at DI 21 and hosted Myanmar engineers for training in China. Since 2019, remote technical support has reportedly continued. Because China South is wholly owned by the Chinese State Council, SAC-M argues that all such assistance is subject to central government authorization.

"By providing aerial bombs and technical production assistance to the OCDI, China South is complicit in the junta's grave violations against civilians," said SAC-M's Yanghee Lee. "China must immediately end all support for Myanmar military arms manufacturing."

The Myanmar military has increasingly relied on air power to target civilian areas – including schools, markets, hospitals, and camps for displaced persons – especially following major battlefield losses to resistance forces since the 2021 coup. DI 21 and other arms factories remain vital to sustaining these operations.

SAC-M calls on the Chinese government to halt all transfers of weapons, munitions, and technology to Myanmar. "If China wants to play a constructive role in Myanmar's future, it must use its influence to stop Min Aung Hlaing from dropping even one more bomb," said Chris Sidoti of SAC-M.

The advisory council also urges other governments to prosecute companies within their jurisdiction that support the junta, warning that aiding Myanmar's military amounts to complicity in potential war crimes.



Myanmar junta soldiers.
Photo: AFP

SIX MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN AMBUSH NEAR PAKOKKU AIRPORT

At least six junta soldiers were killed in an ambush near Pakokku Airport in Magway Region, according to the Southern YSO People's Defence Force (PDF), which reported the incident on 16 July.

Ko Aung Maung, leader of the Southern YSO PDF also known as the Southern Yesagyo PDF told Mizzima on 17 July that resistance fighters intercepted a military patrol west of the airfield around 3 pm on 15 July.

"We didn't target the main column but launched a surprise attack on the reserve patrol. We managed to shoot four or five soldiers from the front unit. Fighting continued with the rest of the force," he said.

The firefight lasted around 25 minutes before resistance fighters were forced to retreat under heavy artillery fire from nearby junta bases. No injuries were reported among the PDF fighters.

According to the Southern YSO PDF, the military has been deploying more than 20 troops daily to

patrol the airport and maintain security in surrounding villages, including Nyaung Luu Kan and Phone Kan.

Ko Aung Maung said the junta troops later moved their wounded to Nyaung Luu Kan village and then transferred them to the Light Infantry Division (LID) 101 base in Pakokku on 16 July.

Pakokku Airfield has been under renovation by the junta for over a year. It is currently being used for paramotor and drone testing, according to local sources.

The Southern YSO PDF also released a statement on 17 July announcing updates on "Operation Nat Mi Kyaung," launched in February 2024. The group claims to have killed up to 70 junta troops, captured nine prisoners of war, and seized 48 weapons over the course of the operation. The statement further asserted that 10 junta soldiers had defected and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

DKBA-LINKED KIDNAPPER KILLED, FOUR OTHERS CAPTURED IN MYAWADDY RANSOM CASE

One of five men involved in the kidnapping of a local businessman in Myawaddy, Karen State, was found dead with a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) identification card on 15 July, while the remaining four were reportedly captured alive, according to sources close to the armed group.

The victim, Haji Myat Ko, the owner of KMK construction supplies store near Myawaddy's golf course, was abducted on 14 July by a group of armed men who demanded a ransom of 2 million Thai baht (US\$61,558) for his release.

On the night of 15 July, a joint force consisting of junta troops, police, and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) launched a pursuit operation as the kidnappers were in the process of releasing the victim.

"The kidnappers are linked to the DKBA Central Trade Department. One was killed in the exchange of fire, and the others were captured. They demanded 2 million baht for Haji Myat Ko's release and appear to have collected the money," a Myawaddy resident said.

The operation began around 9:30 pm and concluded by 1:30 am the next morning. Security forces chased the suspects as they attempted to flee in separate directions using prearranged motorbikes stationed at various street corners. The last remaining suspect was found dead in Myaynigone after a shootout near the Yepu traffic light.

"At first, we weren't sure who they were, maybe rebels from the jungle, but now it's clear they're tied to an armed group. Only one was left in the car—he died while trying to escape," the resident said.

This kidnapping followed a previous robbery targeting Haji Myat Ko's home on 30 June, during which the suspects stole a phone linked to Thai and Myanmar bank accounts, along with 1 million kyats in cash. After that incident, Haji Myat Ko relocated to Mae Sot, Thailand.

However, on 14 July, during a brief visit to his Myawaddy shop to collect money, he was abducted again, allegedly by the same group that had earlier robbed him. In addition to kidnapping him, they also stole more than 100 million kyats from the day's sales, according to local accounts.

"The kidnappers had reportedly been monitoring him in Mae Sot. When he came to collect money, they beat and dragged him away," one resident said.

A DKBA identification card was recovered from the deceased suspect, bearing the name "Saw Tay Zar Lin" and listing him as a member of the Central Trade Department. Authorities also seized a vehicle linked to the 30 June robbery from the DKBA trade complex.

The alleged ringleader, identified as Ye Htet, remains at large and is currently being pursued by security forces.

Mizzima is continuing efforts to reach Colonel Saw Htut Phoe, a senior official with the DKBA Central Trade Department, for comment on the incident.



Private Nay Lin Aung

DEFECTING SOLDIER SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICERS EXECUTED RETREATING TROOPS ON RAKHINE FRONT LINE

A Myanmar army defector has accused military officers of executing their own retreating troops on the Ann-Padan front line in Rakhine State, as a brutal measure to prevent desertion amid growing battlefield losses to the Arakan Army (AA).

Private Nay Lin Aung, conscript No. 134981 from the Light Infantry Division (LID) 99, said he was forcibly conscripted, tortured, and later escaped to join the Arakan Army. In a video released by the AA on the evening of 15 July, he alleged that officers opened fire on soldiers who attempted to retreat under intense fighting pressure.

"When we were pushed to the front and tried to fall back under pressure, officers would ask, 'Why are you retreating?' — and then shoot us," he said. "I saw one of my friends shot in the head. His skull exploded. After that, we were all terrified. Many of the new recruits ran away."

He added that conscripts were misled, told they would be conducting road patrols near Ann and Padan but were instead deployed directly into combat zones.

Nay Lin Aung further claimed that soldiers who attempted to escape and were later captured were tied up and left exposed on hilltops, areas vulnerable to AA sniper fire.

He said he had been arrested by junta forces on 2 November 2024 while returning from work and was

sent to serve at Infantry Battalion (IB) 79 under the LID 99. He escaped military custody on 9 July 2025 and surrendered to the Arakan Army.

Captain Zin Yaw, a former junta officer who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), corroborated parts of the defector's account, saying that desertions have become so widespread that the military has been forced to prioritize guarding conscripts over fighting.

"In Ann, I've heard that conscripts who try to flee are executed if caught as a warning to others," Captain Zin Yaw told Mizzima on 25 June.

According to the AA, newly conscripted soldiers, many of whom were forcibly recruited under the junta's People's Military Service Law, are routinely sent to front-line combat areas. Facing mistreatment, fear, and lack of leadership, many are reportedly deserting in growing numbers.

In its latest statement, the AA reiterated its call for defectors from across Myanmar to join its ranks, guaranteeing safety and protection to those who surrender in areas under its control.

The Arakan Army currently controls 14 towns in Rakhine State, including the headquarters of the Western Military Command. It is continuing its military campaign to seize key coastal locations such as Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung.

MYANMAR JUNTA CLAIMS RECAPTURE OF NAWNGHKIO TOWN NEAR MILITARY ACADEMY

Myanmar's junta claimed on 17 July to have ousted armed rebels who captured a town near the military's main officer training academy after a year-long battle.

The northeastern town of Nawngkhio was seized by opposition fighters last summer, after some of the disparate groups organised a combined offensive which secured a string of victories against the military.

Nawngkhio is only about 40 kilometres (25 miles) -- roughly an hour drive -- from Pyin Oo Lwin, the town that hosts the country's main military officer school.

Its capture was a major victory for ethnic fighters from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the pro-democracy People's Defence Forces.

But the junta said in state media The Global New Light of Myanmar it had retaken the town after "566 armed engagements within 11 operational months".

A rare one-page spread in the newspaper showed soldiers holding rifles aloft in celebration and detailed the battle, admitting initial attacks led to officers and enlisted men "sacrificing their lives".

But "by combining strategic ground and air military tactics", the military captured "the whole Nawngkhio area" by Wednesday, it said.

In a statement, the TNLA did not acknowledge the junta's claim of victory.

But it said "it has been difficult to continue administrative work in the town due to the heavy offensive" and it had "moved civil administration services to safe locations".

Nawngkhio is only around 80 kilometres from Myanmar's second most populous city, Mandalay.

While the combined rebel offensive has inflicted sweeping losses, analysts say the junta's control over major population centres is secure as it wields an air force capable of staving them off.

Northeastern Lashio city was also captured in the combined offensive starting in October 2023, but was handed back to the junta this April in a deal brokered by China.

AFP



A family flees the fighting in Kani.
Photo: Supplied

THOUSANDS DISPLACED IN KANI AS JUNTA FLOTILLA MOVES UP THE CHINDWIN RIVER ACCOMPANIED BY AIRSTRIKES

Around 10,000 residents from Kani Township in Sagaing Region have fled their homes after a military flotilla traveling upriver and intensified aerial assaults triggered mass displacement, according to local sources.

"We had to flee as soon as the military vessels started heading upriver. It's raining, and it's hard to find shelter. People are scared to stay in monasteries or schools because of the risk of airstrikes," said a woman who fled her village.

The displacement began early in the morning on 14 July, as a flotilla of four warships and nearly 30 flat-bottomed vessels reportedly departed from Ahlon Mindaunt Port. Local defence forces said the vessels were transporting fuel, construction materials, and military supplies.

Local sources noted that the junta is capitalizing on the swollen waters of the Chindwin River during monsoon season to extend its riverine reach. In addition to the naval movement, paramotors, drones,

and Y-12 aircraft are being deployed to carry out aerial reconnaissance and bombings in support of the flotilla.

"The Y-12 dropped bombs along the riverbanks for nearly an hour. The flotilla is now nearing Kani. The river is wide, making accurate attacks difficult, so local defence forces are holding back for now," said a source from the Union Liberation Front (ULF).

Residents from several villages along the river including Ohn Pin Seik, Thabyay Taw, Min Oh, Ai Taung, Chaing, Modedaw, Natkyi, Nga Phyat, Pan Saing, Daze Chaung, and Nyaungbin Wun, have fled amid fears of both ground assault and airstrikes. Many are now sheltering in makeshift camps or forested areas with limited access to food and medicine.

Local humanitarian groups warn that without immediate aid, the displaced face worsening conditions under continued rain and military pressure.



ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL COUNCIL (ARNC) FORMED TO RECLAIM IDENTITY AND SEEK JUSTICE

A new political body called the Arakan Rohingya National Council (ARNC) was officially formed on 13 July, aiming to restore the Rohingya's indigenous identity and secure their full citizenship rights in Myanmar's Arakan (Rakhine) State.

The council's formation is seen as a response to decades of systematic exclusion, state-backed persecution, and attempts to erase the Rohingya identity.

In a public statement, the ARNC accused the Myanmar military of committing genocide in 2017 and alleged that the Arakan Army (AA) which now controls large areas of Rakhine State, is currently targeting the Rohingya population through violence, mass killings, destruction of property, and forced displacement.

According to the council, since the AA began consolidating control, more than 2,500 Rohingya have been killed, over 150,000 have fled to Bangladesh, and thousands more have escaped by sea or crossed international borders.

The statement claimed that dozens of Rohingya villages in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships have been burned down, leaving survivors without access to food, security, or freedom, and forcing them to live in constant fear.

The ARNC said it will work toward securing full legal rights and international security guarantees for

the Rohingya, with the ultimate goal of enabling a safe and dignified return to their ancestral lands under international supervision.

It also pledged to respond to what it described as an ongoing genocide carried out by both the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army.

In building what it hopes will be a future federal democratic system, the ARNC stated that it will continue dialogue with Rakhine leaders, Myanmar's broader democratic movement, and all relevant stakeholders, including the Arakan Army.

The council also vowed to advocate for Rohingya rights on the international stage, engaging with bodies such as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), ASEAN, and the European Union.

"The era of silence and exclusion is over. The voice of the Rohingya must be heard by the world," the ARNC declared, calling on the international community, regional powers, and humanitarian agencies to recognize the Rohingya as legitimate political representatives and to offer their support.

The ARNC comprises members from inside Myanmar, leaders from refugee camps, and members of the Rohingya diaspora. Its organizational structure includes 40 Central Executive Committee members and 60 Central Committee members.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE MISTAKENLY HITS OWN TROOPS IN KYAUKPHYU, INJURING AT LEAST 19 SOLDIERS

In an apparent case of friendly fire amid fierce fighting in Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine State, junta forces mistakenly bombed their own troops, seriously injuring at least 19 soldiers, including an officer, according to military and local sources.

The incident occurred on 13 July near Gonechwain village, where military personnel advancing to reinforce front-line positions were misidentified as Arakan Army (AA) fighters and targeted by drone strikes, a local military source said.

"They bombed their own troops using drones. The exact number of casualties is still under investigation, but at least 10 soldiers were seriously injured," he said.

CDM Captain Zin Yaw, speaking with Mizzima, confirmed the incident and said the number of critically wounded was likely higher.

"We haven't confirmed which unit it was, but there were at least 19 soldiers in each platoon. Even if they weren't killed including the officer, they are likely to be seriously injured," he said.

Rakhine-based Arakan Princess Media (APM) reported on 15 July that 10 junta soldiers were killed and many others seriously wounded. Narinjara News, meanwhile, stated that more than 20 troops were injured in the incident.

Facing mounting resistance and heavy casualties in Kyaukphyu, the junta has resorted to transporting

reinforcements by naval ships from Sittwe and Yangon. Since March, over 1,000 troops have been sent to Kyaukphyu by sea, according to military sources.

Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) 542 and 543, based in Kyaukphyu, are reportedly on the brink of collapse. At least 10 junta soldiers from Police Battalion 32 have fled the front lines, sources told Mizzima.

Fighting around Police Battalion 32 remains intense, with reinforcements sent weekly to hold the position. The Arakan Army has launched repeated attacks on the battalion, resulting in ongoing artillery shelling and explosions.

The junta is providing additional firepower from LIB 542 and 543, shelling AA-held or suspected positions in the region in an effort to slow the rebel advance.

CDM Captain Zin Yaw described the current battlefield dynamics as a "tug-of-war" between the junta forces and the AA.

"One thing is certain: the AA remains on the offensive, while the junta troops are attempting to transition from defense to offense as it replenishes its forces. However, there are times when defensive positions shift into active defense," he said.

The Arakan Army currently controls 14 towns in Rakhine State, including the junta's strategic Western Command. It continues to push toward key coastal hubs, including Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Munaung.



PDF OUTPOST FALLS IN GYOBINGAUK AS MYANMAR JUNTA ADVANCES ACROSS THAYARWADDY DISTRICT

A People's Defence Force (PDF) outpost in Gyobingauk Township, Thayarwaddy District, Bago Region, was overrun on 13 July during a coordinated raid by junta forces, according to local resistance fighters. Two PDF members were killed in the attack, and the unit was forced to abandon its position.

The outpost belonged to Company 1 of Thayarwaddy District Battalion 3802 and was located in the Bago Yoma mountain range, east of Thayarwaddy Township. An official from Company 2 confirmed that contact had not yet been reestablished with the frontline unit following the assault.

"We've lost contact with several comrades, including the battalion commander," a local officer said, describing the ground situation as increasingly tense since the military's latest advance began.

Junta troops reportedly launched a major offensive into Gyobingauk Township starting on 13 July, part of a broader campaign to reclaim territory held by anti-regime forces across Thayarwaddy District. Resistance

fighters say troops have been deployed across key townships, including Minhla, Letpadan, Okpho, and Gyobingauk.

"The enemy forces are moving in with overwhelming numbers. It's not just one unit under attack, multiple battalions are being targeted," said an information officer from Battalion 1.

Troops have been advancing through Minhla Township for over six weeks and recently entered Gyobingauk with more than 300 soldiers, according to a resistance official.

The junta is also launching heavy assaults on the Khar Chin Taung base in Minhla Township, a strategic site still under PDF control.

The renewed offensive has triggered a wave of displacement. Around 40 villages in Minhla Township are now affected, with thousands of civilians fleeing their homes to escape the escalating violence, local sources said.

CEREMONIES HELD ACROSS REGIONS FOR PEOPLE'S MILITARY SERVICE TRAINING 15

Opening ceremonies for the 15th round of People's Military Service Training were held on 14 July at various military command centres across the country, with eligible citizens joining the program in their respective regions.

The People's Military Service Law, which came into effect on 10 February 2024, mandates that every citizen contribute to national defence by upholding the "Three Main National Causes": the non-disintegration of the Union, the preservation of national solidarity, and the perpetuation of sovereignty.

The first intake of the military service program began on 8 April 2024. Those who completed training under the earlier intakes are now reportedly serving in various military units, taking on roles in defence and security operations.

Under the law, men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 are subject to mandatory service, while professionals such as doctors and engineers can be conscripted up to the age of 45. Those who fail to comply face potential prison sentences ranging from three to five years.

Since its announcement, the law has triggered fear and displacement, particularly among urban youth and families in resistance strongholds, with thousands fleeing to border areas or hiding to avoid being drafted.

Despite this, the junta continues to implement the law, claiming it is essential for national defence and stability as the country remains embroiled in widespread armed conflict.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES INJURE FIVE IN MAWCHI AS ATTACKS INTENSIFY

Five civilians were injured after the military junta launched an airstrike on the Mawchi region in Bawlake District, Karenni State, according to a statement released on 15 July by the Coordination Team for Emergency Relief (Karenni), also known as CTER-Karenni.

The bombing occurred at around 1 am on 15 July, with four men and one woman sustaining injuries. Residential structures were also damaged in the attack, the group reported.

This marks the second aerial assault on Mawchi in less than 24 hours. On 14 July, at approximately 2 pm, fighter jets dropped three bombs on the area, killing six civilians.

“The Military Council is deliberately targeting civilians. We have no choice but to stay alert and take precautions,” said a spokesperson from Jobs For Kayah, a local humanitarian group supporting resistance to the junta.

Karenni State has faced repeated airstrikes since the military coup, with Mawchi alone being targeted nine times, according to CTER-Karenni.

An earlier attack on 25 June killed seven local lead miners and wounded more than 40 others, Jobs For Kayah confirmed.



Photo: Supplied

SHELLING BY MYANMAR MILITARY KILLS FOUR, INCLUDING CDM TEACHER AND PDF MEMBER IN MAGWAY'S YESAGYO

Four people, including a teacher who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and a People's Defence Force (PDF) member, were killed in Yesagyo Township when a junta artillery shell hit Kambe village on the night of 15 July, according to local resistance forces.

A spokesperson for the Yesagyo PDF told Mizzima that troops from Infantry Battalion 258 fired two 80mm mortar shells around 10 pm. One of the shells exploded on a house, triggering a fire. As villagers rushed to extinguish the flames and seek safety, the second shell landed nearby, causing multiple casualties.

"One shell fell first, and as they were heading to a safe place, the second one then landed close to them. They were in a group and got hit," the official said.

The deceased were identified as 20-year-old PDF member Comrade Kauk Gyi (aka Maung Yan Naing),

his 24-year-old wife Ma Thazin Wai, CDM teacher Ma Nwe Oo May, aged 32, and 17-year-old villager Maung Shin Lin Ko. Four additional villagers were reportedly injured in the blast.

The following day, on 16 July, Infantry Battalion 258 fired four howitzer shells toward the western side of Yesagyo Township, though no casualties were reported.

Local resistance groups say a junta column is currently stationed in Kan Thit village along the Yesagyo-Pakokku road. Resistance fighters are closely monitoring troop movements in the area.

The incident highlights the growing toll on civilians amid ongoing artillery attacks by the junta across Magway Region, where the junta continues to clash with resistance forces.

FIERCE BATTLES ALONG MYANMAR'S SITTAUNG RIVER LEAVE 40 JUNTA TROOPS DEAD IN YEDASHE

Clashes between Myanmar junta forces and local resistance fighters have left around 40 regime soldiers dead and at least 20 others injured in Yedashe Township, according to a statement released by Company 3 (Red Scarf) of Battalion 3504 of the People's Defense Force (PDF), Taungoo District.

The fighting broke out in Peihnepinseik village, situated within the Kyweyaingpyin village tract on the western bank of the Sittaung River, and lasted nearly the entire day on 7 July. The resistance group said the engagement followed a build-up of junta troops in the area earlier in the month.

On 4 July, a military column of around 40 soldiers launched an assault near Yehlwe village, burning down approximately 40 civilian homes before occupying the area. Revolutionary fighters mounted a counterattack, forcing the junta troops to retreat toward Kayinchaung village.

Subsequently, the junta reinforced its position by deploying an estimated 200 soldiers to Yehlwe and Peihnepinseik villages on 7 July. A major confrontation

ensued in Peihnepinseik, resulting in heavy casualties among junta ranks, including four officers, according to the PDF statement. Mizzima has not independently verified these casualty numbers.

"Their bodies were transported using two military pickup trucks and a Hijet vehicle. This movement was confirmed by locals in Yedashe town and surrounding villages," said the information officer from Company 3 (Red Scarf).

Following the retreat of junta forces, combined revolutionary units conducted mine clearance operations along the route used by the regime troops, the statement added.

An official from resistance Operation Area No. 2 of the Sittaung River Basin under the Naypyidaw Military Command reported that the current situation in the area is "under control".

Photo: AFP

DENGUE OUTBREAK INFECTS OVER 30 MYANMAR CHILDREN IN SITTWE RELIEF CAMPS

At least 30 children sheltering in monasteries and relief camps in Sittwe, Rakhine State, have contracted dengue fever, according to residents familiar with the situation.

The outbreak has occurred in camps housing families forcibly relocated by the junta from villages in Sittwe Township to the downtown area. The infected children are currently receiving treatment at Sittwe General Hospital.

"It's happening in monasteries now being used as shelters. Each site holds fewer than 10 people, but with three or four such camps, the number of infected children has reached over 30," a Sittwe resident told Mizzima.

Most of those infected are under the age of 10. Locals said dengue-related deaths were also reported in Sittwe town and nearby villages in both 2023 and 2024.

Since February 2024, only about one-third of Sittwe's original population remains in the city, as junta forces forcibly relocated ethnic Rakhine residents from at least 14 villages including Padalek, Yay Chan Pyin, and Byine Phyu into central areas of Sittwe.

Displaced families now live in overcrowded relief camps and monastery compounds under increasingly dire conditions. Food shortages, poor sanitation, and health issues are widespread.

"There are many places selling medicine, but most people can't afford it. Paracetamol that used to cost 200 kyats now sells for 500 kyats per tablet. It's expensive at this rate," said another Sittwe resident.

Dengue fever, a viral illness spread by Aedes mosquitoes, spikes during the early and mid-monsoon seasons. Severe cases can lead to internal bleeding and death, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Despite the ongoing health crisis, the junta has not provided food or medical assistance to the forcibly displaced residents. Families are relying on limited aid from local donors and civil society groups.

Sittwe remains under junta control, but worsening food insecurity has pushed many to the brink. Local reports suggest that some families have taken their own lives due to starvation.



Mandalay. Photo: AFP

EARTHQUAKE STRIKES MANDALAY EARLY MORNING, SPARKING PANIC AMONG RESIDENTS

An earthquake centered in Mandalay early on the morning of 16 July caused widespread panic among local residents, according to eyewitness accounts.

The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology reported that a magnitude 4.9 earthquake struck at 3:27 am, about 4 miles southeast of Pyigyitagon Township, Mandalay, at a depth of 10 kilometers.

The tremor was felt in Mandalay, Pyin Oo Lwin, and several other major cities.

Residents said the quake, though brief, was powerful enough to shake buildings and wake people from their sleep.

Strong tremors were also reported in Maymyo, Kyaukse, Myit Nge, and Tada U.

Many residents took to social media to share their experiences, saying they were jolted awake and ran outside in fear.

This latest quake comes in the wake of a destructive earthquake on 28 March, which heavily affected Sagaing, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw. Since then, over 200 aftershocks have been recorded, according to the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology.

Authorities have not reported any casualties or major damage so far from this morning's quake, but residents remain on alert for further aftershocks.



Photo: Mizzima

NGOS URGE THAILAND TO ALLOW MYANMAR REFUGEES TO WORK LEGALLY

Eleven rights organizations have urged the Thai government to allow over 107,000 refugees, mainly Karen and Karenni, to work legally, citing rising tensions from decades of confinement, according to a July 18 statement.

The statement is as follows:

Since 1984 — a span of 41 years — Thailand has served as a second home, or the only home, for hundreds of thousands of people fleeing armed conflict and their families from Myanmar. While over a hundred thousand of them have resettled in third countries, the unending violence in the ethnic states along the Thailand-Myanmar border over four decades has led to continued displacement. 107,502 refugees — most of them Karen and Karenni — remain in nine temporary shelters in Mae Hong Son, Tak, Kanchanaburi, and Ratchaburi provinces (TBC, June 2025). A total of 90,759 individuals have been registered with the Ministry of Interior and/or UNHCR.

We, as border-based civil society organizations and allied networks, are deeply appreciative of the successive Thai governments that have facilitated refugees' access to food, shelter, education, and health services provided by various international and Thai

non-governmental organizations. However, the policy allowing refugees to survive through dependence, without legal permission to work for their livelihood, may have been suitable only for temporary emergency situations — not for the prolonged displacement that has persisted. In fact, each temporary shelter has existed for nearly 30 to over 40 years, where generations have been born, grown up, and started families within the barbed-wire fences — some now reaching the third generation.

We all understand that this situation cannot be prolonged. International donors must reallocate limited resources to respond to other urgent global crises. Meanwhile, refugees — as human beings — possess the natural drive and potential for self-reliance. Preventing them from becoming a productive human resource for Thailand and the world has led to economic, environmental, and social tensions in border areas. Especially concerning are the feelings of despair among children and youth who cannot see how education will lead to opportunities or a future in which they can meaningfully participate in society.

At least 40% of the refugees were born in Thailand or have lived here since early childhood. They have no memories of life in any other country. For many, Thailand

is their only true home. Considering that Thailand has now entered a completed aged society, opening opportunities for refugees—who regard Thailand as their second or only home and already have registered identities and household numbers in the Ministry of Interior's database—to emerge as human resources for society is a solution to both the humanitarian crisis and the demographic transition. In reality, many refugees have already utilized their potential as an important labor force for local communities. However, working outside the shelters exposes both the workers and their employers to legal risks, as such actions are currently prohibited and punishable by law.

We, border-based civil society organizations and allied networks, believe that when people have the capacity and will to take responsibility for themselves and society, a regulated transition from dependency to self-reliance is imperative. Over the years, we have studied the issues and consistently communicated with Thai society to present this approach. Most recently, the urgency of this matter has intensified following announcements from humanitarian organizations stating that health services in 7 shelters and food aid in all shelters will cease after 31 July 2025. Therefore, we respectfully request your consideration and support in moving forward with the following proposals:

To alleviate the humanitarian crisis, the Thai government should urgently approve a pilot program to regulate the employment of refugees within the border areas. Those who hold identity documents and household registration records issued by the Ministry of Interior should be allowed to engage in daily commuting work within the subdistricts where the shelters are located and nearby areas without going through complex procedures, while consultations and the development of a systematic management framework covering broader timeframes and geographic areas must be expedited in parallel.

To ensure the success of the initiative, the management model should be developed through consultations among government authorities, employers, local administrative organizations, humanitarian agencies, and refugee-led civil society actors in each locality, recognizing that local contexts and lab or demands may vary. Regular short-term evaluations during the initial phase will be essential for improving the implementation model and may serve as

a basis for future geographic expansion.

To ensure that refugees can genuinely access opportunities to contribute as part of the labor force, the employment system must be as streamlined as possible, with no fees imposed for the issuance of identity documents and work permits. This applies to individuals who are already registered in the Ministry of Interior's database and whose economic status does not allow them to bear the costs associated with exercising the right to work.

To enhance the quality of human resources, Thai language proficiency must be recognized as a critical occupational skill and developed as an urgent priority. The government should promote public-private collaboration in providing Thai language education in all temporary shelters, through intensive courses for potential workers, non-formal education programs (NFE), and integration into all existing educational curricula within the shelters.

To strengthen national security and enhance the effectiveness of administrative planning, the Thai government should collaborate with UNHCR to conduct a survey, screening, verification and registration process for all refugees in the temporary shelters who are not yet included in the system, so that they no longer remain as unregistered residents.

Individuals can become valuable human resources to society when given opportunities. Refugees are human beings who can offer solutions to challenges, drive Thailand's economy, and represent a vital potential for the country. Accordingly, we are willing to contribute information and support initiatives that enable displaced persons in temporary shelters to become quality members of Thailand's labor force.

MYANMAR ORGANIZATIONS URGE SOUTH KOREA TO REJECT JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTION

A total of 24 Myanmar organizations have submitted an open letter to the South Korea's Presidential Office, calling for non-recognition of the military council's planned "sham" election and urging stronger action against the junta's ongoing crimes in Myanmar.

The letter, sent on 20 July, outlines seven key demands, including rejecting the election that the groups say is being held without the consent of the Myanmar people. The demands were presented during a solidarity rally held in front of the War Memorial Museum in Seoul, South Korea.

The rally was organized by the Myanmar Federal Democratic Mission Coalition (MFDMC), the Myanmar Anti-Coup Committee (Korea), 22 MFDMC-affiliated supporting organizations, and South Korean civil society groups aligned with the Myanmar democracy movement.

Leaders and organizers stated that the junta's proposed election, which is expected to take place between December this year and January 2026, is a political manoeuvre aimed at deflecting international pressure and legitimizing its grip on power.

The letter also calls on the South Korean government to take decisive action against the junta to halt ongoing atrocities, including mass killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and widespread violence targeting civilians.

Among the demands, the organizations requested that military officials not be invited to international forums and meetings. They also called for diplomatic efforts between South Korea and Thailand to help ensure the safety and human rights of Myanmar refugees living along the Thai border.

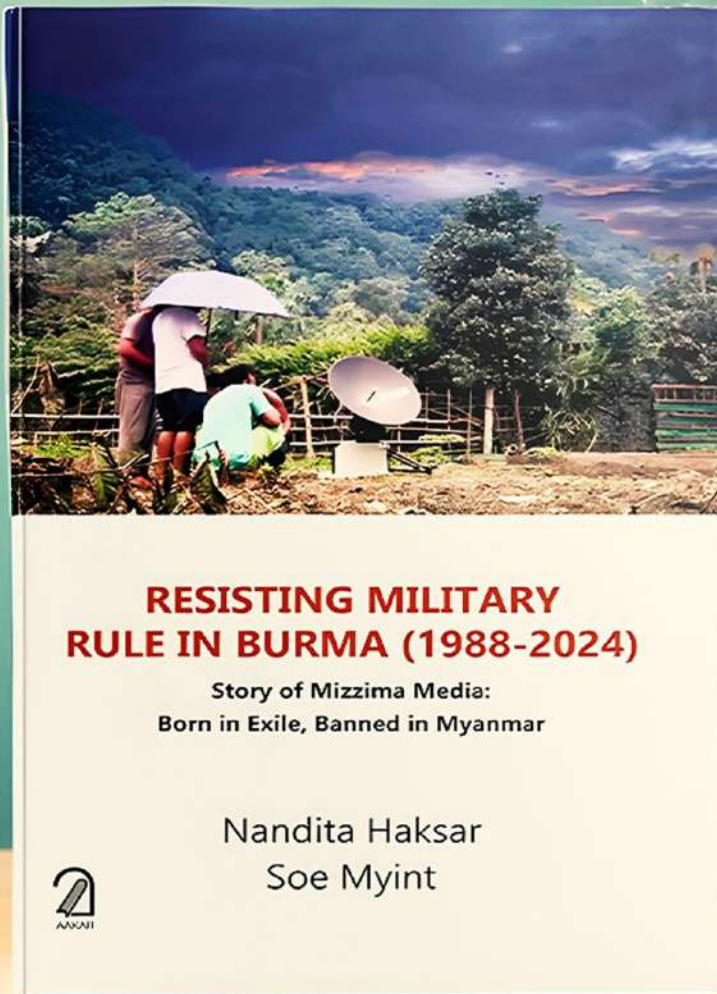
In addition, the letter proposes the swift establishment of a liaison office in South Korea to enable consistent coordination between the National Unity Government (NUG) representative office, Myanmar pro-democracy organizations, and relevant stakeholders, as part of broader efforts to support a democratic transition in Myanmar.

While the junta has announced plans to hold elections, resistance forces and ethnic armed organizations have made it clear that they will not recognize any such vote held under military rule.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by *Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

Story of Mizzima Media:
Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar

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Myanmar refugees in India.
Photo: AFP

OVER 11 MILLION REFUGEES RISK LOSING AID BECAUSE OF FUNDING CUTS: UN

Massive cuts to humanitarian budgets risk leaving more than 11 million refugees without desperately needed aid, the United Nations warned Friday.

That corresponds to a full third of the number reached last year by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

In a new report, the agency highlighted a deadly confluence of factors pummeling millions of refugees and displaced people globally: "rising displacement, shrinking funding and political apathy".

"We are right now facing a deadly cocktail," UNHCR's head of external relations, Dominique Hyde, told reporters in Geneva.

"We are incredibly concerned for refugees and displaced populations around the world."

Dramatic aid cuts by the United States and other countries have left UNHCR and other aid organisations facing gaping shortfalls.

UNHCR has said it needs \$10.6 billion to assist the world's refugees this year, but so far it has received just 23 percent of that amount.

As a result, the agency said it was seeing \$1.4 billion of essential programmes being cut or put on hold.

The impact, Hyde cautioned, risks being that "up to 11.6 million refugees and people forced to flee are losing access to humanitarian assistance provided by

UNHCR".

The agency said families were being forced to choose between feeding their children, buying medicines and paying rent.

Malnutrition is especially severe for refugees fleeing war-ravaged Sudan, where the UN has been forced to reduce food rations and nutrition screening, she said, decrying the "devastating impact for children who have fled to Chad".

The cuts have also forced UNHCR to pause the movement of new arrivals from border areas to safer locations in Chad and South Sudan, "leaving thousands stranded in remote locations", the agency said.

Health and education services for refugees are also being scaled back worldwide.

In camps in Bangladesh hosting nearly a million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, education programmes for some 230,000 children risk being suspended.

UNHCR also said its entire health programme in Lebanon was at risk of being shuttered by the end of the year.

Funding for aid programmes is not the only issue.

Last month, UNHCR announced it would need to cut 3,500 staff -- nearly a third of its workforce worldwide -- amid the budget shortfall.

AFP



Photo: AFP

MORE COUNTRIES BECOME VOCAL AGAINST CHINESE AGGRESSION IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

SUN LEE

The opposition to China's belligerence in the South China Sea has intensified recently as more countries have joined the voice against Beijing's expansive territorial claims and aggressive tactics. These countries are a motley group from the South China Sea region, neighbouring areas as well as those located far away.

Fiji, a small island nation in the South Pacific, has sternly warned China not to build military bases in the region. Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said he intended to use his influence in the region to prevent China from building military bases. "If they want to come, who would welcome them? Not Fiji. And I think that China understands that well." Moreover, he asked the Chinese coast guard to "observe our sovereignty, our sovereign waters" in the wake of the 'Ocean of Peace' treaty, which is a framework being built to reject

"coercion as a means to achieve security, economic or political advantage".

Foreign ministers of the ASEAN countries took exception to the conflict regarding the control over the islands in the South China Sea. The statement issued by them did not make an explicit mention of China. But the criticism of land reclamation activities in the statement assumes significance since China is responsible for a large-scale land reclamation and artificial islands construction.

Other ASEAN countries' share is minuscule compared to China's. "Concerns were expressed by some ministers on the land reclamations, activities, and serious incidents in the area, including actions that put the safety of all persons at risk, damage to the marine

environment, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region," reads the statement.

Vietnam raised concerns over its sovereignty over Sandy Cay in the Spratly Islands of the South China Sea during China-Philippines clashes. It was noted through diplomatic channels. However, it went public when it registered protests against China after the latter sent a navy hospital ship to the contested Paracels, a group of small coral islands and reefs in the South China Sea. This approach aimed to deter Chinese coercion.

Doan Khac Viet, deputy spokesperson for the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said "Vietnam resolutely opposes any activities infringing upon Vietnam's sovereignty." Vietnam's response to Chinese coercion publicly comes from the Asian country's growing closeness with the US and QUAD. "Vietnam's sustained response demonstrates its concern over China's intrusive survey tactics," said Ray Powell, director of the Stanford University-affiliated maritime analysis group SeaLight.

Lithuania jumped on the anti-China bandwagon after it ceased to consider China peaceful and friendly amid the clashes with the Philippines. Lithuanian Defence Minister Dovile Šakaliene. "I believe that, in this case, revealing to the world how China is harassing the Philippines' navy and fishermen of the Philippines in their own waters is very important because it shatters the illusion of China being a peaceful and friendly neighbour," she said.

Earlier, Lithuania had joined the US in slamming China over its "continued provocative, destabilising and intimidating activities" against Taiwan in the South China Sea. France, Germany, and Canada are major European powers that have been challenging the

growing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. Australia and Japan could be seen ramping up their efforts to counter Chinese military expansion in the region.

Australia has time and again condemned Chinese coercive actions in the South China Sea and sought peace and stability. It has also offered world-class aerial drones to the Philippines during an event. Notably, the event marked the ninth anniversary of the Hague court's ruling that rejected China's Nine-Dash Line claim, which Beijing used to assert its control over about 90 percent of the South China Sea.

India became vocal in the South China Sea matters after the Himalayan clashes of 2020 occurred, and the recent rebuke came through the QUAD bloc. The recent QUAD statement was issued after the meeting of the foreign ministers of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. It warned against any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion.

"We continue to express our serious concern about the militarisation of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea," it said. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said the South China Sea remains an "issue of great concern" and sought efforts for a peaceful and free of conflict region. The US and Japan called China the "greatest strategic challenge" for the region.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia and geopolitical affairs.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Ben's simple words resonate strongly: "If I could do something small for one person, why would I not?"

This episode of the Insight Myanmar Podcast brings together Ben, an Australian who previously lived in Myanmar, and a Burmese student known as "Little Activist" to discuss an extraordinary act of transnational solidarity. Their exchange highlights the continued resistance against the junta, the courage and resilience of those continue to advocate for democracy, and the how small acts of generosity can create a ripple effect of hope and connection.

Ben begins by sharing his limited but impactful connection to Myanmar, which stemmed from a three-month stint working with a UN agency in 2017. This was when the Rohingya crisis flared up, which Ben describes as both eye-opening and heart-wrenching. After returning to Australia, he continued to follow events from afar, and after the 2021 military coup, he only became more concerned. It was at this time Ben found Insight Myanmar Podcast, and one particular interview stood out.

A turning point came when Ben heard our episode last year featuring Little Activist. Inspired by the raw and personal account of a young Burmese student-turned-revolutionary, Ben felt compelled to act. He described how Little Activist's sacrifices, which included giving up education and career prospects to resist the junta,

struck him on a deeply personal level. It prompted him to reach out to Better Burma and offer a monthly donation to support Little Activist and his mission. Ben felt this was the least he could do, a small gesture to stand by someone risking so much.

Ben describes his decision to provide ongoing support not as an act of charity, but as a conscious choice to stand in solidarity with Myanmar's aspirations for democracy. He speaks about the importance of doing what one can, no matter how small, to make a difference. For Ben, this was also a way to honor the kindness and generosity he experienced during his time in Myanmar, where strangers went out of their way to make him feel welcome. He hopes that his actions could inspire others to support Myanmar's struggle in their own ways.

Little Activist's reflections on this support are equally moving. He describes the donation as a lifeline, not just for its material benefits but for the morale boost it provided. Knowing that someone a world away cared about Myanmar's future—and him, in particular—gave him renewed strength and hope. He also sees this connection as a form of karmic connection now becoming ripe, rooted in Buddhist beliefs about interconnectedness and shared past lives. This perspective adds a spiritual dimension to the relationship, highlighting the cumulative impact of seemingly small acts of kindness. Little Activist even shared news of Ben's donation with his friends and community, emphasizing that this gesture extended far beyond himself. He immediately decided to distribute portions of the donation to support others in even greater need than himself, such as displaced people fleeing by the conflict, reflecting his commitment to collective well-being and solidarity, further and inspiring collective hope.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/7/7/episode-364-the-ripple-effect>



Photo: Mizzima

JUNTA CLAIMS TANINTHAYI REGION SHOWS TOURISM GROWTH

Myanmar's military junta, which staged a coup in February 2021, continues to promote tourism development despite ongoing civil unrest and international condemnation.

The Taninthayi Region Tourism Committee recently reported significant expansion in its hospitality sector, approving 15 new hotel construction projects and issuing licenses for 17 new hotels and guesthouses in June 2025, according to junta-controlled newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

The region's marine tourism hub, Kawthoung, recorded 5,686 international arrivals, 59 foreign yacht visits, and over 600 same-day tourist trips across 384 outings. Tourism authorities also approved 30 new travel agency licenses and 55 local tour guide permits, while extending numerous existing licenses for hotels, guesthouses, and travel operators.

Despite ongoing conflicts, the military junta claimed Myanmar's tourism industry has grown, reporting over 520,000 foreign visitors from January to May 2024.

However, the tourism push occurs against a backdrop of severe instability. Since the coup, Myanmar's military has killed more than 6,000 people and arbitrarily detained over 20,000, while the U.S. State Department maintains a Level 4 "Do Not Travel" advisory due to armed conflict and wrongful detention risk, according to Amnesty International.

The military situation remains volatile, with armed resistance groups making significant territorial gains and the junta implementing mandatory conscription for young people.



Wut Yi Aung. Photo: Facebook

MYANMAR NETIZENS MOURN POLITICAL PRISONER WHO DIED IN DETENTION

Myanmar social media users expressed grief and condemnation shortly before the funeral of political prisoner Wut Yi Aung on July 22, who died at Insein Prison after allegedly being tortured by the junta and denied adequate medical care.

Wut Yi Aung, a member of the Dagon University Students' Union Central Executive Committee, passed away on July 20 inside Insein Prison. The prison authorities issued a release order on July 21 and returned her body to her family.

The political prisoner had reportedly suffered torture during military interrogation and was denied sufficient medical treatment while in detention, leading to her death. Wut Yi Aung was arrested on September 14, 2021, along with five other students in Kyauktada Township in Yangon for protesting against the military coup. She was sentenced to a total of seven years in prison.

Facebook users shared emotional tributes and criticism of the military junta. A user wrote, "She spent over 4 years of her 25-year life unjustly imprisoned and tortured before passing away. RIP, little sister."

Another user posted a prayer, "Dear daughter, may you be reborn as a human in a country where people treat each other with humanity in your next life."

"I pay my respects to you, daughter. RIP," wrote another user.

A commenter reflected on the broader impact, "These are the lives sacrificed for the anti-junta revolution. How heartbroken the parents must be."

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.