

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**The Tragedy and Challenges of Demining  
in Burma – Lots of Danger and No Money**

## ELECTION UPDATE

● **Trump ends US protected status for Myanmar nationals**

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Analysis & Insight



## DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# NOT JUST MYANMAR

**T**echnology, once celebrated as a pathway to freedom and civic participation in Myanmar, has been co-opted by the post-coup junta to entrench fear, silence dissent, and monitor the everyday lives of citizens.

The promise of digital connectivity has collapsed into an architecture of control, where online expression is scrutinized and weaponized. The threats posed by the junta's surveillance apparatus are not abstract - they materialize as arrests for social media posts, intimidation through targeted digital monitoring, and the constant risk that one's private communications may be intercepted and used as evidence of disloyalty.

In this environment, the line between public and private has all but dissolved. People learn to self-censor, not only to avoid punishment but to protect families and friends who might be implicated simply by association. Technology that once empowered activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens over the last decade or so has become a trap, turning smartphones, messaging apps, and social media platforms into tools of potential self-incrimination. Only last week, the UN warned of the dangers of online surveillance.

The junta's control over telecommunications infrastructure allows it to impose shutdowns, block platforms, and harvest personal data at will. These powers amplify its ability to intimidate critics and dismantle organized resistance. Even encrypted communication is not immune to risk, as arrests and interrogations increasingly rely on forced device unlocking or compelled disclosures.

Beyond immediate repression, long-term digital profiling casts a shadow over the future - citizens know that any online footprint could be examined retroactively in a political climate where what is permissible today may be punishable tomorrow. The cumulative effect is a society conditioned to silence, where fear is algorithmically reinforced.

What is especially troubling is that Myanmar's experience does not stand isolated. Around the world, including in long-established democracies, governments and private entities are expanding their surveillance capacities under the banners of national security, counterterrorism, and public order. Even in the West, where legal safeguards are stronger, technologies such as facial recognition, predictive policing algorithms, mass data collection, and covert access to digital communications are steadily eroding the boundary between state power and individual autonomy.

The normalization of constant monitoring, often justified as harmless or necessary, creates an environment where abuses can unfold quietly. Myanmar represents an extreme, but it is also a warning. Once surveillance capabilities exist, they tend to grow, and the incentives for restricting them weaken.

In both authoritarian and democratic settings, surveillance's deepest danger is its capacity to reshape behaviour. People adapt, often unconsciously, to avoid the gaze of unseen watchers. Creativity, critique, and dissent become fraught. The health of any society - its civic participation, its capacity for honest debate, its collective imagination - depends on the freedom to think and communicate without intimidation. Myanmar shows the consequences when that freedom is stripped away - the digital public sphere collapses into a tool of oppression, and citizens find themselves monitored not only for what they say, but for what they might think.

George Orwell would be shocked by developments. The global drift toward technologically enhanced observation demands vigilance. Myanmar's tragedy highlights that surveillance is not just a technical issue but a human one, determining whether technology amplifies freedom or extinguishes it.

## EDITORIAL

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# CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## 3 EDITORIAL

**6 The Tragedy and Challenges of Demining in Burma - Lots of Danger and No Money - Antonio Graceffo**

**10 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR**  
Analysis & Insight

## 14 ELECTION UPDATE

Myanmar election not free or credible: Thai FM

**15** NUG ambassador warns UN that Myanmar junta's sham election will fuel trafficking and instability

**17** Myanmar junta authorities accused of forcing inmates in Loikaw Prison to cast advance votes

**18** Myanmar junta drops sentences of 3,000 convicted by coup dissent law

**19** Myanmar junta grants mass amnesty, releases NLD figure ahead of election

**20** UN fears mass-electronic surveillance during Myanmar vote

## 21 CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Trump ends US protected status for Myanmar nationals

**22** Myanmar junta hails end to US protected status for Myanmar nationals

**23** Authoritarian ally: Belarus president Lukashenko arrives in Myanmar for first-ever visit

**24** Arrests surge in Myingyan as Myanmar junta proxy forces rally forced recruits



- 25** Farming collapses across Myingyan District as conflict deepens
- 26** Thousands of Myanmar scam workers flee Karen State compound after KNU raid
- 27** Myanmar junta air strikes kill seven civilians including displaced persons in Mandalay region
- 28** Myanmar junta fires heavy weapons day and night to deter AA advance toward Sittwe
- 29** Young people abducted in Yangon and sold to Myanmar's junta as unwilling conscripts
- 30** DKBA-linked drug factory uncovered in Karen State forested ravine
- 32** ICG warns Shan State entering volatile new phase as non-Shan forces gain ground
- 33** Myanmar junta troops killed in Wetlet clash, resistance forces claim
- 34** UN issues alert on risk of digital violence against women and LGBTIQ+ in Myanmar
- 35** **SURVEILLANCE**  
Inside the Digital Siege – Insight Myanmar
- 39** **COMMENTARY**  
Network Revolution and Bottom-Up Federalism: The false 'problem of unity' in Burmese opposition politics
- 41** **ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**  
'Truly severe' floods overwhelm Southeast Asia
- 43** Bangladesh ex-PM Hasina gets 21 years in jail for corruption
- 45** **COLUMNS**  
**INSIGHT MYANMAR** – Scamland
- 46** **JUNTA WATCH**
- 47** **SOCIAL WATCH**

Cover photo of deminers and mine-injured in Karenni State by Jon Moss





Deminer with explosive ordnance. Photo: Jon Moss

# THE TRAGEDY AND CHALLENGES OF DEMINING IN BURMA - LOTS OF DANGER AND NO MONEY

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**



**M**yanmar recorded more than 1,000 landmine and unexploded ordnance casualties in 2023, the highest in the world, according to UNICEF and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Independent human rights experts said this figure represents only part of a wider crisis as the junta escalates attacks on civilians, including people with disabilities. They reported that soldiers have forced civilians to walk through minefields and have blocked medical care and prosthetics for victims, actions that violate the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and UN Security Council Resolution 2475.

Children are among the most affected. UNICEF confirmed that more than 27 percent of the casualties in 2024 were minors, out of 1,052 verified civilian casualties in 2023. This is a sharp increase from 2022, when 390 incidents were recorded. Children are especially vulnerable because they often cannot recognize explosive devices, and mines are placed in homes, schools, playgrounds, and farming areas.

Victims face further hardship as amputees are being criminalized by the junta, which associates missing limbs with resistance activity. Many amputees are now hiding to avoid harassment and arrest. Experts highlighted the case of a young woman who lost her leg and was later denied a prosthesis because junta forces blocked access to the materials needed to make one.

In resistance-controlled areas, there are very limited resources for prosthetics. Most funding comes from private donations routed through ethnic civil action groups and churches. In Karenni State, for example, there is only one rehabilitation clinic for amputees. Across all resistance-controlled areas, waiting lists for prosthetics can be long while donors struggle to raise money for each artificial limb.

Jon Moss is one of the few volunteers who has come to Burma to help with the landmine issue.

Moss is a U.S. military veteran with a law degree who served as a Navy Special Operations officer specializing in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD). He said he had always wanted to join the military, but the deciding moment came when he saw the Syrian government use chemical weapons on civilians. "That was it for me. I was like, I need to do something." He joined the military because he wanted to help people and prevent that kind of atrocity. When he learned that EOD technicians disarm everything from grenades to nuclear and chemical weapons, he said, "I felt like I want to do that." He completed EOD school, dive school, and jump school.

After leaving the military, he decided he wanted to come to Burma and support demining efforts. He joined his first mission with the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) in 2022. Moss described seeing M14 anti-personnel mines scattered throughout villages, booby-trapped stick



Vehicle used as part of the demining process. Photo: Jon Moss



grenades, and 500-pound bombs with half-torn fuses that had failed to explode. He said unexploded ordnance and active mines were everywhere.

Moss returned to the United States for seven months to get married. When he came back to Burma, he found the war had intensified. "Drones and Y-12s dropping mortars and all that kind of stuff all over the place." This time he entered the field specifically to carry out demining. Another EOD technician from Ukraine accompanied him, and they brought a detector to search churches and school areas for mines. But the detector malfunctioned, and the local teams had no formal training. Moss said they had no option but to probe by hand, creating extremely dangerous conditions. Even so, they continued assisting local teams and provided instruction on mine probing, tourniquet use, and basic detector operation. Local leaders later invited them back to help launch a larger demining effort, and Moss began developing a program to support it.

He explained that they are collaborating with a partner in another country to build a flail, a heavy machine equipped with chains designed to detonate anti-personnel mines and clear ground before deminers

go in by hand. Donors have since stepped forward to support the effort, enabling Moss and his colleagues to equip local demining teams. "We're buying personal protective equipment, face shields, armor for their bodies, mine probes. And then we're putting a curriculum together to do training." His goal is to pilot two demining teams and deploy them into Karenni State.

They were invited by the Karenni Interim Executive Council, the civilian government, "to go in and start clearing some of these grounds, using our flail and using our detectors and using our PPE and all that. And our teams that we've trained to go in there and start clearing the areas." Moss explained that their goal is to meet international standards. "We want to do it to an international standard. So, the same way you'd see The HALO Trust or MAG (Mines Advisory Group) or these other legitimate demining orgs. They follow a standard. We want to try to follow that standard as close as we can. But understand that we're in a conflict zone."

Demining work has taken place in nearby Cambodia for decades, but that is only possible because the conflict there has ended. Burma, however, is often left out of similar aid because major organizations will not



Teaching how to use a mine detector. Photo: Jon Moss



violate international law by entering a country without an invitation from the internationally recognized government, which in this case is the same military junta responsible for killing civilians and blocking humanitarian access. Most major organizations also will not operate in active combat zones. Demining is dangerous under any circumstances, but even more so when you are exposed to air and drone strikes and all sorts of attacks by the Burma military.

Moss said, "So, we're going into an area where others will not go. And we are going to do the demining. Under fire. Under fire."

In addition to removing as many mines as possible, Moss wants to build a sustainable system. "We want to establish a mine action center. And that would legitimize even more so our demining efforts." He explained that such a center would handle more than disposal. "The mine action center wouldn't just be responsible for disposing of the mines. But we'll actually do non-technical surveys of areas where there are mines to map where mines are located. And then we would then give that information to a team. And then they would go in there and take care of the mines. And you would train local teams."

Moss described the biggest hurdles in demining in Burma, beginning with the issue of access. "There is no access to humanitarian aid that comes into Burma. So, there is only stuff that we can bring in and stuff we can bring in through our teams." Even transporting equipment is uncertain. "Getting a flail in there, I don't know how we're going to do that. But we'll figure out a way to do it."

Money is the next barrier. Because international aid and large organizations will only deal directly with the junta, resistance-controlled areas rely almost entirely on small private donations. Moss said, "A demining machine that they would use in Ukraine or some of these other areas costs half a million dollars." Inside Burma, no donors can raise that amount, and the few cross-border aid groups that exist often conclude that the same money would save more lives if spent on medicine or food rather than a single machine clearing only a few mines per day.

Moss emphasized that the half-million-dollar price tag for a flail is only the beginning. "And that doesn't include the maintenance. That doesn't include the shipping from another country... we don't have the money. We don't have the people."

He added that even basic equipment strains budgets. "It's getting the right equipment here... if we buy ten detectors, that's \$30,000 for ten detectors. That's a lot of money for us." On top of the cost, equipment is

sometimes delayed or blocked entirely because of restrictions on shipping batteries and other components.

He reached out to major demining organizations, but they refused to come for legal and security reasons. Under international law or under their internal bylaws, large NGOs cannot enter a country without an invitation from the internationally recognized government, which in Burma is the same junta bombing civilians and blocking aid. And most major mine-action organizations will not operate in active combat zones, which excludes nearly every area where demining is needed.

He also contacted qualified deminers, people who regularly risk their lives clearing explosives in Africa or other post-conflict environments. But large organizations offer salaries, insurance, medical evacuation, and protected transport. Moss told them that in Burma there is no salary, no insurance, no evacuation, and they must accept being shot at while working. Most declined immediately. "Nobody wants to come here to do this," he said. "It's a closed country."

Since he cannot bring outside trainers into Burma, Moss hoped to send ethnic deminers abroad for instruction. But that plan faces the same obstacles, no funding, no institutional support, and practical problems like most candidates lacking passports or English. He explained that the international community will not recognize their work as humanitarian demining unless it meets IMAS, the International Mine Action Standards. "If you want to follow the IMAS standard, you have to have IMAS training. If you want to be IMAS trained, you have to go to these training camps or these training schools that are in Denmark and in Kosovo. So it would be great if we could get one of these programs to come here. And I've already mentioned that to some people."

The problems Moss faces with demining aid are the same problems people face with aid for internally displaced people, food, medicine, amputee rehabilitation, prosthetics, and everything else. Foreign governments will only provide government-to-government aid, and large international organizations refuse to enter a combat zone or operate in resistance-controlled areas, which now cover more than 70 percent of the country. Small organizations that are willing to help have limited budgets and can reach only a very small fraction of the 40 percent of the population that is in dire need of assistance.

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

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



Photo: AFP

## CORRUPTION REPORTED IN JUNTA ELECTION PROCESS

**A**s Myanmar's military regime accelerates preparations for its controversial election scheduled to unfold in three phases from late December to the end of January, reports of vote-buying, legal intimidation, and forced advance voting continue to surface across the country and among overseas migrant communities.

In Yangon's Hlaingtharyar Township, residents say the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) distributed cash during campaign activities in recent days. The handouts drew public criticism even from ordinary bystanders, who described the action as blatant corruption intended to sway voters in what many already view as a "sham election." The junta has marketed the polls as a return to political order, but resistance groups, independent observers, and much of the public see them as an attempt to legitimize military rule amid ongoing conflict.

At the same time, the regime is escalating repression against critics of the electoral process. This week, three well-known Myanmar artists - a film director, an actor, and a comedian - were each sentenced to seven years in prison for comments related to the



junta's election propaganda film. According to sources close to their families, the trio did not criticize the movie itself, but simply commented on one of the actors in posts on their personal social media accounts. Their trial lasted only a single remand hearing, with no legal defense permitted. Observers report that the district judge delivered the verdict immediately after receiving a phone call, underscoring concerns about political interference. The artists were charged under the newly enacted Election Protection Law introduced in July, which provides some of the harshest penalties for perceived interference in the regime's electoral messaging.

As campaigning intensifies, parties aligned with or permitted by the junta have begun releasing their political messages. The People's Pioneer Party (PPP) has promoted a platform centered on "people's livelihood comes first; grow peacefully and securely,"

emphasizing prosperity through stability. The People's Party, led by the 88 Generation activist Ko Ko Gyi, has attempted to distinguish itself by pledging to "ensure the right implementation" of the junta's conscription law to ease public fear, while also promising to support peace and ceasefire efforts. Meanwhile, the USDP - the military's proxy party - continues promoting its theme of building a "stronger Myanmar" by prioritizing law enforcement, public security, and basic needs, while reiterating its commitment to supporting the armed forces in national defense.

In Yangon, the destruction of campaign signboards has forced authorities to deploy nighttime security teams to protect them. A Yangon resident told BBC Burmese that motorcycle taxi drivers had been hired to guard the signs while wearing municipal uniforms. "They carry sticks and chains... In some places, they even laid down mats and drank alcohol," the resident



The public are not interested in taking part in the sham election. Photo: AFP

said, noting that some guards appeared to have settled in permanently at the sites.

The junta has also tightened control over advance voting procedures. University students whose campuses are located in townships different from their home constituencies are being required to cast advance ballots between December 17 and 21 before they travel for enrollment. Students report that university administrators demand proof of having voted before processing enrollment. A student from Mawlamyaing Technological University told Mizzima that the student affairs department called his friend to “show the letter confirming he had voted.”

The pressure extends beyond Myanmar’s borders. At the Myanmar Embassy in South Korea, workers renewing passports were instructed to fill out Form-15, an advance voting request. Embassies are now preparing to conduct early voting in the first week of December, and migrant workers who submitted Form-15 say they are being contacted to return to the embassy to cast their ballots.

## Public ‘indifferent’ to poll

Despite daily announcements echoing through Yangon’s neighborhoods urging residents to check their names on updated voter lists, the public response to the election remains overwhelmingly indifferent, according to residents and civil society groups. The junta has released a second-round voter list after correcting errors from the first, but locals say the revisions have done nothing to improve trust in the process.

A resident from Thingangyun Township told DVB that most people are ignoring the loudspeaker calls entirely. “People are not interested in checking the voter list, and they are not interested in voting either,” the resident said. “The second list is no different from the first.” The junta’s repeated attempts to draw public attention through ward-level instructions have failed to shift sentiment in a city where resentment toward military rule remains strong.

Opposition to the polls is not limited to urban areas. Twenty-five Karen civil society organizations issued a joint statement urging Karen people and other





ethnic communities not to participate in what they described as a sham election. The CSOs argued that the planned vote cannot resolve Myanmar's political crisis and instead serves only to legitimize the military's continued repression.

For many young people who cast their first ballots in the 2020 general election, the junta's new polling exercise is described as painful and symbolic of the country's political reversal. Phyu Sin (a pseudonym), a master's student, told People Spring Media that voting in 2020 had been a moment of pride. "Our whole family and all our relatives were excited," she recalled. "When my finger touched the ink, I felt like I had become an adult. It was meaningful."

Reflecting on the coming election, she added: "Our first votes were denied by the junta. The first time is the most important, but ours became meaningless. I'm not interested in this sham election."

Another student echoed that sentiment, saying the polls are not for the people but for the military to gain a false sense of legitimacy. The student warned that the outcome would only allow the junta "to kill legally, commit crimes every day, and make people's lives even worse."

An independent survey conducted by the Platform for People Movement between October 27 and November 5 further illustrates the depth of public distrust. The study gathered responses from 3,663 participants, 85 percent inside Myanmar and 15 percent abroad. Of them, 98 percent said they do not believe the junta's election will be free or fair; 96 percent said they would not go to polling stations; and 98 percent believe the election is not a solution to the country's crisis.

## **ASEAN'S position on the Myanmar election**

ASEAN has been unable to form a unified stance on Myanmar's planned multi-phase election, but a statement released on 26 October indicates growing concern within the regional bloc over the legitimacy and potential consequences of the military-organized polls. The statement primarily reviewed the junta's

progress on the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and humanitarian assistance, noting that implementation remains slow and insufficient more than three years after the agreement was adopted.

While the statement did not explicitly endorse or reject the junta's election plan, ASEAN called for any political process to be inclusive, fair, and transparent - language that regional analysts say is unusually pointed for the bloc. Experts warn that despite these cautions, ASEAN's acknowledgment of the election indirectly risks giving the military government a degree of procedural legitimacy, even as it continues to violate the 5PC and escalate violence across the country.

The junta, meanwhile, continues to enjoy political support from several major powers, including Russia, China, India, and Belarus. These states have either openly backed or tacitly accepted the military's roadmap, strengthening the junta's diplomatic shield as it pushes ahead with the vote.

In contrast, Myanmar's closest neighbour has taken a more critical - but nuanced - position. On 25 November, Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow publicly stated that the upcoming election cannot be considered free and fair under current conditions. However, he added that even an imperfect election could "create an opportunity" to move Myanmar toward greater stability and, eventually, a democratic path, citing the military-managed 2010 election as an example of how a flawed process had nonetheless opened limited political space in the past. Sihasak also urged the junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi, noting her advanced age and the lack of transparency regarding her health.

ASEAN faces increasing scrutiny over whether its approach strikes the right balance between engagement and legitimacy. As the Myanmar junta prepares to hold its controversial election, the bloc's mixed messaging reflects both internal divisions and the complex geopolitical pressures shaping its response.



Thailand Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow

## MYANMAR ELECTION NOT FREE OR CREDIBLE: THAI FM

**M**ilitary-ruled Myanmar's election starting next month will be neither free nor credible, Thailand's foreign minister said, calling for the release of detained democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar's military ousted the Nobel laureate's elected government and seized power in a 2021 coup, sparking a civil war.

The junta is trumpeting the vote as an opportunity for reconciliation, but neither Aung San Suu Kyi nor her dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) will take part.

The election will not be held in the swathes of the country not controlled by the military or its allies, and analysts have dismissed it as a ploy to disguise continuing military rule.

"We want it to be free and credible, but it's not going to be the case, we know that," Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said late Tuesday.

"My feeling is that we won't be in a position to recognise the elections."

But he suggested it could be a stepping stone towards reform, saying that general Thein Sein was

elected president in an "imperfect" poll in 2010 and went on to release Aung San Suu Kyi, with the NLD winning the next poll.

"Maybe an imperfect election can also be a good opportunity to return the country back to stability and democracy," he told reporters in Bangkok.

Neighbouring Thailand hosts millions of people who have fled the conflict in Myanmar or left the country to seek work outside its moribund economy.

A career diplomat and former ambassador to France, Sihasak urged the Myanmar authorities to free 80-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi on humanitarian grounds.

"It's time to release her," he said. "Sometimes we must say things that are the right thing to say."

"She's been in custody for too long. At her age, we don't know the condition of her health, and so I hope that they do that the first thing, or immediately."

The first phase of voting in Myanmar begins on December 28, with a second slated for January 11, but subsequent rounds and a result date have not been announced.

AFP





Kyaw Moe Tun. Photo: AFP

## NUG AMBASSADOR WARNS UN THAT MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION WILL FUEL TRAFFICKING AND INSTABILITY

On 26 November, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Myanmar to the United Nations, addressed the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. In his statement, he asserted that human trafficking in Myanmar is directly rooted in the collapse of the rule of law following the 2021 military coup.

The content of his statement is as follows.

Trafficking thrives on systemic failure and the collapse of the rule of law.

Myanmar welcomes the "2025 Political Declaration" as a vital milestone signaling that the era of impunity is ending. We thank the co-facilitators, Permanent

Representatives of Cyprus and Tajikistan. We also deeply appreciate the Special Rapporteur's statement, which mirrors the harrowing reality in our country.

In Myanmar, human trafficking is a direct symptom of the collapse caused by the unlawful military coup in February 2021.

People across Myanmar continue to endure the compounded effects of multiple crises.

Now nearly 3.6 million people are being internally displaced nationwide due to the military junta's widespread and systemic atrocities, including escalating indiscriminate airstrikes against civilians, forced conscription, and rampant human rights violations.

Unfortunately, in their flight, our people face perilous trafficking risks, particularly women, children, and minorities, including the Rohingya. The recent harrowing reports of illicit organ removal are also critically alarming.

The junta's dismantling of the justice system has regrettably fuelled industrial-scale trafficking where locals are trafficked out due to desperation and foreigners are trafficked in for criminal operations. Moreover, abhorrent modern slavery and sophisticated cybercrime have expanded unchecked, turning Myanmar into a safe haven for Transnational Organized Crime.

The UNODC has highlighted the terrifying reality of "forced criminality" in Southeast Asia, with Myanmar serving as a central theatre. The long list of victims from numerous countries is proof of the severity of the issue and its threat to the region and beyond. No one around the globe is safe from this serious international crime.

In this regard, Myanmar pays tribute to the recent actions taken by our neighbouring countries, regional partners, and international actors. These endeavours align fully with the "3P" approach: protection, prosecution, and partnership.

However, further concrete actions must be taken to dismantle these large-scale criminal gangs.

Madam President,

In the case of Myanmar, we must be clear about the origin of this catastrophe.

The military dictatorship and its unlawful coup are the root cause of the issue, which caused the total collapse of the rule of law and the economy. A regional analyst for UNODC has rightly stated that the military dictatorship acts as the catalyst for crime to spread "like a cancer."

It is crystal clear that we can resolve this issue in Myanmar only through the ending of military coup and the military dictatorship as well as the ending of culture of impunity.

On the other hand, the National Unity Government and the Ethnic Resistance Organizations expressed the firm position to combat transnational organized crime including online scam, pledging full cooperation with all regional and international actors.

Today, the Karen National Union (KNU) issued another statement calling for urgent and serious international cooperation for crackdown of this heinous cybercrime including evidence collection and effective investigation.

We believe that working together we can effectively identify, prosecute, and dismantle these criminal networks and uproot the root cause of this cybercrime in Myanmar.

Amidst our efforts, the international community must not be misled nor fall into the trap of the military junta through its planned sham elections.

Let us be clear: a process dictated by those who bomb their own people, conducted in a climate of fear and repression, is not a free, fair, and inclusive election but a fraud.

It will not resolve the crisis; rather, it will inflame further violence and prolong the instability that fuels these very trafficking networks.

The NUG and the EROs alongside the people of Myanmar categorically reject this junta's planned sham election.

Ending the military dictatorship and building a federal democratic union is the only viable path to excising this cancer and ending the scourge of trafficking in Myanmar.



Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA AUTHORITIES ACCUSED OF FORCING INMATES IN LOIKAW PRISON TO CAST ADVANCE VOTES

The Karenni Political Prisoners Association (KPPA) has accused the Myanmar junta authorities of attempting to rig the election by collecting the names of inmates in Loikaw Prison and forcing them to cast advance ballots at the end of September.

A KPPA official told the media that lists of male and female inmates, including political prisoners and detainees, were documented in the second week of September before they were instructed to vote in advance later that month.

"I learned this from people who were released. They were first counted and then instructed to vote, and all of them did," the official said.

He added that there are more than 700 inmates in Loikaw Prison, but it remains unclear whether they were directed to choose a specific party.

"In prison, you have no choice but to do whatever you're told. If you're ordered to vote in advance, you must vote in advance. You can't refuse. That's the reality. I don't know whether they were instructed which party to vote for. It's very hard to get information inside

the prison. Prisoners can't even think about which party they like or dislike; they simply have to vote as instructed," he said.

The KPPA said the process was overseen by the Prison Department and argued that the procedure violated the election law issued by the Myanmar junta, which does not grant prisoners the right to vote.

"The law clearly states that convicted persons are not allowed to vote. But now they are being asked to vote early, which is outside the law. So, we have to question how and where these prisoners' advance voting lists will be used," the association's official stated.

The junta has announced that the first phase of staged elections will take place on 28 December in 102 townships.

Meanwhile, US lawmakers discussed Myanmar during a 19 November debate in the House of Representatives, warning that the junta's planned polls are merely an attempt to legitimise its rule, describing any claim of a free and fair election as "nothing more than a fantasy."



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA DROPS SENTENCES OF 3,000 CONVICTED BY COUP DISSENT LAW

**M**yanmar's junta on Wednesday dropped the sentences of more than 3,000 people convicted under legislation monitors say was wielded to crush post-coup dissent, encouraging them to vote in upcoming polls.

Myanmar's military seized power in a 2021 coup that sparked a civil war, but it has scheduled elections to start in December and trumpeted them as a return to normalcy for the Southeast Asian nation.

With democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi jailed and her party dissolved, numerous rights monitors and a UN expert have slammed the vote as a ploy to rebrand continuing military rule.

The junta said in statements it had amnestied or dropped the sentences of 3,085 convicted under a post-coup amendment punishing comments that "cause fear" or spread "false news" with three years in prison.

Nearly 5,600 pending cases have also been shut, the junta's National Defence and Security Council said.

Media freedom monitors say the clause was key to crushing Myanmar's vibrant press, which flourished during the country's decade-long democratic thaw. This ended with the toppling of its civilian government.

But the junta said the sentences were dropped "to ensure that all eligible voters do not lose their right to vote in the upcoming multi-party democratic general election".

Myanmar's elections are due to begin on December 28 and are expected to run through late January.

The poll run-up has seen the military wage bloody new offensives against rebel groups and introduce stark new laws punishing protest or criticism of the poll with up to a decade behind bars.

While the military has touted the vote as an opportunity for nationwide reconciliation, the kaleidoscope of rebel groups which control huge tracts of Myanmar are set to block it from their territories.

The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) warned Wednesday it was increasingly receiving reports of "serious international crimes committed in Myanmar in the run-up to the elections".

Detention of election critics and air strikes to claw back territory ahead of the vote may amount to crimes against humanity, IIMM head Nicholas Koumjian said in a statement.

AFP





U Kyi Toe, former NLD member.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA GRANTS MASS AMNESTY, RELEASES NLD FIGURE AHEAD OF ELECTION

**T**he Military Commission granted a mass amnesty to thousands of political prisoners jailed under Penal Code Section 505(a), resulting in the release of several high-profile detainees on 27 November. The move comes as the junta prepares for an upcoming general election.

Among those released from Yangon's Insein Prison was U Kyi Toe, a key figure in the National League for Democracy (NLD)'s Central Information Department. U Kyi Toe was arrested by the junta on 18 March, 2021, at the height of anti-coup protests.

Upon his release, U Kyi Toe made a defiant statement to media representatives, asserting, "I am determined to work alongside Aunty Daw Aung San Suu Kyi until I am 90 years old."

Also freed from Insein was freelance photojournalist Ko Zaw Lin Htut, also known as Phoe Thar. A co-founder of the Former University Students' Union Alumni Force and an active participant in anti-dictatorship movements, Phoe Thar had previously been released under a Section 505(a) amnesty in May 2023. He was rearrested in September 2024 following his involvement in a flaming-torch protest and again sentenced under the same provision.

The husband of well-known actress Khine Thin Kyi, Khant Naing, was also among those released, as confirmed by a post on her social media account.

Junta-aligned channels reported that 192 prisoners, comprising 78 women and 114 men, were released from Insein Prison on Tuesday.

The releases followed a major announcement by the Military Commission on the evening of 26 November detailing the extent of the amnesty: it had closed and withdrawn cases against 5,580 individuals who were facing charges under Penal Code Section 505(a) (incitement) or under Criminal Procedure Code Section 512 for absconding after committing such offenses; and it had granted sentence reductions or releases for 3,085 prisoners currently serving sentences under Section 505(a) in prisons, detention centers, and labor camps across the country.

Sources close to recently released detainees indicated that the amnesty was extended to cover individuals who had been re-imprisoned under Section 505(a), even though the junta's own Criminal Procedure Code usually requires those who reoffend after a 505(a) amnesty to serve the remainder of their previous sentences. The new order appears to override that provision.

The Military Commission explicitly stated that the latest amnesty was issued to ensure that all eligible voters retain their right to vote in the junta-planned upcoming election.



Photo: AFP

## UN FEARS MASS-ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE DURING MYANMAR VOTE

**E**lections scheduled in military-ruled Myanmar next month could never be free or fair, the United Nations insisted Friday, warning that the junta could unleash mass-electronic surveillance on polling stations.

The ruling junta has said the polls, scheduled to start on December 28, are the path to peace.

But the vote will be blocked from rebel-held enclaves and monitors are dismissing it as a ploy to disguise continuing military rule.

"This military-controlled ballot will be conducted in an atmosphere rife with threats and violence putting the lives of civilians at risk," UN rights office spokesman Jeremy Laurence told reporters in Geneva.

"The growing insecurity and the lack of measures to protect civilians raise serious concerns about the safety of voters who choose or are forced to participate," he added.

Rights groups have said the election cannot be legitimate, with democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi deposed and jailed in the coup, and her vastly popular National League for Democracy party dissolved.

Laurence pointed out that the elections were taking place even as the military was "actively suppressing participation".

Many major political parties, as well as entire minority groups, including Rohingya, Tamils, Gurkhas and Chinese, have been excluded, he added.

At the same time, "the military has stepped up mass electronic surveillance to identify dissidents, and there are fears this will be used at the polling stations", he warned.

### Surveillance concerns

James Rodehaver, head of the rights office's Myanmar team, echoed that concern.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva via video-link from Bangkok, he pointed to how the military had "introduced a wide range of electronic surveillance throughout the country utilising AI-biometric tracking".

"There's a real worry that this electronic surveillance technology is going to be used to monitor how people are voting," he said.

Rodehaver pointed out that Myanmar's election commission had decided the election would be done by electronic voting only.

This raises concerns around the possible tracking who people are voting for, exposing them to possible persecution and threats both from the military and opposition groups.

"In some contested areas, villagers are being forced to attend military training on how to use electronic voting machines," Rodehaver said.

"After such training, some participants were warned by armed groups not to vote," he added.

"The civilians fear being caught between the two warring sides."

AFP



Photo: AFP

## TRUMP ENDS US PROTECTED STATUS FOR MYANMAR NATIONALS

**T**he Trump administration announced on Monday that it was ending temporary protections shielding immigrants from Myanmar from deportation from the United States.

The move affects around 4,000 people from the Southeast Asian nation who have been living in the United States under what is known as Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

TPS protects its holders from deportation and allows them to work.

It is granted to people deemed to be in danger if they return to their home countries, because of war, natural disaster or other extraordinary circumstances.

President Donald Trump, as part of his sweeping immigration crackdown, has removed TPS for nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Syria, South Sudan and Venezuela.

Trump announced on Friday that he would also withdraw TPS from Somalis.

TPS was extended to Myanmar nationals after a 2021 military coup. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said the decision to withdraw it was made after a review of conditions in the country.

Myanmar continues to face "humanitarian challenges due in part to continued military operations against armed resistance," Noem said.

But, she added, there have been improvements in "governance and stability at the national and local levels."

Noem noted the July lifting of a state of emergency and the announcement that "free and fair elections" will take place beginning in December.

The move drew fierce criticism from nongovernmental advocacy organizations like Human Rights Watch (HRW).

"Homeland Security's misstatements in revoking TPS for people from Myanmar are so egregious that it is hard to imagine who would believe them," John Sifton, HRW's Asia advocacy director, said in a statement.

The group noted that "Myanmar's supposedly revoked state of emergency in July was immediately replaced with a new state of emergency and martial law in scores of townships across nine states and regions."

Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has said it is "unfathomable" for Myanmar to hold free and fair elections under current circumstances.

"How can anyone say that they're free and fair," Turk said in a recent interview with AFP.

"And how can they even be conducted when considerable parts of the country are actually not in anyone's control, and with the military being party to the conflict and having suppressed its population for years?" he added.

Rights groups have said the election cannot be legitimate, with democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi deposed and jailed in the coup, and her popular National League for Democracy party dissolved.

The junta seized power making unsubstantiated claims of fraud in a 2020 election that the NLD won in a landslide.

A many-sided civil war has since consumed Myanmar, with the junta having lost swathes of the country to pro-democracy guerrillas and powerful ethnic-minority armed factions.

The US State Department currently advises Americans not to travel to Myanmar due to "armed conflict, the potential for civil unrest" and "wrongful detentions."

AFP

Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA HAILS END TO US PROTECTED STATUS FOR MYANMAR NATIONALS

Myanmar's junta applauded the Trump administration on Wednesday for halting a scheme that protected its citizens from deportation from the United States back to their war-racked homeland.

Around 4,000 Myanmar citizens are living in the United States with "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS), which shields foreign nationals from deportation to disaster zones and allows them the right to work.

Myanmar nationals were made eligible for the TPS programme after the military snatched power in a 2021 coup, sparking a devastating civil war and a raft of repressive legal measures and arrests of activists.

However, Washington said on Monday it was removing Myanmar citizens' eligibility, citing "substantial steps toward political stability" that include upcoming elections and this summer's ending of emergency rule.

The move has been panned by monitors who describe the vote as a charade, while localised martial law remains in many places and the military is conscripting men to bolster its ranks.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said Washington's announcement was "a positive statement".

"Myanmar citizens in the United States can come back to the motherland," he said in a statement, urging them to "come back to Myanmar and vote in the general election".

"We would like to inform you that you are all welcome to participate in building a modern and developed nation," he said.

Announcing the TPS stoppage, President Donald Trump's Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said "it is safe for Burmese citizens to return home".

However, the UN's Independent Investigative

Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) warned on Wednesday that it was increasingly receiving reports of "serious international crimes committed in Myanmar in the run-up to the elections".

Detention of election critics and air strikes to claw back territory ahead of the scheduled vote "may amount to persecution and spreading terror in a civilian population as crimes against humanity", IIMM head Nicholas Koumjian said in a statement.

There is no official toll for Myanmar's civil war and estimates vary widely.

According to non-profit organisation Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, which tallies media reports of violence, as many as 90,000 have been killed on all sides since the 2021 coup.

Me Me Khant, executive director and co-founder of US-based advocacy group Students for Free Burma, called the TPS stoppage "a slap in the face to the community" of exiled citizens.

"It's obviously really not safe to go back home," she told AFP. "Everyone is really upset by the news."

Myanmar's military is organising phased elections from December 28, projecting a return to normality after grabbing power and jailing democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi's party has been dissolved, new junta-enforced rules punish protests against the poll with up to a decade in prison, and swaths of the nation are locked in combat.

"To hold elections under these circumstances is unfathomable," Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, told AFP this month.

AFP





Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

## **AUTHORITARIAN ALLY: BELARUS PRESIDENT LUKASHENKO ARRIVES IN MYANMAR FOR FIRST-EVER VISIT**

**B**elarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, an isolated European leader and close ally of Russia, arrived in Myanmar's capital this week for his first-ever visit to the Southeast Asian nation since the 2021 military coup.

A source in Naypyidaw told Mizzima that President Lukashenko arrived at 7:25 pm, Myanmar Standard Time on 26 November, on what the junta described as a friendship trip at the invitation of military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Specific details regarding the trip's agenda have not yet been released by the junta.

The visit marks a major diplomatic boost for Myanmar's junta, which has been globally isolated and heavily sanctioned by the West following the overthrow of the civilian government. It is a reciprocal gesture following two visits by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to Belarus in March and June of this year, during which he met with Lukashenko.

Both nations are subject to extensive international sanctions. Lukashenko, who has governed Belarus since 1994 and is widely regarded as an authoritarian leader, faces sanctions from the United States and the European Union (EU) over the suppression of peaceful protesters, opposition figures, journalists, and electoral misconduct.

Since the coup, the Myanmar junta has deepened its ties with a small circle of international allies, including China, Russia, and Belarus, in an effort to secure arms, investment, and diplomatic support.

The relationship with Belarus is heavily focused on military and technical cooperation. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing signed bilateral agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) during his 2025 trips to Russia and Belarus.

Activist group Justice for Myanmar (JFM) stated in June that the Belarusian government has supplied a specially designed air defence command system to the Myanmar military. They also allege Belarus is providing training to military personnel from the junta's arms manufacturing sector at Belarusian universities.

The current visit by a major head of state reinforces the deepening alliance between the two authoritarian-led countries amidst the ongoing political crisis and internal conflict in Myanmar.



## ARRESTS SURGE IN MYINGYAN AS MYANMAR JUNTA PROXY FORCES RALLY FORCED RECRUITS

In Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, local sources report that the pro-military Pyu Saw Htee group has detained at least 12 men in November who are expected to be transferred to Military Commission Battalion (15) for forced militia training.

The individuals detained throughout the month include young and middle-aged men taken into custody by the local Pyu Saw Htee group led by Ma Thida Yu Mon.

Local sources indicate that the recruitment drive is substantial.

"It's understood that about 100 people will be required to join Pyu Saw Htee training this week, including recruits from other towns," a source said. "They are being held at Thida Yu Mon's place. Those detained from villages around Myingyan are ordinary shoppers, traders, and transporters - all men, and all under the age of 50."

The arrests in November appear to be escalating. Seven men were reportedly arrested on the evening of 5 November and another three on 7 November. Most recently, on the evening of 26 November, eight workers sitting in a car parked on Bogyoke Road were arrested in Myingyan. The vehicle, which was transporting tobacco products, was seized for allegedly carrying

more than the permitted amount.

According to a member of the Myingyan Township Humanitarian Committee and local residents, six of the 18 people detained in November were released after paying a ransom.

The local source also reported that 50 women have been detained for militia training this year, most of them impoverished and with no prior background or experience. While no girls were arrested this month, the source noted that some girls underwent training in March.

"A few girls from KTVs joined the militia training voluntarily and even posted videos on TikTok wearing Pyu Saw Htee uniforms. Men, on the other hand, rarely join voluntarily - most are arrested and forced to participate," the source said.

Locals in Myingyan Township report that following the military coup, the notorious Pyu Saw Htee leader Thida Yu Mon, in coordination with the military junta, has been arresting and killing civilians, extorting money, and looting property on a daily basis. The continuing presence of Pyu Saw Htee forces and Military Commission soldiers is causing locals to flee the area.



## FARMING COLLAPSES ACROSS MYINGYAN DISTRICT AS CONFLICT DEEPENS

Photo: AFP

**V**ery few people in Myingyan District are still engaged in agriculture, leaving most locals unemployed and struggling to survive, according to residents.

Locals say the situation is widespread across Myingyan, Natogyi, and Taungtha townships due to ongoing artillery shelling and advances by junta columns.

Farming has sharply declined for multiple reasons, including large-scale displacement, the burning and destruction of fields and storage barns, the refusal of traders to offer advance capital, soaring input costs, and buyers forcing down prices.

"Right now, there is hardly any farming or livestock rearing left. The capital cost of one viss (1.6 kg) of onions is 1,500–2,000 kyats (US\$0.71-US\$0.95), but the current market price is only about 500 kyats (US\$0.24). We are losing 1,000 kyats per viss. Farmers who used to grow three crops – summer, monsoon, and winter – can no longer do so. Everything has become uncertain, and even those who stored crops are losing money. Last year, I personally lost more than 6 million kyats (US\$2,856) from just two acres of onions," a local resident told Mizzima.

He said the cultivation of key crops such as sesame, groundnut, red and white onions, and rice has dramatically decreased.

Although locals estimate that the number of people engaged in farming has fallen by up to 80 percent in 2025, Mizzima has not been able to independently verify the figure. Residents also report that livestock rearing of goats, sheep, cattle, and pigs has nearly disappeared.

"Even if we manage to grow crops, we don't dare go to the market because of the risk of being arrested, extorted, or even killed. Last year, some people had to abandon their cattle and flee. At that time, some owners sold a goat for just 30,000 kyats (US\$14.28), and a cow worth 2 million kyats (US\$952) was sold for only 700,000 (US\$333). These things really happened," another resident said.

An official from the Myingyan Township Humanitarian Committee said most locals are unable to farm due to military operations.

"When the military advances its columns, most people stop working. Last year, onion farmers faced huge losses. When they planted groundnuts, junta soldiers raided the fields and seized the crops. They even used tractors to haul away groundnuts. Some people abandoned their fields, and when they returned later to collect their crops, the troops opened fire. So, people don't dare go back. That's also part of the problem," the official said.

Farmers in Natogyi Township say a small number of people are still growing groundnuts and betel leaves, but falling prices mean they cannot recover costs. Betel leaves that once sold for 20,000 kyats (US\$9.52) per viss now fetch only around 7,000 kyats (US\$3.33).

Despite this, the junta published propaganda earlier this year claiming that onion cultivation in Myingyan District was profitable, a claim residents say is false.

Locals continue to flee to safer areas as junta forces carry out daily artillery shelling, aerial bombardments, attacks using motorized parachutes, and arrests and killings of civilians across Myingyan District.





Photo: AFP

## THOUSANDS OF MYANMAR SCAM WORKERS FLEE KAREN STATE COMPOUND AFTER KNU RAID

**N**early 1,000 Myanmar workers from an online scam compound in Min Lat Pan village, south of Myawaddy town on the Thai-Myanmar border in Karen State, returned home on 27 November around 1:00 pm, according to local residents.

The return of this large number of Myanmar workers is occurring on the fifth day after the compound, known as Shunda Park, was jointly raided by the Karen National Union (KNU) and the People's Defense Force (PDF).

"Most of the returnees are young people, around 20 to 30 years old. The Military Commission said they would open the road from 1:30 pm to 2:00 pm and everyone must leave completely within that time. They are heading toward Myawaddy carrying big and small bags," a Min Let Pan resident told Mizzima.

Those returning to Myawaddy are travelling on foot, by motorbike, private car, and truck. While workers were moving from Min Let Pan village to Ingyin Myaing village, the Military Commission side fired a heavy weapon and a heavy machine gun as intimidation.

A Karen political analyst warned that the returning youth need to be extremely careful as they are highly likely to be subjected to conscription or forced porter duty by the Military Commission.

The KNU released a statement saying that the joint forces raided the compound, which was led by Chinese mafia groups and protected by the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), in Min Lat Pan village on 23 November.

The raided scam compound is reportedly operated under the control of DKBA Battalion (905) Deputy Commander Colonel Saw Kyaw Ko Min, alias Tha Khwa Thee. The DKBA issued an arrest warrant for Colonel Saw Kyaw Ko Min on 24 November for charges including failing to properly perform his duties under military discipline Article (2) and exceeding his authority under military discipline Article (13).

Foreign nationals from the scam syndicate are facing difficulties returning home via Thailand and are currently stranded on the Moei River sandbank along the Thai-Myanmar border.

In a related incident, Military Commission troops shot and killed three Myanmar female workers who had been working in the compound and were trying to return home on 23 November. In addition, several civilians were injured and are receiving medical treatment.



## **MYANMAR JUNTA AIR STRIKES KILL SEVEN CIVILIANS INCLUDING DISPLACED PERSONS IN MANDALAY REGION**

**F**ighter jets belonging to the Myanmar junta carried out multiple air strikes on four villages in Singu Township, Mandalay Region, on 27 November, killing seven civilians, including those displaced by fighting, according to a township People's Defense Force (PDF) official.

The first attack occurred in the morning when fighter jets flying from Meiktila Air Base struck the Waryonkone Village monastery, killing five people and injuring 10, reported Singu PDF's Information Officer Ko Thanmani. "There were displaced people in that monastery. On the Sabbath, while the monk was giving a sermon, the airstrike killed and injured many people," he said.

Later in the day, at around 4:30 pm, Military Commission forces carried out further airstrikes on Pinlelgyi, Shaukpinyoe, and Pyinpin Villages, killing two internally displaced persons (IDPs) and injuring two others, the township PDF team stated.

The junta army is carrying out a major offensive to retake military bases it has lost in neighbouring Madaya Township, causing many local residents from the Madaya area to flee to Singu Township.

The PDF official said the junta is specifically targeting areas sheltering displaced people.

"The military has been carrying out airstrikes in our township. There have also been suicide-drone attacks, especially targeting areas where displaced people are sheltering," he said.

The township PDF is urging residents and IDPs to follow its air raid warnings and take shelter in designated bunkers. This latest incident follows a previous attack on 12 November, when the junta's Air Force bombed a school sheltering displaced people in Marle Village, Singu Township, killing five and injuring at least five others.





Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA FIRES HEAVY WEAPONS DAY AND NIGHT TO DETER AA ADVANCE TOWARD SITTWE

**T**he Myanmar junta has been firing heavy weapons and small arms continuously since 22 November in an attempt to intimidate and prevent the Arakan Army (AA) from advancing into Sittwe, Rakhine State, residents told Mizzima.

On 22 November, around 500 junta soldiers arrived in Sittwe aboard large vessels from Yangon. From that day through 24 November, the military fired both heavy and small weapons nonstop, day-and-night to block AA forces positioned in the southern part of Ponnagyun Township from pushing toward the Rakhine State capital, according to local sources.

"The junta is firing artillery now. They're trying to frighten the AA so it cannot move forward. Naval forces are also nearby, and artillery units have been deployed. On 22 November, reinforcements arrived and they started firing around 8 pm, even though there was no fighting. It's all intimidation. All entry and exit points of the city are blocked, with police and soldiers

everywhere. They are searching neighbourhoods and monasteries, and arrests are happening constantly. Anyone suspected of having ties to the AA is detained and taken to prison," a resident told Mizzima.

Locals said daily searches and checks are being conducted in wards such as Shwe Min Gan, Nazi, Satyonesu, as well as in relief camps and monasteries. At least 10 people have been arrested in these areas so far in November.

The junta has also restricted fishing near the maritime boundary, and fishermen and net-laying crews are reportedly being arrested.

Residents believe that after suffering losses in recent fighting around Min Pyin village in Kyaukphyu Township, the junta is increasing pressure on towns it still controls. They also report that some junta administrators are pressuring Sittwe residents to vote ahead of the junta's planned election.



## YOUNG PEOPLE ABDUCTED IN YANGON AND SOLD TO MYANMAR'S JUNTA AS UNWILLING CONSCRIPTS

**B**rokers in Yangon Region are luring young people with false job offers, abducting them, and selling them to the junta for forced conscription, according to the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) and local residents.

During the second and third weeks of November, people seeking work were arrested and forcibly recruited through company employees and employment brokers.

This month, three youths from Kone Ta La Paung village in Mingalardon Township were detained by job brokers and handed over to the junta in exchange for payment, an RSN official told Mizzima.

"The broker lied to them, saying he had jobs available, and then sold them to the military. They were sent to the army in Taungoo. Overall, more arrests are happening in Dagon Myothit Ward 4, Thaketa, and North Okkalapa townships, where they target low-income communities," he said.

In a similar case on 2 September, a young man who had travelled to Yangon from a remote area was reportedly lured by a taxi driver in Hlaing Tharyar Township and sold to the junta, according to both local residents and the RSN.

Likewise, in early November, a young man in Yangon's Pabedan Township was abducted after meeting a man posing as a broker who claimed he

could arrange accommodation, according to the victim's friend.

"We lived together. He wanted to move downtown, so he posted online looking for a roommate. A fake broker called, saying he could show him a place. After that, he stopped answering his phone. Two days later, I learned he had been conscripted and sold for 1.5 million kyat. His mother tried to get him released, but officials said he couldn't be recalled because he was already registered in the army," he said.

Additionally, two men in their 20s working for a well-known private eye clinic were arrested by plainclothes officers near People's Square at around 8 pm on 10 November and taken to the military, a source close to the pair told Mizzima.

"Two boys from our clinic were returning from work when they were arrested. They were questioned about the clinic and then taken away. When we called, the officers demanded 180 lakh (1.8 million) kyat. The boys earn low salaries and couldn't afford it, nor could their parents. We later learned they had been sent to the army the next day," he said.

Taxi drivers and labour brokers – including members of the Pyu Saw Htee militia and their associates – are reportedly selling people suddenly seized from the streets to the junta for between 150,000 and 300,000 kyat each, according to residents of Thaketa, South Dagon, and Hlaing Tharyar.

"We want to warn people not to go out alone or in groups at night in isolated areas. They are constantly targeting people. If they can't capture someone, they demand money instead. We urge residents to stay alert to the activities of military recruiters in their neighbourhoods and villages and take precautions to avoid them," an RSN official said.

According to RSN data, at least 30 people have been detained in Yangon so far this month.

On 17 November, the junta announced the commencement of Military Service Training Course No. 19 at military training camps in Yangon Region.

The Rangoon Scout Network reported that, as part of the recruitment campaign, pedestrians have been arrested while sitting by the roadside, during searches, and in random checks across Dagon Myothit, North Okkalapa, Twante, Thaketa, Insein, Mingalar Taung Nyunt, Mingalardon, Ahlone, Kyee Myin Daing, Thingangyun, Bahan, and Thaketa townships.





## DKBA-LINKED DRUG FACTORY UNCOVERED IN KAREN STATE FORESTED RAVINE

**MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW**

A clandestine drug-manufacturing complex spanning over 650 feet in radius has been discovered deep inside a forested ravine near Thae Phyu Chaung, east of Myawaddy along the Thai-Myanmar border, with evidence linking the site to the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), according to resistance fighters who scouted the area.

The secret facility lies about 23 miles from Myawaddy. Travellers moving along the Wawlay Road must turn off at Thone Htet Kwae junction, continue past the DKBA's Kyawt Wa Poe camp, and take a right before Kyaut Khat village, reaching Thae Phyu Chaung.

A further two-mile advance and a left turn, fighters say, leads directly to the DKBA-run drug production zone.

It was first identified by Company Commander Ko Shine from Cobra Battalion 5 under the People's Defence Force (PDF).

In November 2022, after clashes between resistance forces, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar junta forced a retreat from Taung

Ni village, troops used Thae Phyu Chaung then under DKBA authority as a forward base.

Fighters stationed there reported repeatedly smelling WY methamphetamine drifting from the ravine. A type of methamphetamine originally branded by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Shan State as 'WY', has become so common that it has become a colloquial term for methamphetamine in Myanmar alongside the older term, "myin say" or "horse medicine" in Myanmar.

A Mizzima military correspondent who spent 18 months covering the area confirmed the persistent scent and said multiple comrades acknowledged the existence of the facility.

Ko Shine attempted to reach the factory several times but was blocked by DKBA troops. In March 2023, he provided an interview for publication only if he was killed or resistance forces withdrew. He was later killed in the Kawkareik battle on 28 October 2023.

Video filmed by Ko Shine and later seen by Mizzima shows the scale of the operation including warehouses, buildings, raw chemicals and waste materials.

Comrade X, a PDF fighter who accompanied him, describes two WY-processing machines inside a tent, a 70-foot warehouse, a guard post, landmine traps, a dormitory, clinic, an 'ice' crystal methamphetamine processing facility, waste pond, burial grounds and a prison cell used for addicts.

"When we first entered the warehouse, we saw raw WY materials, dye bottles, 'ice' ingredients, acid drums and powders we didn't recognise. Workers were both Myanmar and Thai. On the walls were writings like 'I want to go home,'" he said.

Inside the main structure, they recorded blue WY packaging bags, finished tablets, tin drums of raw materials, boilers and industrial-scale drug machines. Around 40 workers were seen.

"We cannot say who is DKBA and who is staff, but the scale shows how well equipped they are," Comrade X said.

The forward unit was confronted by more than 10 people, including a DKBA officer. They later confirmed on-site processing of WY, 'ice', opium and marijuana, as well as multiple smaller factories in surrounding forests. Three additional factory-linked camps were located but not entered due to minefields.

A former DKBA soldier said workers were not allowed to seek treatment outside the compound and were instead given traditional folk medicine.

Nearby, fighters found at least 10 shallow graves, some containing bodies still in DKBA uniforms, with bones emerging from soil beneath banana trees.

The factory is believed to have been constructed in 2021, confirmed by satellite imagery. Cobra Battalion 5's presence near Myawaddy since its March 2023 offensive allowed it to regain proximity to the site, though it is unknown whether the compound remains fully operational.

Copernicus satellite images taken every five days show signs of continued activity.

Methamphetamine is reportedly cheap and abundant in DKBA-controlled areas including Min Let Pan, Kyauk Khat, Wawlay, Hpalu and Sone Si Myaing.

A former drug-using soldier said five to six WY pills cost around 100 baht. The price rises to 10 baht each for those close to the trade, with 50-pill packs selling for about 500 baht.

On 21 March, Thai authorities seized 18 million methamphetamine pills, 750 kg of 'ice' and 300 kg of ketamine transported from Mae Sot opposite Myawaddy on the Nakhon Sawan Highway. Thai media reported links to DKBA Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Saw San Aung and Military Region 1 Commander Brig. Gen. Sai Kyaw Hla. Bangkok later shut 59 border gates for vehicle traffic following the incident.

Both Kyaw Hla and San Aung were sanctioned by the US Department of Treasury on 15 November for their involvement in cyber scam centres along the Myanmar-Thai border.

On 17 May, the Myanmar junta raided the home of DKBA 2nd Lt. Saw Thein Naing in Mawlamyine, Mon State, where meth-production materials were recovered. On 13 November, the KNU's Karen National Police Force seized narcotics in Min Let Pan village.

The strategic road to Thae Phyu Chaung wide enough for container trucks remains active. A Mizzima reporter following a freight truck through the forest said three separate times that WY fumes seeped into vehicles along the route.

Attempts to contact Bo Dar Baw, commander of PDF Strategic Operations 32 responsible for the area, for comment were unsuccessful at the time of filing.

Reporting based on field accounts, satellite imagery and interviews with resistance fighters.





## ICG WARNS SHAN STATE ENTERING VOLATILE NEW PHASE AS NON-SHAN FORCES GAIN GROUND

Myanmar's Shan State has entered a more volatile and fragmented phase of conflict since the country's 2021 coup, with powerful non-Shan armed groups seizing Shan-majority towns and sidelining traditional Shan political and military actors, the International Crisis Group (ICG) said in a new briefing released on 17 November.

In this new analysis, ICG said the military's post-coup decline created space for groups such as the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Kokang-based Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) to expand rapidly, seizing territory historically under the influence of a variety of ethnic Shan armed groups.

Long major players in the state's political landscape, Shan-dominated armed groups now find themselves "marginalised." At the same time, many Shan communities report growing insecurity and weakened local leadership.

Meanwhile, China has emerged as the decisive external broker, pressuring armed groups to halt offensives, arranging withdrawals from hard-won territory, and pushing to reopen major trade routes with China.

ICG warns that China's stabilisation efforts have also "entrenched a fractured landscape," deepening Shan grievances and inflaming anti-Chinese sentiment nationwide. Indeed, Beijing is seen to be shoring up Myanmar's highly unpopular junta.

Shan State – Myanmar's largest administrative unit and home to over six million people comprising a dozen major ethnic groups – is critical to both legal and

illicit regional economies. Conflict along the Mandalay–Muse corridor, for example, has already disrupted half of Myanmar's formal cross-border trade with China.

Instability due to the ongoing political and military conflict has accelerated displacement and facilitated transnational criminal activity, including narcotics trafficking and the growth of cyber scam centres and online gambling.

ICG's analysis notes that the future of Shan State will remain uncertain until Myanmar's broader political crisis is resolved, but urges local actors, armed groups and international partners to take steps to prevent escalating inter-ethnic conflict.

Non-Shan armed groups now governing ethnically Shan areas should incorporate Shan representatives into local administrations and improve protection of civilians, the briefing says.

The ICG also calls on China to pair its pressure for ceasefires between armed groups and the junta with investments in licit economic opportunities to reduce communities' dependence on illicit economies.

It also calls on foreign donors to support local civil society – particularly women-led groups – and strengthen independent media.

Shan leaders, meanwhile, must "modernise the inclusive political vision" that historically bound the state's diverse communities, ICG argues, warning that exclusion and unmet grievances risk fuelling hardening ethnonationalism and future conflict. "The alternative," it concludes, "is a fractured Shan heartland where grievances deepen and inter-ethnic tensions sharpen."



## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN WETLET CLASH, RESISTANCE FORCES CLAIM

**T**he Shwebo District Battalion 1 claims that 35 junta soldiers were killed and weapons and ammunition seized during a clash with a military column near Ponna village in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region.

At around 8:30 am on 23 November, revolutionary forces engaged in a 10-hour battle with a column of more than 120 troops from Light Infantry Battalion 11 and Infantry Battalion 42 under the Light Infantry Division 33, which had departed from the Sainaing junction near Ponna village.

soldiers were killed in the engagement, and MA rifles, MG-3 machine guns, RPGs, sniper rifles, mortars, and other equipment were seized.

The attack was carried out under the direction of the Shwebo District Commander with the coordinated participation of Battalions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 17, the Wetlet Township People's Defence Force (PDF), the Hanlin District PDF, and allied local PDFs.

Mizzima is unable to independently verify the reported casualty figures or capture of weaponry.

According to Shwebo District Battalion 1, 35 junta



Photo: Mizzima

## UN ISSUES ALERT ON RISK OF DIGITAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND LGBTIQ+ IN MYANMAR

**O**n 25 November, the United Nations in Myanmar issued a statement for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, noting that digital platforms have become major avenues for gender-based violence, including non-consensual image sharing, disinformation, and AI-generated deepfakes targeting women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The statement is as follows.

Digital platforms have provided new possibilities for women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals in Myanmar, but they have also created new avenues for gendered abuse, including non-consensual image sharing, disinformation and AI-generated deepfakes designed to humiliate, intimidate and silence. These forms of online harm have detrimental impacts in real life, such as coercion, physical violence, economic loss, social exclusion and profound mental health impacts, and they must be recognized as gender-based violence.

As the world marks International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and begins the 16 Days of Activism, the United Nations in Myanmar aligns with the global theme: “UNiTE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls.” We reaffirm our condemnation of all forms of gender-based violence and our commitment to support all women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals who are victims of online violence, as well as all those women-led organizations that continue to provide life-saving support.

Myanmar’s compounded crises continue to heighten risks of violence and strain already limited protection systems. Digital abuse adds another layer of harm, and deep digital inequalities intensify these risks. Today, nearly 10.4 million women, girls and LGBTIQ+

individuals in Myanmar remain in humanitarian need, and nearly half of female-headed households lack stable phone or internet access. Limited connectivity, internet shutdowns, data insecurity and digital literacy across urban, rural and conflict-affected areas, expose women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals to scams, harassment, trafficking and exploitation, while restricting access to credible information and support.

Despite these constraints, women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals across Myanmar are using digital platforms to challenge abuse, support survivors and dismantle entrenched patriarchal and discriminatory systems. Their leadership and efforts, especially through the voices of victims and survivors, demonstrate the potential of digital spaces to advance inclusion and equality when those spaces are safe. In this regard, women’s organizations are central to Myanmar’s gender-based violence response. Global reductions in gender-equality financing have already weakened essential services, even as needs grow and crises intensify. Sustained, flexible support is urgently required so these organizations can continue delivering life-saving protection and care.

To reiterate the Secretary-General’s call, we underline the shared responsibility of all stakeholders to address all forms of digital violence. Strengthened legal protection, safer digital platforms and community-wide commitment to zero tolerance for online abuse are essential elements of a comprehensive response.

During these 16 Days of Activism, and every day, we stand with Myanmar’s women, girls, LGBTIQ+ individuals and the organizations that support them, in demanding a future free from violence—online, offline or anywhere.



# INSIDE THE DIGITAL SIEGE

**INSIGHT MYANMAR**

**"T**here is a person behind every piece of policy," says Nandar, a senior digital security expert at DigiSec Lab, reflecting on Myanmar's transformation into a digital prison since the 2021 military coup. Alongside her colleagues—researcher and safety trainer Vox, journalist and consultant Myat, and political researcher Candle—she sketches the contours of a country where the Internet, once a symbol of connection, has become a machinery of surveillance. Each expert in turn describes a different layer of the same siege: Nandar dissects the state's digital weapons, Vox retraces the collapse of online freedom, Myat explains how journalists adapt to survive, and Candle argues for an ethics of protection in research. Together, they reveal how technology, once a tool of liberation, now enforces silence in Myanmar's post-coup landscape.

Nandar begins by describing the "digital siege" not so much as a blackout but as creeping paralysis. She explains that Myanmar's Internet still functions, but access to the wider world is filtered and monitored. What distinguishes Myanmar's experience from China's Great Firewall, she says, is its incremental nature. Instead of cutting people off overnight, the junta tightens control layer by layer. "The outer layer filters what you can access," she explains. "The middle layer watches what you do, and the inner layer makes you afraid to even try anything." The result an Internet that appears to work but no longer grants freedom.

## DIGITAL WEAPONS

From this framework emerges what she calls the "three digital weapons of governance." The first of these is deep packet inspection (DPI), "a microscope



of Internet traffic” that allows the state to open and read the contents of any data packet passing through telecom systems. The second is civilian traffic logging, an invisible layer of surveillance at the network core that tracks users’ activities, session durations, and app usage, building a behavioral map of citizens. “Technically,” she says, “it really looks like a national CCTV system for the Internet.” The third weapon is the 2025 Cybersecurity Law, which forces digital service providers to store user data inside the country and surrender it on demand. Nandar notes that this law shifts the regime’s focus from individuals to platforms: the state now seeks to control intermediaries that hold masses of personal information.

These three weapons together have crippled independent media, civil society, and youth activism and resistance. Over 150 journalists have been

detained, she says, and many others have fled to border areas where slow connections, blocked websites, and constant monitoring make it nearly impossible to report from afar. Yet she also points out that Myanmar’s independent media continue to resist, finding creative ways to publish and share truth despite the dangers. “The logic of a digital siege is not to switch off the Internet entirely,” she says, “but to make people [silenced] under constant observation.” In that silence, she insists, the first victims are those who depend on the Internet to document, organize, and communicate.

## COLLAPSE OF DIGITAL TRUST

Vox, a digital safety researcher who trains activists and civil society groups, enters the discussion where Nandar leaves off. His testimony unfolds as both history and a personal narrative. He recalls the night



of February 1, 2021, when the military seized power and plunged the country into its first Internet blackout. "People were lining up in front of ATMs," he remembers. "We had no idea how to deal with it. It was very unreal." Over the following weeks, blackouts gave way to nightly "Internet curfews," a uniquely Myanmar phenomenon. During these hours, communications vanished, and police raids swept neighborhoods while no one could send warnings.

Vox describes the broader collapse of digital trust. Companies once expected to uphold international standards, such as Telenor under Europe's GDPR, abandoned users. "We had Telenor, a European company," he says bitterly, "and they actually sold us out!" With no reliable protection, activists turned to encryption apps—Signal, Telegram, VPNs—but soon realized that technology alone could not keep them safe. Even encrypted apps exposed users through phone numbers and metadata; SIM card registration linked every account to a real identity. When a member of a Signal group was arrested, their contacts could be traced through stored numbers. Telegram, though more flexible, was equally dangerous: the same platform used by activists was exploited by soldiers spreading propaganda and targeting opponents.

## SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

In response, Vox and his peers learned to live like spies. Every call was treated as a potential trap. Every unverified contact might be an informant. He describes the psychological toll—sleepless nights waiting for a colleague's codeword reply, moments of panic that later turned out to be false alarms. "It was just bizarre," he says. "This is '1984,' to be honest! Every space, physical and digital, is being monitored." By 2025, he concludes, the combination of legal repression, advanced surveillance tools, and mandatory conscription has created an environment where young people could not "live comfortably" inside their own country. What was

once a symbol of freedom has become a totalitarian grid.

For Myat, a journalist with more than a decade in the media industry, this grid defines her daily reality. She recalls that before the coup, independent outlets, like The Irrawaddy, DVB, and Mizzima, were expanding under partial civilian rule, covering politics and ethnic issues with relative freedom. After 2021, everything changed: licenses were revoked, journalists arrested, websites blocked, and offices forced to close. Many fled to Thailand or other border regions, but exile did not guarantee safety. They still relied on contacts inside Myanmar, who faced surveillance and violence. The result, she explains, is a fragmented media community struggling for survival while audiences lose access to reliable information.

## ONLINE THREATS

Even online, journalists face extreme risk. Every action—sending a message, uploading footage, logging into social media—can expose them. "The military also targeted the journalists," she says, "not only from offline, but also on the digital as well." VPN use, once a simple workaround, is now criminalized. If caught using it, a journalist can be detained or interrogated. Encryption offers little protection when authorities demand passwords under threat. Torture and forced decryption are common, and possession of sensitive files can lead to long prison sentences.

Myat and her colleagues now train reporters in digital hygiene: encrypting communications, rotating passwords, limiting information sharing, and creating emergency protocols. She emphasizes that safety must become part of newsroom culture, not just technical training. "This digital safety should not only be at the technical level—it should be the daily newsroom culture." Yet even these measures are sometimes no match for brute force. She recounts how one journalist,



trying to cross a checkpoint, hid his USB drive in a snack box to evade inspection. Such small acts of ingenuity, she says, have become part of routine survival. Beyond censorship and arrests, another crisis looms: funding cuts from international donors have forced many outlets to close. For those that remain, digital security is inseparable from financial and physical security—the struggle to stay online is also a struggle to exist.

## **RISK OF RESEARCH**

Finally, Candle joins the conversation, shifting the focus from journalism to research ethics. As a political researcher leading DigiSec's "Duty of Care" project, she describes how scholars collecting data in or about Myanmar face the same surveillance risks as journalists. Their work—interviews, surveys, ethnographies—often involves sensitive subjects, and both researchers and participants can be targeted. Candle explains that after the coup, "it became more difficult and risky to conduct research and to collect data." Every conversation, every recording, every file stored on a laptop could endanger someone. Her team therefore developed what they call a Risk Assessment and Mitigation Plan (RAMP) for social research projects, adapting traditional ethics to the digital environment.

At the heart of this approach lies the principle of "do no harm." Researchers must constantly question whether to record an interview, whether to store names, and where to keep data. In authoritarian settings, she argues, digital security is an ethical obligation, not a technical luxury. "We encourage researchers to think like security experts," she says, "because all these potential risks are imposed after 2021." This means integrating encryption, anonymization, and offline storage into every stage of research—from design to publication. Even after results are released, teams must review reports to remove identifying details that could expose participants or communities. Candle stresses that researchers themselves are also targets, so they

have to think of themselves and their own safety first, because an arrested researcher endangers everyone they have spoken to.

## **NEED FOR DIGITAL SECURITY**

She also highlights the chilling effect of repression. Many potential participants now refuse to speak, fearing surveillance or reprisals. Even with secure methods, she says, people ask who will publish the report and how their identities will be protected. As a result, the data reaching the outside world represent only a fraction of reality. The fear extends to young scholars, many of whom have abandoned research altogether. "Digital security," she concludes, "is no longer just an add-on; it should be an integral part of research design and ethics." Her call extends to donor organizations, which she urges to include security training and technology as essential components of all research funding in Myanmar.

Taken together, the four interviews form a composite picture of a country where information itself is endangered. Yet within their testimonies lies a shared insistence on resilience. Whether through improvised security protocols, clandestine journalism, or ethical innovation, Myanmar's information defenders continue to find ways to speak. Their struggle is not only for access to the Internet but for the right to communicate truth without fear—a right that defines freedom itself.

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

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/19/episode-435-inside-the-digital-siege>



# NETWORK REVOLUTION AND BOTTOM-UP FEDERALISM: THE FALSE 'PROBLEM OF UNITY' IN BURMESE OPPOSITION POLITICS

**ASHLEY SOUTH**

*The 'problem' in Myanmar is not lack of unity among anti-junta forces. A new Burma is being born from the bottom-up. This is a complex and asymmetrical process: unity in diversity!*

Nearly five years after the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, there is a growing risk of narratives swinging behind the junta, as it prepares for rigged elections next month in those areas it controls (about half of the country). With the USA having withdrawn from Burma as an issue, (at least temporarily), the main problem is China and Russia's support for the brutal and illegitimate junta. Unfortunately, in their desperation for an 'exit strategy', some actors and analysts are questioning the credibility of Burmese opposition forces, due to a perceived lack of unity and coherent strategies. It is important to push back against the narrative of inevitable Myanmar military dominance.

There is some justification to such criticisms, but these mostly fail to appreciate the huge changes in Myanmar since the coup. Rather than a source of weakness, the diversity of opposition actors reflects the inclusive nature of the Spring Revolution, and the ongoing transformation of longstanding ethnic insurgencies into locally based revolutionary states, intent on building a better Burma from the bottom-up.

For the first time since independence, Ethnic Armed Organisations are on the front foot, both politically and militarily in Burma. (While some Ethnic Armed Organisations support the junta, or are trying to stay

neutral, the majority have joined the fight, and thus are often referred to as Ethnic Resistance Organisations.) Unlike in 1988–90, when narratives were dominated by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and Burmese politicians in exile, the political momentum today is with long-standing struggles for ethnic self-determination. New political and military alliances reflect the strength and credibility of ethnic nationality groups, many of which have been providing services and basic governance to some of the most vulnerable displaced and other communities in Southeast Asia, often for many decades. Since the coup, they have been joined by a new generation of young anti-junta activists from the towns and cities, determined to resist the military takeover of their country. In this context, newly emergent structures can look quite messy. However, complexity should not be confused with ineffectiveness or incoherence, or weakness.

Contemporary Myanmar can be seen as a set of complex conflict systems, within which multiple actors are adapting (or not) to a fast-changing situation. Successful adaptations are the building blocks of federalism in the new Burma. For example, with the collapse of centralised education nationwide, the Karen National Union's (Karen Education and Culture Department) school system teaches nearly 150,000



children in the war zones of Kawthoolei – one of half-a-dozen effective but under-resourced ethnic basic education providers. Although threatened by the collapse in funding this year, ethnic education systems are excellent examples of the credibility of ethnic nations, and their local governance and services delivery systems. The resilience of indigenous communities and networks is extraordinary.

It is of course challenging to build coherent positions and strategies across and between different anti-junta systems. Part of the problem is old-style thinking among some groups, who want to see a democratic Myanmar based on a centralized and top-down state. A complexity theory (systems analysis) approach should lead us to expect higher-level (or federal union level) functions to emerge from the interactions and common positions of network actors and blocs. With key stakeholders sharing common values and identities, developing strategies across networks is an iterative process, involving trial and error.

With justice and conflict dynamics on their side (despite some recent battlefield losses), ethnic armed forces are likely to continue driving the transformation of Burma, from the bottom-up. Emergent federalism in Myanmar will inevitably be asymmetrical, not least because of the different context in various places. This does not mean that 'bottom-up federalism' lacks fundamental coherence or resilience.

In complex, adaptive and asymmetrical systems, such as bottom-up federalism, resilience and coherence should be sought at the network level, rather than with a single leading entity. The 'Pathology of Unity' in Myanmar has been identified by Matthew Walton as a tendency to assume that political order and organization must be subsumed under a single leader or party (e.g. the centralizing National League for Democracy, or even the junta). However, the country is moving beyond such out-moded politics, to embrace a more networked and collective approach.

Since the coup, articulations of federalism have become increasingly bold, with key actors (Ethnic Armed Organisations and state-based bodies) more confidently rejecting the old top-down approach, moving towards asymmetrical bottom-up strategies. With the collapse of the centralised state, increasing demands have been articulated for the recognition of federal unit (or ethnic nation) autonomy. For example, the Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations and Federal Councils Representing States/Nationalities – later simplified as the Multi-Ethnic Council – is an emergent network of post-coup actors, developing bottom-

up federal solutions to Myanmar's crises, composed of armed groups and civil society organisations. In September 2024 this informal nine-member body issued a first statement on bottom-up federalism. A follow-up statement on 12 February 2025 (Union Day, commemorating the 1947 Panglong Agreement) announced the development of Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA), in member groups' respective areas. It insisted that they "will not accept a holding together model of federalism that will renew centralization" – calling instead to "rebuild our country as a strong nation through bottom-up federalism by strengthening the states."

The diverse but coordinated set of groups working on the AFTA made significant progress through August 2025, devising guidelines for recognizing accommodating bottom-up federalism at the union level (most groups having already established their own state-level transitional arrangements). The process was joined by the CRPH and a reluctant NUG – but not by the NLD. Earlier this month, two key Ethnic Armed Organisations withdrew from the National Unity Consultative Council, but the AFTA process will hopefully continue. In the meantime, despite recent tensions, strong connections still exist between northern Ethnic Armed Organisations, including powerful Ta'ang, Kokang and Wa groups, and the Kachin Independence Organization. In the west, the Arakan Army, with its confederationist 'Way of Rakhita', controls almost the whole of Rakhine State.

Reflecting the increased political and military weight of Ethnic Armed Organisations in the post-coup context, the convergence of armed and political struggles for federal democracy around a bottom-up dynamic is a significant development. Some 'actors and analysts' however, see only the difficulty of identifying a single leading body to engage with on Myanmar. However, new alliances are emerging based on true commonalities of interest and identity; these will consolidate in the future.

More importantly, Myanmar looks to be an early outlier of central state collapse, in a global context of increasing insecurity and disorder, driven by widespread conflict – and increasingly by climate change. While state actors in the region may prefer that the country not fragment, it's too late to put the emergent and asymmetrical new Myanmar back into the box. A new networked Burma is emerging from the bottom-up built – on unity amid diversity.

Ashley South's website: <http://www.AshleySouth.co.uk>



Aerial view of Hat Yai, Thailand.  
Photo: AFP

## 'TRULY SEVERE' FLOODS OVERWHELM SOUTHEAST ASIA

**A**uthorities across Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia worked on Thursday to reach residents trapped in floods that have killed dozens of people across the region in recent days.

The toll from floods and landslides rose to 19 in Indonesia's North Sumatra, which has been battered by heavy rain for days, with dozens still missing.

Road access to some areas has been cut off by debris, with communications and electricity down too, national search and rescue agency official Emy Freezer told AFP.

Heavy rain in Aceh has also forced the evacuation of thousands of people.

"This flood is truly severe," said 47-year-old Ibnu

Sina, whose home in Aceh's second city Lhokseumawe was inundated.

The region's main highway was now impassable, he told AFP, leaving the region "completely paralysed".

"The regional (governments) are overwhelmed," he said.

The same weather system has caused enormous flooding in southern Thailand, particularly in Hat Yai, near the border with Malaysia.

Entire districts were submerged by flooding that pushed desperate residents onto rooftops.

Authorities said on Wednesday that 33 people had been killed across seven southern provinces.



Floodwaters began to recede in Hat Yai on Thursday but Kamban Wongpanya, 67, said she was not able to return home yet.

"The water rose to the ceiling of the second floor," she told AFP, explaining that she had to be rescued by boat.

"The water inside my house has dropped by half, but there are still strong-flowing floodwaters on the road to my house. I can't return home yet."

Many residents lost homes and livelihoods in the floods, which began last week in Thailand.

The region is experiencing its annual monsoon season, but scientists have shown that climate change produces more intense bouts of rain because a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture.

Warmer oceans also fuel more intense and wetter storm systems.

### 'Waist-deep'

Hat Yai shop owner Chayaphol Promkleng thought at first that his business would be spared because initial flooding was "only ankle-deep".

He returned the following day to find his shop "flooded to waist-deep level".

"There was nothing I could do. I left the shop to save my life."

Thailand's government announced a compensation package this week for affected families of around \$280 per household.

But Chayaphol said he lost everything.

"I have to start from zero."

Across the border, Malaysia's Civil Defence forces used boats to evacuate elderly or frail residents trapped in homes in the town of Kangar in Perlis state.

Two people have been killed in flooding in Malaysia so far, with authorities warning more heavy rain was expected in coming days.

Ali Mat Isa told AFP he carried his bedridden wife up the stairs on Wednesday night as floodwaters rushed into their home.

"I couldn't move to the flood relief centre because of my wife's condition," he said as he was helped into a boat in waist-high, murky brown floodwaters.

"It rose fast. I only managed to move the electrical items. Everything else, I left behind."

The frequency of flooding has increased in northern Malaysia in recent years, with urbanisation, poor drainage systems and deforestation among the contributing factors, said Renard Siew, climate change adviser to the Kuala Lumpur-based Centre for Governance and Political Studies.

"So, in some ways, we are anticipating that things are only going to get worse from here on," he told AFP.

AFP



Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.  
Photo: AFP

## BANGLADESH EX-PM HASINA GETS 21 YEARS IN JAIL FOR CORRUPTION

**A** court in Bangladesh sentenced ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday to 21 years in prison for corruption, a week after she was given the death penalty for crimes against humanity.

Hasina, 78, is currently residing in India and has defied court orders that she return to Bangladesh.

She was sentenced in absentia on November 17 to be hanged for crimes against humanity after ordering a deadly crackdown against a student-led uprising last year that eventually ousted her.

But three other cases had been brought against the ex-leader by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) over land grabs of lucrative plots in a suburb of the capital Dhaka.

Hasina's conduct "demonstrates a persistent corruption mindset rooted in entitlement, unchecked power, and a greedy eye for public property", ruled judge Abdullah Al Mamun.

"Treating public land as a private asset, she directed her greedy eye toward state resources and manipulated official procedures to benefit herself and her close relatives."

Hasina's US-based son Sajeeb Wazed and daughter Saima Wazed, who has served as a top UN

official, were sentenced to five years each.

Hasina fled Bangladesh by helicopter on August 5, 2024, after weeks of student-led protests against her autocratic rule.

Public prosecutor Khan Moinul Hasan said he would appeal the verdict in the corruption cases.

"We are not satisfied with the verdict, as we had sought maximum punishment," he told AFP.

"We will consult our client, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and decide on the next course of action."

Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since the end of Hasina's rule, and violence has marred campaigning for elections slated for February 2026.

The United Nations says up to 1,400 people were killed in crackdowns as Hasina tried to cling to power.

Hasina has called the guilty verdict and death sentence in her crimes against humanity trial "biased and politically motivated".

She is also being prosecuted in three other corruption cases, along with her sister Sheikh Rehana and her children, including British MP Tulip Siddiq.

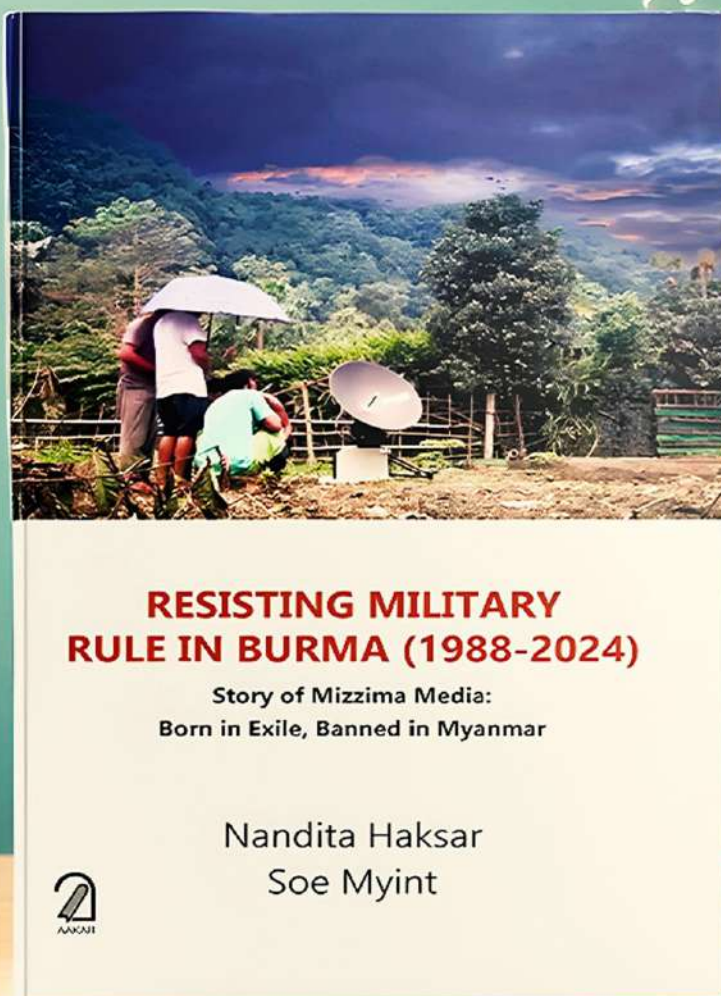
AFP



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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## SCAMLAND

“I hope this conversation will give fruitful insights of what is going on in scam centers and what the situation is inside them,” says Lin Jin Fu, a Myanmar researcher whose work exposes the intersection between human trafficking and organized crime. Specializing in illicit economies across Southeast Asia, Lin Jin Fu studies how online scam compounds have evolved from small Chinese operations into a multi-billion-dollar industry spanning Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and beyond. His latest study, *Scam haven: Responding to surging cyber crime and human trafficking in Myanmar*, commissioned by Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar, investigates the mechanics and human toll of this phenomenon, situating it within the country’s political collapse and globalized criminal networks.

Lin Jin Fu explains that the origins of the current system lie in China’s history. The term for scam houses, *jiapian* (literally “scam house”) once described a form of organized labor within criminal groups. The practice of scamming people proliferated in China’s underground economies for decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for scamming at a whole new level. The closure of borders during the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensifications of restrictions by Beijing incentivised criminal networks to invest more heavily in

cyberscamming and seek new spaces where regulation was weak. “They found countries like Myanmar and Cambodia, where the rule of law and governance are failing,” he says. They embedded themselves in lawless frontier zones—the Golden Triangle, northern Shan State, the Cambodia-Thailand border—creating self-contained compounds that combined physical captivity with digital exploitation. Regardless of their Chinese origins, Lin Jin Fu stresses that they are actually now multinational in character. Australians, Thais, and Westerners have all been arrested as participants. The model, once regional, has become transnational.

In practice, the scam centers form hubs around which secondary economies flourish: local logistics, black-market banking, narcotics, and prostitution. What began as digital fraud has merged with every kind of illicit commerce, drawing on and reinforcing existing criminal infrastructures. Economically, the scale is staggering. Lin Jin Fu estimates that scam centers in Southeast Asia could collectively generate thirty-seven billion dollars annually, though the real earnings may be far higher because of side businesses like drugs, gambling and human trafficking. Exact accounting is impossible; official figures like that of the UNODC derive from reported victim losses, primarily in Western countries, but untold numbers of Asian victims remain uncounted.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/15/episode-432-scamland>





# JUNTA-CONTROLLED MEDIA TOUTS MEDICAL AID PROVIDED BY MYANMAR NAVY VESSELS

**M**yanmar's junta is trumpeting a series of medical missions carried out by its seagoing and riverine hospital ships across the Ayeyarwady Region. The operations are portrayed as humanitarian outreach even as the junta faces mounting accusations of human rights abuses nationwide.

Over the past week, junta-controlled media has published near-daily reports detailing the movements of Myanmar Navy hospital vessels and the activities of their medical teams. The vessels include the seagoing ship Thanlwin and riverine craft Shwe Puzon and Saku.

The vessels were reported as travelling between villages in Ngaputaw, Wakema, Myaungmya, Labutta and Ngayokkaung townships. Junta media listed hundreds of patients treated at each stop, often at monasteries, jetties or township health departments.

In Ngaputaw, for example, 533 people received care according to one account of the Thanlwin's visit. In nearby Myaungmya, a naval medical team reportedly treated 391 residents. And a separate mission in Ngaputaw days later reported 352 patients receiving care.

The types of care offered ranged from general medicine to eye and orthopaedic surgery, examination

of paediatric and gynaecology patients, dental treatment, and the conduct of laboratory tests, x-rays and ultrasound scans.

Junta-controlled media described warm welcomes from village officials and schoolchildren as the ships moved through additional townships in the Ayeyarwady Delta region.

The junta's publicity push comes as it battles a nationwide insurgency, with armed groups including the Arakan Army (AA) and the People's Defence Forces (PDF) operating in western Ayeyarwady Region and in the adjacent Rakhine State and Bago Regions. Health services have been disrupted by conflict, displacement, and economic collapse across the country.

Rights groups say the junta has repeatedly used state media to promote what it describes as "public welfare" programmes in a bid to counter narratives of widespread abuses. The junta is currently making efforts to present itself in a positive light domestically and internationally as it moves to hold nationwide elections later this month and in January 2026.

Independent access to the areas visited by the naval teams remains heavily restricted, making it difficult to verify the scale and nature of the assistance.



# RAID ON KK PARK MAKES HEADLINES BUT SCAM CENTRES STILL ACTIVE

**T**he military of Myanmar has escalated its efforts to address online scam operations concentrated near the Thailand border, particularly in areas such as KK Park (Myawaddy) and Shwe Kokko.

In a recent enforcement operation, authorities detained hundreds of individuals and confiscated numerous devices utilized for scam activities, including mobile phones, computers, and reportedly dozens of satellite internet terminals.

Government representatives have shared video footage of demolished buildings and seized equipment through state media, framing the crackdown as a significant initiative to dismantle the illegal scam industry.

Nevertheless, feedback from users on social media platforms, including Facebook and Telegram, suggests

skepticism regarding the effectiveness of these actions.

"While one compound is destroyed, many others continue to operate."

"The leading figures often evade apprehension; only low-level employees and trafficked individuals face arrest."

"Substantive actions are portrayed on television, yet scam towns persist, and scammers remain active online."

Despite the crackdown, Telegram job ads offering "chatting work" for Myawaddy (including Shwe Kokko and border areas) are still circulating.



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