

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

EUROPE-MYANMAR RELATIONS

With the reduction
in US aid, is Europe
filling the gap?



SPECIAL ISSUE

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.

WELCOME MOVE AS MYANMAR

REFUGEES IN THAILAND FREE TO WORK

The decision by the Thai government on 26 August to allow Myanmar refugees residing in Thailand to seek employment marks a significant and welcome step forward in the long-standing refugee situation along the Thai-Myanmar border.

For decades, approximately 81,000 people who fled conflict and persecution in Myanmar have lived in temporary shelters in Thailand, caught in a state of limbo with limited access to basic rights and opportunities. This move, which grants them the right to work, not only acknowledges their dignity and humanity but also provides a practical solution to an enduring humanitarian challenge.

For many of these refugees, life in the camps has been defined by uncertainty and dependence. Entire generations have grown up behind fences, with no legal status beyond their presence in the shelters and no formal pathway to contribute to Thai society or support themselves independently. The lack of legal work opportunities has fostered cycles of poverty, vulnerability, and, in many cases, exploitation. With limited access to education and mobility, many young people have found themselves with few prospects for the future. In this context, the right to work is not just about earning an income - it is about restoring agency, hope, and a sense of purpose to thousands of people who have long been denied these basic elements of life.

The Thai government's decision comes at a particularly critical time. Recent drastic reductions in US humanitarian aid to the refugee population have left many of these camps in precarious conditions, straining resources and reducing access to essential services such as food, healthcare, and education. These aid cutbacks have compounded existing hardships and made it increasingly clear that a shift from dependency to self-reliance is urgently needed. By enabling refugees to work legally, the Thai authorities are helping to fill the gap left

by international funding shortfalls while empowering refugees to meet their own needs and support their families with dignity.

Moreover, this move sets an important precedent in the region and demonstrates a compassionate and pragmatic approach to a protracted displacement crisis. Thailand has long carried the responsibility of hosting refugees from Myanmar, often without adequate support from the international community. Allowing refugees to work is a way to share the responsibility more sustainably and reduce the pressure on local resources and host communities. At the same time, it opens the door to greater social cohesion, as refugees can now contribute economically and build more integrated relationships with their Thai neighbours.

It is essential that this policy shift be implemented inclusively and fairly, ensuring that all eligible refugees are given access to employment opportunities without discrimination or undue bureaucratic barriers. Collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, employers, and refugee communities will be key to making this a success. With careful planning and support, the move to allow refugees to work could become a turning point - not only in the lives of the individuals concerned but also in the broader approach to refugee policy in the region.

In light of all these factors, Thailand's decision deserves recognition and support. It reflects a humane and forward-looking stance that honours international principles of refugee protection and human rights. Most importantly, it offers long-overdue hope and opportunity to tens of thousands of displaced people who, after years in limbo, may finally begin to build lives of independence and dignity.

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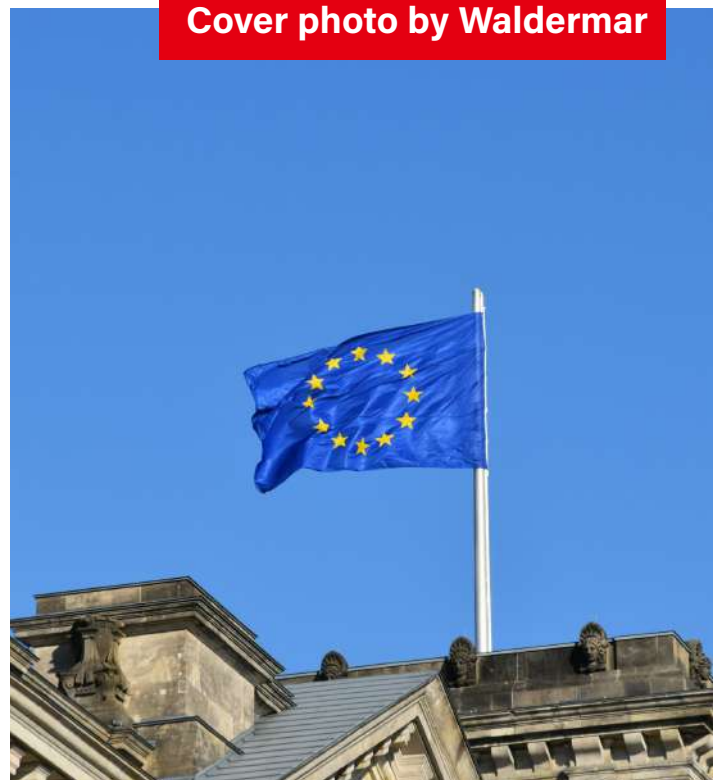
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Cover photo by Waldemar





EUROPE-MYANMAR RELATIONS

**WITH THE REDUCTION
IN US AID, IS EUROPE
FILLING THE GAP?**

Has the European Union (EU) emerged as the most consistent, strategically effective, and morally principled international partner for Myanmar's democratic cause?

As other major powers – most notably the US government – have stepped back, Europe may be stepping in to provide a comprehensive approach which offers both a lifeline for the anti-junta resistance and a roadmap for effective international engagement.

Earlier in the year, Myanmar's citizens, NGOs and support groups were shocked by the decision of the US President Donald Trump administration to dramatically pull the plug on a range of overseas aid that in many cases shuttered or reduced crucial humanitarian, media and diplomatic efforts.

In January 2025, President Trump's administration enacted sweeping cuts to US foreign aid, halting over 90 per cent of USAID-funded programmes worldwide. Myanmar was among the hardest hit – roughly \$259 million in planned aid was canceled, stripping \$39 million intended for democracy, human rights, and independent media initiatives. Healthcare, education, and humanitarian services were abruptly suspended, resulting in loss of essential aid and at least one reported death due to clinic closures.

Refugees, activists, journalists, and civil society across Myanmar were plunged into a dire humanitarian and rights-based crisis as food aid dwindled and democratic institutions lost critical support.

Refugee camps along the Thailand–Myanmar border – home to over 80,000 displaced individuals – saw the suspension of healthcare services, food distribution, education, and sanitation. Organizations like the IRC and The Border Consortium were forced to halt operations.

At least one death was directly linked to these disruptions: Pe Kha Lau, a 71-year-old Burmese refugee, died after being discharged from a U.-funded clinic when services were abruptly shut down.

Independent media and exiled journalists, partially dependent on USAID funds, lost vital financial support. Many saw salary cuts or were forced to cease operations entirely, worsening the information war.

The UN World Food Programme announced food aid cuts for over 1 million people in Myanmar, beginning in April, partly attributed to diminished US contributions.

Human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Fortify Rights, warned that the abrupt cessation of aid “poses an existential threat” to human rights defenders and civilians – especially women, children, and refugees.

For many organizations it was lights out, kitchens emptied, doors closed.

Given the dire circumstances, there was little surprise that a range of Myanmar-related NGOs turned to the EU for support. But how flexible is the EU and the European nation states to pivot and engage more with Myanmar and the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding in the country?

In the following stories in this Special Issue, Mizzima takes a look at various aspects of Europe's relations with Myanmar and the junta from aid, to development and lobbying for a free Myanmar.



EUROPE'S DECISIVE ROLE IN MYANMAR'S FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY - A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY AGAINST THE JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTIONS

JAMES SHWE

As Myanmar's military junta orchestrates elections designed to cement its authoritarian rule while excluding genuine democratic voices, the international community faces a critical test. These sham elections - planned to begin in December 2025 - represent more than domestic political theater; they are a calculated attempt to fracture the resistance, manufacture false legitimacy, and weaken the resolve of international partners who have sustained Myanmar's pro-democracy movement through its darkest hours.

At this pivotal moment, the European Union (EU) has emerged as the most consistent, strategically effective, and morally principled international partner for Myanmar's democratic cause. As other major powers have stepped back, Europe's comprehensive approach - combining humanitarian aid, democracy promotion, financial leverage, and unwavering diplomatic isolation of the junta - offers both a lifeline for the resistance and a roadmap for effective international engagement.

Why the Junta's Elections Are So Dangerous—And Why EU Leadership Matters

The regime's upcoming elections pose three fundamental threats:

Manufacturing False Legitimacy: By excluding opposition parties, political prisoners, ethnic minorities,

and millions of displaced citizens, these polls are designed to provide international cover for continued military rule. Any recognition—however qualified—risks legitimizing a process built on exclusion and coercion.

Deepening National Division: The electoral framework deliberately marginalizes ethnic voices and resistance actors, threatening to entrench the very divisions that have plagued Myanmar for decades and making future federal democracy more difficult to achieve.

Undermining International Support: Recognition of sham results could justify reduced sanctions, weakened aid to resistance areas, and decreased diplomatic support—leaving millions without protection and the democratic movement without critical resources.

The EU's response to these threats has been exemplary: European-backed organizations like International IDEA have condemned the elections unequivocally, calling for complete international non-recognition. Individual EU member states—France and the Czech Republic—have permitted NUG representative offices to operate, providing political space without formal diplomatic recognition that might complicate humanitarian operations.

Europe's Multi-Track Strategy—Balancing Support and Pressure

Unlike approaches that have faltered elsewhere, the EU has developed a sophisticated, multi-dimensional strategy that maximizes impact while minimizing risks:

Separated Humanitarian and Democracy Channels:

The EU deliberately keeps its humanitarian assistance (Euro 46M+ in 2025) separate from its democracy-building initiatives. This dual-track approach protects vulnerable communities from political backlash while quietly strengthening civil society, independent media, and governance capacity in liberated areas.

Strategic Media and Information Support:

With Voice of America and Radio Free Asia Burmese services shut down, EU support for DVB, Mizzima, and The Irrawaddy has become even more critical. These outlets—widely viewed within resistance communities as both professionally objective and supportive of democratic change—provide essential counterweights to junta propaganda and BBC Burmese, which many perceive as insufficiently critical of military narratives.

Financial Leverage and Divestment Leadership:

Europe's greatest untapped power lies in its financial networks. Major European institutional investors—including ABP and PFZW (Netherlands), Amundi, AXA, and FRR (France), AP7 (Sweden), PKA and P+ (Denmark), Storebrand (Norway), and Unicredit (Italy)—collectively hold billions in companies linked to Myanmar's military economy across oil, gas, telecommunications, arms, and manufacturing sectors.

The Norwegian Government Pension Fund's divestment from military-linked companies has set a powerful precedent, demonstrating how European sovereign wealth can be redirected away from supporting authoritarian rule. Civil society campaigns have successfully pressured other funds to follow suit, creating real economic consequences for the regime.

Unity Incentives and Governance Support:

EU funding increasingly rewards collaboration between the NUG, EROs, and civil society organizations. By tying access to resources and diplomatic platforms to inclusive governance and joint projects, Europe creates practical incentives for the kind of unity that Myanmar's federal future requires.

Lessons from Comparative Aid Models

Analysis of international approaches reveals why Europe's strategy is particularly effective:

EU Model: Medium overhead costs (15-20%) with high effectiveness through established local partnerships. The separation of humanitarian and political programs enhances durability while financial leverage through sovereign funds creates material pressure on the junta.

US Model: Historically significant but recently hampered by funding cuts and operational challenges. The 2025 suspension of most democracy and humanitarian programs has reduced American leverage just when consistency is most needed.

Myanmar Advocates' Proposals: Democracy activists have developed innovative unity-centered aid models that explicitly link assistance to multi-stakeholder collaboration and federal governance—approaches they hope the EU might adopt to further enhance effectiveness.

What the EU Must Do Now—Maintaining Isolation and Expanding Pressure

To counter the junta's electoral strategy, the EU must:

Lead Global Non-Recognition:

Use IDEA's authoritative condemnation to anchor an EU-wide diplomatic front explicitly refusing legitimacy to the election results. Coordinate with other democratic partners to ensure the junta gains no international credibility from this charade.

Accelerate Complete Divestment:

Press all European institutional investors—pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, and private asset managers—to divest entirely from companies operating in junta-linked sectors. The Norwegian Fund's leadership must become the European standard.

Expand Media and Civil Society Support:

Increase funding, security training, and technical capacity for DVB, Mizzima, and The Irrawaddy while supporting new platforms and digital infrastructure that can reach audiences both inside Myanmar and globally.

Deepen Unity Incentives:

Make unified representation between NUG, EROs, and civil society a prerequisite for major EU programs and diplomatic engagement, turning Europe's support into a powerful force for inclusive governance.

Strengthen Sanctions and Isolation:

Expand targeted sanctions on junta leaders, military-owned companies, and international enablers

while maintaining strict diplomatic isolation of the regime.

What Myanmar's People Must Do—From Diaspora to Resistance Areas

European support reaches its full potential when matched by strategic action across Myanmar's democratic movement:

Diaspora Communities: Intensify lobbying of European governments for sustained non-recognition and complete divestment while pressing resistance leaders for greater unity and transparency in their use of international support.

Liberated Areas: Build and demonstrate transparent, inclusive governance that showcases democratic alternatives while documenting junta abuses that strengthen the international case.

Under Junta Control: Engage in safe resistance and maintain communication with democratic leadership through secure channels.

All Citizens: Advocate consistently for the formation of a unified representative body that can speak with one credible voice to international partners and command both domestic legitimacy and global recognition.

Conclusion—Unity, Isolation, and the Path to Democracy

The junta's sham elections represent a direct challenge to democratic values worldwide. But they also present an opportunity: for Myanmar's resistance to demonstrate unity and governance capacity, and for

Europe to show that principled international partnership can make the difference between democratic success and authoritarian entrenchment.

Europe's comprehensive approach—humanitarian aid separated from democracy promotion, independent media support, financial pressure through divestment, and unwavering non-recognition of illegitimate processes—offers a template for effective international engagement in the world's most challenging environments.

The junta thrives on division, confusion, and the gradual erosion of international resolve. Europe's strength lies in unity, clarity, and sustained commitment to democratic values. Myanmar's future depends on how effectively these forces align—with the resistance presenting a united, accountable front and Europe maintaining the comprehensive pressure that can deny the junta any claim to legitimacy.

The path forward is clear: reject the sham election, support the genuine, and build the united democratic future that Myanmar's people deserve.



Armed policeman on a Yangon street.
Photo: AFP



EUROPEAN UNION TIGHTENS RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON ILLEGAL MYANMAR JUNTA

IGOR BLAZEVIC

The European Union has been intensifying restrictive measures in response to the 2021 Myanmar coup and worsening human rights violations in the country. As of April 2025, the EU has renewed these sanctions through April 2026, targeting over 100 individuals and more than 20 entities. Measures include asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes, and bans on dual-use technology and military cooperation.

How effective are these measures and should more be done?

Sanctions are like a stubborn trench war: you never really win, but the important thing is not to lose.

You don't win a war simply by holding the trench line or pushing it a few meters forward. But trenches - just like sanctions - are necessary to defend positions and to hold the opponent at bay.

Sanctions will not by themselves topple an entrenched, brutal regime locked in an existential struggle for survival. But they do reduce the regime's resources and capacity to prevail against us.

In today's geopolitical context, where international institutions exist but do not function, democracies hesitate to provide decisive support for those fighting for freedom and rights, and autocracies like China and Russia stand ready to sustain faltering regimes,

sanctions are less impactful than they were 15 years ago. If the EU, UK, Canada, and the US impose sanctions, others - China, Russia, and beyond - see that as an opportunity for economic and geopolitical gain.

Still, sanctions have an important effect. They not only limit the junta's access to Western capital, markets, and technology, but also reduce the willingness of Western businesses to lobby their governments to normalize relations and legitimize a kleptocratic and murderous junta. This denial of legitimacy is an achievement in itself. Often, our struggle is less about outright victories in one area and more about containing harm in one field while seeking advantages in others.

Since Myanmar's Spring Revolution in response to the coup began, I have stressed again and again that we should not expect external actors - neighbors, regional powers, or democracies - to deliver us victory. They will not. What we can do is prevent or at least complicate their ability to help the junta survive and continue with impunity. Overcoming military dictatorship is possible only through domestic strength: the breadth and depth of resistance, determination for liberation struggle, people's participation, and the unity of revolutionary forces.

That is the reality of today's world. Complaining about its unfairness gains us nothing. The world is as it is. We must understand it, adapt to it, and use it in

the best way possible to advance our cause and reduce opportunities for the Myanmar junta.

Some European countries - particularly the Czech Republic and France - have taken proactive stances by recognizing the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate voice of Myanmar's people. The Czech Republic hosts one of the only two NUG representative offices in the EU, while France's Senate formally acknowledged the NUG in late 2021.

How important is this and what more needs to be done?

The Czech Republic and several other European countries have a long tradition of supporting Myanmar's democracy movement. I am confident that there will always be political and civil society voices in the Czech Republic standing in solidarity with us.

That said, we need to be realistic. While the Czech Republic will continue to support the democratic and federal aspirations of the Myanmar people, it will still align with the broader EU policy framework.

What is urgently needed now must happen inside the country. Only if we build real political momentum domestically will we have something meaningful to amplify through international advocacy.

The junta cannot achieve an outright military victory, either now or in the medium term. Yet perceptions have shifted: the junta is seen as regaining ground, while the revolution is perceived as weakening.

This shift is largely due to external interference - above all from China, Russia, and India - designed to help the junta survive and push revolutionary forces toward surrender through ceasefires, sham elections, and corrupt deals over trade and "development".

The junta's survival strategy is now primarily political: repackaging itself as a pseudo-civilian government through fake elections. These elections

are not about controlling the whole country but about claiming the right to act as the "central government".

The junta and its allies will endlessly repeat narratives such as: the 2020 parliamentary mandate has expired, elections will restore "civilian government", elections can bring peace, there is a possibility for a "new start", something is better than nothing.

All of this is false. The reality is the opposite. Fake elections will not bring peace but more war and destruction. They will not create something new but attempt to roll history back to 2010 - a strategy that will ultimately fail.

This struggle is not only about realities but about narratives, perceptions, and legitimacy.

It is not enough to simply react to fake elections by condemning them, urging international partners not to recognize them, or organizing boycotts and acts of civil disobedience. These actions are necessary but insufficient.

While strike committees and civil society can lead rejection campaigns, political actors - the NUG and ethnic revolutionary organizations - must take a further step: to initiate and implement a joint political process that renews the legitimacy of revolutionary leadership. They must create a credible alternative to the junta's sham parliament and fake civilian government: a revolutionary leadership that continues to claim, with legitimacy, to represent the people of Myanmar and to embody central government authority.

This must be a national-level effort - one that captures public imagination, unifies resistance forces, and draws the attention of the international community.

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



Photo: AFP



Garment workers in a Yangon factory.
Photo: AFP

EUROCHAM AND MADE SEEK TO SUPPORT MYANMAR WORKERS' RIGHTS

EuroCham Myanmar has been carefully following the moves of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as it sought this year to bring Myanmar to book through their Article 33 Resolution to address Myanmar's forced labour and freedom of association violations, as recommended by a 2025 International Labour Conference resolution and a prior Commission of Inquiry. This action, which involves inviting ILO constituents - governments, employers, and workers - to evaluate and cease financial and commercial relations that enable these violations, is the strongest measure available to compel compliance with ILO recommendations.

The Article 33 recommendation was issued on 5 June.

EuroCham Myanmar published and shared their "Business Advisory: FAQs: Understanding the ILO Article 33 Resolution in Myanmar" with their members on 11 June, less than one week after the Article 33 Resolution was adopted on Myanmar.

In this Business Advisory, EuroCham Myanmar's stance is clearly stated: "EuroCham Myanmar encourages its members operating in and sourcing from Myanmar to conduct heightened due diligence, strengthen grievance mechanisms, and support decent working conditions in line with international frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines."

IMPROVING LABOUR RIGHTS

As a leading chamber in Myanmar for responsible and sustainable business practices, EuroCham Myanmar also shared this Business Advisory with other garment stakeholders including business associations in order to help improve labour rights and standards in Myanmar.

EuroCham Myanmar tells Mizzima that they cannot comment on the texts of the Article 33 Resolution which was adopted through ILO's mechanism. However, they note the statements at the 113th International Labour

Conference, by the European Union and jointly by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, important export markets for Myanmar's CMP garment sector.

EuroCham says it welcomes their clear signal that they will prioritize protecting and supporting the livelihoods of workers in Myanmar and importance of responsible businesses to be able to continue operating in Myanmar. They also note that the resolution also expressly reaffirms the ILO's commitment to "enable continuing support for activities that benefit directly the Myanmar people and their communities"

'RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS'

In their Business Advisory, EuroCham Myanmar provided five practical guidances that businesses need to undertake in light of ILO Article 33 Resolution.

"We expect our members to reflect those recommendations in their practices while sourcing from

and/or operating in Myanmar. With the uncertainty surrounding the global trade, European firms continue to play an important role in supporting the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of workers and their families in Myanmar, through their operations, as long as European businesses can continue to do so responsibly."

EuroCham Myanmar tells Mizzima that it is actively engaging with local stakeholders - including with a trade union federation, labour rights organizations, employers' associations, international partners, and our members, particularly garment brands - to continuously improve working conditions and remuneration. These efforts aim to support workers' livelihoods and foster responsible business practices not only in the garment sector, but also across all sectors where our European member companies operate.

"Our members also have been engaging with a trade union federation through EuroCham Myanmar's facilitated ongoing dialogue to understand the latest state of the garment industry and to work together with



the trade union federation on resolving the workplace disputes and allegations. From time to time, EuroCham Myanmar also has been liaising with multiple stakeholders to help support the peaceful conclusion of demand for wage increase in the industry. Please also see our Garment Advocacy Group's statement in April, calling to significantly increase the minimum wage in Myanmar's export-oriented apparel manufacturing sector to reflect inflation. We believe that increasing the minimum wage would help improve worker retention and support more stable livelihoods, contributing to a healthier and more resilient workforce."

WORKING WITH 'MADE IN MYANMAR'

In addition, EuroCham Myanmar is an implementing partner of the MADE in Myanmar project (originally SMART) primarily funded by the European Union, with the objective of strengthening responsible business practices in the textile, clothing and footwear sector, achieving critical industry improvements and protecting livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of families. Many of EuroCham Myanmar's garment brand members are participating in this project.

A European initiative, SMART, started as Myanmar began opening up over a decade ago, sought to help European companies, changing its name to MADE in Myanmar in 2023 in the wake of the 2021 military coup.

According to EuroCham, the MADE in Myanmar project is funded through a 3-million euro grant from the European Union and implemented by the German developmental organization Sequa in partnership with EuroCham Myanmar. The project is still in operation – post-coup – and will run till the end of 2026.

A MADE spokesperson told Mizzima that the text of the Article 33 Resolution is clear and that MADE's approach is consistent with the actions the ILO advises

for the private sector, and with the EU's endorsement of Article 33 and response to it – along with statements from some other UN member states, such as the UK – many of whom indicated that negative impacts on vulnerable workers – such as garment sector workers, domestic migrants, ethnic minorities – should be avoided.

"So, the MADE stance is that our project and the nature of our work is precisely what Article 33 envisions and recommends for private sector actors in the manufacturing sector, in terms of providing mechanisms to support and carry-out supply chain due diligence, to monitor and mitigate risks for abuses (such as forced labour and child labour). We work on such topics weekly, and we have worked with our 31 international member brands across their 168 supplier factories to achieve thousands of significant improvements. A great deal of what we do is related to occupational safety and health and human resources management. HR managers with better knowledge and capacity, supervisors with knowledge of the labour laws, workers able to complain and claim their legal rights, safer factories – this is what we like to see and what we work to achieve."

A GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL HUB

Many among the MADE team have been working to improve the garment and footwear industry in Myanmar for over a decade. Myanmar is perhaps the only significant global industrial hub for garment and footwear production free from catastrophic or major, fatal industrial accidents. There have been no major garment factory accidents since 2009 which have killed more than one individual in a single incident.

This contrasts with the often troubling record of some other countries in Asia. Several workers were injured in a garment factory fire in Pakistan earlier this

month. In Bangladesh, vast improvements have been made, but they have struggled for years with fatal industrial fires, with several hundred fatal incidents over the previous two decades. In addition, there have been boiler explosions and fires in Vietnam, China and Cambodia.

Why do the factories in Myanmar seem safer? Well, the average facility age is from 2016 and the most common, most typical garment or footwear factory, among exporting facilities, was built in 2019, the year of the most construction and growth. So, newness helps but so do technical interventions and capacity building.

Last week, MADE reports they had electrical engineers working with two facilities to troubleshoot and remediate electrical safety issues. They have other teams working with two factories on child labour prevention and remediation.

The MADE spokesperson noted that their teams discovered three child workers in August across their network of 168 factories. They have been removed from work and will be provided with a stipend for lost income until they reach 16 years of age and have alternative schooling programmes fully funded, paid for by the retailers and factories. The MADE project has worked on 53 child labour remediation cases since 2022, most of which have resulted in educational attainment for the children, monthly stipends for lost income and a childhood free from factory work. Due to the heightened risks in this area, MADE has intensively trained over 200 HR managers and compliance officers on prevention and remediation systems. The incidence of child labour, as discovered by MADE teams, is – so far – less in 2025 than in 2024. All of their work in MADE is majority funded by the EU and co-funded by the private sector, especially major European retailers.

HELPLINE FOR GARMENT WORKERS

MADE works with labour rights organizations to support them and help them protect worker rights in their networks and to address violations. They also run a dedicated helpline for garment workers as an alternative grievance channel if or when they feel their factory-specific options are deficient. They have fielded 439 complaint calls since they launched their helpline in September 2023. This gives many workers an additional avenue to pursue access to remedy.

“When we receive such grievances, we work to investigate and remediate and we do it together with our members and our labour rights and civil society partners. The feedback I receive from our members is that they often do not have such effective tools or channels in other countries where they source. I had a call last week with a member who is trying to copy elements of our approach for their suppliers in Mauritius, where they seem to struggle with many labour rights abuses,” the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson notes that in terms of the European firm response to the ILO’s Article 33, most seem to view that the text is more constructive rather than punitive. The ILO seems to want European retailers to work through the problems with robust systems, not to run away and leave behind a mess of poverty that benefits no one and undermines the potential success of Article 33 itself.

“I have seen retailers try to claim ‘responsible exit’ from Myanmar ever since 2021. It’s often a hollow term, used perversely for some quick PR boasts. Nothing constructive seems to have resulted from companies exiting. How can it? They are gone, with no leverage and no way to influence anything. In any case, the

net effect of retailer exits has been little other than a disappearance of growth."

Overall, this industrial sector is about the same size in 2025 that it was in 2019 and 2020, in terms of total employment and exports. It was expected to grow by over 25% annually, and has not due to the political circumstances, but it has not dropped off. UK retailers have been largely replaced by Polish, Italian and Turkish retailers.

MADE indicates they recognize their limits, in that they cannot work on all the industry problems. But, they can protect and boost worker rights, wages and safety standards for the nearly 200,000 individuals working at the 168+ factories where their members source, and they see that they have major success doing this.

"We are probably most frustrated not to find more success in boosting wages, but this is a global challenge that relates to the wider business model. Nevertheless, our data show us that MADE suppliers pay more than other factories. About 5% more. It's not enough to brag about, but I do think it's noteworthy. The industry is working in a globally competitive system, often with razor thin margins, and for MADE's network of factories to simply voluntarily pay more than they have to or more than their competitors offer is often challenging for them. I'd prefer to see the minimum wage substantially increase - and this is clearly supported by all of our members - but the tri-partite process has been stuck."

NO BACKSLIDING

MADE does not want to see the industry backslide on standards, after all it is the vulnerable workers who are likely to suffer. MADE is focused on maintaining "normalcy" around safe factories, decent human

resources and social compliance and management in line with best practices, and factories free from child labour, where young workers aged 16 to 17 are prohibited from hazardous work and given special protections. In addition, they are looking to bolster auditor and network capacities, make progress on climate action – essentially a more rapid adoption of solar power over the coming months and a complete phase out of coal by the end of 2025 across their network of factories – and maintain trade linkages. "The EU market continues to account for about 60 per cent of Myanmar's garment, handbag and footwear exports – directly and sometimes indirectly – hence the EU and its buyers wield leverage and the 31 retailers working with us in MADE are using that leverage to monitor and improve conditions. Wages are the main area where we would like them to give greater attention and action and this is something we are working on. Purchasing practices and prices are one of the keys for improving wages."

After the ILO Article 33 decision, EuroCham Myanmar and MADE in Myanmar will continue to prioritize protecting and supporting the livelihoods of workers in Myanmar and continue to encourage responsible businesses to continue operating in Myanmar.



EUROPEAN TECH COMPANIES DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY SUPPORTING THE MYANMAR MILITARY'S WAR MACHINE

ANDREW LANDEN

Over the past 12 months, growing evidence has emerged that European companies have been supplying drones and related military technology to the Myanmar military junta, aiding its brutal campaign against pro-democracy resistance forces. These developments appear to run counter to the national political stance of several European countries that call for sanctions against the Myanmar military regime that seized power in a coup in 2021. These findings, brought to light through the work of investigative organizations and independent researchers, raise serious questions about the effectiveness of international arms embargoes and the role of private companies in conflict zones.

SUPPORTING THE WAR MACHINE?

Austrian company Schiebel Corporation has been at the center of the controversy. Schiebel manufactures the Camcopter S-100, an unmanned helicopter drone that has been documented in use by Myanmar's military forces. The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar previously identified

Schiebel's exports as dual-use goods that breached European Union arms embargo restrictions. Despite the ban, parts and maintenance support for these drones have continued to flow into the country, often through indirect channels. A key actor in this network is Miya Win International, a known arms broker that has been facilitating military procurement for the Myanmar junta. Reports by the civil society group Justice For Myanmar reveal that Miya Win International acquired Camcopter components through Russia and facilitated transactions with several European suppliers, including Austrian company Axis Simulation and German firm Haux Life Support.

Axis Simulation provided flight simulators to Myanmar's Air Force, while Haux Life Support sold hyperbaric chambers to Myanmar's Navy SEALs unit. These seemingly civilian products, once integrated into military training and operations, represent classic examples of dual-use goods that can support combat capabilities. Although such sales may technically fall outside of standard arms classifications, their role in enhancing the military's readiness and survivability

is undeniable. The use of intermediaries such as Miya Win International allows European companies to claim ignorance or plausible deniability, while their products continue to serve repressive military functions.

Another company implicated in this growing web is Grob Aircraft SE, a German aviation firm whose aircraft and components have been procured by Dynasty International, another Myanmar-based broker. According to investigative findings, Dynasty began acquiring aircraft from Grob as early as 2015 and maintained a long-term supply chain relationship. While some transactions predate the February 2021 military coup, continued maintenance and support potentially violate the EU embargo enacted thereafter. These relationships demonstrate how Myanmar's military continues to access European technologies despite formal sanctions.

In a particularly revealing development, the organization Conflict Armament Research (CAR) conducted field investigations that exposed European-made anti-jamming modules inside downed drones used by the Myanmar military. These drones were recovered in conflict zones in Kayah and Chin states, areas heavily affected by junta-led airstrikes and surveillance. The anti-jamming devices—vital for protecting drones from electronic interference—were traced back to a European manufacturer whose identity remains undisclosed due to ongoing investigations. CAR's report indicates that the modules were exported in March 2023 to a verified distributor in China. From there, they entered Myanmar's military supply chain and were found installed in operational drones by early 2024.

This discovery highlights the challenge of controlling dual-use exports that are shipped through third countries. Even when European companies comply with national regulations, once products reach distributors in China, they can be repurposed and redirected toward military ends. The Myanmar junta's increasing reliance on drones for surveillance and airstrikes, especially in contested ethnic areas, makes the presence of such technology deeply concerning.

The documented use of European components in these attacks suggests that embargo enforcement mechanisms are failing to keep pace with the realities of global trade and proxy supply chains.

The watchdog group Justice For Myanmar has played a pivotal role in exposing these networks. By analyzing trade databases, leaked corporate records, and customs filings, the organization has built a picture of ongoing procurement channels that tie European companies—whether knowingly or not—to Myanmar's military activities. Their findings have been reinforced by the UN's fact-finding mission and investigative journalism by outlets like The Guardian and Mizzima. The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), a body comprising former UN officials and legal experts, has further underscored the complicity of international firms in sustaining Myanmar's military-industrial complex. Although SAC-M has focused more broadly on arms manufacturing capabilities within Myanmar—highlighting how machine tools, software, and raw materials from countries like Austria, France, and Germany have supported weapons production—their work supports the broader thesis that foreign technology is fueling the junta's war machine.

SUPPORTING SURVEILLANCE?

Over the past several years, mounting evidence suggests that European-linked technology and services have enabled the Myanmar military regime to tighten control over communications, monitor dissent, and curtail digital freedoms in alarming ways. One central case involves Telenor Myanmar, formerly a subsidiary of the Norwegian telecom giant Telenor Group. In the aftermath of the February 2021 coup, the junta increasingly demanded access to intercept customer communications in real time. Although Telenor struggled to resist these requests, internal and external pressures eventually compelled its exit. Critics point to leaked documentation indicating that Telenor had already installed a German-made lawful interception gateway (LIG) from Utimaco—a system capable of monitoring calls and SMS across its network—before the coup. After the sale of Telenor Myanmar to the

M1 Group and the military-linked Shwe Byain Phyu, human rights groups warned that metadata for millions of users could now be easily accessed and repurposed by the junta. Justice For Myanmar condemned this as effectively providing the regime with a surveillance platform.

Complaints have also been raised about European-funded internet infrastructure used for surveillance. The British International Investment (UK government investment arm) along with partners from Norway and Denmark have backed Frontiir, a Myanmar-based internet service provider. Investigations by human rights watchdogs and press groups found that Frontiir had installed equipment developed by China's Geedge Networks—infamous for enabling censorship and packet inspection. That system reportedly allows the regime to intercept and decrypt traffic, block websites, and disable VPNs, undermining one of the few lifelines citizens had for accessing independent news and communicating securely.

In January 2025, the junta enacted a sweeping cybersecurity law imposing further controls on digital communications. Among its provisions are bans on unauthorized VPN use, requirements for platforms to retain user data for up to three years, and sweeping authority to block online platforms for alleged “disinformation” or threats to national security. These legal measures, paired with technological tools such as those provided via Frontiir, have reinforced the regime's grip on the digital sphere.

Beyond telecom and internet infrastructure, European forensic and surveillance technologies have also reportedly been used by the junta to extract data from detainees' phones. Investigations based on leaked budget documents and detainee interviews revealed that Western firms—including Sweden's MSAB, as well as OpenText and Magnet Forensics—had previously sold mobile endpoint security and digital forensic tools to Myanmar police or security services. Rights observers warn that once deployed, such tools can enable detailed profiling of political activists or journalists, often contributing to arrests, torture, or worse.

These developments depict a worrying trend:

technologies that originate in Europe—or are backed by European state funds—are being integrated into systems of oppression. Whether via Telenor's network infrastructure, state-supported ISPs like Frontiir, or digital forensics tools, the result is the erosion of privacy, free expression, and the ability to resist authoritarian control. The layering of restrictive laws like the Cybersecurity Law further cements the regime's surveillance-modern warfare over its population.

TIGHTENED CONTROLS NEEDED?

Taken together, these findings expose a pattern of systematic failures in embargo enforcement and corporate due diligence. Companies across Europe are supplying, directly or indirectly, technology that enhances the military capability of a regime accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Whether through the provision of drones, simulators, aircraft, or electronic components, these exports enable the junta to sustain its campaign of violence and repression. Even where legal loopholes exist - such as for dual-use or “non-lethal” goods - companies must be held accountable for the end use of their products.

The situation calls for urgent reform of international export control systems. Governments must close the regulatory gaps that allow brokers and intermediaries to funnel sensitive technology into the hands of oppressive regimes. Export licensing regimes need stricter oversight, and companies must be compelled to conduct robust end-user verification, particularly when operating in or near conflict zones. Additionally, naming and shaming firms that supply authoritarian regimes should become standard practice in order to create reputational consequences for complicity in human rights abuses.

Ultimately, the continued flow of European technology into Myanmar underscores a sobering truth: embargoes alone are not enough. Without aggressive monitoring, transparency, and corporate accountability, authoritarian regimes will continue to source the tools of repression—often from the very countries that claim to stand for human rights and democratic values.

Reporting: Mizzima, Guardian, The Diplomat



Bjørn Nordahl

DARK SIGNALS - HOW THE NORWEGIAN EMPIRE, TELENOR, GAVE MYANMAR GENERALS THE POWER TO HUNT THEIR OWN PEOPLE, AND EXPOSED THE PRICE OF DOING BUSINESS WITH DICTATORS

INSIGHT MYANMAR

"As a journalist, you always hope for consequences. I mean, otherwise our reporting is meaningless," Bjørn Nordahl, a Norwegian investigative journalist whose team has traced every twist of Telenor's withdrawal from Myanmar, tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast.

Though he speaks with professional clarity about a subject he knows inside and out, his voice reflects the emotion of realizing that one of Scandinavia's most admired companies, once celebrated for bringing affordable mobile communications to millions of Myanmar citizens, had become entangled with one of the world's most brutal military regimes.

Nordahl begins the story by stressing just how positive Telenor's reputation inside Myanmar had been prior to the coup. When the company entered the market in 2014, it shattered the state monopoly, driving SIM card prices down from hundreds of dollars to just a few. Millions gained access to mobile phones and the internet for the first time, sparking what has been described as a communication revolution. Telenor was

hailed not only as a commercial success but as a symbol of the country's democratic opening. For Nordahl, this makes the company's subsequent unraveling all the more painful: it had once empowered civil society, but devolved into a vehicle that the junta used to trace, silence, and imprison its opponents.

Nordahl acknowledges the post-coup operating environment for Telenor was "quite a dilemma." During the first two weeks following the takeover, the company still posted notices about shutting down networks and social media, but after February 14 it was instructed not to reveal anything more. That same day the CEO told NRK: "From now on, I can't say anything. I can't say anything about what we are doing and what considerations we are making in Myanmar." Nordahl's team then worked through more than 750 documents covering the period until Telenor's March 2022 exit. Those records show two kinds of orders: authority shutdowns of services and direct subscriber data demands, including requests such as "We want to know the owner of this number. We want to know

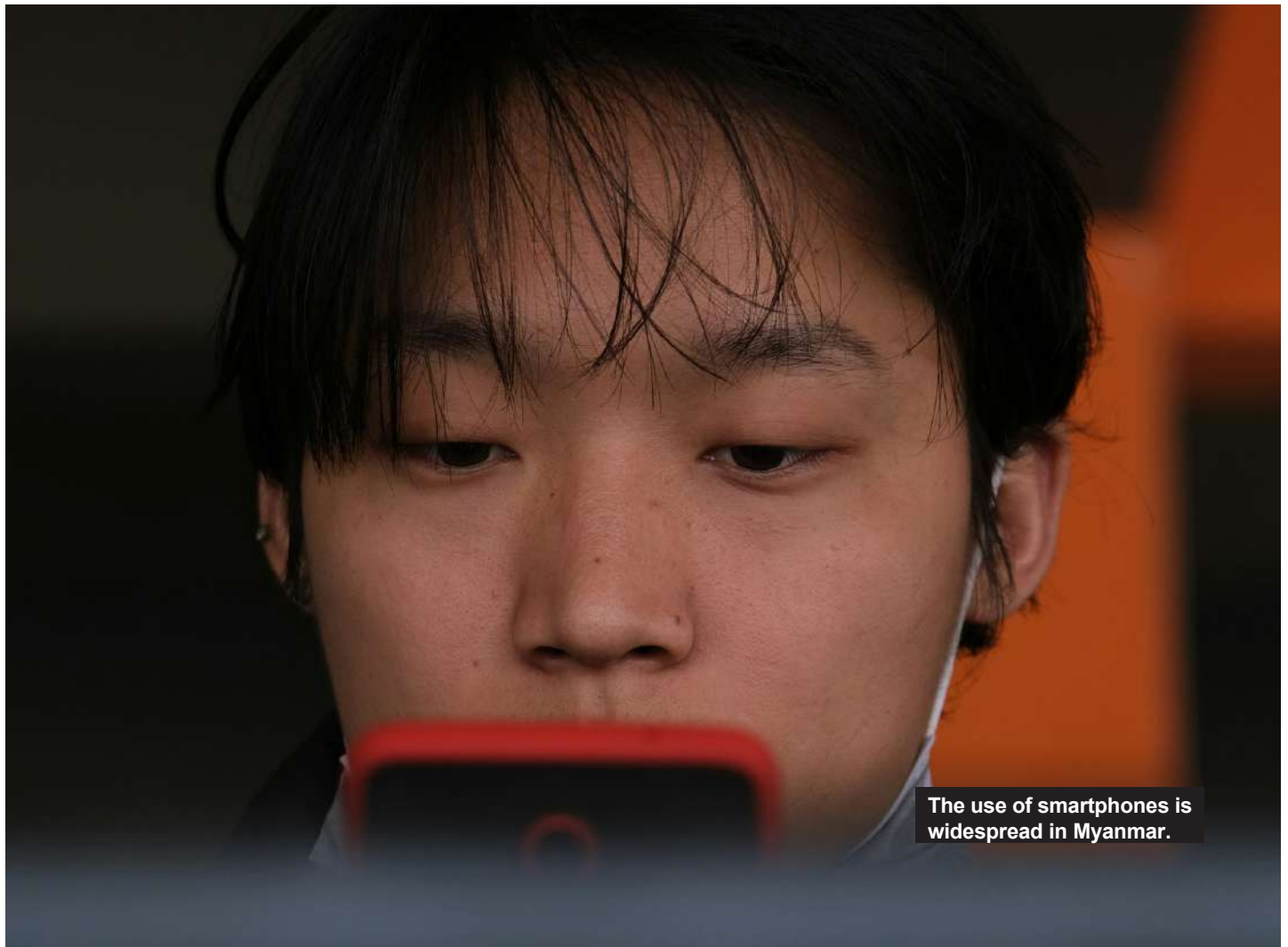
his address. We want to know his last location, and we want to know his call log.”

Inside Telenor, a cross-functional team of lawyers, human-rights staff, and local compliance handled each junta demand; the internal notes record that “the lawyers, they would always win the discussion every time.” When asked if any demand was rejected, Telenor “never said no.” The company’s rationale rested on two points—“we are under military law in Myanmar” and “Norwegian legislation does not come into consideration”—linked to the perceived risks facing about 700 local employees. Yet the peril of handing over such information often rivaled, or even exceeded, the risks of withholding it. For example, in June 2021, one analysis on a PDF member’s number concluded “the impact of sharing this information is extremely high,” and another, concerning a doctor close to Aung San Suu Kyi, said “it’s likely that this number will be used to support the military examinations of the criminal case against Aung San Suu Kyi.”

Telenor eventually sold its Myanmar operation to Lebanon’s M1 Group, which partnered with the local

conglomerate Shwe Byain Phyu. As they prepared the handover, executives told Nordahl they explored wiping or encrypting company data with international security firms but decided against it, concluding the junta would treat that as “a hostile action” that could put local staff at risk. The real-world consequence of continuing to provide data is captured in another case Nordahl describes: a well-known politician was arrested and later killed; eighteen days earlier Telenor had supplied his call logs after a junta request, and the junta’s own documents say they used such information to “map the networks of the opposition.”

In the course of his investigation, Nordahl spoke with former Telenor employees, local civil society representatives, and international experts. Their accounts revealed how painful the exit was for staff on the ground, many of whom felt abandoned. Some had worked proudly to expand access to communication, only to see their employer walk away under circumstances that left their customers more vulnerable than before. Nordahl describes the human toll of employees worried about their own safety,



customers fearful that their private data would be used against them, and activists furious at the betrayal of what had once been seen as a model corporate partner.

The scandal also reverberated in Norway, where Telenor has long been seen as an iconic national company and flagship of industry. Politicians questioned whether the government, as a major shareholder, had exercised sufficient oversight. It later emerged that Telenor held around 30 meetings with the Ministry of Trade and Commerce during the crisis. However, the content of those meetings has never been disclosed, leaving open the question of how much the government actually knew. Officials insisted it was company management's responsibility, while civil society groups demanded accountability and transparency. For Nordahl, the episode underscores a larger truth: globalization means that decisions made in corporate boardrooms in Oslo can have existential consequences for people thousands of miles away.

In addition, the controversy now carries potential political weight at home. Nordahl points out that the Labor Party was in power both when Telenor entered Myanmar in 2014 and when it exited in 2021. He notes that the Minister of Trade and Commerce at the time is now a senior Labor leader expected to eventually take over the party. With Norway's 2025 election approaching, he says the case could affect the campaign, and that "probably there will be people in the opposition who are very interested in this story." He also observes that "there is already among certain politicians and certain opposition groups in Norway [a claim] that the exit of Telenor from Myanmar should be scrutinized by an independent investigation." Nordahl adds, "I think this claim will be even stronger and probably reach another level after we have published this."

Nordahl reflects on the personal dimension of his work. As a journalist, he has spent years reporting on Myanmar, cultivating sources and listening to the stories of those caught between military repression and international neglect. The Telenor case, he admits, was emotionally draining. For him, the sale was not merely a corporate transaction but the end of an era in which there had been hope that foreign investment might contribute to Myanmar's democratic transition.

Looking at the bigger picture, Nordahl sees the Telenor case as emblematic of the limits of corporate social responsibility. No matter how many ethical codes or sustainability reports a multinational publishes, when confronted with raw authoritarian power, companies often retreat into pragmatism. He stresses that this is not

unique to Telenor; other firms in extractive industries, energy, and finance face similar dilemmas. What matters, he argues, is whether companies are honest about these trade-offs and whether governments hold them accountable for decisions that implicate human rights.

Nordahl also highlights the resilience of Myanmar's people through these ordeals. Despite the grave dangers they face, activists continue to document abuses, share information, and press the international community for solidarity. Many of them relied on Telenor's networks during the years of opening, and their sense of betrayal is profound. Yet they continue to fight, demonstrating what Nordahl sees as extraordinary courage. With this in mind, he believes that one day there will be accountability for the junta's crimes, and the record of how international companies responded will matter. His reporting, he hopes, will serve as part of that archive. He knows that some in Norway would prefer to forget the whole affair, but he insists that confronting uncomfortable truths is essential if similar mistakes are to be avoided in the future.

Asked what lessons he draws from the saga, Nordahl points to the need for greater clarity about the responsibilities of state-linked companies. Telenor is partly owned by the Norwegian government, which means that questions of accountability extend beyond the private sector. For him, the lack of decisive government intervention in the exit process reflects a deeper reluctance to grapple with the human rights implications of foreign investment. He adds that when the state is a shareholder, it also bears responsibility for the ethical consequences. As he puts it: "Why were the Norwegian government so involved when Telenor entered the country and not involved when they exited the country? I mean, it seems to be a contradiction in terms."

Today, Nordahl looks ahead with a mixture of hope and caution. He knows that Myanmar's struggle will be long, and that one day in the future, foreign companies may once again be tempted to prioritize markets over morals. Yet he believes the record of what happened with Telenor will stand as a warning, a case study in how even the best-intentioned corporations can falter when confronted with authoritarian demands.

LISTEN TO THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/8/21/episode-384-dark-signals>



Photo: AFP

COMPLAINT FILED IN NORWAY AGAINST TELENOR FOR MYANMAR SANCTIONS VIOLATIONS

Justice for Myanmar released a statement on 28 August announcing the joint filing with ICJ Norway of a complaint with Norwegian police against Telenor for alleged violation of sanctions on Myanmar.

and broadcast a radio interview about our complaint.

The complaint details that Telenor violated sanctions in the following manner:

The text of the statement is as follows.

Justice For Myanmar and ICJ Norway filed a complaint with the Norwegian police against Telenor and the management of its Myanmar operations for violating Norwegian sanctions from 2018 to 2022. The sanctions in question are the Myanmar Regulation ('Myanmarforskriften'). The complaint was filed on December 19, 2024.

The Norwegian broadcaster NRK has recently published extensively on the role of Telenor in Myanmar, including articles on nrk.no, Podcasts and on TV and radio, especially on the sharing of sensitive network traffic data with the junta after the coup attempt on 1 February 2021. Today NRK has also published an article

a. From 2018 to 2021, it installed, maintained, and contributed to the setup of sanctioned surveillance equipment connected to the Myanmar state surveillance centre, which came under military control on 1 February 2021.

b. Following the military's ongoing attempted coup from 1 February 2021, Telenor transferred the surveillance equipment to a subsidiary of M1 Group as part of Telenor's sale of its operations in Myanmar on 25 March 2022.

c. Telenor transferred sensitive customer data to the junta.

"In a time when Norway and other Western countries increasingly use targeted sanctions against individual officials ('Magnitsky sanctions') and sectoral sanctions to promote respect for international law (including human rights and humanitarian law) and fight impunity, the complaint has a keen public interest," said Terje Einarsen, Head of the Board of ICJ Norway. "The Police must establish whether the Telenor Group violated the Myanmar sanctions."

Substantial evidence, handed over to Norwegian police, backs the complaint. This includes documents from Telenor and correspondence with the Myanmar telecommunications regulator. The complaint provides a detailed timeline, including the November 2017 purchase of the 'Lawful Interception Gateway' ('LIG'), facilitated by Huawei, from the German company Utimaco GmbH. The equipment was delivered to Myanmar in February 2018, immediately following the Myanmar military's brutal "clearance operations" against the Rohingya.


"Telenor needs to be fully investigated both for sharing sensitive network traffic data with the junta and for transferring so-called lawful interception equipment to a Myanmar military-linked company, a potentially deadly weapon that enables real time surveillance," said Yadanar Maung, spokesperson of Justice For Myanmar. "The Myanmar Regulation aims to prevent Norwegian companies or citizens from in any way assisting the military's international law violations. Therefore, it may be a fundamental breach of the Regulation to make this equipment and customer data available to the junta, for which there must be accountability. Telenor must also be fully investigated as to whether it aided and abetted the commission of crimes against humanity, including through the company's role in the executions of Jimmy and Phyo Zeyar Thaw by knowingly providing their personal data to the junta."

Context of Telenor's Myanmar investment

Even before the military's coup attempt, when Telenor first entered Myanmar, it was common knowledge that the military had a long history of committing human rights violations, that the military and police were not under civilian control, and that laws and regulations were not in place to protect citizens from electronic surveillance. Concerns were raised with Telenor regarding lawful interception requirements before they even entered Myanmar. If Telenor had done sufficient due diligence from the outset, they would have been aware that there was not genuine civilian democratic control of the telecommunications regulator and that there would be a long-term risk that the military would stage a coup. The military was already before the coup attempt controlling much of the government and had also been perpetrating alleged crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar 2016-2017, as ongoing cases before the ICJ and the ICC have confirmed. Telenor should have known that any telecommunications equipment, activities, and customer data could be compromised by military intervention.

Having an exemption license would be a defence to a possible sanctions breach. Justice For Myanmar and ICJ Norway are unaware of any Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs license provided to the Telenor Group to be exempt from the Myanmar Regulation. ICJ Norway has specifically asked Telenor about this, but Telenor has not indicated that such a licence was given. ICJ Norway and Justice For Myanmar have now – in light of new information relating to our complaint – strong reason to believe that no licence or exemption had or have been granted by the Ministry.

If Telenor has violated Norway's sanctions, it must be held accountable in the courts.

A photograph showing a woman in a red headscarf and patterned clothing holding a young child. In the background, a man in a red shirt and black cap stands with his arms crossed near a white vehicle.

A displaced mother and child.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

EU, UN, AND USA HUMANITARIAN AID FOR BURMA FAILS TO REACH INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

A single truck arrives at an IDP camp, where homes are nothing more than bamboo frames covered with plastic tarps donated by private and religious organizations. One member of each family lines up to receive a small ration of rice, cooking oil, noodles, beans, and fish paste.

The people living in the camp have lost their homes, their farms, their livelihoods, and many have lost family members. Some have been wounded by government airstrikes and attacks. Like all other camps in Burma, the camp has no electricity, internet, or running water. Most camps have makeshift schools run by volunteer teachers, but very few have doctors or hospitals. At best, they have a small clinic. This is how at least 3.5 million internally displaced people are living in Burma.

International aid to Burma's internally displaced people from the UN, EU, US, and international aid organizations is complicated by several factors: the consistent underestimation of the scale of the crisis, funding cuts, and a failure to distinguish between internally displaced people and refugees, who absorb the bulk of available aid.

Added to this are the bylaws and policies of international organizations and governments that prohibit aid from being granted to the civilian administrations in resistance-controlled areas, instead forcing it to flow directly to the Myanmar junta. As a

result, very little aid reaches IDPs from governmental, international, or large nongovernmental organizations. Instead, the limited support comes through third parties, ethnic civil society organizations, and faith-based groups, all of which have very limited funds.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies speculates that the UN estimate of 3.5 million IDPs may undercount the displaced by as much as 50 percent. This discrepancy stems partly from the UN's inability to access resistance-controlled areas where many IDPs are located, and it is compounded by the UN's own definition of displacement.

According to international frameworks, displacement officially ends when IDPs achieve a "durable solution" through one of three paths: return to their home communities, integration in the communities where they sought refuge, or settlement in another part of the country. By that definition, many people still living in camps are no longer even counted as displaced. However, since the people in these camps remain under constant threat of airstrikes, it cannot be argued that they are safe, and they should continue to be considered internally displaced.

International aid flows readily to refugees, but many people fail to understand the crucial difference between them and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Refugees who cross international borders receive

substantial funding and legal protections under international law. By contrast, IDPs, forced from their homes but still within Burma's borders, have no such protections and receive virtually nothing. In practice, this means refugees are supported, while IDPs are largely abandoned.

The disparity is staggering. Across the region, about 1.1 million Burmese refugees outside the country benefit from international assistance. This includes more than one million Rohingya in Bangladesh, along with about 91,000 to 107,000 refugees in nine camps in Thailand.

In Bangladesh, the 2025 Joint Response Plan requested \$934.5 million for 1.5 million Rohingya refugees and host communities. The EU alone contributed €32.3 million (\$36 million) for Bangladesh refugees, part of nearly €1 billion (\$1.1 billion) provided by the EU and its member states since 2017. The United States provided over \$300 million, covering more than half of the total Rohingya humanitarian response in 2024. At the regional level, UNHCR budgeted \$383.1 million for Burmese refugees spread across Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, and Thailand, though only 30 percent of that was funded.

Inside Burma, the crisis is even greater. The conservative estimate of 3.5 million internally displaced persons makes it one of the world's

largest displacement crises and one of the greatest humanitarian emergencies. That is more than a three-to-one ratio of IDPs inside Burma to refugees outside, yet it is the refugees who receive nearly all the aid.

According to the United Nations, 21.9 million people, over one-third of the population, now require humanitarian assistance, compared with just one million before the military takeover in 2021. More than 6.3 million of them are children.

The UN's 2024 humanitarian appeal requested \$994 million to assist 5.3 million people but received only 36 percent of the target (\$389 million), making it the sixth lowest-funded humanitarian operation in the world. As a result, 1.4 million highly vulnerable people who were targeted for assistance went unreached. For 2025, the UN has requested \$1.1 billion to assist 5.5 million people inside the country.

US aid to Burma in 2024 totaled \$167 million, including \$121 million under the Burma Act.

Of this, \$75 million was allocated for cross-border programs through Thailand and India. In 2025, however, the Trump administration suspended \$39.5 million earmarked for human rights and democracy programs, along with \$22 million in humanitarian funding.

The EU allocated €46 million (\$54 million) in humanitarian aid for Burma in 2025, roughly \$15.30 per displaced person. Historically, the EU has provided €456



Humanitarian aid supplies being given out to IDPs.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

million (\$506 million) in humanitarian aid since 1994, alongside €318 million (\$353 million) in development funding for 2021–2027.

The disparity is glaring. Refugees outside Burma, numbering about 1.1 million, receive over \$1.3 billion annually, about \$1,200 per person per year. By contrast, the 3.5 million IDPs inside Burma receive less than \$400 million in aid, or just \$114 per person per year.

And while aid is already inadequate due to undercounting and underfunding, the deeper issue is that even UN, US, and EU assistance earmarked for inside Burma systematically fails to reach internally displaced persons (IDPs). This is the result of structural flaws in the international aid system.

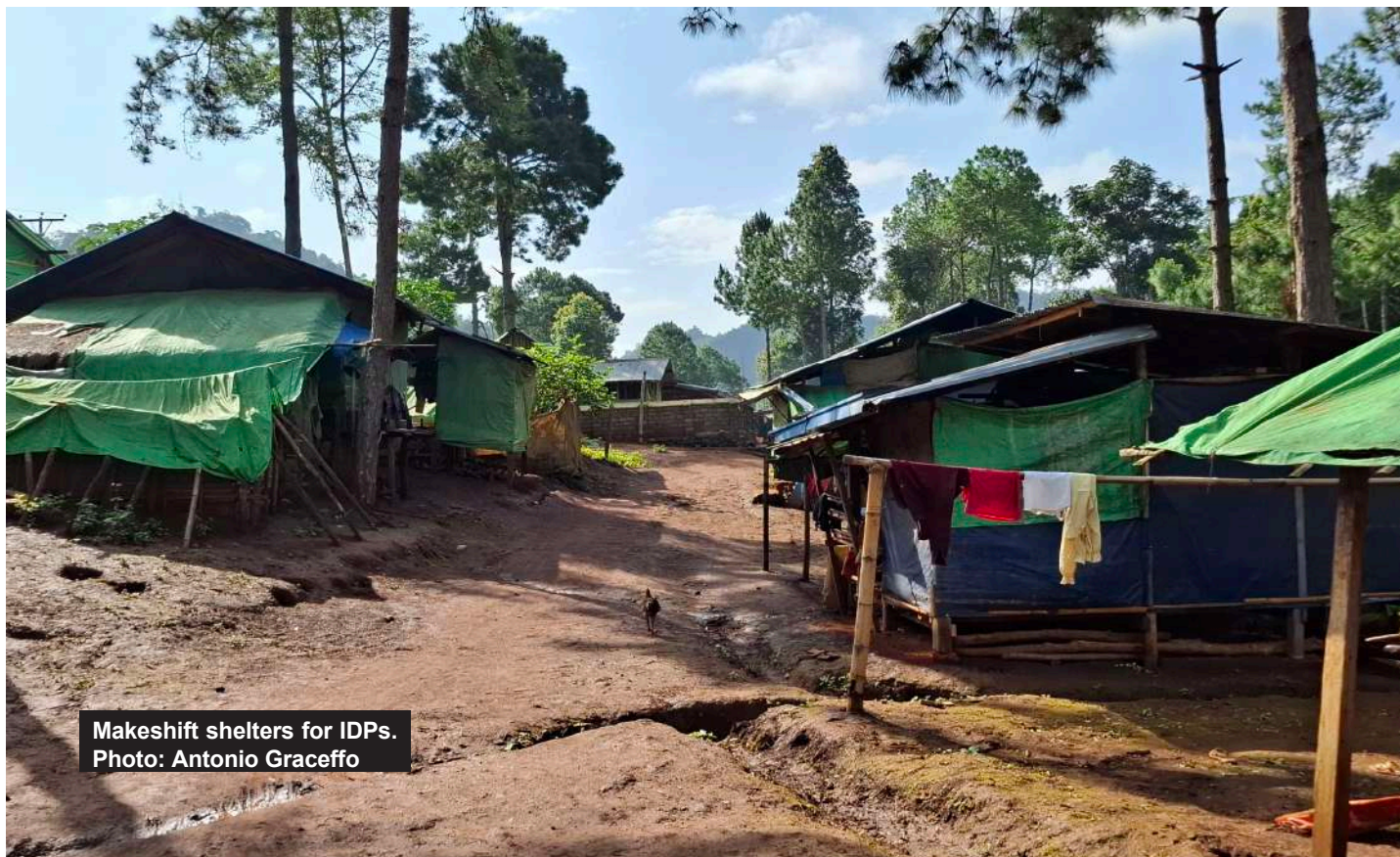
International and government-to-government legal frameworks require aid to flow through “recognized authorities,” which in practice means the junta, while prohibiting engagement with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that control most of the territory where IDPs actually live. As a result, massive resources go directly to the junta and to refugees outside Burma, while those displaced inside the country are left with nothing. Increasing aid budgets will not solve this problem. What must change are the frameworks themselves, allowing aid to be delivered directly to the people in need.

In about 70 to 80 percent of Burma’s territory,

ethnic armed organizations and their corresponding civilian administrations have become the de facto government, caring for IDPs and the civilian population. However, international organizations and government-to-government aid refuse to provide assistance to these groups on the grounds of “neutrality.” The United Nations’ humanitarian principle of neutrality states that providers of humanitarian assistance should “refrain from taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious, or ideological controversies.” Yet by providing aid directly to the Myanmar junta, the UN and similar organizations are in fact taking sides, supporting the very forces that are killing and displacing the civilian population.

Additionally, Western democratic countries and the UN have condemned the junta and refused to recognize it as the official, internationally recognized government of Burma. However, by channeling governmental aid directly to the junta, they have effectively granted it de facto recognition and legitimacy.

The United States, under the BURMA Act, is unique among major donors in explicitly providing non-lethal aid to ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). The law authorizes “technical support and non-lethal assistance to Burma’s ethnic armed organizations and People’s Defense Forces to strengthen communication, command and control, and coordination of international relief and other operations.”



Makeshift shelters for IDPs.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

Other major donors have taken far more cautious approaches. The European Union emphasizes that it “does not channel any humanitarian funding via the military authorities” and instead works through thoroughly vetted humanitarian organizations. While EU documents mention supporting peace negotiations with EAOs, this support is funneled through intermediary NGOs rather than given directly. The United Nations similarly avoids direct engagement, citing its humanitarian principle of neutrality, and provides aid in EAO-controlled areas only through partner organizations. Large international charities also maintain this cautious stance, often negotiating access through local guarantors or committees rather than engaging armed groups directly. In some cases, donors have even restricted aid where groups were designated as terrorists, as happened with U.S. assistance to Somalia.

Even if international actors wanted to provide aid to IDPs in resistance-controlled areas, one final barrier remains: cross-border restrictions imposed by neighboring countries. Along the Thai border, cross-border aid has long been tightly restricted, with Thai officials claiming they must balance economic and security interests while preserving relations with the junta. Decades-old networks along the Thai-Burma border could serve as vital lifelines for informal aid delivery, but they remain constrained by these official prohibitions.

Religious organizations represent another untapped channel but face their own restrictions. Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim clergy live among the people and are often the ones who best understand what aid is needed and who is most deserving of help. Aid that travels through religious networks, whether Buddhist temples, churches, or mosques, is usually transported and distributed by volunteers who draw no salaries, keeping overheads extremely low. The existing structures of parishes, monasteries, and mosques form natural networks for identifying those in need and serving as distribution points.

In Burma, Buddhist monasteries often serve as community centers, while Christian ethnic organizations maintain deep networks in resistance areas. Yet U.S. rules require faith-based groups to separate religious activities from USAID-funded programs, creating artificial barriers. The EU’s secular framework, influenced in part by France’s 1905 law prohibiting state recognition or funding of religion, imposes similar limits on using religious networks for aid delivery. These policies prevent some of the most

effective local networks from being fully utilized.

Meanwhile, major international aid organizations remain tied to the junta’s permission system. The World Food Programme implements the Myanmar Community Support Project largely in junta-controlled areas. UNICEF appealed for \$208.3 million in 2024 but secured only 12 percent of that amount, much of it funneled through junta channels. UNHCR managed to deliver relief to 53,000 people in Karenni State, but only after obtaining junta approval. For the EU, all humanitarian funding flows through partner organizations, typically UN agencies or international NGOs. These groups work with more than 100 local civil society organizations, but all must still operate under junta restrictions, despite the EU’s official policy of non-recognition.

A CSIS report states that the United Nations and international community must change how they deliver humanitarian assistance to Burma. Too much aid is siphoned off by the military junta and its affiliates, while far too little reaches the millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The report calls for halting cooperation with the junta and shifting to cross-border delivery of aid through local ethnic networks that already have access to displaced populations and ties with resistance forces. It notes that this model has precedent in The Border Consortium, which for decades coordinated aid from Thailand to refugees and IDPs.

If the world truly wants to get aid to Burma’s internally displaced people, it should coordinate through local ethnic, religious, and civil society organizations, including the EAOs that govern the areas where the displaced live. Aid given to refugees is separate and does nothing for the IDPs, and aid given to the junta will never reach the people in resistance-controlled areas who need it most.

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

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



Thai military security at a refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border.
Photo: AFP

THAILAND GRANTS REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR THE RIGHT TO WORK, EARNING PRAISE FROM UNHCR

Thailand has approved new measures allowing refugees from Myanmar who have been living in temporary shelters along the border for decades to work legally in the country, a policy shift welcomed by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as a “turning point” in refugee protection and self-reliance.

The Thai Cabinet on Tuesday endorsed two draft announcements: one from the Ministry of Interior granting permission for refugees to live outside designated controlled areas, and another from the Ministry of Labour authorizing them to take up employment under special arrangements. The government estimates that about 42,000 work permits could be made available under the scheme.

According to the Ministry of Labour, Thailand currently hosts 77,718 displaced persons from Myanmar in nine temporary shelters (as of 15 August 2025). Many have lived there for decades, with around 47 percent of the population born inside the camps. Until now, they have been almost entirely dependent on humanitarian aid, which has dwindled in recent years due to global funding cuts.

“This resolution will enable refugees to work legally in the country and contribute meaningfully to the Thai economy,” UNHCR said in a statement. “Recognizing the protracted situation of some 81,000 forcibly displaced people hosted in temporary shelters along the Thai-Myanmar border, this policy shift marks a major step forward.”

Tammi Sharpe, UNHCR’s Representative in Thailand, described the move as transformative: “For too long, protracted exile felt like an unending wait. Today marks a turning point. With this policy shift,

Thailand transforms hosting refugees into an engine of growth – for refugees, for host communities and for the nation as a whole.”

She added that by unlocking the potential of long-staying refugees, Thailand was not only upholding humanitarian principles but also making a strategic investment in its own future. “Refugees will now be able to support themselves and their families, stimulate local economies through increased consumption, and promote job creation, contributing to national GDP growth and economic resilience.”

The new framework requires refugees to apply for permission to leave their camps, undergo health checks, and register for either social security or health insurance. Work permits will be valid for one year, with the first permit exempt from fees. Employment is open in all sectors except those legally restricted to foreigners.

Adisorn Kirdmongkol, coordinator of the Migrant Working Group (MWG), welcomed the Cabinet decision but cautioned that the system must remain flexible. He argued that refugees who already have employers should be allowed to register directly, rather than being rematched through government channels, which could add costs and delays.

UNHCR said the resolution comes at a critical moment, as millions of displaced people worldwide risk losing life-saving assistance due to funding shortfalls.

“If fully implemented, Thailand’s policy will set a new regional benchmark for a sustainable, rights-based refugee solution,” the agency stated, adding that it stands ready to support the government in rolling out the programme alongside other partners.

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Muhammad Yunus, right, with the UN Secretary General on an earlier visit to Bangladesh. Photo: AFP

YUNUS TOUTS SEVEN-POINT ROHINGYA RETURN PLAN

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has put forward a seven-point proposal to address the Rohingya crisis, calling for international support to ensure the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of refugees to Myanmar.

Speaking at the Stakeholders' Dialogue held in Cox's Bazar from August 24–26, where the world's largest refugee camp is located, Yunus emphasized that Bangladesh cannot shoulder the burden alone. His proposal highlighted the "Right to Return, Sustained Aid, Ending Violence, Dialogue, Global and Regional Role, Opposition to Ethnic Cleansing, and Accountability".

"Let's do it together," Yunus told Mizzima at the event, sending a direct message to the Myanmar community.

The conference began with presentations by Rohingya youth, who voiced their desire to return to Myanmar with dignity. The second day focused on humanitarian aid amid shrinking donor funds, and on rebuilding confidence between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities.

International experts urged China to play a more active role, citing its influence over both Myanmar's military junta and the Arakan Army (AA). China's ambassador to Bangladesh referred to the Kunming Consensus of 2023, under which Bangladesh and Myanmar had agreed on a pilot repatriation of 5,000–6,000 Rohingya. He said the initiative failed due to "anonymous actors" and Cyclone Yagi, while also noting the AA's growing influence in Rakhine State.

Concerns over the AA were strongly expressed during the dialogue. Many Rohingya refugees said they feared the group's stance toward them, with some activists accusing the AA of being "worse than the junta." Meanwhile, both Rohingya and Bangladeshi participants remained largely silent about the Rohingya armed groups believed to be aligned with the junta. The fact that some Rohingya are fighting alongside Myanmar soldiers has raised eyebrows, given the Myanmar military drove many of the Rohingya out of Rakhine in 2017.

Arakan Army steps up moves in Rakhine

The Arakan Army (AA) has stepped up its operations in Rakhine State, targeting junta naval vessels and



A burnt down house in Rakhine.
Photo: AFP

arresting foreign fishermen accused of crossing into Myanmar's waters.

On August 26, AA's coast guard forces seized five Bangladeshi fishing boats near villages in Maungdaw Township after they entered Myanmar's maritime territory, according to local sources. While the AA had earlier warned it would detain anyone intruding into Rakhine waters, the group released the fishermen in what it described as a gesture to maintain good relations with Bangladesh.

The incident followed Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) reports that 122 Bangladeshi fishermen had been arrested for illegally crossing into areas controlled

by the AA. Local Rakhine fishermen said frequent intrusions by Bangladeshi boats were depleting resources vital to their livelihoods.

Meanwhile, on August 29, the AA claimed it successfully struck a junta naval vessel with a howitzer in Kyaukphyu Township. The ship, which was patrolling about 10 kilometers from the coast between Zinchaung and Laikhkamaw villages, caught fire after being hit, AA spokesperson Khine Thukha told the Rakhine-based media outlet DMG.

"There were four junta navy ships firing randomly at civilian areas. Our coast guard forces managed to fire and hit one ship, which is now burning," Khine



Thukha said. The type of vessel damaged has not yet been identified. A similar attack on a junta naval ship occurred near the Rakhine–Ayeyarwady border on August 10.

Military analyst and defected officer Captain Zin Yaw told DMG that the junta is deploying naval reinforcements in preparation for future offensives ahead of its planned election. “The regime will maneuver along the shore and Ramree Island is likely to become a major battlefield. The junta might choose Paletwa as its entry point into Rakhine State,” he said.

Separately, the AA released prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians it had detained during fighting. On August 25, the group freed a number of women and children captured in clashes in Paletwa, Chin State. Earlier, the AA had also released 144 POWs and family members taken during battles in Taunggyi.

ARSA and Rohingya militant action in Rakhine

The Arakan Army (AA) has reported fresh clashes and growing tensions with Rohingya armed groups that it accuses of working alongside Myanmar’s junta in northern Rakhine State.

On June 2, AA forces engaged in heavy fighting with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) near Leikya village in Maungdaw Township, seizing an ARSA camp along with weapons and military equipment. Leikya, described by locals as an ARSA stronghold, has been a base for attacks on Rakhine traders. AA fighters say they remain on high alert in the area due to repeated ambushes.

In late March, two AA members were killed in an ARSA ambush along the Taungpyi–Kyeinchaung road. The attack prompted the AA to impose a curfew

across northern Rakhine State.

On October 22, 2024, the AA publicly stated that its forces were confronting not only the junta but also three Rohingya armed groups - ARSA, the Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA), and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO). More recently, AA troops captured weapons and two bases belonging to a new Rohingya group identified as the Rohingya Islamic Mahaaz (RIM).

Adding weight to the allegations, Colonel Kaung Myat, deputy commander of the junta’s No. 15 Military Operations Command and currently held as a prisoner of war by the AA, admitted that the regime had enlisted more than 200 Rohingya militias to guard its administration in Buthidaung. “Your villages and race are in this area. Therefore, you are responsible for serving the military with us. We will provide military training and recognition to you,” the captured commander was quoted as saying.

The AA’s claims highlight a complex and volatile conflict landscape in Rakhine, where ethnic, political, and communal divisions continue to deepen as the junta relies on the Rohingya militias to maintain its control.

MYANMAR CONFLICT CONTINUES TO HAVE REGIONAL RAMIFICATIONS

JOSEPH BALL, MIZZIMA

Photo: AFP



Well into its fifth year, Myanmar's civil war shows little sign of abating. Rather, events in Myanmar may point to an increase in the intensity of conflict and a further deterioration in regional security. This includes India, where, for example, the once relatively stable northeastern border region has become a haven for refugees, humanitarian needs, and an illicit economy.

Myanmar's military rulers have long sought an exit plan from their much-maligned February 2021 coup. Though a deteriorating domestic security environment has consistently thwarted such attempts, with commonly cited statistics claiming the central government controls only 21% of Myanmar's territory, while opposition groups command twice as much ground. Yet, events may now be subtly shifting, pointing to a change in the dynamics of conflict in Myanmar, without necessarily pointing to any resolution to the conflict.

For starters, the Myanmar military recently rechristened their ruling clique – the State

Administration Council (SAC) – the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). This comes along with the repealing of the State of Emergency throughout the country. Both moves, while themselves procedural in nature, were made with an eye to the convening of general elections at the of this year. Elections themselves that are helped to be made possible by the changing regional landscape.

The most significant regional development began roughly a year previously, when China determined to take a distinctly pro-junta position regarding the Myanmar conflict. This change in approach has seen increased government-to-government ties, pressure on ethnic groups to cease their fighting against the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military), and increased weapons flows to the Myanmar military. The latter has contributed toward modest battlefield gains in recent months by the Tatmadaw, though the government and its armed forces remain severely stretched and tested.

Nowhere is this more evidenced than in Myanmar's Rakhine State, bordering Bangladesh, where reports

say the Arakan Army controls 14 of the 17 townships. This is a region of Myanmar of crucial significance for China, as well as India. For China, the port of Kyaukphyu serves as an important node in the country's Belt and Road initiative. For the time being, Kyaukphyu remains in control of the central government, but that could change in the coming months. As for India, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which runs through portions of both government and rebel-held Rakhine State, seeks to connect northeast India with the Bay of Bengal.

But not only does the uncertain future of Rakhine State point to potential complications in New Delhi-Naypyidaw relations, as New Delhi may be forced to deal with the Arakan Army in their economic designs for the region, but India's broader Look East Policy is also jeopardized by the continued instability in Myanmar. Myanmar forms the critical link between India and the markets of ASEAN, yet the civil war in Myanmar threatens not only the Kaladan project but other envisaged projects to bolster regional connectivity and provide direct access to Southeast Asia.

China is arguably also the biggest supporter of the proposed end-of-year elections in Myanmar, at the same time that the United States has lessened its regional footprint in support of democracy and human rights. The elections themselves, scheduled to commence on 28 December, will garner little interest from most Burmese, while opposition groups have already declared them to be a total sham. But that is beside the point. Myanmar's generals, and Chinese leaders as well, are looking to the election to bolster the legitimacy of the Naypyidaw government. And in a game of realpolitik, Myanmar's other neighbors may feel their hands forced – perceiving acceptance of continued military rule in Myanmar as the price to pay to remain engaged in a strategically important theatre.

Myanmar's generals have no desire to return to the democratic experiment of 2011-2021. The rapidity of change jeopardized too many perceived interests of the Tatmadaw, both political and economic, while fomenting further general opposition to the military's

entrenched position in Myanmar society. Recent cosmetic changes to the regime, including its name change, are all part of a broader program to reap some semblance of legitimacy through the planned end-of-year elections.

Meanwhile, reports speak to a growing humanitarian emergency in much of Myanmar, a fact that has only been compounded in the wake of the devastating 28 March earthquake with its epicenter in central Myanmar. According to the United Nations, nearly 22 million people in Myanmar, out of a total population of 57 million, are in need of humanitarian assistance. While more than 3.5 million have been displaced by the conflict.

And this humanitarian emergency is but a symptom of broader state failure, with ramifications for the region as a whole. This includes, in addition to border instability and criminal activity, the potential spread of diseases along with burgeoning refugee and migrant populations.

The proposed election in Myanmar will not address these crises. The presumed victorious military-backed party will continue to be a divisive entity, while various Myanmar opposition groups will continue in their quest to overthrow the military-backed regime. This will in turn lead to potentially even greater local and regional humanitarian needs – at the same time providing little in the way of the stability which all regional stakeholders crave. Within this context, governments will need to choose whether to use their limited political capital to back a grossly unpopular government in Naypyidaw or to instead throw their weight behind efforts to support – should such an opportunity be identified – some kind of negotiated settlement aimed at genuine national reconciliation.



Civilians flee the fighting.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

THEY FLED PEKON - IDPS FLOWING INTO KARENNI STATE AS FIGHTING IN SOUTHERN SHAN STATE INTENSIFIES

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

During the first week of August, 42 IDPs arrived at the Catholic church in Mese, fleeing the fighting in Pekon in Karenni State. They told the priest, Father Alfonso, that at least 500–700 more were on their way, with priests escorting the elderly, the wounded, and those unable to walk on their own.

The group was composed mostly of women, men in their fifties, and small children. Some wore traditional dress, but all looked hungry and exhausted after their harrowing ordeal.

"We left because of the military," said a woman named Antonia, her children clinging to her legs while she cradled a baby in a sling across her chest. A man named Paulu added, "We couldn't stay anymore. We're very likely to be tortured or killed if we get caught by the junta. And the young men will be conscripted." He explained that the group had already been on the road for a long time. Apart from their children, the only things they were able to bring were the clothes on their backs and a small cloth bag.

Part of their journey had to be made by boat, and the driver extorted them. "We had to pay 3,000 baht (\$92 USD) per person!" Paulu said, describing the tremendous sum for rural people, particularly in the context of a war where most have little or no cash income. "Even babies had to pay 3,000!" he added bitterly.

Paulu went on to say, "We had to pay for ourselves and our families, but most of us had to go into debt... to save their lives." He explained that some sold their possessions, others borrowed from friends and relatives, and still others couldn't come up with the 3,000 baht at all, leaving them facing a long walk instead.

Antonia provided exact details on why they had to flee. "Our village is near to Pekon." When they saw the troops coming, the villagers hid. Afterwards, when they returned to the village, they discovered that "The junta came in and took everything including the doors. So, when we came back and saw that we decided to not go back." The first part of the journey was on foot. "We

walked for 2 days." Next, they had to pay 100,000 kyats (about \$50 USD) for the boat and a car. "It took almost 2 weeks in the jungle." During the journey, they received some food from People's Defence Force (PDF) soldiers and the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF).

She said the group chose Mese because it was safer for IDPs. For the most part, in Mese they only have to worry about airstrikes, as there is not much shelling or direct attacks. The Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) provided a temporary shelter for the IDPs, but not all families were complete. Antonia was alone with her children because her husband had been arrested by the junta shortly after the coup.

Another woman said her brother remained in the village and was captured by the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO), an ethnic armed organization which supports the junta. Paulu's son had been injured in the war, but he continues to serve in the PDF despite his father's urging. "He's so passionate he doesn't want to stop. We tried to call him back but he said he won't retire until the war is entirely finished," said Paulu, with a mix of pride and worry.

He went on to say, "I don't feel anything about politics. Personally, I feel proud and sorry for him. But this whole thing is happening to the entire country, so I don't have any different feelings for us in politics. We are all losing our possessions and loved ones."

About the loss of all his earthly goods and his livelihood, Paulu said, "For me, it doesn't matter. If I don't have shoes, I can still walk. But some people don't even have legs."

On a more hopeful note, he added, "I never doubt God. I say prayers and do rosary every night, even during fleeing. I have hope from the Holy Spirit. And even if I have to die, I will accept that's God's will." About the junta he said, "They are very evil and unjust. We fight against them. Even if we cannot fight, we will refuse to be under their rule."

He believed the junta did bad things out of greed. "It's just greed. Greed leads them to crave power and positions in their army. They don't care about the people." In the future, "we hope one day the revolution will prevail. And no matter how difficult the situation is, we won't give up."

At the temporary shelter, Paulu said there was enough room for all the families and their children; however, water was a problem. "When it rains too much it turns brown." But the security situation was much better than in his village. "We feel peaceful here."

They made fires to cook but faced a shortage of cooking utensils. "We don't have enough pots. We have to cook multiple times with a lot of wood." Cooking pots were among the first things Father Alfonso found for the IDPs. Unfortunately, they also needed plastic tarps, which are in short supply, and new donors will have to be found.

When the rest of the group arrives, they will build a new village, with the help and permission of the IEC, in the forest near Mese. "We will talk with the authorities," Father said. "Maybe outside of the town or maybe in a remote area somewhere." He was concerned about having too many people clustered in one location in town for fear of airstrikes. "But there is a safer place there. Better to take refuge in a remote area."

Currently, Father oversees 245 volunteer teachers working in the existing IDP camps. He said he will find more teachers and open new schools for this new group of IDPs. Father calls his organization Servant of Servants, and they are currently educating and feeding the IDPs around Mese through the support of Father John, an American priest with the Maryknoll Missionaries.

Father Alfonso said, "I tell them for the time being, do not worry for the food. For the time being, maybe during these two, three months. But maybe later on

we have to try for them to find a permanent solution.” He gave the IDPs some rice, and the following day organized a more substantial food delivery for them.

Afterwards, he prepared his regular food distribution for the existing IDP camps. On the drive over, he explained that he was encouraging the IDPs to raise pigs and chickens, which is exactly what Khun Bedu, vice-chairperson of the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC), wants. Chickens are relatively easy to raise and feed. Pigs need more food than chickens, but they provide a greater deal of meat. Khun Bedu wants not only the IDPs but also the permanent residents of Mese to concentrate on raising animals and returning to farming, in the hopes of creating better food security in the region. Across Burma, and in Karenni State in particular, agricultural production is down significantly as farmers have been forced to flee their land.

Getting land for agriculture is not a problem, but the two economic needs are animal feed and fertilizer for the crops. Father said, “But in our farm, we don’t use. I do not allow the workers to use chemicals like fertilizer.

Just only natural.” As for the animal feed, “Here, we just give only rice for the chicken. And for the pigs, we mix with the leaves.” Father was convinced that pigs raised on a diet of rice and natural leaves tasted better.

Karenni State is majority Christian, with Catholicism the largest denomination. Servant of Servants, along with the Catholic Church more broadly, provides education and aid to all IDPs regardless of religion. In one of the larger IDP camps, there were three chapels and one priest. “He came with the IDPs because the chapel house at their place was burned when the village was destroyed.” Father explained.

The village headman invited us in for tea while church staff oversaw the distribution of noodles, beans, and fish paste, carefully marking lists to ensure every family received the same amount of food. The headman explained that he was from Demoso, one of the largest cities in Karenni State, and had come here after his area was overrun by the junta. In addition to his home being burned, one of his sons had been killed.



IDPs waiting for aid. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

According to the headman, survival had become increasingly difficult because aid was drying up. Most government-to-government aid went directly to the junta, as did most assistance from large international aid organizations. This meant it never reached IDPs in resistance-held areas. For a time, some USAID funding filtered into the camps through third parties, but that has now stopped. Another source of support came from internal donations within Burma, but after four and a half years of war, donors are suffering from aid fatigue. Even people living in Yangon and other relatively stable parts of the country are worse off financially than they were immediately after the coup and are less able to contribute.

These combined losses have left the camps dependent on what they can produce themselves and on the assistance they receive through Servant of Servants, which operates on a very small budget. Father is only able to distribute oil and fish paste in two camps per month, meaning each camp receives supplemental aid only once every three months. And that was before the new arrivals from Pekon. Now, the meager budget will be stretched even further.

A man named Pedro, collecting the distribution for his family, told me how the junta had killed one of his sons. "They caught him and his friend, two young boys, when the revolution began. They were caught by the military." The soldiers cut off the boys' hands and cut out the eyes of one of them. His son died, and the family's house was burned.

Father said, "All these people still have a village with land but no houses to return to. The houses were burned by the military."

Watching the distribution, Father said with concern, "The children need nutrition. They're not getting enough nutrition."

While the distribution continued, I went over to the school where I met Agnes, a civil administrator who had been part of the civil disobedience movement (CDM) and was now the head schoolteacher in the camp. She explained that in the cluster of camps they had a primary school, a middle school, and a high school, although the high school was a bit of a walk away.

Agnes's son David was only three years and seven months old, but he was already able to communicate with me in English. "Your son is so intelligent," I told her. Agnes beamed, then confided in me, "I am not a teacher. I am an administrator. Teaching is just a hobby." We both laughed, but I could see in her eyes the genuine affection she had for the children. I said, "Yes, but now you are helping the children, and I think you look happy." Agnes smiled and confirmed that teaching children under these present circumstances has brought more meaning to her life than remaining in a government office as an administrator.

Amid the overarching story of loss, shortages, hunger, displacement, and anguish, there are still moments of hope, faith, love, and service to others. Sadly, the situation is expected to worsen as the military junta intensifies its attacks in an effort to reclaim as much territory as possible ahead of the upcoming elections, whose outcome international observers have already dismissed as predetermined, the junta's attempt at legitimacy. Meanwhile, the people continue to live under plastic tarps and survive on aid distributions that are becoming increasingly scarce.

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



A meeting of Thai soldiers and UWSA soldiers on the Thai-Myanmar border. Photo: Supplied

THAILAND, MYANMAR AND THE POLLUTION OF THAI WATERWAYS

DON PATHAN

A ranking member of the Thai Senate, Ms. Angkhana Neelaphaijit, has called for United Nations intervention regarding the pollution of the Kok and Sai rivers, contaminated by Chinese gold and rare earth extraction operations in territories controlled by the Wa militia, located mere kilometers from Thailand's border with Myanmar.

Angkhana referenced the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to justify such intervention.

The 2019 Ramon Magsaysay Award winner, who joined the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances in 2022, argued that China bears moral and legal responsibility to address this issue. She suggested Thailand should petition the UN to raise concerns with China, given Myanmar's inability to control the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a 30,000-member ethnic armed group maintaining a ceasefire agreement with Myanmar's government since 1989.

According to the Shan Human Rights Foundation, while recent media coverage has concentrated on gold extraction along the Kok and Sai rivers near UWSA territory approximately 25 kilometers from Thailand's border, satellite imagery reveals rare earth mining operations at two sites in Mong Yawn, southern Mong

Hsat, roughly 25 kilometers from northern Thailand's border, facing Mae Ai district in Chiang Mai province.

Recent months have witnessed a series of public protests in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces, demanding government action to address the issue with both Myanmar and the UWSA. In early 2025, Thai conservative media sources even advocated military intervention against the Wa, claiming three UWSA outposts had violated Thai territory by 200 meters.

The powerful UWSA controls an autonomous territory along the China-Myanmar frontier. During the late 1990s, the UWSA expanded southward toward the Thai border after collaborating with Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, to eliminate their longtime adversary, Shan opium warlord Khun Sa and his Mong Tai Army (MTA).

Access to UWSA territories remains strictly controlled. Myanmar military personnel and government representatives must surrender weapons and accept escort.

Responding to mounting public pressure regarding river contamination, Thailand and Myanmar took a modest bilateral initiative last week, agreeing during Naypyidaw discussions to establish a joint committee

addressing Kok and Sai river pollution.

Both nations committed to enhancing river water quality, sharing water management information, and creating a joint technical working group for concrete cooperation on contamination solutions. However, the agreement made no reference to the UWSA or China.

A senior Thai military official from Third Army Area command said there have been internal discussions about approaching China directly, since negotiations with the UWSA and seeking Myanmar government assistance have proven ineffective.

Thailand's communications with the UWSA have consistently involved the group's southern command, which invariably defers major decisions to Panghsang, their organization's headquarters on the Sino-Myanmar border. This includes Thailand's request for UWSA to move back from at least nine outposts that situated right on the Thai border; three of these outposts are allegedly positioned 200 meters inside Thai territory. Wa forces maintain that orders must originate from Panghsang and suggest Thailand address border demarcation issues with Myanmar's government, as they concern state sovereignty.

Other ethnic armed organizations said the UWSA will take no action without receiving concessions from Thailand. Like similar groups, legitimacy and recognition are something that are often desired. However, Thailand refuses to offer concessions to the UWSA, particularly given its drug trafficking history.

Several UWSA leaders face US Federal Court indictments for heroin trafficking and related crime, while their southern commander, Wei Hsueh-kang, carries a US\$2 million bounty from American authorities from his conviction as far back as 1993.

Wei and his brothers, originally from Yunnan, arrived in the Burmese Golden Triangle during the 1970s, initially as a Kuomintang operative before entering the profitable heroin trade. When the UWSA formed in 1989 following the Communist Party of Burma's dissolution, Wei provided financial backing, transforming the organization into Myanmar's most formidable ethnic armed group. The UWSA granted him access to opium supplies needed for producing premium grade 4 heroin, known as "China White."

The Tatmadaw quickly established a ceasefire arrangement with the UWSA, and within a decade, the Wa had effectively moved southward, displacing longtime rival Khun Sa's now-defunct Mong Tai Army (MTA) and occupying territories along the Thailand-Myanmar frontier. Currently, UWSA installations, camps, and strongholds populate newly constructed settlements along Myanmar's border adjacent to Thailand's Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, and portions of Mae Hong Son provinces.

Thailand's requests for Tatmadaw mediation with the UWSA are not unprecedented. In 2014, the Thai Army discussed UWSA border positions with Myanmar leader Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing during his Thailand visit. As today, the Tatmadaw possessed limited influence over the UWSA.

But the same cannot be said about China. Last week, the UWSA declared it would terminate all assistance to allied groups battling Myanmar's military, citing a request from China.

"Beginning immediately, Wa State will not provide weapons, military transit, or economic assistance to other organizations under any circumstances, at any time or location," announced Zhao Guoan, Wa Vice Chairman and Foreign Relations Minister, informing representatives from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) during an August 20, 2025 high-level meeting in Panghsang.

The Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) reported that Zhao attributed this reluctant decision to intense Beijing pressure. Chinese authorities had frozen billions in Wa State institutional, corporate, and individual assets, implemented comprehensive border restrictions, and threatened severer measures unless the Wa ceased supporting armed groups in active conflict, according to SHAN, citing Wa News Land, the UWSA's media outlet, as saying.

Since the Brotherhood Alliance's late 2023 offensive began, China has served as a peace broker between Myanmar and ethnic armed organizations. Beijing position gradually shifted toward supporting the Burmese junta, demanding that certain groups, particularly the TNLA and MNDAA, return territories

captured from Myanmar's military. Analysts believe China views Myanmar's military government as the sole entity capable of maintaining national unity, with current support aimed at ensuring the upcoming December 2025 and January 2026 General Elections proceed smoothly enough to legitimize the new administration. Ultimately, this concerns risk mitigation for Chinese investments, trade routes, and strategic interests rather than power-sharing arrangements between Myanmar military government and the ethnic armed organizations.

UWSA: An Uncomfortable Neighbor

Surprisingly, there were periods when Thai soldiers and United Wa State Army (UWSA) troops engaged in friendly volleyball matches along the northern border.

These games represented friendly overtures from new neighbors whose presence deeply concerned the Thai Army for multiple reasons. The UWSA's notorious drug trafficking reputation and their regional commander, Wei Hsueh-kang, certainly didn't help matters.

Furthermore, Thailand and the UWSA never developed the necessary comfort level for peaceful coexistence. Typically, ethnic armed organizations maintaining ceasefires with the Tatmadaw are perceived as threats to Thailand, while those fighting Myanmar for self-governance or independence are considered allies and sometimes serve as buffers or proxies for Thai military forces.

After securing their southern command along the Thai border, the UWSA forcibly relocated over 100,000 Wa villagers from their China-Myanmar border stronghold to the southern command area.

However, the UWSA failed to convince Thai military leadership they posed no national threat. The massive population movement from the north, Wa drug operations and illicit regional investments, and the general perception that ceasefire-holding ethnic armed organizations threaten Thailand's security—all contributed to maintaining this suspicious outlook.

Undoubtedly, historical distrust between Thailand and Burma shaped this threat perception, which

traditionally views Myanmar's friends and allies as dangers to Thailand.

Nevertheless, Thailand-Myanmar bilateral relations have not always been straightforward. Despite mistrust, various Thai governments since decolonization have served as Myanmar's bridge to the international community seeking to isolate the regime for severe human rights abuses. Thailand was the first to enter Burma following the 1988 bloody crackdown against pro-democracy uprising; Thaksin Shinawatra, shortly after assuming power in 2001, made extraordinary efforts to strengthen bilateral economic relations with the country. His assistance to Myanmar included whitewashing the UWSA through the Yongka Project development initiative, which never materialized due to lack of international funding.

Over time, Wa-Thai military clashes gradually ceased, but tensions persisted. Thai security officials report the UWSA has not forgotten the "Surisri 143" incident—allegedly a Thai Army training exercise in May 2002 that saw Thai forces cross the border in tracked vehicles, supported by mortars and artillery, conducting a 24-hour operation eliminating several Wa positions. Some outposts were jointly occupied by the Tatmadaw. Thaksin later claimed the Army had "overreacted."

While the UWSA sought to avoid war with Thailand and desired peace, they were unlikely to easily forget the May 2002 violence. Although both sides no longer engage in border gunfights, that two-decade-old hostility continues influencing Wa attitudes toward Thailand.

Unlike the early 2000s when Wa troops regularly exchanged gunfire with Thai soldiers, UWSA leaders would grant interviews and permit foreign media access to their China-Burma border territory. Today, statements are released through media platforms. Most posts showcase military strength through parades, troop movements, and daily training activities.

Don Pathan is a Thailand-based security analyst.



NUG URGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S FRAUDULENT ELECTION

On 24 August, Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement rejecting the military junta's planned election as a "sham" designed to entrench its power and shield perpetrators of war crimes.

The statement is as follows.

On 1 February 2021, the military unlawfully detained President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and other elected leaders, staging a coup d'état. Having been declared the Enemy of the State on 5 September 2024, the terrorist military has neither the authority nor the legitimacy to organize elections.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) abolished the 2008 Constitution on 30 March 2021. Therefore, all acts carried out by the terrorist military under that charter are unlawful.

The results of the 2020 general election remain valid. The sham election being forced by the junta seeks only to prolong its grip on power and grant impunity for war crimes, thereby violating democratic principles and unlawfully seizing the people's sovereign authority.

Only a genuine, inclusive, and democratic process—driven by the will of the people—can decide Myanmar's future. The NUG, in partnership with ethnic allies and revolutionary forces, remains committed to the Federal Democracy Charter, which mandates the drafting and adoption of a Federal Democratic Constitution through a nationwide referendum, followed by free and fair elections.

The NUG's Counter-Terrorism Central Committee

has already designated the junta and its so-called Union Election Commission as terrorist organizations. Any attempt to coerce citizens into participating in the sham election within NUG-administered areas will face lawful and decisive enforcement action.

For generations, the terrorist military has subjected the ethnic peoples and the citizens of Myanmar to various forms of oppression, persecution, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes. They are perpetrators of crimes against humanity, wanted by the international prosecutors. Since February 2021, the terrorist military has committed grave crimes against humanity, including mass killings, aerial bombardments, artillery attacks, and ethnic persecution. Beginning in August 2025, it has escalated violence to force through its fraudulent election under a new name and structure.

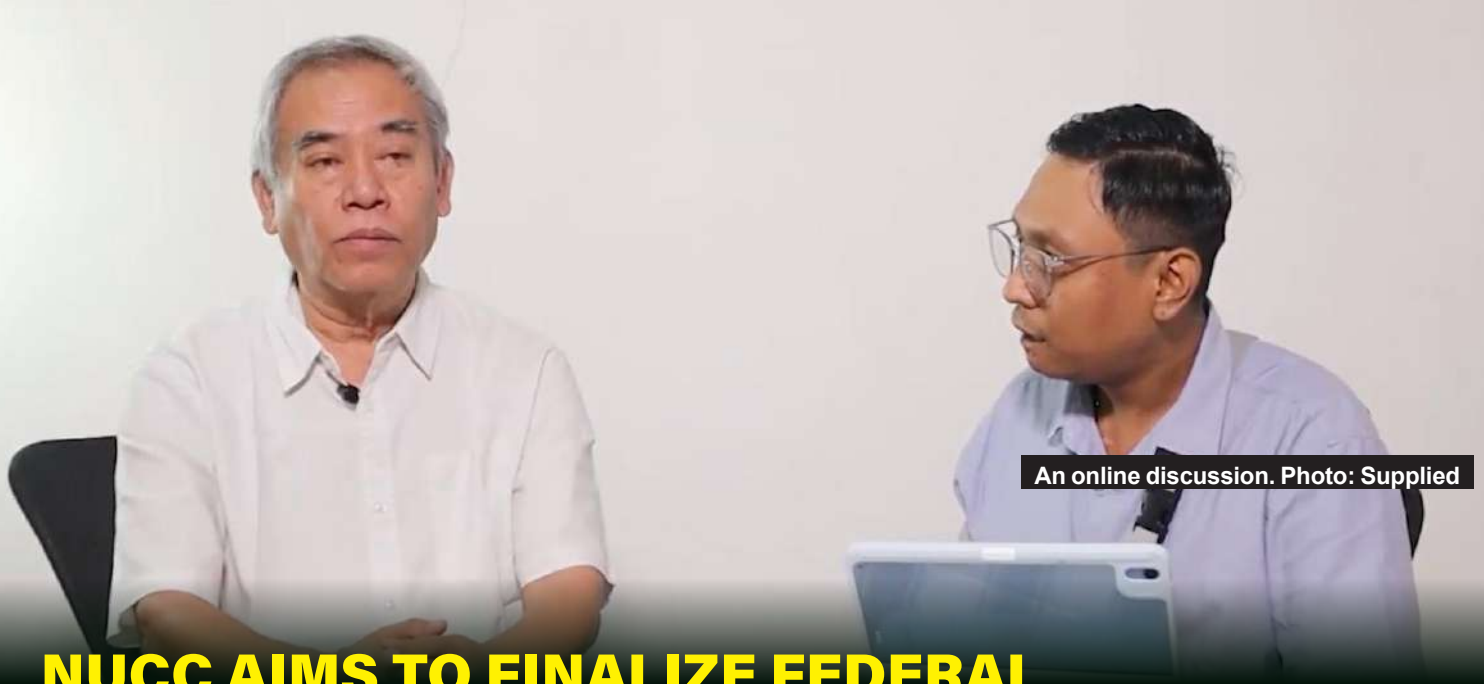
The people of Myanmar, both at home and abroad, have consistently rejected the terrorist military's illegal power grab. The NUG is confident that they will continue to resist—by every means available—any attempt to impose a sham election at gunpoint.

The NUG calls upon governments, international organizations, and democratic allies to:

Reject and denounce the terrorist military's sham election.

Recognize that supporting such an act would condone war crimes and promote impunity.

Stand firmly with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for democracy, human rights, and lasting peace.



An online discussion. Photo: Supplied

NUCC AIMS TO FINALIZE FEDERAL TRANSITIONAL CONSTITUTION AHEAD OF MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTIONS

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) plans to finalize the Federal Transitional Constitution before the junta conducts its planned elections, NUCC member U Toe Kyaw Hlaing told Mizzima in an exclusive interview.

"The drafting process began in September 2024. We expect to have an initial draft within a year, around September 2025. Once the NUCC approves the draft, we will begin implementing it in areas where it's feasible," he said.

Although the draft may not be fully completed by September, the NUCC expects to reach a stage where it can be approved before the regime holds what it calls elections, widely regarded as illegitimate.

The drafting process involves nine groups, including the Transitional Constitution Drafting Working Group (TCWG), ethnic resistance organizations, and state and ethnic representative councils under the NUCC and the National Unity Government (NUG).

Once the initial draft is ready, the NUCC will approve it and apply it in liberated areas, including ethnic-controlled regions, U Toe Kyaw Hlaing said.

"The drafting process involves not just the NUCC but also many ethnic revolutionary forces, key political groups, federal units, and ethnic-based federal councils," he emphasized, noting the broad collaboration behind the effort.

These councils will implement the constitution in their territories and continue negotiations to expand its application across other liberated areas of the country.

The group responsible for drafting the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA) includes the Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Chin National Front (CNF), New Mon State-Anti-Military 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 Women's League of Burma (WLB).

On 12 February, the group announced it is drafting transitional laws to be implemented during the move toward a federal union. The statement also stressed that the future federal democratic union would not adopt a centralized model but instead be built on a bottom-up federalism approach.



Photo: AFP

KNU REJECTS MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTION AS ILLEGITIMATE AND DESTABILIZING

The Central Committee of the Karen National Union (KNU) has rejected the military junta's planned general election, calling it a sham designed to handpick candidates and parties aligned with military interests.

In a statement released on 26 August, the KNU said the attempt to hold elections disregards ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and serves only to install groups favourable to the junta.

It warned that participation by political parties would undermine efforts to establish a genuine democratic system.

"The attempt to hold this election ignores ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and serves as a sham process to install parties and individuals favourable to the military," the statement said.

The KNU cautioned that the election would not resolve Myanmar's political crisis but instead deepen the conflict and fuel instability both within the country and across the region.

It also declared the military-led election illegal, citing its arbitrary and exclusionary nature, and affirmed that it would not recognize the results under any circumstances.

The group stressed that only elections conducted under a new constitution—drafted and ratified through inclusive political dialogue—could pave the way for a lasting political solution and a genuine federal democratic union.

The Union Election Commission under the junta announced on 18 August that the first phase of the election is scheduled for 28 December.



KNU DISMISSES MYANMAR JUNTA'S TERRORIST LABEL AS 'THE THIEF SHOUTING BACK AT THE VICTIM'

The Karen National Union (KNU) has rejected the military commission's move to declare it a terrorist organization, with its spokesperson Pado Saw Taw Nee describing the decision as "the thief shouting back at the victim".

"They're just repeating their own words. They spread blatant lies and talk about the very things they themselves are doing. It's the thief shouting back at the victim," Pado Saw Taw Nee told Mizzima after the announcement late on 28 August.

The declaration was signed by Union Minister for Home Affairs Lieutenant General Tun Tun Naung, who accused the KNU of planting mines on roads and bridges, shelling towns and villages, carrying out bomb attacks, killing civilians, recruiting by force, and destroying state-owned property.

The KNU, one of Myanmar's oldest ethnic armed organizations, has long fought for greater autonomy in Karen State and has been at the forefront of resistance since the 2021 coup.

The military commission has previously designated other opposition groups as terrorists, including the Arakan Army (ULA/AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the National Unity Government (NUG), and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH).

The AA was first declared a terrorist group on 23 March 2020 before the designation was revoked less than a year later, on 11 March 2021. Following the launch of Operation 1027 in October 2023, when the Brotherhood Alliance overran multiple military bases, the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA were once again declared terrorist organizations on 2 September 2024.

Despite such declarations, observers note they have brought little practical impact, as armed resistance against the junta continues to expand. Notably, the military is currently engaged in discussions in Kunming in China with the TNLA, even as it maintains its terrorist designation.



Capitol Building in Washington DC.
Photo: Andy Feliciotti

U.S. MUST NOT FALL FOR THE MYANMAR GENERALS' DIRTY TRICKS AGAIN

KHIN OHMAR

For decades, the people of Burma/Myanmar have resisted military dictatorship with everything we have, and for decades, the United States stood with us.

At our lowest moments, when we were imprisoned, tortured, exiled, or silenced, bipartisan majorities in the U.S. Congress passed laws to support our democratic struggle. U.S. leaders, both Republican and Democrat, condemned military atrocities, supported independent civil society and media, and stood firm in defending those risking their lives for democracy. Through sanctions, humanitarian aid, and symbolic gestures like the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, America sent a clear message: democracy was not a matter of convenience, but conviction.

Today, in contrast, the U.S. government is sending

dangerously mixed signals about its position on Myanmar. Four cronies and armed dealers for the murderous junta had their sanctions lifted. And the junta, desperate and on the brink of collapse, has rebranded its illegal body—literally—in its latest attempt to whitewash its international crimes, escape accountability and gain false legitimacy through its sham election planned for December.

The lifting of sanctions of four military cronies and armed dealers and inaction on the junta's rebranding is a betrayal of the people of Myanmar and the very values that the United States claims to uphold.

A change in name only

On July 31, 2025, the junta announced that it dissolved the so-called State Administration Council (SAC)—the illegal body formed by the military through its 2021 illegal and violent coup attempt—and replaced

it with a newly named entity, the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). The name change was nothing but another attempt to trick the world. The war criminals who led the SAC, Min Aung Hlaing and Soe Win, remain as the SSPC's chair and vice-chair – just like in the SAC. All ten members of the SSPC were senior junta officials just one day earlier. The ministries, chains of command, weapons, policies and acts of terror remain intact.

The junta changes its brand name on the door and expects the world to pretend something new has arrived. Nothing has changed except the public relations strategy – which itself is still an old tactic from the same playbook of its predecessors.

Under U.S., U.K., EU, and Canadian law, the SAC as a body was formally sanctioned – meaning that entities under its control were also effectively blocked, including state-owned enterprises, financial institutions, and ministries.

By changing its name from SAC to SSPC, the junta is trying to exploit a gaping legal loophole. It wants foreign governments and businesses to pretend that this new name represents a new authority so that trade can resume, foreign capital can return, and the path to “normalization” can quietly begin while it continues to intensify the campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar.

Indeed, on the very same day the junta renamed itself, it signed a contract with a Washington-based public affairs firm to “rebuild relations” between Myanmar and the United States. Another public relations contract was signed the very next day.

Clearly, this is a premeditated effort to whitewash the regime's crimes, court U.S. interest in Myanmar's rare earth minerals, and bypass the sanctions that still apply to the SAC.

The U.S. has not moved to close this loophole.

On the ground in Myanmar, atrocities have not slowed

While the junta plays legal shell games, the people of Myanmar continue to suffer. In the weeks since the name change, the junta has only escalated its campaign of terror.

Since late June, nearly daily airstrikes have targeted communities across the country. This is illustrated by looking at just one bloody week last month. On August 17, a junta airstrike in Mawchi, Karenni State, killed at least 32 people, including children. On August 14, the junta bombed a monastery in Mogoke, Shan State, killing 21 people including three pregnant women. On August 11, a junta airstrike on a civilian site in Sagaing killed 16 people. These came as Myanmar reels from a devastating earthquake that struck the country on March 28, made far worse by continued junta airstrikes and its blocking of rescue and obstruction of relief efforts.

The junta has deregistered dozens of political parties, silenced the press, and continued to hold over 22,000 political prisoners, many of whom face routine torture and indefinite detention.

And yet, even as this violence intensifies, some major powers treat the military junta as though it is a legitimate actor preparing for a “transition.” This was clearly evident at the recently held meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where the international criminal Min Aung Hlaing shook hands with leaders of China, India, Russia, and Indonesia, among others.

The press must be wary of legitimizing the SSPC

The junta's attempts to gain legitimacy can be bolstered when international media fail to question their propaganda. For example, in a recent Reuters article, reporter David Brunnstrom refers to the SSPC as a “civilian-led interim government.” In another article, DW's Zsombor Peter similarly refers to the SSPC as an “interim civilian government”—uncritically repeating the junta's own self-description. This language is not just inaccurate; it dangerously undermines the ground realities of the country and the people who have made immense sacrifices to end the military's tyranny.

This sort of language gives cover to a criminal junta that has killed thousands and terrorized the people of Myanmar since the 2021 coup attempt. It lends legitimacy to an illegitimate entity that is doing everything it can to manipulate global perception while continuing its war on the people. And, last but not least,

it shows how such world-renowned media outlets could have a shallow understanding of the crisis in Myanmar, where human suffering has been so immense. This is unethical narrative framing.

I urge media outlets, including Reuters and DW, to exercise vigilance and to avoid amplifying propaganda by the junta. The junta is not a “civilian-led” anything. It is the same military dictatorship—under a different name—that continues to attempt to impose its illegitimate rule and violently suppress the people’s dissent with blanket impunity.

When respected publications adopt the junta’s propaganda, they don’t just mislead the public, they undermine Myanmar and international efforts to uphold principles of democracy and human rights and to hold perpetrators of atrocity crimes to account by law. Reporting like this can mislead the very policymakers Myanmar civil society is trying to reach.

A betrayal of sacrosanct, foundational American values

Over a decade ago, when Myanmar began to “open up” under the quasi-military government of General Thein Sein, the U.S. and other Western governments made the same mistake that governments could risk making now. They moved to lift sanctions too quickly without a clear strategy and backup plan. They wasted all of these persistent measures which contributed significantly to the then-regime’s opening of the country to the world, while claiming the decision was framed as a reward for progress. But the reforms were cosmetic, the power of the military remained intact, and the root problems were left unaddressed. The generals gave just enough to entice the international community, then waited. The result was predictable.

In 2021, the military attempted another coup, tried to remove the elected civilian government, and unleashed a new wave of terror to bring the country back under military dictatorship. Today, we are living with the consequences of that mistake.

As I knew well, this military would not give up power in exchange of carrots, I warned the US State Department and urged them not to lift sanctions that easily. Once, a senior U.S. diplomat told me after the

military’s 2021 coup attempt that I was right and he was sorry. Now I urge the U.S. again: do not fall on the same old trap played by the same bloody military. Do not hand over the carrot to this criminal junta but instead support the democratic movement to dismantle this murderous military institution and help Myanmar people build a peaceful federal union. Sanctions are one of the few tools the international community has to hold Min Aung Hlaing and his criminal junta and cronies accountable and to disrupt their war of terror against the people of Myanmar.

Instead of easing existing sanctions, the US must take immediate urgent actions by further sanctioning the junta in its new name and expanding not weakening sanctions on its arms dealers and cronies. It must also resume and increase humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable internally displaced populations forced to flee the military’s air and ground attacks and blocked from international aid, by directly supporting locally led aid missions through border-channeling.

The current U.S. administration may view this moment as a chance to pursue transactional deals, such to compete and secure access to rare earths. But lifting sanctions in favor of this criminal military junta instead of practically supporting the people’s revolution to end the junta’s violence is not diplomacy—it is a betrayal of sacrosanct American values.

The people of Myanmar have fought for decades to dismantle this brutal military tyranny. They are closer to succeeding than ever. The US must not risk rescuing an illegal murderous military junta that is on the verge of collapse—and harming the people of Myanmar and their democratic resistance movement that is fighting for liberty and to build a federal democracy.

Khin Ohmar is a Myanmar human rights activist who was involved in organizing the 1988 nationwide pro-democracy uprising. She is also the founder and chairperson of human rights organization Progressive Voice.



Myanmar nationals in India. Photo: AFP

439 MYANMAR NATIONALS ARRESTED OVER FIVE YEARS IN INDIA'S MIZORAM, MOSTLY FOR DRUG CASES

Over the past five years, 439 Myanmar nationals have been arrested in Mizoram state, northeast India, in connection with various criminal cases, most of them drug-related, according to a 25 August report by The Statesman, citing Mizoram police data.

Between the 2021 military coup in Myanmar and May 2025, a total of 460 foreign nationals were arrested in Mizoram. Of these, 439 were from Myanmar, 18 from Bangladesh, and three from other countries.

The cases involving Myanmar nationals include 185 drug-related arrests, 66 visa violations, 43 cases involving weapons and explosives, 40 theft and burglary cases, and nine cases of murder and child sexual abuse, the report said.

"Drug-related arrests are increasing. Because of this, living here is gradually becoming more difficult. I just want strict action to be taken against illegal activities," a Myanmar national in Mizoram told Mizzima.

The source added that some local groups have recently called for Myanmar nationals convicted of crimes to be handed over to the junta after completing

their prison terms.

Authorities are compiling the personal information of Myanmar nationals in the state in an effort to curb drug smuggling.

Mizoram police said seized drugs include heroin, methamphetamine, crystal meth, and marijuana, with an estimated value of 7.7 billion rupees (about US\$87.8 million). Drug trafficking has become a growing threat, particularly from Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries.

Police data shows seizures worth 434,300,000 rupees in 2022, 1,896,600,000 rupees in 2023, 2,116,300,000 rupees in 2024, and around 1,065,600,000 rupees between January and May 2025.

As part of the state government's Special Drive on Drugs, Mizoram's police chief and leaders of the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) visited villages along the India-Myanmar border on 25 August to meet locals and study potential trafficking routes, according to local media.



Photo: Supplied

DELIVERY SERVICES IN MYANMAR TIGHTEN RESTRICTIONS ON MEDICINES, COSMETICS, AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Home delivery service providers in Myanmar have imposed new restrictions, banning the transport of a wide range of goods including medicines and cosmetics, according to recent company announcements.

Ninja Van Myanmar stated on 26 August that prohibited items now include unapproved medicines, cosmetics, and agricultural products not certified by the junta's Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Other restricted items are solar panels, power banks, medical supplies, weapons, sharp objects, and goods packed in black plastic bags.

Deliveries of diapers, menstrual products, medicines, and items of uncertain content are also barred in Sagaing Region, while diapers specifically are banned in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region.

"The authorities haven't officially notified us about the specific list of prohibited items. However, when we try to send such items via highway terminals, they are often rejected," a Ninja Van employee said.

Royal Express has also tightened policies, refusing eight categories of goods including weapons, explosives, imitation firearms, sharp objects,

communication devices, military-related equipment, batteries, power banks, and generators. Parcels will now be checked by staff before shipment, full recipient addresses are mandatory, and shipments are restricted to personal use only, with limits on quantity.

Meanwhile, Wepozt Express announced that it will no longer deliver solar panels, electrical appliances, cosmetics, medicines, and even food items such as candy to several townships across Bago, Sagaing, Tanintharyi Regions and Mon and Karen States as well as the capital Naypyidaw.

"These restrictions have been in place for some time, but enforcement has become stricter since late July. At checkpoints, parcels are opened and checked, and if they contain prohibited items, they may be confiscated," a Wepozt customer service representative said.

With bulk shipments now widely restricted, many delivery providers are only accepting small personal parcels, creating significant challenges for online businesses that rely on home delivery to fulfil orders.



MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS RETREAT TO BUDALIN AFTER CLASHES, AIRSTRIKES KILL THREE CIVILIANS

An 80-strong junta column stationed in Pei Pyit Taw village, four miles north of Budalin town in Sagaing Region, retreated to the town on 27 August after clashes with resistance forces, according to local revolutionary groups.

"The fighting broke out a few hours ago while they were pulling back. There may have been casualties, but details are not yet confirmed. The column has now entered Budalin town," said Ko Kye Ni of the Sagaing Federal ERST Committee.

The troops had advanced from Budalin on 25 August, triggering raids and forcing residents of nearby villages to flee. Reinforcements from the Northwestern Military Command in Monywa also entered Zee Taw village near the Budalin-Monywa border on the morning of 27 August and set it ablaze, destroying at least seven houses, local sources said.

Airstrikes accompanied the ground operations. On 26 August, the Budalin Mobile Team reported three separate attacks in the area. At around 3:30 pm, a paramotor dropped bombs near Taungkalat Monastery along the Budalin-Ayardaw road, killing a 16-year-old displaced girl. Later that evening, two fighter jets bombed a gas station on the outskirts of Thakwata village, igniting a fire that killed two civilians and injured several others.

Resistance forces said villagers who fled during the junta's advance have now begun returning to their homes as troops pull back into Budalin.



Photo: Supplied

MINDAT PEOPLE'S ADMINISTRATION REPORTS 40 CIVILIANS KILLED, 120 INJURED IN FIVE YEARS OF MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES

Over the past five years, at least 40 civilians, including women and children, have been killed and 120 others injured in junta airstrikes on Mindat Township, southern Chin State, according to a statement released by the Mindat Township People's Administration on 25 August.

The township governance body documented 176 airstrikes between 27 May 2021 and 3 August 2025, during which roughly 329 bombs were dropped.

The bombings killed 40 civilians and damaged 172 homes, 40 government buildings including schools and hospitals, and 18 religious sites such as churches and monasteries.

"The victims were all civilians, and the airstrikes targeted places where no fighting was taking place," Salai Yawman, head of the Interim Mindat Township People's Administration, told Mizzima on 26 August.

"Bombing during wartime may be expected, but what's alarming is the sheer number of airstrikes targeting villages, hospitals, and schools where no actual fighting is taking place," he said.

The People's Administration said it has supported families of the dead and injured, assisted with damaged homes, and helped rebuild schools, hospitals, and churches.

"Although it is currently difficult to hold the perpetrators accountable, we are actively working to ensure they are brought to justice," Salai Yawman said.

The list of attacks excludes more than 300 additional bombings and casualties during the battle for Mindat from 9 November to 21 December 2024, when the Chin Defence Forces-Mindat and allied groups fought to seize control of the township.

Although some displaced residents remain in Mindat Township, most have not returned due to the continuing risk of airstrikes. Many only return to town intermittently, while working in nearby fields.

On 3 August, Mindat was struck again when junta forces dropped two bombs, destroying two government buildings and eight private homes.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR MILITARY BLOCKADE IN MYINGYAN CRIPPLES TRADE AND DEEPENS HARDSHIP FOR RESIDENTS

For more than a week, the military junta has blocked the transport of goods in Myingyan District, Mandalay Region, causing widespread hardship for residents and leaving crops and produce to spoil.

The blockade began on 18 August, when the junta banned transportation of goods between Myingyan town and nearby villages. The Myingyan People's Strike Committee announced the closure on the same day.

According to sources near checkpoints, only passenger vehicles are permitted to pass, while trucks and cargo trailers remain blocked. Basic necessities such as rice, cooking oil, salt, and vegetables are restricted, and inspections inside the town have intensified.

"The villages are not allowed to transport goods, so flowers, vegetables, and dragon fruits end up being thrown away. With no buyers, everything is wasted. Products can't be sold. The gates remain closed," a local greengrocer told Mizzima.

Before the coup, villages supplied crops to Myingyan, but farming collapsed after 2021. Most

produce was then brought in from Magway Region and redistributed to surrounding villages.

Residents said around 75 percent of these imports are now left rotting, as they cannot be transported out of the town. Vegetable prices in Myingyan have dropped by nearly half.

The junta has also blocked key routes linking Myingyan to Meiktila, Bagan Nyaung-U, and Mandalay, a move locals believe is aimed at isolating both rural areas and the town itself.

Meanwhile, electricity shortages add to daily struggles. Residents receive only two hours of power per day, while factories and workshops have been barred from using electricity for nearly two years and must rely on fuel generators.

Household industries such as noodle-making and bakeries have largely closed.

Violence has also intensified in recent weeks. In the past month, at least 26 civilians were killed across more than 10 villages in Myingyan District.



Photo: Supplied

NEARLY 2,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE IN NGANZUN, MANDALAY REGION SUFFERING FROM FLU AND DIARRHOEA

Around 2,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the western part of Nganzun Township, Mandalay Region, are suffering from diarrhoea and seasonal flu, according to volunteers assisting them.

They said more than 1,000 people are affected by seasonal flu and nearly 1,000 are suffering from diarrhoea. This comes amid an urgent shortage of medicines.

"Seasonal flu and diarrhoea are widespread. The lack of well water and issues with drinking water are contributing factors. I've built small latrines on the island, but now the river water has risen, flooding them, so people are likely wading through water. Some lack proper shelter and food, so I've personally taken in over 100 people. Medicines have completely run out, and we can't manage anymore," one aid worker told Mizzima.

Displaced residents from Moetaung and Ngan Mynar Gyi villages have been fleeing to safer areas since July 2024.

The displacement has now lasted more than a year, with little donor support left. Volunteers said that since

the March earthquake, humanitarian aid has sharply declined, worsening their situation.

Seasonal flu and diarrhoea are affecting mainly children under 10 and adults over 40. Healthcare workers and doctors are unable to travel to Nganzun Township due to terrain difficulties and security risks, while residents have been unable to reach Sagaing for treatment since November 2024.

"Non-farmers can't even afford rice. Many are surviving by catching fish or frogs. Some go hungry to feed their young children. Due to reports of killings in Myingyan, people here are too afraid to return home and are hiding in the forests and mountains. Their stockpiled rice is already depleted," said a local.

Due to arrests, killings, and ongoing military operations by the junta, villagers from the Moetaung village group including Lonekhin, Ywar Tha Aye, Shweli, Lal Kyin Oo, Kyaung Myauk, Ywarma, Ngan Mynar Gyi, Ywarthit, Sakhanta, and Thakyin remain in hiding in nearby forests and mountains.



Photo: AFP

ROCKETS STRIKE MYANMAR JUNTA REGIONAL COMMAND HEADQUARTERS IN SAGAING AND BAGO REGIONS

Resistance forces claimed responsibility for coordinated rocket strikes against the Myanmar junta, hitting both the Northwestern Regional Military Command headquarters in Sagaing Region and the Southern Regional Military Command headquarters in Bago Region.

According to the Justice Brothers Force, two 107 mm rockets struck the Northwestern Regional Military Command in Monywa on 26 August, while five rockets targeted the Southern Regional Military Command in Ketumati, Taungoo Township, on the same day.

"After the attack, the Northwestern Regional Military Command was locked down to suppress information, but the following day we confirmed casualties in the equipment warehouse," a Justice Brothers Force official told Mizzima.

The group said three of five security personnel were killed and two others injured when rockets hit a warehouse housing paramotors and other equipment inside the Monywa command compound. The attack, it added, was carried out in retaliation for recent airstrikes and ground assaults against civilians, including bombings on schools and monasteries.

Following the rocket strike, artillery was fired from inside the command toward Budalin Township in the northeast and Kyauk Maw village in the west, damaging property but causing no reported casualties.

The assault was carried out jointly by the Justice Brothers Force, Golden Triangle Alliance Battalion, Ye-U Ko Thar Gyi and allied forces, who said they withdrew without suffering losses. There has been no independent confirmation of casualties inside the command compound.

Meanwhile, the Brave Warriors for Myanmar (BWM) announced that four out of five rockets successfully hit the Southern Regional Military Command in Taungoo, which they described as a key base involved in operations against resistance groups in Karen, Karenni and Shan States.

On the same day, BWM also claimed to have launched nine rockets at the Bayinnaung Combat Training School in Thandaunggyi, Karen State. The group said the Taungoo mission marked its 45th rocket attack and was carried out in coordination with the Mountain Knight Civilian Defence Forces, the Anti-Coup People's Liberation Force, the Thandaung North Special Area Fighter Sarkhe Group, and the Karen National Liberation Army's Battalion 5, Brigade 2.

The BWM, which has increasingly targeted command centres, airbases, and other strategic military sites, said it continues to coordinate with local resistance forces in its operations.



The damaged bridge. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS HISTORIC GOKTEIK RAILWAY BRIDGE 'BOMBED, DESTROYED'

Myanmar's ruling military junta said on 24 August a colonial-era bridge that was once the world's highest railway trestle had been "bombed and destroyed" by anti-coup armed groups.

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.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said in a video statement to media that the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and People's Defence Forces had "bombed and destroyed" Gokteik bridge.

Another statement by the junta said the bridge had been "exploded with mines".

Standing 102 metres (334 feet) above a gorge, the Gokteik Viaduct is the highest bridge in Myanmar and was the tallest railway trestle in the world when it opened in 1901 during the British colonial era.

Videos and photos on social media showed the bridge partly collapsed and damaged. The bridge connects Mandalay to northern Shan State by rail and draws a number of tourists.

A TNLA spokesperson rejected the accusations and said it was the junta that had bombed the bridge.

"(The) Myanmar army tried to bomb our bases... this morning by using drones. They bombed our troops, but their bomb also hit Gokteik bridge," Lway Yay Oo said.

The nearby towns of Nawngkhio and Kyaukme have seen heavy fighting between the TNLA and the junta in recent weeks.

The junta had claimed to have recaptured Nawngkhio in July.

AFP



Photo: AFP

STUCK IN GRIM CAMPS, ROHINGYA HOPE BANGLADESH CAN TACKLE CRISIS

The rain was relentless the night Mohammad Kaiser fled for his life from his home in Myanmar's Maungdaw township.

Barefoot and exhausted, he trudged with his parents and four siblings on mud paths until they reached the Naf River.

On a flimsy boat, they crossed into Bangladesh, joining around a million of the largely Muslim Rohingya minority, fleeing a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

That was in 2017. Eight years later, rain still lashes down on his simple shelter in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar.

But for the 28-year-old refugee, nothing has washed away his despair.

"War is raging. Hundreds are waiting at the border to enter Bangladesh. Every day, a new family from Rakhine takes refuge," Kaiser told AFP by telephone, speaking outside his cramped hut in Balukhali camp.

"How is it possible to return home? We were destined to stay in this crowded camp, sandwiched between small huts."

'Like a hostage'

Bangladesh is this week holding talks aimed at addressing the plight of Rohingya refugees, even as fresh arrivals cross over from war-ravaged Myanmar and shrinking aid flows deepen the crisis.

The meetings in Cox's Bazar are taking place ahead of a UN conference in New York on September 30.

Both Bangladesh and the UN want to provide stable conditions in Myanmar for the Rohingya to eventually return.

That seems unlikely any time soon.

"I consistently hear from Rohingya refugees that they want to return to their homes in Myanmar, but only when it is safe to do so," Nicholas Koumjian, who heads the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism

for Myanmar, warned ahead of the meeting.

"Ending the violence and atrocities against civilians from all communities in Rakhine is critical for the eventual safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of those that have been displaced."

But Kaisar's old homeland of Rakhine is the site of intense fighting in Myanmar's civil war, triggered by the 2021 coup that ousted the democratic government.

Bangladesh has recorded a surge of refugees from Myanmar since early 2024, with 150,000 more Rohingya arriving.

For Kaisar, life in Myanmar was a spacious home, running a small grocery shop.

Today, in the grim camps, it's a battle for survival.

Safety is fragile. Factional clashes have shaken the camp in recent months.

"We had two armed groups fighting only a few months ago. It was like a hostage situation," he said.

"Violence is common; children are the most vulnerable."

'Violence and atrocities'

In Rakhine, restricted access due to fighting has been compounded by worldwide aid cutbacks spearheaded by US President Donald Trump's freeze on humanitarian funding.

The World Food Programme -- which received nearly half its 2024 donations from the United States -- warned this month that 57 percent of families in central Rakhine are now unable to meet basic food needs.

In the camps, food too is a constant worry.

Each refugee receives a ration card worth about \$12 a month. Kaisar listed what that buys: 13 kilos of rice, a litre of oil, a handful of onions and garlic, and a packet of salt.

"It fills our stomachs, but there is no nutrition," he said.

"I have a three-year-old son. He needs milk, eggs and lentils, but we cannot afford them. Nutrition centres in the camps provide support to children under two. After that, we are left to struggle."

'Used us as pawns'

Education is the next looming hurdle, and Kaisar fears for his young son.

"Will he be able to study and get a job? Or will he spend his whole life as a refugee like me?" Kaisar asked.

He recalled how ordinary villagers in Bangladesh once handed him dry clothes and food after his escape. But beyond that generosity, the future looks bleak.

The violence that uprooted him still rages across the border, and Rohingya militants working with the Myanmar junta have tried to recruit refugees, according to camp residents, UN reports and analysts.

"We civilians have been continuously betrayed," Kaisar said bitterly. "Every side has used us as pawns."

For now, the father's appeal is simple: that Dhaka eases restrictions on education, to allow Rohingya children to attend regular Bangladeshi schools.

"At least allow our children to attend school," he said. "If they can stand on their own, maybe their future won't be as hopeless as ours."

AFP

Erich Ferrari



THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU

A VETERAN SANCTIONS LAWYER EXPLAINS

OFAC DELISTINGS

INSIGHT MYANMAR

“I think it’s a big win. And also people may not like to hear this, it’s actually a win for sanctions,” says Erich Ferrari, founder of Ferrari & Associates and a leading U.S. sanctions attorney. In this wide-ranging interview, Ferrari explains the intricacies of the U.S. sanctions regime, the legal basis and bureaucratic processes behind delisting individuals and entities from the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, and responds to public criticism following the recent removal of several Myanmar-linked clients from U.S. sanctions.

Ferrari begins by reflecting on how he first entered the field. He was a law student in the aftermath of 9/11, when the legal profession increasingly focused on national security and financial enforcement. At the time, several Islamic charities in the U.S. were sanctioned without much due process. Ferrari found this troubling, especially as there were limited ways to appeal these rulings, and this led him to study the field of sanctions more closely, eventually creating a firm dedicated exclusively to this niche.

While his firm’s best-known work involves representing clients seeking to be delisted from U.S. sanctions, Ferrari clarifies that they also handle a wide range of sanctions-related matters, such as compliance for financial institutions and licensing for humanitarian organizations. Yet the heart of their practice remains guiding clients through the complex delisting process—a task that can take years and demands intricate legal strategy, deep familiarity with the workings of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and a broad understanding of U.S. national security priorities.

Ferrari explains that the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List is a register of individuals, entities, and even properties—like aircraft or vessels—that are sanctioned under various U.S. statutes or executive orders. A person or company may be added for engaging in conduct or holding a status deemed harmful to U.S. national security, foreign policy, or economic interests. Importantly, the designation is not necessarily based on criminal activity in the legal

sense. "It's not that the conduct is prohibited by law of the United States," Ferrari says. "But rather that these activities harm U.S. interests."

While OFAC, which manages the SDN list, is housed within the U.S. Treasury Department, decisions as to who gets put on it are most often made through information and direction from a variety of other agencies: the National Security Council, State Department, Department of Justice, CIA, Department of Defense, and other intelligence bodies. OFAC compiles the designation memoranda, but its action is informed by policy direction and intelligence from across the U.S. government. Once designated, individuals often find out from the news or social media rather than an official communication. "People go to sleep at night, and then they wake up in the morning and find out the U.S. government has sanctioned them!" Ferrari says. The consequences are immediate and severe. At that point, all U.S. persons and companies are legally prohibited from dealing with them; foreign banks and institutions often cut off ties as well to avoid running afoul of U.S. secondary sanctions. "It really has the impact of completely shutting them out of the global financial system," Ferrari explains.

Getting off the list is a long and arduous process, often taking more than two years. Under Treasury regulations, there are three possibilities for removal: demonstrating that the original designation was based on error; showing that the underlying circumstances have changed; or proposing remedial steps that would eliminate the basis for designation. Ferrari notes that the first approach—arguing an insufficient basis—is rarely successful. OFAC is granted "extreme deference" by U.S. courts, meaning it does not have to prove anything beyond a reasonable belief based on available information. "They are reviewing petitions to determine whether the party should stay on the list," Ferrari emphasizes, "not whether they should be removed."

Thus, the most effective strategy is to treat the process as one of compliance and remediation. For this, petitioners must engage with the same agency that placed them on the list in the first place, and persuade OFAC (and the broader U.S. government) that they no longer pose a threat. Ferrari advises clients not to argue that OFAC is wrong, but rather to focus on addressing the agency's concerns.

Once a petition is submitted, OFAC shares the

material with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, who verify the claims and look for any additional inculpatory information. He stresses that the burden of proof falls squarely on the petitioner. Even after removal, however, the social and economic consequences of the original designation continue indefinitely; in particular, that can be years of restricted access to financial services. "It's not as if a light gets turned on when someone is removed."

This brings the interview around to the news that has brought the issue of Myanmar sanctions to the fore: OFAC's recent removal of four Myanmar-linked parties from the SDN list, which includes two individuals and one company represented by Ferrari's firm. The move sparked anger among Burmese communities and human rights advocates, especially given accusations that some of the delisted individuals had ties to Myanmar's military and were allegedly involved in weapons procurement. UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews voiced concerns, and some Burmese activists accused Ferrari of enabling impunity. In response, Ferrari offers a firm yet measured defense.

"I'm in no way saying they can't be angry [about this] or they shouldn't have an opinion," he says. But he emphasizes that delistings are not based on whether a lawyer is persuasive, but on a determination by the U.S. government that the legal criteria for designation are no longer met. He then flips the argument and stresses that delisting is actually a crucial component of successful sanctions, saying, "If parties are not being removed from the sanctions list, that means there have been no changes in behavior, which means the sanctions have been ineffective!" So Ferrari urges critics to understand that delisting is part of making sanctions work, not undermining them. He notes that if sanctioned persons believe they will never be removed, they have no incentive to modify their conduct or sever ties with problematic actors. "It's going to create an environment where no one can get off the list," he warns, "and if no one can get off the list, then no one is going to address the U.S. government's concerns."

He also distinguishes his legal work from lobbying. "Lobbying is not permitted for sanctioned persons," he says, noting that OFAC has prosecuted individuals for attempting to do so. Instead, he represents clients in a legal administrative process, conducted entirely in writing. "There's no going into the White House and having a conversation. There's no going to Congress

and trying to drum up political support.”

Moreover, Ferrari makes it clear that he does not take all cases. “If a client came to me and said, I did all of this stuff, and I don’t want to change any of it, I want to continue to do it—I wouldn’t take that case.” He says that his firm only represents clients willing to engage in good faith, and who are prepared to tell the truth to the U.S. government. The risk of lying is significant: criminal prosecution for misrepresentation is a very real possibility. Ferrari emphasizes the importance of understanding that the role of a sanctions lawyer is not to defend a client’s innocence, as in criminal law, but to bring their behavior into compliance with U.S. legal expectations.

When asked whether the recent delistings represent a shift in policy, Ferrari says no, noting that the cases had been pending since the early Biden administration, in fact, and reviewed by two successive administrations. He adds that there is no evidence of any rollback in enforcement or changes to the executive order that governs the Burma sanctions program. These were “technical” cases, he emphasizes, not political signals.

He further explains that U.S. sanctions are authorized under a statute that allows the President to declare a national emergency. That declaration must be

renewed annually to maintain the sanctions program. In the case of Burma, there has been no indication that the U.S. plans to roll back its Burma-focused sanctions or reduce enforcement.

Ferrari concludes the interview by encouraging individuals who may be at risk of designation to take media and NGO reports seriously. “You need to view it as a compliance exercise,” he advises, urging those under scrutiny to either disprove the allegations or take steps to distance themselves from problematic relationships or activities.

For Ferrari, he emphasizes that sanctions law is not about defending reputations but navigating a high-stakes regulatory process with profound geopolitical implications. “My goal here is to make sure that parties understand what the requirements are for removal, to give them the opportunity to present their side to the U.S. government, and then from there, the U.S. government makes a determination.”

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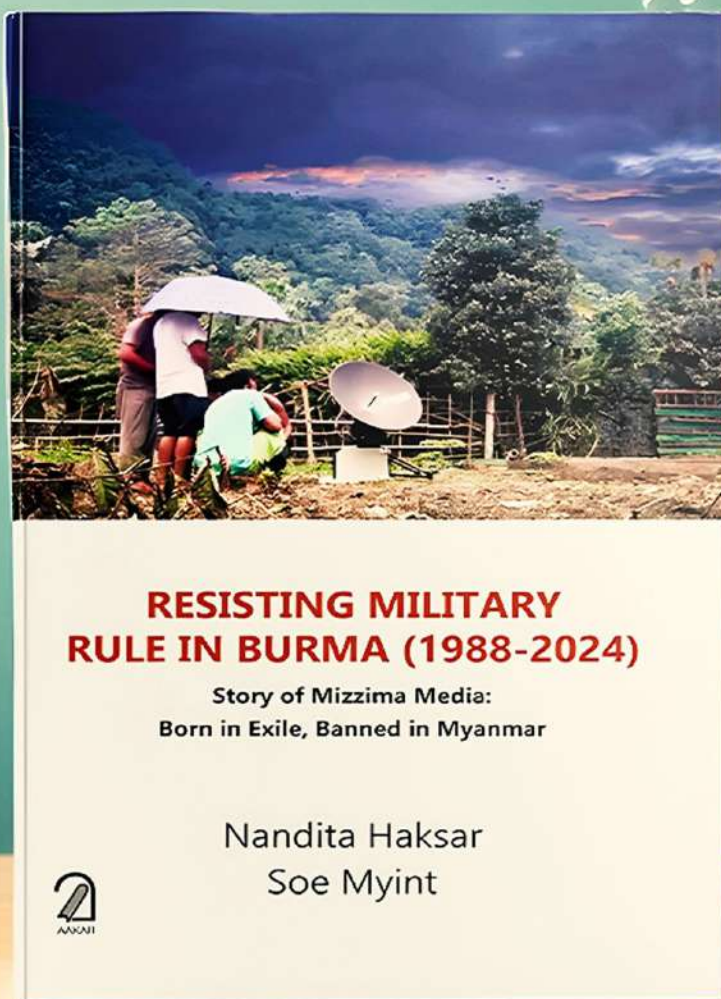
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RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



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US PRESIDENT TRUMP MOVES TO CUT MORE FOREIGN AID, RISKING SHUTDOWN

US President Donald Trump has moved to cut nearly \$5 billion of congressionally-approved foreign aid, the White House said Friday -- raising the likelihood of a federal shutdown as Democrats oppose the policy.

The \$4.9 billion in cuts target programs of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Trump wrote in a letter to the House of Representatives.

The president "will always put AMERICA FIRST," the White House Office of Management and Budget said on social media, releasing a copy of the letter.

Democrats have warned that any attempt to reverse funding already approved by Congress would doom negotiations to avoid budgetary paralysis, the so-called shutdown, later this year.

Chuck Schumer, who leads the Democratic minority in the US Senate, described Trump's little-known legislative tactic, technically known as a pocket rescission, as illegal.

"It's clear neither Trump nor Congressional Republicans have any plan to avoid a painful and entirely unnecessary shutdown," he said.

Some moderate Republican also expressed opposition to Trump's effort to stop spending already approved by lawmakers.

A White House official told reporters the administration has a "solid legal basis" for Trump's maneuver -- and that any challenge in court would fail.

USAID dismantled

Trump has effectively dismantled USAID, the world's largest humanitarian aid agency, since taking office.

Founded in 1961 as John F. Kennedy sought to leverage aid to win over the developing world in the Cold War, USAID has been incorporated into the State Department after Secretary of State Marco Rubio slashed 85 percent of its programming.

Rubio welcomed Trump's latest move as part of "rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse from the US government, saving American workers billions of dollars."

The vast majority of the new cuts -- \$3.2 billion -- would be to USAID funding, according to court documents seen by AFP, confirming an earlier report in the New York Post.

Research published in The Lancet journal in June estimated that the previous round of USAID cuts could result in the preventable deaths of more than 14 million vulnerable people worldwide -- a third of them small children.

Also targeted by the new cuts was \$838 million for peacekeeping missions.

"This is going to make our budget situation or liquidity situation that much more challenging," United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric told a press conference.

Trump, after taking office for the second time in January, launched a sweeping campaign to downsize or dismantle swaths of the US government.

Republicans control both chambers of Congress, but need Democrat support in the Senate to pass new spending laws.

Trump, who is pushing to extend presidential powers, aims to claw back the \$4.9 billion late in the fiscal year so that Congress may not have time to vote before the funding expires next month.

The United States last averted shutdown, with hours to spare, in March.

Shutdowns are rare but disruptive and costly, as everyday functions like food inspections halt, and parks, monuments and federal buildings shut up shop.

Up to 900,000 federal employees can be furloughed, while another million deemed essential -- from air traffic controllers to police -- work but forego pay until normal service resumes.

AFP



Chinese leader Xi Jinping on a recent visit to Lhasa in Tibet. Photo: RFA

HOW CHINA FOOLS THE WEST

IAN WILLIAMS

The mimic octopus is a remarkable creature. It is the world's master at shapeshifting. It is able to transform its appearance into that of more than 15 different aquatic animals, depending on the needs of the moment. It can ward off predators by appearing to be more deadly than it really is – by impersonating a poisonous lionfish, for example. It can also lure prey by mimicking a crab, say, trying to attract a mate, before smothering, paralysing and devouring the hapless suitor. It is much studied by marine biologists, but it deserves more attention from economists and diplomats – particularly those trying to understand the Chinese Communist party. Its portrait should hang beside the great communist worthies lining the walls of the Zhongnanhai leadership compound in Beijing.

Maintaining the Party's grip on power has been paramount, and rather as the mimic octopus relies on fooling those around it, so the CCP counts on the deep western reservoir of gullibility, greed and at times duplicity

After Donald Trump launched his first round of 'liberation day' tariffs in April, President Xi Jinping

was quick to depict himself as a champion of free trade and globalisation, a defender of international institutions against bullies. He called for global unity against Washington. Just last month, Chinese Premier Li Qiang promised the World Economic Forum that, in contrast to Trump's reckless isolationist approach to trade, benevolent Beijing would make its technology available to the world, particularly less-developed countries. To drive that message home, the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist party, condemned America's 'coercion' and demanded 'fairness and justice' to 'safeguard the rules-based multilateral trading system.'

Such bromides from the CCP are, of course, absurd, since rule-breaking, erecting barriers to trade, and economic coercion have been central to China's rise – even more so under Xi. But the display was clever mimic octopus diplomacy, designed to lure in the gullible global business elite, many of whom are so overcome by their hatred of Trump they cannot spot the deceit.

Last month, the CCP anointed five 'model' entrepreneurs, parading them in Beijing under a banner that proclaimed: 'Carry forward the entrepreneurial spirit.' Xi had earlier summoned top technology executives for a pep talk, people he had previously hounded – including Jack Ma, who was driven out of Alibaba, the company he founded, after he criticised the Party. Others, such as Bao Fan, once China's highest profile technology dealmaker, could not make it. He has not been seen since he disappeared more than two years ago amid vague suggestions of corruption. Still, Xi told them he was on their side and they should work together. Private businesses, which have been more marginalised under Xi than under any CCP leader since Mao, were courted, as were foreign investors. 'We welcome more foreign businesses to come to China with a global perspective, and achieve win-win and all-win results as China looks to unleash new quality productive forces,' announced Lin Jian, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry.

CCP shape-shifting is the story of 'reform and opening' itself. Rather like the mimic octopus, the Party has a ruthless survival instinct. It was the main motivation for opening the door to foreign investment in the first place, after decades of Maoist madness had left the county traumatised and impoverished. And over the years, the ebb and flow of reform has mirrored the leadership's insecurities and paranoia. Maintaining the Party's grip on power has been paramount, and rather as the mimic octopus relies on fooling those around it, so the CCP counts on the deep Western reservoir of gullibility, greed and at times duplicity. China's supposed open door has long been tightly policed by a capricious CCP doorkeeper, holding it ajar when China needs to attract favoured suitors, slamming it shut when they are no longer useful.

The latest shape-shifting has been accompanied by efforts to play-up China's technological prowess. Visitors to the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai last month were treated to the bizarre spectacle of two humanoid robots pummelling each other in a boxing ring, like a juiced-up version of an old Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots toy. The not-so-subtle message was that China is ready to take on America when it comes to cutting edge of technology. More China-sympathetic Western journalists have received tours of high-tech facilities. 'I saw the future. It was not America,' declared Thomas Friedman in the New York Times, after he was shown Huawei's usually off-

limits Shanghai campus. A credulous Friedman – who praised China's spending splurge after the 2008 global financial crisis and later asked, 'what if we could just be China for a day?' – lauded Beijing's efforts at AI-driven innovation in order 'to be permanently liberated from Trump's tariffs.'

Having expelled, hounded or otherwise intimidated serious western journalists in their efforts to report critically from China, Beijing has turned to western influencers, the useful idiots of the social media age. In June, the China Youth Daily, a CCP newspaper, launched a campaign to lure foreign influencers on sponsored trips to China. The 'China-Global Youth Influencer Exchange' programme signed up young social media influencers with at least 300,000 followers who would be expected to showcase the 'real China.' This followed the CCP's delight at the May visit from IShowSpeed, the YouTube celebrity, who streamed his way around China, posting awe-struck videos of flying cars and, yes, boxing with a humanoid robot, to his 37 million viewers.

There is more than a touch of the Potemkin about this. Yet to question whether China can really innovate, may seem a little churlish. After all, it has in the likes of Huawei, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, some world-class tech companies. DeepSeek, a chatbot designed to rival American developed ChatGPT but trained at a fraction of the cost is held up as evidence of China's ability to innovate in an area of crucial importance in the race for tech dominance (even if it does tie itself in knots when asked about Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang).

Those who marvel at Beijing's technical advances too often equate research output with innovation capability. Research quantity does not equate to quality, and the ability to imitate and replicate existing capabilities, all too frequently stolen, is very different from the cumulative and gradual process of innovation. China's research and development programme, though generously funded, incentivises waste and fraud. Adversity can of course be a catalyst for innovation – as can fear of a dictator – and much-sanctioned Huawei, the CCP's tech champion, has made great strides in developing home-grown chips. However, there must be severe doubts about whether an increasingly dystopian dictatorship, which wants to be in every classroom, laboratory and boardroom, can create a self-sustaining innovation economy through diktat and wads of cash.

An extraordinary – and bold – June editorial in Caixin, a Chinese business publication, appealed to the government to ‘untie the hands’ of researchers, pointing out that a mere 3.9 per cent of university innovation was industrialised. Like all statistics from China, start-up data needs to be treated with caution, but GlobalData, an analytics company, estimates that the value of venture capital deals in China fell around 45 per cent during the first half of 2025, compared with last year. The Financial Times has suggested that start-up activity ground almost to a halt last year. This hardly fits with the claims of a booming innovation economy.

As trade negotiations have dragged on, China has boasted that its reliance on the US market, which had accounted for 20 per cent of China's exports in 2018, is down to 14 per cent. But much of this is smoke and mirrors – in preparation for trade hostilities, China was shipping substantial quantities of finished or semi-finished goods to the US via third countries, particularly in southeast Asia. In spite of the bravado, China's economy remains fragile. Property, for decades the motor of the economy, is still in the doldrums. Local governments are sitting on a precarious mountain of debt, the jobs market is deteriorating, and consumers remain unwilling to boost their spending. That is in spite of Xi's pledge to ‘fully unleash’ the consumer via trade-in programme worth an estimated \$42 billion so far this year, and covering a range of consumer goods, from washing machines to electric vehicles (EVs), air conditioners, smartphones and tablets.

Nor have renewable technologies, notably batteries, wind turbines, EVs and solar panels proved to be the magical elixir to replace property as the golden goose of China's economy. Last month, Xi admitted for the first time that China had a problem of chronic over-production, though he avoided the word. The Party calls it involution (neijuan in mandarin), which describes what it sees as unhealthy and self-destructive competition, fuelling deflation and undermining growth. What he didn't acknowledge is that this is a direct result of his own policies – the enormous and wasteful subsidies thrown at these industries, which in turn is fuelling global wariness about Chinese exporters dumping at well below cost.

All these problems are compounded by the challenge of measuring what is going on in the economy. Beijing's announcement last month that its economy

grew by 5.2 per cent in the three months until the end of June should be taken with a pinch of salt. Beijing's statistics, always dodgy, have become increasingly political. Shortly before Christmas, Gao Shanwen, a top economist and former official at China's central bank, cast doubt on official figures, telling a conference in Washington DC that China's growth over recent years was probably just 2 per cent, which is less than half what the government had claimed. Gao then promptly disappeared from view. Online commentaries in which he had highlighted soaring unemployment, China's ‘dispirited youth’ and ‘disenchanted middle-aged,’ were deleted. A few months earlier, Zhu Hengpeng, a top economist with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Economics also disappeared after making disparaging remarks about Xi's economic stewardship in what he thought was a private online chat group.

The real problem is Xi himself, who has consistently prioritised security and control over all else and is unlikely to sanction reforms that could dilute the power of the Party. Late last month the old instincts kicked back in as China's national cybersecurity watchdog launched an investigation into Nvidia, the US chip maker, over alleged security risks related to a chip it had designed specifically for the Chinese market. At the same time Chenyue Mao, managing director at Wells Fargo, was blocked from leaving the country, the latest in a string of opaque exit bans, which the CCP has used increasingly against dissidents or those supposedly involved in criminal probes or other disputes. The American bank suspended all travel to China.

While it is true to say that Trump is haemorrhaging trust in America, Xi's ability to take advantage of that and pick off US allies or other trading powers is hidebound by the fact that China never enjoyed much trust in the first place. And as for the mimic octopus, marine biologists have observed that after giving birth the females engage in a form of grim self-harm, devouring themselves until they die. So at the end, the world's master of shape-shifting is its own worst enemy.

An updated paperback edition of Ian's book, Vampire State: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Economy, is published this week by Birlinn.

Originally published in The Spectator.

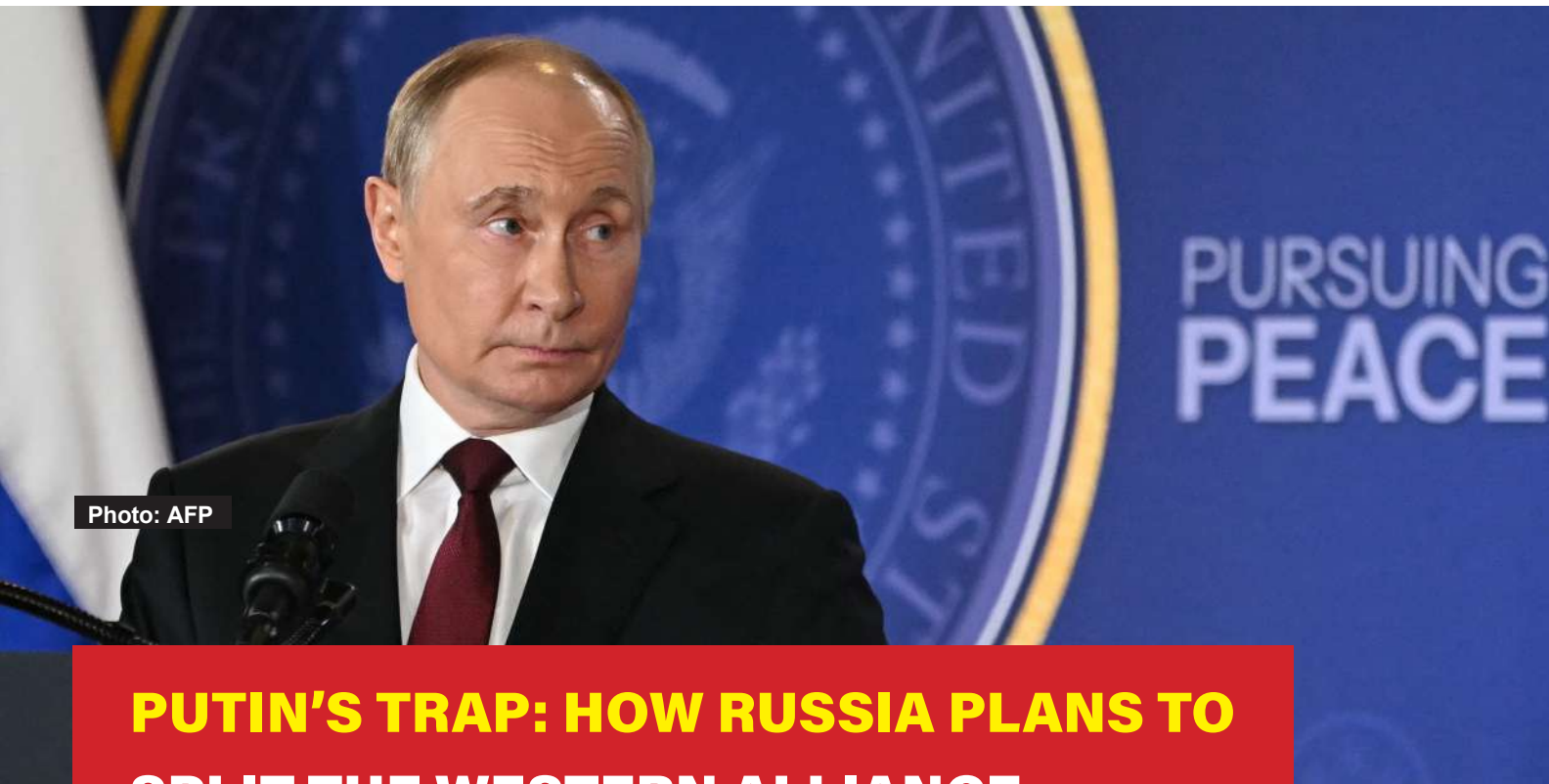


Photo: AFP

PUTIN'S TRAP: HOW RUSSIA PLANS TO SPLIT THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

OWEN MATTHEWS

Though you wouldn't know from the smiles around the table at the White House last week, a trap has been set by Vladimir Putin designed to split the United States from its European allies. In Washington on 18 August, Europe's leaders, plus Sir Keir Starmer and Volodymyr Zelensky, agreed with Donald Trump that the killing in Ukraine should and can be ended as soon as possible. They lavished praise on Trump for reaching out to the Kremlin, despite having themselves treated Putin as a pariah for the past three years. And they even enthusiastically applauded the notion of security guarantees similar to Nato's Article Five 'all-for-one and one-for-all' mutual defence clause as a way to safeguard Ukraine's borders in the future.

But behind every one of these apparently promising areas of agreement lurks a fatal misunderstanding of the intentions of the one man in the world who has the power to make the war stop – Putin.

Let us not forget that the Washington talks were based on Trump and his team's highly optimistic interpretation of what Putin had agreed to in Anchorage, Alaska. That team included precisely zero Russia experts capable of reading the hidden meaning behind Putin's weasel words. Steve Witkoff, Trump's

leading point man on Kremlin affairs, is a real estate lawyer with no experience of diplomacy. And the last time that Trump himself spoke in person to Putin, in Helsinki in 2018, he was quickly persuaded by his Russian counterpart that Kremlin election interference was all just a big hoax.

One of Putin's great skills is appearing to be measured and constructive when in fact he's being insincere, intransigent or plain threatening. Take his innocuous-sounding remarks at the post-summit Anchorage press conference. In order to achieve a long-term settlement in Ukraine, Putin said: 'We need to eliminate all the primary root causes of the conflict.' Decoded, that is a clear reference to Putin's historical thesis that Ukraine is an invented country that has been used for centuries by Russia's enemies as a base from which to attack Moscow – and in his view remains so today. He called, apparently reasonably, for Trump to 'consider all the legitimate concerns of Russia and reinstate a just balance of security in Europe and in the world on the whole.' But to Putin that 'just balance' means a withdrawal of most Nato forces from countries along Russia's borders.

The remark that has caused most excitement among

European leaders was Putin's assurance that 'naturally we are prepared to work on' Trump's suggestion that 'the security of Ukraine should be secured.' Trump and his team came away from Anchorage in the belief that Putin had acquiesced to western security guarantees – and Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Witkoff himself have been touting that as a major breakthrough.

In truth it's no such thing. Security guarantees were discussed at length during the abortive peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in Istanbul in April 2022, and detailed plans of what those guarantees might look like were included in three drafts of a peace deal that was never signed. Back then Russia, absurdly, tried to insist on itself being a guarantor of Ukraine's security as in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, and on having a veto over any intervention. But that point was never resolved after Europe promised Ukraine it could win the war in the field rather than compromise at the negotiating table.

Trump was caught on a hot mic in the White House telling his European guests: 'I think Putin wants to make a deal. You understand that? As crazy as it sounds!' In fact, it doesn't sound crazy at all – Putin undoubtedly does want to make a deal. But what Trump has not yet grasped is that Putin wants to make it on his own terms.

And therein lies Putin's trap. His plan for the endgame in the war is to do everything in his power to convince Trump – his new best buddy and business partner – that he is behaving reasonably, making concessions, bending over backwards to keep dialogue open. At the same time, he will lay down a series of conditions that Zelensky will refuse to accept.

At which point Europe will be forced to choose between heroic and principled words about refusing to compromise Ukraine's sovereignty – which would mean supporting Ukraine's war effort without US assistance – and an ignoble compromise with the Kremlin.

Take the 'land swaps' which Trump has mentioned so many times. In reality, that's a reference to Putin's demand that Kyiv surrender control of the third of Donetsk and a small sliver of Luhansk provinces that he has so far failed to take. In exchange, Putin proposes to withdraw from small chunks of Sumy and Kharkiv provinces that he occupies, and also drop his claim on the remainder of Kherson and Zaporizhia. Effectively he's demanding some very valuable and

heavily defended real estate – including the fortress cities of Kramatorsk, Sloviansk and Konstantinovka – in exchange for land that he has not yet been able to conquer.

Amazingly, Trump has reportedly agreed that this is a reasonable price for Kyiv to pay for peace. Yet Zelensky cannot surrender this territory either politically or practically. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have died defending those positions, and it's possible that his troops would refuse orders to withdraw even if he tried to make them. And Ukraine's ultranationalists would be literally up in arms over such a betrayal, making Ukraine instantly ungovernable.

The brutal truth is that for the past three years the Europeans have been lying to Ukraine and themselves

Putin has laid a similar political minefield for Zelensky and his European allies over legal recognition of the territories he has occupied. Again, Trump is reportedly in favour of forcing Kyiv to de jure recognise Crimea as Russian, while leaving the rest of occupied Ukraine in a legal limbo. Again, such a humiliation would be political death for any Ukrainian leader who made it and incur the armed wrath of legions of angry, heavily armed, well-organised and politically vocal veterans groups such as Azov.

Putin has dozens more such humiliations in store for Kyiv and its backers before he is ready to end his assault on Ukraine. On the economic front, his wish list includes the lifting of sanctions, a resumption of flights and the unfreezing of billions of Central Bank assets. On the geopolitical front, he wants a constitutional guarantee that Ukraine will never join Nato and restrictions on weapons and troops Nato can deploy to border countries such as the Baltic states, Romania and Poland, as well as an assurance of no more Nato eastward expansion to Moldova and Georgia.

In Ukraine, he would demand the enshrinement of Russian as an official language, granting Russian-speaking regions the right to their own education and examinations, and the restoration of the properties of the wing of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which remains loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate. He would also insist on scrapping Ukrainian laws banning Soviet symbols and suppressing the memory of Soviet-era war heroes and cultural figures, in addition to allowing towns to restore demolished monuments to Russian tsars

and writers. Putin would have Kyiv un-ban Russian-language radio and TV stations and newspapers, as well as political parties sympathetic to Moscow, and unfreeze the assets of the 5,000 people sanctioned for being pro-Russian by Ukrainian presidential decree.

That's to mention just the top dozen of Putin's demands. Some he will get, some he won't. But we can be sure that he will push for all of them, and more.

The question for Europe is stark: what will they do if and when Ukraine refuses to submit? If Trump is fine about surrendering the remainder of Donbas, we can be sure that he's not likely to take a stand against Putin over such details as statues of Pushkin or the rights of the suppressed Russian Church (a major grievance for religious-minded MAGA supporters).

J.D. Vance, the US Vice-President, has made his position on Europe clear. 'This is your neck of the woods... you guys have got to step up and take a bigger role in this thing,' he said earlier this month. 'If you care so much about this conflict you should be willing to [fund] this war yourself.' The US, for its part, 'wants to bring about a peaceful settlement to this thing, we want to stop the killing,' he added. Trump has repeatedly promised to do his best to play the peacemaker. But if the Ukrainians and their allies don't wish to agree, Washington will walk away. 'Keep fighting,' wrote Trump last week. 'Good luck.'

The brutal truth is that for the past three years the Europeans have been lying to Ukraine and themselves. In the spring of 2022, Europe, led by Boris Johnson, encouraged Zelensky to fight on and promised Ukraine 'as much support as they need for as long as they need it.' Ukraine kept its part of the bargain, and with the help of hundreds of billions in military and financial aid pushed Putin's far larger army back from over half of the territory it once occupied.

That's an extraordinary achievement. But it hasn't been enough to win. And by this point many of Kyiv's most passionate defenders in Europe are starting to acknowledge that there is little military or political point in fighting on. Others, like the Baltic nations, disagree.

For those allies who believe that it's time to call it a day, the main point that remains to be decided is how Ukraine's reduced new borders can be protected in a

way that Putin will not dare to challenge. Starmer and Emmanuel Macron's idea of putting Nato boots on the ground is foolish and misunderstands that the basis of Putin's paranoid logic in starting the war was to avoid precisely that outcome.

The 'Nato Article Five-like' security guarantees of which Italy's Giorgia Meloni spoke in Washington last week (albeit accompanied by extravagant air quotes) sound formidable. The problem is that security guarantees have to be credible to work. And will Putin believe that Starmer or Macron will send their voters' sons to fight over Donbas, when they have already said that their proposed minuscule peacekeeping force will be 'backstopped' by US air power?

Of more practical use is a proposal to create a network of air defences made of Patriot batteries and drones along the length of Ukraine's border, funded by Europe. That's what Ukraine's reported offer to buy \$100 billion in US weaponry is about, and includes a staggering \$50 billion to develop new-generation drones in partnership with the world's biggest experts in Ukraine itself.

Ben Wallace, the former UK defence secretary, has called Trump the 'appeaser-in-chief' and warned that the peace process could be 'another Munich 1938,' when independent Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to Hitlerite aggression. But that is a bad analogy. At Munich, Sir Neville Chamberlain failed to avert war. Today's Ukraine, with western help, has failed to win a war. But neither have they lost. Instead, like Finland in 1941, they have heroically fought a much stronger adversary to a halt and saved 80 per cent of their country and now face a bloody, attritional stalemate.

Putin would like nothing more than for Europe to encourage Ukraine to fight on, and to lose even more of their land and independence. The question Ukraine's friends must ask themselves today is whether it's time to choose an unjust peace over a righteous but never-ending war.

Owen Matthews is an Associate Editor of The Spectator and the author of Overreach: The Inside Story of Putin's war on Ukraine.

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ALL ALONG THE MEKONG

“**M**yanmar is a source of inspiration everywhere! This is me speaking directly to friends in Myanmar, that they should understand that they are the source of inspiration, and the source of ideas and reflections, to a level that they don't recognize. Because there are a lot of reflections going on in the corners of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, that [are] not there on media.”

Tee, a Vietnamese activist, has devoted his efforts to understanding and supporting movements for democracy and human rights across the region. This passion has even shaped the way he views his own identity: as he puts it, “I am from Vietnam ... but I think my identity is much more connected to being a Southeast Asian.” His focus is peacebuilding, which in his words includes fostering inclusive governance, de-masculinizing and civilianizing politics, and creating bottom-up frameworks for federal democracy that reflect the diverse voices within Myanmar's ethnic and political landscape. Only this will ensure that the military and security forces do not overpower democratic rule.

Tee sees the growth of peacebuilding initiatives as a cornerstone for meaningful progress in Myanmar.

He views it as an opportunity to address the deep, structural issues caused by decades of military rule and repression. At the same time, Tee acknowledges the skepticism many hold toward peacebuilding, given that the Burmese military has a long record of hijacking or co-opting peace processes, using them to consolidate its power or stall meaningful reforms. Previous ceasefire agreements and dialogue initiatives have often been tools for the military to manipulate opposition groups, fracture alliances, and maintain control without making significant concessions. So Tee understands that overcoming this skepticism will require transparent approaches rooted in local leadership, and which prioritize the needs and aspirations of the people over the agendas of powerful institutions. He stresses, again, peacebuilding in Myanmar is not just about agreements or settlements, it is about reshaping the social and political fabric to ensure a sustainable and equitable future free from military domination.

Tee's involvement with Myanmar is deeply personal; it is intertwined with an emotional sense of solidarity with individuals he has met over the years. For this reason, he defines solidarity as “being there” for these comrades—standing with friends in their struggles during moments of political crisis and beyond. Tee elaborates on this theme, saying that for him, solidarity is not about grand gestures; rather, it is about participating in the everyday realities of his friends' lives. In addition, his involvement in Myanmar's struggle has led Tee to reflect on Vietnam's own history, both its progress as well as its shortcomings.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/8/8/episode-377-all-along-the-mekong>



MYANMAR HIRES U.S. FIRM TO HELP REPAIR WASHINGTON TIES

The McKeon Group, a Virginia-based lobbying and consulting firm, has been hired by Myanmar's junta in a bid to strengthen strained relations with the United States. The contract, which began on 1 August, will pay the firm US\$60,000 per month over the term of the six-month contract to provide outreach to the US Congress and State Department.

The firm was co-founded by Howard McKeon and his father, Buck McKeon, a former California Republican Congressman. Howard McKeon will reportedly lead the Myanmar effort. Saudi Arabia is also among the firms long-standing clients.

Myanmar's junta also recently made a US\$3 million one-year deal with the DCI Group on 31 July to rebuild ties with the US.

Taken together, the two deals show a heavy investment by Myanmar's junta in lobbying and communications to improve relations with the US.

The junta has announced national elections for December 28, but international observers remain sceptical. A Washington Post editorial this week labelled the planned vote a "sham," noting the regime controls less than half of the country, with ethnic armed groups holding sway elsewhere.

Myanmar's crisis continues to deepen, with more than 3.5 million people displaced within the country and another one million having fled abroad.



VPN RESTRICTIONS MAKE INTERNET ACCESS HARDER FOR MANY

This week, social media in Myanmar has been filled with complaints about the military's tighter controls on VPNs, which many people rely on to read independent news and connect to blocked platforms.

On Facebook and X, users say that VPN connections have become unstable, slow, or completely unusable in some areas. Young people complain that they cannot log in to Facebook, Messenger, or news websites without repeated failures. Some posts show screenshots of error messages, while others share tips on which VPNs are still working.

The overall mood online is frustrated and anxious. Many accuse the authorities of trying to cut off citizens

from the outside world by tightening internet controls under the new Cybersecurity Law. Critics argue that restrictions on VPNs not only block access to news but also affect students, workers, and families who depend on online communication.

The 2025 Cybersecurity Law gives the junta broad powers over digital platforms, requiring data storage, limiting VPN use, and expanding online surveillance. Since its enforcement, internet freedom groups report that censorship and restrictions have sharply increased, with Myanmar now ranked among the most repressive online environments in Asia.

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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.