

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



EU Ambassador addresses the challenges in Myanmar

**Cycle of Displacement - The Myanmar Junta
Driving Civilians to Flee Again and Again**

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

CHINA SUMMIT HELPS MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER WITH 'LEGITIMACY' AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's recent attendance at a high-profile Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China serves as a carefully orchestrated bid to polish his international image ahead of Myanmar's planned December general election, widely viewed by Western governments and human rights groups as a sham.

By appearing on the global stage alongside Chinese and Russian leadership and his regional counterparts, the junta chief is signaling that he retains diplomatic viability - fragile though it may be - and that his illegal military regime in Naypyidaw still commands a seat at the table.

In particular, China's support for the election process has been emphatic, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi urging progress toward domestic peace, national reconciliation, and socio-economic stability - clearly language that masks broader strategic motives, including protecting Beijing's investments, its Belt and Road Initiative and its influence in Myanmar, while pushing reluctant ASEAN neighbours toward some form of acceptance.

Moreover, India's engagement - most notably Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Min Aung Hlaing at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit and India's willingness to send election observers to Myanmar - further reinforces this image of regional legitimacy. Modi emphasized the importance of "fair and inclusive" elections and underscored Myanmar's strategic importance to India's Act East policy, a signal that New Delhi is keen to maintain stability and cooperation with its neighbour.

During the China visit, Min Aung Hlaing attempted to project an image of responsible leadership, calmly steering Myanmar toward a return to electoral politics, despite the unprecedented civil conflict raging across the country sparked by his illegal 2021 coup. His narrative, bolstered by Chinese

and Russian backing, suggests that he wants the vote to pave the way to stability and peace - a façade of official acceptance.

But Western nations remain far from oblivious. Observers in the United States, Europe, Australia, and beyond continue to denounce the election as a hollow exercise, lacking the essential features of democracy. With the junta controlling close to a third of the country's territory, suppressing dissent, banning major opposition parties, jailing tens of thousands, and stifling independent media, Western governments and human rights advocates dismiss the upcoming polls as a cynical attempt to legitimize military rule, not a genuine transition to civilian governance.

That said, Western responses have varied in tone and intensity. While there have been statements condemning the elections, calls for inclusive political dialogue, and sanctions targeting military figures and businesses, Washington - most notably under President Donald Trump - has appeared to waiver, even lifting sanctions on certain individuals. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio recent issued a directive not to criticize elections in other countries - which was seen as including Myanmar. This ambivalence undercuts the coherence of Western pressure.

Min Aung Hlaing's summit attendance in China was a strategic move to reframe his regime as regionally accepted and diplomatically resilient. He aims to turn international association - especially with China and India - into a shield against criticism and a stepping stone toward broader recognition.

Western nations, however, should not be blind to these maneuvers. Most continue to treat the December election as an orchestrated façade designed to cement the junta's grip on power, and while their responses have not always been forceful or unified, their distrust is unmistakable.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of EU Ambassador Marc Fiedrich courtesy of the EU office in Yangon





EU Ambassador Marc Fiedrich

EU AMBASSADOR ADDRESSES THE CHALLENGES IN MYANMAR

Marc Fiedrich arrived in Myanmar as new Head of Delegation of the European Union in August 2025.

Here he outlines for Mizzima Weekly the issues for the EU in their relationship with Myanmar.

Why does the Myanmar crisis matter to the countries of the European Union?

To understand how the crisis in Myanmar today matters to Europeans it is important to understand how Myanmar's trajectory resonates with many Europeans. The transition and opening of the political system in Myanmar from 2011 onwards had a strong symbolic significance for many Europeans not least because 20 out of the 27 current EU Member States themselves experienced totalitarian or authoritarian regimes at some point during the 20th century. That is why many Europeans felt they could relate to the changes that the Myanmar people were experiencing between 2011 and 2021.

Furthermore, those years were challenging for Europeans. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, we were struggling with unemployment and slow growth. At the EU's doorstep, Russia illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, putting the multilateral and rules-based order to the test. The Arab Spring first raised hopes for a more free and democratic future along Europe's southern borders which could then not be realized. So the developments in Myanmar, towards a civilian, democratic government garnered a lot of sympathy. Myanmar came to be seen as an example of democratic transformation prospering through sustainable growth. Many Europeans wanted to learn more about a country previously inaccessible to them and visited as tourists. Others came as investors to participate in Myanmar's development.

So despite the geographical distance, European and Myanmar citizens grew closer to each other and this was reflected in more open trade, political and cultural relations. Consequently, the EU increased its presence in the country. In 2012, we opened our first EU Office, which rapidly transformed into a full-fledged EU Delegation in 2013. More EU Member States opened Diplomatic Missions in Myanmar. The EU became one of the country's major donors, firmly convinced that with our solidarity, and that of other like-minded countries, Myanmar could effectively address the numerous challenges it was facing and become a leading force for

good in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The military coup in 2021 brought a sudden and unexpected halt to this trajectory, leading the EU to review and revise its stance towards the state of Myanmar, while remaining supportive of the people of Myanmar who strive for democracy and freedom.

Beyond its own attachments, the EU also maintains close relations with the Southeast Asia region as a whole and is concerned by the risks that Myanmar's crisis poses to the region's political and economic development. In an interlinked world, this affects us all. Myanmar's crisis poses a challenge for ASEAN integration and broader regional connectivity. Connectivity within and between regions is an EU priority because it facilitates sustainable and inclusive prosperity, making sure that our partnerships foster greater equality. This is what we aim to achieve through the EU's "Global Gateway".

In Myanmar, conflict and the expansion of transnational criminal networks go hand in hand, undermining opportunities to make a decent living. The trafficking of drugs and people, or scam syndicates operating in Myanmar do not only fuel conflict within the country, they also affect citizens from many other parts of the world, Europeans among them.

What are the EU's priorities in dealing with the Myanmar crisis and trade issues?

The European Union was quick to condemn the 2021 coup and the ensuing violence. After 2021, the EU committed to cutting all political and economic support to the military regime. This also meant interrupting development projects that had for years been contributing to the strengthening of public institutions, governance bodies and social services, including public health and education.

However, as the EU has reiterated since 2021, we are committed to standing with the people of Myanmar. This means that, although we respect all views, we do not agree with the narratives that claim that the complete withdrawal of all foreign actors, private or public, would lead to positive change. Through our continued presence in Myanmar we aim to support livelihoods, promote access to education, support communities living in the most vulnerable situations, and reinforce voices that would otherwise not be heard.

We do this in several ways.

First, Myanmar has seen its economy contract drastically. Additionally, Myanmar has seen one of the steepest increases in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in recent years, even greater than in countries like Afghanistan, Syria or Ethiopia, which are also undergoing crises. Our most urgent priority is therefore to respond to Myanmar's expanding humanitarian crisis.

Second, we want to avoid that the economic and social progress achieved throughout the decade of 2010 is lost. The EU's development assistance currently aims at improving people's resilience and livelihoods amidst the multiple ongoing crises. Together with our partners, we try to ensure access to quality education, skills development and learning for children and youth at risk. We work with communities that are vulnerable to climate change to prevent, respond and mitigate challenges from climatic stresses. We accompany small and medium businesses in their efforts to grow and adopt sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions. We support sustainable practices in the agriculture and industrial sectors, so value chains can become more resilient, and private initiative can spur growth in a sustainable way. And we work to empower youth, who are the backbone of this society, and can lead Myanmar into a brighter future. We do all this through hundreds of local and international partners, who work tirelessly in challenging circumstances.

Third, the European Union promotes responsible business practices, in particular in the garment sector. The "Everything But Arms" trade scheme between Myanmar and the EU remains in place allowing access to all goods - except arms and ammunition - to the EU market, free of quotas and duties. In 2024, apparel products accounted for approximately 85% of Myanmar's total exports to the EU, valued at approximately €3.1 billion. Despite the many challenges in the current labour market in Myanmar, we strive to protect the hundreds of thousands of jobs that the garment sector provides, in factories that are highly dependent on exports to the EU. Through projects like MADE, the EU aims not only to preserve these jobs, but also to ensure that European retailers exercise due diligence to guarantee that decent working conditions are offered to all workers and that wages are improved. The sector's main workforce are young women, often migrants from rural Myanmar, and in many cases the sole breadwinners in their families, who feed their children and parents with the salaries they earn, and whose working conditions

are, across the board, proven to be better than in factories that do not supply European brands.

Last, though definitely not least, we aim at promoting inclusive dialogue opportunities, where possible. Our history has taught us that any negotiation that is not inclusive will remain incomplete and unsustainable in the long-run. This said, all actors in a dispute should be able to come to the negotiation table in similar conditions, and this is challenging in Myanmar's current context.

To address these priorities, EU tax payers have contributed over EUR 320 million in development assistance to Myanmar in the last 4 years. It is important to keep in mind that this is the contribution of European taxpayers. When you see an EU flag in Myanmar it stands for the support and solidarity that EU citizens want to show to the people of Myanmar.

The US government administration has dramatically cut back on humanitarian aid for Myanmar. How has the EU responded?

It is not for me to comment on what the US or any other country chooses to provide as voluntary contributions. That said, the global humanitarian landscape is undergoing a profound shift, with funding cuts by many countries emerging as the most visible and damaging consequence. These cuts are already being felt on the ground, and their long-term impact on people's lives cannot be overstated. Humanitarian needs do not shift with policy - they persist. Europe is choosing a different path. This year, the EU has increased its initial global humanitarian aid budget and now provides approximately one-third of the world's humanitarian assistance. Yet the EU cannot fill the gap left by others alone - the scale of global needs is simply too vast. Every country that values stability, human dignity, and shared prosperity must step up.

We remain committed to supporting fragile and conflict-affected countries, including complex crises like Myanmar. Since 1994, the EU has provided €456 million in humanitarian aid to Myanmar. For 2025, €46 million have already been allocated to address urgent needs, supporting communities affected by conflict and by the devastating earthquake of March 28th. This aid is delivered directly through trusted and vetted humanitarian organisations, wherever the needs are greatest, and in full adherence to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

How should we approach EU countries when it comes to helping them understand the Myanmar issue? Do all the countries of the EU take the same stance?

This is a great question, and one that we ask ourselves very often internally too. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East are crises that are much closer to the EU's borders. They also affect the European citizen more directly than what is currently happening in Myanmar. We often get criticized for not giving the Myanmar people what we have given to Ukraine. Yet the cases are different, and more importantly, they affect European citizens in different ways.

This said, Myanmar does matter to the countries of the European Union, as we discussed in response to your first question. And as EU representatives in Myanmar, it is also our job to ensure that Europeans know what is happening in Myanmar. Not all our efforts to bring the Myanmar crisis to the fore take place in Myanmar. Some of them are carried out in Europe, close to where the policymakers take their decisions. When we promote actions to ensure Myanmar visibility in Europe, we do this to help our citizens better understand the

current crisis, and why it is important that we continue to stand by the people of Myanmar. Of course, nobody is better placed than Myanmar citizens themselves to convey an understanding of the Myanmar issue to the rest of the world, including Europe.

It goes without saying that in a continent of 450 million people, viewpoints vary. I would lack credibility if I claimed that all countries of the EU always take the same stance on Myanmar or our relations with any other country, for that matter. However, through consultation and compromise, we have so far always been able to reach a common stance and this is what matters.

Hence, in response to your question, we will continue advocating for Myanmar in Europe, and hope that others will also do the same. It is a pre-requisite to ensure that political pressure, funding and support remains substantive in rough times. This advocacy work might take different forms in different countries, but this must be a joint effort, that reaches as many decision makers in Europe and elsewhere as possible.



Casualties of war - Internally displaced children.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



LABELED 'TERRORIST' – WHAT NOW FOR THE KNU?

The Myanmar junta has declared the Karen National Union (KNU) a terrorist organization, but the group has dismissed the move and vowed to continue resisting military rule.

On August 28, the junta's State Security and Peace Commission and Ministry of Home Affairs announced that the KNU was once again classified as an "illegal team" and a "terrorist group." The KNU had previously been removed from the illegal organizations list after signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the government in 2015.

In its statement, the regime accused the KNU and its allied forces of actions that undermine "lawfulness, stability, and public peace," including road sabotage, artillery attacks on towns and villages, civilian killings, forced recruitment, and the destruction of public property.

The KNU, however, has focused its recent efforts on shaping a political alternative to junta rule. It is working to finalize the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA), also known as the Federal Transition Constitution, which it says will serve as a governing framework during the revolutionary period. The group has also called for the formation of joint resistance forces to defeat the junta, stressing that greater unity is needed for more effective fighting. It cited the example of the early 1990s, when many ethnic armed groups and majority-Bamar resistance forces coordinated against military rule.

Rejecting the regime's planned election, the KNU issued a statement on August 26 urging Karen people, political parties, and armed groups to oppose the vote in non-violent ways. "This election is only to choose persons and parties for the junta regime instead of the

Myanmar people," the statement read. KNU brigades across its controlled areas later released their own declarations echoing the central leadership's stance.

Cross-border trade blockage

Hundreds of trucks loaded with goods bound for Myanmar remain stuck on the Thai side of the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border as the junta tightens restrictions on cross-border trade.

According to traders, about 500 lorries carrying food, construction materials, and electrical goods have been blocked from entering Myanmar. Junta officials have limited entry to only 20 to 30 trucks per day, citing efforts to curb illegal trade. They have also been seizing goods and issuing trade licenses in a highly restricted manner.

The delay is driving up costs for Myanmar traders, who are forced to pay daily parking fees while their trucks remain idle. "First and foremost, charges for overnight stops will increase," one trader told Mizzima, warning that prices of Thai imports inside Myanmar will likely surge as a result.

At a recent meeting with Thai officials, Myanmar's ambassador to Thailand, Zaw Zaw Soe, proposed shifting border trade routes from Mae Sot-Myawaddy to Mae Sai-Tachileik and Ranong-Kawthaung, both of which are firmly under junta control. The meeting was called after the Myanmar regime unilaterally shut down the No. 2 Friendship Bridge on August 18.

Karen State Economic Minister Saw Khin Maung Myint told The Irrawaddy that the shutdown order came from the Union level. "We do not know the exact reason though, there are too many illegal trade routes and out of control. Most of the tariffs went to the insurgents rather than the State. I assumed that's why the State instructed to shut down the bridge," he said.

The closure comes amid a crackdown on corruption along the Myawaddy-Yangon trade route. After junta deputy leader Soe Win pointed to departmental involvement in illegal trade, several senior officials were arrested, including Brigadier General Zaw Min Aung, the second commander of the Southeast Command, along with customs officers, police, and military security staff in Karen State. Traders say about 16 officials have been detained, while an unknown number of businessmen have also been arrested.

Fearing arrest, many traders and lorry owners have fled the area, scrambling to hide goods or move them elsewhere.

Meanwhile, junta troops, supported by pro-Border Guard Forces (BGF), took control of the key Kawkaik-Myawaddy road on September 6. Two days later, Myanmar's Foreign Minister met the Thai ambassador to discuss resuming smooth border trade. Although the route remains closed, junta officials signaled they aim to reopen it soon, given that it is one of their most important sources of revenue.



Thai security on the Thailand-Myanmar border.
Photo: AFP



Displaced people in Karenni State receive aid.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

CYCLE OF DISPLACEMENT – THE MYANMAR JUNTA DRIVING CIVILIANS TO FLEE AGAIN AND AGAIN

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Intensified fighting in Karenni State has driven massive civilian displacement. Families are fleeing frontline areas such as Moby and Pasaung toward towns like Demoso and Mese. Yet even these supposed refuges are under attack, as Demoso is now hit more frequently by drones and airstrikes, forcing people to move yet again. This cycle of displacement and re-displacement is worsened by the Myanmar junta's growing campaign of bombing civilian areas where no military forces are present.

On August 14, the KNDF and allied Karenni forces, including the Karenni Army (KA), KNPLF, and several PDFs, launched an offensive to capture the remaining sections of Pasaung City. After being repelled by airstrikes, drones, and artillery, the resistance regrouped and mounted a second assault on August 17. That same day, the junta carried out airstrikes on the mining town of Mawchi, several hours drive from the battle, killing at least 32 people, almost all of them civilians.

According to AK, a KNDF soldier, there were few survivors. "Most of them died," he said. He was at the casualty collection point during the battle for Pasaung when a truck arrived. "Maybe around six or seven people were injured, but most of them died. It was terrible. And a lot of them died on the way. It's a three-hour drive."

AK added that he believed the junta deliberately

created chaos at the casualty collection point. "I think the junta intentionally clogged it up. It's one of their tactics, you know." The crowded conditions made it harder for medics to treat the wounded. "It's one of the dirty tricks in their hands. They're full of dirty tricks."

Speaking about the comrades who fell during the two days of battle, he expressed regret. "When they die and you win the battle, you feel like they died for something." But in this case, both civilians and soldiers died for nothing, or more accurately, so that the junta could maintain control.

Meanwhile, areas that had long been in the hands of the resistance are now coming under heavier attack, with places once considered relatively safe becoming unsafe.

"Demoso is getting pretty intense," said AK. I had observed the same in August, with the sound of explosions echoing all day, every day, and occasional airstrikes once or twice a day - something that had not been the case during my visits in February and March. AK confirmed that there had been an airstrike the day before we left for the battle. He added, "Now there are more threats from drones because they're coming closer. They can fly the drones in much nearer now."

In addition to long-range attacks, ambushes are now occurring in several areas. In Hpruso, "a lot of civilians" have been hit, AK said. "They'll be driving

down the road and then just get shot. I think three people have died already since last month."

Other places, like Moby, which has seen intense fighting, are also experiencing increased displacement. "People who live on the outskirts of Moby are now coming into Demoso. So yeah, West Demoso is packed with IDPs, more and more. It's rough, especially in the rainy season. They need a lot of cover, and there isn't much food."

He explained that fundraising alone cannot solve the problem. "There are a lot of issues where you can't just throw money. We could do a fundraiser, we could give them money, but it won't help." They had to abandon their rice paddies because of the fighting and the increased risk of airstrikes. "If all the rice fields on the outskirts of these villages are not being cultivated because the military is attacking, where are we going to buy rice? It's not like we can just buy it from Thailand and send it to Demoso. It's such a long way."

A local Burmese man based in Demoso explained how he raises money online to support IDPs. "We do fundraisers, we get medical supplies, food, rice, that kind of stuff." He said some of the support comes from people working abroad, as well as from smaller organizations that run their own fundraising drives. "Then they'll say, hey, I want to donate to IDPs. And it'll be a good chunk. Like last month, we got \$2,000. And, you know, we split it between maybe eight different IDP camps for rice and food." But \$2,000 was an unusually good month, and when that money is divided between multiple camps, it does not buy much.

Mawchi is now almost completely deserted. "No one dares to live there anymore. I mean, a few people are still there, but a lot have run away, either to Demoso or even back into junta-controlled areas because they're too scared of airstrikes. It makes sense from their perspective, there are no planes attacking when

they're in military territory. And that's exactly what the junta want people to think, and what they want people to do."

AK recalled his experience helping a family evacuate from Mawchi a few months ago. There had been an airstrike, and nine people piled into the car with him to flee to Demoso. "They'd never been there before," he said, "but they thought it would be safe once we got there."

The mother tried to reassure her children throughout the journey, telling them that Demoso was bigger and safer than Mawchi. AK admitted he was less certain. "I wanted to tell them they'd be safe...I hoped they would." But only about twenty minutes after they arrived, the area was bombed.

He went on to describe several other random bombings in and around Demoso that struck no military targets. "Just terrorizing people, you know," he said. "That's what they do - just randomly, terrorizing people."

The local priest in Mese, about five hours from Demoso, reported that IDPs are still arriving from Pekon, with about 600 reaching the area over the past few weeks. Sadly, he also said that two elderly people had died along the way. At the same time, people are even fleeing from Demoso to Mese. AK explained, "Some people feel like, well, if I'm running away from the bombs, I might as well run very far." Many of these families have already been displaced two or three times. "So they're like, why stop in Demoso when they can go all the way to Mese?"

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert with extensive reporting on Burma.



Aid delivery to displaced people.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo.



An injured fighter being carried to a forest clinic.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo



Displaced people on the Myanmar-Thai border. Photo: AFP

THAI GENERAL CALLS FOR INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SECURITY AND MIGRANT WELFARE

DON PATHAN

Outgoing Royal Thai Armed Forces commander Gen. Songwit Noonpakdee has called for security personnel and academics to collaborate in developing a deeper understanding of the overlap between national security and human security.

In opening remarks at a recent seminar discussing the findings from a recently concluded research, the "Study of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand and Situation, Attitudes, and Impacts After 2021," Gen. Songwit stated that the security dynamics along the Thailand-Myanmar border demonstrate how the two issues are inseparable.

The commander, who is due to retire at the end of the month, said civil servants, security officials, and academics must work together to strengthen their research on the links between these issues, noting that the well-being of future generations depends on the context of understanding being formulated today.

The seminar was held at the National Defence Studies Institute (NDSI), a think tank under Thailand's armed forces that conducts strategic research and

trains future military leaders.

This recently concluded study examined migration trends from Myanmar following the 2021 coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Participants pointed to the ongoing conflict between Myanmar military government and resistance forces, along with other factors, such as economic hardship and the forced conscription into the armed forces, as the reason behind the influx of migrants into Thailand since the coup.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Lalita Hanwong of Kasetsart University's Faculty of Social Sciences said that while Thailand remains a preferred destination for Myanmar migrants over China or India, government agencies must better coordinate to manage the influx. She pointed to inconsistent statistics between agencies and noted that despite Thailand's economic reliance on migrant workers, rigid labor laws often push documented workers into undocumented status, making them vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Cholnapa Anukul of the Just Society Research Institute (JuSRI) stated that migrant workers are vital

to Thailand's economy as consumers, taxpayers, and laborers in undesirable jobs. However, she argued, the social services returned to them and their families, such as health and education, are extremely low.

Cholnapa explained that traditional border security prioritizes state sovereignty and law enforcement, criminalizing migration and driving it underground, thereby undermining human security. She urged Thai policymakers to develop a comprehensive "migration policy" and clearly communicate its pros and cons to the public.

Cholnapa concluded that while Thailand relies on migrant labor, it hesitates to fully regularize their status for political reasons, making it "unthinkable" for lawmakers to advocate for their rights. The current system, which often sacrifices human security for border security, creates long-term risks to public health and the rule of law, she said.

Zcongklod Khawjang, a director at the Ministry of Interior, warned that Thai society is indifferent to its rapidly aging population, complacent in the assumption that migrant labor will always be available. "Thailand needs to do away with such an attitude and start treating people as people, not as others," he said.

Michiko Ito of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Thailand noted the study found more positive public attitudes toward registered migrants. She cited high costs and complicated procedures as key barriers to registration and argued that simplifying the process would benefit Thailand. However, she added, "This has to be an emotional endeavor. We can't just use data (to change people's attitude). We have to address the emotional side and concern of the Thai public."

According to IOM Policy Review released in May 2025 in which the organization called for "safer, more flexible labour migration pathways to Thailand," although more than 3 million migrant workers and 600,000 employers benefited from the in-country registration since 2020, problem still persisted. "The policy review found that up to 70 per cent of eligible migrants face difficulties completing the regularization process, whether due to frequently changing requirements, limited ability to pay recruitment-related

costs, and limited access to information."

According to the review, the number of migrant workers registering their employment through the in-country registration process has increased by 60 per cent – from 1.5 million in 2020 to over 2.4 million as of August 2024. In contrast, the number of those entering through formal bilateral agreements between Thailand and Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar has declined significantly from 1 million to approximately 600,000 during the same period."

"The in-country registration process will remain a critical pathway for migrant workers to legally stay and work in Thailand, given the complexity and costs associated with the formal bilateral agreement recruitment system, alongside evolving situations in countries of origin, particularly Myanmar," Géraldine Ansart, IOM's Chief of Mission in Thailand, was quoted in the review as saying. "This process now accounts for more than 80 per cent of all registered migrant workers in the country," she added.

In closing remarks at the seminar, Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang, Thailand's Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), stated that conflict, insurgency, crime, and narcotics are undeniably intertwined with migration—a situation worsened by recent earthquakes in Myanmar. He challenged the Thai government to rethink its approach by changing the status of migrant workers to "residents," granting them access to basic rights and social services.



Photo: Supplied

KNU SAYS FEDERAL TRANSITION CONSTITUTION FOR MYANMAR WILL BE COMPLETED BEFORE JUNTA ELECTION

The Karen National Union (KNU) has confirmed that the Federal Transition Constitution will be finalized before the election planned by the military junta, according to spokesperson Pado Saw Taw Nee. He added that once completed, the constitution will be presented to the international community.

Speaking at a press conference on 1 September on the Thai-Myanmar border in Mae Sot, Pado Saw Taw Nee said the Federal Transition Constitution, also known as the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA), was a priority. The press conference was focused on preventing sexual violence and eliminating gender discrimination.

"The decision to complete the Federal Transition Constitution has been made. No matter what, we will finish it before the military's election. If we don't accept the junta's election, then the question arises: what kind of election will we hold? If we can show the world that we are proceeding with a new constitution, then we can move forward politically and militarily in our own way," he told Mizzima.

He explained that while it was difficult to give a percentage of progress, the draft would be ready ahead of the junta's planned polls in December.

"We are not working alone. For decades, other ethnic groups have been fighting on one side and

preparing constitutions on the other. Those who joined the revolution more recently need more time for discussions and understanding. That's the reality," he said.

The drafting process involves nine organizations, including the Transitional Constitution Working Group (TCWG) under the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organisations, and state-level representative councils.

Once the draft is complete, it will be approved by the NUCC and implemented in liberated areas, including ethnic regions, NUCC member U Toe Kyaw Hlaing told Mizzima on 25 August.

The initiative stems from a joint announcement made on 12 February this year by the KNU, Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Chin National Front (CNF), New Mon State Party-Anti-Dictatorship (NMSP-AD), Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC), Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC), Mon State Federal Council (MSFC), Ta'ang Political Consultative Council (TPCC), and the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

The groups stressed that the future Federal Democratic Union will not follow a centralized federal system but will instead adopt a "bottom-up federalism" model designed to limit centralized control.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with Indian PM Narendra Modi at the SCO meeting in China. Photo: AFP

INDIA PM MEETS MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER AND CALLS FOR A 'FAIR AND INCLUSIVE' ELECTION

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday met Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in China's Tianjin and expressed hope that the upcoming elections in Myanmar will be held in a "fair and inclusive" manner, according to Indian media.

According to India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Modi "expressed the hope that the forthcoming elections in Myanmar will be held in a fair and inclusive manner involving all stakeholders. He underlined that India supports a Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned peace process, for which peaceful dialogue and consultation is the only way forward."

India's MEA said that Modi had reiterated India's readiness to support the developmental needs of Myanmar and noted that India attaches importance to ties with the country as a part of its Neighbourhood First, Act East and Indo-Pacific policies.

"The two leaders reviewed bilateral ties and discussed the way forward on several aspects of bilateral cooperation, including development partnership, defence and security, border management and border trade issues," the MEA said.

"Prime Minister stressed that progress on ongoing connectivity projects would foster greater interaction between the people of the two countries, while promoting regional cooperation and integration as

envisioned in India's Act East policy."

The Indian foreign secretary Vikram Misri told media that Modi had "welcomed the announcement of elections in Myanmar and stated that dialogue was the only way forward to foster peace and stability in Myanmar".

Myanmar's state-run Global New Light of Myanmar, India had also agreed to send electoral observation teams and also agreed to back Myanmar's application for entry into SCO.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung said Modi's meeting with Min Aung Hlaing was "deepening India's complicity in the junta's international crimes and helping prop up a criminal junta."

She added that the so-called "bilateral cooperation" was not about peace or development but about "arming and supporting a junta that bombs schools and massacres children."

The activist group further warned that India's decision to send election observers would risk legitimising what it called a "sham electoral process" and lend "dangerous credibility to the junta's attempt to steal power from the people of Myanmar." It described the junta as "an illegitimate body" with "no legal basis to join SCO," and said that any support for its membership would embolden further "war crimes and crimes against humanity."



Photo: Swan Linn

MONKS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT DECLINING FAITH IN BUDDHISM UNDER JUNTA RULE

A new survey has revealed that Buddhist monks across Myanmar are increasingly pessimistic about the state of Buddhism under the military junta, citing eroding public trust, political interference, and worsening social conditions.

The findings, released on 2 September by the Blue Shirt Initiative (BSI), paint a bleak picture of monastic sentiment nearly five years after the February 2021 coup. The survey, conducted in early December 2024, gathered responses from 595 monks and 127 nuns representing 237 monasteries and nunneries across the country.

According to BSI, most monks surveyed believe that the military-led State Administration Council (SAC) has undermined Buddhism in Myanmar.

Nearly half of the respondents expressed concern that the junta's attempts to forge close ties with the Sangha – the Buddhist monastic community – could damage public trust in the religion.

"The majority of monks surveyed doubted that the State Administration Council and its leaders would bring any benefit to Buddhism. Only one in four monks expressed confidence, while eight out of ten said they did not trust them," BSI stated in its report.

In contrast, monks expressed more favourable views of both the ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) government and the previous military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) administration. While attitudes toward the USDP were largely neutral, perceptions of the current military government were overwhelmingly negative.

The survey focused on three key areas: the public's faith in Buddhism, the relationship between the government and the Sangha, and unity within the monastic community. Results suggest that monks associate the junta with growing divisions within the Sangha and increased social fragmentation.

When asked about the main challenges facing Buddhism since the coup, 32% of respondents cited increased restrictions on religious events and ceremonies. Another 20% pointed to worsening economic hardship, and 15% noted a decline in public religious faith.

The survey also found a notable level of support for opposition figures and forces. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as the most trusted leader, with 80% of monks expressing confidence in her. About half said they also trusted other opposition leaders, including the National Unity Government (NUG)'s acting president, Duwa Lashi La.

Roughly 24% of monks believed that closer ties with the NUG would strengthen public faith in Buddhism. However, around 40% declined to comment on this issue, reflecting caution or uncertainty amid ongoing political repression.

While most monks surveyed emphasized the need to focus on strengthening Buddhism, they were critical of Buddhist nationalism, particularly efforts framed as protecting "race and religion." Many said such movements erode public respect and do not align with the core values of the faith.



Resistance fighters in Kani

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS MAN AND DISPLACES THOUSANDS IN KANI TOWNSHIP

An airstrike by Myanmar's military junta on 3 September killed an 18-year-old man and forced thousands to flee from Thaminchan village in southern Kani Township, Sagaing Region, local sources told Mizzima.

The strike happened at around 1:30 pm, when a fighter jet dropped bombs and rockets near homes in the village. A local resident said the young man was struck by a rocket as he raised his head from a bomb shelter to watch the aircraft, which had flown over the village. The jet reportedly fired around eight times during the attack.

The junta's offensive along the Yinmabin-Kani road uses advanced drones to scout targets before

launching attacks. These operations have caused more than 10,000 residents to flee their homes, according to local reports.

On the same day, approximately 300 troops from the Northwest Regional Command entered Htayawkyin village via the Bant Bwe outpost, set it on fire, and pushed further toward Kani Township. Earlier, on 31 August, a bombing in Thaminchan had already killed a woman.

Villagers from Chaungma, Htayawkyin, Thintwin, Thaminchan, Linponeyae, Twin, and Leshae – all along the Kani Yinmabin route – have now been displaced due to the junta's military operations.



Photo: Supplied

POLITICAL PRISONER DIES AFTER SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN MYANMAR'S HPA-AN PRISON

A recently released political prisoner from Hpa-An (Taung Kalay) Prison revealed that 12 political detainees who had asked for more nutritious food were placed in solitary confinement and tortured by prison officials. This brutal treatment resulted in the death of one prisoner.

The military junta allocated funds in April for nutritious meals at Hpa-an Prison, Kayin State. However, authorities reportedly misused the money and failed to provide proper food to inmates. In response, political prisoners in the Kyokya dormitory submitted a demand for better meals.

On June 14, 150 political prisoners were removed from their dormitory by police and prison staff. Of these, 12 individuals seen as leaders, were shackled by their legs and locked in an eight-room building.

By July 13, the shackles were removed, but the detainees were beaten again. Political prisoner Ko Nyan Min Tun died during this beating. Two others were seriously injured.

A released prisoner described the scene: "They beat them while their chains were still dangling. They dragged them out of the room one by one and beat them. Those who lost consciousness were pulled away and thrown back inside. Because they just dumped him like that, we didn't know how he died overnight. Only in the morning, when staff unlocked the room, did they find the dead body. One injured was taken to the hospital, and another was treated inside the prison clinic with a plaster cast."

Ko Nyan Min Tun, from Pyapon in Ayeyarwady

Region, was imprisoned in 2023 under Section 49(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. The other 11 solitary detainees are from Yangon, Bago, Naypyitaw, and Ayeyarwady Region, and were sentenced under terrorism-related charges between 2022 and 2024.

One of the injured was hospitalized at Hpa-an General Hospital for five days. Upon return, he was placed back in solitary confinement. Of the original 12, one has died and the remaining 11 were still in isolation as of September 2, according to the released prisoner. This raises serious concerns about their well-being.

Following the incident, the Kyokya dormitory was reallocated as a women's dormitory. Former occupants were moved to other overcrowded dorms, where more than 70 prisoners share space in a one 18-by-50-foot room.

A released prisoner described the overcrowding: "In that 18-foot space, we have to sleep in three rows. The middle row ends up pressed against the feet of the people sleeping opposite. When walking to the toilet, we have to step over others' feet carefully."

Since the incident, inmates are allocated a fixed amount of water for bathing. Any additional water – more than 10 cups – costs 20,000 kyats per month.

The released prisoner said that up to his release at the end of August, meals still lacked enough meat, and the bean soup was of very poor quality, nothing more than watery broth.

Hpa-an Prison currently holds about 1,800 inmates, including around 200 political prisoners.



Sithu Maung

NLD MEMBER SITHU MAUNG SAYS HE HAS BEEN PROVISIONALLY SUSPENDED FROM PARTY

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has allegedly moved to provisionally suspend Sithu Maung from the party, according to a leaked statement he shared on Facebook on 1 September. The party itself has not yet made any official announcement.

The leaked document stated that the decision was made during a regular party meeting to “temporarily suspend U Sithu Maung’s party membership” and notify him of his right to appeal to the National Congress or Central Committee.

Mizzima could not independently verify the legitimacy of the statement, which did not bear an official NLD signature or seal.

“This shows a message: ‘Don’t criticize us.’ I see that they are using me as an example to warn others in the party. If you criticize, this is what will happen,” Sithu Maung told Mizzima.

He added that he did not know who proposed the action or approved it, claiming the Central Executive Committee had not been involved.

“The decision did not follow proper procedures,

such as conducting an inquiry or investigation. I think they are just doing whatever they want,” he said.

On whether he would appeal, he replied: “Why should I appeal? I am not the defendant. Another question is whether the CWC (Central Working Committee) itself was legally organized in line with party rules. They should examine their own legitimacy before asking me to appeal!”

As of 2 September, Sithu Maung said he had not received any formal notification of his suspension and did not know the reasons behind it.

Mizzima has contacted the NLD’s Central Working Committee for comment but has not received a response.

Sithu Maung was elected in the 2020 general elections as the NLD representative for Pabedan Township in Yangon. He currently serves as a member of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH).



Captured weapons. Photo: Supplied

EIGHT MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN KYAUKKYI AS RESISTANCE FORCES LAUNCH SURPRISE ATTACK

According to a statement of No. 2 Operation Area of the People's Defence Force (PDF), eight junta troops, including a captain, were killed when the joint resistance forces attacked a military junta column that had entered an area under the control of the revolutionary forces in Kyaukkyl Township, Bago Region. The revolutionary forces also seized weapons and ammunition.

On 2 September, a junta column of over 100 soldiers from Infantry Battalion 60, based in Kyaukkyl Township, and Pyu Saw Htee militia was attacked by joint resistance forces, according to Saw Do Shar, information officer of No. 2 Operation Area on 3 September.

"The junta were in disarray when our side launched an attack. At least eight junta members, including a captain, were confirmed dead on the enemy side," he claimed.

The junta launched an airstrike and shelled the area with heavy artillery during the fighting. No. 2 Operation

Area reported that resistance fighters suffered no losses, though a civilian was wounded.

The junta column withdrew after the clash, but reinforcements were sent in and plans are reportedly underway by the junta for another offensive, said Saw Do Shar.

He added that "all townships within the No. 2 Operation Area No. along the Sittaung River basin are in a state of active combat, meaning clashes could break out anywhere at any time."

According to No. 2 Operation Area, the joint resistance forces captured seven small arms, one RPG launcher, ammunition, and other military equipment during the battle.

The attack was carried out jointly by No. 2 Operation Area, Bago Region Military Department, Strategy Unit 24, Nagani Battalion (P-29903), Battalion 3502 and KNLA Battalion 8.



JRS WELCOMES THAILAND'S DECISION TO GRANT WORK RIGHTS TO MYANMAR REFUGEES

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) welcomed the Thai government's decision to grant Myanmar refugees living in camps along the border the legal right to work, in a press release on 3 September.

The statement is as follows.


Under this policy, registered residents in the nine shelters are permitted to work in all sectors not prohibited for foreign nationals, for a period of up to one year, subject to health screening and registration for health insurance. This development not only benefits displaced persons by fostering self-reliance but also contributes to tax revenue, increases productivity, and addresses national labor shortages, supporting Thailand's sustainable economic growth. The Thai government's decision is highly commendable, as it reflects not only a systematic approach to addressing economic and social challenges but also a clear commitment to humanitarian principles. By granting displaced persons the right to work legally, they are enabled to live with dignity, generate income for themselves and their families, and reduce reliance on international assistance. Importantly, this measure also helps to ease tensions in border areas and enhances the credibility of Thailand's foreign policy. The policy demonstrates a balanced approach between domestic management and compassion for fellow human beings, drawing recognition from the international community, particularly United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which publicly praised the Thai government's courageous decision.

MRN welcomes this crucial step, which reflects a shift in perspective, from viewing displaced persons primarily as a national burden or security concern to recognizing them as part of Thailand's valuable human resources. This policy may serve as a positive model for other countries in the region facing similar challenges. Especially in times when international organizations face limited budgets, enabling displaced persons to become self-reliant represents a sustainable and mutually beneficial solution.

Nevertheless, various stakeholders must prepare to implement the policy in ways that meet the specific needs of displaced persons. This includes ensuring legal status that allows them to remain in Thailand safely. At the policy level, considerations should extend to labor quotas, effective registration and oversight mechanisms, and the inclusion of economic, social, educational, and health dimensions. At the community level, measures should be introduced to promote local economic participation and strengthen mutual understanding with host communities.

In addition, there is an urgent need to develop policies and operational mechanisms to address the situation of displaced persons who have arrived from Myanmar since the 2021 coup, many of whom are high-skilled professionals, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, academics, lawyers, and engineers. Oversight should include processes to recognize and certify these skills in line with Thai standards, the strengthening of the National Screening Mechanism (NSM) to extend work rights to individuals granted "protected person" status, or the establishment of new mechanisms to match business sector needs with refugee skills. Such mechanisms must be adapted to the complex realities of displaced populations from Myanmar, ensuring both economic and social benefits for Thailand and adequate protection for these groups. These proposals are consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Studying the Economic and Social Impact of Granting Work Rights to Refugees in Thailand: A Case Study of Tak, Chiang Mai and Bangkok research study, which highlighted that granting work rights to Myanmar displaced workers who arrived after 2021 not only enhances individual income potential but also generates substantial overall economic value.

Finally, MRN commends the collaborative efforts of government agencies, the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations that contributed to this successful policy advocacy. We sincerely hope that this spirit of cooperation will continue to address future challenges, strengthen protection for diverse displaced populations, and contribute to sustainable economic and social stability in Thailand and across the region.



Destruction in Budalin

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS TORCH VILLAGES IN BUDALIN TOWNSHIP, THOUSANDS DISPLACED

Junta forces burned and destroyed at least five villages in Budalin Township, Sagaing Region, since launching an offensive on 1 September, according to local residents.

“About five villages have been burned down. Because junta troops are still stationed in the area, the exact number of houses destroyed cannot yet be confirmed. Even today, they are still burning,” said Ko Zay Lin Maung, a Budalin resident.

The affected villages include Shwe Taung, Pauk Sein Pauk, Htan Taw, Kan Thar, and Htoo Kyi, where most residents are farmers.

Around 300 troops from the Northwest Regional Military Command reportedly advanced along the Budalin–Kan Thar road, clashing with resistance forces.

“The military commission forces are launching offensives to create the impression of territorial control. Whenever they encounter revolutionary forces, they burn down civilian homes,” said a member of a resistance group.

With the troops advancing toward Kone Thar village, nearly 5,000 people from 15 surrounding villages including Kone Thar, Zee Taw, Htoo Kyi, Man Kyi Auk, and Aung Thar—have fled their homes.

The military has intensified its operations in the Budalin area since declaring martial law in neighbouring Kani, Yinmabin, and Pale townships, residents said.



PDF COMMAND VOWS TO BLOCK JUNTA-ORGANISED ELECTIONS IN RESISTANCE CONTROLLED AREAS OF MYANMAR

The Special Military Region Command of the People's Defence Force (PDF), under the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence, announced on 3 September that elections organised by the junta's Election Commission will not be permitted in its areas of control.

"Within the operational areas of the Special Military Region Command, the junta commission will have absolutely no chance to hold elections. Any military offensives launched under the pretext of elections will be firmly resisted. Protecting and safeguarding the people will remain our top priority," the statement read.

The command comprises PDF strategic units, battalions, drone forces, and people's defence organizations (PDO) operating across Karen and Mon

States. It coordinates with KNU/KNLA forces in Karen and Mon States, as well as with units in the Ye-Dawei area of Mon State and Tanintharyi Region.

It also works alongside the Bago and Yangon Regional Commands to carry out joint operations and territorial defence in parts of Bago Region.

The Special Military Region Command pledged to align its activities with the strategic objectives of the PDF Central Command and allied Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs). Based in the Sittaung River Basin, it said it will continue cooperating with nearby regional commands to sustain operations in Bago and Yangon.



Photo: Mizzima

NB-BURMA RELEASES NEW REPORT DOCUMENTING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ACROSS MYANMAR

On 3 September, the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma (ND-Burma) released its first biannual report entitled, 'Solidarity in the Struggle.' The new report documents the ongoing deteriorating human rights situation across Myanmar as documented by ND-Burma members during the first half of 2025.

The press release accompanying the report is as follows.

According to documentation by ND-Burma members, from January to June 2025, there were 320 documented cases of human rights violations through 188 events across 12 regions and states in Burma. Of these, 158 were committed by the military junta, five by the security forces (mainly police officers), eight by various militias, seven by Ethnic Revolution Organizations (EROs), one by the People Defence Force (PDF), and nine remain unidentifiable.

The ongoing crimes committed by the military junta have created a worsening atmosphere of fear in Burma, where civilians are worried about their daily survival. The rise in airstrikes, in particular, has increased uncertainty. ND-Burma members all expressed concern for the communities in their targeted areas, which

have endured immense suffering. With the situation far from improving, the international community is urgently called upon to respond to the crisis in Burma, including the escalating humanitarian emergency that has displaced over 3 million people.

"Every day, people in Burma are just trying to survive as the junta unleashes airstrikes, indiscriminate artillery attacks, and arbitrary arrests. The suffering is real and continues to grow. As human rights defenders, we persist in documenting these abuses because the voices of survivors must be heard. The world must act now to stand with the people and ensure the junta is held accountable. Justice and accountability are long overdue, and we urge global actors to take urgent action to hold the junta responsible for its crimes," said Nai Aue Mon, Program Director at the Human Rights Foundation of Monland.

The time to act is now. Global stakeholders must clearly tell the junta they are criminals and therefore must face long-awaited consequences for their many crimes. The people of Burma overwhelmingly reject the terrorist junta, and the international community must support their calls for action by calling for an urgent referral to the International Criminal Court and implementing targeted sanctions on aviation fuel.



Aung San Suu Kyi prior to the coup.
Photo: AFP

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S SON EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT THE HEALTH OF HIS MOTHER, CALLS FOR HER TO BE FREED

Kim Aris, son of Myanmar's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, has issued an urgent appeal following deeply distressing reports that his mother's health has deteriorated significantly while in military detention.

"It is deeply distressing to have heard my mother's health has taken a turn for the worse. She has had ongoing heart complications which have undoubtedly been exacerbated by the conditions under which she is being held. She needs to see, and has asked to see, a cardiologist from outside the prison. I have no way of knowing if this has been granted. This is cruel and life-threatening for her," Kim said 4 September in a press release.

Aung San Suu Kyi, aged 80, continues to be held in an undisclosed location by the military junta, with no transparency regarding her condition, location, or access to medical care. Her detention without fair trial and without access to adequate health treatment constitutes an extreme violation of human rights and international norms.

Kim emphasized: "She is aged 80 and needs care and most importantly needs to be freed and no longer a political prisoner for standing up for democracy and freedom for her country. It is shocking and shattering for this military junta to hold her without fair trial and with no compassion for her age or health. I ask the world to help me find a path to freedom for her."

The family urgently calls on: The international community to demand immediate proof of life, medical access, and her unconditional release; human rights organizations to escalate pressure on the Myanmar military junta to comply with international humanitarian standards; governments worldwide to increase diplomatic and public actions in support of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Myanmar. This is a matter of life and death, they say. Aung San Suu Kyi must be freed.

Photo: AFP

UN WARNS SCENES IN MYANMAR MIRROR 2017 ATROCITIES

The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is worsening, the UN said Tuesday, decrying scenes reminiscent of the 2017 atrocities committed against the Rohingya minority that some countries deemed a genocide.

Rakhine State has been blockaded by Myanmar's military as it battles ethnic fighters in a many-sided civil war that has consumed the country since the junta toppled the democratic government in a 2021 coup.

UN rights chief Volker Turk warned that both the military and local ethnic fighters from the Arakan Army "have acted with near complete impunity enabling the recurrence of violations in an endless cycle of suffering for the civilian population".

"Videos and pictures show death, destruction and desperation, distressingly similar to images that we already saw during the 2017 atrocities committed by the military against the Rohingya" minority, he said in a statement.

"It pains me deeply to see the same happening again," he said, reiterating his call for the UN Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades, with hundreds of thousands fleeing during the 2017 military crackdown that is now the subject of a UN genocide court case.

'Indiscriminate attacks'

A fresh report from Turk's office on the rights situation in Myanmar, looking at the situation between April 2024 and May 2025, highlighted how hostilities in Rakhine had displaced hundreds of thousands more people in the state.

The UN estimates that some 150,000 of them

have fled to Bangladesh since November 2023, joining the around a million Rohingya already languishing in refugee camps there.

"Civilians from both Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine communities continue to suffer the consequences of the hostilities," Turk said, pointing in particular to "widespread and systematic patterns of indiscriminate attacks by the military against civilians and protected objects".

Citing credible sources, the rights office found that nearly half of the 1,811 verified civilian deaths in the conflict during the 14-month period covered by the report were directly caused by military aerial attacks, including on schools.

"Forced displacement, forced recruitment, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, arson and property destruction," were also rampant in the state, Turk said, with civilians also facing "denial of humanitarian assistance, and repeated atrocities aimed at terrorising them".

The report also highlighted abuses carried out by the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine, including killings, forced recruitment and forced displacement.

On a positive note, it said there had been a "comparative decrease in violence affecting the Rohingya" since the start of this year.

But the ongoing military blockade that has throttled supplies to the territory is meanwhile deepening a severe hunger crisis.

Turk urged countries to back international efforts to hold those responsible for abuses to account and to enable humanitarian aid.

AFP



Photo: AFP

BROUK PETITIONS ARGENTINE COURT TO EXPAND JURISDICTION TO COVER ALLEGED AA CRIMES

The Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) released a statement on 3 September announcing its formal petition to the Federal Court in Buenos Aires to broaden its universal jurisdiction case on the Rohingya genocide to also include alleged rights abuses by the Arakan Army (AA). BROUK hopes to secure arrest warrants for those in the AA's chain of command, especially Commander-in-Chief Major General Twan Mrat Naing and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Brigadier General Nyo Twan Awng.

The BROUK announcement continues as follows.

For more than a year, the AA – an ethnic armed resistance group that is fighting the Myanmar military and currently controls much of Rakhine State – has led a brutal campaign of abuse against Rohingya civilians, including mass killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, and forced starvation. This campaign has intensified considerably in 2025.

In a report released on August 29, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, documented a wide range of atrocity crimes committed by the AA against Rohingya civilians, forcing many to flee their homes and villages. One of the most horrific

incidents occurred on May 2, 2024, when AA fighters massacred hundreds of Rohingya in a single day in Htain Shauk Khan village (known locally as Hoinya Seeri) in Buthidaung Township, Rakhine State.

Witnesses described being stopped by Arakan Army elements, divided into three groups in nearby paddy fields, and then fired upon – leaving dozens dead. One survivor recalled the scene as “a river of blood... I saw shooting. I saw mass killing. It was a lot of guns; people were shot in the legs and chest.” Another recounted the killing of 20 relatives, including three children.

The INGO Fortify Rights has also documented a pattern of the AA torturing and “disappearing” captured Rohingya men in ad-hoc detention centres. Aid actors, meanwhile, have warned that these crimes are taking place in a context where Rohingya are increasingly at risk of starvation, in part due to onerous humanitarian access restrictions imposed by the Myanmar military.

“There is no question that these atrocities amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya, who have already faced a decades-long state-sponsored genocide in Myanmar. The Arakan Army, as a non-state actor, has the same responsibility as Myanmar military to refrain from committing crimes against humanity and genocide,” said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

The pioneering universal jurisdiction case, initiated by BROUK in 2019 and formally opened in 2021, saw the Buenos Aires Federal Court issue arrest warrants in February for 25 Myanmar officials implicated in the Rohingya genocide. In today's filing, BROUK submitted further evidence and five witnesses ready to testify on recent Arakan Army atrocities. It will also seek arrest warrants of AA Commanders.

“As Rohingya – we wanted to unite with Rakhine and all ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar against our common enemy, the Myanmar military. Instead, we face the same horrific crimes from the Arakan Army as we do from the Myanmar military. We have privately and publicly called for an end to these crimes, but they have reached unspeakable levels. It is with frustration that we now initiate this case, as a prompt resort to try to prevent further atrocities from Arakan Army,” said Tun Khin.

BROUK believes it is impossible to view the AA's crimes as separate from the wider pattern of violations facing the Rohingya. Rather, they are part of the same genocide and crimes against humanity the Rohingya have faced for decades.



Photo: Supplied

CHINA'S UPSTREAM POWER PLAY: THE MEKONG RIVER CRISIS AND REGIONAL FALLOUT

SUN LEE

The Mekong River, Southeast Asia's lifeline, originates in China's Tibetan Plateau and winds its way through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam nourishing ecosystems, economies, and cultures across a 4,800-kilometre stretch. It is the world's largest inland fishery, supporting over 70 million people, with 75 percent of the lower basin's population relying directly on fishing and farming. Yet this vital artery is being throttled at its source by China.

China has constructed a series of massive dams on the upper Mekong (known domestically as the Lancang), exercising unilateral control over water flows with little regard for downstream consequences. These dams are not just engineering feats, they are geopolitical tools. By manipulating water levels, China has repeatedly disrupted seasonal flows, exacerbated droughts, and destabilized the economies of its neighbours. Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and

Vietnam are all feeling the squeeze.

This upstream dominance is part of Beijing's broader assertive strategy: using infrastructure and resource control to project power, sideline regional cooperation, and bypass international norms. Despite calls for transparency and equitable water sharing, China refuses to join the Mekong River Commission as a full member and routinely withholds hydrological data. Its Lancang-Mekong Cooperation initiative, launched in 2016, is widely seen as a mechanism to fragment regional consensus and entrench Chinese influence.

The consequences are profound. Hydropower development has turned the once free-flowing Mekong into a fragmented system, with cascading effects on agriculture, fisheries, and small-scale industries. Fish migration routes are blocked, sediment flows are disrupted, and riverbank erosion is accelerating. The

Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia, once a biological treasure, is shrinking, threatening food security and biodiversity.

Sand mining, particularly in Cambodia and Vietnam, adds another layer of destruction. Driven by construction booms, extraction rates far exceed natural replenishment. Vietnam's Mekong Delta alone loses over 43 million cubic metres of sand annually, up to 17 times the rate of renewal. This depletes riverbeds, lowers water levels, and undermines the region's agricultural productivity.

Climate change compounds the crisis. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and prolonged droughts intensified by dam-induced flow alterations are reshaping the river's hydrology. The annual flood pulse, essential for sediment distribution and aquatic life cycles, is weakening. By 2050, the flooded area in the Tonle Sap basin may shrink by 11 percent, slashing sedimentation and aquatic primary production by up to 59 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Soil fertility and fish stocks will decline, hitting the poorest communities hardest.

Hydropower, once touted as a clean energy solution, is proving economically and ecologically disastrous. Studies show that the loss of fisheries, sediment, biodiversity, and livelihoods outweigh the benefits of electricity generation and irrigation. The gains flow to urban elites, developers, and financiers; the losses are borne by rural populations, especially women who depend on river resources for subsistence and income.

Human security is at stake. Environmental degradation, displacement, and livelihood losses are pushing communities to the brink. The Mekong's transformation from a shared resource to a contested frontier is fuelling inequality and instability. China's refusal to respect international law and its disregard

for transboundary governance norms only deepen the crisis.

Institutional frameworks like the Asian Development Bank's Greater Mekong Subregion Initiative (GMS) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) have struggled to counterbalance China's dominance. The GMS, launched in 1992, aimed to foster peace through connectivity and development. But its liberal vision is being undermined by China's strategic infrastructure diplomacy. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, in contrast, prioritizes bilateral deals and opaque decision-making, sidelining regional consensus.

What's needed is a paradigm shift. Policymakers must recognize the ecological value of the Mekong's natural flow and invest in sustainable alternatives like solar and wind power. Transparent data sharing, inclusive decision-making, and genuine consultation with riparian communities are essential. Without these reforms, the Mekong risks becoming a cautionary tale of environmental collapse and geopolitical coercion.

China's upstream dam-building is not just a technical issue, it's a political statement. By weaponizing water, Beijing is asserting dominance over its neighbours, disregarding ecological limits and international norms. The Mekong's fate is a litmus test for regional resilience, cooperation, and the future of shared natural resources in an era of rising authoritarianism.

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



Photo: AFP

KIM, PUTIN, XI SHARE WORLD STAGE AT CHINA'S MILITARY PARADE

The leaders' collaboration is a "direct challenge" to the international order, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief says.

Enormous intercontinental ballistic missiles, new underwater drones, laser weapons and other military hardware paraded across Beijing's Tiananmen Square for 90 minutes on 3 September — a commemoration of 80 years since the Japanese surrender that ended World War II and a showcase of modern Chinese military might.

But many eyes were on the world leaders Chinese President Xi Jinping invited to the event, especially Russia's Vladimir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un. Images from the event showed the three, who appeared together in public for the first time, shaking hands, standing side-by-side and walking together down a red carpet. They spoke repeatedly during the event.

It was a moment, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief said, that wasn't just symbolic.

"Looking at President Xi standing alongside the leaders of Russia, Iran, North Korea in Beijing today, these aren't just anti-Western optics, this is a direct challenge to the international system built on rules," Kaja Kallas told reporters. "A new global order is in the making."

U.S. President Donald Trump, in a message on his social media platform aimed at Xi late Tuesday, highlighted the U.S. military's role in World War II and asked the Chinese leader to "give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un, as you conspire against The United States of America." The Kremlin said that Putin was not conspiring against the U.S. and

suggested Trump was being ironic in his remarks.

On Wednesday, Xi warned that the world was facing a choice "of peace or war, dialog or confrontation, win-win or zero-sum." He called China "unstoppable," and said that the Chinese people "firmly stand on the right side of history."

In a meeting with Kim, Putin thanked North Korea for helping to push back Ukrainian soldiers in Russia's Kursk region, part of the war that has followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

North Korea has shipped containers of weapons and thousands of soldiers to support Russia. The two countries inked a military partnership agreement last year.

"We will never forget the sacrifices made by your armed forces and the families of your servicemen," Putin said.

Kim, in his second reported trip abroad in six years, made at least two additional moves of interest: he brought along his daughter and possible heir Kim Ju Ae — the first international appearance by the teenager. And he shook hands with Woo Won-shik, the speaker of South Korea's National Assembly. Woo has called for the resumption of dialogue between Seoul and Pyongyang; North Korea has so far rebuffed those overtures.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia. Includes reporting from Agence France-Presse and Reuters.



Japanese soldiers on a military exercise.
Photo: AFP

PACIFIST JAPAN STRUGGLES TO BOOST TROOPS AS CHINA ANXIETY GROWS

Supporting dark face paint and clutching a gun, teenage soldier-in-training Takuma Hiyané crawls across a field on Japan's Okinawa, the front line of the nation's defence as anxiety grows over China's territorial ambitions.

As the world marks the 80th anniversary of World War II, Japan - which has been officially pacifist since its defeat - is trying to lure more talent into its armed forces.

Tokyo began upping its military spending in 2023 and aims to make it two percent of its gross domestic product by the end of the 2027 fiscal year, but has come under pressure from Washington to boost it even further.

Japan fears that China could attempt a forceful takeover of Taiwan - the self-governed island it claims - potentially triggering a conflict with Washington that could drag in Tokyo as well.

But it has been hard to convince enough young Japanese to enlist.

Hiyané, a 19-year-old former high school badminton player who signed up after his graduation in March, was swayed by the idea of helping victims of natural disasters, he said.

"I thought this was a job that I could contribute to my country and be proud of, so I decided to join," he told AFP, carefully dodging questions on the sensitive topic of national defence.

Tokyo wants a beefed-up military in southwestern regions such as Okinawa, home to some 70 percent of US military facilities in Japan and seen as strategically important for monitoring China, the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula.

In 2023, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) aimed to hire almost 20,000 people, but recruited just half that number, according to the defence ministry.

Dangerous duties, low pay and a young retirement age of around 56 are off-putting for young Japanese, officials and experts say.

Japan's low birth rate, shrinking population and

tight labour market are also complicating recruitment, leaving around 10 percent of the force's 250,000 positions unfilled.

Better conditions

On Okinawa, Hiyane and his fellow trainees braved scorching heat to stage a line formation, before dashing forward to capture a mock enemy fort.

"I find training here very physical and hard, but I am used to it in a way since I played sports at school," he said.

"I find it more exhausting and nerve-racking when I have to shoot guns."

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said in June that increasing SDF numbers was "a top priority" given Japan's worsening security environment.

Kazuyuki Shioiri, who helps manage an infantry regiment in Okinawa where Hiyane trains, said increased defence expenditure was gradually making troops' lives better through various upgrades including air conditioning, cleaner bathrooms and more privacy in dormitories.

"We have been able to improve conditions," he said.

Before the extra funds, Japanese troops had complained that they lacked bullets and basic supplies.

They used to strip old tanks and jets for parts to repair newer equipment, the defence ministry said.

But it's not simply "muscular troops with high combat capabilities" that the force wants, said Toshiyuki Asou, an SDF recruiter on Okinawa.

"We are looking for a wide range of personnel now as national security involves everything from cybersecurity, space defence, electromagnetic warfare,

and of course intelligence work," he added.

Reluctant to fight

Despite the government's defence push, Japanese citizens have traditionally kept their distance from the subject, with some still carrying bitter memories of the nation's militarist past.

Japan's constitution, which was drafted by the US after World War II and enjoys wide public support, bans Tokyo from using force and does not recognise the SDF as a formal military.

While the troops are highly respected, the public have loudly opposed any attempt to amend the constitution to grant them that status.

In a Gallup International survey released last year, only nine percent of Japanese respondents said they would fight for the country if there was a war, while 50 percent said they would not.

That compares with greater willingness in some other countries, with 46 percent of South Koreans, 41 percent of Americans and 34 percent of Canadians saying they would fight.

Ryoichi Oriki, the former head of the Joint Staff of the SDF, said during a recent press briefing that he wished for "greater understanding among the public about the reality of national defence".

In the field, new recruits said they were excited about launching their military careers despite the geopolitical turbulence.

"I have learned the spirit and skills of Self-Defense Force personnel," said Hiyane, who is about to complete his initial training. "I feel I have grown."

AFP



Phnom Penh. Photo: Roth Chanvirak

CAMBODIAN LAWMAKERS PASS BILL ALLOWING GOVERNMENT TO REVOKE CITIZENSHIP

Critics say the measure would have a “disastrously chilling effect” on freedom of speech.

Lawmakers in Phnom Penh on 1 September approved a law that will allow the government to strip Cambodian citizenship from people convicted of conspiring with foreign governments against the national interest.

Approved by 120 of the 125 members of the National Assembly, the measure was made possible by a change to Cambodia’s constitution that lawmakers passed in July. The measure needs to be approved by the Senate and signed by the king to be fully enacted.

The bill’s passage comes amid a wider crackdown on opponents of the government of Prime Minister Hun Manet. On Sunday, a group of 50 Cambodian non-governmental organizations issued a statement saying the “vaguely worded” measure “will have a disastrously chilling effect on the freedom of speech of all Cambodian citizens.”

speech, association and assembly currently enshrined in Cambodian law,” the groups said. “The government has many powers, but they should not have the power to arbitrarily decide who is and is not a Cambodian.”

Ahead of the vote, Cambodian Interior Minister Sar Sokha framed the measure as important to boost patriotism in Cambodia amid high tensions with Thailand over their disputed border. “A small handful” of Cambodian citizens are imperiling that patriotism, he said, and “should no longer be qualified as Cambodian citizens.”

If the bill becomes law, revocations would be directed by a committee established at Sokha’s request.

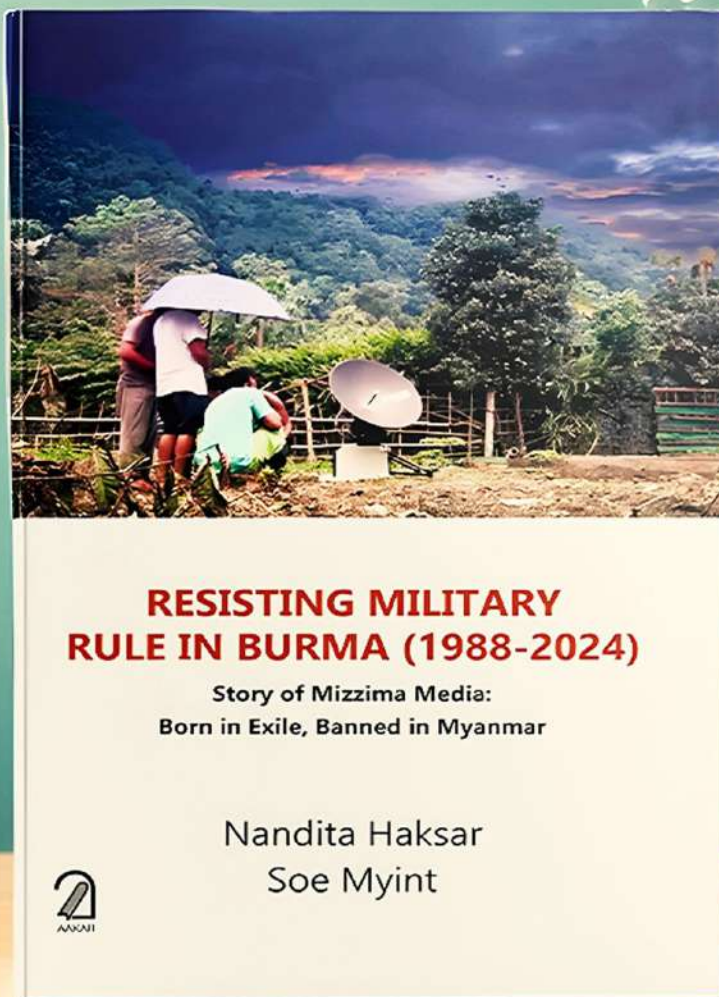
Courtesy of Radio Free Asia. Includes reporting from The Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse.

“It would undermine every legal protection for

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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RETURN TO NOWHERE

“I think this experience of seeing violence that close and not being able to protect myself or my mother... gave me a strong urge to actually address violence, that I have felt all my life.”

Minna Fredriksson is a Swedish human rights advisor at Diakonia, a faith-based Swedish development organization. As a child, she witnessed abuse, violence and addiction, and these formative experiences shaped her life-- which now embodies a decades-long commitment to justice, gender equity, and humanitarian response in conflict-affected regions, particularly Myanmar. Her insights are crucial for anyone interested in ethical aid work, displacement, and trauma-informed humanitarianism. For those working in or concerned with Myanmar—especially in light of donor fatigue, diminishing resources, and escalating repression—Fredriksson’s reflections offer a sobering assessment, reasons for hope, and ideas for the future.

Fredriksson worked for years in Indonesia before transitioning to Myanmar in 2013, where her first post involved managing Diakonia’s humanitarian initiatives in nine refugee camps along the Thai border as part of the Border Consortium. This was a time, during the opening transition period, when donor governments—in particular the US, Sweden, Germany and Japan—were

pushing for refugee returns, despite ongoing insecurity in Myanmar. She explains how, bound by institutional reporting cycles, political considerations and fixed timelines, donor agencies gradually become detached from on-the-ground realities. “There is a clash between this sort of difficult, long term, super serious decisions to be made by people, and the donor perspective on something... you get funding for the next one year, and after that, [they] want to see the change.”

Fredriksson emphasizes the complexity of encouraging returns to a country that is still unsafe. Many of the refugees were born in the camps and had never set foot in Myanmar, and so a return could very well mean entering a political system that continued to discriminate against their ethnic communities. One story that stayed with her came from a youth group of Karen refugees, who showed her a Burmese schoolbook that labeled them as “insurgents” and “troublemakers;” in other words, the government was declaring—and teaching—how the entire ethnicity was an enemy of the state!

In contrast to much top-down humanitarianism, Fredriksson—like a number of other recent, Insight Myanmar guests—praises the model of humanitarian aid that places refugee communities at the center of program design and delivery, such as the Border Consortium. “Treat [the refugees] as a community with all the respect that you would show outside a camp setting,” she says, describing this more ethical and trusting approach.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/8/21/episode-385-return-to-nowhere>



MYANMAR PARTICIPATES IN ASEAN ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETINGS ON CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Myanmar joined regional and international partners at the 18th ASEAN Environment Ministers' Meeting (AMME) and related sessions, held in Malaysia from September 2 to 4 in a hybrid format. Deputy Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Min Thu led the Myanmar delegation.

The AMME sessions, attended by ministers and senior officials from ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Secretariat, reviewed regional progress on biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, coastal and water management, sustainable urban development, waste management, and environmental education.

A key highlight was the 20th ASEAN Transboundary Haze Pollution Control Ministers' Meeting (COP-20 AATHP), which examined implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution and the 2023–2030 Action Plan. Reports noted a 25 percent reduction in fire hotspots and haze pollution across the Mekong region between December 2024 and May

2025 compared to the previous year. Preparations were also discussed for COP-21, to be hosted by Vietnam in 2026.

Myanmar also took part in several ministerial dialogues with external partners. The meetings also included the inaugural ASEAN-EU Ministerial Dialogue, co-chaired by Malaysia and European Commission officials, addressed climate adaptation, carbon markets, and a global treaty to end plastic pollution.

The 3rd ASEAN-Japan dialogue focused on the ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment (SPACE) and future cooperation. In addition, the 19th ASEAN Plus Three meeting with Japan, South Korea, and China reviewed initiatives on marine plastic pollution, sustainable consumption, and environmental frameworks extending to 2030.

Concluding the meetings, ASEAN environment ministers met Ambassador André Aranha Corrêa do Lago of Brazil, Chair of UNFCCC COP30, to exchange views on upcoming global climate negotiations



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing attends a meeting at the SCO in China. Photo: AFP

MIN AUNG HLAING'S CHINA TRIP AND PHOTO CAMPAIGN SPARKS ONLINE DEBATE

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's recent trip to China, where he was seen taking photographs with foreign leaders during a multilateral gathering, has stirred strong debate on Myanmar social media.

Myanmar state media highlighted images of the junta leader standing alongside heads of state and government officials from countries attending the forum, portraying the meetings as a sign of recognition and international engagement. Commentaries in the *Global New Light of Myanmar* framed the trip as evidence that Myanmar continues to maintain diplomatic relations despite Western sanctions and isolation.

However, on Facebook and X many users dismissed the images as propaganda. Critics argued that the carefully staged photos were intended to legitimize the military regime ahead of the planned December

elections. Memes mocking the photo-ops circulated widely, with captions questioning whether a handshake or a group photo amounts to genuine political support.

Some voices expressed concern that the junta would use these images to strengthen its domestic narrative of international acceptance. A Yangon-based activist wrote, "A photo is not recognition. The world still knows who they are."

Observers note that China remains one of the few powerful allies maintaining open ties with the Myanmar military administration. The timing of the visit, coming months before the scheduled polls, underscores the junta's efforts to project authority both at home and abroad.

For many online, the trip symbolized the widening gap between the junta's official narrative and the lived realities of citizens still caught in conflict and crisis.

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.