

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

LOST GENERATION

UNDP warns Myanmar youth face crisis

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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.

WORSENING CRISIS IN THE DEPTHS OF MYANMAR

In the heart of Myanmar, where the Ayeyarwady River cuts through fertile lands, families in the Sagaing Region once thrived on rice farming and seasonal harvests. Today, those same lands lie fallow, scarred by months of fighting, artillery fire, and military raids as the resistance and military junta battle for the soul of Myanmar. Fields that once yielded life now are empty. Across burnt-down villages and makeshift camps, hunger and uncertainty rule, especially for the most vulnerable, namely children, the elderly, and those who have lost most of their possessions to the war.

Sagaing has become one of the epicentres of the country's escalating civil conflict, where military crackdowns against resistance forces have destroyed entire communities. Thousands of homes have been torched, and with them, the stores of rice, grain, and essential supplies that families rely on. Displaced villagers flee to nearby forests or mountains, carrying what little they are able. With aid convoys frequently blocked or looted, the displaced rely on sparse local donations or foraging to survive. Malnutrition is now a daily reality, particularly among children, many of whom show signs of stunting and severe wasting. Mothers boil leaves and roots to fill empty stomachs, knowing it is not enough.

In the west, Rakhine State faces its own disaster, largely out of sight. Already battered by decades of ethnic tension and displacement, the Rohingya community remains trapped in a cycle of statelessness and starvation. Camps around Sittwe, built years ago for those displaced by previous waves of violence, are now overflowing. Recent conflict flare-ups between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military have triggered new waves of displacement, forcing even more families into crowded shelters with barely enough food or water, according to the latest reports. Aid agencies, often

restricted or outright banned from accessing the region, struggle to deliver basic supplies. Those who remain in remote villages cut off by the fighting are left to their own devices, eating less and less each day as food prices rise and markets have less to offer.

Myanmar's monsoon rains have only deepened the crisis. Flooded roads and destroyed infrastructure make transportation difficult. Temporary shelters collapse under the weight of wind and water, leaving families soaked, sick and exposed. Diseases like diarrhea and respiratory infections spread quickly in cramped and unsanitary conditions, further weakening already hungry bodies, with the lack of medical care compounding the suffering.

For internally displaced people across Myanmar, the food crisis is not just about hunger, it is about survival in a system that has seemingly abandoned them, not helped by recent aid cuts. With both local supply chains disrupted and international humanitarian access limited, many face a grim choice between starvation and returning to villages that no longer exist.

Children, who should be in school, now spend their days searching for food or firewood. Entire communities rely on a handful of shared rations, uncertain if help will arrive.

Sagaing and Rakhine are arguably the most crisis ridden areas of Myanmar, but there are other areas that are suffering. In many areas, food is no longer guaranteed. The civil war has stripped life down to its barest essentials, and even those are vanishing.

The most vulnerable people are left to wait, caught largely out of sight in a war that continues to plague the country.

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Cover photo of youths
in Yangon by AFP



Photo: AFP

LOST GENERATION

UNDP WARNS MYANMAR

YOUTH FACE CRISIS

Years after the destabilizing 2021 military coup, Myanmar's youth are in dire straits.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a report on 2 October, warning that Myanmar's youth, who make up more than one-third of the population, face a stalled future as education and job opportunities collapse under political instability, economic decline, and conflict.

The findings are drawn from the nationally representative Myanmar Youth Survey 2024, complemented by interviews and focus group discussions. Entitled "A Generation on Hold: Youth Employment and Education in Myanmar", this is the second report in a UNDP Asia-

Pacific series tracking the effects of prolonged conflict on young people in Myanmar. Rural youth are particularly disadvantaged with lower access to formal jobs and education compared to urban peers, deepening regional inequalities.

"The stalling of education-to-employment pathways in Myanmar represents not just an economic challenge, it sets off a generational alarm," said Kanni Wignaraja, UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. "Millions of young women and men are seeing their aspirations and their potential collapse under the weight of disrupted education, disappearance of good jobs and heightened insecurity on top of entrenched gender and social barriers."



A female resistance fighter remembers dead colleagues. Photo: AFP

ALARMING STATISTICS

The statistics are worrying:

High levels of youth exclusion from work: One in four youth — nearly 4 million — are not employed, with rates exceeding 50% in Kayah and 40% in Rakhine. Most employed youth work in informal sectors such as own-account farming or casual labor, leaving them vulnerable to income shocks and economic instability.

Widespread disengagement from learning: Three in four youth aged 18 to 24 — over 5 million — are no longer in education or training. This figure increased to four in five in rural areas, particularly in Tanintharyi, Chin, Sagaing, and Kayin.

Gendered burdens in education and jobs: Nearly one in four young women leave school due to household responsibilities, compared to just 5% of men. Women earn, on average, 22% less than men. In Tanintharyi, more than one-third of non-working women report that their spouses prevent them from seeking employment.

Instability of youth livelihoods: One in four youth changed their main source of income in the past two years due to layoffs, insecurity, or household pressures.

Rising risk of a 'NEET generation': Nearly one in five youth — around 3 million — are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). The rates are highest among women, at 25%, and in conflict-affected regions like Kayah, where the rate is 42%, and Rakhine, where it is 32%.



Normal lives shattered - a young woman takes up arms. Photo: AFP

RESILIENCE & AMBITION

Despite these challenges, the UNDP report highlights the resilience and ambitions of Myanmar's youth, with nearly half identifying technical education and vocational training as a top priority, and many already engaged in small-scale entrepreneurial activities, mostly out of necessity.

Based on this data, UNDP calls for immediate, locally-driven actions to expand flexible learning and vocational training, especially for rural, displaced, and caregiving youth. Aligning these skills with jobs in agriculture, digital, and green sectors. While challenging,

it is important to address specific barriers to young women's employment, from easing caregiving burdens and restrictive norms, to providing incentives for young women to remain in education and in the workforce. Supporting youth-led entrepreneurship and small businesses, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas is a lifeline.

"Investing in Myanmar's youth is critical for the country's future resilience and recovery," added Wignaraja. "What is at stake is more than jobs and education. It is the future capabilities and dreams of an entire generation."



Mon resistance fighters in training.
Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Kachin refugees. Photo: AFP

FIGHTING INTENSIFIES IN KACHIN STATE

Fierce clashes between the Myanmar junta and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) along with its allied resistance forces have intensified across several parts of Kachin State, as the junta pushes to reclaim control over rare earth mining zones in Chipwi and Hsawlaw townships.

According to KIA frontline sources, the junta has opened multiple offensives in Waingmaw, Bhamo, and Hkawnglanhpu areas since August, deploying local militias and Border Guard Forces (BGF) made up of Rawang fighters to assist its operations.

One major offensive was launched toward Lamyang village in Waingmaw Township, a strategic gateway to the Sadon route. Junta troops advancing through the plains of Waingmaw encountered strong resistance from the KIA and its allies, forcing them to retreat to Wuyang village after heavy fighting. Renewed clashes broke out on September 25, followed by intense battles on September 26 and 27, during which the deputy commander of Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 318 was reportedly killed by a KIA drone strike. In response, the junta launched retaliatory airstrikes using Y-12 aircraft targeting the Lamyang area.

In the Lanse area, joint forces of the junta and Khaunglanhpu-based militias have been assaulting KIA positions since September 19, supported by repeated airstrikes involving both Y-12 planes and jet fighters. The combined force, estimated at around 300 troops, initially retreated on September 22 after suffering losses but reentered from another route the following day, sparking renewed clashes. The KIA reported detaining prisoners of war, though it did not specify numbers.

The junta and Rawang militia are reportedly attempting to seize the Lahinsin post, a KIA stronghold on the Hkaunglanhpu-Lanse road, which remains under the control of KIA and allied forces.

In Bhamo, fighting has escalated since late September, following junta reinforcements in August. Junta troops launched counteroffensives to retake positions lost earlier in the year. While they managed to expand control in some northeastern parts of Bhamo,

the KIA and allied groups carried out counterattacks, intercepting junta columns and reclaiming several frontline posts. KIA sources said at least three major junta columns are currently engaged in ongoing battles scattered across the township.

Meanwhile, junta forces have continued air and artillery attacks targeting civilian areas. In Hpakant, indiscriminate drone and artillery strikes over six days left five civilians dead and eight seriously injured.

On September 22, around 2:30 p.m., the junta conducted an airstrike on Lanse village, killing three civilians, including a young boy, and injuring two others. Local residents said the attack occurred far from the active battle zone, suggesting it was carried out in retaliation for frontline losses.

A week later, on September 29, two jet fighters bombed Sadon town, killing eight people, including



Young women are in danger of being conscripted into the military. Photo: AFP

three schoolchildren, and injuring several others. Three of the wounded later died, raising the death toll to 11.

The renewed fighting and airstrikes underscore the junta's determination to reclaim resource-rich territories in Kachin State, while civilians continue to bear the brunt of its escalating military operations.

Women being conscripted?

Despite repeated denials from junta-aligned lobbyists, women across Myanmar are increasingly facing pressure and extortion related to the military's conscription law, with reports emerging even from Yangon, the country's commercial capital.

Residents from Yangon's North Okkalapa, Mayangone, and Hlaing townships told Mizzima that ward administrators have been demanding monthly payments from households to avoid being drafted into

the military. The targeting often focuses on homes where only women reside or where men are absent, they said.

According to the residents, families with men aged between 18 and 45 and women between 18 and 35 are being asked to pay between 50,000 and 500,000 kyats each month, depending on household income. "We have to pay 50,000 kyats every month. If not, they say we must go to military service," said a woman from Mayangone Township. "When we asked if paying that fee would protect us from being taken as porters or forced into conscription, they told us they couldn't guarantee anything."

The payments have added to the growing economic hardship faced by ordinary citizens amid spiraling inflation and high commodity prices. "People are already struggling with daily survival, and now this kind of extortion puts us at even greater risk," one woman said.



A collapsed monastery in Mandalay after the quake. Photo: AFP

As fear spreads, many women eligible for conscription have begun leaving the country through any available means. At the same time, the junta has reportedly tightened restrictions on young men and women attempting to travel abroad, especially those within the age range set by the conscription law.

According to the Myanmar Defense & Security Institute (MDSI) - an organization formed by defected soldiers after the 2021 coup - the junta secretly began the first batch of women's military training in June at the No. (4) Non-Commission Training School in Yangon.

Meanwhile, Khit Thit Media reported, citing junta sources, that around 500 new soldiers from No. (14) Conscription Training have died in combat, with another 200 injured after being deployed to active frontlines in northern Shan, Kachin, Kayin, Karenni, and Rakhine States, where fierce fighting continues.

Parents of some recruits confirmed that their wounded sons are being treated in military hospitals but said they are not allowed to visit them. "We only learned about our son's condition through brief messages he managed to send," said one parent.

While junta spokespeople continue to deny the enforcement of conscription for women, evidence from Yangon and across the country suggests that both men and women are being coerced, extorted, and even forcibly trained under the regime's expanding military recruitment drive.

Slow clean-up after quake

Six months after the powerful earthquake struck central Myanmar, recovery and reconstruction efforts remain slow and uneven, with survivors in Sagaing, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw still facing serious hardships.

Although Naypyidaw - Myanmar's administrative capital - has been prioritized for rehabilitation, progress remains limited. Reconstruction has mainly focused on key government buildings, including the presidential residence and the parliamentary complex. However, widespread destruction and logistical challenges have slowed the overall process, leaving many damaged residential and public structures unrepaired. Many government offices are now operating temporarily out

of parking lots, while staff who can afford to do so have rented private houses. The majority, however, are forced to live in container shelters or continue working in structurally unsafe buildings, highlighting the ongoing dangers and inadequate living conditions in the capital.

In Mandalay, temporary camps for displaced residents have been closed, and although the junta authorities and local charity teams have provided limited assistance, progress remains slow. People who received help have managed to clear the debris from their destroyed homes, but those who did not receive any support are still unable to remove the rubble. Residents say the rehabilitation process is "very weak and slow," despite repeated promises of aid.

Even months after the main quake, the region continues to experience aftershocks measuring around magnitude 5 on the Richter scale, renewing public fear. Seismologists have urged residents not to panic, emphasizing that these tremors are a normal part of post-quake activity.

The situation is particularly dire in Sagaing Region, which has been devastated not only by the earthquake but also by ongoing conflict between junta forces and resistance groups under the People's Defense Force (PDF) and National Unity Government (NUG). Recent flooding during the late monsoon season has compounded the crisis.

Although debris clearance has largely been completed, the reconstruction of homes has progressed only for a small number of families who can afford it. Most survivors remain unable to rebuild due to soaring construction costs and limited access to materials. "Due to the junta's restrictions on transporting construction materials into Sagaing, prices have skyrocketed, making it impossible for most residents to rebuild their homes," a local charity worker told BBC Burmese. Businesses in the affected regions have also struggled to recover, with many unable to return to pre-quake operations because of both the natural disaster and the conflict.

According to a recent report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Myanmar, survivors still urgently need housing reconstruction support and other humanitarian assistance six months after the disaster.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

NUG LABELS MIN AUNG HLAING'S REBRANDED JUNTA A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

On 30 September, the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement declaring the National Security and Tranquillity Commission and subordinate bodies as terrorist organisations, and its members – including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing – as terrorists.

The National Security and Tranquillity Commission, also known as the State Security and Peace Commission, is a rebranding of the military junta which took place in July.

The text of the NUG statement is as follows.

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 6, Subsection (g), and Section 72, Subsection (b) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, and with the concurrence of the Union Government, the Central Committee for Counter-Terrorism of the National Unity Government hereby issues this Declaration Order.

On 1 February 2021, the terrorist military group led by Min Aung Hlaing unlawfully arrested the democratically elected President, U Win Myint, the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of the civilian government, thereby seizing power from the people and committing the crime of high treason.

On 1 March 2021, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) declared the so-called "State Administration Council," led by Min Aung Hlaing, as a terrorist military group. On 5 September 2024, the National Unity Government further declared the same as the Enemy of the State and the People of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

On 31 July 2025, the said terrorist military group rebranded and reorganized the "State Administration Council" as the "National Security and Tranquillity Commission."

As the "National Security and Tranquillity Commission" is a direct continuation of the already-declared terrorist organization, the State Administration Council, and as it continues to commit atrocities and acts of violence against the people, the National Unity Government hereby:

- Declares the "National Security and Tranquillity Commission" and all its subordinate bodies as terrorist organizations; and
- Declares all members of the Commission, including Min Aung Hlaing, as terrorists.



FROM CHIN STATE TO MALAYSIA: WAR SHATTERS BURMESE MIGRANTS' LIVES

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The apartments of Burmese exiles in Malaysia are always at the top of a long walk up in old, run-down buildings with no air-conditioning, places Malaysians don't want to live in. On the fifth floor of one such building lives Michael, a Chin man who had been studying to be a pastor, but his training was cut short by the war. He returned home when he heard news of the coup and was unable to resume the seminary. "My plan was to do ministry in my hometown, in Myanmar." Over 90 percent of the population of Chin State is Christian. "But due to this military coup, I cannot stay. Every young person 18 to 35 years old must be in the army." So, he fled to Malaysia.

Since arriving, he found work in a restaurant, toiling long hours for low pay. One Burmese worker explained that the salary can be as little as 1,800 ringgit (about

\$420 USD) for 12 hours a day, six days a week. The Burmese share apartments, often with eight or more people in a single flat, each paying about 400 ringgit (about \$96 USD) for rent. Apart from covering food and living expenses, many also send money home to their families or, if possible, to support the resistance.

Michael befriended a local pastor who shared with him a self-study seminary program. Now, after his shifts in the restaurant, he studies Greek and Hebrew and the Old and New Testaments. And on his one day off per week, he has lessons with the pastor, hoping to realize his dream of ministering to his people. "The biggest spiritual need for the Chin people is forgiveness, forgiveness," he said. He talked about how many still have hatred for the junta "because of how they treated the people, and even they lost their family, and they lost

their property, and they lost their land. So, the hatred is still there. Sometimes it's very difficult to forgive them."

Adding to his family's hardship, his brother was deported back to Burma and now cannot travel from Yangon to Chin State to reunite with his wife and five children. The journey would be costly and extremely dangerous, as it requires crossing areas contested by multiple ethnic armed organizations.

"And he has to pay back money he borrowed," said Michael. His brother had borrowed money to come to Malaysia and now he has to deal with his debts in addition to being stuck in Yangon with no money, no job, and no way home. Communication with family back in Burma is also difficult because of the lack of electricity, phone, and internet services in most of the country. "Such experiences, and such things are a tragedy," lamented Michael. "Before the military coup, he had a good government job with a good salary, and he could take care of his family." Now he has nothing, because of the junta and the war.

Michael remains in Malaysia, doing his independent study, but he said he would go back "maybe if the country, the situation is normal, peaceful in Myanmar." He continued, "I don't want to be here in Malaysia. I have no choice."

In the evening, at a mamak restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, several Chin migrants gathered to watch the football match. While Liverpool defeated Crystal Palace, they ate plates of nasi goreng and drank Teh O ais limau, talking about the war and the lives they left back in Burma.

Twenty-year-old Solomon was hoping to finish high school in his township in Chin State when the war broke out. He briefly joined a local People's Defense Force (PDF), but his family urged him to focus on his education. He completed his GED and later moved to Malaysia to attend college.

Back in his township, Solomon said the PDF had about 400 to 500 soldiers who stayed in the jungle, fighting against the Burma Army. Many PDFs and resistance forces struggle to balance protecting civilians with keeping far enough away so that government bombs targeting the resistance do not fall on villages. Even so, the war often spilled into population centers. "Sometimes, if our township had fighting, everybody would leave. They would go to the forest and stay in camps. After that, if the fighting finished, they came back home."

This, Solomon explained, is how his family was living before he left, and how more than one-third of Chin people still live now, internally displaced or fleeing to India on a rotating basis. "Sometimes they run, sometimes they come back," he said. "They have no permanent house. They have just a temporary home. Because now it's fighting for years, so we cannot stay."

He described how airstrikes made life unbearable. "We cannot stay there in this war, because any time, by airplane, by jet fighter, they come and drop the bombs."

He reflected on his parents and siblings: "As you know, in Burma we have no income, especially in the fighting places. The people have many challenges because of the war. I am so very sorry for them, for my township and for my family."

He explained that sometimes, if there was a lull in fighting and the family could return to the township, it was possible to do some work or small business to earn money. But during the periods when they had to flee, it was impossible. "They cannot find money, they cannot work when they go to the camp. And we have a lot of children to take care of, but some people have no food."

Compounding his worries about his family, Solomon found it difficult to stay in contact with his parents. "In our township, the military cut all the internet, so the people have to use Starlink. But Starlink is very expensive," he said. Because it has to be ordered

from other countries like India, Bangladesh, or China, the cost is high. "If they want to use Starlink, they must get money, maybe 3,000 to 4,000 kyat (just under \$2 USD) for one hour."

For people with no income, this is unaffordable. Across the country, the average salary is estimated at about \$100 USD per month, but this is only an average. The vast majority of people living in resistance-controlled areas, like Solomon's family, have no regular income at all. And when they manage to find the money, they have to call Solomon. He cannot call them. Consequently, he said he only has contact with them about once a month.

"That's why most of the people come to Malaysia and Thailand. Actually, they don't want to come here. I also don't want to come here," he explained.

When Solomon first left Chin State, he was able to attend school briefly in Yangon. "But when I was about 18, they said we must go to the army. I didn't want to go," he said. "I don't want to go to the government army, because the military is killing people, and destroying their houses. Many, many thousands of people have died because of the military. So, I didn't want to go. If I join an army, I will join the resistance army. That's why I came here to study."

Now he lives with his older brother and some members of his Chin community. "I have contact with the guys in my house and people from my township. We talk, and I encourage them."

Sitting beside Solomon was his good friend Alex who was about the same age. They came from the same part of Chin State, spoke the same dialect, but had very different stories. Alex had already spent 10 years in Malaysia and could speak some Malay and English, but he never got to earn a GED. He was educated in the Burmese community school in Malaysia, "but we don't have proper teachers," he said. The teachers were just volunteers from the community, often with no formal

education themselves. And of course, the school lacked resources. "Not like kids who come now," said Alex. "Even if the school is not good, they can learn English from YouTube."

Unlike Solomon, Alex had no passport, only a UN card. While this theoretically allowed him to work, he said the police would often shake down refugees for money, taking them into custody and demanding payment for release. "Sometimes it is only 300 ringgit," he said (about \$72 USD), "but for those with no UN card and no ID, the fee could go as high as 3,000 ringgit."

The lack of a passport meant that, other than being deported, there was no way for Alex to leave Malaysia or return to Burma. He waxed nostalgic as he recalled the last Christmas he remembered in his homeland. "We have a custom where you take the food and smear it on people's faces if you love them." He laughed at the memory. "When the war is over and I can return to Burma, that will be the best Christmas ever," he concluded.

Alex would have liked to attend university, but out of economic necessity he was working, taking whatever labor or restaurant jobs he could find. Still, he hoped that one day he could become a successful businessman. "And then I will help my people," he said, dreaming of a brighter future.

Solomon still has two more years of studies in Malaysia. He said it was important for him to get his diploma because after the war, Chin State will need educated people to help rebuild. And like Alex and many of the Chin in Malaysia, the only way he can see his parents again is if the war ends. Still, he is hopeful. "We hope God will restore this democracy. I hope, I believe, we will win this fighting, this war. We will get democracy in Myanmar. One day, God will prepare that for us, absolutely, for us."

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

ELECTION WATCHDOG WARNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED POLLS LACK CREDIBILITY

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) has warned that Myanmar's military junta is preparing to stage elections that fall short of democratic legitimacy, releasing a report on 30 September that argues the planned vote cannot be regarded as credible under international standards.

The report, Myanmar Junta's Planned Elections: Falling Short of Democratic Legitimacy, details 15 areas where the process violates basic democratic principles. It concludes that the polls announced for 28 December 2025, will unfold in an atmosphere of "widespread violence, restrictive laws, and intense repression," with no independent oversight and only junta-approved political parties competing.

Myanmar's armed forces, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, seized power on 1 February 2021, citing alleged fraud in the 2020 general election. The military's accusations have never been substantiated. The coup triggered nationwide protests and an armed resistance movement that has since escalated into full-scale civil war.

The junta's five-point roadmap promised to hold "free and fair multiparty democratic elections" once the state of emergency ended. After seven consecutive extensions, emergency rule expired in July 2025 and the regime rebranded itself as the State Security and Peace Commission, an "interim government" tasked with overseeing the vote.

But ANFREL's assessment finds that the promised elections will be marred by systemic flaws. These include the introduction of untested electronic voting machines, curbs on freedom of assembly and expression, exclusion of independent media and civil society monitors, and an electoral framework designed to secure the military's grip on power.

The report indicates that far from resolving Myanmar's political crisis, the widely perceived "sham elections" are likely to deepen divisions and prolong suffering. "More than a question of legality, these elections raise profound moral concerns given the ongoing suffering of the population," says the report.

The watchdog drew on extensive monitoring, dozens of stakeholder interviews, and nearly two decades of experience observing elections in Myanmar, including the 2015 and 2020 polls. It urged the international community not to endorse the junta's roadmap, warning that recognition of the results could legitimize military rule and undermine regional commitments to democratic norms.

ANFREL pledged to continue working with Myanmar civil society and regional partners to "uphold democratic principles and to draw attention to the challenges and risks" surrounding the planned elections.



NEW ZEALAND MPS URGE GLOBAL ACTION ON MYANMAR CRISIS, REJECT JUNTA'S 'SHAM ELECTION'

A delegation of New Zealand opposition MPs has called on Wellington and the wider international community to reject Myanmar's planned December elections, describing them as a "sham" designed to entrench military rule, and urged greater humanitarian support for communities devastated by conflict.

The appeal by MPs Phil Telford, Rachael Boyack, and Teanau Tuiono came at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand in Bangkok on Monday, following the conclusion of a nine-day fact-finding mission to the Thai-Myanmar border.

Boyack, of the Labour Party, said the crisis in Myanmar had been overshadowed by other global conflicts. "We need to see a significant uptick in humanitarian aid," she said, noting that aid needs to actually reach communities inside Myanmar. She went on to praise Thailand's pragmatic support for NGOs but warning of worsening conditions on the Indian and Chinese borders.

Tuiono, a Green Party MP, said every group they met during the trip – from exiled politicians to youth activists – had urged the rejection of the junta's polls. "People told us this isn't a general election, it's a general's election," he said. With the military controlling only about a quarter of the country, Tuiono argued, "there is no way this can be a fair election." In conclusion, he stated, "the international community must reject it".

Telford, a former minister, warned that Myanmar is "really the worst conflict in Asia, the major source

of forced displacement." He criticised wavering liberal democracies for considering engagement with the regime. His reply to this was "hold on to your principles and be true to the people of Myanmar." He also found fault with ASEAN for a muted response. He singled out China, saying its support made it "complicit" in the junta's war crimes.

The MPs said their meetings with more than 30 groups highlighted growing support for federal democracy and grassroots governance initiatives, including health and education services set up by ethnic communities. Young leaders, they noted, are playing a central role in shaping a post-military future.

They also raised alarm over collapsing international aid, particularly the US cuts to Myanmar programs and looming food shortages for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. They welcomed proposals for an ASEAN humanitarian fund but stressed that aid must bypass the junta to reach those in need.

The delegation pledged to press New Zealand's government to reject the elections, review humanitarian assistance, and deepen engagement with Myanmar's democracy movement.

The Myanmar's people "deserve a better future," Tuiono said. He advocated a more "holistic approach that actually is what is good for communities in terms of having their ability to be free in their own lands is actually what's going to help move the whole country to a better and freer society."



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA OFFERS A MONTHLY 30,000 KYAT BONUS TO LOYAL STAFF AMID SOARING INFLATION

Myanmar's military junta will provide an additional monthly allowance of 30,000 kyat to government employees who are not participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), state-controlled newspapers announced on 1 October.

The payments, starting this month, will apply to both military and civilian personnel under junta control, including retired staff. Daily wage earners working in government departments and affiliated organisations will receive an extra 1,000 kyat, according to the reports.

However, the allowance will not extend to employees on official overseas study leave or to retired staff residing abroad.

Since seizing power in a coup in 2021, the junta has raised allowances twice for active personnel and

once for retirees. The latest increment is being framed as a measure to support staff amid economic instability. But some workers remain unconvinced by the gesture.

"How can it cover the costs? It can't. I'm not excited," a government employee in Naypyitaw told Mizzima, pointing to the impact of rising prices.

Myanmar's economy has been in steady decline since the coup, with inflation placing immense pressure on household incomes.

In June, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported that approximately 2.7 million people in Yangon were living in poverty, with conditions continuing to deteriorate.



MYANMAR ONE CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHTERS SPONSORED BY KAREN BGF LEADER'S FAMILY AMID CONTROVERSY OVER SCAM LINKS *HAN HTOO ZAW FOR MIZZIMA*

The family of Colonel Saw Chit Thu, commander of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), has provided financial and logistical support to several Myanmar athletes who participated in recent One Championship events in Thailand, raising concerns over the growing influence of criminal-linked entities on international platforms.

According to one competitor who spoke to Mizzima, Saw Chit Thu's family financed the travel and expenses of athletes, including Thwe Lin Htet, who competed in Bangkok on 26 September; Sein Lone Chaw, Har Ling Om, and Soe Naing Oo, who fought in August; and Eh Mwi, who took part on 12 September.

"They provided a car for going and coming. There is some financial support. This is the first time we've received support for this month's competition," said Ko Phyo Wai, founder of the Phyo Wai Club. He did not disclose the exact amount of financial assistance received.

The appearance of the SKK Thaung Ying FC logo on stage during the event has drawn criticism, with observers calling it a provocative gesture amid international scrutiny. A Karen youth activist described the act as "flipping off" the US, China, ASEAN, and Western countries.

"This act is like flipping off the US, Western countries, China, and ASEAN. It's like saying, 'I have money, I have weapons, I have power—what do you want to do about it?'" he said.

The SKK (Shwe Kokko) brand, prominently associated with online scam operations and human trafficking along the Thai-Myanmar border, has been the focus of international condemnation.

Shwe Kokko, under BGF control, hosts modern infrastructure tied to over 100 Chinese-run businesses allegedly involved in illicit online activities, including gambling, scams, and illegal currency exchanges.

Despite an official announcement on 4 September 2024 that all operations under the Yatai International Holding Group – a Chinese company partnered with the BGF in the Shwe Kokko development – would be suspended by 15 September, locals report that activities have not only continued but expanded.

The BGF reportedly earns around US\$3.8 billion annually from its scam and casino operations, according to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

Saw Chit Thu's children – Colonel Saw Eh Htoo Moo, Lieutenant Colonel Saw Chit Chit, and Nan Nwe Nan Da Aye – operate several sports clubs and own shares in BGF-affiliated businesses. Their teams, such as BSO FC, Thaung Ying FC, and ARKU'S FC, regularly compete in local events. Most of the teams are reportedly composed of individuals working in scam companies and are named in Chinese.

One Shwe Kokko local noted that most competitions are orchestrated for show, with winning teams often linked to the BGF leadership. "These teams are mostly from companies running scam operations," the resident said.

A Karen political analyst said the use of sports and entertainment is part of a broader strategy to normalize BGF's image and maintain influence among the Karen population despite international sanctions.

In August, Saw Chit Thu reportedly planned a football match to celebrate the first birthday of his grandson, offering a record 3 billion kyat prize—nearly four times the Myanmar National League (MNL) championship prize of 750 million kyat.

In May 2024, the United States sanctioned Saw Chit Thu and two of his sons and designated the the Karen National Army (KNA) – a rebranding of the BGF – as a criminal organization. Additional sanctions followed on 8 September, targeting BGF-linked businesses including the Chit Lin Myaing Group and Shwe Myint Thaung Ying Company.

Although the BGF claims to have cut ties with Myanmar's junta and reorganized as the KNA, it continues to operate under the BGF banner. It has also allowed and supported the junta's election plans in the territories it controls.

Meanwhile, renewed fighting in Lay Ka Kaw New Town in Karen State has displaced over 3,000 civilians since early September, but BGF-controlled scam centres such as Dongmei Park and KK-Park continue to function undisturbed, even in conflict zones.

Despite ongoing battles since 2021 along key areas including the Myawaddy-Wally Road and the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge 2, BGF's scam hubs remain intact, highlighting the growing impunity of armed criminal enterprises operating across Myanmar's borders.



KALAY DISTRICT POLICE CHIEF SUSPENDED BY NUG SUBMITS REBUTTAL, CITES POLICY DIFFERENCES

Kalay District Police Chief U Aung Gyi, who was suspended by the National Unity Government (NUG) earlier this month, has submitted a rebuttal statement addressing the decision, citing a mismatch between ground-level realities and central policies.

Speaking to Mizzima, U Aung Gyi said he was officially suspended from duty on 10 September by the Interim Local People's Administrative Implementation Committee, which operates under the authority of the NUG's Prime Minister.

"From my perspective, if it's a breach of conduct or discipline, there's nothing to explain. This is due to policy differences. I've submitted a letter stating that the ground-level difficulties and the central decisions are mismatched," he said.

The letter, according to U Aung Gyi, outlines systemic challenges encountered in Kalay Township and reflects on the broader context of the Spring Revolution. He emphasized that the submission is not an appeal to regain his position but a formal explanation of differing views and practical constraints.

He declined to disclose the exact date of the rebuttal submission or provide full details of the incident leading to his suspension.

Despite the disciplinary action, U Aung Gyi stated his commitment to the revolution.

"This is not about any individual or group. It's about achieving federal democracy and resisting military dictatorship," he said.

In response to his suspension, ten police personnel who had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) reportedly resigned from their posts.

The NUG's police force in Kalay has been actively involved in arresting individuals for drug-related crimes and transporting criminal offenders to court, as part of its law enforcement efforts in the region.

In a related development, U Lu Lay, the People's Administration head of Kalay Township, has also been suspended, according to a person close to the local administrative team.

"He couldn't handle ground-level operational duties on time, which was seen as underperformance. There was also insufficient support from village-level administration, so he was put on hold," the source told Mizzima.

Attempts to reach U Lu Lay for comment have so far been unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Kalay Township continues to experience active conflict between junta forces and local revolutionary groups. The leadership vacuum caused by the suspension of both the police chief and township administrator has sparked concerns about governance and coordination during a critical time.

Critics warn that the delay in appointing a new township administration head could hinder coordination between village tracts and disrupt both military and civilian operations. Although the issue has been submitted to NUG's central leadership, the appointment process remains stalled.

Mizzima has contacted NUG officials for comment on these developments, but no response has been received as of 29 September.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS TWO CIVILIANS IN PALETWA, INJURES SEVERAL OTHERS

Two civilians were killed and several others critically injured after a military airstrike struck Paletwa, a town under the control of the Arakan Army (AA), on the afternoon of 29 September, according to local reports.

Arakan Princess Media, a local news outlet, reported that junta fighter jets conducted three separate strikes between 12:31 and 12:40 pm, targeting Paletwa Public Hospital, a mobile phone shop named 'Zaw,' and an area known as Bo Te.

The attack claimed the lives of Ma Mya Mya Khin, 19, and Daw Thu Zar Win, also known as Boke Boke, 42. Emergency medical teams are treating the injured, with some victims reportedly in critical condition.

This strike is the latest in a series of aerial assaults

by the junta on areas under the AA's control. In recent weeks, such bombings have intensified across Rakhine and Chin States.

The most fatal incident this month occurred on 12 September, when an airstrike on Pyinnyar Pankhin Private High School in Thayet Tabin village, Kyauktaw Township, killed at least 19 students and children.

More recently, on 26 September, a 500-pound bomb hit Tat-U Monastery in Toungup Township. The following day, another bombing in Thandwe left one person dead and injured five others, including a six-year-old child and a pregnant woman.

The junta has not issued a statement regarding the latest airstrike.

MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES ADVANCE TO WITHIN FOUR MILES OF KYAUKME, TNLA ACCUSES JUNTA OF USING POISON GAS BOMBS

Fierce clashes are escalating near Kyaukme town as junta forces advance to within four miles of the area, which remains under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), according to a TNLA spokesperson.

"Our administration remains in Kyaukme town, with no indication of withdrawal. Fierce clashes are ongoing in the Longwal area, just four miles from Kyaukme," said TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo in an interview with Mizzima.

As of the morning of 28 September, junta troops were continuing their push toward the town following the capture of Nawngkhio on 15 July. Fighting has since erupted in multiple villages, including Longwal, Taungsaylate, and Sakhantha.

According to the TNLA, junta forces deployed three poison gas bombs during the clash in Longwal, causing several TNLA soldiers to experience symptoms such as dizziness, vomiting, nausea, fatigue, and rapid breathing. The affected soldiers are currently receiving medical treatment.

Lway Yay Oo claimed that the military commission has used chemical weapons at least seven times since the launch of "Operation 1027," including in recent battles near Kyaukme.

On 28 September, TNLA troops stationed in Mine Tin village also located four miles from Kyaukme on the Mogok-Kyaukme road withdrew from the area after local villagers demanded their departure.

"There are civilians in the Mine Tin area, and the residents did not want our troops stationed there, leading them to dismantle the checkpoints," she said. However, she denied any claims that TNLA forces were withdrawing from Kyaukme town itself.

The TNLA stated that it would alert local civilians in the event that junta troops reach the town.

"Currently, many civilians have taken refuge. If the military commission troops enter the town, we will warn the locals as soon as possible," Lway Yay Oo said.

In a video released on 26 September by the pro-military People Media Telegram channel, military supporter Kyaw Soe Oo claimed junta troops were nearing Kyaukme and suggested the town could fall within days if TNLA forces withdraw as they did in Nawngkhio.

After the junta took Nawngkhio on 16 July, the TNLA announced that its civil administration and public offices had been relocated to safer areas.

Fighting in and around Kyaukme, along with continued military airstrikes, has displaced an estimated 10,000 residents, local sources and humanitarian workers report. Many are now in urgent need of food, shelter, and medical aid.

Kyaukme was captured by TNLA and allied forces in early July 2024 during the second phase of Operation 1027. The current clashes mark a significant push by junta forces to reclaim the strategic town.



Dead children lie on the road.
Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL 11 CIVILIANS, INCLUDING CHILDREN, IN KACHIN STATE

At least 11 civilians, including two five-year-old children, were killed after Myanmar's military junta carried out two airstrikes on the town of Sadone in Kachin State on 29 September, according to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

The attacks targeted a local market near a school in the afternoon and evening, Colonel Naw Bu, a KIA information officer, confirmed on Monday. He described the second airstrike as hitting during ongoing rescue efforts.

"Eight civilians, including two children, were killed instantly, and three more died later of their injuries. The second strike hit while rescue operations were underway. This was not a battle zone. Bombing schools and civilian areas, then striking again, means they targeted rescue teams. This is inhumane," said Naw Bu.

The dead included six adults identified by the KIA

and two children, one of whom was the son of a local resident, U A Ywet. One body remains unidentified. Three other victims, who succumbed to their injuries later, were also adults.

Six people, including two children, are receiving treatment for severe injuries, according to the KIA.

Sadone, located about 25 miles west of Kanpaikti near the China border, has been under KIA control since early June 2024. Colonel Naw Bu accused the junta of committing a war crime, noting there was no active fighting in Sadone at the time of the airstrikes. However, he acknowledged that clashes between junta forces and the KIA continue elsewhere in Waingmaw Township.

The junta has not issued a statement on the incident.

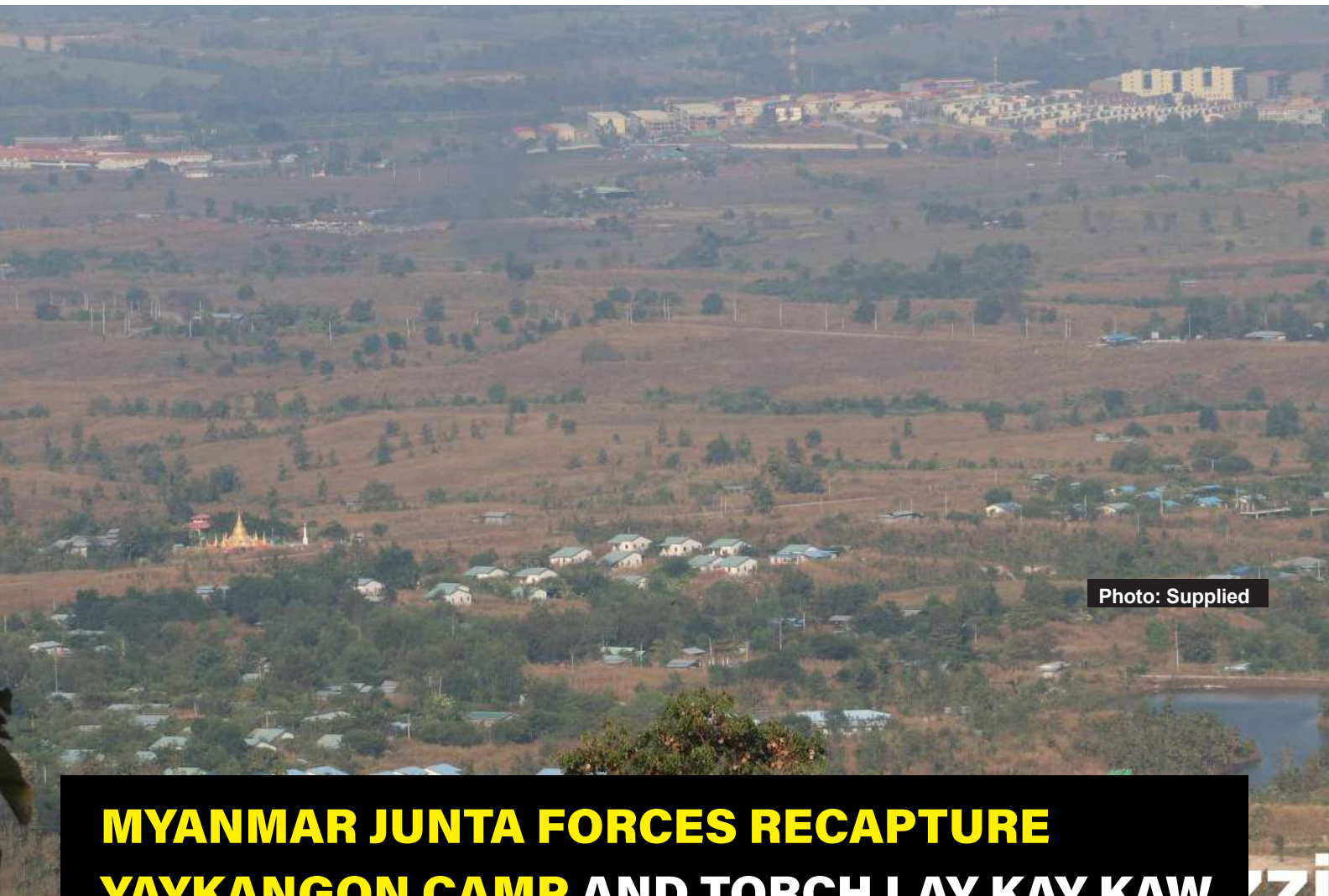


Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RECAPTURE YAYKANGON CAMP AND TORCH LAY KAY KAW TOWN

Myanmar junta forces recaptured Yaykangon hill camp near Lay Kay Kaw town, south of Myawaddy near the Thai-Myanmar border, on the morning of 29 September, according to military sources. The camp had previously been under the control of the Karen National Union (KNU).

Following the recapture, junta forces reportedly set fire to Ward 6 of Lay Kay Kaw, escalating the offensive in the region. The assault, which began on 22 September, involves a joint operation between the junta and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF).

"They captured Yaykangon camp this morning. We lost one comrade. The enemy column from Kyaukgu advanced on our forward posts on Lay Kay Kaw hill before retreating back toward Yaykangon," a revolutionary soldier told Mizzima.

Residents and resistance fighters reported that five kamikaze drones, including large fixed-wing drones and smaller FPV (First Person View) units, flew over

the area during the morning assault.

"This morning, five kamikaze drones flew overhead, including large aircraft-style kamikaze drones and smaller FPV drones. The enemy sniper was highly skilled, shooting from around 500 meters. I heard he was a gold medallist," said a revolutionary soldier.

In a further escalation, two schools in Hpalu and Minlatpan villages were struck by kamikaze drones in the afternoon of 29 September, damaging the buildings.

The previous day, 28 September, the military carried out four airstrikes on the town of Lay Kay Kaw and bombed the Miba Mytta restaurant in Hpalu village. A day earlier, on 27 September, a monastery adjacent to the Hpalu school was also bombed.

The ongoing offensive has displaced more than 3,000 civilians from at least six villages, with many seeking shelter along the border. The area remains tense as fighting continues on multiple fronts.



Photo: Harish Shivaraman

WOMEN IN YANGON TOWNSHIPS FORCED TO PAY TO AVOID MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Women in several Yangon townships are being coerced into paying monthly fees to local administrators and Military Commission officials to avoid being conscripted into military service, according to residents.

Locals from North Okkalapa, Mayangone, and Hlaing townships told reporters that ward administrators have been holding community meetings to inform households of new monthly charges.

The fees, which range from 50,000 to 500,000 kyats depending on income levels, are reportedly collected from families with men aged 18 to 45 and women aged 18 to 35.

"We have to pay 50,000 kyats each month. If we don't, we're told we could be taken into military service," said a woman from Mayangone Township. "But even if we pay, they won't take responsibility if we're still chosen."

Residents allege that ward officials often arrive at homes with weapons in hand to collect the payments, heightening fear among families already burdened by rising inflation and commodity prices.

"They're just robbing us now, armed and demanding money," the same woman said. "We're paying without any guarantee that we'll be safe from conscription."

Many women eligible for conscription say they are

seeking ways to avoid military service, including trying to prove they are enrolled in educational programmes or making arrangements to leave the country - though such efforts are becoming increasingly difficult.

"I'm over the age limit now, but my niece is 20. I'm trying to protect her," said a woman from North Okkalapa. "But leaving the country isn't easy anymore. No matter what connections you have, nothing is truly safe - they control everything."

Under the Military Commission's People's Military Service Law, men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 are subject to mandatory conscription.

Specialists, such as doctors and engineers, can be drafted up to age 45 for men and 35 for women. The initial service period is up to two years, extendable to five years during a state of emergency.

The military has also tightened restrictions on international travel for individuals of conscription age, further limiting options for those seeking to avoid enlistment.

According to local sources and pro-military Telegram channels, the military is currently training its 17th batch of conscripts and actively recruiting for the 18th batch - allegedly through abductions, roadside arrests, and random name-based targeting.

REFUGEES ALONG THAI-MYANMAR BORDER TO BE GRANTED LIMITED WORK RIGHTS FROM 1 OCTOBER



Refugees in a Thai camp. Photo: Supplied

Beginning 1 October, Myanmar refugees living in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border will be allowed to work legally in Thailand under strict conditions, according to Thai officials and refugee representatives.

Under the new arrangement, only individuals who are granted official work permits will be allowed to leave their camps and only with authorization. Family members will not be permitted to accompany them, a restriction that has raised concerns among refugee leaders.

"When employers come to hire refugees, they sign a one-year work visa contract, and the refugees must commit to working for at least a year," explained an official from one of the refugee camps.

Phichat Dawphan, Director-General of the Thai Department of Employment, confirmed that refugees must meet six conditions to be eligible for departure. These include health checks at government hospitals, purchase of health insurance, and the issuance of official work permits prior to employment.

Saw Bwe Say, secretary of the Karen Refugee Committee, voiced concerns about the separation of families caused by the policy.

"How will the refugees find it convenient? They've been living together in the camps for over 50 years, and now only one person will be allowed to leave," he told Mizzima. "Family members worry about the individuals who leave, especially since the work is far from the camps and the employment period lasts for one year."

According to the Karen Refugee Committee,

around 12,000 of the 42,000 eligible refugees across nine camps have registered for the program. The camps are located in the Thai provinces of Mae Hong Son, Tak, Kanchanaburi, and Ratchaburi. Refugees are generally prohibited from leaving these camps without government approval.

"The list was gathered about a month and a half to two months ago. In the meantime, there is nothing from the refugee side – they just registered," Saw Bwe Say added. "Starting 1 October, it's unclear which day exactly the selection and processing of workers will begin."

The employment process is being rolled out in phases. The first step of compiling a list of willing workers is currently ongoing. In early October, employers will begin selecting workers and submitting their names to provincial labour offices.

After that, selected workers will be taken to undergo health checks and receive health insurance. Employers will then request formal permission from the district administration office for workers to leave the camps. The province where the job is located must also be notified.

This move follows a labour shortage in Thailand after tens of thousands of Cambodian workers returned home due to a recent conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. On 26 August, the Thai government announced that it would begin allowing Myanmar refugees in the camps to fill labour gaps, with implementation starting on 1 October.



CHINA SENTENCES 16 MYANMAR-LINKED GANG MEMBERS TO DEATH

A Chinese court sentenced to death on 29 September 16 members of a family-run criminal gang that established deadly scam centres in Myanmar's Kokang region on the border with China, among other crimes.

Scam compounds have flourished in Myanmar's lawless borderlands, staffed by foreigners -- many of them Chinese -- who say they were trafficked and forced to swindle people online, part of a multibillion-dollar illicit industry.

Beijing has stepped up cooperation with Southeast Asian nations in recent months to crack down on the compounds, and thousands of people have been repatriated to China.

The Wenzhou Intermediate People's Court said on Monday that a family-run criminal organisation had engaged in cyber fraud, drug trafficking, organising prostitution, setting up casinos, and other crimes from 2015.

They had "relied on armed force" to establish multiple compounds in Kokang, the court said in a statement posted on social media.

The court said the group had killed 14 people, including 10 involved in fraud who had tried to escape from the group or disobeyed its management.

It cited one incident in October 2023, when the accused "opened fire" on people at a scam compound to prevent them from being transferred back to China.

The group's operations attracted numerous "financial backers" to whom it provided armed protection, and involved more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion), the court said.

Five of those sentenced to death were granted a two-year reprieve, while another 23 suspects were given prison sentences ranging from five years to life.

In April, the United Nations warned that Chinese and Southeast Asian gangs are raking in tens of billions of dollars a year through cyber scam centres.

The activity, which relies on an army of workers often trafficked and forced to toil in squalid compounds, was spreading to South America, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and some Pacific Islands, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said.

The UN estimates that hundreds of thousands of people are working in scam centres globally.

By April this year, around 7,000 people from at least two dozen countries had been repatriated from Myanmar.

AFP



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR'S RAKHINE STATE FACES HUNGER CATASTROPHE AMID CONFLICT AND AID CUTS

Rakhine State in western Myanmar is now confronting a severe hunger crisis, as conflict, restricted humanitarian access, and sharp reductions in aid deepen suffering among civilians, especially the Rohingya, according to press and social media reports.

Aid agencies warn that the region's dire food insecurity could escalate into full-blown catastrophe. More than 100,000 children in Rakhine are suffering from acute malnutrition, but fewer than 2 per cent of them have access to treatment.

Conflict between the military junta and the Arakan Army is making supply routes dangerous or impassable,

while the junta has been accused of actively blocking food and medical assistance into heavily affected areas.

Markets are running dry, prices have soared to many times normal levels, and many families have been reduced to eating leaves, roots, or skipping meals entirely.

The United Nations estimates that across Myanmar, 16 million people are acutely food insecure, and 540,000 children may suffer from severe malnutrition this year - a 26 per cent increase over last year.

UN Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR UN ENVOY URGES END TO JUNTA TO RESOLVE ROHINGYA CRISIS

At the opening segment of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 30 September, Myanmar's UN Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun called for international action against the junta, emphasizing that the coup and atrocities are the root causes of the Rohingya crisis.

The text of his statement is as follows.

We thank the speakers for the insightful remarks during the opening segment and wish to register our sincere gratitude to H.E. Philemon Yang, President of the 79th Session of the UNGA and the two co-facilitators, Ambassador Elina Kalkku, Permanent Representative of Finland and Ambassador Ahmad Faisal Muhamad, Permanent Representative of Malaysia for bringing this conference to fruition.

Madam President,

The situation of Rohingya Muslims represents a protracted and severe humanitarian and human rights crisis.

Challenges facing the Rohingya people, encompassing those remaining in Myanmar and those subsisting as protracted refugees in host countries, are complex and multifaceted.

Since the mass exodus, displacement is reportedly increasing, and the affected population faces existing and new challenges. These include a lack of sufficient humanitarian aid, recurring conflict and violence, education and health issues, early child marriage, child labour and human trafficking.

Myanmar remains indebted to the host countries. We also appreciate the host countries for improving living conditions of the refugees and their access to health and education services as well as employment opportunities.

To effectively address the crisis, Myanmar and the host countries urgently need substantial support from the international community, in addition to establishing

a conducive environment inside Myanmar.

Regrettably, Madam President, the current reality including continued aerial attacks by the military junta across Myanmar including Rakhine State overshadows any near-term prospect for the safe, dignified, and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas.

The reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) provide a common message that the human rights situation in Myanmar is dire.

The clear reason for this lies with the military junta's unlawful military coup in February 2021. They are the sole culprit and the root cause to the destruction of Myanmar's peace and security.

For over 4 years, all people of Myanmar have struggled for their lives.

Every single day, the military junta kills and arbitrarily abduct individuals, regardless of age and gender. They consistently employ their usual tactics of terror against civilians. These perpetrators have been launching indiscriminate artillery bombardments and aerial attacks to instill fear on innocent civilians.

Furthermore, forceful conscription threatens all households, including Rohingya families and other minorities and international criminal networks have found safe haven in Myanmar.

Madam President,

The National Unity Government adopted a Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2021 and commits to resolve the crisis as part of its overarching ambition.

To create a conducive environment for repatriation, first and foremost we must end this military dictatorship and its atrocities against civilians, and we all need to double every effort to build trust and unity among us.

At the same time, we all have to respect and adhere to the international humanitarian law and international human rights law to make each and every individual enjoy their fundamental rights.

In this regard, the role of our neighbouring countries, the regional organization and the international community including the United Nations so much important. Here is my humble advice to you all. Since you know well of the unspeakable suffering of the people of Myanmar including Rohingya, please do not support the military junta politically, militarily and financially and strongly reject the junta's planned scam election.

Finally, Madam President, resolving the situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar will not be possible unless we address the root cause. We can yield results only by acting together to end the military dictatorship, its unlawful coup, and its culture of impunity.

At a time when human rights, justice and humanity are under critical attack, please help in our genuine endeavour to build a federal democratic union that rooted in these very principles. Genuine, inclusive federal democracy will bring a viable and sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

Today's high-level conference must achieve this goal and send a strong message of solidarity and hope to all people of Myanmar including Rohingya through a decisive and effective action.

Most importantly, please send a clear and strong signal that the international community will not fail the people of Myanmar.



ROHINGYA TELL UN OF MYANMAR BLOODSHED, SUFFERING

A Rohingya refugee who fled ethnic violence in Myanmar along with 750,000 others in 2017, spending seven years in Bangladesh, described 30 September the endless cycle of violence and exile facing the mostly Muslim minority.

Addressing a special UN conference on the Rohingya, Maung Sawyeddollah held up a photograph of dead women and children in civilian attire and said they had been killed by an armed group fighting against Myanmar's army.

"These people were killed in a drone attack by the Arakan Army on August 5, 2024," said Sawyeddollah, part of the Rohingya Students Network.

"These are not isolated cases, they are a part of a systematic campaign...Where is justice for Rohingya?"

The mostly Muslim Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades, with many escaping the 2017 military clampdown that is the subject of a UN genocide court case and now finding themselves unable to return as fighting rages in Rakhine state.

The state, their homeland in western Myanmar, has been the site of some of the most intense fighting between the army and Arakan Army since the 2021 military coup that overthrew the democratic government.

"The Junta blocks aid, recruits Rohingyas as human shields and continues systematic oppression," said Wai Wai Nu, founder of the Women's Peace Network, who spent several years imprisoned in Myanmar.

The Rohingyas are now targeted by the Arakan Army, a predominantly Buddhist ethnic armed group that fights the junta and whose tactics "mirror" the junta's "massacre, force recruitment, arson, torture... sexual violence," she stated.

A number of UN officials corroborated her testimony.

"Their plight is somehow unique -- not only do they continue to be discriminated (against), deprived of rights and abused, a situation they have endured for decades, but they are also caught in one of several ethnic conflicts affecting the country -- except it is not their own," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

He added that 1.2 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are facing the impacts of drastic cuts in international aid.

'Dangerous and overcrowded'

"We have also suffered deeply in the dangerous and overcrowded camps because of restrictions on livelihood opportunities", said Lucky Karim, who spent six years in a Cox's Bazar camp, adding she was grateful to Bangladesh for taking her in.

"Our goal is to return to our homeland safely with rights, but how do we get there?"

Earlier, UN Special Envoy on Myanmar Julie Bishop warned that bloody fighting between Myanmar's army and the Arakan ethnic armed group was proving an "insurmountable barrier" to the return of displaced Rohingya.

The human rights and humanitarian situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State has sharply deteriorated since November 2023, deepening the life-threatening conditions faced by the Rohingya living there.

The impoverished state -- a riverine slice of coastal Myanmar bordering Bangladesh -- has witnessed intense suffering in Myanmar's civil war, triggered by a 2021 coup deposing the democratic government.

AFP



Photo: AFP

ARAKAN CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT CHALLENGES CLAIMS OF ROHINGYA MASSACRE IN RAKHINE STATE

A coalition of Rakhine-based civil society groups has disputed widely reported allegations that the Arakan Army (AA) massacred hundreds of Rohingya civilians in northern Rakhine State last year, releasing findings from an independent investigation that contradict accounts of a large-scale atrocity.

The Arakan Civil Society Forum (ACSF) said its inquiry into the alleged 2 May 2024 killings in Htan Shauk Khan village, Buthidaung Township, found no credible evidence to support claims that as many as 600 Rohingya were massacred.

The report, published Tuesday, draws on group interviews with local residents, Muslim community leaders, and displaced villagers, as well as demographic data and population records. Investigators documented testimonies that described heavy clashes between the Myanmar military, its Muslim conscripts, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) fighters, and the AA between 3-4 May 2024. Witnesses said around 100 combatants, mainly junta troops and allied forces, were killed, while only two civilians were confirmed dead.

Population displacement records also undermined claims of mass killings, the report said. Of 933 residents counted in the village before the fighting, roughly 800 remain sheltered in nearby communities while just over 100 fled to Bangladesh. These figures, ACSF noted, were inconsistent with the scale of casualties alleged by some rights groups and media outlets.

"Respondents and witnesses categorically refuted the allegation of a massacre," the report stated. "All evidence points instead to a fierce battle between armed actors, with civilian casualties limited but widespread

displacement caused by shelling and airstrikes".


The ACSF launched its investigation amid competing narratives. A recent report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights cited accounts of mass civilian killings, while the Arakan Rohingya National Coalition accused the AA of genocide and war crimes. Conversely, local religious leaders and Myanmar-based media questioned the veracity of key testimonies, including one survivor later identified as not being from Htan Shauk Khan.

The ACSF said its objective was not only to clarify facts but also to promote "communal trust, peaceful co-existence, and social harmony" between Rakhine and Muslim communities in the state. It urged caution against misinformation and hate speech, warning that unverified atrocity claims risk undermining fragile intercommunal relations.

Recommendations included calls for the UN and international rights bodies to reassess their reporting on the incident, to re-verify witness information, and to engage local civil society groups in future investigations.

"All respondents," ACSF said, "feel highly concerned with the self-interest and orchestrated and misguided narratives" which could erode trust just as communities are slowly rebuilding cohesion after years of conflict".

The Htan Shauk Khan case remains deeply contested, reflecting the broader struggle over facts and narratives in Myanmar's multi-front war, where independent verification is scarce and rival groups battle not only in villages but also in the information space.



Female resistance fighters in a safe house. Photo: AFP

IN THE CROSSHAIRS

INSIGHT MYANMAR

How a tour guide joined the resistance and found herself aiming through a sniper's scope on the front lines of war

“We have to go forward,” says Pandora. “We have to fight to win! And we believe, until now, we could win.”

Pandora had been living a quiet life in Yangon. She was a professional tour guide, hardly interested in politics. When Covid hit in 2019, her livelihood ground to a halt, and she returned to her hometown of Bago. Then the coup changed everything...

As was the case with so many young people, her outrage propelled her into activism. Taking to the streets, she joined local demonstrations and quickly became a leader, organizing students and youth in her small town. At first, she and her fellow protesters underestimated the danger. They believed the regime could be toppled within weeks through sheer energy and numbers. Only when friends were arrested and threats mounted did she realize she herself was at risk.

Her parents pleaded with her to stop, referencing her vulnerability as a young woman. Instead, Pandora chose to flee to the borderlands to continue contributing to the revolution. It was a wrenching decision though, leaving her family behind, perhaps forever. She explains how her choice was driven by the determination not to let the younger generation suffer under the same broken education system she had endured.

The transition from city life to the jungle was not easy. Conditions were harsh: poor food, leaking tents, no phone service and constant uncertainty. Yet she found solidarity with other young people equally determined to fight back. The initial months were spent adapting, and then in September 2021 she entered formal training with the People's Defense Forces (PDFs). Out of some 200 trainees, only 13 were women.

She remembers this period as both challenging and surprisingly supportive. Some commanders treated female recruits like sisters, encouraging them to believe in themselves. However, she notes how broader cultural prejudices persisted, as some men doubted women's physical abilities, or had been brainwashed that woman had diminished spiritual power, or pon. For example, she describes being forced to bathe downstream from men, as well as other female fighters who were prohibited from going to the front.

But the challenge in Pandora's case was more deep-rooted. This is because she had witnessed actual gender-based violence in her family home— she had thought it was “normal” for wives to be beaten. She now openly acknowledges her trauma, drawing connections between the violence in her home and the structural violence of the military and patriarchy. These layers of trauma intertwine in her memory, making healing difficult. She notes that other fighters, male and female,

suffer trauma too, though many avoid rest, insisting on returning to the battle despite their exhaustion.

Returning to her training, Pandora describes how for the first month, everyone received general instructions before being asked to choose a specialization: commando, mining, or sniper. Pandora rejected mining because she feared explosives, and commando work because of the constant exhaustion and the prospect of face-to-face combat. Sniping, by contrast, allowed her to strike from a distance, and she chose it.

She had never touched a weapon before. When she first stepped up to the firing line with a handgun, she was shaking so hard she thought she might not be able to shoot! Yet with her trainer's guidance, her very first shots hit the target. She quickly advanced to heavier weapons—the M4 and M16— which demanded significant physical strength to manage their weight and recoil. Daily drills included running with rifles slung



PDF fighters during training.
Photo: Supplied

across their backs, push-ups while holding the guns, and long endurance sessions to build stamina and confidence. Over time, she learned not just how to hold a weapon but how not to fear it.

Her consistent accuracy earned her a place in an advanced sniper program, a small group of just a dozen participants. Pandora was the only woman accepted. At first she used an M4 fitted with a scope, but eventually she trained on a proper .308 sniper rifle. By then, her instructors were recommending her as one of the most capable shooters in the cohort.

In that program she also met her boyfriend, another sniper trainee. They became a professional team as well as a couple, working in the classic sniper-spotter pairing. She served as spotter, calculating distance, wind speed, and timing, and passing those judgments to him before the shot was taken. The work demanded extreme patience and discipline. On some

missions they had ten or fifteen minutes to prepare; at other times only seconds. If winds exceeded sixteen kilometers an hour, they had to wait. Sometimes that wait stretched for an entire day, or even a week, lying hidden in the same position.

Pandora endured the harsh field conditions, but the hardest part was the moral weight of the work. Every calculation, every call she made as spotter, was linked to a life taken. Even after leaving the jungle, the burden followed her. She describes waking at night to the faces of those she had seen through her scope, her sleep shattered by nightmares and flashbacks.

Eventually Pandora left the jungle, still committed to the revolution yet needing some separation from combat. She revived an idea she had once had— to start her own clothing brand. Under the label Rise and Shine, she sews with local fabrics in Mae Sot, selling online— international orders have even reached the



Female resistance recruits.
Photo: Supplied

UK, US, and Singapore. Rise and Shine also employs civil disobedience movement participants. Her brand name symbolizes both the brightness of a new day and the hope of a liberated future.

Besides her business, she pursues political education, enrolled in an online diploma class about federalism and peace studies through a Myanmar university program. These courses have opened her eyes to the historical suffering of ethnic minorities, which she had not really understood before. She says that learning about the military's decades-long repression of ethnic groups, including bans on native languages, shocked her. "We really don't know about the actual grievances of the ethnic groups," she reflects. Now, empathy and solidarity drive her to advocate for broader awareness of human rights and the need for unity across Myanmar's divides.

A recurring theme in her story is that deepened awareness of and commitment to women's empowerment. She teaches sewing to survivors of gender-based violence among migrant worker communities and envisions broader programs once she can return to her hometown. Yoga practice has also become a tool for healing and for teaching resilience

to other women. She emphasizes how the revolution has changed her sense of self: once apolitical, she now wants to "promote women empowerment in Myanmar," challenging norms that normalize domestic abuse and silence women's rights.

Four years on, Pandora reflects on the trajectory of the resistance. In early 2025, she says, revolutionary forces felt strong. Now the military has regained ground, and the urgency for progress on the battlefield has increased, especially with national elections looming. She warns that if the revolution does not advance before the election, its momentum could stall. Still, her belief in eventual victory endures. She insists that international support matters, but the core strength lies in the energy and determination of Myanmar's youth.

In the end, Pandora responds with gratitude and resolve. "We need to unite each other," she says, urging citizens and international allies not to give up. Her final appeal is direct: "Please support us. We remain determined to fight the military. Please believe us!"

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/9/23/episode-404-in-the-crosshairs>



Female resistance fighters.
Photo: Supplied

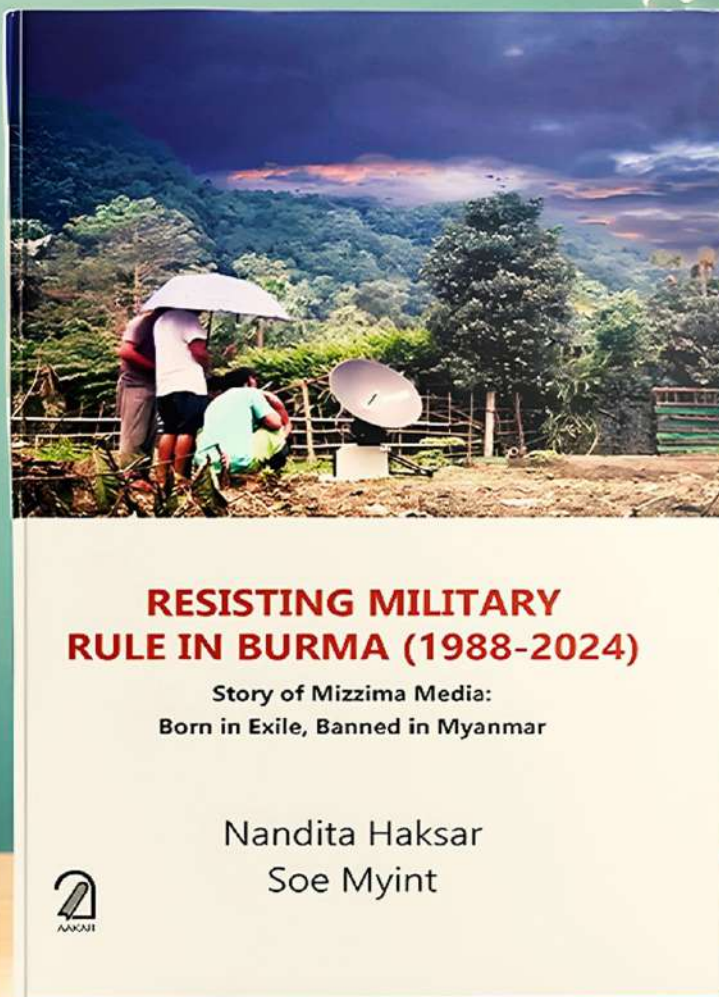


Resistance fighters.
Photo: Supplied

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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India is building a mega dam.
Photo: AFP

INDIA PLANS MEGA-DAM TO COUNTER CHINA WATER FEARS

On a football field ringed by misty mountains, the air rang with fiery speeches as tribesmen protested a planned mega-dam -- India's latest move in its contest with China over Himalayan water.

India says the proposed new structure could counteract rival China's building of a likely record-breaking dam upstream in Tibet by stockpiling water and guarding against releases of weaponised torrents.

But for those at one of the possible sites for what would be India's largest dam, the project feels like a death sentence.

"We will fight till the end of time," said Tapir Jamoh, a resident of the thatch-hut village of Riew, raising a bow loaded with a poison-tipped arrow in a gesture of defiance against authorities. "We will not let a dam be built."

Jamoh's homelands of the Adi people are in the far-flung northeastern corner of India, divided from Tibet and Myanmar by soaring snowy peaks.

Proposed blueprints show India considering the site in Arunachal Pradesh for a massive storage reservoir, equal to four million Olympic-size swimming pools, behind a 280-metre (918-foot) high dam.

The project comes as China presses ahead with the \$167 billion Yaxia project upstream of Riew on the river known in India as the Siang, and in Tibet as the Yarlung Tsangpo.

China's plan includes five hydropower stations, that could produce three times more electricity than

its vast Three Gorges dam -- the world's largest power station -- though other details remain scant.

Beijing -- which lays claim to Arunachal Pradesh, fiercely rejected by India -- says it will have no "negative impact" downstream.

"China has never had, and will never have, any intention to use cross-border hydropower projects on rivers to harm the interests of downstream countries or coerce them," Beijing's foreign ministry told AFP.

Chinese media reports suggest the project may be more complex than a single giant dam, and could involve diverting water through tunnels.

The area around the village of Riew is one of the shortlisted sites for India's response mega-dam, a project that people like Jamoh feel is the more immediate threat to them.

"If the river is dammed, we also cease to exist," the 69-year-old told AFP, saying that the arrow's tip was dipped in poisonous herbs foraged from the mountains.

"Because it is from the Siang that we draw our identity and culture," he added.

'Water bomb'

Despite a thaw between New Delhi and Beijing, the two most populous nations have multiple areas of disputed border manned by tens of thousands of troops, and India has made no secret of its concerns.

The river is a tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra, and Indian officials fear China could use its dam as a

control tap -- to create deadly droughts or release a "water bomb" downstream.

China rejects that, saying that the "hype surrounding the Yaxia Hydropower Project as a 'water bomb' is groundless and malicious".

But Arunachal Pradesh state Chief Minister Pema Khandu said protective action against China's dam is a "national security necessity", and sees India's dam as a safety valve to control the water.

"China's aggressive water resource development policy leaves little room for downstream riparian nations to ignore it," said Maharaj K. Pandit, a Himalayan ecology specialist at the National University of Singapore.

India's dam could produce 11,200-11,600 megawatts of hydropower, making it the country's most powerful by a huge margin, and helping scale back emissions from its coal-dependent electricity grid.

But generating power is not the priority, acknowledged a senior engineer from National Hydropower Corporation (NHPC) -- the federal agency contracted to develop the dam.

"It is meant for water security and flood mitigation -- if China seeks to weaponise their dam and use it like a water bomb," the engineer said on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to talk to reporters.

"During the lean season, the reservoir will be filled to capacity, so that it can add in if water is diverted upstream," the officer said. "That is the calculation."

In the rains, water will only reach up two-thirds of the dam wall -- so there is capacity to absorb water if released suddenly by China.

India's former ambassador to Beijing, Ashok K. Kantha, called China's dam project "reckless" and said that India's dam, as well as generating power, would be a "defensive measure" against potential attempts "to regulate the flow of water".

'Identity and culture'

India's dam would create a giant storage reservoir of 9.2 billion cubic metres, but the exact area flooded depends on the final location of the dam.

The Adi people, like Jamoh, consider the river sacred and depend on its life-giving waters for their lush lands dotted with orange and jackfruit trees.

They fear the dam will drown their world.

"We are children of the Siang," said Jamoh, who was the former headman of Riew -- before being forced

to quit by local government authorities for protesting against the dam.

In May, furious Adi villagers blocked NHPC from surveying a proposed site.

Today, government paramilitary forces watch over the charred remains of the drilling machines that protesters torched. But the protests have not stopped.

When AFP visited, thousands gathered to hold a traditional court-style meeting of Adi clans to condemn the proposed dam.

"We are asking for a project plan to have an idea of the magnitude of the dam," said Bhanu Tatak of the Siang Indigenous Farmer's Forum (SIFF), a local protest group.

"Instead they have militarised us, treating us like extremists," she said.

The dam, the local residents are convinced, would drown dozens of villages.

"If they build a huge dam, the Adi community will vanish from the map of the world," said Likeng Libang, from Yingkiong, a town that even officials say is likely to be entirely underwater.

"The Adi will be totally displaced," he added. "We will be nowhere."

NHPC did not respond to AFP's requests for comment.

'Dam-for-dam'

India's "dam-for-dam" approach may be counterproductive, said Anamika Barua, a transborder water governance expert at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati.

"Diplomatic engagement, transparent water-sharing agreements, and investment in cooperative river basin management would yield more durable and equitable outcomes than reactive infrastructure building," she said.

Building mega-dams in earthquake-prone Arunachal Pradesh is also risky, said Barua.

But India's construction drive of massive dams suggests it will not back down on this project. Two other major dams overcame local resistance.

"If the dam must be built, I hope I die before that day comes," said bow-and-arrow-wielding Jamoh.

AFP

VANITY OVER VALUE: HOW CHINA'S INFRASTRUCTURE OBSESSION FUELS CORRUPTION AND DEBT

SUN LEE



On August 31, 2025, a video surfaced online showing a gleaming escalator snaking up the mountainside of the Lingshan Scenic Area in Jiangxi Province. Branded as the “Yunding Sky Ladder,” this US \$18 million project was hailed as a technological marvel, a 700-meter-long, ten-section escalator ascending the equivalent of 88 floors in just 20 minutes. But beneath the polished steel and promotional fanfare lies a deeper, more troubling reality: a system where infrastructure is not built for public good, but for political gain, personal enrichment, and propaganda.

The escalator began trial operations on July 25, 2025, and was suspended just a week later amid public backlash. The project, financed through local government special bonds, was awarded to a state-linked contractor for 127.9 million yuan. By the end of 2023, only 42 million yuan had been paid, leaving over 90 million yuan in outstanding debt. With the project

managed by a state-owned enterprise, the burden falls squarely on taxpayers, many of whom are already grappling with delayed salaries, high unemployment, and weak consumption.

This is not an isolated case. It is emblematic of a broader pattern in China’s infrastructure sector, where vanity projects are greenlit not for their utility but for their optics. Under the Chinese Communist Party’s cadre evaluation system, local officials are incentivized to boost GDP figures, often through large-scale construction. The result? A proliferation of bridges to nowhere, ghost rail stations, and now, escalators rusting in the rain.

The Lingshan escalator, while marketed as a tourism innovation, has drawn sharp criticism. Environmental experts warn that carving steel into the mountain has damaged vegetation, displaced wildlife, and increased risks of soil erosion and water loss. People mocked the

project, suggesting it was designed for officials who wanted mountain views without the climb or worse, as a vehicle for siphoning public funds. Some even speculated that dismantling the escalator later would create another round of profit opportunities.

This cynical view is not unfounded. Investigations by China's disciplinary authorities have repeatedly uncovered embezzlement and fraud in infrastructure projects. Contracts are often awarded to politically connected firms, budgets are inflated, and oversight is minimal. Once completed, many of these projects are underused or abandoned, yet their maintenance costs continue to drain local coffers.

The economic context makes this even more egregious. China's public debt is estimated in the tens of trillions of yuan. Local governments, facing shrinking revenues and mounting obligations, are increasingly reliant on land sales and bond issuance to fund development. But as the property market cools and bond yields rise, the sustainability of this model is in question. The Lingshan escalator, with its multimillion-yuan annual maintenance costs, exemplifies the fiscal recklessness that has become normalized.

Moreover, the social contract is fraying. Citizens are growing weary of seeing their money spent on projects that serve no practical purpose. In an era where basic services are underfunded and economic anxiety is rising, the spectacle of a mountain escalator feels like a cruel joke. Public anger is not just about waste, it's about betrayal.

The CCP's response has been predictably opaque. While local authorities promoted the escalator as a post-pandemic tourism booster, they failed to address concerns about cost recovery, environmental impact, or actual usage rates. Critics argue that the project undermines the essence of hiking replacing challenge

and communion with nature with a mechanized shortcut. Others point out that escalators, like cable cars, are vulnerable to weather disruptions, making them unreliable even during peak tourist seasons.

Looking at the broader landscape, China's infrastructure mania is a symptom of deeper systemic rot. The obsession with growth-at-all-costs has led to distorted priorities, where appearance trumps substance. Roads are laid where no one walks, parks bloom where no one visits, and statistics are manipulated to justify spending. The problem doesn't end with construction. Debt repayment and maintenance drag on for years, often outlasting the officials who approved the projects.

Despite repeated exposures and public criticism, these projects continue to resurface under new names and in new locations. Infrastructure has become a panacea for struggling local economies, but the debt is left for future generations. The Lingshan escalator may serve as a turning point, but unless the performance evaluation system itself is reformed, China's obsession with flashy, impractical infrastructure will persist leaving long-term damage to both society and the environment.

The real tragedy is not the rusting escalator, but the system that built it. A system where corruption is institutionalized, accountability is absent, and public trust is eroded. Until transparency, oversight, and genuine public interest replace vanity and vested interests, China's infrastructure will remain a monument not to progress, but to failure.

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



BETWEEN GUNS AND GHOSTS

"It is, at times, it's quite heavy!"

These are the words of James Rodehaver, the head of the UN Human Rights Office on Myanmar, reflecting on the emotional burden of bearing witness to mass atrocity. His decades-long career in human rights—in Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Syria, and now Myanmar—has taught him to navigate repression and conflict; but what he encountered in Myanmar, both before and after the 2021 coup, marked a uniquely tragic turn.

Perhaps the first thing to share about the UN Human Rights Office's Myanmar team is that they are not allowed to operate in Myanmar, much to Rodehaver's chagrin, as the regime does not allow them access inside. And so from across the border, they are charged with monitoring ongoing (as well as past) human rights violations, advising other UN agencies, and assisting civil society. Since the coup, its work has focused primarily on violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the targeting of civilians, and the legal and institutional collapse across Myanmar. It's a far cry from what Rodehaver had expected of the post when he initially joined. Back then, during the latter stages of the democratic transition, he was hoping

he would oversee post-conflict work, such as working on issues like transitional justice. Instead, the coup shattered that reality, and he found himself heading a team tasked with documenting the Myanmar junta's escalating atrocities.

Rodehaver draws disturbing parallels between Myanmar and the Syria governed by the Assad regime. He characterizes both countries as "very fractured," with an extremely repressive and violent military apparatus. But he says Myanmar's situation is even more complex, with its many ethnic fault lines and historical trauma, made worse by the recent betrayal of democratic aspirations many had hoped would stabilize the country.

When asked about the anger many Burmese feel toward UN agencies engaging with the military junta, James Rodehaver acknowledges that frustration as being "completely understandable." He explains that some UN agencies choose to engage with military authorities to secure access and protection for humanitarian operations, even though such engagements are "wholly unsatisfactory." He clarifies that similar engagement is occurring behind the scenes with other actors, such as the NUG, CRPH, and ethnic armed organizations—but these interactions are not publicized, often at the request of those groups, in order to protect humanitarian workers. He stresses that UN engagement with the military should always include "tough messages" demanding they uphold their obligations to protect civilians and warning of future accountability for ongoing violations.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/9/15/episode-400-between-guns-and-ghosts>



Photo: AFP

CHINA LEADS MYANMAR RICE IMPORTS IN FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF FY2025-26

China has emerged as the top importer of Myanmar rice in the first five months of the 2025-26 financial year, purchasing nearly half a million tonnes of rice and broken rice, according to figures released by the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

Between April 1 and August 31, 2025, China imported 498,926 tonnes, outstripping other major buyers by a wide margin. Indonesia ranked second with over 120,000 tonnes, followed by the Philippines (106,000 tonnes), Belgium (89,000 tonnes), Spain (35,000 tonnes), and Madagascar (20,800 tonnes). Other export destinations included Poland, Senegal, the UK, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Italy.

Myanmar exported just over one million tonnes of rice and broken rice overall at a value of US\$355 million during this period. Monthly shipments ranged from 142,700 tonnes in April to 193,000 tonnes in August. May recording the highest volume at over 529,000 tonnes worth US\$91 million.

Sea routes continued to dominate rice exports, while only limited quantities were shipped across

border trade points, likely due to ongoing conflict in border areas and closed trade gates.

The MRF has set an ambitious target of three million tonnes in rice exports for the current financial year. In FY 2024-25, Myanmar earned US\$1.13 billion from 2.48 million tonnes of exports.

To support this goal, the junta's Ministry of Commerce is reportedly collaborating with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and commodity associations to coordinate monthly export targets and facilitate overseas sales.

Myanmar's rice trade remains a key foreign exchange earner amid a dire economic situation due to political upheaval, armed conflict and international sanctions. China's position as the leading market underscores the continued importance of bilateral agricultural trade between the Naypyidaw and Beijing despite geopolitical tensions.



RAKHINE FACES HUNGER CATASTROPHE AMID CONFLICT AND AID CUTS

Rakhine State in western Myanmar is now confronting a severe hunger crisis, as conflict, restricted humanitarian access, and sharp reductions in aid deepen suffering among civilians, especially the Rohingya, according to press and social media reports.

Aid agencies warn that the region's dire food insecurity could escalate into full-blown catastrophe. More than 100,000 children in Rakhine are suffering from acute malnutrition, but fewer than 2 per cent of them have access to treatment.

Conflict between the military junta and the Arakan Army is making supply routes dangerous or impassable,

while the junta has been accused of actively blocking food and medical assistance into heavily affected areas.

Markets are running dry, prices have soared to many times normal levels, and many families have been reduced to eating leaves, roots, or skipping meals entirely.

The United Nations estimates that across Myanmar, 16 million people are acutely food insecure, and 540,000 children may suffer from severe malnutrition this year - a 26 per cent increase over last year.

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.