

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**China's Ongoing
Meddling in Burma:
Ministerial Meeting
and Arms Sales
Prohibition**

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

THE DANGERS OF WIELDING

THE PEN

Independent media in Myanmar face an increasingly perilous environment in reporting on the country's ongoing crisis, one marked by political instability, widespread conflict, and military repression. Since the February 2021 military coup that overthrew the elected government, the space for free and independent journalism has narrowed dramatically. Journalists and media outlets like Mizzima that attempt to report on the junta's abuses, the civil resistance movement, or the worsening humanitarian situation risk arrest, torture, or even death. The dangers of wielding the pen that they face are both systemic and direct, part of a deliberate strategy by the military regime to silence dissent and control the narrative.

One of the most immediate challenges is the criminalization of journalism itself. The junta has passed sweeping laws that target the press, such as amendments to the Penal Code and Telecommunications Law, which criminalize the spread of so-called "false news" and "incitement"—terms that are broadly interpreted to include any reporting critical of the regime. This legal repression has led to the arrest and imprisonment of dozens of journalists, many of whom are held without fair trial or subjected to military courts. The fear of persecution has forced many media workers underground, while others have fled the country entirely, often continuing their reporting from exile at great personal risk.

Access to information is another major obstacle. The military has imposed internet blackouts, censored websites, and shut down independent media outlets, effectively cutting off large swathes of the country from outside scrutiny. These blackouts often coincide with military offensives, preventing journalists from documenting atrocities in real time. Even when the internet is available, surveillance is pervasive, and

sources risk retaliation for speaking to journalists. This makes verification of events on the ground difficult and increases the risk of misinformation or underreporting, especially in remote conflict zones where atrocities are most likely to occur.

Independent media must also contend with the psychological toll of reporting under such constant threat. Journalists live with the daily possibility of raids, arrests, or having to go into hiding. Many face trauma from witnessing or covering violence, while being isolated from support networks. Financial insecurity further compounds the issue. As many independent outlets have lost access to advertising revenue or have been forced to shut down their operations, surviving newsrooms rely heavily on a reduced stream of foreign funding and volunteer work, which is often unsustainable and vulnerable to disruption.

In exile, media organizations operate with a different set of challenges. They must navigate censorship, digital threats, and the logistical difficulty of verifying news from afar. They also risk being labeled as foreign agents by the junta, which uses nationalist rhetoric to discredit their work. Yet despite all of this, Mizzima and other members of Myanmar's independent media continue to play a crucial role in informing the public and documenting abuses that would otherwise go unrecorded. The courage of reporters under fire underscores the essential role of a free press in times of crisis. But without sustained international support and protection, these media voices remain dangerously vulnerable to a regime that is determined to silence them at any cost.

Support for Myanmar's independent media is more vital than ever before.

EDITORIAL

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Photo: AFP

CHINA'S ONGOING MEDDLING IN BURMA: MINISTERIAL MEETING AND ARMS SALES PROHIBITION

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

On the ground in Burma, resistance forces have never possessed air defense systems and are now running dangerously low on ammunition. Meanwhile, the junta enjoys total air superiority thanks to Chinese support and is gaining the upper hand even in infantry confrontations as the resistance struggles to source bullets.

Abroad, the NUG and EAOs are not being granted state-level visits nor are they invited to meaningfully participate in international meetings and organizations, but with Beijing's support, the junta is slowly gaining legitimacy, at least among China-aligned countries.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to shape the outcome of the Burma war and stands as one of the greatest obstacles facing the resistance. Beijing has escalated support for the junta through three main channels: direct military aid, including assistance with

weapons production; diplomatic legitimization, such as hosting junta leaders at high-profile state events; and coercive peace initiatives that pressure ethnic armed groups into unfavorable ceasefires.

This marks a clear departure from China's earlier posture of balancing between sides. Beijing now openly backs the junta as the sole power capable of safeguarding Chinese economic interests, even as the regime commits war crimes and prolongs Burma's devastating civil war.

China's state-owned China South Industries Group Corporation has played a central role in enabling the Myanmar military to manufacture aerial bombs at Defence Industry 21 (DI 21) in Magway Region, according to a July 16, 2025 report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar. Its subsidiary Hunan Vanguard provided technicians between 2014 and 2019 and trained

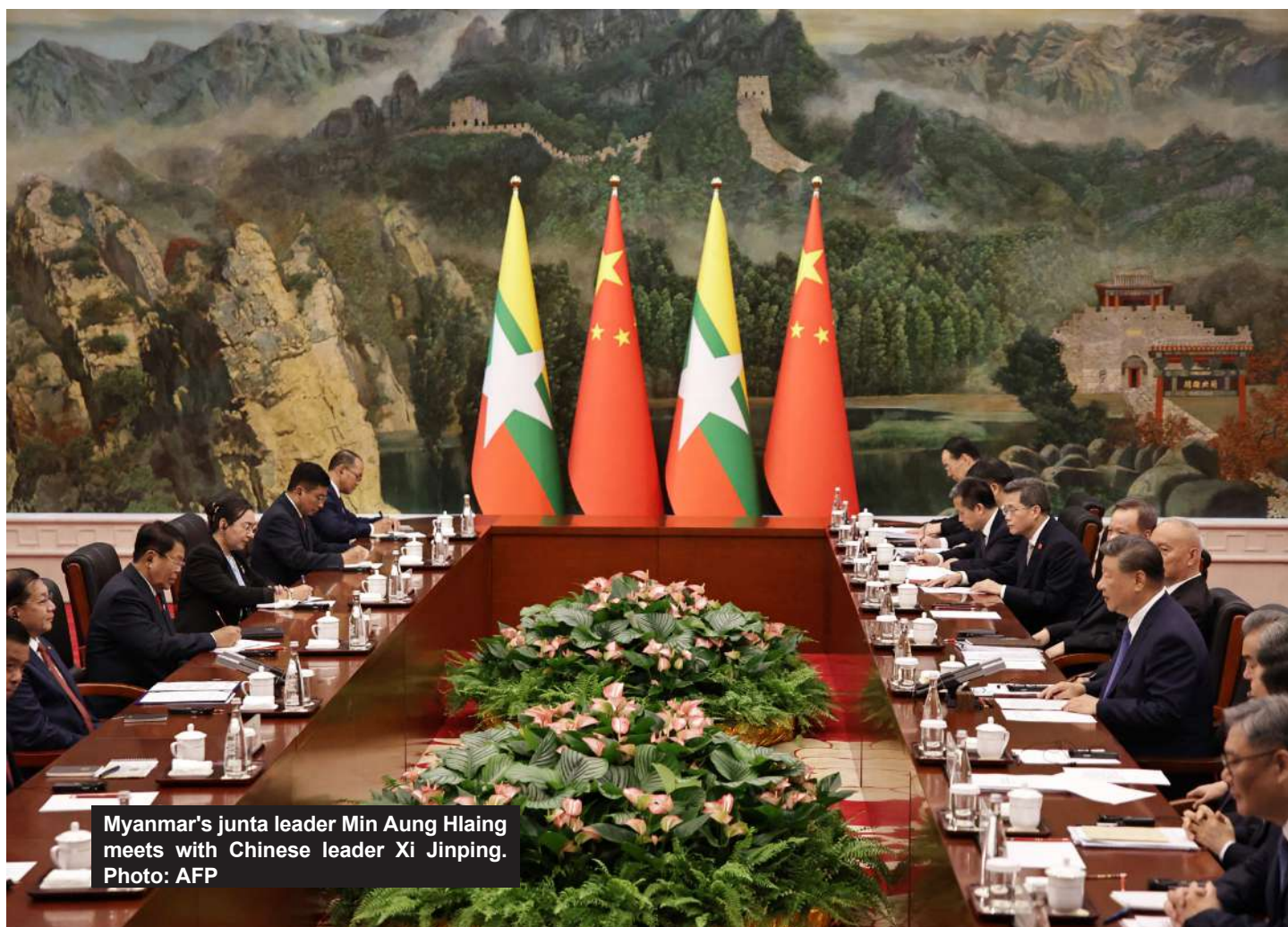


Myanmar engineers in China, with evidence that technical assistance has continued remotely since then. Because China South is owned by the State Council, these transfers represent direct authorization from the Chinese government.

The weapons produced at DI 21 include 250 kg and 500 kg bombs, fuel-air explosives, and cluster munitions, used by the junta in airstrikes against civilians in markets, schools, places of worship, IDP camps, and hospitals. Beyond domestic production, China has also delivered advanced military hardware: a Y-8F-200W medium-lift cargo plane and three FTC-2000G fighter jets in December 2024. The Myanmar military has long sought self-sufficiency through a network of 25 weapons factories, but still relies heavily on imported micro-electronics and foreign expertise for bomb production.

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi pledged \$3 billion in assistance to Burma's junta, with funds earmarked for a census and elections aimed at legitimizing the regime. This financial commitment reflected Beijing's de facto recognition of the junta as Burma's lawful government, a position underscored by a series of high-profile diplomatic gestures in September 2025.

Early in the month, China welcomed junta chief Min Aung Hlaing to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin, followed by his attendance at China's massive military parade in Tiananmen Square on September 3. Standing alongside Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un, Min Aung Hlaing received unprecedented international legitimacy. The parade, which drew more than 50,000 spectators, featured over 10,000 troops and advanced weapons systems including DF-61 intercontinental ballistic missiles, hyperso-



Myanmar's junta leader Min Aung Hlaing meets with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

nic anti-ship missiles (YJ-21 and YJ-19), air-defense lasers, extra-large undersea drones, stealth aircraft, and robot dogs.

For Min Aung Hlaing, the parade marked his first state-level invitation since the 2021 coup and the clearest signal yet of Beijing's official recognition. China even referred to him as "acting president" during the World War II Victory Day commemorations, further elevating his status. Analysts argue these steps indicate a transition from partial to full Chinese backing, economic, military, and diplomatic, as Beijing moves to stabilize its border and safeguard Belt and Road investments worth billions in Burma.

By the end of the visit, Min Aung Hlaing declared to Chinese media that it had been his "most successful trip so far." The regime signed seven memorandums of understanding with Chinese companies, many linked to military-linked firms, covering infrastructure, trade, cross-border connectivity, and law enforcement. Several agreements were tied to the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, highlighting Beijing's aim to secure control over key overland trade routes into Southeast Asia and maritime corridors linking the region to China.

During his meeting with Xi Jinping, Min Aung Hlaing thanked China for pressuring ethnic armed organizations in northern Burma, crediting Beijing's mediation with slowing the rebel advance. China's diplomatic and economic pressure has cost the resistance significant internal support.

On August 20, 2025, the United Wa State Party (UWSP) announced it would stop selling weapons and ammunition and end all support to allied groups, including the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP). UWSP Vice

Chair Zhao Guoan admitted Beijing had forced the decision, saying China held the UWSP responsible for fueling conflict in northern Shan State and had already taken "unprecedented actions" such as arrests, asset freezes, and border closures. He warned ethnic allies, "If we do not end our support for your organizations, China will escalate its punitive measures. The current pressure is already unbearable: the worst survival crisis in 40 years."

The impact on the battlefield has been immediate. The MNDAA was compelled to hand Lashio back to the junta in April, while the TNLA suffered intensified airstrikes after rejecting regime demands during failed China-brokered talks in Kunming. China also closed border gates to MNDAA- and TNLA-controlled areas and pressed the UWSA to seal crossings into MNDAA territory.

China is such an asymmetrically large, wealthy, and powerful force that decisions made far away in Beijing dramatically change outcomes on the ground in Burma. While resistance leadership still hopes the US or the international community might intervene, many have expressed the necessity of finding their own independent and domestic solutions to the lack of air defense capabilities and ammunition, and to simply keep fighting, as many ethnic armed groups have done since 1948.

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

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Aerial views of villages in Rakhine State.
Photo: Supplied

JUNTA TARGETS RAKHINE SCHOOLS IN DEADLY ATTACKS

The Myanmar military has intensified airstrikes in Rakhine State, targeting civilian areas including schools, monasteries, and homes as its forces face mounting losses against the Arakan Army (AA) on multiple fronts. Within just 17 days, the junta carried out four major strikes in AA-controlled areas, leaving dozens dead and injured.

One of the deadliest attacks occurred on September 12 in Thayet Thapin - Kyauktaw Township, when junta aircraft dropped two 500-pound bombs on two private boarding schools—Pyinnya Pannkhinn and Amyin Thit—at around 1:05 a.m. The bombs struck as students, mostly from Grade 8 to Grade 12, were sleeping in their dormitories. At least 22 students were killed and more than 20 wounded. Most victims were from villages in Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Maungdaw townships.

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) has since requested detailed evidence of the strike, including casualty data, destruction assessments, and any available photos or videos of the aircraft and munitions.

AA commander General Tun Mrat Naing strongly condemned the bombing in an interview with The Irrawaddy, questioning the junta's claims of patriotism while it "kills the students who are the future of the country." He contrasted the attack with the AA's treatment of children of prisoners of war, saying the group strives to care for them despite scarce resources.

Two weeks later, on September 26, the military launched another 500-pound bomb strike in Taunggoke Township, this time hitting a monastery. The building was completely destroyed, but monks escaped injury after evacuating in advance upon receiving warnings of the raid.

The next day, September 27, junta aircraft struck twice in Thandwe. The second strike hit a civilian home, killing a father and injuring his wife and two sons, along with two others nearby.

On September 29, airstrikes struck Paletwa, where two women were killed and 19 others injured. Locals reported that the junta dropped two 500-pound bombs and a cluster bomb in three separate attacks.

A local analyst told Narinjara News that the wave of airstrikes reflects the military's desperation as it suffers heavy losses along the Rakhine-Magway and Rakhine-Bago mountain ranges. With the AA counteroffensive intensifying in Kyaukphyu, Ann, and Taunggoke townships, the junta appears to be retaliating through indiscriminate aerial bombardments that disproportionately harm civilians.

Junta makes changes to election line-up

Myanmar's military-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) has announced that no voting will be held in 56 out of the country's 330 constituencies, citing a lack of conditions for a "free and fair election." The statement, released on September 14, has raised further doubts about the regime's controversial plan to stage a nationwide poll while large swathes of the country remain under the control of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and resistance forces aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG).



Myanmar junta leader continues his preparation for elections to be held in December and January. Photo: AFP

According to the announcement, the excluded constituencies include 37 areas under EAO and NUG control, 14 townships with heavy military activity, four townships under the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and one under the Mongla-based Myanmar Democratic Alliance Army (MDAA). Mizzima research shows that the list omits 10 townships already seized by anti-junta forces, raising questions about the regime's political calculations.

In Kachin State, for example, the UEC's list omitted Bhamo, where fierce fighting is underway between junta troops and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and its allies. Two other townships—Momauk and Mansi—were also left out, even though they are fully administered by the KIA. In Kayah State, three townships currently held by the Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) were included, but two others that the military recaptured in July and August were omitted.

A similar pattern is seen in Chin State, where towns controlled by the Chin Brotherhood were listed, but

Tonzang, seized by the Chin National Front (CNF), was left out. In Rakhine State, where the Arakan Army (AA) has taken full control of 14 constituencies, the junta's commission listed only 10. Four others—located in the south bordering Ayeyarwady and Bago regions, along with Ann in the north near Magway—were excluded. Analysts suggest the military still hopes to retake these areas and stage voting there, despite suffering recent losses in Ann and Taunggye. AA commander Tun Mrat Naing dismissed the regime's plans in an interview with *The Irrawaddy*, saying there was “no need to ask or answer” about the junta's election in areas under AA control, as the military has no authority there.

The situation in Shan State is even more complex, given the presence of multiple armed actors. While 12 constituencies controlled by the KIA, TNLA, MNDAA, UWSA, and MDAA were excluded, Kyaukse and Hsipaw—captured by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) during the 1027 offensive—were not. The junta is reportedly conducting operations to retake Kyaukse.



In Myanmar's heartland, the UEC added constituencies beyond the four already seized by resistance forces. In Sagaing Region, eight townships were excluded due to intense fighting, while in Mandalay, three constituencies—two held by the NUG and TNLA and one harshly contested—were listed. In Magway Region, five townships facing heavy clashes were also included, underscoring the widespread instability even in central Myanmar.

Analysts say the announcement underscores the junta's struggle to balance political optics with battlefield realities. By omitting certain EAO-controlled townships, the regime may be signaling its intent to launch fresh offensives to reclaim them ahead of the poll. But with the military losing ground in multiple theatres, doubts persist over whether its planned "election" can extend beyond paper declarations.

Military escalates conscription

Myanmar's military regime is escalating its forced conscription drive with methods that go far beyond the legal framework of its conscription law, according to reports from local media and residents.

The law technically requires new recruits to be chosen by lottery from men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27. However, junta authorities are instead using a range of coercive tactics, including night-time household checks, daytime searches of commuters, and arrests carried out under threat of misusing the law.

Despite official promises that conscripts would not be deployed to front-line combat zones, many recruits have been sent directly into intense battlefields. Families are often informed only belatedly of the deaths of their sons. As a result, large numbers of parents have chosen to send their sons abroad, most commonly to Thailand, to avoid the draft.

One of the most serious incidents occurred on September 28 in Thaton Township, Mon State. A combined force of around 50 soldiers and police raided Kayin Lay Seik village, arresting 35 people, including boys as young as 13, men up to age 50, and several women. The detainees were reportedly taken to the No. 9 Basic Military Training School.

A villager told Khit Thit Media: "Soldiers from the No. 9 training school and policemen from Thein Seik station, around 50 personnel in total, arrested 35 civilians, including middle school students, girls, and women without any reason. This kind of raid happens again and again. Previously, on August 30, they also arrested many villagers from Patainyoe."

Alongside raids, another troubling practice has emerged: the trading of conscripts through ward and village administrators. Under pressure to meet quotas, administrators have been buying recruits using funds collected from households that wish to avoid sending their sons into the military. This practice has created what locals describe as a growing "market" for conscripts.

On September 25, two administrators in Patheingyi city, Ayeyarwaddy Region, were arrested for allegedly profiteering from this conscript-trading scheme, though they were released three days later. That same day, two administrators in Kayan Township, Yangon Region, were also detained over conscription-related issues. Their whereabouts remain unknown, and even their families had no information as of September 29.

Reports from the Myanmar Pressphoto Agency indicate that in Kayan Township, households with boys of eligible age are required to pay between 40,000 and 60,000 kyats monthly to avoid conscription. Families with two eligible sons are charged double, while households without sons must pay 20,000 kyats. The two administrators detained in Kayan were notorious for collecting as much as 100,000 kyats per household, which is believed to be the reason behind their arrests. Following the collection of these payments, no official conscripts have reportedly been recruited from the township.



Resistance fighter on the frontline.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

FROM PEKON TO THE FRONTLINE: WHY BURMA'S YOUTH TOOK UP ARMS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Nay Zin, a female soldier with the People's Defense Force (PDF), explained why so many from her area joined the resistance. "We have been oppressed since 2021," she said. Most of her battalion is made up of people from Pekon in Shan State who joined because they could not accept the behavior of the Myanmar military junta and what it did to the people.

Since 2021, the junta has committed a series of atrocities and acts of repression in the Pekon region. During the first year of the coup, junta forces forced 20 villagers to walk in front of their soldiers during operations against resistance forces, using them as human shields. That same year, the junta arrested cowherds and farmers, seizing their animals as part of a campaign of intimidation and resource confiscation.

In May 2022, junta troops burned down Saungnankhae village, which had about 50 households, in Pekon Township near the Shan-Kayah border. Residents fled as homes were destroyed. The attack came a day after clashes in nearby Aashay Inn Village,

where junta and Pa-O National Organization forces fought local defense groups, and the junta bombed the area. That same month, junta forces, including Light Infantry Battalion 422 and PNO militias, carried out a scorched-earth operation east of Moebye Lake.

They burned over 100 houses in the Loi Pao village tract, displacing more than 4,000 people. Villages such as Saung Nam Kay were torched even without fighting. On May 16, junta troops also shelled Loi Pan Sone village on an island in Moebye Lake, damaging the temple, school, and houses, and injuring villagers who were sheltering inside.

In March 2023, the Burma military maintained offensives into Moebye with a campaign of airstrikes, indiscriminate shelling, and village burnings across Shan State, causing displacement and rising civilian casualties. The junta also shelled and bombed PDF forces in Pekon; in one raid, two elderly villagers (ages 81 and 78) and a Grade 7 child were killed, reportedly burned alive.

On September 5, 2024, the junta bombed an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Pekon Township on the Shan-Karenni border, killing nine displaced civilians, including six children, and wounding 19 others. The strike destroyed shelters, a school, and other civilian infrastructure.

In 2025, fighting in and around Moebye intensified, with territory changing hands several times. For much of the year, Moebye remained an uninhabited ghost town as resistance forces and the junta military battled for control.

In July, junta troops and Pa-O National Organization militias burned 27 houses in Nargon Village in Pekon Township and about 30 more in Hsantswea Village in Nyaungshwe Township. They claimed PDF fighters were hiding in those communities, though villagers had already fled. Displacement in Pekon has grown increasingly severe, with 1,200 people forced from their homes during a single battle in the spring. Since then, there has been a steady flow of IDPs fleeing Pekon, seeking safety in resistance-controlled areas closer to the Thai border.

All of these atrocities against the civilian population drove Nay Zin and many like her to take up arms. She recalled the early days of the revolution, when they entered the jungle without proper weapons and relied on homemade guns and explosives. "In 2021 we did not have automatic rifles, so we started with hunting rifles. That's how we started," she said. Many of the fighters were very young, mostly boys, though girls also served. Most young women worked as medics, but some fought alongside the men. "They are all involved in the revolution," she added.

Community support was strong at the beginning. In 2021, the people provided half of the food the battalion needed, allowing donations to be prioritized

for weapons. That year saw many small battles. In August and September, a battle in Khone Thar claimed many lives, including many from the Karenni forces who were fighting alongside the PDF. In November, her unit endured what they call the "seven days war" in western Pekon, where they lost many fighters against an enemy with far superior weapons.

Losses continued into 2022. "It is worth mentioning that some didn't lose their lives but lost their organs, eyes and legs. Losing one leg is also a loss for them," she said. To avoid endangering civilians, her battalion eventually moved its camp further away from the city.

As the years went on, shortages began to set in, forcing the unit to plant rice for themselves. Weaponry, however, gradually improved. "We only had five automatic rifles in 2021. But we slowly began to buy more weapons and eventually we even had artillery," she said. By 2024, they had obtained scout drones, which proved extremely useful in battle. Still, shortages remain. Soldiers often have limited food rations. "Only two meals a day, but we are able to fight well in battles. The soldiers came from the people and they have a lot of passion, and that's the most important thing," Nay Zin explained.

She emphasized that the PDF takes care to avoid becoming like the regime they are fighting. "We are very careful to not be like the dictators we are fighting against. We take that seriously and always prevent any actions that could lead us to become like those," she said.

Resistance commanders have explained that one of the biggest challenges they face, unlike the junta, is the care of the civilian population. Resistance forces must avoid camping near civilians, which could invite airstrikes, and when battles erupt, they also have to help evacuate those caught in the fighting. For a

movement already strapped for cash, this means more mouths to feed and more families to house. By contrast, the junta's generals show no concern for civilians and can devote all of their resources to military operations.

Nay Zin recounted how most of those killed have been young, leaving the battalion grieving alongside the families. Yet they remain determined. "We vow to keep fighting until the military dictatorship is gone," she said. Personally, she admitted, "Sometimes we really want to give up, we really do. But we cannot do that. Considering our future generations, for their rights and opportunities, we cannot surrender."

Their base has been bombed three times, but she believes divine intervention saved them. "God protected us; most of us were safe, but we lost one soldier," she recalled. In moments like that, she said they try to find the good and the bad in the situation.

Today, the PDF and the Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) both maintain forces in Pekon. The people continue to support them. "The people support us to this day, no matter what. And that encourages us to keep moving forward till the victory," she said. Still, her greatest hope is for peace. "One thing I hope for is the wars to end soon because the people have already been suffering a lot. They want to go home now."

In a recent interview with a resistance commander in the area, he described the fighting as intense and ongoing. "The situation is heavy fighting there, and a little bit worrying," he said. He explained that his forces were "taking the area back as much as we can," as clashes with the junta forces continued daily.

When asked about displacement, he explained that internally displaced persons (IDPs) were no longer as mobile as before. Instead, they had moved slightly away from the main road in an effort to protect themselves.

"The people have to move back a little bit from the main road to save themselves," he said.

Previously, IDPs had formed camps along the main road because it offered better chances for economic opportunities and access to scarce supplies of food and other necessities. Now, some are establishing camps deeper in the jungle to make themselves less of a target for airstrikes. Many of the current IDPs have already been displaced two or three times, and now they hope to build more permanent villages that they will not have to flee from again.

Over the past year and a half, drones have become an increasingly prominent feature of the conflict, responsible for many, if not most, of the casualties. Now, however, as the junta pushes to retake Pekon and surrounding areas, the fighting has escalated beyond drones and mortars to include more direct clashes. "It's a little bit bad. Not just drones and mortars now, you've also got shooting as well," the commander said.

On the issue of civilian casualties, he stressed that while there had not been large numbers recently, civilians were still targeted. "It's all about control," he said, adding that "they are bombing civilian sites." He recalled that in the previous month, junta forces bombed several civilian areas, including a church in Mochi Rite where seven people were killed. This month, he noted, there had been fewer civilian casualties because the junta was concentrating on moving the frontline into areas that the civilian population had already fled.

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



THE REVOLUTION'S RESOLVE: MYANMAR'S UNBROKEN WILL RESOUNDS GLOBALLY

JAMES SHWE

Despite reports of setbacks and diminished international support, the determination of the people of Myanmar—inside the country and across the world—to be free from military oppression remains unshaken. Recent weeks have made this resolve unmistakable: On September 20, a major rally convened in front of the United Nations in New York, with diaspora and supporters demanding Ambassador U Kyaw Moe Tun's continuation, protesting China's interference, and rejecting the junta's sham elections. These actions also continue in London, Tokyo, Seoul, Sydney, and in San Francisco, where local Myanmar communities have organized weekly demonstrations since the coup. Inside Myanmar itself—in Salingyi, Yinmabin, and Kalay in Sagaing Region—brave citizens have risked draconian laws and state violence to

denounce the regime's December 28 election, even as the risk of repression and arrest looms.

Among the voices at the September 20 UKMT campaign rally in New York was a 12-year-old girl of Myanmar descent from Kentucky, whose mother grew up in an IDP camp in Myanmar. Her heartfelt speech for democracy in Myanmar and compassion for the suffering of the people of Myanmar offered a poignant reminder that the spirit to resist military tyranny lives on in new generations—carried far beyond Myanmar's borders into every corner where hearts yearn for justice and dignity. As long as the desire for freedom remains in the hearts of the new generation, the battle is not lost yet.

On the commemoration of International Democracy Day, September 15, the Global Union Federations (GUFs), representing over 200 million workers worldwide, issued an unequivocal condemnation of the Myanmar military junta's illegal and illegitimate elections. Declaring the planned vote "a dangerous mockery of democracy and a calculated ploy to entrench military rule," these federations joined Myanmar's labor movement in calling for a global boycott and demanding that international institutions reject the sham process outright.

International IDEA echoed these themes in its widely cited August 2025 statement, emphasizing that the junta's moves are "not genuine reforms but strategic repackaging of military rule to give a semblance of democratic legitimacy." It warned that elections staged under such conditions are "calculated attempts to undermine Myanmar's legitimate interim government institutions," not the democratic exercise the regime claims. Earlier this year, a coalition of respected international election experts and organizations released a joint declaration stating that no credible or legitimate election is possible under junta control, and that the planned process is designed only to further entrench the illegal military regime.

Ethnic resistance organizations (EROs) and ethnic political parties have added their powerful rejections. Parties such as the Arakan National Party (denied registration by the regime), the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (refused registration), and multiple other EROs and armed organizations have united in their categorical rejection of the junta's election charade. They know that federal democracy and genuine ethnic rights cannot emerge from a process orchestrated at gunpoint.

Myanmar's movement for democracy continues to demonstrate extraordinary organizational resilience:

diaspora networks sustain major fundraising, youth and grassroots leaders continually educate and mobilize, and broad-based, cross-ethnic coalitions flourish even in the shadow of repression. From New York's UN plaza to the central Myanmar town in Sagaing Division of Salingyi, and from union halls in Geneva to villages across Myanmar, the Spring Revolution's demands cannot be silenced.

Today, we—inside Myanmar and around the world—must press the international community harder: **REJECT** the planned election. Do not give the junta its much-sought legitimacy. The well-being, dignity, and rights of 54 million people must never be sacrificed for political expediency or economic gain, nor should crimes against humanity be forgiven or forgotten. It is a moral imperative that the world stands with Myanmar's people.

Finally, let this be a call to our own leaders: Set aside personal ambitions, historic grievances, and factional boundaries. Unite. Build and present a broad, trusted alternative governing body—one the world can trust as truly representative of Myanmar's hopes and diversity. International actors and donors must listen to authentic voices on the front lines, not just those with privileged access or polished presentations. Assistance must incentivize unity and inclusion, not deepen division.

The world's attention, solidarity, and principled action must not waver. The struggle for Myanmar's freedom unites old and young, exile and citizen, global and local. This is a revolution that belongs to all who believe in the dignity, justice, and transformative power of people determined to change history.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA REGAINS ASIA HIGHWAY IN MYAWADDY BUT BLOCKS CIVILIAN TRAVEL

Myanmar's military has regained control of the Asia Highway, the key trade route linking the border town of Myawaddy with Kawkaik in Karen State, but is still not allowing civilians to use it, according to residents and truck drivers.

Junta troops retook the highway and nearby battalion camps, including the Thin Gan Nyi Naung command post, in the first week of September. The road had been controlled for more than 18 months by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and allied resistance groups.

Although damaged bridges and road sections have been repaired, residents said civilian travel remains blocked nearly three weeks after the junta's takeover.

"We still can't use it. Other routes are closed due to heavy taxes and arrests, so most of us have stopped," said a truck driver in Myawaddy.

Another resident added, "I heard they might reopen it on the 28th or 29th, but nothing is confirmed."

The 27-mile stretch normally takes just over two hours to travel, but locals are forced to use the Hta W Kaw

Koe road and the old Myawaddy-Kawkaik mountain road, which take around four hours. Many truck drivers have stopped operating, citing high customs duties and the seizure of Thai goods.

The closure has driven up prices in Myawaddy, where food staples cost nearly double compared to towns deeper inside the country.

"Rice, oil, salt, eggs and onions are almost twice as expensive as in Hpa-An. Even a pack of Marlboro cigarettes is now 10,000 kyat," said a local woman.

The KNLA and its allies seized the Asia Highway and the Thin Gan Nyi Naung base in March 2024. The junta launched "Operation Aung Zeya" the following month and finally retook the area in September 2025.

Fighting is ongoing in Myawaddy district, with junta forces attempting to capture remaining resistance strongholds in the Myawaddy area including Lay Kay Kaw, Palu and Thay Baw Boe. Infantry Battalion 275 in Myawaddy and the Thin Gan Nyi Naung command are providing support with artillery, howitzers and rockets, according to residents.



Mudra. Photo: Supplied

IFJ URGES ARAKAN ARMY TO RELEASE DETAINED JOURNALIST IN RAKHINE STATE

On 25 September, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Myanmar Journalists Network (MJN) urged the Arakan Army to immediately release Border News Agency journalist Mudra, who was abducted from her home in Rakhine State on September 20.

The press release is as follows.

The Border News Agency journalist was abducted from her home in Maungdaw and remains held under interrogation at the Arakan Army Intelligence Office, according to a statement from the Agency on September 22.

Mudra is known for reporting on human rights abuses and the ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, regularly documenting forced recruitment, abductions, and violence against vulnerable communities. The Agency said her abduction undermines efforts to amplify the voices of ethnic and religious minorities in the conflict-affected region and appealed to the ethnic armed organisation (EAO) for the journalist's immediate release on humanitarian grounds and with respect for international law.

The Arakan Army, formed in 2009 and currently fighting against the Myanmar military junta, has faced recent allegations of policies targeting the Rohingya

minority in the region. Journalists across the country have faced ongoing threats and targeting from both the military regime and opposition rebel groups since the February 2021 coup d'état.

Since the 2021 coup, at least seven journalists have been killed, according to the IFJ's affiliate, Myanmar Journalists Network (MJN). As of August 2025, the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law recorded at least 223 journalists detained by the junta, with 91 sentenced to a combined total of 511 years in prison.

The MJN said: "The arrest of a journalist from the Border News Agency by the Arakan Army indicates that the threat to press freedom in Myanmar is not exclusive to the military regime. MJN demands that all armed groups respect freedom of the press. We call for the media to be recognised not as propaganda tools for any armed faction, but as independent organisations working to amplify the voices of the people and advocate for their interests."

The IFJ said: "Journalists should never be targeted in retaliation for their reporting. The IFJ urges the Arakan Army to immediately release Mu Dra and stresses that all parties in Myanmar's civil war have a fundamental responsibility to protect critical voices reporting on the conflict."



Hakha. Photo: Supplied

FRACTURES IN CHIN RESISTANCE - EXILES HOLD OUT HOPE FOR UNITY

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Since Myanmar's February 2021 military coup, Chin State has become one of the clearest examples of armed resistance successfully pushing regime forces out. Rebel groups now control most of the state, but internal divisions threaten these gains. Two major factions, the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Chin Brotherhood, have both driven out junta troops yet remain deeply divided. Their rivalry has already led to deadly clashes, complicating efforts to form unified governance and justice institutions across Chin State. The presence of the Arakan Army, which controls Paletwa in southern Chin and fights alongside the Chin Brotherhood, has further aggravated tensions.

The humanitarian toll has been devastating. More than 160,000 people, over one-third of Chin State's pre-coup population, have been displaced since 2021, with most remaining inside Myanmar and many others fleeing across the border into India. Homes, towns, and infrastructure have been destroyed in military airstrikes and punitive raids. Displaced families face shortages of food, shelter, and medicine, while insecurity and the destruction of markets and roads prevent them from returning. For many, stability and access to essential services will be the key conditions for going home.

Chin refugees and exiles in Malaysia monitor the situation back home through phone calls with friends and family and through social media. The war is a constant topic of conversation as they pray for the day the country will stabilize and they can return home. After a church service in Kuala Lumpur, Chin exiles spoke about the resistance. They expressed frustration with the way things were going. They were proud that the Chin were the first to take up arms after the coup, but now the ethnic armed organizations are fighting each other. "They don't really focus on fighting against the military army," said one of the Chin men, named Dennis. "Now it's like, here's the ethnic group, they got their own army. So, they compete with each other."

The Chin have a long history of resistance to military rule, led by the Chin National Front (CNF) and its armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), formed in 1988. After the 2021 coup, local militias emerged across Chin State, many consolidating into Chinland Defense Forces (CDFs), with some trained and supplied by the CNF. Together with unaffiliated People's Defense Forces (PDF), these groups formed an informal united front that controlled most of Chin State by early 2024, except Hakha and Paletwa.

This unity fractured in December 2023, when the CNF and allied CDFs created the Chinland Council under an interim constitution. Several CDFs opposed the CNF's dominance and instead formed the Chin Brotherhood Alliance (CBA). Distrust of the CNF, partly rooted in its past willingness to negotiate with the junta, deepened the split. By 2024, political rivalry escalated into clashes between Chinland Council and CBA forces. Fighting broke out in February, May, June, and August, even as efforts at reconciliation were attempted in India.

The roots of today's divisions lie in longstanding ethnic, tribal, and geographic rivalries in Chin State. The Chin are not a single, homogenous group but a collection of dozens of ethno-linguistic communities, often collectively referred to as Kuki-Chin-Mizo. These communities are spread not only across Chin State but also into neighboring Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine regions, as well as across borders into India and Bangladesh. Although attempts to forge a broader pan-Chin identity have been made, politics and loyalty still largely follow tribal or regional lines.

These divisions have carried into the resistance, leaving the CNF and the CBA suspicious of each other and prone to clashes sparked by propaganda, misunderstandings, or local disputes. In recent years, the Hakha have been the most powerful tribe, while the Falam held dominance in the past. Generally, the Chinland Council draws support from central Chin tribes, while the CBA is stronger in the north and south. In some areas, even a single town may field rival militias aligned to opposing sides.

Another layer of tension involves external actors. The Arakan Army (AA) claims Paletwa Township as Arakan territory, while the Chinland Council insists it belongs to Chinland. The Council accuses the CBA of seeking AA support by conceding Paletwa, while the CBA, in turn, accuses the CNF of secretly collaborating with the junta, even presenting contested testimony to support its claims. Such accusations deepen mistrust and fuel divisions.

Beyond tribal and political rivalries, generational differences also shape the split. Older CNF leaders, who have fought for Chin rights for decades, see a historic chance to establish the Chinland they envision. Younger CDF and PDF volunteers, however, want greater participation in decision-making and often push for a different vision of Chinland's future. The demand for a voice is particularly strong among Chin women, who have emerged as an increasingly vocal force in the

resistance.

Despite these many tensions, on 26 February 2025, both the Chinland Council and the CBA signed an agreement to unite under a single political body. This represents a major step toward reconciliation and cooperation. Yet the unity remains fragile. If the process stalls or collapses, Chin State could once again see renewed internal fighting, undermining the resistance, fracturing control, and potentially allowing junta forces to regain territory.

Dennis shook his head when he talked about the resistance. He said the Chinland Defense Forces used to be under the Chin National Army, but now some groups pulled out and made their own armies. "They fight each other," he said. "Chinland Defense Force here, Chin National Army there. Some groups don't agree with the CNA, so they quit and build their own power. Now they are against each other."

Instead of focusing on the junta, Dennis said the EAOs were too busy turning on one another. "In Hakha, the biggest city, the Burma army can do whatever they want. They don't care. They just stay there. Outside the city, our own people fight each other. This is really bad."

He laughed bitterly and pointed at the soldiers living comfortably under Myanmar junta control. "The Burma army, they just enjoy their time in the city. They don't even need to fight anymore."

Dennis looked worn down as he explained that, even with all these problems, the armed groups still try to raise money and the diaspora sends it. "They always ask support from overseas, always fundraising. But they never really fight the military."

Most of the Burmese exiles work twelve-hour shifts in hotels, restaurants, and construction sites, earning paltry wages. Yet they still send what money they can back to Chin State. Dennis felt that if the Chin united, the Myanmar junta would not stand a chance against them. Like so many others in exile, he holds out hope that one day, through the sacrifices made by both those inside Chin State and those abroad who support them, his people will see peace, democracy, and freedom.

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

CHIN BROTHERHOOD VOWS TO BLOCK MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTION

The Chin Brotherhood has declared strong opposition to the Military Commission's planned election, warning it will take decisive action against any attempts to organize polling inside areas under its control.

In a statement released on the night of 25 September, the group said holding an election without the consent of the public amounts to undermining the democratic system and forcibly seizing the people's authority.

The Chin Brotherhood currently controls the towns of Matupi, Mindat, Kanpetlet, Falam, and Kyindwe in Chin State.

The Military Commission has announced plans to conduct elections in three of these towns, Matupi, Mindat, and Kanpetlet while excluding Kyindwe.

However, it stated these towns will not be part of the first phase of polling scheduled to begin on 28 December this year.

According to the Chin Brotherhood, the planned election will not bring about a genuine democratic government but instead deepen ongoing conflicts. It accused the junta of seeking to extend its military rule by staging an election that denies equal voting rights to all citizens.

The statement further urged international organizations not to support or legitimize the Military Commission's electoral plans, adding that the group will coordinate with allied revolutionary forces nationwide to resist the election.



MILITARY CHARGES KNU LEADERS AND CHINLAND OFFICIALS UNDER ELECTION LAW

The junta's Ministry of Home Affairs announced that at least 40 individuals including leaders of the Karen National Union (KNU) and members of the Chinland government have been charged under the junta's Election Protection Law.

The law, enacted at the end of July, has been used to arrest and prosecute critics of the planned election. The latest announcement marks the first time KNU leaders have been formally targeted.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, 11 KNU leaders have been charged, including Chairman Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, Vice-Chairman Pado Saw Say Gay, General Secretary Pado Ta Doh Moo, Joint Secretaries Pado Saw Thaw Thi Bwe and Pado Saw Hla Tun, and Central Committee members General Saw Johnny, Major General Saw Tamla Thaw, Pado Saw Law Eh Moo, Pado Saw Eh Kalu Say, Pado Naw Dar Dar, and Pado Saw Taw Nee.

The cases were filed at Hlaingbwe Township Police Station in Karen State on 29 August and 1 September, accusing the leaders of making speeches and statements on 12 and 30 August that allegedly

disrupted the election process. Chairman Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win faces two separate charges.

The KNU has publicly rejected the junta's election. In a speech on 12 August during the 75th Karen National Martyrs' Day, Chairman Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win said it was a national duty to prevent the military's poll from taking place.

Mizzima attempted to reach KNU spokesperson Pado Saw Taw Nee for comment but received no response.

The announcement also stated that 17 others including Chinland government Prime Minister U Pa Than, as well as members of the Arakan Army (AA) and the People's Defence Force (PDF) have been charged since late August.

Additionally, the junta confirmed the arrests of five residents from Loikaw Township in Karenni State, including three minors, and four residents from Shwepyitha Township in Yangon. Authorities said more arrests and charges are under investigation.



TNLA fighters in training.
Photo: AFP

TNLA ARRESTS OVER 10 JUNTA SPIES AND INFORMANTS IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) announced that it has arrested more than 10 members of the Military Affairs Security (MAS) and junta informants who were allegedly sent to gather intelligence in Kyaukme and Hsipaw townships, northern Shan State.

MAS is the junta's military intelligence arm.

The TNLA said the arrests were made during random inspections by the Ta'ang Township Police and related departments. Those detained were accused of collecting information on TNLA checkpoints, troop strength, weapons, and military bases in areas under the control of the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), the TNLA's political wing.

According to the statement, the junta used such intelligence to conduct airstrikes and assess the effectiveness of its attacks. The informants were also tasked with monitoring road conditions and supply routes that could aid the military in penetrating TNLA-held areas.

The TNLA said the alleged spies used disguises posing as wealthy residents, beggars or tourists and entered towns by foot, motorbikes, buses, or cars. They exchanged information through signals and meetings at tea shops, betel stalls, and public toilets before sending updates via Viber, Facebook, WeChat, and Telegram.

The group said those arrested are being safely detained and, if found guilty, will face trial under Ta'ang State law.



RESIDENTS STRUGGLE WITH PHONE AND INTERNET BLACKOUT FOR NEARLY TWO WEEKS IN MYANMAR'S KALAY TOWNSHIP

Residents of Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, say they are struggling with serious disruptions to daily life following phone and internet outages that began on 13 September.

Phone calls technically connect but voices cannot be heard on either side, and text messages have not been working for 12 days, locals told Mizzima.

"Healthcare, business, and even basic needs are becoming very difficult. We're now using the line secretly through unofficial access," one resident said.

Some households have covertly installed Starlink internet, but access is limited and only shared among trusted circles, according to sources. Patients and healthcare workers are also facing challenges due to their inability to contact blood donors, while a few shops that still provide money transfer services are overcrowded, forcing residents to wait for long periods.

The blackout comes amid intense fighting in the northern part of Kalay Township, including in Mawlaik and Banmaw.

Locals suspect the military may have cut communication lines to restrict access to frontline news. However, a representative from the People's

Defence Force in the area claimed the disruption was caused by a damaged Ooredoo and MPT cable along the Kalaywa–Ye-U road.

As of 25 September, junta authorities have issued no statement on the disruption. Currently, U9 Myanmar (formerly Ooredoo) and MPT networks remain down in Kalay, while Atom and Mytel have no users in the township.

Adding to the difficulties, heavy rains have damaged roads leading into Kalay, cutting goods transport, leaving some residents unemployed, and driving up daily hardships.

Myanmar ranks as the world's second-most affected country for internet shutdowns, with 13 out of 14 regions and states and more than 80 townships facing blackouts, according to a statement by the National Unity Government (NUG) on 8 June 2024.

The NUG also condemned the use of connectivity blackouts as a weapon to deny citizens access to information and freedom of expression.



Mandalay clean-up.
Photo: AFP

QUAKE-HIT MYANMAR CITY BECOMES EPICENTRE OF JUNTA ELECTION OFFENSIVE

Six Myanmar war widows speak softly of their grief as they walk inside the crumbling walls of Mandalay Palace, fresh arrivals in an earthquake-wracked city strained anew by conflict.

"We feel more freedom here," said one among them, all widows of dead soldiers.

She was evacuated from her hometown, which was "ruined by war", to the improbable refuge of a military-run quake recovery zone several months after it struck.

The March 28 jolt killed nearly 3,800 people as it flattened swaths of Mandalay -- an ancient royal capital hemmed by jungle-clad mountains and the snaking Irrawaddy River.

The 7.7-magnitude tremor dealt an especially heavy blow in a country reeling from civil war since the military seized power in a 2021 coup.

The junta has pledged elections beginning on December 28 and has touted them as a path to

peace with its myriad adversaries -- from ragtag pro-democracy partisans to semi-professional ethnic minority armies.

However, a UN expert has dismissed the vote as a "fraud" and rebels have declared they will block it.

The military is besieging their enclaves with new offensives, bidding to expand the poll's reach into regions it does not currently control.

Fighter jets and helicopters howl over Mandalay's quake-dented skyline, flying towards front lines while newly displaced civilians arrive daily, crowding shelters in a city where much was razed.

Draped over the tarpaulin-wrapped palace parapet, a new red military banner urges: "Co-operate and crush all those harming the union".

The widows, who AFP is not identifying for security reasons, have been left in mourning and displaced in a strange and wounded place.

"Some of our husbands fell in battle right before our eyes. Some fell far away," said one, now raising three children alone.

"I have no idea about politics," she said. "I do not think it is good that Myanmar people fight each other."

'I really hate war'

The strain is not immediately visible on the streets.

Most collapsed buildings have been cleared and the scaffolding-filled city resembles one undergoing a modest construction boom.

The gem market has become an unlikely hub for those displaced from the ruby-mining town of Mogok, around 115 kilometres (70 miles) north of Mandalay.

The junta, which has hammered the coveted town with air strikes since it was seized by rebels last summer, has said it will not hold elections there.

Now the displaced flee to Mandalay, hawking precious stones inside a shopping mall with cracked walls where trading has been restricted to the ground-floor entrance lobby.

"Because of the heavy fighting every day more and more people are coming," said one recent arrival, touting tiny sapphires to prospective buyers.

More than 90,000 people, many jostling for aid, are living displaced in the Mandalay region, according to UN figures.

"We are getting less and less since the earthquake," said 62-year-old Ohn May, who was sitting on the floor with around a dozen people among their belongings in a Buddhist monastery hall.

"We have been waiting for donations like chickens waiting for feed," Ohn May said.

The prospect of polls is irrelevant for some as they scramble to meet their daily needs.

"I do not want to think about who is right or wrong -- about the power, or the politics, or whatever," said a 56-year-old displaced teacher. "But what I know is I really hate war."

Weary from a near half-decade of fighting, others like Khin Maung Htwe, 55, regard the election with a nothing-to-lose mindset.

Perhaps, he reasoned, "it will bring a little bit of peace and stability".

"With the fighting, it's the worst situation possible," he said.

Nothing left to give

The March earthquake hit with a force so immense that the ground sheared up to six metres (20 feet) in places, according to NASA analysis, tearing gaping holes into roads.

Portions of the Sky Villa condo in Mandalay were pancaked in the deadliest single site, killing 206 people, according to the managers of the upmarket mid-rise.

The last of the bodies were recovered in mid-September, said a search and rescue worker as excavators churned through the ruins one recent morning.

A security guard, who once watched the daily lives of Sky Villa's residents, has remained at his post for the past six months.

He guards the wreck of homes that buried many alive, observing a city hobbled by the combination of natural and human-made disasters.

"Everyone has their own problems and has had to look after themselves," said the 65-year-old, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"They haven't been able to look after each other."

AFP

Photo: AFP



FEMALE PRISONERS FACE TOUGH CHALLENGES DURING AND AFTER THE 2024 LASHIO PRISON BREAK

On 28 July 2024, Lashio Prison was stormed amid fierce fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) together with allied revolutionary forces during the second phase of Operation 1027.

As heavy artillery pounded the area, prison guards deserted their posts, locking the cells behind them and leaving prisoners without food or water. With casualties rising, inmates began forcing doors open one after another. Eventually, they recovered a set of keys from the main jail and started unlocking the remaining buildings. Among those freed was interim parliamentary chairman U Tun Tun Hein, whom political prisoners protected and escorted to safety amid the continuing assault.

Mizzima interviewed Ma Sherry Thwin, one of the political prisoners freed in the breakout. She had taken part in the nationwide anti-coup protests in February 2021 and later joined the North Dagon Urban Guerrilla that April. Shortly before she could leave for a liberated area to undergo training, she was reported

and subsequently arrested by the military.

Could you share when you were first arrested, the charges or sentence you faced, and when you were officially transferred to prison?

I am 29 years old and became active in the anti-coup movement in 2021. On 29 June 2021, I was arrested in the North Dagon Military Administrative area and later handed a life sentence under Section 50 (I). In the early morning of 15 January 2022, at 3:15 am, a coordinated transfer from Insein Prison to Lashio Prison commenced. We departed around 5:00 am and reached Lashio Prison by approximately 8:00 pm that same day.

Can you describe how intense the fighting was in Lashio in the period leading up to the prison breakout?

Before the prison was stormed, the military used its walls for cover and continuously fired at Operation 1027 forces. Artillery shells were exploding inside the compound. Under the orders of Lashio Prison's warden,

the administration sided with the military, reportedly using inmates as human shields while attempting to bring in reinforcements. This led to the deaths of nearly 100 prisoners and left hundreds more injured. Despite cries for help, guards did not provide medical aid and kept prisoners locked inside. At the main gate, machine gun fire was constant, and long-term inmates, persuaded by Warden Than Kyaw Tint to assist the military in exchange for possible release, also fired on prisoners. Meanwhile, small arms fire from tower guards and soldiers rained down on the cells, putting everyone inside at grave risk.

What was happening inside the prison in the hours before the breakout? Can you describe your personal experience and how the prison staff and guards acted during that period?

In the early morning of 28 July 2024, around 7 am, Warden Than Kyaw Tint, with bandaged fingers, conducted a patrol of the facility. He visited the women's ward and asked through the mesh window whether any health workers were present and capable of handling medical emergencies on their own. He then secured the prison by invoking the "24 modes of conditionality by Buddha" and instructed inmates to take cover near the walls in case of gunfire before leaving. Shortly afterward, he and the ward officers conducted cell inspections but provided no food or water, locking prisoners inside as they abandoned the facility. Doors were repeatedly secured, leaving inmates trapped.

What were you doing when the prison was breached? How did you and your fellow inmates support each other during the breakout, and are you still in contact with them?

Around 10 am, with no breakfast provided, prisoners were hungry and anxiously observing the chaos inside the prison. Suddenly, a large bomb struck the roof of the women's dormitory but did not explode, causing panic and screams. Fearing detonation, inmates forced the dormitory door open to escape. Political prisoners who had already freed themselves helped unlock the lower ward using a fire extinguisher. Everyone quickly gathered at the main entrance. Meanwhile, heavy weapon fire continued striking the men's wing, resulting in numerous deaths. Prisoners pried open locked doors and retrieved keys from the main jail to release others, using hammers to open the remaining cells. Among those rescued was interim National Assembly chairman U Tun Tun Hein, whom the prisoners surrounded to shield from ongoing heavy fire.

Can you describe how you managed to get past the prison doors and walls? What challenges did you face while trying to escape?


Prisoners surged toward the entrance, breaking into the reception area before reaching the final main gate, which remained locked and guarded by armed soldiers. Initially refusing to open it, the guards eventually gave way when the crowd became too large, fearing for their own safety. The inmates escaped through a crater created by artillery fire, moving cautiously through smoke and debris. Outside, with clashes still ongoing between the joint revolutionary forces and the military, political prisoners quickly grouped together, seeking shelter from the gunfire. They took refuge in nearby homes and gradually relocated as the fighting shifted, eventually regrouping safely at a single location.

How did the MNDA and the joint revolutionary forces respond to and manage the released prisoners after the prison was breached?

After the prison was breached, the 1027 units and allied revolutionary forces separated political prisoners from other inmates, conducted headcounts, and moved them to temporary safe locations. They provided food and basic care until the fighting ended with the capture of the Northeastern Regional Command. Only once full control was secured were the prisoners allowed to return home or continue on according to their own plans.

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

Myanmar's prisons have long been sites of severe human rights violations, where prisoners endure brutal oppression behind closed doors. Over decades, countless inmates have died, while many survivors suffer from chronic illnesses, torture-related injuries, and widespread skin diseases. Some are released after serving their sentences, while others have gained freedom through prison breaks. The swift release of all political prisoners and their ability to rebuild independent lives depend crucially on the total collapse of the military dictatorship. We remain committed to taking decisive steps toward dismantling the regime and overhauling a prison system marred by inhumane military oppression. As a former political prisoner freed in a prison break after a life sentence, I pray for the liberation of the people of Myanmar and their return to a path of true democracy. I hope for the speedy and healthy release of Mother Suu, the President, and all political prisoners.



Damage in Kyaukme.

A MONK AND THREE FAMILY MEMBERS KILLED IN KYAUKME, GIRL REPORTEDLY RAPED

A Myanmar junta column operating in northern Shan State's Kyaukme Township killed a monk and three members of a family, including a minor girl who was allegedly raped before being killed, according to a statement by the Shan Students Union.

The incident occurred on 24 September in Nar Oik Khan village when junta troops entered the area. Victims were identified as 12-year-old Sai Maung, his mother Pa Lyan, 48, his sister Nan Thein Sar, 16, and a monk aged around 30.

"The girl's body was found without clothing on her lower half. Based on her condition and military uniforms left at the scene, we are calling it a rape case," said Ying Mwe Lyan, Shan Students Union secretary.

According to the Shan Students Union, the monk was killed after remaining in the village to care for an elderly senior monk, while the three family members were attacked in a nearby field hut. Troops reportedly shot the mother and son on the spot, while the teenage

girl was raped and then killed. The elderly monk was not harmed.

"The family of the raped girl was not living in the village but had been waiting for their father to return. The troops left their uniforms behind at the site," Ying Mwe Lyan said.

The attack comes amid intensified military operations around Kyaukme following the junta's recapture of Nawngkhio town from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in July. On 30 August, the military announced it had seized Gut Htit Bridge, Gut Twin Shukhintha, and Nawng Pain village near Kyaukme. Their operations are now reported to be advancing closer to Kyaukme town.

While many residents have fled due to the ongoing offensive, some locals remain in the area, unable to leave because of financial and livelihood challenges.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
National Government

NUG ACTING PRESIDENT MEETS KNU CHAIRMAN TO DISCUSS SPRING REVOLUTION COOPERATION

Duwa Lashi La, acting president of the National Unity Government (NUG), held talks with Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman Padoh Kwe Htoo Win to discuss steps aimed at accelerating the success of the Spring Revolution, according to a joint statement.

The NUG and KNU-Central released the statement on the evening of 25 September, noting that the two leaders had a detailed discussion on areas where revolutionary forces can strengthen cooperation.

Both leaders pledged to work “more unitedly” with other revolutionary groups to achieve the complete liberation of Myanmar from military dictatorship and to eradicate tyranny.

Additionally, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to continue close cooperation in pursuit of freedom, peace, and prosperity for the people of Myanmar.



Local resistance fighters.
Photo: Supplied

LIEUTENANT COLONEL AMONG MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN FIVE-HOUR BATTLE IN SAGAING REGION

A five-hour clash on the border of Khin-U and Shwebo townships left numerous junta soldiers dead, including a lieutenant colonel, a lieutenant, and several sergeants, while two others were captured, according to the Khin-U Township People's Administration Team.

The battle broke out at 7 am on 22 September and lasted until noon, involving about 90 junta troops, the Khin-U Township People's Defence Force (PDF) said in a statement released on 23 September.

An official from the Khin-U Township People's Administration Team said the military column had been moving from Khin-U toward No. 8 Shwebo Military Training School and Bokegone – a Pyu Saw Htee militia-controlled village – to transfer troops.

"The junta troops are being transferred. Khin-U Township is under martial law, and the junta cannot hold elections here," the official told Mizzima.

The PDFs reported that weapons were seized in the battle with no casualties on the resistance side. Over 5.2 million kyats and a stockpile of arms were confiscated, including four MA-3 rifles, five MA-1s, one BA-63/G3 rifle, a carbine, one BA 100/60mm commando mortar, one MA-5 pistol, four Claymore mines, two anti-personnel landmines, four 60mm mortar rounds, and one RPG grenade.

The operation was carried out jointly by the Shwebo District Battalion 2 and Khin-U Township PDF Battalion 3, five township People's Administration Teams, and the Khin-U Township People's Liberation Army.

According to the township administration team, this was the second confrontation in recent days, following an earlier clash with junta forces on 18 September.



KINEMASTER

PDF DRONE STRIKE KILLS AT LEAST TEN KATHE ARMED GROUP MEMBERS IN KALAY TOWNSHIP

At least ten members of a Kathe (Meitei) ethnic armed group allied with the junta were killed in a drone attack by resistance forces in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, according to a statement issued on 23 September by Military Region 1 of the National Unity Government (NUG).

The statement said that Kalay District Battalion 4 of the People's Defence Force (PDF) carried out the strike on 15 September, dropping bombs from drones on Kathe fighters stationed in Nan Han Nwet village.

In addition to the casualties, a junta major overseeing the group was reportedly injured.

The Kathe armed group, numbering around 60 fighters, had been part of a military column that launched an offensive in Nan Saung Pu village on 5 September. Following the drone strike, the group was withdrawn to the rear, according to the NUG.

The statement also said about 30 Kathe fighters, led by a captain, are undergoing officer training at Military Training Depot 10 in Kalay Township.

The Kathe group entered Kalay in August by river from Homalin Township, where they had regularly clashed with resistance forces in Hkamti District. Locals say the group has long been based in He Zin village, Tamu District, where they have lived for more than a decade and are involved in drug and weapons trafficking.

Alongside the Kathe, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) has also fought with junta forces in Tamu and Hkamti districts.

Earlier this year, the Chief of Staff of the Indian Army met with the commander of the junta's Bureau of Special Operations 1. Both sides have conducted joint exercises and cooperated in military technology, aircraft, and drone supplies, according to reports.



Mizoram in India's Northeast.
Photo: Supplied

NORTH EAST INDIAN STATES WITNESS IMPROVEMENT IN SOCIOECONOMIC PARAMETERS

SUN LEE

A healthy mix of targeted schemes, region-specific incentives, and intensive connectivity projects has translated into faster improvements of human development indicators in Northeast India, driving fresh momentum for the local economy. The past ten years have witnessed the northeastern states quietly moving from the margins toward the centre of national policy, thanks to New Delhi's focus on holistic growth, regional integration and inclusive and sustainable development.

The dedication and focus of the Government of India can be gauged from the whopping 47.6 percent increase in the annual budgetary allocation, which amounts to INR 59.15 billion this year. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has pursued a transformative approach for the inclusive development of North East India. "Your dreams are my resolutions.

This spectacle will give strength to the nation," said Modi after laying the foundation stone for hydro and solar projects in the region.

The holistic and committed efforts over the past decade have led the historic gaps between the eight Northeastern states and the rest of the country to shrink in recent years. Over four-fifths of 121 districts in the region have shown remarkable performance in the SDG Index (2023-24), according to the NITI Aayog, the premier policy think tank of the Government of India. A majority of them have entered the "front-runner" band for progress across health, education, water and sanitation, and other SGD goals.

All these states—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura—have now witnessed improved socio-

economic conditions. Government programmes could reach grassroots targets and achieve their objectives due to an active push, dedicated funds, and incentives for the northeastern states. All this led to the seamless and efficient implementation of infrastructure projects, social services, and livelihood generation plans, while also taking into account the specific needs of these states.

PM-DevINE (Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region) filled the gaps left by general schemes, accelerated the socioeconomic progress and caused rapid, inclusive and holistic development of the region. The Government of India has increased financial support to the northeastern states through budgetary allocations, equity support, special grants, central sector schemes, concessional loans, targeted infrastructure funds, tax incentives, and capacity-building programs.

A report titled "State Finances of North Eastern States" showed that the financial condition of these states was good due to optimum allocation of funds from different ministries under the New Delhi government. "Our fiscal position is now good. We are making committed expenditure as well as releasing funds for the major road and infrastructure projects. No major finance crunch in any sector," said Pranajit Singha Roy, the Finance Minister of Tripura.

The transport connectivity and urban infrastructure have seen a huge transformation. Several new overland routes and flight operations have brought the region closer to the rest of India and different parts of the world, providing a fillip to economic development. The inter-state connectivity has improved due to better roads and a reduction in travel time by 30-40 percent.

While Bharatmala Pariyojana, a national road development project, facilitated highway construction in northeastern states, a specific initiative called North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) propelled the rapid implementation of road projects. The Government of India increased allocation

to the NESIDS to INR 24.81 billion in 2025-26 from INR 15 billion a year ago.

Almost every household, even in remote and hilly parts, now has round-the-clock access to electricity as the government has expanded the coverage of renewable energy projects, particularly small hydro and solar. Ronsing Phangcho from Assam's Ailathal Karbi Punjee appeared a happy man as his village got electricity for the first time. Getting solar power is like a dream come true, as we had been longing for such facilities in our village. We had been expecting it for years but today with the hard work of the village leaders and cooperation of Seva Kendra Silchar, the entire village got solar power from the Government," he said.

Piped water and clean cooking fuel coverage are expanding. Arunachal Pradesh achieved 100 percent saturation in piped water despite the state having hilly and difficult terrain. "We had water scarcity. Whatever little water was available had lots of iron content. But with the installation of tap water connection in my house, I get potable water now," said Kuladhar Keleng, from Manipur village.

As New Delhi seeks to integrate the Northeastern region with Southeast Asia, several promotion programmes are held to boost tourism and hospitality, agro-food processing, textiles and handicrafts, among others. Entrepreneurial skills are encouraged among women from the northeastern states with the help of the Swavalambini programme, in which the latest industry insights, business incubation strategies, and hands-on coaching techniques are taught.

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




Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA CHARGES NINE PEOPLE, INCLUDING 14-YEAR-OLD, FOR ALLEGED ELECTION DISRUPTION

The Myanmar junta has arrested and charged nine residents from Loikaw and Yangon, including a 14-year-old boy, accusing them of attempting to disrupt the upcoming election, according to a report published on 23 September.

Those detained were accused of organizing protests, writing letters, and posting messages on social media and in public spaces to oppose the election.

The detainees from Loikaw, Karenni State, include minors Htun Nay Oo Hlaing (14), Phyo Paing Zay Aung (16), and Aung Naing Lin (17), along with adult residents Paing Paing Soe and Han Htun Aung. From Yangon's Shwe Pyi Thar Township, the arrested were Ye Thu Aung, Kyaw Wunna, Chit Win, and Pyay Htun.

The five detained in Loikaw were charged at the Loikaw Township Police Station, while those in Yangon face charges under Section 23(a) of the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction.

A Yangon resident told Mizzima, "Even though the whole country and the world knows the election is unfair, no one dares to speak out. We're in their hands, and there's nothing we can do. They'll just keep going."

Section 23(a), enacted in late July, carries prison sentences of three to seven years and a fine, with the death penalty possible if disruption results in fatalities.

On 25 August, state media reported that Ko Nay Thway from Taunggyi, Shan State, was sentenced to seven years in prison, the maximum penalty under the same law for criticizing the junta's planned election.

Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, chairman of the junta's Central Committee on Security Supervision for the Multiparty Democracy General Election, said on 5 September that three cases had already been filed under the law as of 2 September.



Photo: AFP

RIGHTS GROUP WARNS US AID CUTS COULD KILL 200,000 IN MYANMAR

A new report from Human Rights Myanmar warns that US cuts to foreign aid could result in up to 200,000 excess deaths in Myanmar by 2030, including more than 21,000 children, raising questions over whether such policies amount to crimes against humanity.

The findings follow President Donald Trump's 20 January executive order cancelling over 80 percent of USAID's global programs under an "America First" realignment. The cancellations included \$1.1 billion earmarked for Myanmar, halting support for vaccinations, HIV and tuberculosis treatment, malaria prevention, and malnutrition programs.

Within days, hospitals and clinics along the Thai-Myanmar border shut their doors, while the World Food Programme warned that more than one million people faced acute hunger. Human Rights Myanmar estimates that the six-year toll from the U.S. decision will reach 165,000–200,000 excess deaths, disproportionately affecting children, the elderly, and displaced families.

The rights group argues that the deliberate withdrawal of life-saving aid, despite internal US government warnings and repeated appeals from humanitarian organizations, could fit the definition of "extermination" or "other inhumane acts" under the Rome Statute governing crimes against humanity. "The

U.S. Government knowingly engineered a drastic aid cut despite repeated warnings from both internal and humanitarian stakeholders of catastrophic mortality," the report states.

A Lancet study cited by the group estimated that over 14 million people worldwide could die prematurely by 2030 as a result of U.S. aid cuts, including 4.5 million children under five years old. While genocide and war crimes are deemed inapplicable, Human Rights Myanmar notes that the sudden suspension of food, medicine, and shelter amounted to an "inhumane policy decision executed with full awareness of its consequences".

Despite this, the report concedes that existing international law offers no enforceable mechanism to hold Washington criminally liable, as donor states are not legally obliged to sustain aid abroad. Instead, it calls for reforms, including a binding humanitarian assistance treaty, mandatory consultation and mitigation clauses in funding agreements, and stronger accountability mechanisms.

The group concludes that the US decision has deepened Myanmar's humanitarian crisis and exposed a critical gap in international law.



MALAYSIA GRANTS 14-DAY VISA-FREE ENTRY TO MYANMAR PASSPORT HOLDERS

The Malaysian Embassy in Yangon has announced that Myanmar passport holders will be eligible for visa-free entry into Malaysia for up to 14 days.

According to the embassy's statement released on 25 September, the new policy is designed to facilitate travel for Myanmar citizens. However, it emphasized that final entry into Malaysia remains at the discretion of immigration officials, meaning that the visa exemption does not guarantee entry.

The embassy clarified that the program is strictly for travel purposes and not intended for those seeking

to remain in Malaysia illegally. Travelers are advised to ensure that their passports are valid for at least six months before their departure.

Also, the embassy recommended that travellers carry additional passport-sized photos, a printed copy of their hotel booking or accommodation details, a confirmed return flight ticket, and at least USD \$1,000 in "show money" to present to immigration authorities if requested.



Photo: AFP

PRESERVATION OVER DESTRUCTION: WHY MYANMAR'S REVOLUTION—AND ITS NEIGHBORS—MUST CHOOSE A DIFFERENT PATH

JAMES SHWE

Inspired by an interview with Arakan Army Commander General Tun Mrat Naing, this reflection examines Myanmar's crossroads: Will the country's future be decided by preserving communities and creating lasting peace, or by the logic of annihilation that has left it on the "path to self-destruction"?

The Stakes: Two Starkly Different Visions

As violence intensifies, two opposing philosophies shape Myanmar's fate. The resistance, under leaders like General Tun Mrat Naing, has consciously focused on preserving habitats and protecting livelihoods even while fighting off military assaults. By keeping schools open, clinics functioning, and markets alive—often under fire—these groups show what liberation truly means: resilience, hope, and the capacity to govern in a way that the junta cannot.

In contrast, military strategy is defined by "scorched earth"—airstrikes and artillery on civilian structures, burning of farmland, and destruction of vital infrastructure. This is no accident: the regime's aim is to make liberated regions uninhabitable, so resistance forces cannot demonstrate competent, inclusive governance. The result? Over three million displaced, thousands dead, and millions more living with trauma and deprivation. This is not victory; it is social and environmental destruction.

The Peril of Proxy and "Balanced" Regional Policies

Neighboring countries seeking quick fixes or strategic leverage risk worsening the crisis. Bangladesh, for instance, has played a risky game by enabling some armed Rohingya groups to pressure both the Arakan Army and Myanmar's junta—hoping to protect borders

and shift negotiation dynamics. While intended to serve national interests, this policy risks trapping already vulnerable refugees in cycles of violence and creating new security problems for the region.

China, meanwhile, continues to back the junta diplomatically and supports the sham elections scheduled for 2025. While this may offer short-term access to markets or minerals, it is causing Myanmar's fragmentation to deepen. Propping up an illegitimate regime, or playing multiple sides for influence, only reinforces a cycle of instability. As international analysts warn, these approaches may buy time—but will ultimately cost everyone in terms of lost security, legitimacy, and prosperity.

Why Unity and Preservation Are the New Imperative

General Tun Mrat Naing's message—echoed by civic leaders and relief workers across the country—is that simply replacing one form of destruction with another will not work. For Myanmar's resistance, this means setting aside personal or ethnic ambitions and uniting around the common goal of protecting people, restoring governance, and credibly building a federal democracy. The biggest danger to progress now is division: disunity among resistance groups or cycles of revenge that erode moral legitimacy and public support.

Reports from 2025 indicate the junta has lost significant ground, with some sources claiming it has full control over as little as 21–32% of the country's territory. It is evident that if the diverse resistance forces unite and form a cohesive alternative governing body around the junta-held central areas, the regime's claim to power would be critically, if not fatally, undermined. Such a united front would demonstrate to both the people of Myanmar and the international community that a viable, inclusive future exists beyond military rule.

This is probably the best counter to the sham elections.

The region's policymakers must also work toward nonviolent alternatives: coordinated humanitarian corridors, broad-based ceasefires, and sustained engagement that rewards civilian protection and cooperation, not just short-term cessation of violence or trade deals. ASEAN and the UN must move beyond “business as usual” and help set clear paths for transition, recovery, and reconciliation.

A Constructive Course—And a Shared Opportunity

Myanmar's tragic experience is a warning, but also a call for bold, positive action. Preservation—of civil life, diversity, and natural resources—must become the shared value, not destruction for narrow political or strategic gain. The world's attention, now focused on Ukraine and elsewhere, cannot afford to look away as one of Asia's most promising societies is burned, bombed, and broken for shortsighted ambitions.

Liberation, not annihilation, must become the rallying cry for both those resisting in Myanmar and those guiding policy across the region. This means supporting united civilian leadership, trusting local peacebuilders, and ceasing support for policies that perpetuate division or proxy wars. It means upholding humanitarian standards and enabling voices for inclusion and federal democracy in every discussion about Myanmar's future.

If Myanmar is to emerge from this era of destruction into one of hope, the fundamental choice could not be clearer: will the country and its neighbors double down on policies that have proven so catastrophic—or will they finally embrace a path of preservation, unity, and reconciliation for the benefit of all? The future depends on that answer.

Photo: Kyle Smith

US TREASURY SANCTIONS MYANMAR ARMS NETWORK LINKED TO NORTH KOREA'S WEAPONS PROGRAMS

The US Department of the Treasury has announced sanctions on five individuals and one entity tied to illicit arms trafficking networks that are funnelling revenue to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs, including by supplying weapons technology to Myanmar's military junta.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said the targeted measures expose and disrupt a network that facilitated sales from the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID) – Pyongyang's primary arms dealer – to the Myanmar junta. KOMID, also known as the "221 General Bureau," is already sanctioned internationally for its central role in exporting missile and conventional weapons technology.

At the centre of the new designations is Royal Shune Lei Company Limited, a Myanmar-based procurement firm that brokered its first deal with KOMID in 2022. According to Treasury, Royal Shune Lei arranged the transfer of aerial bomb guidance kits, bombs, and airborne monitoring equipment to the Myanmar Air Force.

Royal Shune Lei executives, including CEO Tin Myo Aung and employee Kyaw Thu Myo Myint, travelled to China to coordinate directly with North Korean officials

on these sales. KOMID representatives provided weapons samples for testing to finalize the junta's orders.

The designations underscore the role of foreign intermediaries in sustaining Myanmar's military following the February 2021 coup. The junta has intensified airstrikes against resistance groups, often hitting civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and religious sites and killing or wounding thousands of civilians.

Washington said the sanctions cut off "an important funding stream" for Pyongyang while also targeting the Myanmar military's ability to acquire advanced aerial munitions.

Alongside the Myanmar-linked sanctions, OFAC also listed a North Korean intelligence officer, Nam Chol Ung, accused of running overseas revenue-generation schemes through businesses in Laos and Thailand.

All U.S. assets belonging to the designated persons are blocked, and American entities are prohibited from engaging in transactions with them. The move also warns international financial institutions that doing business with the sanctioned network may expose them to secondary sanctions.



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

Story of Mizzima Media:
Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar

Nandita Haksar
Soe Myint



RESISTING MYANMAR MILITARY RULE (1988-2024): STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA; BORN IN EXILE, BANNED IN MYANMAR

BOOK REVIEW BY DON PATHAN

They say the pen is mightier than the sword, but not everyone dares to live up to the ideals behind these words. When a group of people comes together to demonstrate how this can be done, hope in humanity is restored.

Resisting Myanmar Military Rule (1988-2024): Story of Mizzima Media; Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar, co-written by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint, is a testimony of such courage.

The book tells not only how this news agency came together, starting with a single laptop to become the largest multimedia platform in just a few years, but also the story of a remarkable friendship between a young Burmese political activist who dared to dream and an Indian human rights lawyer he called "aunty." The

friendship they built, the legal struggles they endured, and the network and foundation they established not only created a multimedia company that informs millions in Burmese and English but also helped bring the people of these two countries closer.

To say Soe Myint took India by storm when he first entered the India's national scene in 1990 would be an understatement. Looking back at the circumstances of his entrance, it was somewhat comical, similar to a script from Monty Python's Flying Circus.

In November 1990, Soe Myint and a friend, Htin Kyaw Oo, hijacked a Rangoon-bound Thai Airways International flight, forcing it to change course and land in Calcutta. Their aim was to raise awareness about the atrocities being committed in their country by the armed forces.

Incidentally, it was Soe Myint's first time boarding a plane. The moment he announced his intention, he charged into the toilet, thinking it was the cockpit. Fortunately, it was unoccupied at the time.

Htin Kyaw Oo was carrying a fake bomb made of soap stuffed with wires to make it realistic, housed inside a ceramic Happy Buddha figurine, which he dropped during turbulence. Needless to say, the fake bomb didn't detonate but imagine the passengers' faces at that moment.

Initially, three people planned this operation, but they could only afford two tickets. The team had prepared statements in Burmese and English for the press conference upon landing but forgot how they would communicate with each other and the cockpit. Some passengers stepped up and served as intermediaries.

All in all, it was an extremely risky move, but it ultimately paid off greatly, considering the outpouring of sympathy and support from the Indian public and prominent lawmakers, including George Fernandes who became the Defense Minister and Nandita Haksar, the co-author of this book.

Moreover, the passengers and flight attendants who served as intermediaries between the two hijackers and other passengers developed what appeared to be Stockholm syndrome.

The fact that these two hijackers carried no real

weapons helped their case. The outpouring of support and sympathy did not mean Soe Myint and Htin Kyaw Oo were out of legal trouble. There was relentless pressure from the Burmese military government on India to treat these two young men as criminals.

But they were nothing like professional assassins or revolutionaries, most notably the Palestinian militants behind the series of hijackings in the 1970s and '80s. They were two studious college students who put their own lives on the line, hoping to draw global attention to the plight of the Burmese people amid a bloody crackdown by the country's military.

In 2003, Soe Myint was acquitted from the hijacking charges and free from years of court proceeding. Soe Myint remained in India, where he met Thin Thin Aung, a Burmese woman who was every bit as passionate as he about restoring democracy and human rights for their country's people. In 1998, he and Thin Thin Aung started the Mizzima news service with a single laptop, using a public phone booth to get online. Two decades later, when Myanmar began to open up, the couple seized their chance and returned to their homeland to establish a multimedia group that included websites, newspapers, a magazine, and television. When the junta launched a coup in February 2021, Mizzima refused to compromise and instead relocated to rebel-controlled areas along the Thailand-Burma border to continue their reporting.

Resisting Myanmar Military Rule is much more than a story about two determined teenagers hijacking a plane to raise their country's profile—it's the tragic story of an entire generation of Burmese people scarred by a repressive regime. But they didn't accept it passively; they fought back hard. Mizzima was a product of that generation that refused to be silenced by the military junta. Their followers' number in the millions worldwide. But one wonders if readers ever pause to consider what these ground-level journalists endure to deliver information to us—the late nights, the daily struggles, the sneaking in and out of towns and cities, and war zones, past immigration officers, the constant fear of being caught as they pursue their stories so the public can stay informed.

I can personally relate to some of what Mizzima journalists experience, having spent time in conflict

areas—Afghanistan, Cambodia, Burma, and Thailand's far south—but these were assignments I chose to take for a negotiated day rate as a freelance correspondent. This is something I could walk away from at any time and return to my comfortable life.

The incident that touched me deeply was Sein Win, Soe Myint's brother, being stranded on the bridge between Singapore and Malaysia, two of Southeast Asia's most developed nations. That unimaginable sense of helplessness captures the story of millions of Burmese migrant workers who came to Thailand seeking better opportunities, to work and send money home. They pay their dues, Thai taxes, and sometimes under-the-table money, and their contributions help make Thailand the rapidly developing nation it is today. Sein Win's moment on the bridge encapsulated the same predicament as the millions of migrant Burmese workers —constantly looking over their shoulder, wondering when harassment or arrest will come, regardless of whether their documentation is in order. Moreover, one has to wonder if the Thai authority and society would handle the hijacking incident if the two had landed in Bangkok instead of Calcutta.

For readers unfamiliar with Myanmar's political history, the book is quite accessible. The first few chapters provide a crash course in Burma's modern political history. The post-colonial period was promising, with the 1947 Constitution guaranteeing press freedom, laying the foundation for fresh debates among writers, scholars, poets and artists. All that were forced to go underground after the 1962 coup by the extremely superstitious General Ne Win, whose "Burmese Way to Socialism" strangled Burma's economy until the people could no longer endure it any longer. A nationwide uprising in 1988 was carried out, resulting in thousands of protesters' deaths and pushed many student activists to border areas where they joined ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Soe Myint found shelter with the New Mon State Party near the Thailand border.

Chapter 2 explores Soe Myint's life before the 1988 uprising. His mother's attention to detail and his father's relaxed gentleness helped shape his judgment and resilience, qualities that proved invaluable in running an enormous multimedia company that was more than

just a business enterprise. In Chapter 3, Soe Myint guides us through the 1988 national uprising, followed by his journey to the Thai border, where he learns to appreciate the ethnic minorities' struggles. Chapters 4-5 discuss the Thai Airways flight hijacking and its motivations, and Chapter 6 shifts to human rights lawyer Nandita's first-person voice, recalling how a love story between a Burmese Muslim refugee and a camp guard in Manipur led her to become involved in Burma's pro-democracy movement and the Burmese community in India.

Chapter 7 covers Soe Myint's life in exile, including how he met his future wife, then a stringer for BBC Burmese Service in India. It was in India that Soe Myint came to appreciate his ethnically diverse homeland's diversity and celebrated many Christmases with the Indian community. Soe Myint and others received widespread support from Indian public figures, including George Fernandes, the country's defense minister at the time, and legendary Lakshmi Sahgal, a Communist Party of India (Marxist) member from an aristocratic background who once served in the Indian National Army. She was already in her 90s when they met but continued going to her clinic in Kanpur every morning to treat patients, mostly migrant workers. Soe Myint also encountered Indians who had been expelled from Burma by General Ne Win. Not only did they harbor no grudges, but they were very supportive of Burmese migrants and their pro-democracy activities.

Chapter 8 discusses Mizzima's birth—a modest investment of \$700, Soe Myint and Thin Thin Aung's entire savings at the time—for a bulky Toshiba laptop with a \$1,000 price tag, purchased by a Burmese friend visiting from the United States. This was 1998, when India and the world were entering the telecom revolution. Filing stories required Subscriber Trunk Dialing (STD), telephone booths that had sprung up throughout New Delhi. Mizzima was indeed born. With the internet came a website, launched in 2000. Then came Soe Myint's arrest in April 2002 on hijacking charges. This time, Indian police treated him as a terrorist. The choices were stark: leave India quietly for resettlement in Europe or face trial in Indian court with the possibility of life imprisonment under Indian hijacking laws. Soe Myint chose to stand trial. After

more than a year of extensive legal battles, advocacy, and support from various voices, Soe Myint was acquitted in July 2003. Despite the popular support, there will always be somebody in key position who is supportive of the Burmese junta's agenda.

Chapter 9 explores how Mizzima came of age, attracting funding from international donors. The timing was perfect for the 2007 Saffron Revolution, which lasted three months with participation from pro-democracy activists and Buddhist monks—hence the saffron reference. It was the largest demonstration since the August 1988 uprising.

Armed with mobile phones and small digital cameras, demonstrators and reporters no longer needed STD booths but could use internet cafés to send stories and images. There were clandestine offices in Rangoon, but regular power outages took their toll on online media like Mizzima.

The 2010 general election, the first in 20 years, approached, and Chapter 10 discusses Mizzima's decision to return home. The election was boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. But just months after the results were announced, with the government party winning nearly 80 percent of contested seats, in August 2011, President Thein Sein invited all exile leaders to return, and by October, the government began releasing political prisoners. Sein Win was the first to return and test the waters. On January 26, 2012, after 23 years away, Soe Myint landed in Rangoon.

Mizzima operated from inside Burma from 2012 to 2020, highlighted in Chapter 12. Naturally, the country didn't transform overnight, and it was a leap of faith—the idea of making changes from within. They accepted the government's invitation to train their media personnel in newsroom management and professional journalism. But Mizzima stood their ground as best they could despite pressure from all sectors of Burmese society to keep the Rohingya issue at arm's length, not to mention their refusal to use the term "Bengali" to suggest that these extremely persecuted minority has no place in modern day Burma, also known as Myanmar. The country officially recognized more than 130 languages.

Chapter 13 examines Indian-Burmese friendship

from Nandita's perspective, crediting Mizzima's role in fostering it. In November 2012, Suu Kyi visited India in her capacity as opposition leader. Nandita criticized the Indian press for being ignorant about Burma's pro-democracy movement, noting that no one asked the Lady why she hadn't included any members of the Generation of '88 in her party, why her cabinet didn't include more women, or how she felt about Indian government support for the Burma junta while she was under house arrest. There were no questions about the 320,000 Burmese Indians living in Burma who had been rendered stateless since General Ne Win's time.

Chapter 14 begins with an exchange between Nandita and Soe Myint about the book project, conceived while the latter was undergoing treatment for bile duct cancer. Then came the 2020 General Election, followed by the February 2021 coup that ousted Suu Kyi from power, forcing Mizzima to flee Rangoon for the Thai border, where they took refuge with the Karen National Union (KNU). Thin Thin Aung wasn't so fortunate; the military arrested her in April 2021. They were willing to release her in exchange for Soe Myint's surrender and Mizzima's closure.

"This was truly what every political activist faces: the conflict between the personal and the political. Soe (Myint) had to rescue other Mizzima journalists who had joined the democracy movement, and it could not campaign for one person alone. And yet the fear and anguish caused by each arrest is felt deeply and personally by those closest to the arrested person; it is their responsibility to cope with their fear—the fear that the person could be detained for weeks or even years, and the ever-present fear that the loved one could be subjected to torture," Nandita wrote.

Thin Thin Aung was released along with 5,000 other prisoners in October 2021. She remained in Rangoon, living a very low-key life.

Don Pathan is a Thailand-based writer and security analyst.

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Journalists in action.



Photo: AFP

'YOU'RE GOING TO HELL': TRUMP ATTACKS UN AND EUROPE IN SCATHING SPEECH

US President Donald Trump blasted the United Nations and Europe on his return to the world body on 23 September, warning that migration is sending Western nations "to hell" and dismissing climate change as a "con job."

In a blistering speech during his first UN General Assembly appearance since his White House comeback, Trump also accused the world body of failing to help him as he tried to broker peace deals including in Gaza and Ukraine.

"What is the purpose of the United Nations?" asked Trump in a wide-ranging speech lasting nearly an hour. "It has such tremendous potential, but it's not even coming close to living up to that."

Trump's first speech to the UN back in 2018 saw fellow leaders laughing at the Republican, but this time his full-frontal attack on the global organization and US allies was received in near total silence.

The 79-year-old's litany of complaints even extended to a broken escalator and teleprompter at the New York headquarters of the UN.

After the speech, he met with Ukraine's wartime leader Volodymyr Zelensky and caused surprise by announcing a short while later that he now thought Kyiv could regain all its territory invaded by Russia -- a complete shift from his previous statements.

'Going to hell'

Trump's fieriest words of the speech were on migration, as he advised the world to follow his lead on one of the core political messages that drove his two US election victories.

Trump lambasted the UN for "funding an assault" on Western nations that he described as an "invasion," before turning his fire on his supposed allies in Europe.

"Your countries are going to hell," he told European leaders.

Trump also criticized the UN for failing to get involved in what he claims are seven wars that he has ended, or in his failed attempts to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Israel's war in Gaza.

"All they seem to do is write a really strongly worded letter," he said. "It's empty words, and empty words don't solve war."

But the US leader later dramatically escalated his rhetoric on Ukraine, saying that NATO nations should shoot down Russian planes violating their territory.

And after talks with Zelensky on the sidelines of the summit, he posted on Truth Social that he thinks "Ukraine, with the support of the European Union, is in a position to fight and WIN all of Ukraine back in its original form."

'Con job'

On Gaza, a subject that has dominated the UN summit, Trump called recognition of a Palestinian state by US allies including France and Britain a "reward" to Hamas for "horrible atrocities" in the armed group's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

French President Emmanuel Macron said, however, that Trump could only achieve his long-held goal of a Nobel Peace Prize if he stopped the Gaza war.

The US president meanwhile took a typically strident stance on climate change too, saying he was "right about everything" as he pushes for oil drilling and the rolling back of green policies.

"Climate change -- it's the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world," said the billionaire property tycoon.

Trump's second term has opened with a blaze of nationalist policies curbing cooperation with the rest of the world.

He has moved to pull the United States out of the World Health Organization and the UN climate pact, severely curtailed US development assistance and wielded sanctions against foreign judges over rulings he sees as violating US sovereignty.

Opening the annual summit, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that aid cuts led by the United States were "wreaking havoc" in the world.

After meeting Guterres, Trump appeared to call for a change in leadership, telling reporters: "The UN could be unbelievable with certain people running it."

Trump's other meetings included his Argentinian counterpart and close ally Javier Milei, with the US president saying he did not believe the struggling South American country needed a bailout.

Security was tight for the summit, with New York's UN district swarming with heavily armed police.

The US Secret Service said they had disrupted a plot to potentially disrupt telecommunications around the UN that involved "nation-state threat actors."

AFP



THIS IS MY LAND

"There is no other issue in Thailand that has this long of a history of civil society engagement like Myanmar."

With these words, Mic Chawaratt, a Thai humanitarian worker and civil society advocate, opens an in-depth and urgent discussion about Thailand's decades-long, complicated, and often contradictory responses to Myanmar's humanitarian crises. As a veteran in cross-border aid and migrant rights advocacy, he describes how recent developments, including the aftermath of the 2021 Myanmar coup and the surge in displaced persons, have reshaped the humanitarian and political landscape in Thailand.

Mic begins by discussing the historical relationship between Thailand and Myanmar regarding Burmese refugees, which dates back to the 1980s. Thailand, despite never signing the 1951 Refugee Convention, has hosted large numbers of Myanmar nationals—first from ethnic armed conflict zones and later from military crackdowns in urban areas. He characterizes Thailand's approach as a balancing act between humanitarianism, national security, and political self-interest. For decades, this has resulted in policies that are informal and inconsistent. Refugees are managed in camps without legal recognition, while urban refugees and migrants live in precarity. In fact, Mic says, Thai civil society organizations have been the main driver of long-term humanitarian support for Myanmar people. Thailand's border-based NGOs, activist networks, and

local communities have built what Mic calls a "parallel system" of care and protection, even as government policy oscillates.

The recent coup in Myanmar triggered a renewed sense of urgency because of a large surge of refugees, which only highlights further the delicate balance between official Thai policy and Thai civil society. As for Thailand's official response, Mic notes it has been spotty. While the military does allow some humanitarian assistance into border zones, much depends on the local commander's discretion. There is no overarching refugee policy, while new waves of refugees are still being produced by the conflict.

Part of the problem, Mic explains, is that Thailand is careful not to appear opposed to the Myanmar junta. This is reflected in what he refers to as "proxy diplomacy." On the surface, Thailand may engage ASEAN mechanisms and speak in support of humanitarian corridors; in reality, it maintains relations with the junta and sidelines the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed organizations. As a result, Thai civil society must operate delicately, navigating both domestic constraints and international expectations. "Thailand is very good at not recognizing refugees, so this is something that we are trying to address by using the term 'mixed migration,'" he says. "Thailand tries not to take sides, as they don't want to be seen as supporting the refugees, which could be interpreted as 'anti-government' in Myanmar."

Mic is especially concerned about the long-term implications of Thailand's informal refugee management. Refugees in camps lack legal status, are denied mobility, and live in limbo. At the same time, those in urban areas are vulnerable to arrest, exploitation, and deportation. "The result is that displaced people are treated differently depending on their location and whether they can access donor-funded programs.

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MYANMAR'S JUNTA EXPANDS NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA AT WORLD ATOMIC WEEK FORUM

Myanmar junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, led a high-level delegation to Moscow last week for the World Atomic Week Forum 2025, underscoring Naypyidaw's growing pursuit of nuclear energy partnerships with Russia and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The forum, held from 25–28 September, gathered officials and experts from more than 100 countries to discuss clean energy, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and technological cooperation.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing addressed the plenary summit, highlighting nuclear power as a "green, low-carbon" solution to Myanmar's energy shortfalls and an engine for economic development. According to reports in the junta-run Global New Light of Myanmar, he cited nuclear applications in agriculture and medicine, while stressing the importance of strict safety and waste-management measures.

During the visit, the Myanmar junta's Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Electric Power signed cooperation agreements with Russia's state nuclear corporation ROSATOM. The pacts reportedly cover human resource training, infrastructure development, and peaceful applications of nuclear technology. Union ministers also attended a plenary session titled "Everything starts with an atom," alongside regional leaders and ASEAN partners.

The junta's delegation met ROSATOM Director-General Alexey Likhachev, reportedly discussing plans to establish a small modular reactor in Myanmar as a first step toward nuclear power generation.

Junta officials appealed for continued Russian support in developing infrastructure and expertise, while urging the IAEA to expand assistance in human resource training and safety oversight.

The forum additionally witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between ROSATOM's Technical Academy and Yangon Technological University, paving the way for curriculum exchange, student scholarships, and joint research.

Myanmar already hosts a Nuclear Technology Information Centre in Yangon and has organized science fairs in partnership with ROSATOM to promote public awareness of nuclear technology.

Min Aung Hlaing's delegation included Union Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Electric Power, Energy, and Health, as well as senior Tatmadaw officers. The Global New Light of Myanmar notes the visit builds on cooperation agreements dating back to 2022 and reflects Myanmar's strategy to integrate nuclear energy into national planning under IAEA guidelines.



MYANMAR JUNTA USES CHINA-STYLE INTERNET CENSORSHIP TECHNOLOGY

Myanmar's military junta has taken a dangerous leap toward replicating China's infamous "Great Firewall," deploying surveillance and censorship systems that mirror those used in Beijing. A recent investigation by Justice for Myanmar exposed how the junta is partnering with Chinese firm Geedge Networks to roll out advanced blocking, monitoring, and decryption capabilities in Myanmar's telecom infrastructure.

Since May 2024, the junta has implemented a sweeping VPN ban using deep packet inspection (DPI) methods, technology commonly associated with China's censorship apparatus, to block access to anonymizing tools.

These moves intensified after the adoption of Myanmar's new Cybersecurity Law in January 2025, which criminalizes unauthorized VPN use and requires internet providers to assist in surveillance.

Social media users complain of constant VPN disconnections, blocked servers, and fear of device inspections. One Telegram comment read, "Every time my VPN drops, I feel watched."

Advocacy groups warn the junta's censorship expansion is not merely mimicry but a deliberate shift toward digital authoritarianism. The junta now controls not only what content can be seen but can also trace who saw it and when. This setup creates chilling effects on dissent, press freedom, and safe communication.

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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.