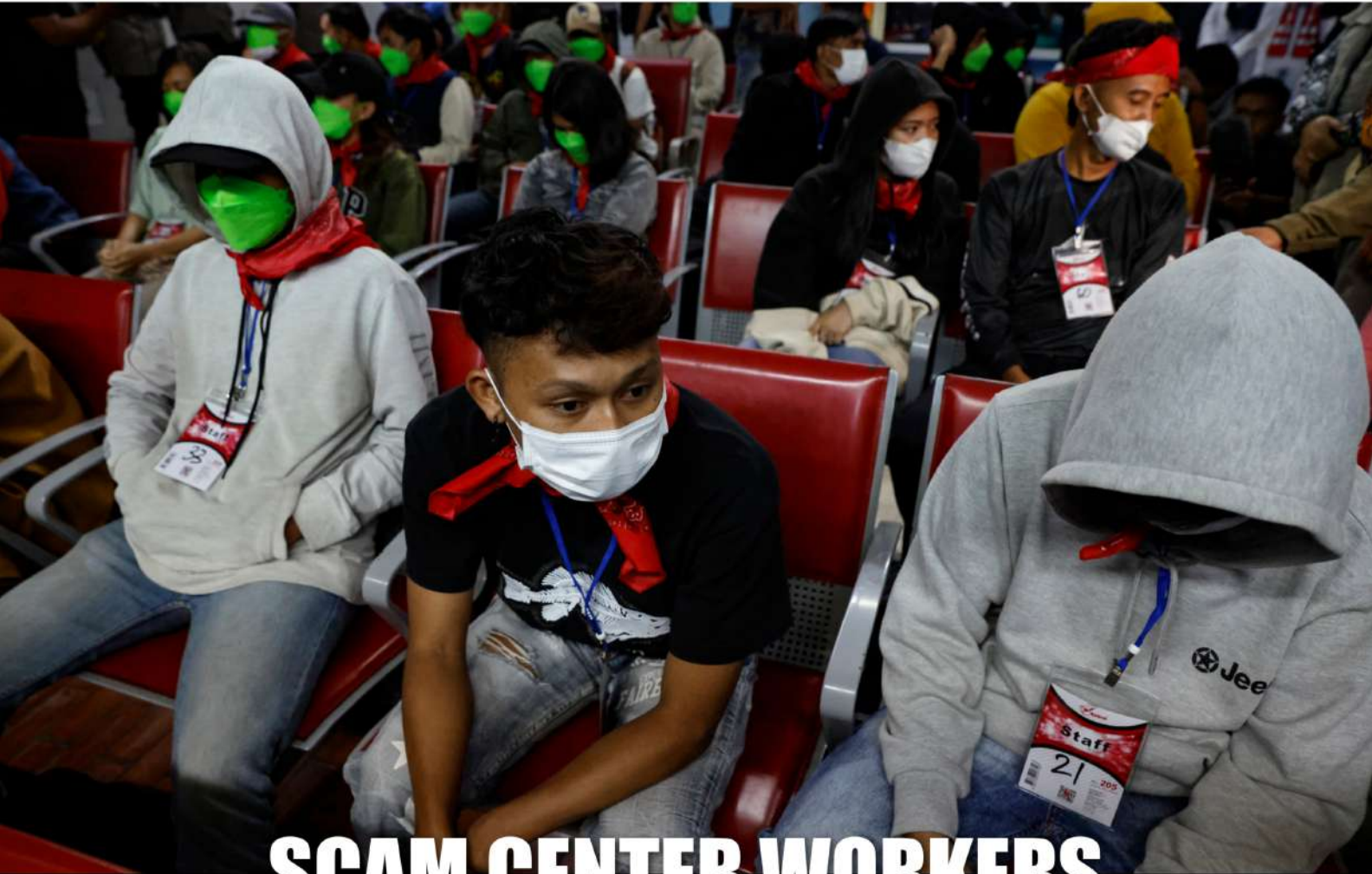


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



SCAM CENTER WORKERS

Some Are Voluntary, Most Are Trafficked

No hope, false hope: Myanmar youth hit educational dead ends in Thailand

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

SCAM CENTRE RAID SEEKS TO POLISH MYANMAR JUNTA'S CREDENTIALS

The Myanmar junta's recent crackdown on a notorious cyber-scam centre near the Thai border reflects more than a law-enforcement effort - it is a calculated attempt to polish its battered international image ahead of elections planned for December and January. The junta, which seized power in the 2021 coup, has been under severe diplomatic isolation. Its sudden move against a major criminal hub appears designed to signal cooperation with regional partners and project the image of a regime restoring order after years of chaos.

The timing is revealing. With the Myanmar military promising elections as a path to "stability," the regime faces growing skepticism at home and abroad. The scam compound, which employed thousands of trafficked workers and generated huge profits through online fraud, had become a regional embarrassment, but it is one of many. China and Thailand, both key economic partners of Myanmar, had repeatedly pressured Naypyidaw to curb the criminal networks operating along the border. By staging a high-profile raid and deporting foreign nationals, the junta hopes to show these governments that it is a responsible regional actor capable of tackling transnational crime.

However, the move exposes the regime's deeper weakness rather than its strength. Many of these scam operations flourished in border areas controlled by militias formally allied with the army. For years, the military tolerated or even profited from these illicit economies, using them to finance local operations and maintain fragile alliances with ethnic groups. That the junta only now acts against them - after sustained international pressure - suggests not renewed control, but desperation. The crackdown is less about dismantling criminal networks than about salvaging credibility at a moment when legitimacy is in short supply ahead of the planned poll.

Diplomatically, the junta's problem is that such gestures are unlikely to convince anyone beyond its immediate partners. Regional observers, including ASEAN members, have seen similar patterns before - symbolic enforcement actions meant to deflect criticism without addressing systemic abuses. Western governments remain focused on the regime's human-rights record, its brutal suppression of dissent, and its ongoing war against ethnic-armed resistance movements. A single crackdown on a criminal compound will not offset the perception of a military that continues to imprison opponents, bomb villages and murder civilians.

The junta's domestic situation compounds its diplomatic isolation. Despite controlling major cities, it struggles to govern vast rural areas now under the sway of resistance forces. Its promised elections are widely dismissed as a sham, designed to entrench military power under a civilian façade. Foreign governments understand this, and few expect a credible democratic process. Even China, while pragmatic, sees the junta as unstable and unreliable.

In this context, the raid on the scam centre is best understood as an image-management exercise - an attempt to manufacture legitimacy where little exists. It may win temporary praise from Beijing or Bangkok, but it does not resolve the deeper crisis of authority at the heart of Myanmar's political collapse. Unless the junta couples such actions with genuine reforms, peace talks, and a credible political transition - all of which the resistance rejects - its bid for international rehabilitation will fail. The crackdown might impress foreign diplomats for a moment, but it cannot mask the reality of a regime still fighting its own people and clinging to power through fear.

EDITORIAL

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**Cover photo of scam centre workers
by AFP**



Scam centre workers in custody.
Photo: AFP

SCAM CENTER WORKERS: SOME ARE VOLUNTARY, MOST ARE TRAFFICKED

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The recent raid on a scam center in Burma, coupled with the seizure of numerous Starlink devices, has brought scam centers back into the spotlight of both the media and the international community. According to the 2024 Global State of Scams Report, scams drained an estimated \$1.03 trillion worldwide in 2023. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reports that these operations generate approximately \$40 billion in annual profits.

In addition to the financial fraud, scam centers have become one of the largest destinations for human trafficking. Human trafficking organizations are particularly concerned about individuals who are abducted, tricked, or forced to work in these centers. However, some workers join voluntarily, lured by the promise of high potential earnings.

Mwey Mwey, a 38-year-old Chinese woman who speaks Shan, Chinese, Burmese, and Thai, is originally from Mong Kueng Township in southern Shan State. Now living in northern Thailand, she shared her personal experience working with scam centers.

Four years ago, she began working in Tachileik for the Hoang Bang Company's call center gang as a translator, earning 55,000 baht per month. "All workers must live in the building at all times; we're not allowed to go outside, and outsiders aren't allowed in," she explained. Employees spend nine to ten hours a day creating fake social media profiles using stolen photos and videos to make them appear authentic across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Each worker operates two phones simultaneously, while a separate crew ensures the devices remain charged so the scams can continue uninterrupted.

According to Mwey Mwey, the company hires young people, typically between 15 and 25 years old, especially those skilled in IT and languages. She claimed they could earn between 100,000 and 150,000 baht per month, paid in Thai baht and Chinese yuan. Only authorized vendors licensed by the company are allowed to sell food and water inside the building. The compound is heavily guarded by armed personnel in United Wa State Army (UWSA) uniforms, and local residents are forbidden from approaching.



The wages Mwey Mwey mentioned are six or more times what a college graduate earns in Thailand, and seven or more times wages in Laos, Vietnam, or Cambodia. Scam center workers have come from as far away as Africa and even Europe. Thousands of people worldwide have been trafficked into scam compounds run by Chinese mafia networks along the Moei River, opposite Thailand's Mae Sot and Phop Phra Districts. Many were lured by fake job offers in Thailand, only to be transported across the border into Myanmar, where they were detained and forced to work in online fraud operations. Victims describe modern-day slavery conditions, long hours, confinement, violence, and constant surveillance. Some are beaten, starved, or sold between compounds if they resist.

Despite this, a smaller number of workers, especially young Thais, enter the scam economy voluntarily. Drawn by promises of high pay, they take positions inside compounds in Myanmar, Laos, or Cambodia, believing they can "get rich fast." However, most later find the work brutal and exploitative. Even when Thai workers were "rescued," some resisted repatriation, preferring to stay for the money despite the harsh conditions.

Inside these compounds, the routine is rigid and exhausting. Workers spend long days generating fake social-media personas and engaging in romance or investment scams under threat of punishment. While the pay can appear lucrative, most profits go to criminal bosses and armed groups such as the Karen Border



Myanmar junta releases photos of their raid on a scam centre.
Photo: Myanmar junta

Guard Force (BGF) and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), which protect the compounds. In contrast, trafficked victims, often from China, Malaysia, and other countries, receive little or no pay. Many describe being deceived by recruiters, trapped by debt, or physically prevented from leaving.

Mwey Mwey also revealed that her close friend works as a recruiter and broker for the company, earning large bounties for each young person she snags. "The people brought in are essentially sold to the company. Once inside, they have no chance of leaving," she said. Workers who fail to meet financial targets are harshly punished.

According to Mwey Mwey, her friend deceives young people by promising them better jobs, only to hand them over to the company where they become trapped. Once recruited, these workers are pressured to lie to their families to extract money. She recounted the story of one young Shan man who was forced to ask his family for money under the pretense of needing investment funds. After his family's resources were drained, he was transferred to another city under United Wa State Army (UWSA) control.

"As news of these call centers spreads on social media, local police and Burmese soldiers sometimes raid the buildings," she added. "But top leaders and bosses are usually tipped off in advance by the police and leave before the raid. High-ranking officials from the Burmese military and police profit from these call centers; in reality, they're all part of the same network."

During one raid on her building, various young workers, Chinese, Burmese, Thai, and members of ethnic minorities, were arrested. Mwey Mwey managed to avoid prolonged detention by presenting her Thai ID card. "They charged me 150,000 Thai baht for my release, and I agreed," she said. After her release,

she crossed the Tachileik–Mae Sai border and returned home.

Most scam center workers were not as fortunate as Mwey Mwey. They never got to return home.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that "hundreds of thousands" of people are forcibly engaged by organized criminal gangs in online scam operations across Southeast Asia, including romance scams, investment fraud, and illegal gambling. Cambodia and Myanmar are identified as the main hubs. The OHCHR estimates that at least 120,000 people are being held in scam compounds in Myanmar and around 100,000 in Cambodia under similar conditions.

Despite recent high-profile raids by the Myanmar junta, it is unlikely these scam centers will ever disappear. They are massive cash cows, generating billions of dollars in near-pure profit each year. Whoever controls the scam centers controls vast fortunes. In Burma, only a few armed groups are powerful enough to seize these operations, but that would simply mean a change in management, not an end to the crimes.

Meanwhile, if the United States succeeds in pressuring Elon Musk to shut down Starlink, which enables communication for both civilians and scam centers, the entire population of Burma will suffer. Millions would lose their only means of communication, as well as the ability to report junta atrocities to the outside world. Even without Starlink, the scam centers would likely continue, replacing it with similar Chinese technology to keep their operations running.

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

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Photo: AFP

JUNTA INTENSIFIES ACTION IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

The Myanmar junta has intensified its counteroffensive operations in northern Shan State, advancing toward areas controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) following their capture of Hsipaw town on October 15.

According to frontline sources, junta troops have pushed westward along the Hsipaw-Namtu road and managed to recapture the No. 23 Regiment base on October 18, which had previously been seized by the TNLA during Operation 1027. However, the TNLA continues to hold control of the junta's No. 503 and No. 504 Battalion bases in the same area.

"They [the junta troops] have reached the 23rd base, but TNLA is still holding 503 and 504," a frontline source told Shwe Phee Myay News. "The junta has not been able to advance further."

The junta also reopened the Mandalay-Lashio highway for limited civilian travel on October 18. Passenger vehicles and small trucks are now permitted to operate under supervision, though large freight lorries remain restricted. A driver told DVB that while

“big lorries are not allowed, some 12-wheel trucks have been seen traveling.” Despite damage to several bridges along the route, smaller vehicles have been able to continue their journeys without turning back.

Military observers caution that the junta’s offensive should not be seen as targeting only the TNLA, warning that other northern resistance groups could soon face similar attacks. A Kachin military analyst said, “If this situation is treated as only TNLA’s problem, the junta will gradually move to recapture areas controlled by the MNDA (Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army) and KIA (Kachin Independence Army) as well.” A Ta’ang political observer agreed, noting that “the first phase focuses on TNLA, but other resistance forces will face offensives one by one.”

The junta’s current columns are advancing toward Namtu and Mantong, both key TNLA strongholds. Clashes broke out near the Moetay Bridge on October

21 as junta forces attempted to move into Namtu. Additional columns are reportedly assembling to push toward Mantong. Prior to the ground assaults, junta aircraft carried out repeated airstrikes on Namtu, Mantong, and nearby TNLA-controlled townships.

A resident from Mantong described the situation as desperate. “We have nowhere to hide. The air patrols are constant, and we don’t know how to survive,” the local told independent media.

For now, junta forces appear focused solely on TNLA-controlled territories, avoiding direct confrontation with other ethnic armies such as the MNDA, KIA, Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS).

However, both analysts and residents stress the need for stronger coordination among resistance groups to withstand the junta’s renewed push in northern Shan



Photo: Arakan Army

State. Calls for closer cooperation between the TNLA and neighbouring forces — particularly the KIA and SSPP — are growing as fears mount that the junta's campaign could expand beyond Ta'ang areas.

Arakan Army tightens noose around Sittwe

Artillery exchanges between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces have sharply intensified around Sittwe, the Rakhine State capital, amid reports that the AA has encircled major junta positions along the Rakhine mountain range and advanced close to several military factories in central Myanmar.

Residents of Sittwe told Narinjara News that the city has been rattled almost daily by heavy artillery fire since

mid-October, as junta troops from Police Battalions No. 12 and No. 36 fired toward AA-controlled townships, including Ponnagyun, Pauktaw, and Rathedaung. The AA responded with artillery and drone strikes, targeting junta battalions and security compounds inside Sittwe.

"The junta's firing has become more intense, and the AA also fired back with artillery and drones," one resident said. "The exchanges happen almost every day on the outskirts of Sittwe. Some of the AA's shells hit near the compounds of junta battalions."

An AA statement on October 15 also mentioned heightened exchanges around Sittwe. The city currently hosts more than ten junta battalions, including auxiliary regiments and two police battalions. On the night of October 26, AA artillery reportedly struck near the Sittwe Regional Operations Command (ROC), the



junta's last major command centre in Rakhine after it abandoned key headquarters in Ann, Kyauktaw, Buthidaung, and Taunggoke.

A local source said the shelling that night was among the most intense in weeks. "The firing continued more than 50 times until early morning, and the night-time explosions were particularly strong," the source said. The attack is believed to have caused casualties among junta troops. Following the clashes, police and soldiers guarding a bridge at the city's entrance reportedly relocated their station to a safer area.

Meanwhile, the AA has made major progress along the Rakhine mountain range, tightening its encirclement of the junta's main defensive line leading to Magway Region. The group announced that it had nearly seized the strategic Natyekan post, the last major obstacle before reaching junta-operated military factories in Ngape Township.

Sources close to the AA said junta troops at Natyekan are struggling with water shortages and isolation as supply routes have been cut. The AA has already captured several smaller outposts between Natyekan and the No. 14 Military Factory, located about nine miles away, effectively cutting ground reinforcement routes.

In the southern Rakhine front bordering Bago Region, AA and allied resistance forces have also advanced to within four miles of the No. 16 Military Factory. Junta forces have attempted to reclaim positions lost earlier in October, launching airstrikes in desperation to defend key military production sites, including Factories No. 5, No. 6, and No. 9 — all located along the AA's offensive path.

Despite these air offensives, the junta's counterattacks have largely failed. On October 15, the AA seized the strategically important Point 666 outpost, forcing junta troops to retreat further and leaving their remaining defensive positions increasingly vulnerable.

The intensified conflict underscores the junta's shrinking control in Rakhine and its growing struggle to protect vital military infrastructure as AA offensives expand toward central Myanmar.

Dire straits for Yangon street vendors as 'informal shops' torn down

Yangon's municipal authorities have launched a widespread crackdown on street vendors and roadside shops after junta leader Min Aung Hlaing complained that such activities were ruining the city's appearance during his recent visit.

Min Aung Hlaing toured Yangon earlier this month to inspect the Dala Bridge project and housing developments for military families. During the trip, he reportedly expressed dissatisfaction with the city's bustling roadside vendors and "undisciplined" shops, instructing local officials to "tighten restrictions" and ensure such scenes would not appear on his next visit.

Following his directive, municipal teams — backed by junta troops — began large-scale demolitions across Yangon on October 11. The operation targeted not only makeshift street stalls but also extensions and add-ons constructed by officially registered shops. Witnesses said municipal workers, accompanied by soldiers, cleared entire rows of small vendors from major streets and neighbourhood markets.

On October 14, the crackdown escalated when municipal officials forced flower sellers near the Pyidaungsu overpass to dismantle their stalls, warning that bulldozers would be used if they refused to comply. The operation continued throughout the week, extending even into small shops in residential wards.

Local sources told Yangon Khit Thit that the municipal authorities plan to arrest those who continue operating without permission once a short "educational period" ends. "We are cleansing shops and markets that are not recognized by the municipality," a city official said. "After the educational period, anyone who fails to comply will face fines or imprisonment under municipal laws."



HRM SPOTLIGHTS DANGER TO RESISTANCE OF US CONGRESSES NARROW INVESTIGATION OF STARLINK USE BY MYANMAR SCAMMERS

Human Rights Myanmar called attention to the potential wider spread impacts if the US Congress investigation of Starlink's links to Myanmar scam centres ignores its positive use by the resistance and communities across the country.

The HRM report continues below.

A U.S. Congressional investigation into the use of Starlink by scam centres in Myanmar risks a blunt and disproportionate response that would further undermine the rights of a vulnerable population already suffering from repression, conflict, and poverty.

Military's digital blackouts and Starlink's role

Since the 2021 coup, the military has weaponised internet shutdowns, website blocks, and digital interception, leaving large areas without secure connectivity for extended periods. This of creating a digital dictatorship is designed to provide cover for military atrocities and silence dissent, denying people access to life-saving information.

Reports claiming Starlink is one of Myanmar's biggest internet providers are based on data. Starlink

is, however, an undeniably vital dual-use technology in specific areas. In conflict zones and resistance-held areas, Starlink provides the primary, and often only, means of accessing the internet. It is a tool used by journalists, human rights defenders, humanitarian groups, and the resistance to bypass military control, document atrocities, and coordinate aid. Starlink enables many people to exercise their right to freedom of expression and access to information.

Risk of disproportionate and untargeted international response

The U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee's investigation into transnational criminal syndicates operating scam centres in Southeast Asia is an attempt to address serious human rights, including people trafficking. Committee member Maggie Hassan to Elon Musk, the CEO of SpaceX, which operates the Starlink brand, raising concerns about the scammers' use of Starlink services and asking for due diligence information.

Although the Committee's investigation has a legitimate aim, there is a risk that it will force or encourage a disproportionate, sweeping end to the Starlink service, adversely affecting the rights of many people across Myanmar. Similar disproportionate responses have harmed people in countries such as . suggests this may already be happening, as widespread Starlink outages were reported in October 2025, days after the investigation was made public.

A similar concern of a disproportionate international response is seen regionally. The Thai authorities have people and confiscated Starlink devices in Thailand under the that they are unlawfully imported and could be destined for scam centres. A default that all Starlink devices heading to Myanmar are intended for scam centres prevents vital communication technology from reaching the country. The military is actively this assumption, with the aim of encouraging Starlink to withdraw all services.

SpaceX's obligations under international standards

Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), Starlink's owner, SpaceX, has a responsibility to respect human rights. Although Starlink falls under U.S. and the service is not licensed in Myanmar, SpaceX still has a responsibility to its users in the country. These users are legitimate, paying customers who have purchased the service in another country and use its official "global roaming" service, which is designed to provide connectivity worldwide.

The UNGPs expect companies like SpaceX to continuously conduct due diligence to identify and mitigate the actual and potential human rights risks associated with their services. As Myanmar is a conflict-affected and high-risk area, SpaceX should conduct heightened due diligence. This means understanding both the negative impacts (enabling scam centres) and the positive, protective impacts (providing internet to those in conflict zones). Based on this assessment, SpaceX should then take appropriate and proportional action to prevent and mitigate adverse impacts. The principle of proportionality is key: the action taken must not create a greater human rights harm.

Crucially, this due diligence also applies to the process of ending a service. A company should consider the foreseeable human rights impacts of ceasing its operations or business relationships. A sudden, blanket withdrawal of the Starlink service from Myanmar would aid the military's internet shutdowns and foreseeably endanger the lives of civilians, journalists, and human rights defenders, representing a failure of this responsibility. If SpaceX was ever to consider closing down access to users in Myanmar, a responsible approach would require the mitigation of these harms.

Why a blunt ban would be ineffective

A “ban” urged by the U.S. Congress or a technological block unilaterally imposed by SpaceX would not only be disproportionate but also ineffective against the stated objective. The transnational criminal syndicates running the scam centres are multi-billion-dollar enterprises with the financial resources to adapt to bans by either relocating their operations to other lawless areas in Myanmar or neighbouring countries or by switching to alternative technologies from other satellite internet providers.

In contrast, Myanmar communities, including the pro-democracy movement, have no viable, low-cost, portable alternative to Starlink. A blunt ban would therefore primarily punish the vulnerable while only temporarily inconveniencing the criminals.

A standards-compliant approach balances the human rights abuses in scam centres with the fundamental rights of the people of Myanmar. Under the UNGPs, SpaceX has a responsibility to find the narrowest means to meet its obligations. This requires a thorough and conflict-sensitive human rights due diligence process to assess all potential actions and their impacts before a decision is made. This process must evaluate all available tools, including options like, to determine the most proportional response.

Focus on the military coup, not technology

The only sustainable way to address transnational criminal syndicates in Myanmar is to restore the rule of law by ending the military coup. The U.S. Congress has already authorised the Burma Act, a framework to support this goal. However, the legislation remains poorly implemented, and the U.S. Government has instead made to USAID funding. This has de-funded the very journalists and civil society organisations who are essential for exposing criminal activity and restoring the rule of law in the country. This withdrawal of support deepens the economic crisis, making a desperate public poorer and more vulnerable to being

drawn into illicit economies, such as scam centres or the drug trade, simply to survive.

This policy incoherence is a far greater strategic problem than the misuse of a single communications service. A consistent US policy that empowers the democratic movement is the most effective way to combat the criminality that thrives under military rule.

Recommendations

International diplomatic efforts should focus on addressing the root cause of the transnational criminal syndicates in Myanmar, shifting from blocking communications technology to ending the military coup, which provides the lawless environment and protection for these criminal syndicates to operate.

The U.S. Congress, and key senators such as Senator Maggie Hassan, should demand a narrow, proportional, and standards-compliant response from SpaceX, targeting criminal actors without causing widespread harm to the rights of the Myanmar people or the pro-democracy movement. This includes calling for the full implementation of the Burma Act and the restoration of USAID funding for Myanmar’s civil society and independent media, which are essential for restoring the rule of law.

SpaceX should cease disproportionate actions, halting any sweeping, non-targeted service shutdowns in Myanmar, and conduct a transparent human rights due diligence assessment in accordance with the UNGPs. This process must lead to the implementation of a narrow, targeted solution that mitigates criminal misuse while protecting legitimate users.

Other States, including Thailand, should end policies that indiscriminately block the flow of communications technology to Myanmar, and work with civil society to establish safe corridors for legitimate humanitarian and civilian access to technology, while focusing enforcement on confirmed criminal supply chains.



Photo: AFP

FOREIGN AND MYANMAR WORKERS FLEE ONLINE SCAM COMPOUNDS NEAR MYAWADDY AMID JUNTA RAID FEARS

Workers from several countries, including Myanmar nationals, have been fleeing online scam compounds near Myawaddy on the Thailand-Myanmar border since the morning of 22 October, amid reports of an imminent junta crackdown, local residents said.

The exodus began from scam hubs in Mae Htaw Tha Lay, In Kyin Myaing, and Min Let Pan, where compounds such as Dongmei Park, Huanya Park, Poly Park, KK Park, and Shunda Park operate under the control of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) – also known as the Karen National Army (KNA) – and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA).

“Military commission troops arrived at KK Park last night and are reportedly preparing to clash with the BGF. This morning, BGF Brigadier General Saw Tin Win – known locally as ‘Grandpa Tin Win’ – released all Chinese nationals from the site and allowed them to leave,” a resident of In Kyin Myaing told Mizzima.

Myanmar workers at the online scam centres are reportedly hiding along the Thaungyin (Moei) River, fearing arrest as they attempt to flee toward Myawaddy. Some have been transported to Myawaddy and Kyauktaw by BGF/KNA and DKBA forces, sources said.

Others, including Chinese and other foreign nationals, are escaping across the Thaungyin River into Thailand. “Around 11 am, workers tried to cross from the In Kyin Myaing floating market gate to the Thai side,” said a resident of Mae Htaw Tha Lay. “The BGF was negotiating with Thai officials, but crossings were halted by noon. Some managed to cross at other

points, though several were caught by Thai soldiers.”

Thai authorities have detained more than 200 foreign nationals who fled the scam centres and are preparing to house additional arrivals, according to a source close to the Thai government.

“We’ve heard that over 100 foreigners from Myanmar have arrived in Mae Khue, with around 2,000 more expected,” said a Mae Sot resident.

Those fleeing include workers from online scam and casino operations, as well as cleaners, cooks, security guards, and construction workers, most of them Myanmar nationals.

A Mizzima reporter stationed near KK Park on the Thai side said the compound appeared deserted.

“Construction has stopped, and the buildings are silent. There’s no sign of a raid,” the reporter said, adding that Thai troops were inspecting suspected foreigners in Mae Sot and had seized a car near the Naung Bwa roundabout earlier in the day.

The junta had earlier claimed in an October 19 statement that it had raided KK Park and seized Starlink satellite dishes and other equipment. However, independent investigations have since revealed the operation was staged, with evidence showing the images were taken at a separate site.

Despite reports of mass flight from scam compounds, online operations in Myawaddy and Shwe Kokko both under BGF/KNA control, are reportedly continuing without interruption.

The Myanmar junta's claim of raiding KK Park, a notorious online scam hub near the Thaungyin (Moei) River, about 10 miles from Myawaddy in Karen State, has proven to be false.

However, subsequent investigations revealed that the operation did not take place at KK Park but rather at a nearby compound known as Poly Park.

“They entered the compound next to ours. There were no Border Guard Force members around that day. The items they said they confiscated were just old monitors. We saw soldiers removing Starlink dishes from rooftops, but nothing changed here, operations continued as usual,” he said.

Photos released by the junta show newly built structures with unpainted walls, unused air conditioners, unfinished glass doors, and equipment still wrapped in plastic – clear indicators that the images were taken at a newly constructed site, not at KK Park, which has been operating for several years.

Buildings shown in the released photos also differ from typical scam centres, which usually feature iron-barred windows, Chinese-language company names, and rules displayed in Chinese. The structures appear more like residences than online scam facilities.

Although the junta claimed to have found 2,198 people including 1,645 men, 455 women, and 98 security guards, it offered no supporting photographic evidence. A resident of Paheikalaw village confirmed that no one was taken away during the supposed raid.

The precise locations of the photos released by the junta are still being verified.

According to a former cook who worked in the area for more than a year, KK Park 1, 2, 3, 4, and Poly Park together employ around 40,000 people, including many Myanmar nationals.

“Each building has its own kitchen team. We share meal counts in a group chat. Altogether, there are more than 40,000 workers,” she said.

Satellite imagery indicates that Poly Park's construction began around October 2020, while KK Park 1 was built in 2019 and later expanded into four zones. Although located nearby, Poly Park operates separately from KK Park.

The ownership of Poly Park, another hub for large-scale online scams, remains unclear. A female worker from KK Park 3 said the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) provides security within the compound.

Last week, news media reported widespread use of Starlink satellite internet in the Myawaddy region's scam centres. Following this, the U.S. Congress launched an investigation into Starlink's role in facilitating online fraud operations in the area. On 16 October, Starlink connections in Myawaddy and the nearby Payathonzu (Three Pagodas Pass) were reportedly blocked.

The junta's alleged raid now appears to be a staged publicity move, intended to deflect international scrutiny after the U.S. inquiry into online scam operations in Myawaddy.

Photo: Mizzima

27 ARRESTED OVER ONLINE GAMBLING OPERATIONS IN YANGON AND MANDALAY

The Myanmar junta has announced the arrest of 27 individuals allegedly involved in online gambling operations, according to junta-controlled newspapers published on 24 October. The detainees include 17 men and 10 women.

Authorities said 49 mobile phones, two laptops, two tablets, and eight vehicles were seized during the arrests. Legal proceedings are reportedly underway to open cases against the suspects.

The arrests were conducted between 14 and 20 October in multiple locations, including Mingalardon, Dagon Myothit (East), and Yankin townships in Yangon Region, as well as Pyin Oo Lwin and Maha Aung Myay townships in Mandalay Region.

According to the report, the suspects were allegedly working as commission agents for several online gambling platforms, including Ibet 789, 555 Mix, MOUNG 556, Batman 688, Shan 234, and 2D/3D gambling websites.

Investigators said nine of the suspects used bank and mobile payment accounts including KBZ, Yoma, AYA, CB, UAB, A Bank, and WavePay to process deposits and withdrawals connected to the gambling operations.

Since the military seized power, online gambling and scam networks have expanded rapidly across Myanmar, causing widespread financial losses among citizens.



HRW CALLS ON ASEAN TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTIONS

Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a statement on 23 October requesting government attending the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) Summit reject elections planned by Myanmar's junta for December 2025. The rights group made its demand in a letter sent to each nation sending delegates to the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur on 26-28 October the Myanmar crisis will be on the agenda.

The text of HRW's statement continues below.

The Myanmar junta has continued its repression of pro-democracy forces, carried out arbitrary arrests, torture, and abusive conscription, and increased military attacks on civilians. The junta has intensified its crackdown ahead of the planned elections, which the authorities scheduled to begin December 28. ASEAN members and partner countries should strengthen efforts to address Myanmar's human rights and humanitarian crisis and the plight of millions of its people displaced since the February 2021 military coup.

"Myanmar's junta has demonstrated neither the intention nor the capacity to organize and hold elections that would even remotely meet international standards," said John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "The junta's repression and unlawful attacks have created a climate of fear in which no genuine polls can take place, let alone voting that will be free and fair."

The military's widespread atrocities in recent years have included crimes against humanity and war crimes,

arbitrary detention of opposition politicians, and the dissolution and criminalization of opposition political parties. On July 30, the junta issued a draconian law that criminalizes criticism of the election by prohibiting speaking, organizing, or protesting that "disrupt[s] any part of the electoral process."

Since large parts of Myanmar are not under military control but instead held by opposition armed groups, the junta would not be able to hold polls in most of the country's townships.

Senior United Nations officials, international election monitoring groups, and several foreign governments have issued warnings about the planned elections. The UN secretary-general's special envoy for Myanmar, Julie Bishop, said: "There is a significant risk that the election planned for December, under current circumstances, will increase resistance, protest, and violence and further undermine the fragile state of the country."

Several former ASEAN foreign ministers issued a joint statement on October 11 calling on ASEAN to "unequivocally reject" the planned "sham election" and initiate a "complete strategic reset on Myanmar."

"ASEAN and ASEAN partners should categorically reject the idea that free and fair elections can currently be held in Myanmar and refuse to support the elections in any way," Sifton said. "Other governments should also signal that if elections are held, any supposed results will not be considered credible."



ANFREL STRONGLY OPPOSES UPCOMING MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTION

On 24 October, as ASEAN leaders meet for the 47th ASEAN Summit, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) issued a statement strongly opposing the Myanmar junta's planned elections.

The statement is as follows.

This electoral exercise, scheduled to begin on 28 December 2025 and continue in stages into early 2026, undermines any prospect of a genuine democratic transition and serves as a calculated attempt to manufacture legitimacy for military rule, and falsely project a return to civilian governance despite the absence of fundamental freedoms and meaningful participation.

ANFREL's in-depth assessment, released on 30 September 2025 following extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, outlines 15 critical aspects of the electoral process that clearly demonstrate that the elections planned by the junta do not meet international standards and cannot be considered as credible or legitimate.

In light of these findings, ANFREL has made a principled decision not to observe or seek accreditation for the junta-planned election. This marks a significant departure from ANFREL's long-standing engagement in Myanmar, having been the only international organization to observe all national elections from 2015 to 2020, including the 2015 and 2020 General Elections and the 2017 and 2018 by-elections.

ANFREL joins regional and international actors

in urging ASEAN and its member states to adopt a principled, coordinated, and human rights-based approach to the Myanmar crisis. While the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on an Extended and Expanded Ceasefire in Myanmar, adopted during the 46th ASEAN Summit in May 2025, was a step toward peace, it lacked enforceable mechanisms, independent monitoring provisions, and accountability measures.

As ASEAN leaders meet in Kuala Lumpur and prepare for the handover of the ASEAN Chairship from Malaysia to the Philippines, ANFREL calls on ASEAN to reject and refrain from recognizing the junta-planned election and its outcomes, and to uphold the region's foundational principles of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. ASEAN must also engage meaningfully with pro-democracy forces, including legitimate representative bodies, ethnic organizations, and civil society actors, and support the establishment of a credible, inclusive, and civilian-led roadmap toward a genuine democratic transition in Myanmar.

As the Philippines assumes the ASEAN Chairship, ANFREL expresses hope that its leadership will revitalize ASEAN's collective commitment to democracy and human rights, ensuring that the Myanmar people's struggle for freedom and self-determination remains a central regional priority. Democracy in Myanmar cannot be imposed through force or simulated through a junta-planned election; it must be reclaimed by its people with ASEAN's genuine solidarity and support.



Photo: Supplied

CRPH URGES GLOBAL PARLIAMENTS TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTIONS AT IPU ASSEMBLY

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Myanmar's exiled parliamentary body recognized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as the country's legitimate representative, has called on the international community to reject the military junta's planned elections and the legitimacy of any parliament formed under its control.

In a statement released after the 151st IPU Assembly in Geneva, held from 19 to 23 October, the CRPH said the main agenda of its participation was to oppose and seek non-recognition of the junta-organized election, which it described as "unfair" and "illegitimate."

The CRPH said its delegation focused on strengthening international support for Myanmar's pro-democracy and revolutionary forces to achieve a sustainable political resolution to the conflict.

During the meetings, the CRPH participated in the Asia-Pacific Group and the Women Parliamentarians Forum on 19 October, followed by the Executive Council meeting, the Conference, and the General Debate on 20 October. It also held separate discussions with parliamentary delegations from Malaysia, Thailand, Italy, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, and Australia.

According to the CRPH, it briefed its counterparts on the junta's escalating airstrikes, human rights abuses, and violence against civilians, as well as the plight of displaced populations and Myanmar nationals

forced into exile. It also provided updates on the country's political situation.

"The military's formation of a commission and plan to hold elections is not the solution to the current crisis," the CRPH said. "These elections cannot be considered fair as they are organized by the military and supported by allied parties. This approach ignores the root causes of the crisis while the junta continues to profit from cross-border crimes and online fraud."

Dr. Win Myat Aye, who led the Myanmar delegation at the conference, warned that backing the junta's election plan would effectively legitimize online scam networks operating in Myanmar and across the region.

"People in more than 70 countries are being enslaved by these scam centres," he said. "Supporting the military dictatorship's upcoming elections would be equivalent to legitimizing online fraud and undermining regional security. We urge all governments not to endorse the junta's sham elections or any puppet parliament it may establish afterward."

The IPU, which unites parliaments from 183 countries, has continued to recognize the CRPH as Myanmar's legitimate parliamentary representative since the military coup in 2021. The CRPH said this recognition remains in place and reflects the global parliamentary community's continued support for Myanmar's democracy movement.



JFM DEMANDS END OF ASEAN COMPLICITY IN MYANMAR JUNTA'S CRIMES AND REJECTION OF ELECTION

Justice for Myanmar (JFM) released a strongly worded statement on 23 October demanding the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) put a stop to its complicity in the ongoing crimes being committed by the Myanmar junta. The group further demands that ASEA reject the junta's planned elections aimed at manufacturing false legitimacy for its continued rule.

The text of the JFM statement continues below. Underlined sections are in the original.

The call comes on the eve of the 47th ASEAN Summit, hosted by Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

Over four years since ASEAN adopted its failed Five-Point Consensus, the Myanmar junta has only escalated its campaign of terror against civilians and its transnational criminal activities, enabled by the complicity of ASEAN, its member states, and regional businesses.

As the junta prepares for its sham election, it has intensified indiscriminate airstrikes across the country and continues to commit mass killings, rape and sexual violence, torture, and the systematic destruction of villages. Children are increasingly among the victims.

Over 22,000 people remain arbitrarily detained and subjected to torture by the junta. Meanwhile, surveillance and censorship has deepened.

Businesses in ASEAN member states have fuelled and financed these international crimes.

At least 54 companies based in ASEAN member states maintained business ties with the junta and its associated companies since the military's illegal coup attempt of February 1, 2021. These include investments and trade in oil and gas, timber, land leases, communications and surveillance technology and the provision of aviation fuel that are lifelines sustaining the junta's nationwide terror campaign.

The junta has also funded its international crimes through cyber scams and other transnational criminal activities, causing global harm and regional instability.

ASEAN's own defence cooperation frameworks have provided the Myanmar military with access to meetings, intelligence and training. The military's involvement in ASEAN has allowed the junta to expand its capabilities to continue to commit violence and atrocity crimes against Myanmar people, develop content for propaganda purposes, seek false legitimacy, and forge bilateral military ties with regional powers.

ASEAN has the opportunity at this Summit to end its continued complicity by rejecting the junta's sham election, bar the junta and its representatives from ASEAN and its bodies, and stand with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for federal democracy, peace, and justice.

ASEAN member states and businesses must immediately cut the junta's access to funds, arms, equipment, technology, and aviation fuel.

In preparation for its sham election, the junta rebranded its executive, legislative and judicial entity, the "State Administration Council (SAC)" to the so-called "State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC)." Justice For Myanmar warns that this calculated move can enable the junta to circumvent international sanctions and obscure accountability for its ongoing international crimes.

We call on ASEAN to be clear-eyed that the SSPC rebrand is a ploy to deceive the international community for legitimacy.

ASEAN partners that sanctioned SAC—Canada, EU, UK and USA—should urgently update their sanctions to list SSPC and prevent their sanctions regimes from being circumvented.



Photo: AFP

UK ENVOY CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES ON CIVILIANS AND CHILDREN

The United Kingdom has strongly condemned Myanmar's junta for continuing airstrikes on civilian areas, including attacks that have killed children, British diplomat Andrew Jackson said in a video message released on 22 October.

Jackson, who recently assumed his post as Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Yangon, said the UK government remains committed to supporting the Myanmar people amid ongoing violence.

"Such attacks are extremely terrifying and are actions that must be completely avoided. These actions also severely violate the rights of children," he said, adding that London will continue to push for accountability for human rights violations committed by the junta.

Jackson said he plans to meet and speak with people from various communities in the coming weeks

to better understand Myanmar's diversity and explore how the UK can support the public's "aspirations for a peaceful democratic future."

He also voiced concern over worsening food insecurity in Rakhine State, where the World Food Programme reports that 57 percent of families with children are no longer food secure.

Highlighting Britain's continued humanitarian support, Jackson noted that the British public raised more than £20 million to aid victims of the March earthquake in Myanmar.

He added that the UK government is working closely with partner organizations, including the United Nations, to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches communities most in need.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TARGETS SCHOOLS IN CHIN STATE AIRSTRIKES

Myanmar's military junta has stepped up airstrikes on schools across Chin State, deliberately targeting civilian education sites in recent weeks, according to local People's Administrative Bodies and Defence Forces.

A school in Zathal village, Senthang area of Hakha Township, was hit twice by airstrikes around 1 am on 21 October. The attack followed a similar bombing on 13 October, when two bombs were dropped on Vanha village school around 10 am.

On 8 October, junta aircraft also bombed schools in Htin Chaung and Wamathoo villages in Mindat Township at about 7 pm. In total, schools in five Chin villages have been attacked within just 13 days, local sources said.

Although no casualties were reported in the 21 October strike, the Zathal village school and a nearby house were damaged. The Vanha school bombing killed two students – a one male and one female – and injured 21 others. The earlier attack on Htin Chaung killed a disabled woman and three male students, while wounding 22 others, according to local administrative officials.

"There are no military operations, no battles, and no army camps here anymore. They are just bombing

indiscriminately," an official from the Senthang Revolution Force (SRF) told Mizzima. He condemned the attacks as "acts of terror" intended to intimidate civilians and force support for the junta's planned elections.

The SRF urged residents to boycott the junta's upcoming "illegal elections," suspend all schools indefinitely, and avoid public events for safety reasons.

The Hakha Township Central Council and interim Mindat Township People's Administration have also issued notices advising the closure of schools amid the escalating air raids.

Military sources said the junta currently maintains control only in Hakha and Tedim townships, while resistance forces hold most of the remaining seven townships. Aerial bombings have intensified in areas without junta troops; a tactic Chin leaders believe is aimed at spreading fear among civilians and weakening support for the resistance.

The junta's first phase of elections, scheduled for 28 December, is expected to take place only in Hakha and Tedim. Southern Chin townships – including Mindat, Kanpetlet, Matupi, and Paletwa – are unlikely to participate due to ongoing conflict and security risks.



Photo: Supplied

THREE CHILDREN KILLED, 12 CIVILIANS INJURED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON MOGOK

Three children were killed and 12 civilians, including another child, were injured when Myanmar's military carried out an airstrike on Mogok town in northern Shan State, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) said in a statement on 21 October.

The TNLA, which controls Mogok, said junta fighter jets dropped two 250-pound bombs near the Kan Thone Lone Futsal Ground in Kantaw Ward at around 2:58 pm. The group said there was no fighting in the area at the time of the strike.

The TNLA identified the victims as Ma Mon Thu, 12, Ma Khu Tha, 6, and Ma Char Shi, 12. Twelve other residents, including a child, were wounded, while 11 houses and a futsal ground were damaged, the group said.

According to the TNLA, the Mogok attack was part of a series of aerial assaults carried out by the junta between 1 and 20 October across several Shan

State townships including Mantong, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Mongngawt, Monglon, Namhsam, Namtu, Momeik, and Mogok.

The group said those airstrikes killed seven children, 13 men, and 21 women, and injured two monks, 11 children, 17 men, and 17 women. A total of 143 houses, four schools, four monasteries, eight school buildings, three other structures, two poultry farms, five shops, one tea factory, four motorbikes, and one vehicle were also damaged.

The TNLA added that on 19 October, junta aircraft dropped bombs near a school in Kyauk Phar village, west of Mogok, hitting a poultry farm owned by local residents.

The ethnic armed group urged civilians to remain alert and to take safety precautions amid ongoing air raids by junta forces.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS TWO CIVILIANS IN TNLA-HELD MONGNGAWT

Two civilians were killed and two others injured after a Myanmar military jet carried out an airstrike on Mongngawt town in northern Shan State, controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), local sources said on 20 October.

Residents said the aircraft dropped two bombs around 8 pm, one landing near the town's market and another close to the old police station.

"The plane bombed twice, the first explosion hit near the market and the second near the police station. The blast near the market killed two people," a local Palaung resident told Mizzima.

The victims were identified as a man and a woman, while two others sustained serious injuries. Several houses in the area were damaged, residents added.

"People are increasingly fearful, even in TNLA-administered towns," said Ashine, another Palaung local.

Since early October, the military junta has stepped up airstrikes across TNLA-controlled areas in northern Shan State, with at least 46 civilians reportedly killed in attacks since 2 October, according to local monitoring groups.



KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR MILITARY CONDUCTS EIGHT AIRSTRIKES ON KIA BASE IN HPAKANT

The junta launched eight airstrikes on a Kachin Independence Army (KIA) base in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, on 21 October, according to a military source.

The Y-12 aircraft carried out eight bombing runs targeting the KIA's Brigade 9 and the headquarters of Battalion 6, dropping a total of about 40 bombs, the source said.

"The aircraft dropped 40 bombs in eight rounds. There were some minor injuries, but no fatalities," a military source told Mizzima, though the information could not be independently verified.

The strikes were carried out around 7:34 am, despite no reported clashes in the area, according to locals.

"It was only about four miles from the village. I heard the sound of the plane while I was in the bathroom. It flew low over the area before bombing," a resident said.

The attack came as the junta continues conscription drives in Hpakant Township, while the KIA and the Kachin People's Defence Force (KPDF) have been stepping up their own recruitment since September.

Between July and October, more than 50 junta personnel reportedly defected to the KIA, the group said.



IDP girl eating porridge.
Photo: Supplied

DISPLACED FAMILIES IN THANDWE SURVIVE ON PORRIDGE AMID WORSENING SHORTAGES IN WESTERN MYANMAR

Thousands of civilians displaced by fighting in Thandwe Township, Rakhine State, are facing severe food shortages, with many surviving on plain porridge as the conflict drags on, local sources said.

More than 4,000 residents from five villages fled their homes after the military commission stepped up naval operations off the coast of Thandwe, aid workers told Mizzima.

"During the planting and harvest season, people try to work in the fields, hunt, or fish to earn a little money for rice," said one local relief worker. "But many can't find work at all. Some are living on rice porridge because they have nothing else to eat."

A resident helping displaced families said that while local social groups continue to deliver food aid, the assistance is insufficient to meet growing needs.

"Conditions are harsh. The displaced have been here for over a year, and there are barely any jobs.

Community groups are helping, but it's nowhere near enough," he said.

Local civil society organizations, working with the Arakan People's Revolutionary Government, have set up free clinics to treat the displaced, but medical services are limited due to a shortage of resources and donors.

"Some clinics are running with help from the Arakan Public Health Department," said an internally displaced person (IDP). "But food scarcity is causing widespread malnutrition."

As winter approaches, aid workers warn that displaced families also urgently need blankets and warm clothing, alongside food and medical supplies.

Although the Arakan Army (AA) seized control of Thandwe Township earlier this year, residents from coastal villages have been unable to return home because of continued naval patrols and shelling by the junta.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA DEPLOYS WARSHIPS NEAR MUNAUNG ISLAND AMID ELECTION PUSH IN RAKHINE STATE

The Myanmar junta has deployed at least 20 warships around Munaung Island in Rakhine State, apparently preparing for new military operations while simultaneously launching election campaign activities among local residents, according to local sources.

A local source told Mizzima that the junta's naval buildup near Munaung and Ramree Islands has intensified in recent days.

"It's unclear whether the warships came from Kyaukphyu or another base but more arrived just three days ago. It appears they are preparing for an offensive from Munaung and Ramree across the sea. At the same time, they've been conducting voter education sessions and restoring phone services in towns and villages," the local source said.

Residents believe the military may be positioning naval forces to advance toward towns such as Taungup and Thandwe, which remain contested amid escalating conflict with the Arakan Army (AA).

Locals on Munaung Island, who rely heavily on fishing and water transport, have been struggling under travel and fishing bans imposed by the junta.

Since 15 October, members of the junta-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) have been visiting wards and villages to instruct local committees on campaign procedures. The Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP), led by U Ba Shein, has

also been active in voter education campaigns in coordination with local administrators.

Earlier this month, the junta's Minister of Communications visited Munaung Township and promised to improve connectivity. On 10 October, the Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) network was restored, but residents say the move was politically motivated.

"For the local residents' convenience, they claimed to have restored the phone network. Only the MPT network is available. Yet, there is still no signal in some places. Those in the neighbourhood without MPT SIM cards hurried to purchase them from any available source as soon as the phone line was restored. Each card cost between 50,000 and 60,000 kyats. Not everyone can find one, especially at that price. They restored the network only because of the election. They ought to have restored it long ago if they were willing. They're not being honest. They might shut it down once more after the election," a Munaung resident claimed.

Previously, only SIM cards from the junta-linked telecom operator MEC had been available in the area.

Munaung Township has not yet seen direct fighting but has been under a military blockade since November 2023, when renewed conflict erupted across Rakhine State. The Arakan Army continues its offensive to seize the remaining junta-held towns of Kyaukphyu, Sittwe, and Munaung.

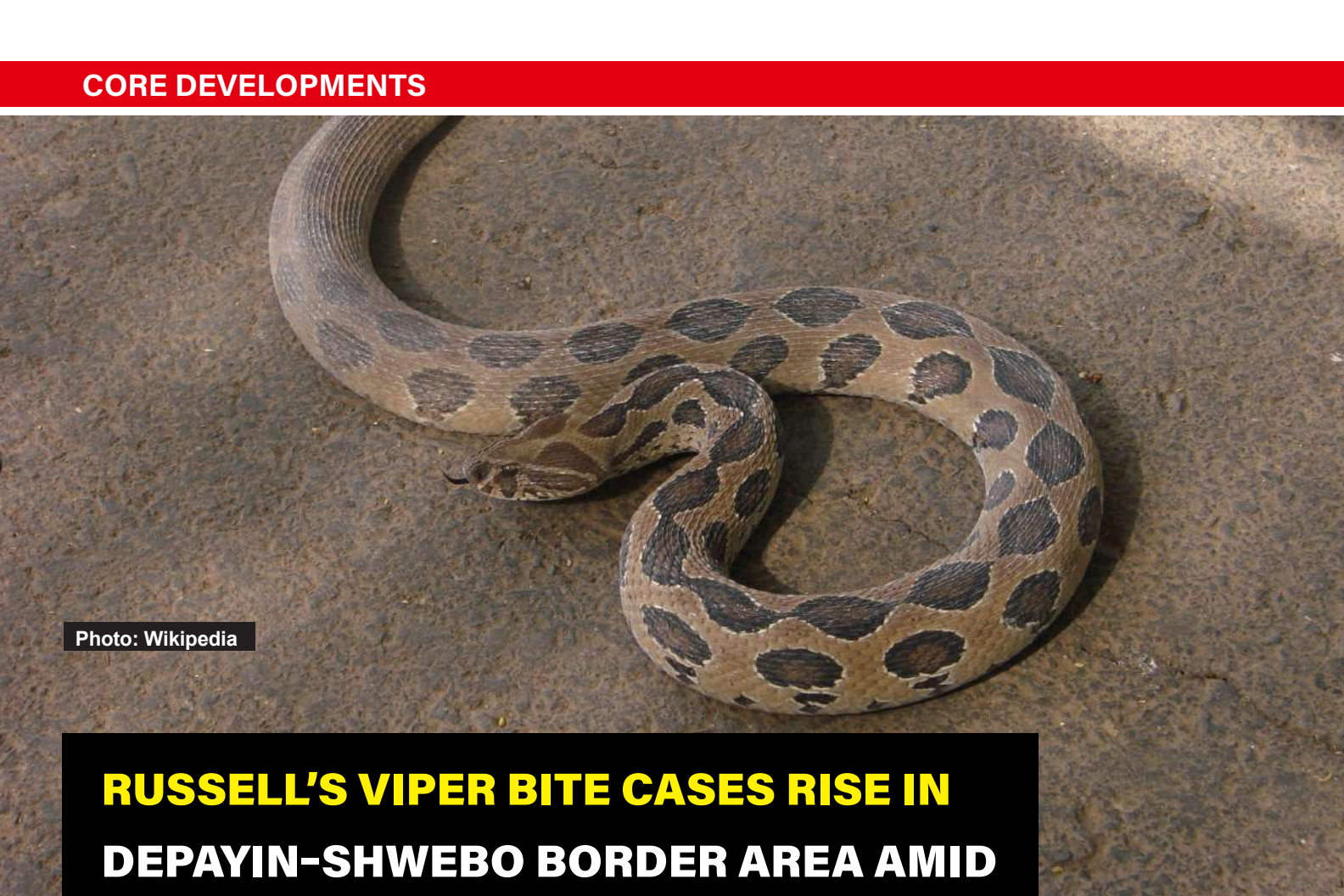


Photo: Wikipedia

RUSSELL'S VIPER BITE CASES RISE IN DEPAYIN-SHWEBO BORDER AREA AMID ANTI-VENOM SHORTAGE

The number of people bitten by Russell's vipers has risen in the border areas of Depayin and Shwebo townships in Sagaing Region, prompting urgent calls for more anti-venom supplies, according to a local healthcare provider.

"All the recent cases are Russell's viper bites. The rise this month is because it's the viper's breeding season. One viper can give birth to 30 to 40 young. All nine of my current patients were bitten by young vipers, mostly while working in paddy fields," said Dr. Gunn, a healthcare provider in the Depayin-Shwebo border area.

Between May and August this year, seven people were treated for snakebites in the area, but the number has climbed to nine so far in October alone. Among the latest patients are a six-year-old child, one woman, and six men, with three of the cases recorded on 22 October.

Although other venomous snakes such as cobras and banded kraits are also found in the region, all reported bites this month were from Russell's vipers.

Depending on the bite location and the spread of venom, patients initially require either eight vials

of Myanmar-made BPI anti-venom or 14 vials of the Indian-made version, Dr. Gunn said.

Currently, a single vial of BPI anti-venom costs about 280,000 kyats (USD\$133), while the Indian version sells for roughly 50,000 kyats (USD\$23.80). Due to the high cost of the local product, most treatments rely on the Indian-made anti-venom. Each patient needs between 28 and 42 vials on average, meaning about 252 vials have already been used for nine patients this month.

"I've already run out of anti-venom. Almost 300 doses were used this month alone. If possible, we need an adequate supply. Without medicine, we can't save lives; chanting mantras won't help," said Dr. Gunn.

The area has long been known for its high viper population. With the viper breeding and rice harvest seasons coinciding, healthcare workers fear more snakebite cases could occur, worsening the medicine shortage.

In addition to anti-venom, rabies vaccines are also needed. The Depayin-Shwebo border area hosts at least five internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, sheltering an estimated 35,000 people.



HRW CALLS ON MALAYSIA TO DEMAND RELEASE OF MYANMAR FAMILY ABDUCTED FROM KUALA LUMPUR

Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the Malaysian government on 22 October to press for the release of a refugee family abducted from Kuala Lumpur in July 2023. Myanmar junta authorities announced their detention of Thuzar Maung on 17 October 2025, more than two years after the disappearance of her, her husband, and three children.

The text of the HRW press release continues as follows.

The junta said that Thuzar Maung, 48, and her family members were arrested for “illegally re-entering” Myanmar and that an arrest warrant had been issued for her under Myanmar’s counterterrorism law in January 2023. Malaysian authorities should urgently reopen their investigation into the abduction of Thuzar Maung and her family from their home in Kuala Lumpur, which may amount to transnational repression, a cross-border violation of human rights against a country’s nationals.

“The Malaysian authorities should publicly press Myanmar’s junta to free Thuzar Maung and her family and investigate how this prominent refugee ended up in Myanmar,” said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The Malaysian government is failing to protect refugees at risk, including children, and the role of Myanmar’s junta and possibly other governments needs to be fully explored and brought to light.”

Maung is a longtime advocate for democracy in Myanmar and for refugee and migrant rights in Malaysia. She fled Myanmar for Malaysia in 2015 to escape growing violence against Muslims. The United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, recognized her and her family as refugees. At the time of her abduction, she had over 93,000 followers on Facebook, where she would post criticism of abuses by the Myanmar junta following the February 2021 military coup.

The junta reported that the Myittha Township

Court in Mandalay Region had issued an arrest warrant for Thuzar Maung under the junta-amended section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law and section 512 of the Criminal Procedure Code for providing support to the opposition National Unity Government, which it has declared as a “terrorist organization.” Section 52(a) carries a prison sentence of three to seven years.

The announcement includes a photo allegedly of the five family members in custody with their eyes blacked out. It states that action will be taken “against those living abroad contacting terrorist groups, opposing the state, and providing financial support to terrorist groups.” No information was provided regarding the date of their arrest, any legal proceedings against the family, or where they are being held, meaning they remain forcibly disappeared.

On July 4, 2023, unidentified men abducted Thuzar Maung with her husband, Saw Than Tin Win, and her daughter and two sons from their home in Ampang Jaya, Kuala Lumpur. A friend on the phone with Maung at the time heard her yell that unknown men were entering the house, before being disconnected. CCTV footage captured a car with fake license plates entering their gated community before the call and exiting three hours later, at which point all of the family’s phones had been turned off.

On July 21, 2023, the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and other UN experts wrote to the Malaysian government, urging the authorities “to urgently advance an immediate, impartial, thorough, and transparent investigation of the alleged enforced disappearance” of the family. The working group expressed concern that Thuzar Maung had been targeted for her human rights activism and that the risk of forcible return “would put their personal safety, liberty, integrity and life in danger and expose her to the serious risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, summary execution, and lack of a fair trial.”

In September, the Malaysian government responded that the police investigation had found no physical evidence or witness testimony to suggest that the family was abducted or forcibly disappeared and that there was no record of their leaving the country. Instead, Malaysia detailed the family’s alleged history of leaving rental houses without notice. It also stated that it had sought assistance from the International Criminal

Police Organization, or INTERPOL, to inform Myanmar junta authorities of the family’s disappearance.

Since the 2021 coup, Malaysian authorities have summarily deported thousands of asylum seekers to Myanmar despite the risk to their lives and freedom, without assessing their asylum claims or other protection needs. Immigration raids and arrests have surged over the past year, with 34,000 between January and mid-May alone.

Malaysian authorities have forcibly returned foreign nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees, at the request of their home governments. Governments wrongfully designating nationals living abroad as “terrorists” reflect what UN experts said was their “profound concern regarding the reported rise in transnational repression” across Southeast Asia. Civil society supporting Myanmar nationals in Malaysia, including UNHCR-registered refugees, told Human Rights Watch of growing fears of arrest and forced returns.

The Myanmar junta has arrested an estimated 30,000 activists, journalists, humanitarian workers, and others since the coup, including thousands under the Counter-Terrorism Law. With millions of Myanmar nationals having fled the country, the junta has engaged in transnational repression to crack down on activists outside its borders, such as requesting deportations, revoking passports, and conducting digital surveillance.

Malaysia is this year’s chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the ASEAN summit and related events starting October 26 in Kuala Lumpur, ASEAN members and partners should urge Malaysia to reopen the investigation into Thuzar Maung’s disappearance and, more broadly, to end its abusive treatment of migrants and refugees. ASEAN as a bloc should ensure that regional instruments enshrine the rights of refugees, dissidents, activists, and other targets of transnational repression.



A UNIFIED REVOLUTIONARY ALLIANCE EXPECTED TO FORM IN MYANMAR, SAYS KNLA DEPUTY CHIEF

A unified revolutionary military alliance between ethnic armed organizations (EOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) is expected to take shape soon, according to Lieutenant General Baw Kyaw Heh, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

Lt. Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh made the remarks during an online discussion with Myanmar nationals in Australia and Dr. Miemie Winn Byrd, held in Perth on 19 October. The event, organized by the Western Australia Myanmar Democratic Network and the Myanmar community in Australia, drew more than 200 participants, including Australian citizens.

The statement comes amid increasing reports that resistance forces are working toward forming a unified command structure to strengthen military coordination against the junta.

Joining the hybrid discussion were Dr. Soe Thura Zaw, Deputy Chief of Staff of the PDF's Central Command, and Dr. Tayzar San, a prominent leader of the Spring Revolution. The speakers analysed the current military and political situation and discussed strategies for future operations.

Dr. Soe Thura Zaw underscored the importance of unity and coordinated action, citing "Night Operations" as examples of successful collaboration among resistance groups.

Dr. Tayzar San urged Myanmar nationals abroad to move beyond observation and actively contribute to the revolution. He and other speakers emphasized the crucial role of the diaspora in providing sustained moral and material support.

Although Karenni National Defence Force (KNDF) Deputy Chief of Staff Marwi was scheduled to participate, he was unable to join due to internet difficulties.

Dr. Miemie Winn Byrd said such forums help bridge the gap between internal and external resistance movements, fostering solidarity and cooperation among all groups working toward a federal democratic future.

Dr. Byrd, currently in Australia, is scheduled to hold similar hybrid meetings in Melbourne and Sydney on 24 and 25 October and will give talks on Myanmar's political situation at Curtin University in Perth and the University of Melbourne.



Photo: AFP

APHR AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS CALL FOR ACTION ON ROHINGYA CRISIS

On 17 October the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) and members of the European Parliament issued a joint letter calling for greater attention to the escalating humanitarian crisis facing Rohingya both in refugee camps in Bangladesh and those internally displaced in Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

Today, members of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), joined by lawmakers from the European Parliament, come together to spotlight the escalating, cross-border humanitarian crisis affecting Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and internally displaced people in Myanmar.

Experiencing relentless violence, mass displacement, collapsing services, and shrinking

humanitarian access, the situation demands immediate international action. With nearly 22 million people in need of assistance and more than 3 million internally displaced, civilians are enduring relentless airstrikes, violence, and the destruction of schools, hospitals, and homes — while thousands are stranded along the Thai-Myanmar border with critically underfunded humanitarian support. Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar face dwindling aid, food shortages, and stalled repatriation efforts. We echo APHR's initial findings during a recent visit to the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar: the dire needs in the camps require urgent, collective ASEAN and international action.

The Myanmar military junta's recent steps, including reshaping state institutions, imposing martial law across 63 townships, suspending legal protections under Articles 5, 7, and 8 of the Privacy and Security Protection Law, and moving ahead with a fraudulent

December election, have intensified the suffering of civilians and made basic survival ever more precarious. These measures do not create the conditions for credible governance or for safe, voluntary returns of refugees and displaced people. ASEAN's guidance that "an election is not a priority" until violence stops must be honored; no international actor should legitimize any poll conducted under continued military rule.

Aligned with APHR's stance, we urge the European Union (EU) to strengthen its support for democracy and human rights in Myanmar. In particular, the EU should step up sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the junta's leadership. APHR has emphasized many times that ASEAN and its partners must pursue "diplomatic isolation of the junta [and] targeted sanctions" as part of a decisive response.

The EU's existing arms embargo on Myanmar must be rigorously enforced and broadened; we join APHR in calling for a comprehensive arms embargo and a ban on aviation fuel to incapacitate the junta's airstrikes.

At the same time, we must recognize and support the courageous efforts of Myanmar's democracy forces and the "federalism-from-below" initiatives. Community- and ethnic-led governance bodies are implementing inclusive health services, education, and advancing the Articles for Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA) as a roadmap towards a federal democratic union. These initiatives deserve sustained international support and recognition.

In light of these developments, we call on the European Union, its member states, and international partners to center humanitarian protection and life-saving support at the core of their international solidarity agenda. We urge them to:

1. Refuse to recognize a junta-sponsored poll or government.

Instead, all parties must insist on an immediate ceasefire and the release of political prisoners before any credible transition can begin.

2. Support federalism from the bottom up

Enhance political recognition and support for Myanmar's legitimate democratic actors, including the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs), and civil society as key partners in shaping a federal, democratic future.

3. Scale up humanitarian funding

Increase aid for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), internally displaced people in Myanmar, and refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border.

4. Strengthen targeted sanctions and diplomatic pressure

Implement a comprehensive arms embargo to end atrocities and human rights violations, and ban jet fuel to halt airstrikes.

5. Bolster EU-ASEAN cooperation to ensure a unified, principled stance that prioritizes human rights and justice in Myanmar.

Finally, this joint statement represents APHR's continued commitment to democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia and aims to champion closer EU-ASEAN cooperation on issues that impact the people of Myanmar, the Rohingya, and other marginalized populations.

As APHR has stressed, "[there is] no future in being indifferent" to the junta's campaign of terror. The EU institutions and Parliament, alongside Southeast Asian lawmakers, must act now to uphold peace, human rights, and democratic aspirations in Myanmar.



JFM CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA TO ADDRESS REGIONAL INSTABILITY

Justice For Myanmar (JFM) urged on 21 October that international actions to address cyber-scam operations should widely target the military junta and its allied militias involved in these criminal networks.

The JFM statement continues below.

On Sunday, the Myanmar military junta staged a showcase raid on the notorious and expansive cyber scam compound of KK Park, seizing a mere 30 Starlink units and finding 2,198 workers, estimated to be a fraction of the total people working or trapped at the site. This was timed ahead of the ASEAN Summit and appears to be an attempt to distract from the key role the junta and their Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) militia continue to play in transnational crime and human trafficking.

The Myanmar military runs a web of criminal businesses, and nurtures and harbours the criminal enterprises of the Karen BGF, which is under Myanmar military command. Together, they function as a transnational organised crime network that generate funds for their ongoing campaign of international crimes, including through KK Park. They profit from transnational crime through the control of land, interests in real estate developments where cyber scams take place, tax collection, the provision of security, smuggling, human trafficking and the sale of utilities.

US sanctions against the Karen BGF/Karen

National Army earlier this year stated that troops from the militia were guarding KK Park. This followed a 2024 Deutsche Welle investigation that also found that Karen BGF troops were providing security at KK Park. European Union sanctions applied last year against Karen BGF lieutenant colonel Mote Thone and Karen BGF major Saw Tin Win identified both as being involved with and benefiting from KK Park.

The direct involvement of the Karen BGF and their leaders in transnational crime, under Myanmar military oversight, extends far beyond KK Park. For instance, the leader Chit Thu and his children collectively own nine Karen BGF companies. Among them are two companies invested in cyber scam compounds: Myanmar Apolo International Investment Company Limited (Apollo Park) and Yulong Bay Resort Tourism Development Company Limited (Yulong Bay Park).

International action to address cyber scams must therefore target the Myanmar military and its militias broadly.

The military is a terrorist organisation under Myanmar law and as defined in international law. It is also a root cause of regional instability as the junta is responsible for mass forced displacement of Myanmar people within Myanmar and across the region and has caused a profound economic crisis that has spilled over to neighbouring countries.

Since the military's illegal coup attempt, ASEAN has lent false legitimacy to the junta and provided intelligence and training to the Myanmar military and junta police, while it commits international and transnational crimes with total impunity.

ASEAN's false legitimisation of the junta has not only emboldened this criminal cartel but undermined the international response to transnational crime by providing it with knowledge that can help it evade international law enforcement.

At the upcoming ASEAN Summit, governments must take a clear stand to reject the junta and the sham election it is staging in an attempt to legitimise itself.

Governments must cut the junta's access to funds, arms and aviation fuel, and ensure international accountability for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, as civil society has demanded.

Only through supporting the Myanmar people's struggle for federal democracy and to dismantle the military can ASEAN and the international community successfully address the cybercrime crisis, and the Myanmar crisis, root and all.



Photo: Lynn Wen Wen

NO HOPE, FALSE HOPE: MYANMAR YOUTH HIT EDUCATIONAL DEAD ENDS IN THAILAND

EMILY OU YONG AND LOK BING HONG

Despite expanding educational opportunities in Mae Sot, youth from Myanmar face an impossible choice: pursue costly qualifications with little hope of university access, or abandon their academic dreams entirely.

MAE SOT, Thailand – Tun Lin, 21, is the image of an average college-age student: unassuming and laid-back with tousled hair. But while others his age might be continuing their education, he is teaching migrant students at his alma mater, Minmahaw School in Thailand's Mae Sot.

Born in Yangon in Myanmar, and raised in Mae La Refugee Camp across the border, he is one of the few migrant and refugee students to graduate with a General Education Development (GED) certificate.

The question is not whether he has the skills for higher education, but why, with his qualifications, he has not been able to access it.

Mae Sot has become a hub for migrant education. It now offers more GED programmes than ever before, providing the high school diploma equivalent needed to enter universities.

More than 2,000 foreign children cross the border monthly, with about 18,250 enrolled in Tak province schools – 75 per cent of them concentrated in Mae Sot, a 2018 study by non-governmental organisation Help Without Frontiers (HWF) showed. These numbers have increased by up to 25 per cent each year since the

2021 military coup.

But while the system successfully helps students earn GED certificates, it falls short of making sure they actually get into universities, owing to the lack of legal documentation, funds, and sufficient scholarship opportunities.

This pushes students toward vocational training and immediate employment instead.

"Even if we (refugees) sacrifice a lot, it's still quite hard for us to go to university," said Tun Lin, who remains uncertain about his future.

Education for all?

Thailand's "Education for All" policy grants every child 15 years of free education regardless of legal status or nationality. Under this framework, migrant and refugee children receive temporary student identification numbers to enter the formal Thai education system.

However, most undocumented Myanmar children bypass Thai public schools entirely, instead attending one of 64 Migrant Learning Centres (MLCs), like Minmahaw School.

Established and run by migrants and refugees themselves, MLCs provide education in students' native languages that are more culturally relevant and have fewer barriers to enrolment than Thai public schools.

"Even though Thailand has a progressive policy, it's not easy in practice," said Ms Siraporn Kaewsombat, director of HWF.

"Border areas like Mae Sot are overcrowded, and schools have to screen applicants to fit their available seats. Government schools prioritise children born in Thailand, those with documentation, or those with guarantees from employers," she said.

These are criteria that recently-arrived Myanmar youth cannot meet.

Mr Ko Moe, 49, who spoke under a pseudonym, is an exiled documentary filmmaker who entered Mae Sot illegally along the Thai-Myanmar border with his wife and 12-year-old son a year after the 2021 military coup.

"I couldn't send my son to school for two years after arriving in Mae Sot out of fear that we would be arrested," he said.

Many stop their education after high school at the age of 15 – provided they receive schooling in the first place.

"Out of all the migrant learning centres, there are only a few that provide higher education programmes to get the GED certificate," said Mr Ko Ye, 39, coordinator at Minmahaw School.

"Otherwise, students don't have any accreditation from migrant learning centres after they graduate," he said.

Stateless and stuck

But obtaining a GED certification is only the first battle won in the fight for further education.

Despite Tun Lin's qualifications, his lack of documentation prevents him from applying for scholarships.

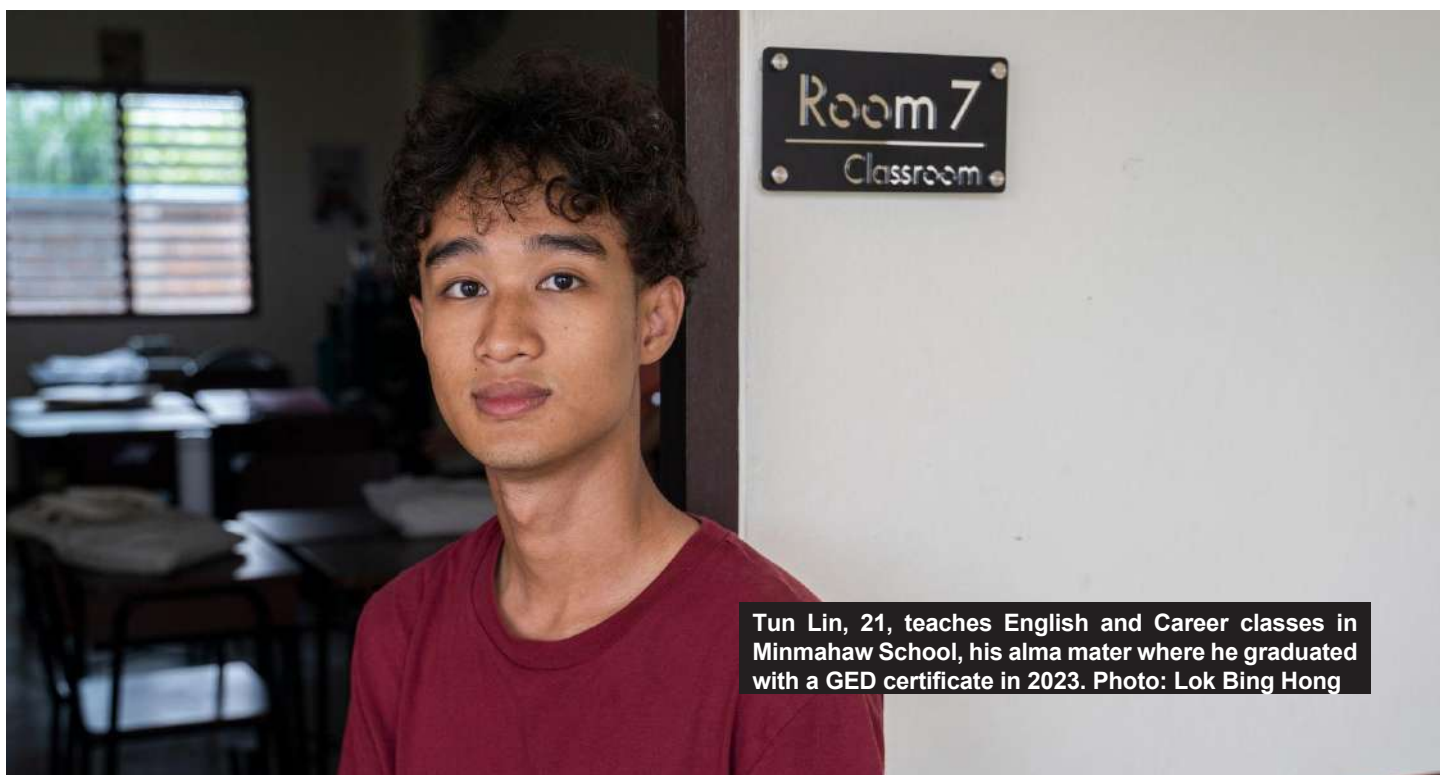
"I left Myanmar when I was two, and I don't have my birth certificate, so they don't know whether I was born in Myanmar or Thailand," he said.

"Every year a lot of people apply for scholarships – hundreds and thousands of people," he added. "Why would they give it to you if you are not even sure that you will get (documentation)?"

The documentation process is costly and demands the very connections and money these students lack.

The non-profit Inclusive Education Foundation – which works with MLCs and Thai schools to support migrant children education – said that total legal support for their students' documentation alone costs them upwards of US\$12,900 (S\$16,535) a year.

"All of the students from Myanmar are determined to continue their education, but the students themselves are starting to lose hope, generation by generation," said Mr Htet Thu Rein, 27, who passed his GED examinations in 2024.



Tun Lin, 21, teaches English and Career classes in Minmahaw School, his alma mater where he graduated with a GED certificate in 2023. Photo: Lok Bing Hong

Moving the bottleneck

Faced with these realities, many students are giving up further education in a bid to enter the working field earlier.

The shift largely stems from the economic pressures facing migrant families, which puts pressure on students to start earning income quickly.

A teacher at another MLC, Hsa Thoo Lei School, who only wishes to be identified as Star, said: "Some parents don't even have a job. Their (family) budget is very restrictive."

Mr Thaw Haw Htoo, 21, who is undergoing hospitality training at Picturebook Guesthouse, said: "I was planning to take GED to go for a scholarship, but I wasn't confident enough because of financial and legal issues."

Picturebook Guesthouse is a boutique hotel and social enterprise run by Youth Connect Foundation (YCF), which leads vocational training programmes for 90 students a year in Mae Sot.

Such vocational programmes like YCF's have direct partnerships with local businesses, guaranteeing job placements for their graduates – which is why they can only accept as many students as there are available positions.

Vocational training is gaining popularity even among those with a GED certification, who increasingly see it as offering better job prospects than the elusive university pathway.

"There are a lot of students who finish GED and come back to vocational training," said Mr Bo Phyu, education coordinator at YCF.

A lost generation

For most, optimism is all they have left as they pursue their education.

"I know it's hard and I don't know if (university) is possible, but this is the best option for my future," said Ms Violet, 22, a student at BHSOH High School. "I must at least try."

Ms Katie Julian, curriculum designer at Mote Oo Education, which works with displaced Myanmar communities, said: "People who are keen enough to get into a GED programme will persist...because the prize at the end of that is the qualification to go to university."

But that persistence comes at a cost, with each of the four GED tests costing US\$80.

"Families put aside money that they can't really afford because they desperately want their child to get an education," she said.

Back in Minmahaw School, Tun Lin still teaches while waiting for his own documentation to be sorted. Despite remaining in an administrative limbo, he sees the struggle as ultimately worthwhile.

"Right now, it's a loop of endless suffering," he said. "But only through fighting for education would we know its value, creating a generation of people passionate and enthusiastic to give back to the community."

Whether his persistence will eventually pay off with a scholarship and university admission remains an open question.

What is certain is that he represents a lost generation of young people caught between an educational system that has expanded enough to create hope, but not enough to fulfil it.



A GED graduate, Mr Bo Phyu works as an education coordinator at Youth Connect Foundation.
Photo: Lok Bing Hong



Zau Sang, right.

MARTYRED KACHIN FREE BURMA RANGER HONORED IN ROJAVA, SYRIA

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

In the city of Til-Talmer, Rojava, Syria, the premier medical facility is the Zau Sang Hospital. The front of the building displays a billboard-sized photo of Zau Sang, a Kachin Free Burma Ranger (FBR) who was killed by a Turkish drone strike on November 4, 2019, while distributing aid and documenting attacks against civilians on the frontlines.

In Burma's Karenni State, near Pasaung, a bomb crater marks the place where Ranger Oo Reh was killed in an airstrike while driving an ambulance to evacuate the wounded. In Moby, Shan State, a 19-year-old Karenni Ranger named Benedictu was killed. During the ceremony before his burial, his casket was draped with the Free Burma Rangers flag and adorned with medals he had earned for bravery and selflessness under fire.

In Karen State, a charred crater remains where three female medics were incinerated by a Burma Army bomb. Ranger Naw Say Moo Paw and a KNU medic were killed. Naw Gay survived but faces years of

reconstructive surgeries and rehabilitation.

They, and many others, including resistance fighters of all ethnicities and combat medics serving across ethnic armed organizations, dedicated themselves to treating the wounded and evacuating civilians to safety. They served their country, their people, and God faithfully.

And while it is noble to give one's life for one's people or country, it is truly extraordinary for someone to board a plane, fly thousands of miles, and risk his life for people he had never met, in a country he had likely never heard of.

The director of Zau Sang Hospital, Jamila Hame, had tears streaming down her face as she recounted how the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) helped the people of Rojava, and how Zau Sang gave his life, becoming an official martyr for the Kurds and all the peoples of Rojava. "We were under siege, and no one could come to help," said Jamila Hame, reliving those painful days

of helplessness. She explained that FBR had secured an armored car and made repeated trips under fire to evacuate the wounded.

Rojava, officially the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), is a multicultural state-within-a-state where Kurds, Christians, Arabs, and other minorities live in harmony, participating equally in their government and serving together in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Despite having one of the most egalitarian systems in the Middle East, granting full rights to women who even serve in frontline combat units, Rojava has no recognized legal status.

Its primary ally is the United States, yet it is beset on all sides by enemies: the Damascus government, which seized power in a coup; neighboring Turkey, whose airstrikes have devastated Rojava's infrastructure to suppress Kurdish autonomy; the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), composed of remnants of extremist factions with ties to ISIS and al-Qaeda; and ISIS itself, which has resurged and is increasing the frequency of its attacks.

The similarities between Rojava and the ethnic states of Burma were not lost on some Burmese people. AK, a soldier with the Karenni Defense Force

(KDF), told me that they are closely observing Rojava and neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan, which enjoys genuine autonomy. He explained that they view this model as a possible framework for Burma, one where the ethnic states could achieve real autonomy within a federal system. Unfortunately, the Damascus government has refused to grant such autonomy, which is why fighting continues in Rojava, just as the Burma junta has refused to recognize the autonomy of its ethnic states.

During his 13 years with the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), most of which were spent in Burma, Zau Sang joined several missions lasting one to two months each, serving on the frontlines in the war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. He and his fellow Rangers were embedded with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who were supported by the U.S.-led international coalition that ultimately defeated ISIS in Syria. Afterward, the Rojava government resolved to preserve its autonomy and continue upholding advanced human rights, freedoms, and equality for all residents, despite the ongoing battles with the Syrian National Army (SNA).

In a 2018 interview in Burma, Zau Sang explained that after several missions, he had grown to care deeply for the people of Rojava and wanted to return.



Zau Sang in the field.

"I still want to go back to Syria because the fighting isn't done yet. There are still constant battles, and civilians have to keep fleeing. When they come to us, the FBR team gives them medical care and distributes food. I still want to go back and do those things—while also recording and reporting the situation. Going back now would be the best time because the fighting hasn't finished yet. Now is the beginning of the end, so the fighting will be more intense. There are more people fleeing, and I want to go back and help until it is finished. If I have the opportunity to go back, I will go back."

Zau Sang originally worked as a medic with the Free Burma Rangers but later trained as a cameraman, becoming one of FBR's top videographers. Jamila Hame explained how crucial that work was: "Because their job [FBR] was also getting the news out. They played this role very well."

There were no journalists present at the time, and FBR reporters like Zau Sang were the only ones documenting the blatant attacks on civilians. "They occupied this area," said Jamila Hame, referring to the Syrian National Army (SNA). "They displaced thousands of people from a place called Serekaniya, most of whom remain displaced to this day because the SNA is still occupying their homeland." She added that she was grateful to FBR for documenting "what they have done, all these terrible things."

In his final interview before returning to Syria, Zau Sang said, "I am grateful and thank God and everyone for giving me the opportunity to help."

Jamila Hame said, "I remember, that's why I cried. I remember the attacks and how they stayed together with us. FBR were not caring that much if they didn't have food or if it was dangerous—whatever it was, they stood with us. We appreciate the work that they have done with us, the help that they gave us, because they rescued many lives at that time, many wounded people who could have died, and they rescued them."

She went on to say, "The day that Zau Sang was martyred, it was a big thing that happened on social media and in the news—that a Burmese guy was martyred here. So this affected the public media also, even on the Turkey side." She was referring to Kurdish media across the border, where for Kurds everywhere, Zau Sang was seen as a hero.

During this stressful time of war, Jamila Hame said the people were inspired by the fact that "Among us, there were Americans and Burmese there also." She continued, "So this affected the situation here. They gave their lives to protect Rojava. So these people will never forget their help and their hard work that they have done here. We were happy to have them with us, standing with us to protect our people, to give security, to have this. But for sure, we didn't want them to die and leave their families. But this is what happened."

On the same day that Zau Sang was killed, his daughter celebrated her first birthday.

"So, Zau Sang has his name on the hospital, so we remember him in this way. This became a way to honor his soul, to tell the world who he was, to tell his story and how he risked his life. We are so lucky to have these friends like you, like the foreigners."

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



Zau Sang Hospital in Syria.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo



Iselin Frydenlund

THE MILITARY MONASTIC COMPLEX

INSIGHT MYANMAR

"There has been a massive lay critique of leading Buddhist monks that have been seen as pro-military... but to conclude that monks are either silent or pro-military is too hasty! What we actually see is polarization and division within the Sangha," says Iselin Frydenlund, a professor of religion in Norway who has spent decades studying Buddhism and politics in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. "We have to understand this very deep-seated fear in Buddhism of anarchy. For some conservative monks, supporting the military is not about greed or corruption, but about believing that some kind of order is better than total chaos." Frydenlund gives voice to the deep sense of betrayal many lay Buddhists feel toward parts of Myanmar's clergy after the 2021 coup. Yet she says that while that anger is real and must be acknowledged, it risks obscuring the fact that many monks and nuns are still serving their communities.

Frydenlund frames the conversation around two corrections to conventional wisdom, and credits her co-author Dr. Pyi Phyo Kyaw on much of the ideas that follow. First, she rejects the simplistic picture that "the monks" are either uniformly pro-military on the one hand, or staying silent on the other. Second, she argues that the treasured concept of a unified Sangha has never actually been a social or historical reality—Myanmar's monastic communities have always been diverse, and often divided.

Frydenlund traces how the laity's perceptions of the Sangha were punctured after the coup. Initially, the mirage of a unified Sangha appeared to be true, and in line with the public's anti-military sentiments; several leading monks spoke against the coup; even the chair of the state Sangha committee offered a mild rebuke, calling it "against the will of the people"... and was then promptly placed under house arrest. Many other monks who oppose the junta have instead remained silent under threat of similar surveillance and punishment. As the confrontations turned violent in the succeeding months, Frydenlund describes how the monastic community as a whole retreated into a greater silence that was mistaken for uniform complicity, but the fact of the matter is that many factors contributed to this silence; it was not a monolithic response. Thus, the conventional misperception and superficial reality of a unified Sangha remained intact, only with the pendulum swinging from unified and with the people, to unified but supporting the military.

Related to those common misperceptions, she addresses the claim she often hears that "the Sangha" has been co-opted by the military. She explains that such language, again, oversimplifies the situation: the state certainly can pressure monks through registration, exams, and patronage in areas under its control. But this ignores that in liberated zones, many monastics have spoken out more openly or have overtly aligned

themselves with the resistance. This complex reality undermines the idea of a unified Sangha under military domination.

Frydenlund also points out there had long been a strong, pro-military discourse within the Sangha, dating back to the aftermath of the 1988 uprising. In those years, the junta invested heavily in repairing relations with the clergy— building Buddhist universities and meditation centers, channeling funds to pagodas, and cultivating loyal networks among monks. She has termed this the “military-monastic complex.” These material and institutional bonds gave pro-junta voices in the Sangha a powerful platform and legitimacy they otherwise might not have had. Yet Frydenlund stresses that this did not encompass all monastics. Networks of monks who had allied themselves with the 1988 “Spring Revolution”— in Myanmar and even in neighboring Thailand—articulated a counter-vision that proclaimed democracy and human rights as consonant with the Dhamma.

Both monastic camps have drawn on the Canon and Buddhist history to defend their positions. Pro-military monks have often invoked a duty to protect the Sasana (the Buddha’s dispensation) from threats, and sometimes pulled on texts or commentaries that stress order, obedience, or the legitimacy of rulers who defend Buddhism. In fact, Frydenlund notes that in his infamous 2017 sermon given to a gathering of soldiers, Sitagu Sayadaw invoked the Mahavamsa— a Sri Lankan chronicle that some say extols a militaristic

Buddhism— to justify killing in defense of the faith. In contrast, anti-military monastics have often cited the Aggañña Sutta (DN27) to validate the idea that political legitimacy originates with the people, and therefore argue that the Spring Revolution and other anti-military actions are not a betrayal of Buddhism at all, but a return to its ethical center.

But it is not an either-or, that if monks don’t speak out against the junta, they must be pro-military. Frydenlund sees a “kind of a silent majority, perhaps an obedient majority.” Like all Burmese people these days, monks face threats, surveillance and punishment. Many who remain quiet are not endorsing the junta— they’re just trying to stay alive. Some quietly provide shelter, food, and other humanitarian aid to revolutionaries, even as they avoid public anti-military sermons or social media statements. Others support the resistance within the constraints of the Vinaya (the monastic code of discipline), believing that its preservation is essential if Buddhism is to survive the vicissitudes of history. These quieter kinds of resistance are often overlooked.

She also cautions against the view that reduces monastic alignment with the military to either corruption, cowardice, or greed. Here she refers to a Buddhist “ideology of order,” noting that in Buddhist political thought, anarchy is a nightmare that imperils both society and the Sasana. When the state fragments and regional militias proliferate, some conservative monks conclude—rightly or wrongly— that only central military rule can prevent total chaos. The temptation,



Monks showing support for Buddhist monk Wirathu. Photo: AFP

then, to side with “law and order,” in other words, can be predicated on longstanding textual and ethical anxieties about disorder, and not just venality.

Regarding Sitagu Sayadaw’s 2017 sermon invoking the Mahavamsa, Frydenlund says that as a Sri Lanka specialist, she was struck not by the reference itself—it is actually a familiar theme in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism— but by its starkness. She calls his sermon “a very, very blunt call for killing non-Buddhists.” She explains that in Sri Lanka, even very militant monks usually put forward that argument indirectly or through euphemism, but Sitagu’s directness, in Myanmar’s context and given the timing and the audience, was indeed shocking. She goes on to explain that the military-run media later repurposed its logic to target not only non-Buddhists but Buddhist “enemies within,” or those opposed to the 2021 coup.

Yet she distinguishes ideological blessings from a personal choice to engage in violence. The Vinaya’s prohibitions still hold sway. Militant clerics might preach, bless weapons, or perform ritual “yadaya” (ယဿ), but it is understood that those who choose

to participate in actual armed struggle should disrobe first (one can cite a particular exception which roves the role: an incident from 2013 captured on video in Meiktila of a Buddhist monk swinging a machete towards Muslim villagers). Frydenlund notes that the Buddhist concept of intention (cetana) remains central to moral judgment in Buddhist ethics; this is why military “chaplaincy” across the Theravada world has long endeavored to recast battlefield killing by Buddhist soldiers as karmically neutral when undertaken with a “clean heart” to protect the Sasana.

Frydenlund also pushes back on Western romanticist mindsets about Buddhism, such as the view that it is apolitical and pacifist by definition. This kind of generic “Orientalist” perspective, popularized in European social thought, has made it hard for many outsiders to grasp the politicized, sometimes violent, face of Buddhist institutions. She emphasizes that scholars have been documenting Buddhism’s entanglements with power and military might for over a century. “That kind of Orientalist construction of Buddhism [as an inherently peace-loving religion] has



The Buddhist monkhood in Myanmar has become politicized. Photo: AFP

also served modernist Buddhist projects in Asia itself," she notes, contrasting it with "violent" Islam or secular modernity. Frydenlund notes the irony that while Buddhism has often been romanticized as a pacifist tradition, in Myanmar this image collides with the reality of some monks' overt support for the military and its campaigns of violence against perceived enemies.

Turning towards the side of the resistance, Frydenlund describes that although this is often portrayed as a secular uprising, she sees Buddhist fingerprints everywhere: networks of mutual aid rooted in temple life; ethical vocabularies for justice; and, crucially, mindfulness practices that sustain mental health. Many young resisters center themselves with sermons on YouTube, chanting, or meditation. What seems new is the way these practices blend with therapy, sleep hygiene, exercise, even non-Buddhist self-help— in other words, there has evolved a hybrid, individualized, Buddhist modernism.

She also notes that many Burmese are now making more discriminating choices within the Sangha rather than the general respect and veneration born solely out of religious belief that was more the case in the past. For example, many are "silent-boycotting" military-aligned monks; for example they no longer donate to their monasteries nor do they listen further to their talks. For many in the Buddhist laity, the criteria for which monks to trust and follow now includes politics in addition to the typical spiritual gravitas of calm and ethical clarity.

In thinking about the future, Frydenlund offers possible scenarios as opposed to specific predictions. If liberated areas consolidate, for example, she believes alternative monastic governance could develop even if no formal schism is declared. She explains that while the fear of schism has been a longstanding, historical concern in Burma, new nikayas (orders) typically only emerge around disciplinary disputes concerning technical issues of the Vinaya. Frydenlund speculates that perhaps a new possibility may arise, based on the suspicion that the Sangha has become unjust or morally corrupt due to the connection of some monks with the military. Whether the future yields a freer, more democratic Sangha or not may well depend less on theological debate than the war's outcome.

Amid these possibilities, Frydenlund is concerned about revolutionary rhetoric that writes off institutional Buddhism altogether. For all the justified anger at complicity, she believes that tearing down monastic structures entirely would irreparably impoverish the Sasana. This is why some pro-revolution monks work "within the lines," safeguarding the Vinaya even as they

feed, hide, and counsel the displaced. They are banking on a post-junta Myanmar will still need monasteries— albeit reformed, decentralized, and accountable— to anchor teaching, practice, and community.

Frydenlund summarizes her perspective on the Sangha and the positioning on monks along a political spectrum: On one end of the continuum are protectionist, nationalist monks, which range from ritual enablers to openly militant preachers, and amplified by the military-monastic complex. On the other end are pro-revolution monks, diverse in tone and tactics, some imagining a "Dhamma state... based on social justice and equality among religions and ethnic groups and minority protection," not a privileging of Buddhism by custom and law. Occupying the much larger middle ground are the many monks just trying to navigate fear, duty, and survival.

It is very complex, and this is why she balks at characterizing the Sangha and its relationship to the resistance in any one way. It is not simply, as some claim, a secular break from the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" model of monks leading the people, nor is it the case that all monks support the military or that ordinary Buddhists have abandoned the religious resources that sustain them. Frydenlund stresses that the institutions, practices, ethics, and narratives of Buddhism remain intimately intertwined with Myanmar's resistance: in war-zone clinics and refugee kitchens, in whispered sermons and nightly chants, in the private rituals that calm an anxious mind before another day's struggle. In the end, she wonders how anyone can conceive of one the most religious countries in the world changing so drastically overnight. "Don't buy into this narrative that we all lose faith in Buddhism now, because it's a revolution," she says. "Buddhism is still with us as this kind of personal practice, but it's also the realization of the Dhamma and the need for social justice that informs this societal engagement."

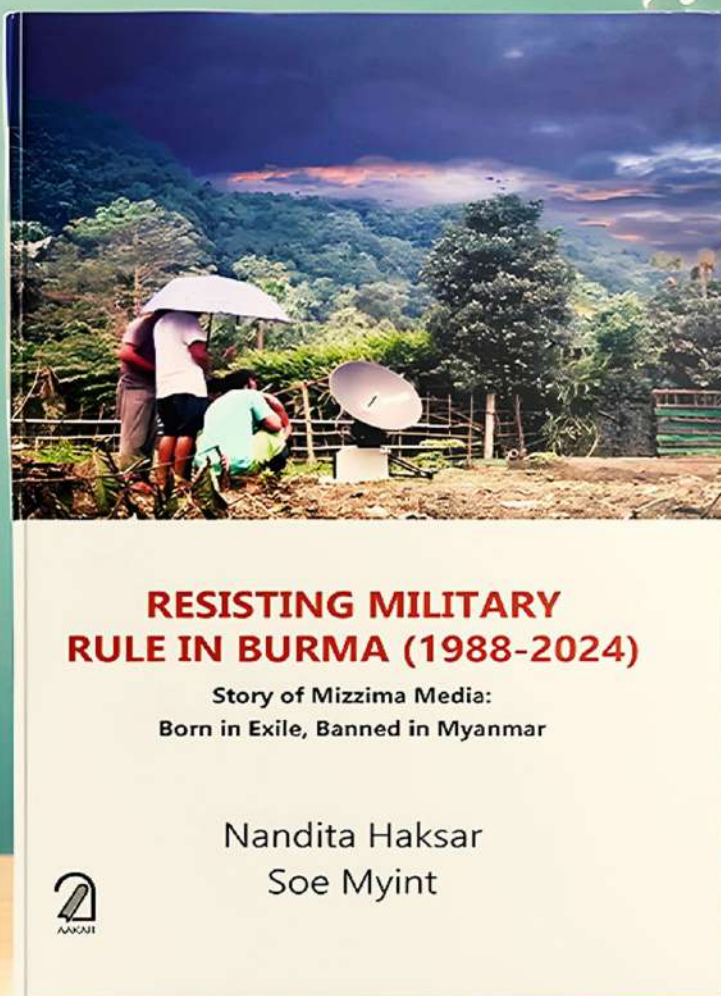
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UN RIGHTS WORK FACING 'EXISTENTIAL THREAT' AMID TARGETED CUTS: REPORT

United Nations rights work is being disproportionately targeted for cuts amid a deep UN funding crisis, posing an "existential threat" to vital investigations and accountability efforts, a report warned 22 October.

Washington's failure to pay UN membership fees, coupled with Chinese and Russian efforts to defund rights bodies, could deal a death-blow to the UN battle against rights abuses, the NGO report said.

"At a moment of sweeping UN reform and financial crisis, these efforts... pose an existential threat to the UN's human rights system," the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) cautioned.

Already, a high-level war crimes investigation ordered by the UN Human Rights Council into violence sweeping the Democratic Republic of Congo has failed to launch due to lacking funds.

And other investigations warn cuts could leave them severely crippled.

Liquidity crisis

The UN is mulling reforms including a 15-percent cut across its 2026 budget to tackle chronic liquidity problems exacerbated by US President Donald Trump's policies.

The United States, the UN's biggest contributor, paused funding after Trump returned to power in January.

As of September 30, Washington owed \$1.5 billion in unpaid UN membership fees, including \$300 million in arrears from previous years, according to the ISHR report.

China, the second-highest contributor, has fuelled the crisis by paying its dues "extremely late", the report said.

Beijing only completed last year's payment on December 27, essentially rendering the funds unusable since UN financial rules require budget amounts not spent by year-end to be returned to member states, ISHR said.

UN chief Antonio Guterres' UN80 reform proposal aims to spread cuts across the body's three pillars: peace and security; human rights; and sustainable development.

But ISHR warned the cuts would "disproportionately hit the human rights pillar due to years of underfunding".

The human rights segment receives less than one percent of the total UN budget.

'Huge gap'

Cuts being discussed could take a heavy toll on the UN rights office OHCHR, which has already seen tens of millions of dollars in US voluntary funds evaporate this year.

The agency has received just 73 percent of member states' promised regular budget contributions for 2025, leaving \$67 million unpaid.

"It's a huge gap," spokeswoman Liz Throssell told AFP.

Concretely, she said, "this is about victims who are less protected, people who can't get accountability".

"We have now reached the critical threshold of efficiency of the system. If it goes down further, it becomes very, very, very concerning."

Kaoru Okuizumi, deputy head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, warned that proposed cuts could see the probe lose 27 positions -- a third of its staff.

"It's huge," she told AFP, warning that specialised teams, including one investigating sexual and gender-based crimes, "may be cut entirely".

'Weaponised'

Targeted efforts to defund rights investigations during UN budget negotiations could deepen the crisis, ISHR warned.

Russia and China especially "have weaponised UN budget negotiations to serve their own interests and shield allies from scrutiny", said Madeleine Sinclair, head of ISHR's New York office.

During UN negotiations, the two countries repeatedly introduced proposals to slash rights funding, with backing from other "authoritarian states", the report said.

In the name of efficiency, they seek to cut funds for OHCHR and for investigations into abuses in countries like Russia, Belarus and North Korea.

The proposals "are clearly about crippling the OHCHR," report author Angeli Datt told journalists.

"They are not about efficiency."

Many countries fold to the pressure, with some even agreeing to block funding for investigations they themselves supported establishing, she said.

AFP



Photo: AFP

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THAI-CAMBODIA TRUCE DEAL TOUTED BY TRUMP

US President Donald Trump jetted into Malaysia on Sunday to oversee the signing of a Thailand-Cambodia ceasefire pact, after deadly cross-border clashes between the countries flared this summer.

Here's what we know about their agreement to uphold a truce, Trump's role in sealing the deal and the conflict at the heart of the matter.

What's in the deal?

Thailand and Cambodia witnessed their worst cross-border clashes in decades in July, when a territory dispute boiled over into five days of open combat along their jungle-clad frontier.

At least 40 people were killed and 300,000 forced to flee their homes as soldiers traded gunfire, fighter jets launched sorties and rocket barrages rained down.

The joint declaration between the Thai and Cambodia prime ministers, witnessed by Trump and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, contains paragraphs of broad pro-peace rhetoric and a few concrete details.

Both sides agreed to remove heavy weapons and landmines from the border, and to establish a ceasefire monitor team from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc chaired by Anwar.

They also agreed to "refrain from disseminating or promoting false information" in a bid to "foster an environment conducive to peaceful dialogue".

Thailand will "promptly release" 18 captured Cambodian soldiers.

While the deal agrees both sides will continue a dialogue through cross-border committees, it does

not resolve the core territorial dispute which caused fighting to flare.

What's Trump's role?

Thailand and Cambodia agreed an initial truce on July 28 after interventions by Trump, as well Malaysian leader Anwar and a team of Chinese diplomats.

But Trump hoarded credit, describing himself as "the President of PEACE" on social media at the time and recently boasting he had "proudly brokered" the armistice.

Both Thailand and Cambodia were courting trade deals with Washington amid Trump's global tariff blitz when he intervened, stoking speculation that the president used economic leverage to force the truce.

Trump called the peace pact signing on Sunday a "monumental step", and the White House swiftly announced new trade agreements with both countries.

A non-binding memorandum of understanding with Thailand outlines measures to increase cooperation on trading rare earth minerals, which are vital to tech products and of which China is the world's leading producer.

The headline of the Cambodian trade deal confirms the 19 percent levy the country had already secured this summer, a let-off from the 36 percent Trump had been threatening.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet issued a statement on Sunday repeating his claim that he has nominated Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the conflict.

Is it all solved?

The Thai-Cambodia conflict flared over a smattering of border temples, contested because of a vague territorial demarcation made by Cambodia's French colonial administrators in 1907.

The International Court of Justice granted Phnom Penh sovereignty over one of the most coveted temples in 1962 and a small patch of land around it in 2013, but Thailand does not recognise its jurisdiction.

The deal touted by Trump in Kuala Lumpur does not wade into the specifics of the territorial spat, which has sparked numerous rounds of violence over decades.

Khoo Ying Hooi, associate professor of international and strategic studies at the University of Malaysia, said any deal between the countries would be "more symbolic than substantive".

"The border issues have been there for a long time," she told BFM news radio.

Trump's comments, though, represent the deal as drawing a line under the dispute -- like many other global showdowns he claims to have put to rest.

"This is a momentous day for all of the people of Southeast Asia, as we sign a historic agreement to end the military conflict between Cambodia and Thailand," he said.

"Today's signing represents just one of eight conflicts that we've ended in eight months of the Trump presidency."

AFP



ROOTS OF THE DHAMMA

"In the core of it, the roots of the Dhamma are living... and so tradition is also living. To live means to be able to die, and then create something new."

This is our second talk with the longtime Buddhist monk, U Jagara. In our first discussion, U Jagara addressed his early life in Quebec, and the foundational experiences that sparked his spiritual journey, including his introduction to meditation and the path that eventually led him to monastic life. He sketched out the trajectory of his involvement in the Dhamma: time spent studying intensively with Mahasi Sayadaw, S. N. Goenka, and Pa Auk Sayadaw; a simple, isolated, monastic life in Sri Lanka; a brief hiatus when he disrobed and lived a lay life in France; and finally re-ordaining.

In this discussion, U Jagara explores some of these topics in more depth, along with reflections on monastic life, the role of creativity, and his overall spiritual evolution. U Jagara's journey is an inspiring blend of personal exploration and universal themes, weaving the structured discipline of monasticism with the profound transformations of human experience. Born in a Western context but profoundly influenced by the Buddhist traditions of Myanmar and Sri Lanka, his story

is a testament to the adaptability and resilience of the Dhamma as it encounters diverse cultural landscapes.

U Jagara begins by expanding on his earlier description of his involvement in the Goenka tradition. He was appointed as a teacher by S.N. Goenka in the early days of the organization's development, and so he was able to observe its evolution firsthand. He describes how what began as a flexible and accessible approach became increasingly systematized and rigidified as the tradition expanded globally. Recorded discourses replaced personalized teachings, and he found that their strict focus on one meditation method led to misunderstandings, along with a hesitancy to so much as interact with monks from other traditions. For U Jagara, this raised serious concerns about the tradition's growing insular nature, coupled with a broader incompatibility with other Buddhist practices. Despite these challenges, U Jagara maintained a deep appreciation for the essential lessons he gained during this period. However, especially after he moved to Sri Lanka, where he immersed himself in scholarship while living a more isolated, monastic life for a time, he ultimately transitioned away from the Goenka Organization. While acknowledging the value of its foundational teachings, he seeks a more expansive approach to the Dhamma, one that allows for greater integration of diverse practices and insights.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/10/14/episode-415-roots-of-the-dhamma>



MOGE AND PTTEP TO DRILL NEW OFFSHORE BLOCKS IN MOTTAMA GULF

The Myanmar junta-controlled Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) will partner with Thailand's state-owned energy company PTTEP International to explore and drill new offshore natural gas blocks in the Mottama Gulf, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM).

The two sides are expected to sign agreements with the Myanmar junta's Ministry of Energy to begin operations on Blocks M-5 and M-6 on November 1, continuing through March 2027. Navigation warnings have been issued for vessels within a four-kilometre radius of the sites.

PTTEP will also install four new platforms and connect underwater pipelines at the nearby M-9 block, where production has continued despite international sanctions. The company and MOGE are already collaborating in the Yadana and Zawtika gas projects, key sources of natural-gas exports to Thailand.

While the junta-run GNLM described the partnership as a step to expand "mutually beneficial"

energy development, rights groups have warned that revenues from the junta-controlled MOGE are a major source of hard currency for the military.

According to a November 2023 briefing by Human Rights Watch, Myanmar's gas projects generate over US\$1 billion annually, making them "the single largest source of foreign revenue" for the junta. Since the February 2021 coup, those funds have helped underwrite the military's campaigns which have been marked by frequent reports of human rights abuses.

EarthRights International estimated in 2023 that about US\$3 billion has flowed to the junta through MOGE accounts since the coup, largely from foreign-operated offshore fields.

Analysts note that with the exit of Western firms, PTTEP's growing role in Myanmar's offshore sector highlights the ongoing challenge of cutting off the junta's lucrative energy lifeline even as sanctions tighten.



SOCIAL MEDIA ABUZZ AS MYANMAR MILITARY RAIDS SCAM HUB

Social media users have been busy reporting on a high-profile event last week.

The military regime in Myanmar launched operations against large online scam hubs on the Thai-Myanmar border, particularly around KK Park in Myawaddy Township, Kayin State.

As the crackdown intensifies, thousands of Myanmar workers, trafficked individuals, and foreign nationals have fled these centers into Thailand. Thai border officials reported that hundreds crossed over following recent raids.

Although Myanmar's military claims to be taking action to shut down scams, analysts and locals believe these efforts are primarily for show. Social media users suggest that the military and various militia groups continue to profit from these scam operations, and that enforcement is inconsistent.

In October 2025, the Myanmar military reported seizing 30 Starlink satellite sets during a raid on KK Park, signaling that these devices have become a recognized part of the fraud infrastructure.

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.