

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima

## WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**The “Asks” for a New US Burma Policy**  
**How the US Could Help End the War**  
**Without Firing a Shot**

**ELECTION UPDATE**

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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.



# A NUT TOO HARD TO CRACK

The Myanmar junta's effort to cast its December-January election as a return to civilian governance faces a monumental problem: the people simply do not believe in it. According to a recent survey by the Platform for People Movement, an overwhelming 96 per cent of respondents said they would not vote in the election, and 98 per cent said it will not resolve the country's crises. This level of public rejection cuts at the very heart of any attempt by the military to claim democratic legitimacy.

One of the most glaring issues is territorial control. Observers estimate that less than half of Myanmar's townships are under junta control, meaning that large swathes of the country - especially resistance-held areas - will not be part of this exercise.

The danger here is profound: if the election is only held in military-dominated areas, the outcome will have the feel of a managed affirmation rather than a genuinely competitive process.

The political landscape has also been narrowed deliberately. Dozens of parties have been banned or forced to dissolve, while thousands of political prisoners remain behind bars. The most popular party prior to the coup, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), is gone. Only a handful of parties, mostly aligned with the junta - with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) being the forerunner - are permitted to contest. This truncation of political competition means that even if the process is technically electoral, it lacks the full voice of the people.

Adding to that, the regime has introduced repressive laws that stifle dissent. Under a newly-enacted election law, any criticism of the electoral process

can be punished by up to 20 years in prison - or even death. Authorities have already arrested people for online posts, distributing leaflets, or organizing. In such a climate, a real contest becomes impossible.

Moreover, the very act of trying to promote legitimacy may exacerbate the junta's problems rather than solve them. Ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy PDFs and youth have rejected the polls outright, calling them a sham designed to entrench military power. These voices matter. They signal that parts of the country may not only boycott but actively resist this election, undermining efforts to present the vote as "unifying".

Internationally, the regime's attempt to win recognition is also fragile. Western governments and election watchdogs have largely rejected the vote as neither free nor fair, nor feasible given the ongoing civil war. Some regional actors may entertain engagement, but legitimacy in the eyes of the global community requires genuine participation and transparency - both of which are lacking.

Even among those who might reluctantly participate, the apathy captured by the survey suggests that their turnout will not reflect enthusiasm or endorsement. When voting is seen as meaningless, participation is hollow. The regime may muster ballots, but without trust, the vote becomes a façade. The challenge for the junta, then, is not merely organizing a poll: it is convincing a skeptical populace that the exercise is more than a cosmetic exercise in power consolidation. And given the entrenched distrust, repression, fragmented control, and exclusion of genuine opposition, that may be a nut too hard to crack.

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**Mizzima Weekly is  
published by  
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Cover photo by Saad Alfozan





**THE “ASKS” FOR A NEW  
US BURMA POLICY**

**HOW THE US COULD HELP  
END THE WAR WITHOUT  
FIRING A SHOT**

***ANTONIO GRACEFFO***

**R**ecent actions by US President Donald Trump's administration suggest a new Burma policy may be emerging, one that could benefit the pro-democracy forces. Targeted sanctions against junta-aligned groups like the DKBA and BGF, the creation of the Scam Center Strike Force, and the careful handling of the Starlink investigation all show a growing U.S. willingness to distinguish between junta proxies and resistance EAOs. These steps indicate Washington may be moving toward an approach that recognizes and supports Burma's pro-democracy movement.

Burma still has several allies in Congress who helped shape earlier policy and have urged the administration to develop a coherent strategy. In the House,

Rep. Bill Huizenga and Rep. Betty McCollum co-chair the bipartisan Congressional Burma Caucus, founded in February 2024. Rep. Huizenga introduced the BRAVE Burma Act in 2025 with McCollum, Rep. Ann Wagner, and Rep. Seth Moulton, while Rep. Gregory Meeks, as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was the original sponsor of the BURMA Act. In the Senate, long-time supporters include Senators Ben Cardin, Jeff Merkley, Richard Durbin, Ed Markey, Todd Young, and Susan Collins, with additional support from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senator Jim Risch.

The BRAVE Burma Act would extend the BURMA Act's sunset period from eight to ten years, require annual sanctions reviews on Myanmar Oil and Gas En-



The Myanmar people are receiving mixed messages from the current US government administration. Photo: Harold Mendoza

terprise, Myanmar Economic Bank, and foreign persons operating in the jet fuel sector, create a U.S. Special Envoy for Burma with ambassadorial rank to coordinate policy, and limit IMF shareholding increases for Burma while the State Administration Council remains in power.

The bill has passed only one of three required House committees. It has not passed the full House, has not been introduced or considered in the Senate, and has not been signed by President Trump. It remains in the early stages of the legislative process with a long path ahead before it can become law.

Existing U.S. Burma policy is anchored in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act, which incorporated provisions from the BURMA Act. The law states that it is U.S. policy to support the Burmese people in their struggle for democracy, freedom, human rights, and justice. It authorizes additional sanctions and non-lethal technical assistance for Ethnic Armed Organizations, People's Defense Forces, and pro-democracy groups, while explicitly barring any assistance to the State Administrative Council (now the National Security and Peace Commission), the Burmese military, or entities under their control. The non-lethal assistance authorization potentially covers uniforms, protective gear, armored vehicles, radar systems, and medical supplies.

In July 2024, in a bipartisan letter, Senators Risch, Cardin, McConnell, Merkley, and Young pressed the State Department and USAID to adopt a more proactive Burma policy, warning against ceding U.S. leadership as the war rapidly evolves. They urged a forward-leaning strategy that provides resistance groups with the non-lethal equipment they need, including medical gear, body armor, early warning radar, and drone jammers to defend against junta attacks.

Over the past ten months, this author has contributed to the drafting of several reports requested by the U.S. Department of State and the White House, explaining the situation in Burma and offering recommendations for U.S. policy. Recent statements have outlined the benefits that a stable, peaceful, and democratic Burma would bring to the United States, the region, and the world.

Experts and individuals tracking the Burma war have consistently emphasized that supporting Burma is in America's national interest. "A democratic Burma is good for the world," said David Eubank, head of the Free Burma Rangers, a frontline aid organization operating in Burma since the 1990s.

A democratic Burma would reduce China's influence in the region, block the Chinese Communist Party from securing strategic access to the Bay of Bengal through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and end the refugee crises affecting Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and other neighboring countries. It would also allow a democratically elected Burmese government to work with the United States and Interpol on major crime issues such as transnational drug trafficking, human trafficking, and the elimination of Southeast Asia's scam centers.

For the United States, an added benefit would be access to Burma's rare earth deposits, which President Trump has already expressed interest in sourcing from Kachin State. Expanding these supplies would strengthen U.S. national security by reducing dependence on China for critical materials.

Papers, testimonies, and articles presented to the U.S. government have outlined several key asks that would improve life in Burma and help end the war. First,



Washington should engage directly with the Ethnic Armed Organizations and their civilian administrations, bypassing the junta.

Second, the United States should provide aid through ethnic networks to support the internally displaced people, a step fully permissible under existing U.S. law. Iraqi Kurdistan offers a successful model, as the United States supported an autonomous region inside a foreign country that now has its own government, military, and visa system, and has become one of the safest and most prosperous areas in its region. The United States could do the same for Burma's ethnic states, where peace and economic stability would allow these areas to rebuild civilian institutions and trade with each other, the United States, and regional partners without requiring a major increase in American foreign aid.

Third, the United States should lead a coordinated international effort, including democratic allies, ASEAN, and India, to limit support from China and Russia and cut off weapons and jet fuel to the junta, with real monitoring and enforcement to weaken the military's ability to continue killing civilians.

Fourth, the United States could help the resistance obtain nets to counter fiber-optic drones, while neighboring countries should loosen transshipping restrictions and allow the resistance to receive drone jammers, demining equipment, Starlink, and protective gear such as body armor and helmets.

Fifth, the definition of non-lethal aid should be broadened to include anti-aircraft systems. While technically weapons, these systems save civilian lives and would include heavy machine guns and shoulder-fired missiles capable of taking down junta aircraft. Pro-

viding the resistance with air defense systems would help nullify the junta's air superiority, which, in addition to saving lives, would help end the war. This mirrors U.S. policy in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion, when the United States supplied FIM-92 Stinger missiles to the mujahideen, allowing them to shoot down Soviet helicopters and ground-attack aircraft. The sudden loss of Soviet air superiority forced a shift in battlefield tactics and significantly accelerated the end of the war.

Sixth, if possible, the U.S. military could provide training to the EAOs in demining, combat reporting, medical care, and monitoring, and support the installation of early warning systems and communications across ethnic states to alert civilians of airstrikes and junta attacks. Seventh, humanitarian corridors should be established in neighboring countries to allow severely wounded patients to be evacuated for medical treatment. All of these asks are achievable, none violate U.S. law, and they only need to be enacted.

And finally, a special request from David Eubank, FBR, and many of the churches in Burma is that members of the U.S. Congress pray for Burma.

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

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



The USDP is the front-runner in the race under the military's "sham" election. Photo: AFP

## JUNTA HITS BACK AT ELECTION CRITICS

Myanmar's military regime has stepped up punitive actions against civilians accused of disrupting preparations for its planned election, enforcing its newly enacted "Law on the Protection of Elections from Interference, Destruction, and Disruption." Legal experts say the junta is now using the law to impose extreme penalties for minor incidents that would normally fall under standard criminal codes.

One such case occurred on 13 November in Oattwin Township, Bago Region, when a motorcycle collision escalated into a physical altercation. According to a local lawyer, the incident began when Tun Min Latt accidentally collided with Bo Bo Tun, a "peon" messenger returning from the township election commission office. The two began fighting, and Tun Min Latt allegedly punched the messenger. Instead of charging him under routine penal code provisions for physical harm—Sections 323 to 326—the junta charged him under the new election-protection law, accusing him of obstructing an election official from carrying out his duties.



In another example of the law's sweeping use, a 65-year-old man in Chaung Sone Township, Mon State, was sentenced to 17 years in prison for tearing down a list of candidates posted in his village. He was arrested on 5 November and received his sentence just two weeks later, highlighting the regime's accelerated legal process for election-related cases.

In Yangon, three youths aged 19 to 24 were given some of the most severe sentences yet under the law. Arrested in September for pasting anti-election posters depicting a ballot box with a bullet hole, two young men received 49-year prison terms while a 19-year-old woman was sentenced to 47 years. The men were convicted on seven counts and the woman on six, all under the law's harshest provision, Article 23(a).

At the same time, the military's favoured Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has begun

campaigning under heavy security. Local outlet Dawei Watch reports that USDP candidates in Tanintharyi Region are traveling with fully armed soldiers, who surround campaign sites and provide close protection - sometimes in civilian clothing. Their presence has alarmed villagers, many of whom fear conscription sweeps or arrests on accusations of supporting the resistance. As a result, young men from several communities have reportedly fled their homes to avoid military encounters.

## **Junta steps up crackdown on scam centres**

Myanmar's military authorities have begun entering the controversial Shwe Kokko project area in Myawaddy Township following junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's recent visit to Karen State, marking the most visible intervention yet in the region's long-running



Scam centre workers under guard. Photo: AFP



online scam industry. The Border Guard Force (BGF), which controls the territory, also announced on 17 November that it would cooperate in eliminating online fraud operations.

The announcement immediately triggered a mass exodus of scam workers from Shwe Kokko. According to local sources, most foreign workers abandoned their compounds and scattered across Myawaddy's urban areas or crossed the border into Thailand. "All hotels and guesthouses in Myawaddy are now full of scam workers," a resident told local media. Despite junta-controlled newspapers claiming that authorities are inspecting road junctions and searching for fleeing workers, most have not been apprehended.

Meanwhile, uncertainty continues over the whereabouts of Brigadier General Saw Chitthu, a key BGF leader long linked to the Shwe Kokko business network. Several independent media outlets reported that he has not appeared publicly since his Chinese business partner, casino tycoon She Zhijiang, was transferred to China on 12 November. BGF spokesman Lt. Col. Naing Maung Zaw, however, denied that Saw Chitthu is in hiding, insisting the commander is "working on the region's development projects" and has no involvement in criminal enterprises. The BGF also claimed it had no knowledge of the illicit operations inside the hotels it permitted to be built in Shwe Kokko - a statement contradicted by locals. One resident said,



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

"He used to be seen moving in Shwe Kokko with his convoy. Since She Zhijiang was taken to China, I don't know whether he returned to his village or is staying somewhere privately."

At a press conference on 20 November, Lt. Col. Naing Maung Zaw said the joint operation had detained more than 960 suspected scammers from 22 countries - most of them Chinese nationals - and seized over 2,000 computers and 20,000 smartphones within three days. He said authorities were attempting to prevent more foreign workers from fleeing to Thailand. While he declined to give a percentage estimate of the operation's overall progress, he acknowledged the crackdown would require "unlimited time" to dismantle the entrenched criminal networks. He also denied allegations that the BGF is sheltering high-level Chinese scam leaders.

From the junta's side, Karen State Border and Security Minister Col. Min Thu Kyaw is directing the operation alongside commanders from the military's No. 44 Infantry Division and the state police force.

### **Arakan Army fighting escalates**

Fighting has sharply escalated in Kyaukphyu Township, where back-and-forth clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces continue across several frontline villages. After suffering losses earlier this year, the military regained a number of positions in late October and early November with the support of heavy airstrikes, drone assaults, and sustained artillery fire.

On 14 November, junta troops advanced toward Min Pyin village, home to a key meteorological radar tower. Outmatched by the military's manpower and firepower, AA units withdrew from the area, allowing junta soldiers to seize the site. Soon after taking control, troops gathered in front of the radar station to take group photographs intended for circulation on Telegram and other propaganda channels.

But as the soldiers posed, the AA launched a precisely targeted artillery strike. Video footage released by the AA - recorded by a drone - shows junta troops assembling for the photo before an explosion erupts, sending thick black smoke into the air. When the smoke clears, surviving soldiers could be seen dragging the dead and wounded into an adjacent building. Local sources report that at least 10 junta personnel were killed instantly.

Min Pyin lies around seven to eight miles south of Mintat Hill, a strategic high ground previously held by the AA. The loss of Min Pyin marks a limited withdrawal by the rebel force from areas gained during its offensive to seize Kyaukphyu, launched in February this year. Although AA fighters advanced to within Kyaukphyu's municipal boundaries, they have now retreated roughly 15 miles from the urban core.

However, the military's position in Min Pyin proved short-lived. Following the radar station strike, junta units withdrew to nearby Thaing Chaung village near Mintat Hill. Both villages - recently captured by the junta - have since become active battlegrounds as AA forces mount heavy counteroffensives. In response, the military has relied on repeated airstrikes and naval artillery to hold its positions.

Local military sources say the junta column had advanced too far ahead of its supporting units and is now effectively trapped in Min Pyin and Thaing Chaung. With AA attacks intensifying, the situation for the forward-deployed junta troops remains precarious.





Photo: AFP

## HRW URGES GOVERNMENTS TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTIONS

On 16 November, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on foreign governments to reject the Myanmar junta's plans to hold elections between December 2025 and January 2026, warning that the polls will be neither free, fair, nor inclusive.

The following is the text of HRW's statement.

The junta announced that the first two phases of the multistage elections will take place on December 28 and January 11. Since the coup, the junta has banned dozens of political parties and jailed an estimated 30,000 political prisoners, including nearly 100 people detained under a draconian election law passed in July. Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the junta's leader, has acknowledged that the elections will not be held in all townships, reflecting the widespread fighting with opposition armed groups characterized by the military's war crimes.

"The Myanmar junta's sham elections are a desperate bid for international legitimacy after nearly five years of brutal military repression," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Governments lending any credibility to these polls would signal a complete lack of support for rights-respecting civilian democratic rule in Myanmar."

On July 29, the junta enacted the Law on the Prevention of Obstruction, Disruption, and Sabotage of Multiparty Democratic General Election, which criminalizes criticism of the election by banning all speech, organizing, or protest that disrupts any part of the electoral process. Violators can face up to 20 years in prison and the death penalty.

Junta authorities have arrested 94 people under the new law since August—including at least 4 children—for social media activity, distributing stickers and leaflets, delivering speeches, and other alleged acts of election "interference" and "disruption." On September 9, a man was sentenced to seven years with hard labor in Taunggyi, Shan State, for a Facebook post criticizing the junta. On October 29, the filmmakers Zambu Htun Thet Lwin and Aung Chan Lu were arrested for "liking" a Facebook post that criticized an election propaganda film.

The authorities have detained nearly 2,000 people since February 2022 for online activity supporting the opposition or criticizing the military, part of the junta's gutting of freedoms of speech, the press, and assembly.

The military lacks sufficient territorial control to hold credible elections, with much of the country contested or held by the opposition, Human Rights Watch said. The nationwide census attempted in October 2024 to compile voter lists was held in only 145 of the country's 330 townships, fewer than half. The Union Election Commission declared in September that voting would not take place in 56 townships deemed "not conducive," while the two phases announced thus far cover only 202 townships.

Junta efforts to retake territory from the armed resistance ahead of the elections have involved repeated airstrikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure that amount to war crimes. China and Russia, the junta's primary suppliers of aircraft and arms, are both backing the election. The two countries have long supported



the junta while blocking international action on military atrocities at the United Nations Security Council.

Military abuses and spiraling conflict have internally displaced over 3.5 million people and left about 20 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Independent media and civil society groups have reported that junta authorities have pressured displaced people and prisoners to vote, as well as increasing checkpoints and digital surveillance.

The 2021 coup effectively ended the country's halting and limited democratic transition under Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). During general elections in November 2020, the NLD secured 82 percent of contested seats, roundly defeating the military proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). In response, the military alleged widespread voter fraud, an unfounded claim rejected by the Union Election Commission and international and domestic election observers.

Early on February 1, 2021, when the new parliament was to sit for the first time, the military detained President Win Myint, Aung San Suu Kyi, and scores of other NLD ministers, members of parliament, and regional administrators, thereby depriving Myanmar's people of their right to choose their government as enshrined in international law.

In the months following the coup, the junta arrested at least 197 ministers and members of parliament and 154 Union Election Commission officials. Suu Kyi and Win Myint are serving prison sentences of 27 and 8 years, respectively, on a slew of fabricated charges.

In January 2023, the junta enacted a new Political Party Registration Law designed to disqualify senior NLD members from participating in elections, violating international standards on the rights of political parties to organize and for their candidates to run for election. In March that year, the junta announced the NLD was among 40 political parties and other groups dissolved for failing to register under the new law. The junta disbanded four additional parties in September 2025 for failing to meet the law's requirements.

The junta had previously declared the opposition National Unity Government and its parliamentary body, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, as "terrorist organizations." Opposition groups have made clear they oppose any election under the junta.

After the coup, the junta replaced the civilian Union Election Commission with a military-appointed body. The European Union has sanctioned the current chair, Than Soe, appointed on July 31, 2025, and other junta commission members for being "directly involved

in actions undermining democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar." Before the coup, Than Soe led the military bloc in parliament's upper house. Under the 2008 Constitution, the military appoints 25 percent of parliamentary seats.

On July 31, in preparation for the elections, the junta announced the formation of the State Security and Peace Commission to replace the State Administration Council, in place since the coup. It also declared a new state of emergency and martial law orders for 63 townships in Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayah), Karenni (Kayah), Rakhine, and Shan States, and Magway, Mandalay, and Sagaing Regions, which were extended for another 90 days on October 31. The orders, issued primarily for townships under opposition control, transfer the "powers and responsibilities of the said townships to the Commander-in-Chief"

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing for alleged crimes against humanity committed in 2017.

The junta has sought to crush all political opposition, derail any possible establishment of democratic civilian rule, and obtain legitimacy for a military-controlled state, Human Rights Watch said. It has laid the groundwork for elections dominated by the military-backed USDP. While the official 60-day campaign period began on October 28, the military proxy party's campaigning was already well underway. The junta has reportedly banned campaign processions.

At the October summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for a "credible path back to civilian rule" in Myanmar, stating: "I don't think anybody believes that those elections will be free and fair." Volker Türk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, called holding the elections in December "unfathomable."

While ASEAN highlighted that peace and political dialogue "must precede elections," the regional body lacks the tools to preclude individual member states from providing technical assistance or support bilaterally.

"Malaysia, Japan, and other Asian governments that have made clear these elections are harmful to Myanmar's people should urge their neighbors to do the same," Pearson said. "Counterbalancing any support from China, Russia, and other countries backing the polls will require a clear, emphatic message that these illegitimate elections will only entrench Myanmar's descent into violence, repression, and autocratic rule."



## USDP CHAIR CLAIMS OVER 1,000 PARTY MEMBERS KILLED SINCE MYANMAR'S MILITARY TAKEOVER

**U**nion Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) Chairman Khin Yi has claimed that more than 1,000 party members have been killed since the military takeover. He made the remarks during a meeting with veterans in Zeyar Thiri Township, Naypyidaw, on 13 November.

In a video released by the party on 15 November, Khin Yi said, "If someone supported the military and happened to be a member of our party, they were killed. It seems that disagreement makes an adversary, doesn't it? As I said earlier, over 1,000 of our party members have been killed."

He urged that the deceased be honoured, adding, "What were their wishes? They have passed into the afterlife. They sought only a higher place and a peaceful life. What must we do for them? We must make sacrifices for them."

Khin Yi also encouraged supporters to continue backing the party ahead of the junta-planned elections next month.

In March 2022, the USDP installed a memorial stone at its Naypyidaw headquarters to commemorate members killed after the coup. During the unveiling, then-chairman Than Htay claimed that from the time of the military takeover to 26 March 2022, a total of 1,327 USDP members and supporters had died.

The memorial includes inscriptions criticising the

National League for Democracy (NLD), the party that won the 2020 election but was removed from power by the coup. It accuses the NLD's "strong attachment to holding power" of contributing to the violence that led to these deaths and expresses condolences to affected families.

In the 2020 general election, the NLD and USDP competed in nearly all constituencies. The NLD won 920 seats while the USDP secured 71. Citing claims of election fraud, the USDP and the military staged the 1 February 2021 takeover, just before the new parliament was to convene.

Since then, the junta has detained key NLD leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, dissolved the party, and prepared to hold elections in December this year with parties approved by the regime. The USDP has submitted a candidate list seeking broad representation.

Many NLD members have been arrested, killed or died in detention during the post-coup period, while civilians nationwide continue to face lethal attacks by the military.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), more than 7,400 pro-democracy activists and civilians have been killed by the military and its affiliates between 2021 and 14 November 2025.





Photo: AFP

## FORTIFY RIGHTS RELEASES REPORT REGARDING MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES PRIOR TO ELECTION

On 19 November, Fortify Rights released a new report detailing how Myanmar's military junta is carrying out deadly and unlawful airstrikes on civilians in Karenni State and along the Karenni-Shan State border. The strikes have destroyed schools, churches, medical clinics, and displacement camps ahead of the junta's planned "sham elections."

The statement is as follows.

The U.N. Security Council and individual U.N. member states should immediately impose comprehensive arms and aviation fuel embargoes on the Myanmar military junta and refuse recognition of its planned "elections," being conducted amid the ongoing persecution, imprisonment, and killings of political opponents.

"The Myanmar military junta's strategy for political and military gain is to kill more civilians and target key infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, ahead of its sham elections," said Sai Arkar, a human rights defender at Fortify Rights. "The world is watching these atrocities unfold in silence, when immediate action is required to stop them. Impunity is deadly. The U.N. Security Council and other member states must immediately cut the aviation fuel and weapons flows that enable the junta's continued reign of terror, and must work to prosecute those responsible for ongoing mass atrocity crimes."

A new 24-page report by Fortify Rights, "Horrible

Sight to Witness," documents 12 junta airstrikes in Karenni State and on the Karenni-Shan State border between June and September 2025. The attacks killed at least 55 civilians, injured more than 40 others, and destroyed schools, churches, medical facilities, displacement camps, and homes. These airstrikes likely amount to war crimes. The report does not reflect all of the airstrikes in Karenni and Shan states during the designated time period, only those investigated by Fortify Rights.

Fortify Rights interviewed 15 survivors, eyewitnesses, and first responders, and analyzed casualty lists, photographs, and videos from the attacks.

In one example, in a single attack on Sat Chau Kone Quarter in Hpasawng Township, Karenni State, on August 17, junta fighter jets killed at least 32 civilians, including children, and injured five others.

On September 1, 2025, a junta airstrike struck an internally displaced persons camp in Demoso Township, Karenni State, known as "Number Three Camp." The bomb landed near a kindergarten, injuring two adults and an 11-year-old Grade 5 student walking to a nearby primary school.

"May," 36, a teacher at the kindergarten school, described the attack to Fortify Rights:

[The bomb] fell on a bamboo grove very close to the kindergarten. ... If it had fallen right on the [school], there would have been nothing left [of the students].

... The children are very scared. They were already studying in fear. ... Now, we have temporarily closed the school.

"Daw Lae Lae," 38, a member of the displacement-camp committee—a body that oversees camp management—told Fortify Rights:

[The wounded fifth-grade student] was hit in the thigh and taken to the hospital. Thankfully, the injuries were not serious. At the time of the attack [8:30 a.m.], some students were still at home, while others had already arrived at school.

Another incident documented in "Horrible Sight to Witness" describes how, on July 14, 2025, three bombs hit a village in Demoso Township, striking a school, a residential area, and a medical clinic. "Michael," 31, a medical volunteer, told Fortify Rights he believed the junta deliberately targeted the school and clinic:

We went to check on the school ... [and] when we came back to our place ... the plane suddenly dropped another bomb [on the clinic]. We all immediately ran to the bomb shelter ... The clinic was destroyed. The gas stoves were on fire ... I feel like this is what [the junta] usually does. They target schools and clinics.

"Michael" explained that the clinic provided medical services to anyone in need of medical assistance, including civilians, resistance fighters, and prisoners of war.

The Myanmar military junta's planned "elections" in December 2025 and January 2026 are widely viewed as an attempt to legitimize its rule, following its February 2021 illegal seizure of power to overturn the results of a democratic election. A credible vote is impossible due to the junta's ongoing crimes and lack of space for meaningful political participation in the country, with many opposition leaders, including the former democratically elected government, imprisoned or killed. The international community should continue to reject the legitimacy of the military junta's coup and to demand a return to dialogue and a democratic transition.

In Karenni State, a key resistance stronghold, the junta announced on August 20, 2025, that the first phase of its election, scheduled for December 28, will cover only two of the state's seven townships, Bawlakhe and Loikaw, both under junta control. On October 29, 2025, the junta declared a second phase scheduled for January 11, 2026, which includes two additional townships, Demoso and Hpruso.

Under international humanitarian law, also known as the laws of war, parties involved in an armed conflict

are required to distinguish between combatants and "military objectives," which may be subjected to military attack, and civilians and "civilian objects," such as homes and hospitals that are not being used for military purposes, which are protected from military attacks.

The Myanmar military junta's repeated airstrikes on civilian areas did not serve any legitimate military purpose and likely constitute war crimes. These attacks continue a broader pattern of junta attacks against civilian targets throughout the country, said Fortify Rights.

On September 4, 2025, Fortify Rights published "Crashing Down on Us," an 86-page report documenting airstrikes by the Myanmar junta on civilians in Kachin and Karenni states. That report revealed the identities of 22 junta officials, military commands, and units to be investigated and potentially prosecuted for war crimes related to the airstrikes.

In both the current investigation and the earlier "Crashing Down on Us" report, almost all the areas the junta targeted had protected status under international law—including medical facilities, schools, places of worship, and displaced persons camps—with no military presence nearby. The junta's consistent targeting of these protected civilian sites strongly suggests that the attacks were deliberate, constituting a graver breach of the laws of war than indiscriminate attacks.

In August 2025, the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights documented the same pattern of indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians, recommending an arms embargo against the junta:

A global arms embargo, including on jet fuel, drones and dual-use equipment, to hinder the military's reliance on air power and improve civilian protection, is an urgent priority. The reliance of the military on aerial weaponry and its use of drones and paramotors have steadily risen over the years, leading to a near doubling of civilians killed by air strikes in 2024 compared with 2023, underscoring the need to continually update controls on the transfer of such equipment.

"Civilians live each day under the terror of bombs falling from the sky, and children running and hiding in fear at the sound of planes," said Winter Berry, a human rights defender at Fortify Rights. "The Myanmar junta is bombing and killing its own people to hold onto power and must be stopped. Failing to act now only guarantees its impunity and allows these atrocities to continue."



## EU CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN STATEMENT FOLLOWING UN ROHINGYA RESOLUTION

On 19 November, the European Union issued a general statement at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly following the adoption of a resolution regarding the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar.

The statement is as follows.

For the past seven years, the EU – together with our partners in OIC – have been presenting this resolution jointly in response to the atrocities against the Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, which forced over a million to flee the country. We thank the OIC, particularly Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, for their productive cooperation in preparing the resolution, and we appreciate all co-sponsors for their support.

Since the illegal and unconstitutional coup against the democratically elected government on February 1, 2021 and the repression that has followed, the situation has drastically deteriorated.

This resolution strongly condemns the widespread and systemic human rights violations and abuses in the country and violations of international humanitarian law. It also reiterates deep concern over the military's excessive use of force, including aerial attacks, mass killings, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as arbitrary detentions.

This year's text includes stronger language addressing the worrying developments over the past

year. It expresses grave concerns over the stated intention of the Myanmar military to hold elections amid intensifying conflict and ongoing human rights violations. It calls for an immediate end to violence and for inclusive dialogue. It also urges all Governments to broaden the donor base and make financial contributions to the refugee response.

With the current situation in Myanmar, there is unfortunately little hope and prospects for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees, who continue to be generously hosted in Bangladesh.

While this year's resolution has been strengthened significantly, the EU believes it should have gone further, particularly in addressing the continued flow of arms, weapons and technology to the Myanmar military, in line with Human Rights Council resolution 58/20 adopted by consensus.

However, we still believe that the current text sends the important message that the Rohingya and the people of Myanmar have not been forgotten by the international community.

The EU continues to stand with the people of Myanmar and fully supports their democratic will and aspirations and their legitimate right to live in peace and respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms.





Photo: AFP

## US REPRESENTATIVES RELEASE JOINT STATEMENT ON MYANMAR

**F**our members of the US House of Representatives issued a joint statement on the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar on 20 November.

The text of the statement is as follows.

Today, U.S. Representatives Ami Bera, M.D. (D-CA) and Young Kim (R-CA), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific, and Representatives Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) and Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on South and Central Asia, issued a statement following yesterday's joint subcommittee hearing on the crisis in Burma:

"Yesterday's bipartisan hearing demonstrated that Members are united in support of the Burmese people in their struggle for freedom and democracy," said the lawmakers. "To support a peaceful and democratic future for Burma, we urge the Administration to publicly condemn the junta's upcoming sham elections and appoint a Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma to lead U.S. efforts to address the crisis. The international community must also work to sustain and improve the response to the refugee crisis caused by the genocide and civil war in Burma, working in partnership with Bangladesh and other countries who have generously hosted the Rohingya. America must continue to stand with all the people of Burma as they pursue freedom, dignity, and a democratic future."



Photo: Mandalay PDF

## TWO SENIOR MANDALAY PDF LEADERS DETAINED AMID INTERNAL DISPUTE OVER NUG COMMAND

**T**wo senior leaders of the Mandalay People's Defense Force (MDY-PDF) - Ko Mone Dine, head of operations and organization, and Ko Naing Gyi, head of finance and fundraising - have been detained by the Mandalay PDF, the Mogok Strategy, local People's Defence Teams and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) of the National Unity Government (NUG), according to a Yangon Region Hluttaw representative.

"Ko Mone Dine was detained on the evening of 14 November 2025. The next day, Ko Naing Gyi was jointly arrested by the Mogok Strategy, the People's Defense Team, MOD, and MDY-PDF," the representative told Mizzima.

The arrests reportedly stem from internal disagreements after the Mandalay PDF's operations were brought under the command of the NUG's Ministry of Defence. Both Ko Mone Dine and Ko Naing Gyi objected to the shift, leading to growing friction within the organization, the source said.

Since their detention, the whereabouts of Ko Mone Dine, his family, and Ko Naing Gyi remain unknown, and all communication with them has been cut.

Mizzima attempted to contact Mandalay PDF spokesperson Ko Osmond for comment, but received no response. The Mogok Strategy was also contacted but did not reply.

The Mandalay PDF operates across multiple townships in Mandalay Region, including Madaya, Singu, Pyin Oo Lwin, Mogok, Patheingyi, Amarapura, and Thabeikkyin, as well as areas in Shan State such as Naungcho (Nawngkhio), Lashio, Namsang, and TNLA-controlled zones.

The MDY-PDF functions under the chain of command of the NUG's Ministry of Defence.





Photo: KNU

## **KNU AND KNPP TEMPORARILY WITHDRAW FROM THE NUCC, CITING DISCONNECT WITH GROUND REALITIES**

The Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) have submitted letters to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) requesting temporary withdrawal from the body, the two organizations confirmed.

“We have notified the NUCC through an official letter that we are temporarily halting our participation. The main issue is that many of the NUCC’s priorities and activities are increasingly disconnected from the realities on the ground,” KNU spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee told Mizzima.

NUCC member U Toe Kyaw Hlaing also confirmed that the KNPP has submitted a similar letter.

According to the NUCC’s 4 May announcement, the council includes the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF), the KNU and the KNPP as ethnic organizations. With the temporary withdrawal of the KNU and KNPP, the ABSDF is now expected to be the only armed revolutionary organization remaining in the council.

The NUCC is composed of representatives from the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), political parties, ethnic revolutionary organizations, strike committees, civil society groups, women’s organizations, and interim state, federal unit, and ethnic representative bodies.

The NUCC’s first People’s Conference, held in January 2022, approved Parts 1 and 2 of the Federal Democratic Charter. After the conference, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT), both of which contributed to drafting the Charter, withdrew from the council.

Under the Charter, the NUCC is tasked with convening the People’s Conference every six months, setting strategic direction for the revolutionary movement, and formulating implementation plans. However, the second People’s Conference was convened only in April 2024 – two years after the first. Notably, representatives from the CRPH and the National Unity Government (NUG) did not attend the closing day of the conference.





Photo: Chin Brotherhood Alliance

## CHIN BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE RETAKES KANEDI MOUNTAIN BASE IN TEDIM TOWNSHIP FROM MYANMAR JUNTA

**C**hin Brotherhood Alliance forces have regained control of the Kanedi Mountain base in Tedim Township, Chin State, according to local resistance group, People's Defence Force-Zoland (PDF-Zoland).

On 18 November, the alliance recaptured Kanedi Mountain (also known as Kennedy Peak), an almost 8,000-foot-high strategic communications base linking Tedim and Kale townships.

"From a strategic standpoint, we temporarily withdrew to avoid the large-scale advance by the junta's mobile units, after which the Chin Brotherhood forces successfully recaptured the area along with enemy weapons and ammunition," a PDF-Zoland spokesperson said.

Resistance fighters documented the recapture in video footage showing clearance operations on the mountain.

The Chin Brotherhood forces had first seized Kanedi Mountain in November 2023. However, on 29 October 2025, more than 200 troops from the junta's Infantry Battalion 269, based in Tedim, launched an offensive. Following days of clashes, the junta regained the mountaintop on 5 November.

According to an 18 November statement from the Chinland government's Ministry of Defence, the Chin National Defence Force (CNDP) and PDF-Zoland are jointly engaging junta units along the Tedim-Khaikam and Falam-Webula routes.

The junta has launched coordinated attacks along the Kale-Thaing Ngin-Tedim road and the Hakha Lay-Webula-Falam road, leading to continuous fighting.

Between 6 and 18 November, approximately 100 junta troops including a major and a captain were killed, while the resistance seized weapons and captured prisoners of war, the Chinland government's Ministry of Defence said.

Under the junta's plan to hold the first phase of elections on 28 December, Hakha and Tedim are among the targeted townships in Chin State. Chin resistance groups say the junta's recent operations aim to secure these areas ahead of the vote, as well as other townships where it has lost territorial control.

Currently, in Chin State, the junta controls only Hakha and Tedim. Revolutionary forces hold Tunzan, Falam, Mindat, Kanpetlet, Matupi, and Paletwa, while both sides maintain positions in Thantlang Township.



## AA GAINS UPPER HAND OVER MYANMAR JUNTA IN HEAVY FIGHTING NEAR KYAUKPHYU

**H**heavy fighting around Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State has caused heavy losses among junta troops, with the Arakan Army (AA) reportedly gaining the upper hand, according to military sources.

Clashes have been concentrated in Min Pyin village, where AA forces have been targeting junta units moving into locations previously mapped as strike points. As a result of the AA's coordinated assaults and tactical baiting, junta troops have suffered significant casualties, a local military source told Mizzima.

"AA pulled back and let the junta troops advance, exactly as expected. Then they lured them in and struck as planned. The junta soldiers who entered the kill zone came under heavy fire and suffered many casualties. They were also unable to regroup with their rear units and became trapped," local source said.

As fighting intensified around Min Pyin, the junta began firing heavy artillery from air force and naval bases in an attempt to support frontline troops and rescue units that had been cut off, the source added.

Recent video circulating on social media shows that after junta troops took positions at the Min Pyin police station and nearby meteorological radar station, the AA launched a drone strike as soldiers stopped to take photographs. At least ten junta troops were killed, according to the footage.

Although the AA briefly withdrew from the municipal area in what appeared to be a tactical retreat, it resumed drone and artillery attacks after the radar station strike. According to Captain Zin Yaw, a member of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the AA appears to be strengthening positions around central

Kyaukphyu Township to block potential junta advances toward Ramree and Ann townships and to regain full control of the region.

"We were somewhat surprised by the AA's tactics in Kyaukphyu. In the past, the AA rarely maintained large permanent bases there – they mostly relied on guerrilla-style operations. But in recent days, they have reestablished positions in the Doe Taung-Kyauk Chuin area of the Ngarlonesu village tract. Strategically, Ngarlonesu is the hub of the township. It seems the AA aims to prevent the navy base in Dhanyawadi and the army units in Kyaukphyu from linking up with forces in Ann Township," he said.

The AA has been attacking targets in Kyaukphyu Township since February 2025 but previously avoided building fortified bases. Its current presence in the Ngarlonesu area suggests preparations for full-scale operations, Captain Zin Yaw noted.

The junta had planned to advance from Kyaukphyu toward Ramree Township, but heavy losses have stalled their operations. Military sources say that even if the junta succeeds in holding elections in Kyaukphyu, the AA could launch major offensives afterward.

Following the radar station attack, the junta began bombing Min Pyin, Wa Natchuin, Laketin, and nearby villages on 18 November, forcing thousands of civilians to flee.

The AA now controls around 15 towns and continues major attacks near Kyaukphyu as well as along the Rakhine-mainland border, where clashes with junta forces remain intense.





Photo: Supplied

## **FIVE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING THREE CHILDREN, KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA MIDNIGHT AIRSTRIKE ON MYAING TOWNSHIP**

**A** junta airstrike on Kangyi village in Myaing Township, Magway Region, killed five civilians, including three children, during midnight sleeping hours, according to local revolutionary forces. More than 20 others were injured.

A member of the resistance forces said the strike occurred at around 12:10 am on 20 November, when a jet fighter from the Meiktila Shante Air Base dropped two 200-pound bombs on the village.

"There was no fighting at all. They deliberately bombed during sleeping hours. Many houses were hit. Three houses were completely destroyed," the resistance member said.

At least 10 homes were damaged and over 20 villagers injured, with several in critical condition, according to local resistance groups.

Revolutionary forces reported that junta troops have recently been conducting patrols across villages in Myaing and Pauk townships and in areas between the two townships, followed by multiple air attacks.

"The column that left the Myaing Industrial Zone is likely to link up with the troops from Pauk and push back toward Myaing, as the Pauk column is heading northeast," a resistance fighter said.

The Anyar Myay Tat Paung Su (Allied Forces of Central Myanmar) also released a statement saying the junta intentionally targeted the village centre and bombed it while residents were asleep.

Intensified troop movements by the junta since early November have triggered a major displacement crisis across Myaing and Pauk townships, forcing large numbers of civilians to flee.

The Anyar Myay Tat Paung Su warned that communities in the region are facing severe human rights violations, including aerial bombings and attacks by junta columns, arbitrary arrests and killings, looting, landmine contamination in villages, deaths due to illness and exhaustion during displacement, and the loss of children's rights to education and safe living conditions.



Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON KANI TOWNSHIP FARMLANDS KILLS ONE WOMAN, INJURES TWO

**T**he Myanmar junta carried out an airstrike on farmland near Min Oh village in southeastern Kani Township, Sagaing Region, killing one woman and injuring two others, according to local residents.

Two jet fighters bombed the area at 3:49 pm and 4 pm on 18 November, striking farm huts along the Chindwin River.

"Two jet fighters flew one after another, firing cannon and dropping bombs. We heard three explosions from inside the bomb shelter. A woman who was harvesting crops in the field was killed by shrapnel," a woman from Kani Township told Mizzima.

Local sources said a 30-year-old female farmer died in the attack, two people were injured, and about three farm huts were destroyed.

"Since we have experienced airstrikes before, we get terrified when we know jets are coming. In the village, we receive news of the airstrikes through communication channels. Being able to evacuate early helps reduce casualties," a 40-year-old resident said.

The 18 November strike came two days after the North-West Regional Military Command attacked Mudra East village in Kani Township using three light helicopters (gyrocopters). The series of airstrikes has brought the number of fatalities in Kani Township to nine so far in November.





Photo: Supplied

## OVER 100 MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN 13-DAY CLASHES ALONG CHIN-SAGAING- MAGWAY BORDER

The Chinland Government's Ministry of Defence said in a statement on 18 November that more than 100 Myanmar junta troops, including middle-ranking officers, were killed during 13 days of fighting along the borders of Chin State, Sagaing Region, and Magway Region.

From 6 to 18 November, the Chinland Government's Ministry of Defence and allied forces launched coordinated attacks using Column 1 and Column 2 in Kalay Township of Sagaing Region, Gangaw Township of Magway Region, and Falam and Tedim townships of Chin State.

"The death toll of Military Commission troops, including officers like Majors and Captains, is a combined count from both columns. There were more casualties on the Column 1 side. We recovered over 100 bodies, and it could be higher. There are also many injured, but it is difficult to confirm the exact number," Salai Naing John Kim, spokesperson for the Chinland Government's Ministry of Defence, told Mizzima.

He said the junta responded with heavy airstrikes due to high casualties on the ground, the loss of weapons and ammunition, and the capture of prisoners of war. On 18 November alone, fighter jets dropped four bombs, while Y12 aircraft dropped about 150 bombs.

Despite difficulties advancing due to the junta's reliance on aircraft and drone attacks, Salai Naing

John Kim said resistance forces are continuing their offensive operations together with local allies.

According to the statement, Column 1 is fighting near Hmantaw and Kyantha in Kalay Township and near Hanthawaddy village in Gangaw Township, along with the Vakok-PDF, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), PDF District Battalions, local defence forces and the Yaw Defence Force (YDF).

Column 2 is operating between Falam and Webula towns in Chin State, and between Tedim and Khaikam, with Chin Brotherhood (CB) members including the Chin National Defence Force (CNDF) and PDF-Zoland.

Between 6 and 17 November, junta forces carried out 17 bombing raids using jet fighters and Y12 aircraft, the Chinland Government's Ministry of Defence said.

Salai Naing John Kim noted that the Chinland Council (CC) and Chin Brotherhood (CB), which have had political and military differences, are now fighting together in the latest operations. He said the two sides had also cooperated during fighting near Mual Pi village in Tedim Township in July and would work toward deeper coordination.

Military analysts say the junta's ongoing advances are likely linked to its plans to hold elections on 28 December, with Hakha and Tedim included in the first phase. They assess that the junta is attempting to retake lost territory ahead of the polls.



## FOUR MYANMAR POLICE OFFICERS KILLED IN COORDINATED ATTACK ON THARSI POLICE STATION

A coordinated attack by revolutionary forces on the Tharsi Police Station in Monywa Township, Sagaing Region, left four police officers dead, according to a source from the People's Defence Force (PDF) unit known as Rocket Fighter.

The assault occurred at around 9 am on 17 November, when resistance forces launched a surprise attack on the station, which housed around 30 policemen and sits about 100 meters from Tharsi Prison.

"We launched a sudden attack and managed to kill four police officers. The dead and wounded were later transported to the prison," Ko Lapyae, a spokesperson for Rocket Fighter, told Mizzima.

Mizzima has been unable to independently verify the number of casualties.

The resistance forces aimed to seize control of the police station. However, after about an hour of fighting, junta reinforcements arrived from Tharsi Prison,

including snipers and machine gunners. Facing the increased firepower, the revolutionary forces withdrew without sustaining casualties.

The Chindwin Spring Revolution Force (CSRAF), which participated in the joint operation, confirmed the attack on 18 November, stating, "We responded to the enemy's attack in the best possible way"

The operation involved multiple groups, including Rocket Fighter PDF, CSRAF, Nyaung-U District Battalion 3, the Bo Kyar Gyi group (Debayin PZero), Butalin Army/Urban Guerrilla, and local defence forces.

The People's Defence Forces under the National Unity Government, along with local resistance groups, coordinated the attack against the military junta.

Despite the success of the operation, local defence forces say they are struggling to replenish ammunition following recent battles. Rocket Fighter has appealed for assistance to sustain ongoing operations.





Residents flee. Photo: CJ

## OVER 10,000 RESIDENTS FLEE AS MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS ADVANCE INTO PAUK TOWNSHIP

**M**ore than 10,000 residents have fled their homes as Myanmar junta troops advance into Pauk Township in Magway Region, according to local sources.

Military units stationed at Seikphyu Defence Product Industries No. 21 and No. 22 began pushing into the southern part of Pauk Township in late October, while another column from Myaing Township Industry No. 2 moved into the northern part of the township at around 9:30 am on 17 November.

Locals said each column consists of around 100 soldiers.

"We had to flee before we could harvest our winter beans and peas. Since it is winter, we're exposed to the cold while on the run. The worst part is the emotional and psychological trauma. It is especially hard on

vulnerable children and the elderly," a Pauk Township resident told Mizzima.

The advancing troops are currently positioned about four miles from the oil fields. Their operations have displaced residents from at least 20 villages, including Kabarphyu, Tegyi, Kanthit, Htanpaukkone, and Phalankone.

"The soldiers told the people they captured not to flee and to meet them peacefully. Those who complied were given food and told to register for the upcoming election through advance voting," said a member of a joint revolutionary group based in Myaing Township.

The troops have reportedly killed five civilians including one woman and burned down about 25 homes during their advance.



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF ACCUSES KAREN ARMED GROUPS OF FUELLING INSTABILITY, LINKING THEM TO CYBER-SCAM NETWORKS

**T**he head of the Myanmar junta, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has accused Karen armed groups of destabilizing Karen State and being involved in cyber-scam networks.

He made the remarks on 15 November during a meeting with state-level departmental officials and local residents in Hpa-an, the Karen State capital, according to military-controlled newspapers.

The junta leader claimed that Karen State has faced instability since independence due to armed conflict, which he said has harmed both the local population and the country. He added that the junta is now taking action to “clear and address” activities it views as threats to regional stability.

Min Aung Hlaing also said the regime is “cleaning out” the KK Park compound near the Myanmar–Thailand border – an area long notorious for online scam centres and illegal gambling – and vowed to complete operations there as a national duty.

Although he blamed “armed groups within Kayin State,” he did not specify which organizations.

However, on 20 October, junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun accused the Karen National Union (KNU) of direct involvement in the KK Park project, alleging that its leaders had misused state-owned land for financial gain.

The KNU denied the allegation, saying the junta was spreading “false information” to cover up the political, economic and military benefits it receives from scam syndicates operating inside Myanmar.

Justice For Myanmar (JFM) reported on 6 March that KK Park – one of Southeast Asia’s largest cyber-scam hubs – is linked to the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), led by Colonel Saw Chit Thu, which operates under the Myanmar military. The BGF rebranded as the Karen National Army (KNA) in 2024.

Although construction began in 2020, JFM said the compound expanded rapidly after the 2021 coup, with the junta profiting by supplying electricity to scam centres.

A separate report by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) in April 2024 stated that BGF leaders were central to online scam operations in Karen State. The report named BGF commanders Colonel Saw Chit Thu, Lieutenant Colonel Mote Thone, and Major Tin Win, as well as Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) commander Brig-Gen Sai Kyaw Hla and former KNU central committee member Saw Roger Khin, as key facilitators of the networks.

USIP estimated that the BGF receives around USD 192 million annually from the Shwe Kokko project, where thousands of scam compounds operate – half of which flows to Myanmar’s junta.

In May 2025, the United States sanctioned Saw Chit Thu along with his two sons, Saw Htoo Eh Moo and Saw Chit Chit, for their involvement in cyber scams, human trafficking and cross-border smuggling.

In September, Washington imposed additional sanctions on three individuals and six entities linked to the BGF/KNA, including the Chit Linn Myaing Company, owned by Saw Chit Thu.

Most recently, on 12 November, the U.S. announced another round of sanctions targeting DKBA Commander-in-Chief General Saw Steel, Chief of Staff General Saw San Aung, Brig-General Sai Kyaw Hla, and Colonel Saw Sein Win, citing their roles in online scam operations.

Both the BGF/KNA and the DKBA have publicly stated they will assist the junta in its planned election.

Although the junta has recently showcased raids and demolition of buildings inside KK Park, online scam and gambling operations in Myawaddy District including those at Shwe Kokko are reportedly continuing.





Photo: Supplied

## ONLINE SCAM SYNDICATE MEMBERS FLEE SHWE KOKKO MYAING AHEAD OF CRACKDOWN ON MYANMAR BORDER

**M**embers of online scam syndicates in Shwe Kokko Myaing, a territory under the control of the Karen Border Guard Force / Karen National Army (BGF/KNA), fled overnight after the group announced on 17 November that it had launched a special operation targeting “Kyar Phyant” scam networks, according to local residents.

Most of those who escaped are believed to be Chinese nationals, and shop signboards in Chinese were quickly covered or removed, locals said.

“There was a lot of commotion in Sites 4 and 5, around the Hpone Htoo area, and at the new sites near the park. I saw Chinese people running away with their bags. Most of them were Chinese. We don’t know where they went,” a witness told Mizzima.

Taxi drivers have been posting frequent advertisements in the Shwe Kokko Facebook group offering transport services, and several reportedly picked up passengers in front of buildings known to house online scam operations.

Residents said the sudden exodus began after reports spread in the evening that junta troops had entered Shwe Kokko Myaing under BGF escort.

“BGF vehicles entered some of the sites, and the buildings went dark. Then we saw cars speeding out, seemingly carrying the Chinese nationals. We don’t

know where they were taken. They are relocating them,” a motorcycle taxi driver said.

Some foreigners, as well as Myanmar citizens, are reportedly still trapped inside the scam compounds, where security teams have locked the doors.

“They won’t let us go outside. All the doors are locked. There are no more Chinese inside only us, Myanmar people, and some other foreigners. The building lights are off, and we’re not allowed to use phones. I think they freed the Chinese and are keeping us as hostages,” a 22-year-old Myanmar woman inside one of the buildings told Mizzima.

The latest developments follow mounting international pressure. On 12 November, the US State Department announced the formation of a Scam Centre Strike Force targeting online scam hubs across Southeast Asia, including in Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.

On 14 November, China led a six-nation ministerial meeting involving Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, during which all parties agreed to strengthen cooperation in cracking down on scam networks.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, during a visit to Hpa-An on 15 November, also declared the suppression of online scam syndicates a national priority.

Abdul Manan



## FAMILY PLEADS FOR RESCUE OF PAKISTANI MAN TRAFFICKED INTO SCAM HUB IN MYANMAR

Family members are urgently appealing for the search and rescue of a Pakistani national trafficked into an online scam compound operated by a Chinese criminal syndicate in the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)-controlled portion of Myawaddy Township, Karen State, along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Twenty-year-old Abdul Manan disappeared at the Thai-Myanmar border shortly after arriving in Thailand in December 2024. His family later received messages from him saying he had been forced to work inside Myanmar as an online scammer.

"I received a letter from my brother. It said, 'Please save me. They beat me every day, they shock me with electricity,'" his sister, Sofia Bibi, told Mizzima. "My brother told me he was being treated brutally and inhumanely."

After he was trafficked into Myanmar, Abdul's family was contacted by a Chinese mafia group demanding USD 15,000 for his release.

"A Chinese man sent the family a video and demanded \$15,000. But the family is very poor and cannot pay," said a Pakistani national who previously escaped from an online scam hub in DKBA-controlled territory.

Sofia Bibi said her brother was trafficked to a location known as Deeko Park, which Mizzima has previously identified as a large compound near Wawlay town and under DKBA control. Two sources confirmed the site was built in October 2024 and is operated by the son of DKBA commander-in-chief General Saw Steel.

"Initially, we learned he was being held in KK Park, and when KK Park was demolished, he couldn't escape. Later, we discovered he had been moved to Deeko Park," she said. "I'm afraid that if the traffickers find out he has contacted us, they will torture him even more or even kill him."

There have been widespread reports of Chinese criminal networks demanding ransom from victims forced to work in online scam operations across Myanmar, including in areas controlled by the DKBA. Some victims have said they were only released after ransom payments were made.

Abdul, the eldest of eight children, has seven sisters. His family describes themselves as poor, and his mother is disabled.

On 12 November, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced sanctions against the DKBA and four senior leaders for supporting cyber fraud centres in Myanmar that target US citizens through online investment schemes.

Those sanctioned include DKBA commander-in-chief Saw Steel, Adjutant General Saw Sein Win, Chief of Staff Saw San Aung, Military Region 1 Commander Brigadier General Sai Kyaw Hla, and Yu Jianjun (also known as Chamu Sawang), a Thai national and director of the Trans Asia company.

Trans Asia International Holding Group Thailand Co. Ltd. Along with Troth Star Co. Ltd., were also sanctioned by OFAC for their tied to Chinese organized crime networks running online scam compounds in partnership with armed groups in Myanmar, including the DKBA.





Photo: AFP

## SHIPWRECK MIGRANTS FACE CHARGES IN MALAYSIAN COURT

**E**leven survivors of a deadly boat capsized two weeks ago appeared in a Malaysian court on Wednesday, charged with illegally being in the Southeast Asian country, officials said.

The accused -- nine Myanmar nationals and two Bangladeshi citizens -- were among 14 people rescued after the November 6 shipwreck off a Thai island near the Malaysian maritime border.

They are said to be from a group of around 70 undocumented migrants, mostly from Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya community, who were trying to reach Malaysia when their vessel overturned.

A charge sheet seen by AFP said the group, aged between 17 and 43, was accused of entering the country around the Malaysian island resort of Langkawi "without valid passes".

Langkawi police chief Khairul Azhar Nuruddin told AFP the charges were read in court "but they (the suspects) did not understand".

The case was postponed to December 21 in order for interpreters to be arranged, Khairul said.

If convicted, offenders faced a fine of up to \$2,400 or five years' imprisonment, or both, and up to six strokes of the cane.

At least 36 people died in the sinking with rescue authorities calling off a search for survivors on Monday.

Relatively affluent Malaysia is home to millions of migrants from poorer parts of Asia, many of them undocumented, working in industries including construction and agriculture.

But sea crossings, facilitated by human trafficking syndicates, are hazardous and often lead to overloaded boats capsizing.

AFP



Spring  
Development  
Bank

Real Bank.  
Real Freedom.

## MYANMAR REVOLUTION'S SPRING DEVELOPMENT BANK'S INVESTMENT VALUE RISES FIVEFOLD

Investment value in Spring Development Bank (SDB) has increased fivefold over the past two years, CEO Calvin Tang said during a press conference titled "From Spring Development Bank's Innovative Financial Success Milestones to the Economic Freedom of the New Myanmar" on 18 November.

He noted that the value of SDB tokens, first offered for sale on 14 November, has risen nearly fivefold since their launch.

"We began operations in July 2023, and our valuation has continued to rise. Last Friday, November 14th, we officially entered the Exchange Listing. We began with an initial valuation of US\$500 million. Today, that figure has risen past US\$700 million and is nearing US\$800 million. Compared with the funding we received two years ago, investments from the revolutionary public have now increased fivefold," he said.

Calvin said growing public support has positioned SDB to surpass the value of several of Myanmar's largest financial institutions, adding that the bank aims

to play a leading role in post-revolution reconstruction and future investment growth.

He also emphasized that Spring Bank was established in accordance with regulations issued by the NUG's interim central bank and continues to operate according to its planned roadmap.

Spring Bank is now listed on the global crypto exchange MEXC and maintains more than 550,000 accounts, with turnover nearing US\$1 billion, he said.

Following its 14 November listing on MEXC, tokens sold during SDB's ICO 1 and ICO 2 rounds can now be exchanged for digital currency on the platform.

SDB was launched to mobilize funds for the Spring Revolution and disrupt the Myanmar junta's financial reach. According to information released at the press conference, the bank has so far contributed nearly US\$30 million to support the movement.





## A CHOLERA OUTBREAK ON INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER KILLS NINE, PROMPTS TWO-MONTH SHUTDOWN OF CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

**A** cholera outbreak in Mizoram State along the India-Myanmar border has killed nine people, prompting authorities to impose a two-month ban on cross-border movement, according to local sources.

Restrictions on both entry and exit took effect on 13 November, local youth organizations and administrative officials said.

The outbreak was first detected on 4 November in Kakhi village of Lawngtlai District. The nine fatalities include three local residents, three Myanmar refugees, and three people from Lawngmasu and Lodaw villages in Shaha District.

"There have been six deaths in our village so far. Around 90 people have been infected, and among them five are in serious condition. The rest are recovering," the chairman of the Youth of Lai Association (YLA) in Kakhi village told Mizzima.

Residents experiencing symptoms reported severe diarrhoea, vomiting, and weakened immunity. Health officials in Lawngtlai District have collected water and

blood samples to determine the source of the infection, he added.

On 16 November, the Lawngtlai District Commissioner visited Kakhi village which has been declared a Containment Area and met community groups, urging them to strictly follow official advisories, according to the Mizoram Department of Information and Public Relations.

"As the area has been declared a containment zone, it is crucial to follow the advisories and refrain from any movement or interaction with the Myanmar side for two months, including for economic activities," the Commissioner said.

He added that authorities would continue providing necessary medicines for cholera treatment, including Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) and IV fluids.

The movement ban covers Myanmar-bordering villages including Kakhi and Tuidan in Lawngtlai District and Lawngmasu and Lodaw in Shaha District. Officials said the border could reopen earlier depending on the progress of disease control measures.

The chairman of a youth organization noted that the border shutdown is expected to disrupt the flow of goods into Myanmar and may cause food shortages there, though Mizoram which exports the goods is unlikely to be affected.

However, due to the cholera outbreak and containment restrictions, residents are struggling to work and earn income, and local food supplies are already becoming scarce.

A request for food assistance has been submitted to the Lawngtlai District Commissioner, but no aid has yet arrived. The Kakhi village youth chairman appealed to donors for urgent support as well as medicines and food supplies.

Kakhi village has around 250 households and more than 800 residents, including both local villagers and refugees from Paletwa Township in Myanmar.



Photo: Mizzima

## CENTRAL BANK OF MYANMAR RENEWS WARNING AGAINST USE OF CRYPTOCURRENCIES

The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has renewed warnings against the use and trade of cryptocurrencies, urging the public to refrain from buying, selling, transferring or holding digital assets amid rising global regulatory crackdowns.

The Myanmar junta controlled central bank issued the notification on 16 November, reiterating that it has not authorized any domestic financial institution to engage in cryptocurrency-related services.

Digital currencies, including popular crypto assets, were first declared illegal for trading - either personally or virtually - in a May 2019 announcement published in state media. A subsequent 2020 directive reaffirmed that no licences would be issued for digital currency activities.

The central bank noted that numerous governments, including China, India, Egypt, Vietnam and Pakistan, do not recognize cryptocurrency as legal tender. China also bans cryptocurrencies and has cracked down on their use. It has instead promoted the use of its e-CNY.

The CBM claims it is also researching the creation

of a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). It noted that despite prohibitions, the popularity of cryptocurrencies is growing rapidly.

The CBM also noted that without bank involvement, the use of cryptocurrencies in illicit activities is also growing. These include drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, online scams and money laundering.

International cases were cited by the CBM including U.S. and U.K. actions targeting Cambodian businessman Chen Zhi and a recent U.S. seizure of an estimated US\$14 billion in Bitcoin tied to forced-labour phishing schemes - reportedly the largest digital asset confiscation to date.

The central bank stressed that the unregulated crypto market exposes users to severe financial losses due to price volatility, hacking and weak consumer protections. For these reasons, it states, it is warning the public to rely solely on regulated banking channels and avoid all crypto-related transactions.



Maui

## HIT 'EM UP

### THE DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE KNDF IS JOINED BY FOUR TOP COMMANDERS TO DISCUSS THEIR ONGOING RESISTANCE

**"**I'm a sniper," says Maui, the Deputy Commander and Vice Chair of Staff of the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF). "Taking another life is not really comfortable... but killing people is also very addictive. As a sniper, if I don't shoot for a long time, like two months, I feel like I want to go back, and I want to go and kill all these m\*\*\*\*\*f\*\*\*\*\*s."

Maui joins this interview alongside four of his top commanders who have been resisting the Burmese military since their 2021 coup. In heart-wrenching detail, they each describe their decision to take up arms against the regime. It's not really a free choice, Maui says; the youth have essentially been forced into making this terrible decision against a violent and uncompromising oppressor. "We used a peaceful way, a non-violent way," he says, describing the early days of protest. "But they start to crack down on us. They started to shoot with real bullets... So we realized that, okay, they are bullying us with the gun. They are not listening to our bare mouth. We should have weapons to talk to them the way they like."

As a result, Maui describes the stark choice they faced: to fight, or to resign themselves— and their country— to life under tyranny as passive witnesses.

The path they chose demanded an immense and perilous commitment: the willingness to shoot, to kill, to defend. Each of the other speakers echoes Maui's words through their own stories of lives abruptly overturned, as they were thrust from ordinary existence into the brutal reality of war.

Bearing the responsibility of holding a gun, Maui underscores the importance of KNDF organization, training, and unity. "When you hold a gun, you become a powerful man," he says. "If you cannot control yourself, this is going to create a lot of bad consequences for our society." At the same time, the urgency and improvised nature of real-world conflict— faced with a cruel and aggressive enemy— leave little opportunity for proper training in advance. Instruction happens when it can, in the brief pauses between battles with the Burmese army. Paradoxically, Maui also explains that his decision to take up arms is rooted in the desire to spare future generations from that same burden. "We want our next generation not to shoot, not to kill each other," he says. "That's why we take our arms, that's why we do it."

The seductive power inherent in holding a weapon and having the ability to kill can become addictive, Maui admits. He poignantly reminds listeners that when the

coup struck, he was an organic farmer, unwilling to harm even insects. "After I finished my university, I was a young activist for environment, peace, and ethnics," he says. "I decided to start an organic farm. I bought a piece of land. I lived on my farm... I didn't want to be a businessman or a politician. I didn't want to be something big. I just wanted to be something small that can contribute to our society in a better way."

Now a trained sniper, Maui admits that at times he feels a powerful urge to kill an enemy responsible for so many atrocities. He must consciously rebalance and recenter himself to avoid being consumed by that impulse. It is a cruel irony: the military forces young people to choose between becoming killers or submitting to life under an oppressive and violent repression.

The conversation turns to the tactics and strategy of the conflict. Despite the "catch-as-catch-can" nature of its organization and training, the KNDF has proven remarkably effective. In the early days, recruits trained with bamboo sticks because there were no weapons available, and access to arms and logistical

support remains a persistent challenge, though the group continues to receive strong backing from local communities. Even so, Maui says their soldiers will fight with whatever they have, noting a 30-to-1 ratio of Burmese soldiers to KNDF fighters killed. Through careful planning and execution, they have even managed to shoot down some of the military's advanced fighter aircrafts.

The KNDF uses a variety of tactics to confront the military. Sometimes the resistance engages in guerilla warfare in Yangon and other cities, but the KNDF is now more inclined to fight conventional battles with the Burmese military. Maui says that soldiers used to "come to our house, our village, our land, and they try to take it. They're trying to grab our land." In those earlier days, the Karenni resistance didn't have many resources, so they would fall back. But he says they learned from their mistakes, and are taking the fight to the army. Recently, they overran a battalion operating on Karenni soil.

Khine Sitthu, the KNDF's drone operator, chimes in. When he first took on the role, he hoped that as



KNDF fighters. Photo: Antonio Graceffo for Mizzima



someone who merely operated a controller— far from the soldiers the drone targeted and seeing its effects only on a small video screen— he would be shielded from the reality of killing, less affected than someone pulling a trigger or wielding a knife in direct sight of a victim. After all, his targets are virtually faceless, just blurred images on a monitor. But as he explains, drone operation is seductive in a different way, and requires its own kind of psychological resilience. “I thought being behind a controller would protect me emotionally, but quite the opposite,” he says. “Over time, it takes its toll.” Because the killing is distant and indiscriminate, there’s less sense of responsibility, and killing becomes almost casual. This detachment, he adds, can breed a kind of existential coldness and erode empathy. “We don’t get to see the aftermath,” he notes. “We don’t know who we hit... It feels evil. It feels like turning into something not human.”

Khine Sitthu says the resistance has even managed to shoot down helicopters using drones. The idea grew out of desperation — no weapons, no ammunition — so he started thinking creatively about how to help.

Remembering his prewar work filming with drones (during his student years as a documentarian), he wondered whether a drone could be rigged to carry and drop munitions. He pitched the idea to Maui, who was already considering drones for combat, and Khine Sitthu was put in charge. Faced with a disassembled stockpile of agricultural drones, he taught himself to rebuild and reprogram them; using the internet — including AI tools — and a lot of trial and error, he gradually gained control over their navigation and turned them into a small but effective air force.

The Burmese army— which initially mocked the resistance’s use of drones, taunting it for not having jet fighters— has since been rushing to play catch-up and is now employing drones of their own. They have the advantage of more resources, and connections to China and Russia. They also started jamming the resistance’s drone signals. This has forced Khine Sitthu and others to think outside the box yet again, trying to respond to this new challenge from the military. There is a concern because they do not have similar jamming capabilities.



KNDF fighters adjust settings on their gun. Photo: AFP

And similar to their more conventional bombing campaigns, the Burmese army's use of drones is indiscriminate, as opposed to the targeted use by the KNDF. They use their air power to generate terror and cause destruction for its own sake. This bothers Maui, who says, "We are the fighters [holding] a gun! If innocent people die, we're going to complain. If you really want to fight, fight us, not [the] people!"

The discussion returns to the issue of weapons and ammunition. Maui frankly admits that access to weapons and ammunition is an ongoing challenge. At times they have to retreat because they are low on ammunition, an issue that the Burmese military doesn't have. He says they do have resources they can sell to get the money needed to buy weapons, often through the black market; he adds that he wished the international community allowed the KNDF to purchase weapons legally, especially as they consider much of the arms to be used in the service of in self-defense. Maui contends that if only they had sufficient weaponry and ammunition, they could fairly easily defeat the Burmese army.

Continuing on the topic of weaponry, the focus turns to the use of landmines. Myanmar has the sad distinction of being the world's most landmine-contaminated country. While acknowledging that his forces use landmines, Maui says they do so under very strict protocols, especially when it's in a "public place." In those cases, they do not plant them and leave, allowing unknowing local residents to step on them and become accidental casualties of the conflict. "We don't want to plant landmines on our own land," he adds. "This is going to cause a lot of problems to us later, even [after] the war is finished." He notes that they then post soldiers near the mines until Burmese forces approach, so they can warn any villagers who may be coming that way about where to walk to avoid triggering the mines.

Maui acknowledges that even so, any landmines they plant now that remain untriggered will only be a problem in the future, one that will be a priority to tackle in a post-war Myanmar. However, he does not accept any comparison between his forces' and the army's use of these terrible weapons. He rails against the Burmese army, which plants them indiscriminately, even in public places, and does not care at all about how gets killed or maimed—indeed, this is often the point.

Maui is also quick to stress the losses from those who have already given the biggest sacrifice. "Right now, why we can talk to you in this situation is because

of our brothers and sisters who already gave their life," he says. "Whatever it takes, we must keep going. We're going to make sure there will be a new democratic society in the future, a place full of love, full of freedom, no discrimination."

As the interview comes to a close, all the commanders acknowledge just how much they have changed in these years. Khine Sitthu recalls that moment in 2021 when he chose to leave his studies and the nonviolent protests behind in order to join the armed rebellion, saying, "It feels like something is about to change drastically, like I'm about to jump off a cliff without a ladder. I know I can't go back. I don't know what's down there, but I'm sure I will survive." Continuing on this analogy later in the interview, he remarks, "I [am now] free-falling in the middle, trying to touch ground... Still, I don't know what's down there, but I know what to do."

This leads towards a focus on the future, and the guests are asked what they would most like to see from the international community. Their answer boils down to one thing—support. "If the international community really believes in democracy," Maui asks, "why don't you support the freedom fighters, pro-democratic fighters?" He clarifies that they are not looking for outside intervention or "boots on the ground," but whatever support is necessary for building a democratic nation and looking after the country's vast humanitarian needs. In the end, though, Maui is realistic. He acknowledges that the KNDF cannot defeat the Burmese army on its own, because of its size and resources; on the other hand, he emphasizes that the military cannot defeat his forces, either. So some negotiation is likely inevitable. But he is clear on one thing: any outcome is predicated on the military not retaining its political status, so that it can no longer disrupt the lives of those innocent civilians. "Let's do work together for a better future and better society, not only for Burma, but also for the whole world," he says in closing.

#### **LISTEN TO THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST**

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/12/episode-431-hit-em-up>



The Mekong River. Photo: Parker Hilton

## CHINA'S MEKONG DAMS AND VIETNAM'S ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

SUN LEE

**T**he Mekong River, stretching over 4,350 kilometres and sustaining nearly 70 million people across Southeast Asia, has become the epicentre of a growing environmental and socio-economic crisis. At the heart of this crisis lies China's assertive dam-building strategy on the upper Mekong, known as the Lancang River. Over the past two decades, Beijing has constructed a cascade of 12 massive dams, altering the river's natural flow and sediment transport. While these projects serve China's energy and water security needs, they have unleashed profound consequences downstream, particularly in Vietnam's Mekong Delta the country's agricultural and fisheries hub.

Vietnam, already grappling with climate change and rising sea levels, now faces compounded challenges due to China's upstream interventions. The dams have drastically reduced water flow and sediment reaching the delta, leading to soil erosion, salinization, and declining agricultural productivity. Farmers in the delta,

who rely on nutrient-rich silt for rice cultivation, report diminishing yields. Vietnam, the world's second-largest rice exporter, risks losing its competitive edge as fertile lands turn barren. The socio-economic implications are immense: millions of livelihoods tied to agriculture are under threat, and food security across Southeast Asia is destabilized.

Equally alarming is the impact on fisheries. The Mekong River is one of the world's most biodiverse freshwater ecosystems, supporting over 1,000 fish species. Yet, dam construction has disrupted migratory patterns, reduced fish stocks, and endangered aquatic biodiversity. For Vietnam, where fish is a staple protein source and a vital export commodity, the decline in fisheries is not merely ecological but deeply socio-economic. Fisher folk communities are witnessing shrinking incomes, forcing migration and exacerbating rural poverty.

China's assertive role in shaping the Mekong's future reflects a broader geopolitical strategy. By controlling upstream water flows, Beijing wields hydro-political leverage over downstream nations. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand find themselves increasingly dependent on China's water release decisions, which are often opaque and unilateral. This lack of transparency fuels distrust and dissent. Vietnam, in particular, has voiced concerns through bilateral and multilateral channels, including the Mekong River Commission, but Beijing's reluctance to engage meaningfully underscores its dominance.

The ecological crisis extends beyond agriculture and fisheries. Reduced sediment flow accelerates coastal erosion in the Mekong Delta, threatening urban centres and infrastructure. Saline intrusion, worsened by diminished freshwater inflows, contaminates drinking water and devastates aquaculture. Vietnam's shrimp industry, a major export earner, faces declining productivity as brackish water ecosystems collapse. The cumulative effect is a socio-economic spiral: declining rural incomes, rising urban migration, and mounting pressure on Vietnam's social safety nets.

Critically, China's dam-building is not an isolated environmental issue but part of a larger pattern of assertive resource control. By financing dam projects in Laos and Cambodia, Beijing extends its influence across the Mekong basin, creating a network of dependency. Vietnam's dilemma is acute: while it seeks cooperative ties with China for economic and political stability, it cannot ignore the existential threat posed to its environment and economy. This tension manifests in Hanoi's cautious diplomacy balancing protest with pragmatism, voicing dissent while avoiding outright confrontation.

The crisis also raises questions about regional governance. The Mekong River Commission, tasked with fostering cooperation among riparian states, remains weak in enforcing compliance. China, not a full member, sidesteps accountability, further undermining collective action. Scholars argue that without stronger regional mechanisms, unilateral dam-building will continue unchecked, deepening ecological

degradation. Vietnam's calls for transparency and equitable water-sharing highlight the urgent need for reform, yet progress remains elusive.

From a socio-political perspective, dissent against China is growing within Vietnam. Civil society groups, environmental activists, and local communities increasingly criticize Beijing's disregard for downstream impacts. This dissent, however, faces constraints under Vietnam's political system, where public protest is tightly controlled. Nonetheless, the simmering discontent reflects a broader regional unease: China's pursuit of hydropower supremacy is perceived not as development but as domination.

Looking ahead, Vietnam must navigate a precarious path. Strengthening resilience in the Mekong Delta through adaptive agriculture, improved irrigation, and climate-smart practices is essential. Diversifying protein sources and investing in aquaculture innovation may mitigate fisheries decline. Yet, these domestic measures cannot substitute for regional cooperation. Vietnam's challenge is to galvanize collective action among ASEAN states, pressuring China to adopt transparent and sustainable water management.

In conclusion, China's Mekong dams epitomize the intersection of environmental degradation and geopolitical assertiveness. For Vietnam, the consequences are stark: declining agriculture, collapsing fisheries, eroding ecology, and socio-economic instability. The crisis underscores the urgent need for regional solidarity and international advocacy to counterbalance China's unilateralism. Without decisive action, the Mekong Delta Vietnam's lifeline risks becoming a casualty of hydro-political power.

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





Photo: AFP

## UN SAYS LACKS BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO FEED WORLD'S HUNGRY

**T**he UN's World Food Programme warned Tuesday that funding cuts mean it will struggle to feed even a third of the 318 million people facing severe hunger in 2026.

"Declines in global humanitarian funding are forcing WFP to prioritise food assistance to roughly one third of those in need," targeting 110 million of the most vulnerable, it said in a statement.

That would cost \$13 billion, the agency estimated -- but warned that "current funding forecasts indicate WFP may only receive close to half that goal".

The WFP's largest donor is the United States which, under President Donald Trump, has cut foreign aid, including to UN agencies. Other big donors, including some European nations, have also shrunk their humanitarian budgets.

The 318 million people facing acute hunger is more than double the figure recorded in 2019, as conflict, extreme weather and economic instability have taken their toll, the WFP said.

UN agencies this year declared famine in Gaza and parts of Sudan, something that WFP executive director Cindy McCain called "completely unacceptable in the 21st century".

In a foreword to the WFP's 2026 Global Outlook report, she said the world's response "remains slow, fragmented and underfunded".

"Global aid now covers less than half of total needs, with steep reductions in food assistance. Almost all operations have had to cut food and cash, and prioritise which vulnerable group receive help," she wrote.

"At the same time, attacks on aid workers have surged, revealing a growing disregard for international humanitarian law."

For those facing hunger in 2026, 41 million people are classified as facing emergency or worse levels.

Last week, both UN food agencies -- WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) -- warned of 16 "hunger hotspots" around the globe, from Haiti to South Sudan, saying that funding shortfalls were worsening already dire conditions.

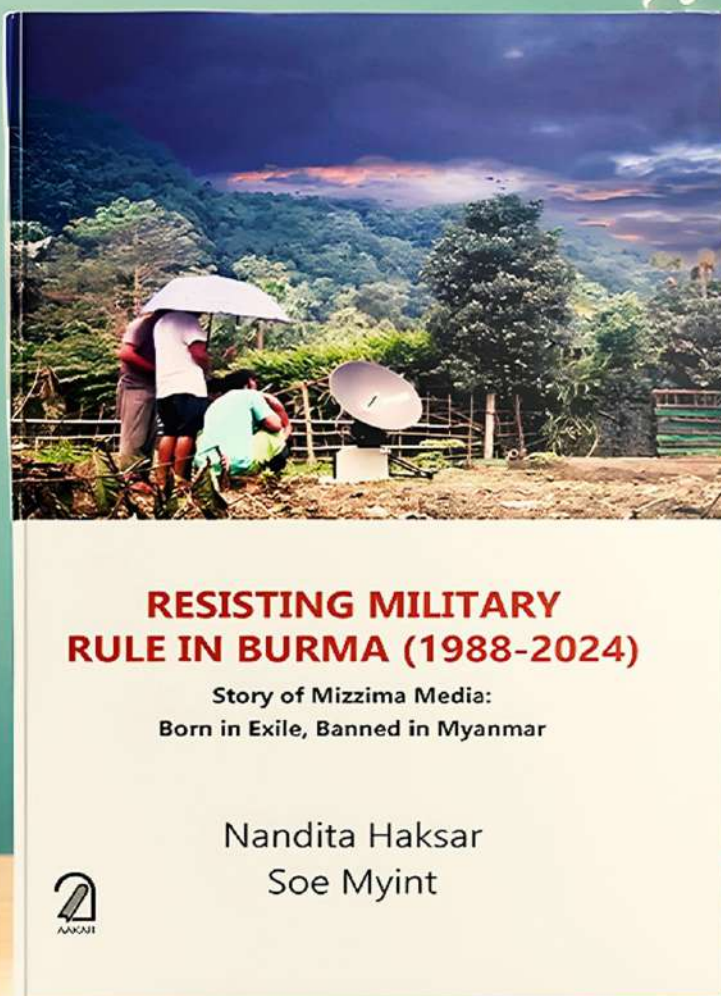
In a joint report, the agencies said that they had so far received only \$10.5 billion out of a required \$29 billion to help those at risk.

AFP

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

*by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



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# A BORDERLINE PERSONALITY

"I'm morally attached to the peoples of Myanmar."

So says Dr. Lalita Hanwong, a Thai historian, political analyst, and academic whose work bridges colonial history, contemporary politics, and the humanitarian realities between Myanmar and Thailand. Her life's trajectory—beginning with her study of colonial Burma at the British Library and extending to her advisory role within Thailand's parliament and military—reflects a long commitment to understanding and improving Thai-Myanmar relations. "I just want to talk to everybody," she says, describing her approach to both research and diplomacy.

Lalita trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, where she completed her MA and PhD in history. Her early academic work was driven by curiosity rather than ideology. Her supervisor, Professor Ian Brown, discouraged theory and told her the best history was a good story. Lalita followed that advice, immersing herself in colonial archives for years, reading gazetteers, police records, and administrative reports from British Burma. She became fascinated by how the British

governed a multiethnic colony and how they relied on Indian soldiers and police to control Burma. "The British were pretty paranoid and suspicious of the Burmese," she says. "The specific race that they found the most difficult to rule and police was actually the Bamar." This resulted in a series of policies that would forever change the trajectory of the colony. "Their solution was pretty simple," she adds, "Let's bring somebody to scare the Burmese!" Hence the presence of the Gurkhas, the Sikhs and so on." To Lalita, the story of policing revealed how colonial power operated through mistrust of the Burmese (and primarily Bamar) population and manipulation of ethnic difference. Her study of colonial policing gave her a foundation for understanding how Burma's internal divisions and structures of control were built long before independence.

During her time in London, Lalita also met Burmese and Karen activists and artists, people she describes as working to make a better Burma. These relationships expanded her interests from history to politics. It was also during these years that she began intensively studying Burmese language, doing so with Professor John Okell, whom she describes with deep affection. She spent two years studying with him, even living with his family for a time when she had nowhere else to stay. Okell, she recalls, was humble, kind, and devoted to peace and to Burma. After his death, she returned to London to visit his grave, though she discovered he had no tombstone, a detail that stayed with her as a reflection of his modest life.

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/2/episode-425-a-borderline-personality>



# CENTRAL BANK OF MYANMAR RENEWS WARNING AGAINST USE OF CRYPTOCURRENCIES

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# INTERNET DISRUPTIONS IN YANGON AND MAJOR CITIES

**T**his week, the most talked-about issue on Myanmar's social media has been the deteriorating internet situation across Yangon and several major cities.

Thousands of users on Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram are reporting a consistent pattern: WiFi becomes extremely weak during the daytime, only to improve late at night. Mobile data from all service providers is also unstable, with many users noting that even basic apps fail to load throughout the day.

Many people describe the current internet quality as "the worst in months," while others speculate that the slowdown might be related to security monitoring or upcoming political events. The lack of an explanation from telecom companies has fueled speculation online.

Common comments seen across social media include:

"Daytime internet is useless. Even sending messages takes minutes."

"WiFi is down again... it only works after midnight."

"Now I understand why the 80 million rich man in Myanmar went bankrupt - he has WiFi and needs to buy data to use it."

"My online job is impossible now. I can't even upload a small file."

"Mandalay is also slow, not just Yangon."

Reports from users in Yangon, Mandalay, Taunggyi, Mawlamyine and Patheingyi suggest the problem is nationwide. No official announcements have been made by internet providers, which has heightened public concern.

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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