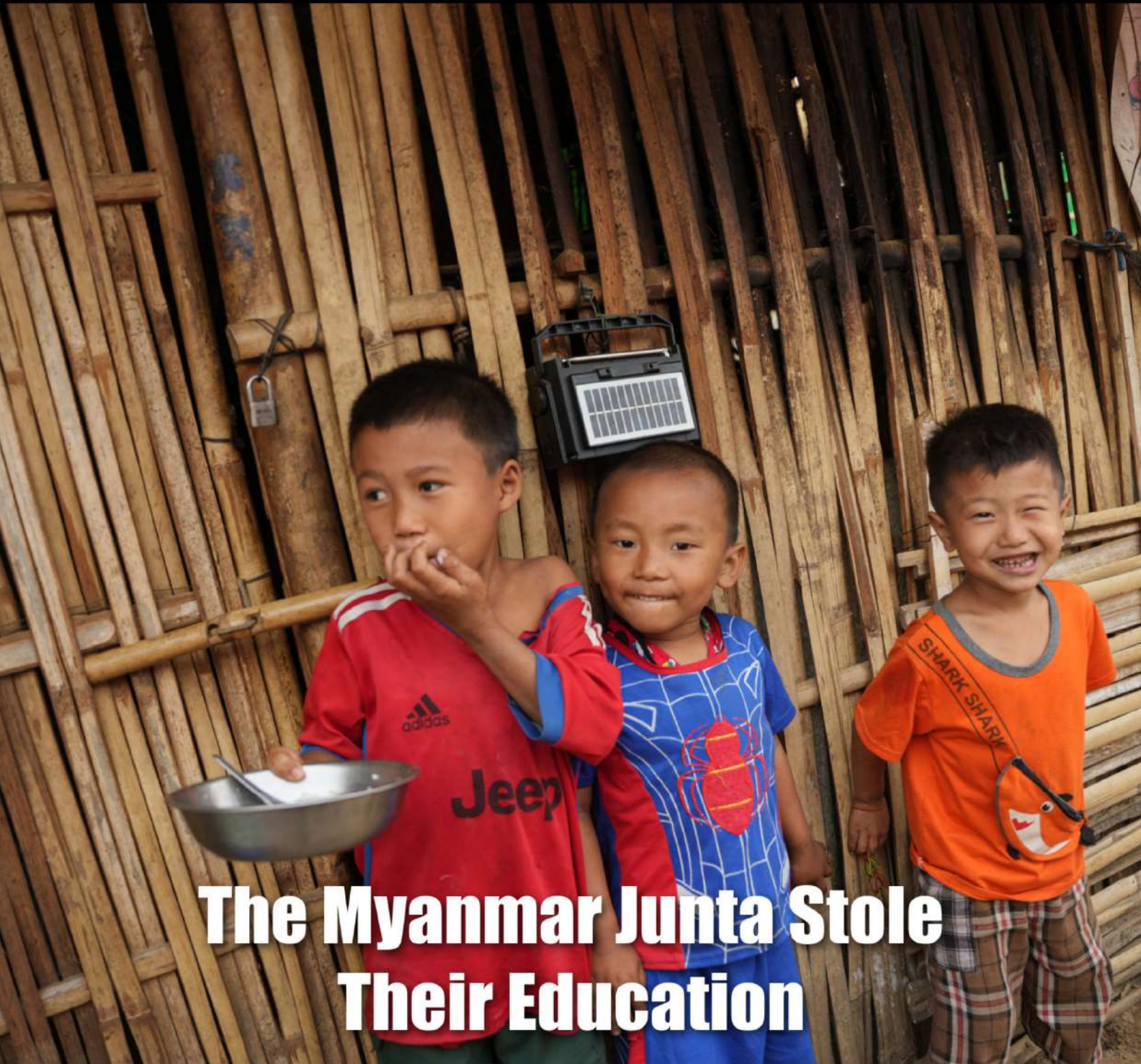


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



The Myanmar Junta Stole Their Education

● Mulling what negotiation means when solving the Myanmar crisis

ISSUE 17, VOL. 2, JULY 31, 2025 | PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY | WWW.MIZZIMA.COM

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.

THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF WESTERN AID CUTS FOR MYANMAR

As we have reported, Western aid cuts in 2025 - particularly from key donors like the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European countries - have had profound consequences on humanitarian programmes in Myanmar and the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. These funding reductions have drastically curtailed critical services, deepening suffering for already vulnerable populations and threatening long-term regional stability.

In Myanmar, the situation has become increasingly dire. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned in April that over one million people would lose food support due to insufficient funds. The cuts are particularly devastating for displaced Rohingya communities in Rakhine State, who are now at severe risk of hunger. Meanwhile, health services have unraveled. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reductions have gutted programmes combating malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, and malnutrition. Clinics in conflict-affected areas such as Chin, Sagaing, and Kayin states have been forced to shut down or scale back, leaving thousands without prenatal care, immunizations, or treatment for preventable diseases.

Civil society organizations, including those offering safe spaces and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, have seen grants vanish - forcing closures, layoffs, and the end of vital services.

These humanitarian setbacks have occurred alongside natural disasters and worsening insecurity. A major earthquake in March 2025 killed thousands and displaced over 200,000, but the global response - particularly from the West - was muted. In this vacuum, countries like China have stepped in with limited aid, subtly shifting the balance of geopolitical influence away from Western democratic actors and further isolating local resistance and civil society networks.

In neighbouring Bangladesh, the consequences for over one million

Rohingya refugees living in camps in Cox's Bazar have been equally severe. Funding shortfalls led WFP to halve monthly food rations from \$12.50 to about \$6 per person. Malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women, is expected to increase significantly. Education for Rohingya children is collapsing, with thousands of learning centres closed due to lack of funding. Of the 437,000 school-age Rohingya children, only about 130,000 still have access to organized learning. Community-run schools are unable to fill the gap, lacking recognition and resources.

The reductions in aid have also affected critical protection services. Health care, water, sanitation, mental health support, and programmes to prevent child marriage, trafficking, and abuse have been scaled back or stopped entirely. The consequences are devastating - despair has led to a sharp rise in dangerous sea journeys, and in May, over 400 Rohingya perished when two boats sank. The United Nations has described these deaths as a direct result of humanitarian neglect.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called the cuts a "crime" and warned that unless emergency funds are secured, further ration reductions will follow. With only 30 percent of the \$383 million needed for 2025 operations raised by mid-year, humanitarian agencies have already frozen over \$300 million worth of planned interventions.

For the people of Myanmar, Western aid cuts are not just budgetary decisions - they are life-and-death choices for millions. The abandonment of humanitarian commitments in Myanmar and Bangladesh is triggering preventable suffering and geopolitical instability. The international community must urgently reverse these cuts and recommit to supporting those whose lives depend on it.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of displaced children in Myitkyina, Kachin State by AFP





THE MYANMAR JUNTA STOLE THEIR EDUCATION

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

In a makeshift school in Karen State, with no government support, no electricity, no internet, and photocopied textbooks, 23-year-old Koe Koe, a dedicated educator working to bring education to children trapped in Burma's war, said, "We try to teach them how to find opportunity in a country where it is almost non-existent."

The humanitarian crisis facing Burma's children is steadily worsening, with 3.5 million people displaced and nearly 20 million, including 6.3 million children, in urgent need of aid. Over 55 percent of children live in poverty, and 85 percent of displaced households report unmet basic needs. Food insecurity is severe, with more than 40 percent of young children unable to access nutritious meals. Grave violations against children, including injuries from explosive devices, have surged, children accounted for 32 percent of all casualties in 2024. There is also a critical need for safe water, sanitation, hygiene services, and protection from abuse, especially in internally displaced people's camps.

Education has become one more casualty of war in Burma, with an estimated one-third of all school-age children, around 5 million, currently out of education. Since the 2021 military coup, Burma's education system has neared collapse amid widespread violence, forced school closures, and deliberate attacks on educational facilities. The military has occupied or damaged hundreds of schools, while enrollment has plummeted due to conflict, instability, and deepening poverty. In response, the National Unity Government (NUG) and

Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) have established a parallel education system in the areas under their control, offering an alternative model based on multilingual instruction, local governance, and federalist principles.

This emerging de facto federalized system reflects the broader political fragmentation of Burma, where over two-thirds of the population now live outside junta control. The military has sought to impose centralized, monolingual education through restrictive amendments to the National Education Law, while the NUG promotes mother-tongue-based and community-led schooling for Burma's many ethnic groups.

However, financial and logistical barriers remain steep. Most public schools are under-resourced, teacher shortages are severe, and in government-controlled areas, corruption has made access to education even harder for poor families. Meanwhile, the NUG and EROs, now responsible for educating up to a million children in conflict zones, face funding challenges as they work to rebuild infrastructure, open new schools, and professionalize teaching.

Koe Koe serves as the vice president of a mission school in K-6 region of, Karen State, and also teaches English online. He explained that the school was founded in 2023. At the time, the local school had shut down due to intense fighting and airstrikes in the area, leaving students without access to education. In response, he collaborated with local teachers to start a mission high school, which now serves students from grades 5 to 10



Young students in a school in Demoso, Karenni State.
Photo: AFP

and follows the Karen curriculum.

"In addition to the subjects required by the Karen Education Department, we also teach the Bible because we are a mission school," he said.

Unlike government schools, which receive free textbooks, Koe Koe's school operates with no government support. "We are on a self-help basis," he explained, noting that they often rely on copying old textbooks and building their own facilities. In the school's first year, classes were held in a church. By the second year, a temporary bamboo-and-tarp structure was constructed on donated land. Only recently, thanks to donations, were they able to begin construction on a permanent school building.

Financial hardship is a constant struggle. Koe Koe said the school lacks consistent donors and faces a serious shortage of staff. Since they couldn't afford to hire laborers, "We had to ask one person from each student's family to help build the school," he said, adding that even the students assisted with construction.

He reflected on the disparities in education access, comparing his own experience in Yangon, where he had textbooks, extra tuition, and access to test prep materials, to the current situation in K-6. "Here they depend on the teacher. And students have a very weak foundation," he said. Many high school-aged students in the area still struggle with basic literacy and numeracy. "They're not at the international level yet, but there is an effort being made," he added.

Despite lacking electricity and internet, the teachers do their best to encourage the students to con-

tinue learning.

The trauma of war continues to haunt students. Although there have been no airstrikes in K-6 since the resistance forces drove out the Burma army, the fear remains. "The sound of planes strikes fear in the hearts of these children," Koe Koe said. "It's not just jets, even passenger planes or a car engine that sounds like a jet causes panic."

He spoke about the toll this instability has taken on the children's will to learn. "A child in K-6 and a child from another country both live under the same sky, but only one feels safe beneath," he said. Frequent school closures and years of violence have sapped students' motivation. "There is no drive to go to school or study for these children anymore."

Since the coup, thousands of Burmese students have crossed into Thailand—some with visas and ID cards, many without. Older students, especially those who appear to be of military age, are often urged by their families to flee in order to avoid conscription into the junta's army.

Sammy, a 19-year-old student living in Mae Pa, just outside Mae Sot, is one of them. He is currently enrolled at Mercy Education Centre, one of several informal migrant schools providing education to displaced youth along the Thai-Burma border.

He described the conditions which, while better than Burma, are lacking compared to western or Thai standards. "There aren't enough qualified teachers and enough facilities at the centre," he said, pointing out that the classrooms are cramped, the walls thin, and



Many children have to make do with poor facilities to study. Photo: Mizzima

electricity unreliable. "I can hear my friend in the other classrooms," he added, making it difficult to concentrate. The dormitories are overcrowded as well, with about 300 students living in a much-too-small space. "It is very loud and I struggle to focus on my work."

Many Burmese students in turn to the GED (General Educational Development) as an alternative path to complete their education. The GED is an American high school equivalency test recognized internationally, including by universities in the U.S. and other countries.

Most Burmese students struggle with the high level of English fluency required to complete the GED, which consists of four subjects: Mathematical Reasoning, Reasoning Through Language Arts (including reading comprehension, grammar, and essay writing), Science, and Social Studies.

For Sammy, the greatest obstacle is financial. Although he is ready to take the GED exam, he cannot afford the test fee, a challenge shared by many students at the centre. "The financial need is too much for my family," he said. Like many of his peers, he hopes to attend university in Chiang Mai, but knows this will only be possible through a scholarship.

Sammy hopes to volunteer at the centre while he waits to sort out his passport, though he's unsure if that will be possible. "If I can get my passport sorted," he said, "but that is what I hope to happen."

Passport and visa issues remain some of the most insurmountable obstacles for Burmese students trying to complete their education in Thailand. Many have never had a passport, and for Burmese citizens, obtaining or renewing one often requires traveling to Yangon, an act that could put them at risk of conscription or arrest by the junta. Without a passport, it is very difficult for Burmese students to obtain an ID card in Thailand and nearly impossible to travel to a third country for studies.

Despite the fact that many older Burmese grew up attending English-medium or convent schools, most young people today do not speak English. Sammy pointed out the stark educational gap between migrant schools and formal Thai schools, particularly when it comes to English. "There are only 3 or 4 of us that know English," he said. Although teachers do their best, many lack fluency. To help bridge the gap, Sammy has taken it upon himself to tutor his classmates.

Another Burmese student, Khant, a 20-year-old from Kawkaik, has been living in Mae Sot since 2021. "I moved here because of the fighting in my region," he said.

At first, Khant tried to continue his education online through Zoom, studying for the IGCSE, an internationally recognized academic qualification equivalent to the British high school completion exam. "It was a struggle," he admitted. Eventually, he enrolled in a lo-

cal learning center that prepared students for the GED exam.

Many Burmese students begin their studies with the IGCSE due to Myanmar's historical ties to the UK and the prestige of the qualification. However, after arriving in Thailand, many find it difficult to continue on this path. Remote learning, limited access to qualified teachers, and a lack of resources and study materials make the GCSE difficult to complete. The length of the program is also a factor, it requires structured study over two years in a formal school setting, something most displaced students simply do not have.

Working on a small or even zero budget to survive while studying, many students try to finish as quickly as possible.

As a result, many switch to the GED, which is more flexible and designed for non-traditional learners. GED programs are also more affordable and widely available through migrant education centers along the border and in Chiangmai, many of which are set up by Christian charities, offering lessons for free. However, even these programs are a challenge for students who have no support from home and no money for food.

For Khant, one of the most stressful challenges in Mae Sot was living without documentation. "For the first two years I had no documents. I was so scared when there were checkpoints," he said, fearing he could be sent back. Now, he says, "by the grace of God," he has obtained legal documents, which allows him to apply for university.

Khant has been accepted to LCC International University in Lithuania, but he explained that completing the paperwork remains difficult. "The rest of the required documents, like the criminal record certificate, are hard for me," he said. Still, he remains hopeful. His plan is to work part-time and apply for scholarships to help cover tuition.

The obstacles Burmese students must overcome to pursue an education are staggering. It begins with the constant fear of airstrikes, forced school closures due to intense fighting, and schools being occupied or destroyed by the military. Many suffer from deep psychological trauma and face the threat of forced conscription. Those who flee to Thailand encounter a new set of challenges: lack of financial support, teacher shortages, weak foundational education, language barriers, and the absence of visas or ID cards.

For the few who overcome all these hardships and manage to secure admission and a full scholarship to study in a third country, the final blow may come in the form of paperwork. Completing required documentation, such as obtaining a criminal record certificate, can become the obstacle that ultimately sinks their educational dreams.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CONTINUES TO PUSH THE MILITARY DRAFT

As Myanmar's military regime intensifies its enforcement of the controversial conscription law, reports indicate that over 70,000 young people have been recruited into military service since March 2024. The National Unity Government (NUG) released the figures, while independent observers warn the number could soon reach 100,000, amid increasing forced recruitment in urban centres.

The junta has reportedly completed 12 training batches, each aiming to conscript 5,000 personnel, totaling more than 60,000 new soldiers. The 12th batch concluded on July 4, with the 13th batch expected to finish in the first week of August. Concurrently, batches 14 and 15 are underway, each involving approximately 5,000 new trainees.

In recent weeks, local sources have reported a surge in forced recruitment in Mandalay Region,

particularly targeting urban youth, even as the region continues to recover from the devastating Sagaing earthquake in March.

Township-level administrators are reportedly under strict orders to meet monthly quotas of 150 conscripts, resulting in widespread coercion and arbitrary detentions. Human rights monitors and defectors allege that conscripts are being used as frontline "human wave" forces, often drugged and pushed into high-risk combat with little or no training.

According to defected soldiers, these conscripts are frequently sacrificed in battle, leading to mounting resentment within military ranks. Despite the junta's efforts to maintain control, resistance forces report a growing number of defections.

In the first two weeks of July alone, around 20



conscripts reportedly fled to resistance-held areas. Records from People's Goal, a monitoring group, show that between January and mid-July 2025, at least 1,643 military personnel and police officers have defected to join the pro-democracy resistance.

As the junta struggles to fill its ranks and maintain loyalty, observers warn that forced conscription and abuse of new recruits may further deepen public resistance and unrest across the country.

Preparations continue for a planned national election

The military government of Myanmar, under the leadership of Min Aung Hlaing, has revealed the dates during which the country elections will be conducted, between December 2025 and January 2026.

This is as the state of emergency has been extended several times since the 2021 coup. The internal work being undertaken to ready the legal and logistic requirements of the election is being done through the Union Election Commission (UEC) under the junta.

To date, more than 77 political parties have filed to be registered but 56 have been allowed to participate, composed mostly of regional parties because of strict new conditions to become registered. The UEC has also conducted a national census of 330 townships, and it is producing interim voter registrations on a population estimate of 51.3 million.

The mode of preparation is now intense with the introduction of electronic voting. It is the first time in all the history of Myanmar to have Myanmar Electronic Voting Machines (MEVMs), which will be used due to its



offline functionality to avoid being manipulated. So far, more than 227 of the total number of election officials have been trained since 2024 through nine rounds of workshops. The MEVMs are already distributed in each of the 14 states/regions in operation and supply approximately 55,000 machines. Such preparations are already being practiced in Mon state and in some territories of Rakhine and Sagaing, which are regarded as rather stable, still, a large number of regions are not ideally available as the conflict is still present.

Nonetheless, the validity of the next election is massively undermined. Only half the country is under the control of the military and only 267 of 330 townships are likely to be held as elections because of security considerations.

Some of the key opposition parties such as National League for Democracy (NLD) have been banned and most of their leaders jailed or in exile. Many civil society groups and the National Unity Government (NUG) do not accept the election as they say it is a planned script to legitimize military rule. Trying to unceremoniously halt the violence will result in the election being neither free nor fair, given extensive use of the violence, few opponents, and extensive population mistrust.

Monsoon sets in

Monsoon rains and storms are causing major flooding and displacement throughout Myanmar. Heated downpours have covered vast portions of Ayeyarwady, Bago, Mon, Rakhine, Kachin and Kayin states and have displaced over 100,000 people across the country. Floods and overflows of rivers displaced more than 23,000 inhabitants of Kachin State and landslides caused by rare-earth excavations killed a minimum of 35 workers in the rare-earth mining

areas. This has prompted thousands to find refuge in monasteries and schools, and to the local governments to cope with the extent of the crisis.

The destruction is not only limited to the displacement of humans but also is extending to the infrastructure and agricultural sector which have been highly destroyed.

In a duplicated occurrence of the monsoon period, Typhoon Yagi 2024 left over 226 lives claimed and saw a displacement of over 240,000 people. It also destroyed roads, bridges and religious places such as Kyeik Than Lan Pagoda in Mon State and about 250,000 hectares of agricultural land. There are still flash floods and landslides in the high-risk regions especially in the south and mountainous parts where several villages have been engulfed or inaccessible because roads have been blocked and washed away.

There are relief activities that are limited by the war, broken infrastructure, and climate exposure. With the bulk of international aid organizations, such as the IFRC helping it, the Myanmar Red Cross has helped tens of thousands with food, shelter, clean water, and medical aid. Nonetheless, there are still some obstacles since the delivery of aid is hindered by constant civil unrest and inaccessibility by transportation. Specialists mention that weather extremes are aggravating the effects of monsoons, making floods more frequent and severe, and straining the disaster recovery and management sector of Myanmar.



Kyaw Moe Tun

MYANMAR'S UN AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN URGES GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR FEDERAL DEMOCRACY

On 22 July, Myanmar's UN Ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, spoke at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, noting the severe setbacks in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals since the 2021 military coup.

According to the Secretary-General's report, only 35 percent of the SDG targets are on track or making moderate progress. Conflicts, uneven progress and gaps in gender equality continue to persist with 5 years left until the 2030 deadline. Against this backdrop, Myanmar calls on the international community to sustain and advance their multilateral efforts, including the Sevilla Commitment, for the SDGs.

The statement continues below.

Mr. President,

The yearly high-level segment provides us an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and challenges in our review of SDGs implementation.

In this regard, I wish to warmly congratulate Member States for their notable progress at national levels.

Unfortunately, my country, Myanmar, is witnessing a series of regression of our previous development achievements since the attempted 2021 military coup.

For example, on Goal 3, the military junta has deliberately attacked the healthcare system by raiding

hospitals, healthcare facilities as well as targeting healthcare workers for providing medical assistance.

Civilian access to clinical services has been impeded and immunization programs have become nearly non-functional. As a result, the rate of infectious diseases from malaria, HIV to tuberculosis have surged over the past few years.

On Goal 5, the military has long perpetrated CRSV and GBV against women in both physical and digital spheres as a traditional tool to suppress women for voicing their fundamental rights.

Women, who have been arbitrarily detained, are exposed to unspeakable sexual violence in prisons with no proper medical care.

The collapse of the rule of law and the lack of accountability, after the coup, has also enabled illicit economies in the region, including online scam, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women from vulnerable communities.

On Goal 8, a lack of employment opportunities, a deteriorating education system, forced conscription, particularly targeting young men, are fueling an alarming youth exodus.

According to the World Bank, a decline in formal sector opportunities, migration of skilled workers, reduced human capital, disruptions to education and health services will threaten Myanmar's long-term development and poverty reduction prospects.

In addition, the military junta has committed violations of freedom of association and forced labour, including killings, arbitrary arrests and threats of trade union members and leaders.

Myanmar, therefore, welcomes the recent decision by the International Labour Conference to invoke

Article 33 of the ILO constitution against the military junta.

Mr. President,

Part of the theme of this year's HLPF is advancing evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda.

It is crystal clear that the military junta and its agency of destruction are not any part of the solution for Myanmar's development or peace agenda.

As the Secretary-General said yesterday, we need an end to the horror and bloodshed in Myanmar.

Sustainable peace and stability are the foundations to sustainable development. People-centered governance, inclusive, just and accountable institutions are all critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda in Myanmar.

Unfortunately, none of this is feasible with the inhumane military junta and its planned sham election as they continue to inflict collective punishment on the civilian population.

The people are utilizing all available means on the ground to preemptively stop this deceitful process.

We cannot replace restricted violence with broader violence.

We cannot mask people's aspirations with a facade of peace.

We simply cannot treat the symptoms without addressing the root cause.

I appeal to the international community to urgently and effectively support the people of Myanmar and their resilient efforts to end the military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union.

Photo: AFP

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S BROTHER PETITIONS TO CLAIM HALF OF UNSOLD FAMILY LAND

U Aung San Oo filed a new petition at the Kamayut District Court on 24 July, requesting direct ownership of half of the land on Plot No. 54, located on University Avenue Road in Yangon, according to sources close to the court.

"U Aung San Oo is not requesting another auction. He is asking to directly take half of the land," a court source told Mizzima.

The next hearing is scheduled for the end of July, during which Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team is expected to present its arguments.

It remains unclear how U Aung San Oo intends to take possession of half the land or whether the portion includes the house where Aung San Suu Kyi has lived for decades.

In May, following four failed auctions of Plot No. 54, U Aung San Oo filed a lawsuit seeking to sell half of the land, excluding Aung San Suu Kyi's residence. That attempt was rejected in June by the court, which cited a prior Supreme Court decision as final.

Legal experts say his new petition is unlikely to succeed.

"There is no legal restriction on inheritance concerning this plot under the Inheritance Act.

Therefore, all he can do is divide the auction proceeds equally, as he initially requested. That is why the Supreme Court issued this ruling. He has no real chance of winning this case," one legal analyst said.

U Aung San Oo is a naturalized U.S. citizen, and under Myanmar law, foreigners are barred from buying, selling, transferring, or otherwise dealing in immovable property.

In 2016, the Yangon Western District Court ruled that the two-story house and half of the land on Plot No. 54 should be divided between Aung San Suu Kyi and U Aung San Oo. But U Aung San Oo appealed to the Supreme Court, requesting an auction of the entire plot and a division of the proceeds. His appeal was dismissed. After the 2021 military coup, however, the Supreme Court allowed him to proceed with the auction process.

The plot has since gone up for auction four times—first at 315 billion kyats (US\$149.9 million), then 300 billion (US\$142.8 million), 297 billion (US\$141.4 million), and finally 270 billion kyats (US\$128.5 million), without attracting a single buyer.

Photo: Supplied

NUG WARNS MYANMAR NATIONALS TO STAY SAFE AMID THAILAND-CAMBODIA TENSIONS

On 24 July, the National Unity Government of Myanmar released a statement expressing deep concern over the escalating military tensions between Thailand and Cambodia.

The statement is as follows.

As a member state of ASEAN, the National Unity Government expresses its deep concern over the escalating military tensions between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Cambodia and respectfully urges both nations to seek a peaceful and diplomatic resolution at the earliest opportunity.

The National Unity Government expresses its deep concern for the safety and well-being of civilians in both countries, given that the ongoing hostilities have already resulted in civilian casualties.

The National Unity Government strongly urges all Myanmar nationals residing in, traveling through, or working in areas affected by the current military tensions to strictly follow emergency instructions and safety advisories issued by the relevant national security authorities of their host countries.

In light of the shared workplaces and communities among the peoples of Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar, the National Unity Government strongly urges all Myanmar nationals to remain cautious and vigilant, and to refrain from making or sharing any content-especially on social media that could further exacerbate the current situation.



UK EMBASSY IN YANGON MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF EXECUTED MYANMAR ACTIVISTS

The British Embassy in Yangon issued a solemn statement today marking the third anniversary of the execution of four pro-democracy activists by the Myanmar junta.

“We pay tribute to all those tragically killed in Myanmar and those who remain in arbitrary detention,” the embassy said, highlighting ongoing human rights abuses including reports of torture, violent interrogations, and medical neglect in detention facilities.

The UK condemned the continued imprisonment of over 22,000 political detainees in Myanmar, noting that nearly 7,000 have died in custody since the February 2021 coup. The statement also drew attention to recent

deaths, including student activist Ma Wutyi Aung and National League for Democracy (NLD) politician Ko Pyay Sone Aung, both of whom reportedly died due to denial of timely medical care.

The embassy finished its statement with a call for the immediate release of all those arbitrarily detained by the junta.

Photo: AFP



WERE KO JIMMY AND KO PHYO ZEYA THAW REALLY EXECUTED? - QUESTIONS REMAIN TWO YEARS ON

"Were Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw really hanged, shot, or executed by lethal injection or are they still alive?"

That question continues to echo across Myanmar's political landscape, even two years after the military junta claimed to have executed the two high-profile political prisoners on 23 July 2022 inside Yangon's Insein Prison.

Within the compound, behind Dormitory 3 and nestled in a plantation area, stands a 25-foot structure with a blue zinc roof, the gallows. It is here, junta authorities claimed, that Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw were hanged "in accordance with prison procedures." Yet multiple signs, the absence of sounds, lack of returned bodies, eyewitness accounts, and contradictions from prison insiders, have raised widespread doubts.

The gallows at Insein had long stood unused. During General Ne Win's socialist regime, executions were indeed carried out there. But under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in the 1990s, hanging as a method of execution ceased. After the February 2021 coup, the military reportedly began restoring gallows across the country, sparking anxiety among the growing population of political prisoners.

In early 2022, the gallows at Insein were fully reconstructed, and vinyl barriers were added to prevent prisoners in Dormitory 3 from seeing the structure. The restoration fuelled speculation and fear inside the prison. News of the possible execution of Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw began circulating by June that year, causing tension among detainees.

The issue became the most debated topic among detainees. Before the alleged executions, footage of Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw was broadcast on junta-controlled media, exaggerating and propagandizing alleged major crimes he committed.

Among political prisoners in Insein Prison, there was a belief that the military junta would not create a situation leading to massive unrest. On the other hand, the new gallows had been fully constructed at its current location in Insein Prison as early as 2022, causing conflicting opinions among the prisoners. Would they really execute detainees or not? If so, what pressures might the junta face, and what scenarios could unfold? Various analyses and opinions were discussed among political prisoners.

Amid these discussions and debates, on 25 July 2022, junta-controlled newspapers and television channels announced that four individuals, including Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy, had been "executed in

accordance with prison procedures.” This news shocked political prisoners in Insein Prison, leading to outbursts of anger. Upon hearing it, the prisoners fell into stunned silence, unsure of what to do. Astonishingly, those in Dormitory 3, located right next to the gallows, neither noticed nor heard any unusual activity, raising the question: Were they really hanged?

During the socialist era under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), there were large trees near the gallows. When executions occurred, the “bang” sound from the trapdoor caused the crows on the trees to suddenly fly off. The gallows had a trapdoor at the base where the condemned stood, controlled by a lever operated by a senior prison official. At dawn, the chief warden waved a white cloth as signal, the lever was pulled, opening the trapdoor. Resulting in the “bang” sound startled nearby crows, causing them to take flight. However, on this day, no such sound was heard at dawn, and the crows in the trees near Dormitory 3’s prayer hall did not fly off. Whether the crows didn’t hear, the location was slightly farther away, or the prisoners didn’t notice remains unclear.

At around 2 am on 23 July 2022 (time may be slightly off), the power went out at Insein Prison. Some long-term prisoners stated that executions were typically conducted in darkness after cutting the power, deliberating to do the execution process in dark time. However, a former chief warden from the socialist era did not mention whether power was cut during executions in his book on the subject. When the power went out, some political prisoners stayed alert, listening intently, unable to sleep as various thoughts raced through their minds. That day, no sounds were heard until the power returned about 30 minutes later. It didn’t rain on 23 July (this could be incorrect), but the power outage prompted prisoners to listen closely. On 24 July, it rained, and strong winds caused another power outage at night, leading some political prisoners to stay vigilant again.

A young political prisoner, detained in 2022 under Section 505(a) at Insein Prison’s meditation cell block, recounted the events of the power outage on 23 July 2022, “We saw car headlights, one after another, shining toward the walls. I wondered what they were doing so late at night. There were a lot of headlights,” he said. The cars, coming from the main jail office toward the gallows, cast light on the meditation cell block’s brick walls, about 300 meters from the gallows. These lights

were clearly visible from the wooden cells adjacent to the meditation cell block’s walls.

At the time of the alleged executions, Union-level Home Affairs Minister Soe Htut visited the gallows, accompanied by the Yangon Region Military Commander, the Police Chief, and senior officials from the Prison Department, who oversaw the process, according to sources within the Insein Prison staff community. Soe Htut had visited Insein Prison twice for security inspections before 23 July 2022. At that time, political prisoners in the extension block of Dormitory 3 could clearly see him inspect Dormitory 3, adjacent to the gallows, including the extension block housing political prisoners. He personally ordered reinforced iron bars and gates in the cells where political prisoners were held. Soe Htut has since been convicted by the junta on corruption charges and currently serving five years in prison.

A well-known political prisoner in Dormitory 3’s extension block in 2022, upon hearing the news on 25 July, recounted: “They said Ko Jimmy didn’t die after the first hanging, so they did it again to ensure he was dead. I heard they (Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw) spoke out about fearlessness from the gallows, demanding the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.”

According to a reliable source, after Ko Jimmy’s execution, he had not died but was only unconsciousness. If such a situation occurs, the condemned should be immediately pardoned from execution. However, the junta’s act of continuing until death without a court order explicitly mandating it reveals a clear injustice, similar to the case of Salai Tin Maung Oo, who was executed until death was ensured.

Another question arise: Were Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy truly executed by hanging, or were they executed by other means? Contradictory reports from within Insein Prison suggest they were not hanged but executed by another method. A current corporal-level prison staff member explicitly stated that Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy were executed by gunfire, not hanging, and claimed that he was present during the execution. This staff member continues to serve at Insein Prison.

A political prisoner who faced trial in 2023 under anti-terrorism charges shared the news he received. “I heard they were killed by lethal injection. That’s what I

know for sure.” This information reportedly came from his contacts within the Insein Prison’s inner circle staff community. There is no solid evidence confirming how Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy were executed. The junta, responsible for the executions, has not released precise details or photographic records, only stating that the executions were “carried out in accordance with prison procedures.”

On 25 July 2022, when the junta announced that Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy had been “executed in accordance with prison procedures,” the Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw’s mother and Ko Jimmy’s sister requested their remains, but Insein Prison authorities refused.

Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw’s mother pleaded, “Please give me back my son’s body; I want to offer alms for him.” The deputy warden responded, “We can’t give back the body. Just do as reported in the news.” This response, relayed to political prisoners in Insein at the time, sparked widespread anger among them.

An investigation to verify whether Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy were truly executed was conducted in Yangon. Over the three days of 23–25 July 2022 around the execution time, major cemeteries such as Yayway, Kyisu, and Htainbin were checked to see if the junta had secretly cremated their remains. The investigation confirmed that no such cremations took place during those days. One of those who led this thorough investigation, now living in Thailand, confirmed these findings.

Another specific report emerged from the political prisoner community in Insein Prison, claiming that Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw were still alive and had been secretly transferred to Ye Kyi Ai interrogation centre. This information came from sources within the prison’s political prisoner community but could not be confirmed. When some prisoners who had been interrogated at Ye Kyi Ai and transferred to Insein Prison were asked about Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, they responded, “There are places no one is allowed to go. There are rumours that they (Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy) are in such places, but we don’t know for sure.”

Another report claimed that one of the individuals supposedly executed alongside Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw and Ko Jimmy was definitively seen in Insein Prison’s long-term cell block. This information came reliably from a prisoner convicted of a criminal offense. The claims

stated that one of the two others executed, either Ko Hla Myo Aung or Ko Aung Thura Zaw, was clearly seen in the long-term cell block within the prison compound. This area is where the junta currently holds death row and long-term prisoners and was also the location of the original gallows used during the socialist era.

There is one person who has complete knowledge of the execution incident that took place on 23 July 2022. That person is U Tun Win Htike, the former in-charge of the main jail in Insein Prison. In this role he managed and oversaw political prisoners at Insein Prison from the time of the 2021 coup until 2023.

He was later transferred to Putao Prison amid rumours of a being whistleblower (referred to as “watermelon” – ‘green’ or military on the outside and ‘red’ or revolutionary on the inside). However, instead of going to Putao, he retired. Inquires indicate that he is currently running a KTV business in Hlaingthaya. A former political prisoner stated that they heard he had fled to Thailand.

Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw’s wife, Ma Thazin Nyunt Aung, said, “I have only 1% chance. I want evidence. I need to see it with my own eyes. If the death penalty was carried out, I want to see what remains.” This means she does not fully believe the claim of the execution.

Ko Jimmy’s wife, Ma Nilar Thein, posted on her social media on 23 July, stating, “For Ko Jimmy, Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, Ko Hla Myo Aung, and Ko Aung Thura Zaw, there is no need to discuss the blood debt; the journey that has not yet ended continues.”

Two years have passed, yet many questions remain unanswered. Were Ko Jimmy and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw truly executed — and if so, how? Were they hanged, shot, lethally injected, or possibly still alive in undisclosed detention?

Without official transparency, forensic evidence, or access to their remains, the truth remains obscured, a haunting silence echoing louder than any official announcement.

Photo: AA



FORTIFY RIGHTS CALLS FOR ICC INVESTIGATION INTO ARAKAN ARMY'S WAR CRIMES AGAINST ROHINGYA CIVILIANS

On 23 July, Fortify Rights released a detailed statement calling on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the Arakan Army (AA) for alleged war crimes against Rohingya civilians in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

The full statement is as follows.

"The Arakan Army is responsible for widespread abductions, brutal torture, and the murder of Rohingya, some of whom were found beheaded, in blatant violation of the laws of war," said Ejaz Min Khant, Human Rights Specialist at Fortify Rights. "The International Criminal Court has jurisdiction and should investigate and prosecute perpetrators of serious crimes in Rakhine State, including from the Arakan Army."

From April to July 2025, Fortify Rights interviewed 39 Rohingya individuals—including eight women—who survived and witnessed AA abuses in 2024 and 2025. Fortify Rights also viewed and analyzed photographic and video evidence of AA crimes.

Fortify Rights documented multiple killings of Rohingya civilians in villages and ad-hoc detention facilities controlled by the AA, including five apparent

beheadings by AA forces. The findings also reveal a systematic pattern in which Rohingya individuals were abducted and subsequently tortured or killed in AA-controlled detention facilities and towns. Survivors reported being detained as a result of unwarranted accusations of links with Rohingya armed groups or as a result of refusing to join AA ranks.

Killings and Beheadings

"Ahmed," a Rohingya, 21, told Fortify Rights how uniformed AA militants abducted his brother in March 2025, during Ramadan, saying:

On the 20th day of Ramadan, my brother was killed by the AA. My brother and our family were fasting. ...There were 10-15 AA armed members wearing uniforms. They had long guns. I saw them take my brother. My entire family witnessed them take my brother from the house I saw them forcibly grab him. They were very angry. He was not willing [to go with them]. They were dragging him. They pushed me away. Both my parents tried to stop the AA men. My younger brother was kicked. My parents pleaded with the AA, "Where are you taking him? Please stop." There is no way to get justice for what happened.

"The forest is behind my house. They took him into the forest," Ahmed explained. Ahmed and some relatives later found his brother's decapitated body in the forest. Ahmed told Fortify Rights:

We found him on the ground. He was packed inside an empty sack of rice. ... His head was fully detached from his body. ... We saw his head, and I could see that it was my brother.

The day after, the family held a rapid funeral before fleeing to Bangladesh.

In a separate case, a group of five Rohingya men were abducted by the AA from Abuja Hamlet in Tha Yet Oak village tract, in April 2024 and later found dead, with four beheaded and all their bodies showing signs of torture. A witness told Fortify Rights:

When I was looking at them hiding behind the bushes and trees, I saw that they caught Numal Hakim and Islam, and took them out of the fish pond area [where they were working]. ... And then they caught [withheld], Abdul Amin, from the shore.... [The AA] took him to sit next to the two others. I kept looking at them, the sun was about to set. ... I saw that three to four [AA] people were kicking and punching them hard. ... They caught all five [men] ... tied their hands, and took them away.

Less than a week later, the bodies of the five abducted Rohingya men were found in a man-made fish pond in Rohingya Daung village, also known as Ywet Nyo Taung, about one mile from where they were abducted. The witness recalled: "[A resident] went there to check the bodies, where they found them. You can listen to [his] voice in the video, which he recorded. They were beheaded, stabbed, and had other injuries.

The 18-second mobile phone video on file with Fortify Rights shows five bodies in a small pond, four of whom were beheaded.

In September 2024, a U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights report documented the same incident: "On 17 April 2024, the Arakan Army detained five Rohingya men in northern Maungdaw. ... locals found their severely mutilated bodies, with four having been beheaded."

In another incident documented by Fortify Rights, a Rohingya man, 33, from Foteh Ali Fara village in Buthidaung Township, Rakhine State, recounted how the AA took his brother "Mohammed":

In January 2024, between 9 and 10 p.m., AA rebels came to our house. On that night, a group of 15 AA members came and called my brother. He came out of the house. They didn't tell him anything. He was just taken by the AA. They all had guns. ... My mother asked the AA, "Where are you taking my son?" One AA militants replied, "We will return him." Once the Rohingya are detained, you have to consider them disappeared or dead. We didn't have an option to find him or inquire about him.

The man explained to Fortify Rights how, two months after the abduction, the AA came to his village and made an announcement saying:

The AA came after two months and said to the residents, "There are dead bodies in Boriyong village [also known as Bo Gyi Chaung village]. Go and find them." I went with my elder brother to the field in Boriyong. It took about 45 minutes to walk. ... I saw dead bodies in an open field. There were 12 dead bodies. They were all men from our village. Some of the dead bodies had gunshot wounds. All had bruises. My elder brother, Mohammed, had black and blue spots, as if he had been beaten very badly. ... His face looked like it had been hit and had dried blood [on it].

Detention and Torture

Rohingya told Fortify Rights how they survived AA detention and torture. "Abdullah," 21, told Fortify Rights that the AA abducted and tortured him in Boli Bazar, also known as Kyein Chaung village, in Maungdaw Township, in early May 2024:

They used bamboo, wire, and kicked and punched as strongly as they could. Four members of the AA came at once and beat me at the same time. One AA member would sit in front of me, on a yellow oil pot, and punch me in the face. Another AA member was beating me with a wooden stick on my back with all his force, just like playing golf. Once it hit my body, it bruised every time. The strikes with the wire immediately caused bruises and bleeding. And the ones with the stick caused painful internal injuries. I still have the scars on

my body, as you can see [showing his scars]. They beat me more brutally than the other three [detainees].

He continued:

They made me sit in a squat position and then started beating my back with sticks, kicks, and punches from all angles. It was extremely painful that I had to shout very loudly every time. They put a cloth in my mouth so that I couldn't shout. My mouth and nose were bleeding heavily. Then I fell on the ground and was unconscious.

The AA abducted and tortured, "Shofiq," a Rohingya from Buthidaung Township, from January 2024 to November 2024. He told Fortify Rights:

On January 12, 2024, at 8 p.m., I was praying the Namaz [evening prayer] at the Hatkannya Fara [village] Mosque near my home. At that time, a dozen of the AA came with guns into the mosque and handcuffed me.

He continued:

Once I arrived at the [AA detention facility], they immediately put both my legs into shackles. I still have scars on my legs [showing his scars]. It was so cold. ...The ground was dirt, and it had only a tarpaulin on it. I had to lie down just like that on the ground. They kept me there for several weeks.

... One of the AA members said, "We detained you because you're a bad person. You send information to the junta military. Tell me, when did ARSA [the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, a Rohingya armed group in league with the junta military] come to your village?" They were accusing me of such baseless, untruthful, and disturbing claims. I said, "I have no knowledge or information on what you are asking." Then they took a two-foot bamboo stick and began beating me on my back, groin and thighs. ...When they beat me, they wore uniforms. I recognized that they were AA uniforms—it has an insignia with letters written "Arakan Army." They beat me for about an hour and a half that day.

Shofiq described how on his third day in detention, an AA member escalated the torture, in an attempt to coerce a confession:

An AA member came and beat me with a bamboo stick and kicked me when I was in a kneeling position, and I fell on the ground. He said, "Why don't you accept the accusations yet?" Then he left.

Shofiq was moved to the main prison in central Buthidaung in June 2024, where he was kept until November 2024. While in prison, he saw the bodies of deceased fellow detainees:

At night, I saw the AA removing dead bodies from various cells. I didn't know who they were, but I clearly saw at least five dead bodies being taken from other cells [during my time in detention]. I was on the upper floor, and the bodies were carried through the ground floor—I could see everything.

Fortify Rights also documented how the AA mistreated and killed Rohingya civilians in ad hoc detention facilities in Rakhine State. One former AA detainee told Fortify Rights:

The AA kept my leg cuffed for over seven months until I escaped from their detention. The leg cuff is made of iron and welded shut. They keep others in the same way. Only when someone dies, do they cut it with iron cutters and remove it. I saw AA members bringing out dead bodies of detainees and removing leg cuffs, and then burying the dead bodies in the mountainous area nearby. ... It was in Battalion No. 10, in Zambonya [village]. I was in that detention facility at that time. [The] family came to the AA to request that the dead body be buried according to Islamic rituals. But the AA didn't allow them to take the body out and buried him inside the compound.

"Shorif," a 21-year-old Rohingya from Hawar Bill village, also known as Kyee Kan Pyin village in Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State, was also abducted along with 18 other residents in July 2024. They were detained in High School No. 3 for 35 days. Later, the AA took them to an AA base in 4-Mile Ward.

The AA put nine of us in a narrow room. In that room, I couldn't lie down, sleep, or move—only sit. Mosquitoes bit us, rainwater leaked in, and it was very cold. We had to defecate and urinate in the same room, as there was no toilet. The smell was everywhere. There was no help—I had to keep myself alive.

On July 14, 2025, Fortify Rights sent a letter to the AA requesting a meeting to discuss the allegations. In response, the AA asked for more details about the incidents cited. On July 18, Fortify Rights provided a three-page document containing testimonies and accounts of killings and torture of Rohingya civilians by the AA, and again requested a response. On July 20, the AA replied in writing, stating the group “categorically reject[s] these false and defamatory accusations.” The AA statement said:

Upon careful examination of the allegations in your correspondence, it is absolutely clear that this is a deliberate, repeated, and malicious attack aimed at damaging our reputation. These fabricated narratives, created with political motives, employ underhanded tactics to exploit human rights issues for the political gain of a few racist and Islamic extremist individuals.

Fortify Rights has consistently documented and exposed instances of AA war crimes against the ethnic-Rohingya population in areas under its control, including a massacre of Rohingya civilians near the Naf River in Maungdaw on August 5, 2024, and an arson attack on Rohingya homes in May 2024. The AA has denied these allegations and has yet to take responsibility or hold its troops accountable for these crimes. In January 2025, the AA did publicly admit that its soldiers had tortured and summarily executed two prisoners of war – a war crime under international humanitarian law.

International Legal Framework

International humanitarian law—also known as the laws of war—is applicable to all parties to the conflict in Rakhine State and the broader conflict in Myanmar, which constitutes a non-international armed conflict. In particular, the Geneva Conventions set forth fundamental rules regulating conduct during armed conflict.

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions protects civilians in a non-international armed conflict, stating, “Persons taking no active part in the hostilities ... shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.”

Mutilation, including beheadings, is considered a war crime both under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the ICC. Article 8 (2)(c)(i) of the Rome Statute explicitly prohibits, “Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture,” as war crimes.

On September 6, 2018, the ICC granted its Chief Prosecutor jurisdiction to investigate and possibly prosecute the crime against humanity of forced deportation of Rohingya to Bangladesh, as well as persecution and other inhumane acts. While the court’s jurisdiction stemmed from the Rohingya genocide of 2016 and 2017, its jurisdiction is indefinite, and its investigation could focus on any individual or group deemed responsible for perpetrating the forced deportation of Rohingya to Bangladesh, including the AA.

The ICC Chief Prosecutor should include the AA’s attacks on Rohingya civilians as part of his ongoing investigation, said Fortify Rights.

“The Arakan Army must end its campaign of torture and killings of Rohingya in detention facilities and villages,” said Ejaz Min Khant. “If the Arakan Army wants to be seen as a legitimate revolutionary armed force, it must respect international law, protect civilians, and be held accountable for the atrocities it has committed.”



Displaced Rohingya in Rakhine.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ACCUSED OF FOSTERING ETHNIC TENSIONS BY FAVOURING ROHINGYA IN SITTWE

The military junta is exacerbating ethnic tensions in Sittwe, Rakhine State, by oppressing Rakhine communities while granting increased privileges to the Rohingya, according to local residents and human rights activists.

Local sources told Mizzima that the junta has restricted Rakhine villagers' access to farmland and fishing rights while allowing Rohingya communities to remain in their villages, cultivate land, and fish in areas off-limits to others.

"The Military Council has given farming rights to Muslims in Byaingphyu village, where cultivation began two months ago. They've relocated Rakhine people into the city, but not the Muslims. The Muslims are also allowed to fish along the riverbanks, paying between one million and 1.5 million kyats per boat to the authorities," a resident of Sittwe said.

He accused the military of stoking inter-ethnic divisions. "This is deliberate discrimination. The junta is creating hatred between the Rakhine and the Muslims. They're arresting and killing Rakhine civilians while protecting the other side."

Access to the riverbank has been restricted for locals in Sittwe, while Rohingya are granted fishing rights in exchange for fees paid to the military authorities, multiple residents reported.

"The Military Council is orchestrating division. They're trying to turn public sentiment against the Arakan Army (AA), even going so far as to put up propaganda posters in Mandalay," said a Sittwe-based human rights activist who requested anonymity due to safety concerns.

Muslim political analyst U Tun Kyi echoed these concerns, warning that the junta is resorting to familiar tactics. "For years, the military has manipulated religious and ethnic differences to maintain power. This is a calculated and systematic strategy to incite conflict and destabilize communities."

Since the military began its operations in the region, approximately two-thirds of Sittwe's population have fled or been forcibly relocated. By February 2024, residents from 14 Rakhine villages including Padalake, Yechanpyin, and Byaingphyu, had been moved into the city, where many now live in monasteries and emergency shelters under severe conditions.

The military demolished homes in these depopulated villages and deployed heavy weaponry, using the areas to establish defensive positions. Rohingya residents in nearby villages such as Thantawli, Latmachay, and Bawdupha have reportedly been allowed to remain in place.

"This is a trap," said a Rakhine community member. "The military is spreading hate and mistrust. If we don't come together and recognize the junta's role in dividing us, they will continue to manipulate both sides for political gain."

On 20 April 2024, local media reported that the military forced around 1,000 Rohingya from a refugee camp in Sittwe to participate in an anti-AA protest. Those who refused were reportedly threatened with the destruction of their homes.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis in Sittwe has deepened. With prices of meat, fish, and vegetables soaring, many families are surviving on rice porridge. Several suicide cases have been reported as desperation mounts amid growing food insecurity.

The Arakan Army now controls 14 towns in Rakhine State, including the Western Military Command headquarters, and is advancing toward coastal strongholds such as Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Munaung. In an effort to retain control of these strategic towns, the junta is reportedly using Rakhine civilians as human shields, forcibly relocating them into urban areas under junta control.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA FLEET CONTINUES UPRIVER MOVEMENT THROUGH HTIGYAING AS RESISTANCE FORCES WARN OF CLASHES

A fleet of junta military vessels moving upstream along the Ayeyarwady River resumed its journey from Htigyaing Township on the morning of 23 July, according to the Htigyaing Revolution (TR) group.

The fleet, composed of cargo ships and river warships enroute to Bhamo, halted overnight in Htigyaing on 22 July before continuing its advance. As of 11:15 am on 23 July, the vessels were reportedly near Dingyi Kya village in Htigyaing Township.

"They've already left. The situation hasn't changed much yet. They're near Dingyi Kya village in Htigyaing Township. There hasn't been any airstrike so far," a TR official told reporters.

In anticipation of possible conflict, the Bhamo District People's Defence Force Battalion 1 issued a public warning on 22 July, urging residents of riverside villages to evacuate immediately. The group also cautioned against traveling along the river, holding festivals, or attending public gatherings due to the risk of air and naval attacks as the fleet approaches.

Residents were advised to return to their homes only once the junta's warships have fully passed and the area is declared safe.

According to a statement from the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence, resistance forces have carried out ambushes and blockades against junta vessels along the Ayeyarwady. In one recent attack between Chaungthale village in Thabeikkyin Township and the Kyaukgyi jetty, resistance forces reportedly set fire to one warship, sank another, and disabled two more. Five junta soldiers were killed, and 21 others injured in that operation, the statement said.

Meanwhile, a separate fleet of six junta warships that departed from Gowin Port in Mandalay on 22 July was reported to have reached Kanbalu Township on the morning of 23 July.

The growing movement of military convoys along the Ayeyarwady has heightened tension across several regions, with resistance forces continuing their efforts to prevent reinforcements and supplies from reaching northern strongholds.

MYANMAR JUNTA CLAIMS RECAPTURE OF GOLD MINING HUB OF THABEIKKYIN

Myanmar's junta claimed on Thursday to have ousted anti-coup rebels from a gold mining hub after a year-long battle, its second declared recapture of a key town in a week.

A civil war has consumed Myanmar since a 2021 coup deposed the civilian government, with the military battling a myriad of pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic armed organisations.

Scattered anti-coup forces initially struggled to make headway, but won a string of stunning victories -- mostly in the north -- when many banded together for a coordinated offensive starting late 2023.

This year, the junta's China- and Russia-backed forces have clawed back ground on the northern front, and state media said its soldiers managed "to fully retake" the town of Thabeikkyin on Wednesday.

One resident, Ye Dinn, said people had fled fighting to shelter in the forest or nearby schools and monasteries.

"People have nothing to eat and no place to flee to," the 65-year-old said.

Thabeikkyin, located about 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of the second most populous city of Mandalay, is a lucrative hive of gold mining sitting on the banks of the Irrawaddy River bisecting Myanmar.

State mouthpiece the Global New Light of Myanmar said an anti-coup alliance attacked Thabeikkyin with "overwhelming strength" last August, but its

counteroffensive retook the town after 17 major battles.

"We are really scared," said another resident, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Nowhere is safe. We are all looking for a safe place, but people have no idea where they should go and hide."

The junta last Thursday said it had recaptured the northeastern town of Nawngkhio, on another key highway towards Mandalay city, fending allied rebels back further into the fringes of the country.

Earlier this week, guerrillas said they ambushed a junta flotilla of five ships sailing up the Irrawaddy north of Mandalay -- another apparent sign of the military's renewed regional offensive.

With control of Thabeikkyin and Nawngkhio, junta forces hold two flanks of the town of Mogok -- the renowned centre of Myanmar's ruby mining industry which rebel forces claimed last summer.

Mines excavating precious metals, gemstones and rare earth elements are coveted by all factions in Myanmar's civil war, allowing them to fill their coffers and fund their offensives.

Some 3.5 million people are living displaced amid the war, according to the United Nations, while more than half the nation of around 50 million now lives in poverty.

AFP

Photo: Supplied

APHR ISSUES URGENT WARNING OF A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FOR MYANMAR REFUGEES

On 21 July, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) issued a statement warning that humanitarian operations along the Thailand-Myanmar border could collapse by the end of July due to funding cuts, threatening over 108,000 Myanmar refugees with a lack of food, shelter, and medical care.

By 31 July 2025, essential aid operations led by The Border Consortium (TBC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and other humanitarian partners are set to cease or drastically reduce their activities due to the sudden and severe funding withdrawals of the United States and other major donors.

The text of the statement continues below.

This funding collapse threatens the survival of more than 108,000 Myanmar refugees, many of whom have spent decades in the camps, stateless, displaced, and forgotten. They include children born in exile, elderly survivors of persecution, and families fleeing atrocities. With aid pipelines vanishing, these communities face imminent threats of hunger, untreated illness, and complete deprivation.

"This is not about budget cuts; it is a collapse of humanity," said Mercy Chriesty Barends, APHR Chairperson and Member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia. "We are abandoning

people who have already been abandoned by the world too many times," she added.

The withdrawal of critical aid services not only endangers the most vulnerable but also erodes decades of humanitarian efforts built through cooperation and regional solidarity. For many refugees, the camps were the last thin line of protection. That line is now breaking—not from conflict, but from international indifference.

"Basic needs are not negotiable," emphasized Emmi de Jesus, Former Member of the House of Representatives of the Philippines. "To deny food, shelter, and safety to displaced people is not simply a policy debate—it is a moral and political failure. ASEAN, Thailand, and donor countries must step up now to prevent a humanitarian collapse."

By May 2025, the humanitarian situation in Mae Sot was already deteriorating, as documented by APHR's fact-finding mission. A previous 90-day freeze on U.S. foreign aid forced the closure of hospitals in several refugee camps in Thailand, leaving thousands without access to essential medical care, showing how political decisions can directly put lives at risk. With further funding now withdrawn alongside ongoing airstrikes, forced conscription, sexual violence, and the aftermath of a deadly 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar

have pushed more people to flee into Thailand, while aid continues to collapse.

Critical humanitarian services now at risk:

The Border Consortium (TBC), which has provided monthly food assistance and shelter to refugees since the 1980s, will end its US-funded food voucher program by 31 July, leaving tens of thousands without guaranteed access to food. Only the most vulnerable will continue to receive minimal support.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has closed down health clinics in seven of nine camps, citing loss of donor funding. These clinics provided lifesaving care including oxygen therapy, dialysis, and maternal health. At least one confirmed death occurred following the closures.

Other humanitarian organizations, including Rights Beyond Border, Mae Tao Clinic, and local refugee-led initiatives, have filled critical gaps in education, legal protection, and psychosocial support—but are now overwhelmed by the sudden loss of system-wide coordination and funding.

For over three decades, humanitarian organizations have been vital in supporting displaced communities along the Thai-Myanmar border. The Border Consortium (TBC) has ensured food security and shelter through a community-led model that empowers refugee committees and promotes resilience. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided comprehensive healthcare to over 60,000 people annually, including maternal care, chronic disease management, and mental health services.

Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot has long served migrant and undocumented populations, now facing overwhelming demand as camp-based healthcare collapses. Community-based groups such as Rights Beyond Border and Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific have filled crucial gaps in education, legal protection, and women's rights, but are now overstretched due to system-wide funding cuts.

"These are not just program closures," said Charles Santiago, APHR Co-Chairperson and former Member of Parliament from Malaysia. "They represent the

collapse of an entire humanitarian ecosystem, one that has safeguarded life and dignity for more than thirty years."

As this crisis exposes the fragility of donor-dependent aid systems, APHR emphasizes the urgent need for sustainable, rights-based solutions grounded in refugee self-reliance.

"Letting refugees work is not charity. It is common sense," said Kanavee Suebsaeng, Member of the House of Representatives of Thailand. "Thailand faces labor shortages and an aging population. Refugees are skilled, motivated, and ready. We must move from closed camps to open opportunities."

Thailand has long played a vital role in hosting displaced populations. Now, it can lead again by granting refugees legal rights to work, easing pressure on the aid system, and setting a regional precedent for pragmatic compassion. Refugees themselves are asking for the chance to support their families. Yet current policies restrict their freedom of movement and bar them from employment, forcing them into dependence or underground economies.

"My children have never seen Myanmar. We live day to day not knowing if we'll have rice tomorrow," said Naw Naw, a refugee mother in Mae La camp. "We don't want pity. We want to work, to survive."

The escalating humanitarian crisis is not just Thailand's burden, it is a regional failure that reflects ASEAN's ongoing inability to implement its Five-Point Consensus. The junta continues to weaponize humanitarian aid, attack earthquake-hit zones, and imprison thousands of political opponents with impunity. Inside Myanmar, over 3.5 million people remain displaced, with more seeking refuge across borders as war, conscription, and natural disaster tear communities apart.

"You cannot deliver aid through those who bomb hospitals and imprison medics," said Wong Chen, APHR Board Member and Member of the Malaysian Parliament. "ASEAN must act with moral clarity—not diplomatic caution."

Photo: Supplied

CIVILIANS ARRESTED AND KILLED BY MYANMAR JUNTA AND PYU SAW HTEE MILITIAS IN MYINGYAN

Civilians passing through military checkpoints in Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, were arrested and later killed by junta troops and pro-military Pyu Saw Htee militias, according to local residents.

Around 30 people, including women and minors, were reportedly killed between October 2024 and April 2025. Their families, unaware of their fate for months, had already held alms-giving ceremonies in their memory.

The victims were allegedly detained while traveling to Myingyan for shopping or delivering goods.

Many were stopped at Pyu Saw Htee-operated internal checkpoints or one of the eight military checkpoints surrounding the town.

"Four or five people from some villages were taken. Their families had no clue for months whether they were alive or dead. Only after learning of their deaths did they begin performing merit-sharing ceremonies. I know of at least 20 people who were killed. They were tortured to death, not shot. The bodies weren't returned to families," a resident said.

Among the deceased were seven women aged between 35 and 40, two boys around 15 years old, and numerous men in their 40s. Sources close to the Pyu Saw Htee militia confirmed that some of the bodies were thrown into rivers, buried in shallow pits, or burned – an apparent attempt to destroy evidence.

One source said, "Five people were killed in our

village – a husband and wife, a mother and son, and another man. Their vehicles and belongings were taken too."

Victims reportedly came from eight villages in the eastern and southern parts of Myingyan Township.

Local sources have confirmed the identities of 20 individuals, and a Pyu Saw Htee-linked informant provided 10 additional names. Due to security concerns, the names of the victims and villages have not been publicly released.

Local residents believe that informants, known as "Dalan" in Burmese, tipped off the junta and Pyu Saw Htee militias. In some cases, detainees were only released after families paid ransoms of 10 million kyats (US\$4,760) each, according to those close to the families.

Even though villagers followed required procedures – registering and obtaining recommendation letters from Pyu Saw Htee groups before entering Myingyan – they were still arrested, and their belongings, including trucks, were seized.

Local defence forces confirmed that Thida Yu Mon, a Pyu Saw Htee leader closely cooperating with the junta, is overseeing internal checkpoints.

Over 50 people remain missing, and their families have received no information about their whereabouts or whether they were transferred to police custody or prison. The fate of many remains unknown.

Ma Wut Yee Aung

DAGON UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEADER DIES IN PRISON FROM TORTURE INJURIES, MYANMAR JUNTA LISTS CAUSE AS EPILEPSY

Ma Wut Yee Aung, a central executive committee member of the Dagon University Students' Union, died from injuries reportedly sustained during torture while under interrogation in junta custody. However, the junta listed her cause of death as "chronic epilepsy" in an official prison release certificate issued to her family.

According to political prisoners recently released from Insein Prison, 26-year-old Ma Wut Yee Aung suffered severe head injuries and possible brain trauma as a result of torture. These injuries reportedly caused her to lose consciousness frequently during her incarceration.

She passed away in the early hours of 20 July inside Insein Prison. On the afternoon of 21 July, prison officials read out a formal decree and issued a prison release certificate to her family.

The Free Funeral Service Association (Yangon) announced that her cremation will take place at 11 am on 22 July at Yayway Cemetery in North Okkalapa township, Yangon. Her body was moved from Insein Hospital to the mortuary at Yayway Cemetery on the afternoon of 21 July.

Ma Wut Yee Aung was arrested on 14 September 2021 and sentenced to three years under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code. On 27 June 2023, she was given an additional four-year sentence under Section 52(a), bringing her total prison term to seven years.

She was initially transferred from Insein Prison to Daik-U Prison on 24 April 2022 and later returned to Insein on 24 October 2022.

As of 18 July, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported that at least 29,405 individuals have been arrested since the 2021 military coup. Of those, 22,184 remain in detention, and 10,884 have been sentenced.

Rights groups and activists have repeatedly accused the junta of using torture and denying medical care to political detainees. The case of Ma Wut Yee Aung has drawn widespread condemnation from student unions and human rights defenders, who say her death underscores the regime's ongoing abuse of political prisoners.



Photo: Supplied

MDY-PDF CLAIMS CAPTURE OF JUNTA OUTPOSTS NEAR MANDALAY, 16 SOLDIERS DETAINED

The Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF) announced on 21 July that joint revolutionary forces had seized multiple junta outposts in Madaya and Patheingyi townships, including strategic locations near Mandalay city.

According to the statement, the coordinated attacks led to the full capture of junta outposts in Thapin Kone village in Madaya township, and Thayet Kaing and Myakan Thar villages in Patheingyi township on 20 July. Myakan Thar village lies just 14 miles from Mandalay Palace, situated along the Mandalay-Myitkyina highway.

During the assaults, 16 junta personnel, including a captain, were reportedly detained. The resistance forces also recovered the bodies of 15 junta soldiers and seized a significant cache of weapons, including firearms, drones, a drone jammer vehicle, and ammunition.

Photographs released by the MDY-PDF show the captured personnel alongside the confiscated equipment and weapons.

The joint operation was carried out by the MDY-PDF, the Madaya Myo Mhan Force, the Madaya Township People's Defense Force (PDF), and the Special Strategic Task Force (SSTF).

However, pro-junta Telegram channels reported that the military temporarily retreated from Myakan Thar village on 20 July but claimed to have retaken control of the area on 21 July. Independent verification of this claim remains unclear.

Mizzima has contacted the MDY-PDF spokesperson for updates on the current situation, but no response had been received at the time of publication.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

NEW BURMA CAMPAIGN UK BRIEFING PAPER HIGHLIGHTS DANGERS OF MYANMAR'S UPCOMING SHAM ELECTIONS

Burma Campaign UK published a new briefing paper on 23 July titled "The Burmese Military's 'Elections': New Date, New Danger, Same Sham." The report makes clear that the international community should be supporting bottom-up democracy in Myanmar rather than the junta's 'sham elections.'

The press release continues as follows.

The Burmese military are planning new elections at the end of 2025. They will clearly be a total sham and mostly rejected internationally and domestically. The Burmese military know this but are calculating that it doesn't matter. They want to repeat what happened with the 2010 elections. Those elections were also rejected, but the international community went on to drop sanctions and support the regime it had previously described as illegitimate.

"The Burmese military likes elections almost as much as it likes coups," said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. "For the Burmese military, elections are an opportunity to rebrand, renew, and try to convince the people of Burma and the international community that reforms are finally happening. If the international community goes along with it like they did after the 2010 elections, they risk enabling military rule and human rights violations for decades to come."

The Burmese military is currently fighting for its very survival. In early 2025, the BBC estimated that the military is only in full control of around 20% of the country. Its latest administrative brand name, the State Administrative Council (SAC), has failed to gain the international legitimacy it craves.

The Burmese military needs a gamechanger. A reset. While it initially seemed that the military were being pushed into holding elections by China, the Burmese military are now deploying significant physical and propaganda resources into preparing to hold the election during December 2025 and perhaps into January 2026.

A few days after the 2021 coup, Min Aung Hlaing made a long speech about his post-coup vision. It was basically a version of the Thein Sein era, but with even tighter military control. He spoke of continued international investment, growing the economy. Incredibly, he was trying to persuade people in the country and outside that nothing would really change after the coup. As if it were just some kind of temporary blip.

While the current Burmese military leadership might not have any particular fondness for Thein Sein himself, the period appears to be a blueprint they want to repeat.

Dialogue and compromise with the military, engaging with whatever new post-election system they put in place, will be throwing a lifeline to the military at a time when it has never been weaker and people have genuine hope that they can finally be free.

Many leaders and activists in Burma have expressed the fear that the international community will pressure them to compromise with the military instead of helping them be free from the military.

There is unbearable suffering in Burma, millions of people displaced, more than half the population in poverty, most of the population living in fear. The international community should not try to use this crisis to pressure and manipulate the people of Burma into compromising with the military and coming in under the 2008 Constitution. That is a recipe for decades more conflict, human rights violations and underdevelopment.

Trying to impose a single central government on Burma doesn't bring stability, it does the opposite. It causes conflict and instability. It hasn't worked for the past 70 years and decades of military rule have destroyed trust that it could work.

An alternative to the single central state structure which has contributed to conflict and instability is being built from the bottom up. When the Burmese military are forced out of an area, new devolved administrations expand into the space created. Some are authoritarian themselves, but many others are not. They are engaging in long consultations with local people about what they want and need, and what kind of government they want. Local people are gaining more control of their lives, identity, religion and natural resources. They are providing schools and health services. This is not just happening in ethnic states, but also other parts of the country liberated from Burmese military occupation.

This is the process the international community should be supporting. Bottom up democracy built mile by mile. What has been achieved with little or no international support so far is remarkable. It offers a viable, if unfamiliar, alternative to ongoing Burmese military dominance, with much better long-term prospects for peace and economic development than that offered by the Burmese military.



UNOCHA HIGHLIGHTS ONGOING CHALLENGES TO HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN MYANMAR

On 21 July, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released its Humanitarian Access Snapshot for June 2025, highlighting how ongoing military operations and clashes have left an estimated 130,000 people without timely assistance.

The update report continues as follows.

Humanitarian organizations reported 77 access-related incidents across 12 states and regions in Myanmar during June 2025, affecting humanitarian operations and constraining assistance to an estimated 130,000 people in need. The number of incidents remained comparable to May, which recorded the second-lowest monthly total so far this year.

This trend may reflect a reduced humanitarian footprint, largely attributed to funding limitations. Northern and Southern Shan accounted for 40 percent of all reported incidents, marking the fourth consecutive month with the area having the highest number of access challenges.

Ongoing military operations and clashes between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) impeded aid delivery across 10 states and regions, with most incidents reported in Northern and Southern Shan, Kayin, Bago (East), Mon, and Magway. Airstrikes reportedly damaged schools in Northern Shan, Kayin, and Mandalay, forcing aid organizations to delay planned distributions.

A community health centre in Madaya Township (Mandalay) was also reportedly hit.

Roadblocks by armed actors in Mon, Kayin, and Southern Shan suspended operations for more than five days in some locations, disrupting food distributions and protection services. In Rakhine, heavy fighting delayed activities for over 10 days in Buthidaung and Ponnagyun.

Administrative impediments made up 30 per cent of reported incidents, with most occurring in Southern and Northern Shan, Rakhine, and Mandalay. In Mandalay and Sagaing, authorities informed partners that prior state-level approval would now be required for cash assistance to earthquake-affected communities. In Northern Shan, a UN agency's travel authorization request for access to Lashio Township remained unapproved for over a month, delaying multi-sectoral activities.

In Rakhine, restrictions on air and water transport of medicines from Yangon left some communities without essential health supplies. Delays at MAF and NSAG checkpoints continued, particularly in Shan. In Kayin, one NGO temporarily relocated activities from Hpapun due to repeated denials of travel requests. Despite these challenges, a joint inter-agency convoy delivered 50 truckloads of relief supplies from Yangon to Myitkyina in Kachin State, via Sagaing, in June.



Both sides of the Myanmar conflict are using drones. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA DRONE CRASHES OVER THAI BORDER

A Myanmar junta drone targeting anti-coup fighters crashed over the border in Thailand, the kingdom's military said, prompting an official rebuke over hazardous spillover from the civil war.

Western Thailand regularly suffers ramifications from the conflict that has raged in Myanmar since the military toppled the country's elected civilian government in 2021.

Deserting junta troops, fleeing civilian refugees and desperate economic migrants often make unsanctioned crossings of the countries' 2,400 kilometre (1,500 mile) frontier.

Thailand's military said it found the "kamikaze drone" on Monday in a forest in Tak Province, 15 kilometres inside the Thai border.

"No civilians were injured or killed, and no property damage was reported," said a Tuesday night statement.

"Initial investigations suggest the drone belonged to the Myanmar military and was intended for an attack on resistance forces, but lost control and crashed on

the Thai side."

The military statement said a disposal team "neutralised the explosive materials" and a "formal protest" has been lodged about the incident through a border dialogue organisation.

Myanmar's junta and its myriad rebel opponents are both increasingly relying on drones to gain a strategic edge in the civil war, which has now ground on for more than four years.

Myanmar ranks third globally -- behind only Ukraine and Russia -- for the number of drone sorties recorded by monitor organisation Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), according to a report this month.

"The accessibility, ease of modification, and cost-effectiveness of drones enable both resistance groups and the military to achieve military objectives while minimising combat casualties," the report said.

AFP

CNO-UCR SEIZES 800,000 STIMULANT TABLETS ENROUTE TO INDIA FROM KALAY

The Chin National Organization - Upper Chindwin Region (CNO-UCR) announced that it seized 800,000 WY-branded stimulant tablets intended for trafficking to India.

The seizure took place on 18 July at a checkpoint situated between Yazagyo and Letpanchaung villages, along the Kalay-Tamu route in Sagaing Region.

According to CNO-UCR officials, five individuals riding four motorcycles from Kalay town toward Tamu were intercepted. In addition to the stimulant tablets, authorities confiscated 15 million kyats in cash and five mobile phones.

"We arrested them at our checkpoint as our intelligence team got the information in advance," said a CNO-UCR officer.

The group confirmed that a case has been opened under relevant drug laws and that legal proceedings are underway to prosecute those involved. One of the detained individuals allegedly admitted that the drugs were meant to be delivered to an individual named EM in India, estimating the street value of the haul at over 1 billion kyats.

The Kalay-Tamu route, which lies along the India-Myanmar border trade corridor, has long been used for cross-border drug trafficking.

Local communities report that this stretch became a hotspot for drug addiction among youth even before the military takeover.

A CNO-UCR official noted that drug circulation has worsened in recent years, particularly after a wave of prisoner releases by the junta.

"After drug addicts were released and rule of law weakened, drugs became more accessible. People could buy them easily in the town," the official said.

Although the organization does not widely publicize its operations on social media, CNO-UCR stated that it continues to run anti-drug education and awareness campaigns in territories under its control.

Local judicial bodies are reportedly convicting traffickers and users, issuing jail sentences and fines.

Locals have expressed frustration over what they see as selective enforcement by the junta. While anti-junta activists are swiftly arrested, drug traffickers often escape accountability, they claim.

CNO-UCR pledged to intensify its crackdown on narcotics in the Kalay-Kabaw area and called on the public to support the anti-drug movement to protect communities and prevent further harm to young people.

Photo: AFP

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.



Photo: Mizzima

STRONG WINDS IN MYANMAR DAMAGE OVER 100 HOMES IN MON STATE, INJURES ELDERLY WOMAN

Strong winds swept through Paung and Thaton townships in Mon State on the morning of 24 July, damaging more than 100 homes, toppling trees, and injuring an elderly woman, according to local rescue teams.

At around 8 am, strong winds struck the road between Daweisu and Pow neighbourhoods in Moenai Ward, Paung Township, tearing through the surrounding mountainous areas. The injured woman was asleep in her home when a tree collapsed onto the structure. She was later taken to Paung Hospital and is reported to be in stable condition.

"All the trees in the mountains were also damaged. I have never experienced a tornado like this before. We are still clearing the area," said an official from a local rescue team.

In Paung Township, Daweisu and Winkhalon neighbourhoods saw the most destruction, with more

than 100 homes damaged. Uprooted trees also blocked roads, prompting rescue and clearing efforts to be carried out swiftly.

Similarly, strong winds hit Naungkalar Ale village in Thaton Township at around 7:30 am on 24 July, causing several homes to collapse. No additional injuries have been reported as of the time of writing.

The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (MOHADMD) under the National Unity Government (NUG) had issued a weather forecast on 21 July, warning of possible typhoon-related hazards, including strong winds, heavy rain, lightning, thunder, and landslides across eight regions and states. Cleanup operations are ongoing in affected areas.



STORM-DRIVEN FLOODS IN MYANMAR HIT MYAWADDY AND TACHILEK AS RIVER LEVELS RISE

Hheavy rains triggered by a passing storm have caused rivers to swell and flood low-lying areas in the Thai-Myanmar border townships of Myawaddy and Tachilek, according to local residents and official reports.

As of 6:30 am on 24 July, the Moei River, also known as the Thaungyin River, had risen to more than nine and a half feet above its danger level in Myawaddy, according to the junta's Meteorology and Hydrology Department.

In Tachilek Township, the Mae Sai creek, particularly near Loi Taw Kham village, has climbed over half a foot above its danger level, and is expected to rise by another half foot in the next 24 hours.

Persistent rain since the afternoon of 23 July has inundated low-lying neighbourhoods in Myawaddy and across the border in Mae Sot, Thailand. While water has reached the base of Friendship Bridge No. 1, the key border crossing between the two towns remained open as of 24 July.

"Myawaddy has been under continuous rain for three days now, and the water level hasn't gone down yet. The skies are still cloudy, and more rain is likely. The town floods every year because it lacks a proper drainage system. Streams and ditches were filled in for construction, so now there's nowhere for the water to go," a local resident said.

Due to worsening conditions, 11 temporary disaster relief camps have been set up in Myawaddy. Local aid workers are urging residents in flood-prone

areas to evacuate early.

In Tachilek, runoff from nearby hills has flooded several low-lying neighbourhoods, including Pone Hton, Talot, Maka Ho Kham, and Wang Kaung. On the Thai side, Mae Sai District has also experienced flooding.

Authorities have warned that continued rainfall and runoff may cause further flooding in Tachilek and have called on residents to prepare accordingly.

The Meteorology and Hydrology Department has issued a nationwide alert, forecasting heavy rain driven by remnants of a typhoon, forming whirlwinds, and a potential low-pressure system in the Bay of Bengal. The department has warned that most parts of the country may face severe weather over the next two days.

River levels are also high in Madauk along the Sittaung River and in Nga Thaung Chaung Township along the Ngawun River, with both exceeding their respective danger levels. Residents living near riverbanks and in low-lying areas have been urged to evacuate immediately.

The National Unity Government's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (MOHADMD) has advised the public to prepare emergency food and supplies, safeguard important documents, switch off electrical appliances, monitor weather updates, avoid walking or swimming in floodwaters, stay away from riverbanks due to erosion risks, and refrain from tying up animals during floods.



Photo: AFP

MULLING WHAT NEGOTIATION MEANS WHEN SOLVING THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Democracy activist Igor Blazevic recently wrote a commentary on the idea of negotiations to end the Myanmar crisis and the problems in such an approach. This and a number of other stories in the media have brought to the fore the idea of negotiations – and also prompted some misunderstanding.

Mr. Blazevic recently sat down with Mizzima to explain his argument. The following is the transcript of his explanation which drill deeper into this difficult issue:

So last time there was a question about negotiations and some people argue and think that negotiations are the only way to end the current deepening crisis in Myanmar, the way to end the junta's war against the people.

So, with negotiations, it depends when they happen. What that means is, what is the power balance between the military junta and the revolutionary forces at the moment when the negotiations are happening. It's also important who is negotiating and about what.

So, I can see and differentiate between probably four types of negotiations.

One type of negotiation is what I would call, fake negotiations offered by the military junta. These are not really negotiations. These are a call for the revolutionary forces to surrender, to give up their liberation struggle, to accept that the military will remain the dominant force in Myanmar politics, that the military will continue to control the key powers in the Myanmar state, and that the military will remain in control of the biggest, most profitable assets of the Myanmar economy. And what the military is ready to offer to these revolutionary forces

who surrender is a role as a junior partner, they can have a seat in the parliament. Perhaps somebody may even get a seat as a junior member of the government. They can get certain corrupt business deals.

So, this is one type of negotiation offered by the junta, which in reality is nothing but a surrender. Their purpose is to try to divide the revolutionary forces so that somebody accepts, somebody doesn't accept, and then the junta has weakened the alliance of the democratic, revolutionary forces.

There are then negotiations in which international actors – ASEAN, China, the UN Special Envoy, and different peace facilitators – are trying to achieve. These negotiations which neighbours and international actors are trying to achieve are not much better than what the junta is offering as a negotiation. Let's say they are just kind of packaged in a little bit nicer way.

But the reality of these negotiations is still the same. The junta, or military, will remain the dominant force in Myanmar politics and state and economy. And other stakeholders should accept some junior role. So, it's nothing substantially different.

And this offer, let's say, is also very unfair, because the neighbours and international community are doing simply nothing to reduce the capacity of the junta to wage its war of terror against the people. They place zero pressure on the way the junta wages war, although they can easily do that.

They can easily block the import of jet fuel. They can easily block the financial flows to the Myanmar junta because everything is coming through the banks of the neighbouring countries. So, they can easily

pressure the junta. But they are not doing anything.

Instead, what they are doing is pressuring the revolutionary forces to accept negotiations, which are basically, I call it, "soft surrender" to ongoing military control over the central state of the Myanmar.

Then we have a third possibility for negotiation, and this is if we have a situation in which the military itself removes Min Aung Hlaing and the SAC either by putting him in jail or killing him or forcing him to escape somewhere abroad. In whatever way, removing him.

And then some representatives of the military make an offer to the revolutionary forces that they are ready to negotiate and that they are ready to accept that military will not have a political role and dominant role in the future of Myanmar. They immediately stop military operations from their side, and they release the political prisoners. So, in that moment, the revolutionary forces should, of course, be ready to go into these negotiations and negotiate for how full power will be handed over to the legitimate representatives of the people.

It's important to understand that in this moment the revolutionary forces are probably not ready for this kind of negotiation because they don't have agreement between themselves about who is negotiating on the behalf of the revolutionary forces and what mandate they have from the revolutionary force. Maybe there is some documentation, joint statements by the NUG and K3C which could give some indication regarding the framework under which the revolutionary forces might be ready to negotiate. It would be good to have a more proper understanding whether, for example, there are three people from the NUG and three people from some of the ethnic revolutionary organisations participating in these negotiations. Or is it a bigger team?

Because the military will know who is negotiating on their behalf and they will know what they want to achieve. They will try to get an amnesty for themselves. They will try to protect as much of their interest as they can.

But we need to also have clarity about who is negotiating in that moment on the behalf of the revolutionary forces and have an agreement that those people have the mandate to conduct negotiations and have clear policy instructions about what they can accept and what they should never accept.

What we don't want to happen is that in that moment there is disagreement among the revolutionary forces who are negotiating resulting in some revolutionary forces saying, "Oh no, no those who are negotiating are not negotiating on our behalf." Or we have a situation wherein political prisoners are released and then the revolutionary alliance is broken with some saying Aung

San Suu Kyi is entitled to negotiate and somebody else is saying Aung San Suu Kyi cannot negotiate on our behalf because we have liberated and defended our country.

So, we need to have clarity now about who has a mandate to negotiate at that moment if the military removes the SAC and is ready to come to negotiate. Let's see how the civilian revolutionary forces are taking over power.

There is also a fourth possibility for non-negotiations. That is if the war continues for one more year, two more years, and we come to a situation in which both sides – the revolutionary side and the junta – are completely exhausted. And let's say there is a stalemate on the front line, that there are basically no more significant dynamics for one side or the other.

So basically, nobody is able to win. Both sides control significant territory, and the situation is kind of blocked. And in that moment, it's also possible, let's say, that negotiations will happen, which will basically politically freeze the unresolved, unfinished war.

And there could be a situation when basically, you know, like North Korea - South Korea, like Turkey and Cyprus – North Cyprus, South Cyprus. There are sometimes moments when basically there is no winner in a war. Both sides are exhausted. And then at that moment you have a ceasefire and then you have a certain political agreement to freeze the situation, although nobody fully accepts that political reality.

So, there is no simple response on negotiations. Because it really depends on what kind of negotiations and what is the power balance at that particular moment and that can determine the outcome of these negotiations.

I don't think that the revolutionary forces should in any way at this moment accept the first two types of negotiations. Because if we accept these first two types of negotiations, that will basically mean that at a moment when the military regime is weak – even half broken – we are giving up on the opportunity, the historic opportunity, to finish the job and to remove them once and for all.

Instead of that, we would basically be accepting that they become the legitimate government of Myanmar. At that moment when they become the legitimate government of Myanmar, from their current weakness, they will start very quickly to regain strength. And once they have regained strength, they will find a way, either forcefully or through economic blackmail or through other things, to take back everything that has been liberated through the Spring Revolution so far.

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



INDIA EXPULSIONS TO BANGLADESH UNLAWFUL, TARGET MUSLIMS: HRW

India has pushed hundreds of ethnic Bengali-speaking Muslims into Bangladesh without due process, Human Rights Watch said 24 July, accusing the government of flouting rules and fuelling bias on religious lines.

The Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has long taken a hardline stance on immigration -- particularly those from neighbouring Muslim-majority Bangladesh -- with top authorities referring to them as "termites" and "infiltrators".

Critics also accuse the government of sparking fear among India's estimated 200 million Muslims, especially among speakers of Bengali, a widely spoken language in both eastern India and Bangladesh.

HRW, a New York-based nonprofit, said India forcibly expelled more than 1,500 Muslim men, women, and children to Bangladesh between May 7 and June 15, quoting Bangladeshi authorities.

"India's ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is fuelling discrimination by arbitrarily expelling Bengali Muslims from the country, including Indian citizens," Elaine Pearson, Asia director at the nonprofit, said.

"The Indian government is putting thousands of vulnerable people at risk in apparent pursuit of unauthorised immigrants, but their actions reflect broader discriminatory policies against Muslims."

New Delhi insists that people deported are undocumented migrants.

However, claims by authorities that the expulsions were to manage illegal immigration were "unconvincing", Pearson added, because of "their disregard for due process rights, domestic guarantees, and international human rights standards".

'They were holding guns'

HRW said it had sent the report's findings and questions to the country's home ministry but had received no response.

The report documented the experiences of 18 people.

A 51-year-old daily wage worker told HRW that he "walked into Bangladesh like a dead body" after India's Border Security Force (BSF) took him to the border after midnight.

"I thought they (the BSF) would kill me because they were holding guns and no one from my family would know," the report quotes the worker as saying.

Bangladesh, largely encircled by land by India, has seen relations with New Delhi turn icy since a mass uprising in 2024 toppled Dhaka's government, an ally of India.

India also ramped up operations against migrants in the wake of an attack in Indian-administered Kashmir in April that killed 26 people, mainly Hindu tourists.

New Delhi accused neighbouring Pakistan of supporting the attack, an allegation denied by Islamabad.

In an unprecedented countrywide security drive, Indian authorities detained thousands, with many of them being eventually pushed across the border to Bangladesh.

"The government is undercutting India's long history of providing refuge to the persecuted as it tries to generate political support," Pearson said.

India has also been accused of forcibly deporting Muslim Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, with navy ships dropping them off the coast of the war-torn nation.

AFP



Thai soldiers on the Thai-Cambodian border.
Photo: AFP

THAILAND AND CAMBODIA TRADE ALLEGATIONS OF TRUCE BREAKING

Thailand and Cambodia exchanged allegations on Wednesday of breaching a ceasefire deal which has largely halted the open combat that engulfed their frontier.

The nations agreed a truce starting Tuesday after five days of clashes killed at least 43 people on both sides, as a long-standing dispute over contested border temples boiled over into fighting on their 800-kilometre (500-mile) boundary.

Khuon Sudary, president of the National Assembly of Cambodia, urged other countries to help ensure the ceasefire is upheld.

"To prevent the breach of the ceasefire, it is urgent to deploy international observers and inspection teams. Please hold accountable those who violate the ceasefire," she said at the sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Geneva.

Thailand's foreign ministry said its troops in Sisaket province "came under attack by small arms fire and grenade assaults launched by Cambodian forces" in an offensive that continued until Wednesday morning.

"This represents a flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement," said a foreign ministry statement.

Thai government spokesman Jirayu Huangsab also reported overnight clashes but said "the Thai side maintained control of the situation" and conditions along the border were "reported to be normal" from 8:00 am (0100 GMT).

On Wednesday, a Cambodian defence ministry official accused Thailand of twice breaching the ceasefire, intended to end fighting which has seen the two countries evacuate a total of more than 300,000 people from the border region.

UN rights chief Volker Turk urged the neighbouring nations to implement their ceasefire deal in full and take rapid steps to build confidence and peace.

"This crucial agreement must be fully respected, in good faith, by both sides, as diplomatic efforts continue, in a bid to resolve the root causes of the conflict," Turk said.

At a temple in Thailand's Surin city serving as a shelter and field kitchen 50 kilometres away from the frontier, volunteer Thanin Kittiworranun said evacuees remain in limbo.

"We don't believe Cambodia will hold the ceasefire," the 65-year-old told AFP.

But an AFP journalist on the Cambodian side who heard a steady drumbeat of artillery fire since fighting began on Thursday reported hearing no blasts between the start of the truce and Wednesday morning.

Beijing said deputy foreign minister Sun Weidong hosted a meeting with Thai and Cambodian officials in Shanghai, where both "reaffirmed to China their commitment to abide by the ceasefire consensus".

'Fragile'

The armistice got off to a shaky start in the early hours of Tuesday, with Thailand accusing Cambodia of continuing attacks in "a clear attempt to undermine mutual trust" -- before peace generally prevailed.

Meetings between rival commanders along the border -- scheduled as part of the pact -- went ahead,

with Thailand's army saying de-escalation steps were agreed including "a halt on troop reinforcements or movements that could lead to misunderstandings".

But later in the day a foreign affairs spokeswoman for Bangkok's border crisis centre, Maratee Nalita Andamo, warned the situation -- in the early days of the truce -- remained "fragile".

Jets, rockets and artillery have killed at least 15 Thai troops and 15 Thai civilians, while Cambodia has confirmed eight civilian and five military deaths.

The flare-up has surpassed the death toll of 28 in violence that raged sporadically from 2008 to 2011 over the territory, claimed by both nations because of a vague demarcation made by Cambodia's French colonial administrators in 1907.

The peace pact was sealed in Malaysia after intervention from US President Donald Trump -- who both Thailand and Cambodia are courting for a trade deal to avert his threat of eye-watering tariffs.

AFP

UN SOUNDS ALARM ON SOUTHEAST ASIA SCAM CENTRE SURGE

Human trafficking for forced criminal activity is growing at an alarming rate, with hundreds of thousands of people trapped in online scamming centres across Southeast Asia, the United Nations said Wednesday.

Too often, instead of getting help, victims are arrested for crimes they were forced to commit, the head of the UN's migration agency said on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

"Trafficking is a human rights crisis, but it's more than that. It's a massive global business that fuels corruption, spreads fear, and preys on the most vulnerable," Amy Pope said.

Her International Organization for Migration agency has witnessed trafficking for forced crime expand with "alarming" speed, she said.

"Right now, across Southeast Asia, hundreds of thousands of people are stuck in online scamming compounds," the IOM chief said.

"These operations bring in an estimated \$40 billion a year, and many of those trapped are migrants, young jobseekers, children, and people with disabilities."

She said the Geneva-based IOM had helped nearly 3,000 victims rebuild their lives since 2022.

The agency has helped bring people home from the Philippines and Vietnam and supported victims in Thailand, Myanmar, and beyond, Pope said.

But she warned that far more remained stranded.

"To make matters worse, instead of getting help, they're often arrested, prosecuted, and punished. Let me be clear: no-one should be jailed for something they were forced to do," she said.

She urged governments and civil society to step up and get national laws changed so that trafficking survivors could be protected rather than punished -- and urged authorities to go after the traffickers rather than those they exploit.

Myanmar's many-sided civil war -- sparked by a 2021 coup -- has enabled the rapid growth of lucrative internet fraud factories established in its loosely governed borderlands.

Cyberscam operations lure foreign workers with promises of high-paying jobs but hold them hostage and force them to commit online fraud. Many of the trafficking victims are Chinese men.

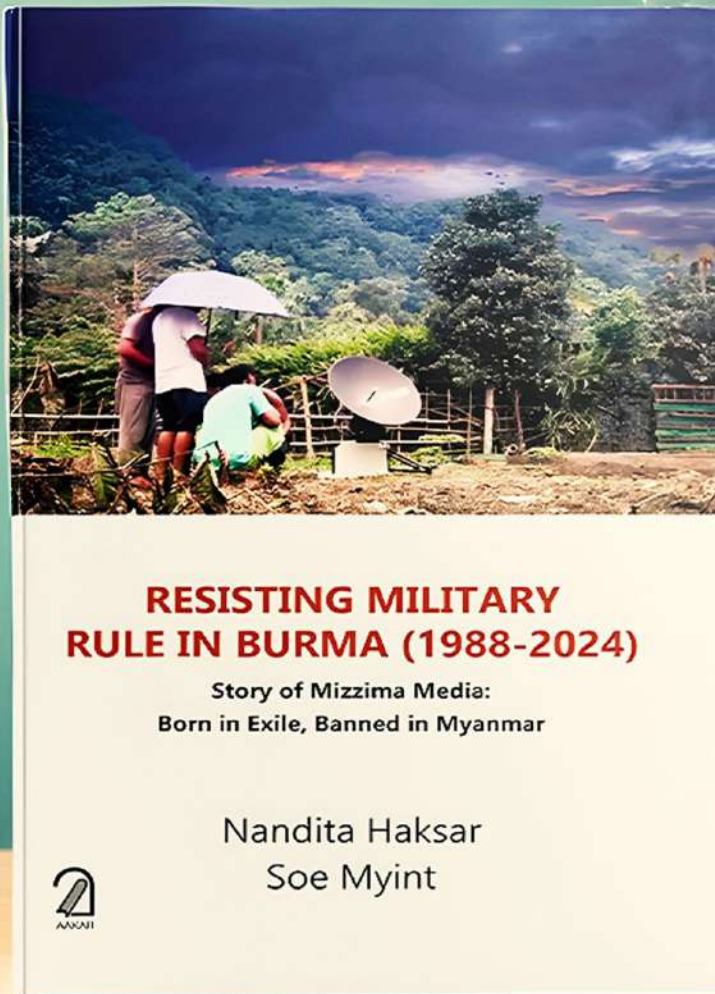
Many people have said they were trafficked into often heavily fortified scam compounds to target victims with romance or business scams on social media, luring them into making untraceable cryptocurrency payments.

AFP

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



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SCHOOLING THE SYSTEM

“I always wanted to do good, to help people,” says Sallo Polak—a Dutch humanitarian, founder of Philanthropy Connections Foundation (PCF), and longtime resident of Southeast Asia—expressing the spirit of his decades-long mission to uplift under-resourced communities. For Insight Myanmar Podcast listeners interested in ethical aid, cross-cultural partnerships, and community-driven development along the Thailand-Myanmar border and beyond, Polak’s story offers both inspiration and hard-earned lessons.

Growing up in the Netherlands, Polak was disturbed by the global inequities he saw in media, and a formative, nine-month, overland trip to India at age 18 crystallized his desire to act. It taught him that “there is no them and us. There is a ‘them’ and ‘us’ in terms of opportunities that people have. I was lucky to be born in a rich country.” Upon his return, he studied medicine before switching to documentary filmmaking to educate people in more developed countries about the challenges facing developing nations. When his filmmaking initiatives did not receive as much attention as he had been hoping, Polak took another path, spending several years doing humanitarian work in Laos and Thailand. This experience led to the eventual launch of PCF in 2011. He continues to employ filmmaking in his current role, reviewing the foundation’s videos, advising the communications team, and leveraging storytelling to build networks, fundraise, and mobilize support.

Polak is not a celebrity philanthropist, nor is his foundation a large INGO. But PCF stands out precisely in its humility and human scale. Since its founding in 2011, it has quietly become a lifeline for tens of thousands in Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, using local networks, language-based empowerment, and strategic partnerships to deliver critical support where it’s most needed.

PCF’s operates on a clear and straightforward model: gain the trust of communities, ensure that they can maintain their dignity, and that communities know best what they need. PCF also does not send Western volunteers to implement projects and prefers not to engage in what he calls “voluntourism.” Volunteers are welcome in the office or in communications roles—if they bring skills that local staff don’t already have—but the priority is always empowering community members to lead. “We listen very carefully to what it is that the organizations and the communities we work with tell us what their problems are,” Polak says. “We listen to what the needs are. We listen to what they think the solutions can be.” Unlike many traditional aid models, PCF does not use an application process. Instead, staff and volunteers—often native speakers of local and ethnic minority languages—seek out groups that are too marginalized or under-resourced to apply for aid elsewhere. “If people can find us, they can find other sponsors as well,” Polak explains. “So maybe they do not need us.”

With this ethos, PCF has grown to an impressive portfolio of 25 to 30 projects annually, serving over 15,000 people, all implemented by trusted local partners. PCF focuses on education, emergency aid, health, sanitation, and nutrition. A standout program is its mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) initiative in northern Thailand, which supports children from ethnic communities like the Akha, Lisu, Lahu, and Karen. These children often grow up speaking only their native language and struggle in government-run Thai schools where instruction is exclusively in Thai. PCF’s initiative trains local bilingual facilitators who teach in both the community’s language and Thai, easing children into fluency over 1–2 years.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/7/13/episode-366-schooling-the-system>



JOINT MYANMAR-INDIA UN PEACEKEEPING COURSE RAISES EYEBROWS

A ceremony to open the UN Peacekeeping Officer Course jointly organized by Myanmar Tatmadaw and Indian Armed Forces took place at Park Royal Hotel in Naypyidaw July 21 morning, according to Myanmar media.

Myanmar analysts are questioning why the Indian Armed Forces are involved in a joint exercise with officers from Myanmar's Tatmadaw, given the Tatmadaw's appalling human rights record.

The training course aims to enable officers and other ranks from Myanmar Tatmadaw to know their duties and functions in the UN Peacekeeping process, according to a media report.

Vice-Chairman of the State Administration Council, Deputy Prime Minister, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win delivered an opening address. Ambassador of India to Myanmar, Mr Abhay Thakur, also made an opening speech.

An officer instructor from Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) of India reported on the participation of India in UN Peacekeeping Operations through a PowerPoint presentation.

The Vice-Senior General and party had documentary photos taken together with officer instructors and trainees.

It is said to be the eighth course of its kind. During the period from 2016 to 2019, a total of 130 officers and 84 other ranks attended the courses. A total of 30 officers will attend this course. The training features the history of UN Peacekeeping Operations, organizational setup, operations under rules, codes of ethic for UN Peacekeeping troops, protection for civilians and children, military-civilian cooperation, patrolling, convoy escort measures, construction of the company base, and Blue Helmet exercise theoretically and practically. It will last up to 1 August.



Photo: AFP

THAI-CAMBODIA TENSIONS SPARK VIOLENCE AGAINST MYANMAR MIGRANTS

Growing tensions between Thailand and Cambodia have led to violence against Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.

On 24 July, as the conflict between these two Southeast Asian countries escalated, a troubling incident occurred at a market in Bangkok. Two Myanmar migrant workers were attacked by a group of Thai men who mistakenly thought they were Cambodian.

Witnesses and videos shared on social media showed the attackers stopping only after the victims explained their nationality. One attacker was heard saying, "Oh, not Cambodian? Okay," before leaving.

The video quickly spread on Thai and Burmese social media, causing public outrage. Many Thai users criticized the attack and expressed shame over the rising xenophobia and nationalism during this international conflict.

This incident highlights the vulnerability of migrant workers during times of geopolitical tension. One victim shared in a Facebook voice message, "Just being mistaken for someone else nearly cost us our lives." People from across the region commented, urging Thai authorities to protect foreign workers, no matter their nationality.

Community leaders are advising migrant workers to be cautious and avoid risky areas, while advocacy groups call for an investigation into the incident and accountability for those responsible. This case reminds us that public sentiment and the realities on the street are closely linked, and migrants often suffer due to conflicts they cannot control.

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.