

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Thai-Myanmar business event in Chiang Mai opens new doors for SME collaboration**

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# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# THE QUEST FOR UNITY IN THE SPRING REVOLUTION

The recent remarks by National Unity Government Acting President Duwa Lashi La on the urgent need for unity underscore a defining dilemma for Myanmar's resistance movement. Since the 2021 military coup, the anti-junta struggle has evolved into a complex patchwork of armed groups, local militias, and long-established ethnic forces. While this diversity reflects the breadth of opposition to military rule, it also exposes structural weaknesses that the regime has repeatedly exploited.

The defection of BNRA PDF leader Bo Nagar to the Myanmar military junta is not simply a symbolic blow - it highlights the fragility of cohesion within a resistance that remains decentralized, unevenly resourced, and politically fragmented.

At the heart of the challenge lies the relationship between the newer People's Defence Forces and the older Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations. The PDFs emerged rapidly after the coup, fueled by public outrage and grassroots mobilization. Many operate with limited training and inconsistent command structures, relying on local legitimacy and improvisation. In contrast, ethnic armed groups possess decades of battlefield experience, established territorial control, and their own political agendas shaped by long struggles for autonomy. Aligning these actors under a unified military and political strategy requires reconciling differing visions of federalism, resource sharing, and post-conflict governance - what many might view as a bridge too far.

Trust deficits compound these difficulties. Some ethnic organizations remain wary of Bamar-majority political leadership, recalling past betrayals by civilian governments that failed to deliver meaningful federal reform. Meanwhile, local PDFs may view certain ethnic forces as overly cautious or self-interested, particularly when ceasefires or localized understandings with the junta appear to blunt the momentum of nationwide resistance.

The absence of a single, authoritative chain of command allows operational successes in one region to coexist with

stagnation or fragmentation in another.

The junta's attempt to legitimize itself through elections adds another layer of complexity. By pursuing a controlled electoral process designed to project normalcy, the regime seeks to fracture international consensus and encourage war fatigue among the population. If segments of the resistance disagree on how to respond - whether through boycott, disruption, or conditional engagement - the result could be strategic incoherence. Moreover, elections provide the junta an opportunity to co-opt local elites, including militia leaders tempted by security guarantees or economic incentives. Defections such as that of Bo Nagar reinforce the perception that loyalty can be transactional in a protracted conflict - and the military junta will seek to further encourage division and rule.

Material constraints further strain unity. Sustaining armed resistance demands funding, weapons procurement, and reliable supply lines, all under conditions of aerial bombardment and surveillance. Competition over scarce resources can fuel rivalries among resistance groups. Without transparent mechanisms for coordination and accountability, accusations of corruption or favouritism risk eroding morale and public support.

Ultimately, the resistance faces a dual imperative - to maintain battlefield pressure while articulating a credible, inclusive political vision for a post-junta Myanmar - some form of federal democratic union.

But unity cannot be reduced to rhetorical appeals - it must be institutionalized through shared command structures, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and a binding commitment to federal democracy that addresses long-standing ethnic grievances. Absent this consolidation, the regime's divide-and-rule tactics - and its effort to cloak authoritarian continuity in electoral form - may yet prolong a conflict that has already exacted a devastating human toll over five years.

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**Mizzima Weekly is  
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**Cover photo of Thai-Myanmar Business, Culture & Sustainability, Gift & Idea Exchange participants by Mizzima**



# THAI-MYANMAR BUSINESS EVENT IN CHIANG MAI OPENS NEW DOORS FOR SME COLLABORATION

In the changing global economic landscape, collaboration between Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from neighboring countries plays a vital role. To this end, a solid business bridge was built in Chiang Mai between Thailand and Myanmar at Memories of Chiang Mai.

The event, titled “Thai-Myanmar Business, Culture & Sustainability, Gift & Idea Exchange,” was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, with the aim of exploring new business opportunities and creating space for SMEs from both nations.

The role of SMEs in developing Chiang Mai as a Smart and Sustainable City was highlighted during the event. Mr. Akorn, President of the Thai SME Federation Northern Cluster 1, and Mr. Soe Myint, Founder and Managing Director of Mizzima, emphasized the importance of information and business connectivity between the two countries as follows:

“How can we collaborate? This is because we cannot stand alone as a single entity, especially in this era of global competitiveness. Our products must be superior, and since we have to compete with other products, we must consolidate and share (resources),” said Mr. Soe Myint.

Mr. Akorn stated, “We opened this place [Memories of Chiang Mai] one year ago already. I still remember that it was last year at the Business Exchange event organized by Mizzima. I came one year ago to present about the idea of this place. And this is the place that I presented at that event. And I’m very happy to have you all here again with us at this event. And this place is actually known as a place of the Burmese community. But actually, we intended this place to be as a community for everyone living in Chiang Mai.”

The “Building Bridges” discussion session followed, where participants shared practical challenges and opportunities encountered in cross-border trade.



There are many opportunities for SMEs in Thailand.

At the same time, the importance of Sustainable Business Practices for the future was also discussed.

Following the seminar, an SME entrepreneur participating in the event shared their perspective on the insights gained, "In this event, it wasn't just about talking. The SME booths facilitated direct B2B [Business to Business] pathways and practical collaborations between entrepreneurs. These are successful new steps for cross-border business cooperation. The business partnerships started from this Gift and Idea Exchange event will certainly lead toward a future of shared prosperity for both Thailand and Myanmar."

On the final day of the event, workshops and capacity-building sessions were conducted by Thai business owners and experts for Myanmar nationals wishing to operate businesses in Thailand.

Furthermore, it was noted that small businesses from Myanmar could apply for membership in the Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce. If selected, they would gain opportunities to engage in joint business ventures between the two countries.

The "Thai-Myanmar Business, Culture & Sustainability, Gift & Idea Exchange" featured business exhibition booths from Thailand, alongside Myanmar traditional clothing and handicraft stalls, as well as food and coffee booths.

## A Guide for Myanmar Nationals Planning to Launch an SME in Thailand

Myanmar nationals residing in Thailand can start a business, but the first step is to understand the ownership rules and legal requirements, as highlighted by a speaker at the Thai-Myanmar Business Gift and Idea Exchange event in Chiang Mai, held on 14 and 15 February.

According to the speaker, partnering with Thai individuals is the most common approach. Currently, foreigners, including Myanmar nationals, can hold up to 49% of a company's shares, while Thai partners must hold 51%. Although 100% foreign ownership is technically possible, the process is more stringent and requires substantial financial proof.



Taking a break at the event.

"Regarding Myanmar nationals living here in Thailand, can they do business? Yes, they certainly can. However, they must collaborate with Thais - that's rule number one," the speaker said.

Entrepreneurs cannot register a company while on a tourist visa. A long-term visa is necessary, such as a Work Visa, Non-O Visa, or a Marriage Visa if married to a Thai citizen.

The registered capital typically ranges from 500,000 to 2 million Baht. If a foreigner requires a visa through the company, a registered capital of 2 million Baht is necessary. However, the paid-up capital needed to start operations can be as low as 250,000 Baht.

A clear business address must be provided. If registering under a Thai partner, the company can use their home address if they own it. If renting, written permission from the landlord is required. Standard documentation, such as passport copies and identification papers, must also be submitted.

After registration, business owners will receive tax guidelines. Corporate income tax is only applicable if

there is profit; if expenses exceed income, no corporate income tax is due.

"I want to encourage everyone to operate legally. By doing so, you can stay long-term," urged the Thai entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurs were also encouraged to build trusted partnerships and enhance their networks by participating in business events and cooperation platforms.

The "Thai-Myanmar Business, Culture & Sustainability, Gift & Idea Exchange" held on the weekend in Chiang Mai aimed to empower SMEs by creating new business opportunities and fostering innovative ideas between the two countries. The event underscored the importance of Thai-Myanmar cooperation, SME support, and promoting sustainable business and green innovation among young entrepreneurs.



A number of products on display.

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

## KIO NOTE REGIONAL AMBITIONS

**O**n 5 February, during a Kachin Revolutionary Day event attended by members of the Kachin diaspora in Texas, Lt. Gen. Gum Maw, Vice Chairman of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), delivered a speech outlining the group's strategic direction amid Myanmar's ongoing armed resistance.

In his address, Gum Maw emphasized operational focus areas that include their Kachin unit, Naga unit, Chin unit, and three districts in the upper Sagaing Region. He stressed the importance of consolidating efforts in these areas to defeat or halt what he described as the "enemy," referring to the military junta. His remarks quickly circulated among resistance stakeholders and pro-junta circles alike, drawing attention to the KIO's broader regional ambitions beyond Kachin State.

Ten days after the speech, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing traveled to upper Sagaing Region, officially to mark the opening of a bridge over the Chindwin River and to visit Lahe in the Naga Self-Administered Zone. Analysts suggest the high-profile trip to these remote areas may have been intended as a symbolic response to Gum Maw's remarks, signaling the regime's determination to maintain control in contested northern territories.

Meanwhile, tensions escalated sharply in Kachin State. On 20 February, a drone bomb struck Myitkyina's civilian airport, damaging a passenger aircraft at its head, body, and tail sections. The junta accused the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied People's Defence Forces of carrying out the attack. The KIA denied responsibility, stating that its policy prohibits targeting civilian infrastructure.

Later that same night, junta forces reportedly conducted indiscriminate artillery shelling, with one shell landing in a civilian ward, injuring three residents and damaging homes. Within the following three days, the military launched airstrikes on eight locations in KIA-controlled areas, including Laiza, the KIA headquarters. Other affected townships included Mohnyin, Waingmaw, Sadung, Momauk, Mansi, Hpakant, and Danai. According to local sources, the air raids left one man dead and ten people injured, among them three children.

On the ground, fighting remains intense in Bhamo, where KIA-led alliance forces continue operations to seize the strategic town. On 18 February, resistance forces captured the junta's No. (236) Regiment outpost,

which also functions under the No. (21) Military Operations Command. Reports indicate that the regiment's commander was injured during the clash.

Although resistance forces briefly paused their offensive, junta troops resumed counterattacks on 20 February. A frontline source told DVB that heavy fighting resumed but that junta forces suffered significant casualties and were again forced to retreat.

The sequence of political signaling, targeted attacks, and escalating ground battles underscores the deepening volatility in northern Myanmar, where both symbolic gestures and military maneuvers increasingly intersect.

### IDPs face worsening conditions

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in western Demoso-area townships, particularly Phruso and Shadaw, are facing a worsening public health crisis as skin diseases and chickenpox spread rapidly in camps and villages lacking adequate water for personal hygiene.



As of the third week of February, more than 50 people in Phruso Township alone have been infected with chickenpox, according to local health sources. The outbreak, which began in December, is accelerating and affecting all age groups — from infants under one year old to elderly residents. Suspected patients have been separated from schools in an effort to contain the spread.

Health workers say the situation is compounded by a lack of vaccines. An IEC health sector staff member told local media that no chickenpox vaccines are currently available in the area. Medical teams are urgently calling for medicines to treat secondary symptoms, along with soap and personal hygiene kits to prevent further transmission.

The health crisis is not confined to Karenni (Kayah) State. In central Myanmar's Salin Township, more than 100 people from four villages have recently suffered severe skin infections, according to the Salin People Administration Force. High prices of ointments and limited financial resources have hampered local response efforts. Similar outbreaks have been reported in Pauk Township, where over 1,000 displaced people are said to be suffering from skin diseases.

In many areas of central Myanmar, displacement remains fluid. Some IDPs cannot remain in fixed camps and are forced to relocate frequently depending on the movement of junta military columns, further complicating access to clean water and medical care.

Beyond health concerns, food insecurity is also deepening. In Tanintharyi Region, aid groups report serious food shortages as donor support declines. Local NGOs, community networks, and resistance-affiliated groups continue to provide assistance where possible. However, aid delivery remains extremely challenging, particularly in central Myanmar, where junta authorities restrict the transportation of goods between townships under the pretext of security controls.

Strike forces and local medical volunteers are attempting to fill the gap, including in Shwebo Township, but humanitarian needs are growing faster than available resources.

The combined pressures of disease outbreaks, food shortages, and restricted aid access underscore the increasingly fragile conditions facing displaced communities across Myanmar.



Conscripts on parade. Photo: Supplied

## Junta military steps up forced conscription

Myanmar's military authorities have intensified forced military conscription operations across multiple regions, with sweeping arrests targeting young men in urban centres and growing concerns that women may soon face compulsory service.

In Monywa, Sagaing Region, security forces conducted large-scale recruitment raids throughout February. On 20 February alone, five lorries reportedly transported more than 30 detained youths from the city's industrial zone. Earlier, between 12 and 16 February, over 100 young men were arrested during similar operations.

Residents say the arrests became particularly aggressive following a stage show held at the city's People's Square. For five consecutive nights, soldiers allegedly waited near the venue and detained youths returning from the event. A parent of one detainee told local media that families were barred from meeting those arrested. Attempts to secure release through informal payments reportedly failed. "Soldiers were arresting for five days... Detainees cannot meet with family members," the parent said, describing a climate of fear spreading across the city.

A similar pattern has emerged in Taunggyi, Shan State, where more than 50 youths were forcibly recruited and sent to Bahtoo military training school for basic instruction. The arrests were reportedly carried out jointly by junta authorities and the Pa-O National Organization (PNO), a pro-military militia group. Among those detained were 10 construction workers seized directly from their job site.

Local sources report that enforcement tactics have evolved. Residents told Mekong News that drones are now being used to monitor intersections and identify areas with fewer commuters before security vehicles abruptly arrive to detain targets. "Their technique has become different," one resident said, describing surveillance followed by sudden arrests.

Socioeconomic disparities have also surfaced. While most detainees remain in custody, reports indicate that two young men from wealthy families

paid five million kyats each to avoid conscription. Some of those arrested are reportedly sons of non-CDM government staff and business families, highlighting how enforcement reaches across social lines — though financial leverage appears to influence outcomes.

Beyond male conscription, concerns are growing over possible recruitment of women. Since January, authorities in Taunggyi, Monywa, and Mawlamyine have been collecting data on women aged 18 to 27. Though no formal announcement has been made, experts warn the move could signal preparation for female conscription, potentially assigning women to administrative or support roles as male troops are deployed to frontlines.

Data collection reportedly excludes married women and government staff, focusing instead on single women. In Monywa, residents reported several young women disappearing between 18 and 20 February, intensifying anxiety. A parent told Khit Thit Media that authorities did not clarify when recruitment would begin but were systematically gathering data.

According to a recent report by the Spring Revolution Database, more than 19,000 youths have been forcibly recruited since the enactment of the conscription law. While the majority were seized in rural areas, nearly 7,000 were detained in urban centres. Others were arrested while traveling, including at bus terminals, airports, and even IDP camps.

The expanding scope and evolving methods of enforcement suggest a nationwide drive that is reshaping daily life - and deepening public fear - across Myanmar.



Bo Nagar defects. Photo: Supplied

## CRACKS IN THE RESISTANCE? BO NAGAR DEFECTS TO THE MYANMAR JUNTA

**B**o Nagar, leader of the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), has surrendered to the Myanmar junta

On the evening of 18 February, the military-run Myawaddy TV announced that Bo Nagar (also known as Naing Lin), the prominent leader of the BNRA resistance group surrendered to the Myanmar junta.

According to the state-media broadcast, Bo Nagar and his family members arrived at a military base in Pale Township, Sagaing Region, at approximately 4:50 pm, turning over several weapons and ammunition.

This unexpected development follows a period of intense internal conflict within the resistance movement, culminating in a major attack by National Unity Government (NUG) forces against BNRA camps on 17 February.

The surrender marks a dramatic turn for a figure who was once a key symbol of the armed resistance in Sagaing.

Tensions between the NUG and the BNRA had escalated over several months, with the NUG accusing

the BNRA of extrajudicial killings, torture, and the oppression of civilians.

While state media has framed the event as a voluntary return to the "legal fold," many within the revolutionary movement are viewing the surrender with a mix of shock and scepticism.

Local residents and activists have pointed out that the infighting between the two groups provided an opening for the junta, which reportedly carried out gyrocopter airstrikes in the area during the clashes.

### EXAMINING DEVELOPMENTS IN MORE DEPTH

On February 5, KIO Vice Chairperson Lt. Gen. Gum Maw delivered a video speech stressing that Sagaing Region is strategically crucial for the defense of Kachin territory. He emphasized that instability or internal conflict among revolutionary forces in Sagaing could weaken the broader resistance movement. For this reason, the National Unity Government (NUG) has been attempting to mediate disputes among revolutionary groups operating in the area.

Bo Nagar formally transformed his armed group into the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) on September 9, 2023. BNRA fighters had previously participated in Operation 1027 under the command of the MNDAA's No. (681) Brigade, alongside the BPLA, KNDF, and other allied revolutionary forces.

Tensions between BNRA and NUG-aligned People's Defense Forces (PDFs) in Pale Township began as early as mid-2022, when the NUG sought to expand its administrative system in the area. After the KIO withdrew from Yinmarbin District — which includes Pale Township — friction between BNRA and NUG-controlled forces intensified further.

In November 2024, BNRA attempted to seize Pale Town and fought for four days before retreating due to heavy aerial bombardment by junta forces. In June 2025, combined revolutionary forces in Pale Township launched an assault on the Kandaunt police outpost under junta control, but BNRA did not participate in the operation, raising additional questions among allied groups.

By early 2026, the rivalry escalated into direct clashes. NUG command forces raided two BNRA checkpoints, prompting BNRA to retaliate by attacking two NUG checkpoints. These checkpoints are significant revenue sources for armed groups, supporting food, ammunition, and operational needs. On February 12, amid rising tensions, two BNRA members reportedly arrested and killed a PDF fighter named Kadone from NUG's No. (4) Regiment, further worsening relations.

Meanwhile, public dissatisfaction was already mounting over an unrelated but politically sensitive issue — the corruption case involving Kyi Pyar, Permanent Secretary of the NUG Prime Minister's Office. The verdict issued by Prime Minister Mann Win Khaing Than was limited to a "severe warning," rather than stronger disciplinary action as many members of the public had expected.

On February 18, news broke regarding Bo Nagar. On the same day, the Prime Minister's order concerning Kyi Pyar's corruption case became publicly clear to complainants and observers. The timing drew attention. By the following day, public criticism spread widely on

social media, with many expressing dissatisfaction over the NUG's handling of the corruption case, especially in contrast to the unfolding controversy surrounding Bo Nagar.

Suspicion toward Bo Nagar had already existed among some revolutionary actors. During online coordination meetings, some participants questioned his reasoning. In one instance, he claimed he was urgently marching toward battle, yet remained present throughout a lengthy Zoom meeting, prompting doubts about the consistency of his statements.

Further controversy arose after an image circulated showing Bo Nagar delivering weapons to junta officials while still carrying his pistol at his waist. A junta defector told BBC Burmese that standard procedure requires individuals surrendering weapons to carry no arms except those being officially handed over. He added that the junta is usually cautious about documenting such events and that the receiving officer appeared to be at G-1 level. According to the defector, the message behind the image may have been strategic — suggesting either that the junta intended to position Bo Nagar against other revolutionary forces or that he could potentially turn against them.

Taken together, the internal clashes in Sagaing Region, the controversy surrounding Bo Nagar, and public dissatisfaction over the NUG's corruption verdict have compounded concerns about unity, accountability, and public confidence within the revolutionary movement.

The loss of Bo Nagar's leadership and the fragmentation of the BNRA pose significant questions for the future of the resistance in central Myanmar, as the junta continues to exploit divisions among its opponents.



## BNRA MEMBERS ORDERED TO HAND OVER WEAPONS TO NEARBY NUG PEOPLE'S DEFENCE TEAMS

The Yinmabin District People's Defence Force (PDF) under the National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement on 19 February calling on those living in Yinmabin District hold weapons issued by the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) to promptly contact their respective district or township People's Defence Organisation (PDO or Pa Ka Pha) units and surrender the firearms and related equipment.

Ward, village-tract, and sub-township-level PDO and People's Administration Teams operating in Yinmabin District have also been advised to coordinate with district and township PDO officials if any BNRA members are found in their respective areas.

The announcement also strongly prohibits the sale, pawning, concealment, or destruction of any BNRA-issued weapons and accessories. It warned that strict action will be taken against anyone found engaging in such activities during inspections.

The statement comes after the NUG reported that around 150 members of the BNRA, including three

battalion commanders, surrendered their arms and joined the PDF. The move followed reports that BNRA leader Bo Nagar and several senior officials were taken away by two Myanmar junta helicopters on 18 February.

"Some BNRA members are afraid and avoiding contact with us because they believe they might be killed. But we have already met with some of them, and a number are now staying with us like brothers," said Ko Nay Min of Yinmabin District Battalion 12.

However, not all BNRA members have joined the PDF or PDO units.

Some are reported to have defected to the junta instead. In Min Tine Pin village, 15 BNRA members allegedly joined the junta forces, while another five are said to have joined the junta unit based in Pale Township.



General Yawd Serk. Photo: Mizzima

**RCSS CHAIRMAN GENERAL YAWD SERK  
DISCUSSES THE CHALLENGES OF FEDERALISM  
AND THE NCA IN SHAN STATE: INTERVIEW**

In a Mizzima Exclusive interview conducted on 7 February in Loi Tai Leng, the headquarters of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), U Sein Win, Managing Editor of Mizzima, sat down with General Yawd Serk, Chairman of the RCSS to discuss developments in Shan State.

Question: (U Sein Win) Mingalabar, Mr. Chairman. Since this year marks the 79th Shan State National Day, what key message would you like to convey to the people of Shan State on this special occasion?

Answer (General Yawd Serk): The Panglong Agreement has now reached its 79th anniversary - a truly significant span of time. It remains profoundly important to every ethnic group and every citizen. Without the Panglong Agreement, this Union would never have come into existence.

The fact that we have been unable to fulfill the promises contained within the Panglong Agreement is the very reason why the country hasn't progressed - this is a fact that can be proven by current reality. Because the Panglong Agreement serves as both evidence and a historical milestone, you cannot bypass it if you intend to reform the country.

Therefore, to reform the nation, it is essential to build trust. Only when we can build trust, we will be able to move forward with national reforms. Looking back at the past, it was our inability to build trust that led to the failure of all our negotiations.

Question: I have learnt through news reports that the Shan State Federal Affairs Steering Team was recently formed. Can we say that forming this steering team is a step toward gathering strength within Shan State to implement those Panglong promises you mentioned earlier?

Answer: If we look back at Shan State's history, our way of life was actually already a form of federalism. Looking at the era of the Saophas (Sawbwas), they governed their own respective domains and cooperated among themselves. If you examine that, it was a type of federal system. Later, when we joined with mainland Burma and signed the Panglong Agreement to enter the Union, the 'Federalist Shan State' vanished. The 1947 Constitution was lost, and when the 1974 Socialist Constitution emerged, the situation in Myanmar changed completely.

Trust between different ethnic groups also disappeared. Because of this, we reviewed all these historical facts and invited various organizations and ethnic groups to begin creating a political corridor for the public. If you look at the political parties, they are formed under the 2008 Constitution; therefore, everything they say and all their policies seem confined within the framework of that 2008 Constitution.

If you look at the revolutionary organizations, they each hold onto their own specific policies, so no one is in a position to truly represent and solve the issues for

the whole of Shan State. Consequently, the public has no place to express their desires or make their voices heard. Their voices are lost amidst the wars (conflicts). New generations of youth are also emerging, but they don't know which organization to support or follow.

That is why we considered a framework that can represent the public, and organized this Federal Affairs Steering Team. Furthermore, we must work to provide federal education to the people. We need to teach what federalism is and how we should live and practice it - even incorporating these lessons into schools. That is why this team was born, as stated in our announcement on the 6th.

Question: Even the Burmese military has started using the term 'Federal' now. It's been talked about among the Burmese public and other ethnic groups for a long time. In political circles, people say Shan State's federal affairs are extremely delicate. What is your view on how to handle the political problems of Shan State's federalism?

Answer: Yes, it is true that Shan State's federalism is very delicate and sensitive. However, federalism comes in many forms. We need to think about which model we will adopt - what the federal framework should look like for the Union, and what the federal framework should look like specifically for Shan State.

Question: Related to that, I noticed in your message today you mentioned a 'Federal Army.' Could you tell us more about your vision for jointly establishing a Federal Army?

Answer: This is a very broad subject. Here, I am merely presenting a conceptual idea. To actually implement it, various groups need to come together, discuss it, and establish a set of principles and policies."

Question: Could we describe you as a soldier with great political calculation?

Answer: "No, you can't. I am just a person who thinks according to nature - how things naturally arise and pass away. I wouldn't call myself a soldier who has great political calculation.

Question: Regarding our current revolution and the barriers to federalism - the military junta is the main obstacle. What should the revolutionary community do to unite? How do you see the best way forward?

Answer: Every group needs to study the nature of the process. They need to accept the reality of what is happening. If you only have 100 Kyats but you go around claiming you have 10,000 or 100,000 to do business, who is going to trust you?

Question: Regarding the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement), the RCSS has held onto it until now, maintaining that political problems must be solved through political means. In the current political landscape, can we say the NCA is still 'alive' for the self-determination of the Shan people? Is there still an opportunity there?"

Answer: The most important reason our organization holds onto the NCA is that it didn't come about easily. It took two years of negotiations to emerge. Furthermore, having countries like China, Thailand, Europe, the UN, India, and Japan as witnesses adds to the prestige and integrity of the NCA.

The fact that the NCA cannot move forward is related to the leaders. To sign the NCA, we first had to sign preliminary commitments. But because those promises were not followed, the signing became ineffective. The military seizing power from the NLD (National League for Democracy) government was their own separate issue, but doing so impacted the NCA and damaged the entire peace process.

They have been seizing power from one another. However, they had a responsibility to ensure that the political dialogue table was not destroyed. It had to be maintained. If there had been faith in the NCA and if promises had been kept, this coup would not have happened. There are laws in place, and the NCA is a political matter. In reality, the current crisis is what is harming the NCA."

Question: Is there a possibility for a unified platform where groups that signed the NCA, groups like the 7 Alliance, and those that are not part of either can all meet and discuss?

Answer: That point is still impossible to predict.

Question: This is my third time attending an RCSS event. From my observations, I see a lot of young people. Does the RCSS have a specific policy for nurturing and developing the youth and the next generation? What is that like?

Answer: Yes, we have a policy. We have been nurturing and supporting the youth from the very beginning. If we didn't have such a policy, why would we - as a revolutionary organization - spend so much money opening and maintaining schools? Even after they graduate, we continue to encourage and support them until they find employment.

Question: As a leader, are you satisfied with the current state of development in Loi Tai Leng and Shan State as a whole?

Answer: In truth, complete satisfaction is hard to come by. However, I manage my own mindset. I find fulfillment in the act of doing - in the fact that I am providing and working for the people. I take joy in the knowledge that 'I am serving' and 'I am contributing.'

Question: Shan State is a region rich in vacant, fallow, and virgin lands, as well as natural resources. What is the current situation regarding the right to manage these resources and the ability to export agricultural products to foreign markets?

Answer: Right now, farming in Shan State is still stuck in traditional methods. People plant in their old plots or clear a bit of new land to farm. They haven't reached the stage of producing enough to put products on the market systematically; it's still just traditional subsistence farming. To sell agricultural products, you first need to be able to produce them as a viable 'output.'

Actually, improving the lives of the public and securing market access for them is the responsibility of governments. Governments are supposed to handle this. However, those who claim to be our 'governments' haven't done it. Throughout successive governments, we haven't seen them truly working for the benefit of the people.

Question: What would you say are the challenges for the RCSS (Restoration Council of Shan State) currently? What specific points stand out?

Answer: There are three main organizational challenges. First, the healing and reform of the country's affairs is a critically important challenge. As I mentioned before, achieving political reform remains a major hurdle to this day.

Second, many armed revolutionary organizations have emerged. In the past, there have been instances of these groups fighting amongst one another. If we cannot communicate and negotiate effectively, this will become another massive challenge.

The third challenge is that the revolution has lasted for a very long time - over 60 years now. Our people have lived through the scourge of war for so long that they are in extreme poverty. This is a real challenge. If we were to rely entirely on the public for everything in this revolution today, it would be an incredibly difficult situation. This, too, is a significant challenge.

Question: Looking back from your childhood to your current position as a leader, did you ever expect that the journey would be this difficult?

Answer: I never imagined it. I joined the army when I was 17. From then until now, I've reached this position.

When I first joined, I only planned to serve for four years - I just wanted to see what being a soldier was like. While serving, I received military training, studied, met with the public, and learned political ideologies. From those experiences, I began to understand politics.

As I learned more, my responsibilities grew step by step. I fulfilled every duty given to me. While working, I always thought, 'We are about to get Shan State back soon; we are about to win.' I truly believed that. But as I thought that, time just kept passing by.

Question: "What message would you like to give to the people of Shan State - to all the diverse ethnic groups residing there?"

I have three messages.

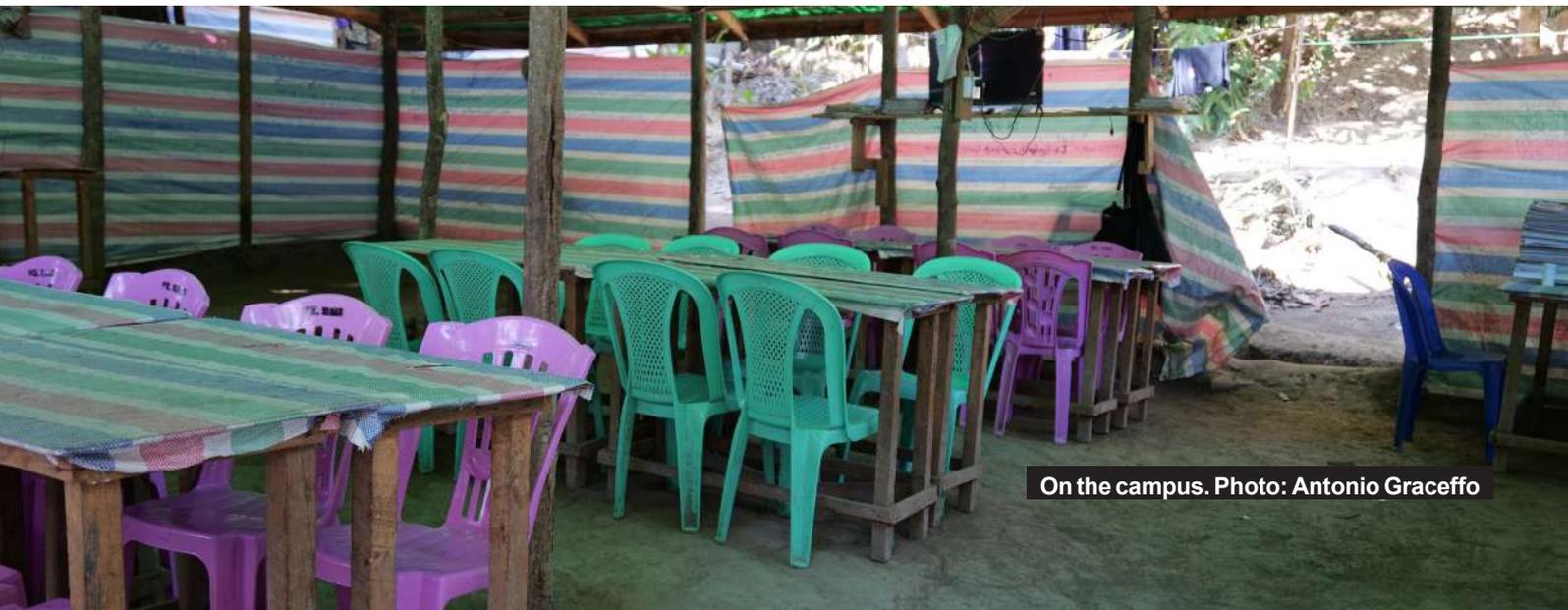
First, just as it is important to know how to live and survive, it is equally important to pursue as much knowledge as possible.

Second, the situation is changing very rapidly. Because the people of Shan State have to live among many different armed organizations, you need to know how to speak, how to move, and how to carry yourselves - and you must possess courage. You must have knowledge and wisdom. You need to be able to analyze and distinguish between what is good and what is bad. Then, you must be able to act accordingly.

Finally, in this era of IT (Information Technology), if you know how to use it properly, there are many benefits for you. But if you do not, it can bring a great deal of danger. Now, the era of AI is also emerging. AI is reaching a point where it can do almost anything. In this situation, if you do not use it systematically, it is like inviting a major problem.

If you lack the wisdom to distinguish between good and bad, then when you look at the news, you won't be able to tell what is real and what is fake. If you mistake the fake for the truth, or the truth for a fake, that becomes a serious problem.





On the campus. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

## A SCHOOL IN AN IDP CAMP IN BURMA REVEALS THE BROADER STORY OF WAR AND DISPLACEMENT

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

In Pekhon, on the Shan side of the Karenni-Shan border, an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp sprawls along both sides of a valley, with families living in houses made of bamboo and plastic tarps, integrated into the jungle and terraced up the side of the mountain. Stair steps are cut into the earth, but in the rainy season they turn to mud and slide down the slopes, making movement from house to house difficult, dirty, and wet.

The valley has only one way in, a long dirt road about forty minutes' drive from the nearest pavement. The remoteness and the thick jungle canopy are the only reasons the inhabitants are still alive. The camp is difficult to spot from the air, and it would be hard for jets to dive at the right angle to bomb it as they did the camp where most of the residents previously lived.

Drones, however, are another story. If government forces discover the camp, they could wreak havoc with drones or send soldiers down the single access road, killing unarmed civilians at will, something this community has already experienced. They have been displaced multiple times, first driven from their homes, then from one camp after another as the Burma army and its ethnic allies, the Pa-O National Army, terrorized civilians.

The camp's population is in the low thousands, underscoring how badly Burma's ongoing war has affected this region along the Shan-Karenni border. In

a recent nearby battle, fourteen thousand people were displaced in a single day. Nearly every IDP camp in the region has the same story: it used to be somewhere else but had to relocate because of Burma army attacks.

Water is scarce. The only source is a small stream far from the homes. Residents carry plastic bottles and jugs up and down steep terrain to collect small amounts of water and gather firewood to cook what little food they have. IDP camps receive no support or protection from the UN and must depend on limited assistance from private charities and churches.

As desperate as the situation is, this camp has a rare resource: Paula, the principal of the camp school. Despite shortages or the complete absence of nearly every resource, she built one of the best schools in the state. Even children from non-displaced families come to study there.

The classrooms have whiteboards. One bamboo-and-plastic classroom has two rows of computers, and another has a smart screen. All of the books, however, are photocopied, requiring long trips to make copies.

Principal Paula ensured that students have classes in English and Japanese, as well as science, math, and their mother tongue. Many parents choose resistance-controlled schools to avoid government propaganda and to ensure their children are literate in their home language as well as Burmese.

Her thirty years of experience before the revolution are evident. Everyone I spoke to, from students to teachers to the priest chaplain, respected her and credited her with building a strong school out of nothing.

The school's English teacher, Edward, gave me background on the school. While he was speaking, I noticed that on one plastic wall a student had written, "If the world was ending I want to be next." Edward said he encourages students to write whatever they feel to help them cope with war and displacement.

Another student wrote, "Dad is my hero, Mom is my life, he is my energy." These lines were written in English. Edward pointed to one written in Burmese and translated it: "Although I live in my country, I miss my country." The sentence captures the essence of displacement, being targeted by your own government despite having done nothing wrong.

In my interviews, I found that most students, in addition to losing their homes, had lost family members and friends to government bombs. One teacher lost his wife and child in the same airstrike. His remaining daughter, age 12, is alive, but he cannot reach her. She had been attending school in a government-controlled area, and it is now too dangerous for him to return. She is too young to travel alone, so they remain separated. She has lost her mother and brother and cannot see her father. He sits alone each night in his hut with memories of the time before the coup, when his family was whole.

Burma has 135 ethnic groups. The largest, the Bamar, control the military and the government. Most of the population is Buddhist, but some ethnic minorities are Christian. Karenni State is home to about seven related ethnic groups, most of whom are Christian, with Catholics forming the majority. This part of Shan State is inhabited by Karenni people and once belonged to Karenni State. Most students in the camp are Karenni and Catholic, although Edward emphasized that the school accepts students of all ethnicities and religions. As a result, there are nearly as many Buddhists as Christians.

"It's okay if they come from the war," Edward said, explaining that they even accept students whose families have not yet been displaced. Everyone is suffering in this war. Even children outside the camps endured school closures and a forced shift to Burmese propaganda without instruction in their mother tongue.

Their parents, including those still in their homes, suffered from joblessness and the collapse of the Burmese economy. They also endure periodic airstrikes.

"About half of the students are on scholarship because their parents can't pay," Edward said. The school tries to provide two meals per day, but "sometimes the school has no money for food, so we have to go house to house for donations."

Edward told me the plastic tarps must be replaced once a year. "So that's a bit of a burden until we can build permanent roofs and permanent walls," he said.

Across Karenni State and Karenni areas of Shan State, most IDP homes are made of green plastic tarps. Nearly all came from the Free Burma Rangers. David Eubank, the group's founder and leader, told me he has distributed tens of thousands since the coup. When the Rangers visit villages and camps, he asks what people need most. Spending time with the Rangers, the two most common requests I witnessed were vehicles and more tarps. Other frequent requests included solar panels, water pumps, and Starlink.

The list reveals what displacement truly means and how the war has pushed much of the region back to preindustrial conditions without electricity or running water. A plastic tarp costing only a few dollars has become an aspirational purchase for 80 percent of Karenni State and more than four million displaced people nationwide.

They were meant as temporary shelter. No one expected the war to last this long or that five years later families would still live beneath them. Sometimes a newer tarp is layered over an older one. In many cases, however, families are left with a single shredded sheet that lets in rain and wind.

Five years into the coup, the tarps are fading. Six cohorts of high school students have turned eighteen and either joined the resistance or joined their parents in IDP camps. The lucky ones find volunteer work with the civil administration. A precious few continue their education. Every student I interviewed seemed bright, polite, and determined. All wanted further study. Most said it would likely be impossible for lack of funds.

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



The underground operating theater.  
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

## BUILDING AN UNDERGROUND OPERATING THEATER TO PROTECT FROM AIRSTRIKES

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

**T**hirty-four-year-old Saw Emmet is a qualified civil engineer who joined the Burmese civil-disobedience movement, shortly after the 2021 military coup, and eventually made his way to the jungle to serve as a combat medic. He said that, as fulfilling and useful as his work on the front lines was, he did not hesitate for a moment when a hospital in Karenni State asked if he could help build an underground, reinforced operating theater to keep patients and doctors safe during airstrikes.

While still overseeing construction of the operating theater, he was offered his next project: helping to build a university in resistance-controlled areas. He has now found a new calling in keeping the helpers safe. In the outside world he would be called a freelancer, but inside the revolution area he works only for food and a place to stay.

Asked about the greatest difficulties in construction in a war zone, Saw Emmet said material availability and technical access were serious obstacles, but transportation has been a near-crippling challenge.

Schools and hospitals now have to be built in remote areas to avoid becoming targets for airstrikes. Paved roads often cannot be used because they are under government control or are being targeted. As a result, most transport is done by truck along nearly invisible jungle paths that become impassable in the rainy season and long and difficult in the dry season.

The first step in the project was building a road through the jungle, a muddy and time-consuming task. A surface of rocks had to be laid, often by hand. When the rains came, large puddles formed, making it difficult to get vehicles in and out. Trucks carrying heavy loads of construction materials would sink up to their axles.

Saw Emmet said that on a similar project in another country there would have been multiple excavators. Here, they had only one small machine, and it, like the trucks, also became stuck in the mud. It broke down several times.

"But the operators, they are very good," he said, laughing. "They can operate the excavator and also they can fix the broken parts." After five years without access to spare parts, operators have become experts at fabricating replacements or repurposing components from other vehicles. "Because of them, we could finish a lot of work."

To build a bunker that extends underground and can withstand explosions, several layers of thick concrete are required, reinforced with heavy rebar. The materials must be special-ordered and transported by truck through the jungle. Shipments are broken up in case one truck is captured or hit by a bomb. By the time the materials arrive, the price has tripled.

Excavation presents another challenge. The hole must be deep enough to accommodate not only the

operating theater but also thick layers of concrete. Engineering calculations must account for angles and soil stability so the walls do not collapse during construction.

The concrete itself was highly specialized. It was needed in large quantities, and the mixing, pouring, and timing had to be precise and coordinated with the weather. As with other materials, sourcing it was difficult and expensive, and much of the mixing and pouring had to be done by hand.

"We didn't have a boom pump, so we had to pour with manpower," Saw Emmet said. Normally, an entire floor would be poured and cured at once. Because the process took so long by hand, they had to create construction joints, pouring and drying the floor in sections.

He joked that universities do not teach engineers how to design bomb-proof structures, so in wartime they must rely on past knowledge and additional reading to solve new problems.

Saw Emmet said he is not the only civil engineer working with the revolution. Many serve in headquarters and logistics, planning defensive fighting positions, trenches, and bunkers for the resistance. "In this revolution time," he said, "the soldiers and the resistance forces and other organizations focus on the battle front line, because we need to win."

His own role, however, is different. As an unattached engineer working with civilian institutions, he focuses on protecting noncombatants. "The revolution is now five years after the coup. It is a very long time. And there are many people fleeing their houses to other places in the jungle. They need a safe place, a safe house. Because in Karenni, the Burma Army cannot directly get into Karenni, but they can carry out airstrikes and mortar shelling. Some of their airstrikes hit civilian areas. When I hear the news that civilian IDP camps were bombed and how many people died, I feel very sad."

He said the revolution needs to win quickly, but in the meantime they must protect the people standing with them. "So I want to help with my profession."

He believes engineers and other educated civilians will play a crucial role in rebuilding the country. "There's a lot of engineering work that needs to be done. Roads and bridges and also a water supply," he said. "In Karenni, there are only a few places where we can get water."

Water shortages are a constant problem for internally displaced people's camp, and the combination of limited water and instability makes it difficult for families to grow food. He said engineers could help address this, if they had access to the necessary materials.

He returned to his broader mission. "We need to win this revolution fast so we can do other rehabilitation work for the states and for the country." In addition to supporting the resistance during the war, he said engineers will be essential to rebuilding society afterward.

He argued that even before the coup, construction standards in many parts of the country were poor.

"Last year we had the earthquake in Sagaing and also in Mandalay, and many buildings collapsed. So many people died. But there are other countries where earthquakes happen, like Japan or Taiwan. In Japan, they have many disasters like earthquakes, storms, and tsunamis, and no one dies. They have many skilled professionals, many professional engineers. They already consider disasters when they make a building code. So they prepare and improve their engineering."

He pointed to technologies such as base-isolation systems, installed at the foundation of residential buildings to reduce earthquake damage, and said Burma needs similar approaches.

At the same time, he said the country must address basic failures in workmanship and materials. Investigations after the earthquake found substandard materials, improperly installed reinforcement steel, and concrete that did not meet design strength because contracts were awarded to the lowest bidder.

"So we need to improve technically, and we also need to educate the worker associations and the clients," he said. "If they have adequate general knowledge about their property and their buildings, I am sure we can prevent that kind of disaster."

Until that day comes, Saw Emmet remains one of the many teachers, doctors, nurses, and other civilians focused on keeping people alive and safe so they can build a better country when the war ends.

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



## ICRC REACHES OVER 500,000 PEOPLE IN MYANMAR AMID DEEPENING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In its latest “Facts and Figures” report covering January to December 2025, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it reached more than half a million people across Myanmar in 2025, as conflict and displacement and “explosive hazards” continued to drive humanitarian needs nationwide.

The ICRC said it provided emergency and longer-term assistance to communities affected by armed conflict, violence and natural disasters, working alongside the Myanmar Red Cross Society and local partners.

Economic assistance formed a core component of its response. Around 139,000 people received support to restore food production through seeds, tools and organic fertilisers, while more than 105,000 people improved food consumption through emergency rations. Over 137,000 people were given essential household items such as blankets and hygiene kits, and more than 12,000 received direct support for daily needs.

Access to basic services remained a major concern. Approximately 150,000 people benefited from improved access to safe drinking water, and 55,000 received shelter assistance. The ICRC also supported

48 hospitals, clinics and rehabilitation centres with infrastructure upgrades to ensure reliable energy and water supplies.

Health services were bolstered through support to 30 facilities of the Ministry of Health and emergency referrals for nearly 17,000 patients. More than 13,000 people received emergency treatment from ICRC-supported teams.

With landmines and unexploded ordnance posing persistent threats, nearly 5,000 people with disabilities accessed physical rehabilitation services, including 1,892 survivors of these explosive hazards. Over 2,300 prosthetic and orthotic devices were provided.

The ICRC also conducted 1,790 risk awareness sessions for landmines and unexploded ordnance, reaching about 74,000 people, and distributed more than 76,000 information materials to promote safer behaviour.

The ICRC stated its neutral and independent mandate under the Geneva Conventions remains central to delivering assistance “wherever people are and whatever the circumstances”.



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR RECORDS WORLD'S HIGHEST LANDMINE CASUALTIES AS CONFLICT INTENSIFIES, SAYS LANDMINE MONITOR

According to the 2025 Landmine Monitor report, Myanmar recorded the highest number of casualties globally in 2024 due to landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The report states deaths and injuries more than doubled in a year as conflict spread across the country.

The report found that 2,029 people were killed or injured in 2024. This is an increase from 1,003 in 2023 and 545 in 2022, and marks a sharp escalation since the military coup in February 2021. Two-thirds of casualties were caused by antipersonnel mines. The majority of victims - 86 percent - were civilians.

Since the Landmine Monitor began recording data in Myanmar in 1999, at least 9,206 people have been killed or injured by mines and ERW in Myanmar. The true figure, however, is believed to be higher due to underreporting.

The report says Myanmar's armed forces continue to produce and frequently use antipersonnel landmines. Non-state armed groups - including People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) - also laid mines, including improvised victim-activated devices. New mine use increased significantly in 2024-2025.

As of October 2025, suspected mine and ERW contamination had been reported in 211 of Myanmar's

330 townships, in every state and region. The United Nations previously described the country as "littered with landmines."

The Landmine Monitor also documented allegations that the military has forced civilians to act as human shields and "human minesweepers." Junta troops reportedly force civilians to walk ahead of troops in mined areas, a practice that rights groups say constitutes grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Despite the worsening crisis, Myanmar is not party to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. While it has voted in favour of recent UN resolutions supporting the treaty, neither the junta authorities nor the parallel National Unity Government (NUG) has taken steps toward accession.

Access to medical care and rehabilitation for survivors has deteriorated sharply amid ongoing conflict and attacks on health facilities. International demining organisations remain barred from conducting clearance operations.

Humanitarian groups warned that without urgent action to halt new mine use and allow systematic clearance, civilians will continue to pay the price long after the guns fall silent.



**NUCC URGES ASEAN TO MAINTAIN  
NON-RECOGNITION OF MYANMAR JUNTA  
INSTITUTIONS AFTER PHUKET MEETING**

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) issued a statement on 19 February regarding Thailand's informal meeting with Myanmar's military junta in Phuket. They welcomed humanitarian engagement but emphasized that ASEAN should not recognize the junta's election results or any related institutions.

The text of the NUCC statement is as follows.

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) acknowledges Thailand's recent informal meeting with the Myanmar military regime in Phuket. As a frontline neighbor, Thailand directly faces the humanitarian challenges, cross-border complexities and security implications arising from Myanmar's crisis, and NUCC welcomes initiatives aimed at easing suffering and promoting dialogue with ethnic communities.

However, NUCC stresses that ASEAN's credibility depends on consistency. The electoral process conducted in Myanmar between December 2025

and January 2026 was neither free nor inclusive, and ASEAN has already taken the principled position of not recognizing the election results. This position must extend to all institutions arising from that process, including the Hluttaws and USDP claimed parliamentarians.

Engagement with Myanmar must remain strictly humanitarian and security focused. ASEAN unity requires that political legitimacy be reserved for inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders, as reflected in the Stakeholders Engagement Meetings (SEM) initiated by Malaysia and reinforced by the Philippines.

NUCC reaffirms its commitment to work with ASEAN's Chair Troika and member states to uphold this principled stance and ensure that ASEAN's engagement with Myanmar remains balanced, constructive, and legitimacy-preserving.



## NEARLY 120,000 CIVILIAN HOMES TORCHED ACROSS MYANMAR SINCE 2021 COUP AS ARSON ATTACKS INTENSIFY

According to a report released on 19 February by Data for Myanmar, a total of 119,411 civilian homes across Myanmar were burned down during fighting and military conflict between May 2021 and August 2025 following the coup.

The group said that 115,568 of those homes were burned down in arson attacks carried out by the Military junta and its affiliated groups during this period.

According to the data broken down by state and region, Sagaing Region recorded the highest level of destruction, with more than 77,700 homes burned. This represents over 65 percent of the total number of civilian homes destroyed nationwide.

Between June and August 2025 alone, more than 2,500 civilian homes in 81 villages across eight states and regions were set on fire. During this three-month period, large numbers of homes were destroyed in Kanbalu in Sagaing region, Minhla in Bago region, Chauk and Pakoku in Magway region, Myingyan and Nyaung-U in Mandalay region.

Clashes between Military Commission forces and revolutionary groups have escalated in the post-coup period, resulting in widespread arson attacks across conflict-affected areas.

"The Military Commission and its affiliated groups have been seen to have carried out military operations in the conflict areas, burning down towns and villages, destroying houses, looting valuables, and setting fire to houses while stationed in those areas," said the statement.

Concerning the situation in Rakhine State, the report said that more than 3,800 civilian homes were burned in Buthidaung Township in May 2024. However, it added that the specific group responsible for those incidents has not yet been identified.

Data for Myanmar has called on all armed groups to immediately cease targeting civilians and setting fire to civilian homes. The organization also urged the international community to exert pressure to bring an end to such actions as soon as possible.

The report further warned that the figures presented may be lower than the actual situation on the ground, as incidents that could not be independently verified or lacked complete data were excluded due to various challenges.



## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS ENTRENCH IN KYAIKTO TOWNSHIP VILLAGES, LEAVING THOUSANDS DISPLACED AND UNABLE TO RETURN

Local sources say that thousands of residents from villages in Kyaikto Township, Mon State, remain displaced and unable to return home because Myanmar junta troops have been stationed inside their communities.

Beginning on 9 February, junta forces from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 207 and Artillery Battalion 310, based in Theinzayat town in Kyaikto Township, advanced toward the villages of Sitkwin, Mokekamawt, Khaywe, Kyaukyaydwin, Winkan, and Kyaukpongyi.

Since that day, junta troops have deployed and entrenched themselves across Khaywe, Kyaukpongyi, Winkan, and Mokekamawt villages. With the forces now facing off directly with resistance groups, civilians are reportedly too afraid to return home.

The area where military tensions remain high lies near the Sittaung River in villages under Kyaikto Township, along the border between Mon State and Bago Region.

Due to the current situation, residents from at least ten villages — including those mentioned — have fled to forests within territory controlled by Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 1, Battalion 3, as well as to Theinzayat town. These villages are nearly 40 miles from Kyaikto town, so only a small number of people have fled toward Kyaikto.

“We’ve heard the junta troops may continue advancing toward Kawkat (a village inside KNU Brigade 1, Battalion 3 territory). There have already been clashes, and at the moment both sides are still confronting each other,” a frontline source told Mizzima

on the afternoon of 20 February.

“No one dares stay. Everyone had to run,” said one local resident.

Clashes broke out on the very day the junta column first entered the area, leaving four resistance fighters dead. In addition, four villagers from Mokekamawt were killed during the fighting due to gunfire and alleged arrests and killings by junta troops.

Similarly, residents from Hpoewarthein village and the villages of Ahlugyi and Ahlulay, located along the Kyaikto–Bilin Township border where junta forces advanced, have also been unable to return home.

The junta column had previously entered Ahlulay, Ahlugyi, Hpoewarthein, Nyaunghtaut, and Shansu villages once on 7 February and earlier on 12 December, 2025.

During those operations, clashes occurred between junta troops and resistance groups active in Bilin Township. Civilian deaths were also reported due to artillery shelling and killings attributed to junta forces.

In addition, junta troops reportedly took civilians’ motorcycles, money, and phones and burned down some houses.

At present, some residents from Ahlugyi, Ahlulay, and Nyaunghtaut villages have returned home, but residents of Hpoewarthein village where nearly the entire village was destroyed are still displaced and unable to resettle.



## NATIONAL UNITY AND MILITARY-POLITICAL COORDINATION ARE ESSENTIAL FOR BUILDING CHIN STATE

Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the National Unity Government (NUG) stated that the building of Chin State will only be successful if the Chin people are united. He made these remarks during the 78th Chin National Day ceremony held via Zoom platform at 10:00 am on 20 February.

He added that as Chin State is moving toward becoming a fully controlled territory, it is necessary to continue establishing guaranteed liberated areas and to carry out the Chin national liberation to its completion.

"It is necessary to simultaneously implement the liberation of Chin State with full guarantees through both military and political means. For this, national unity is crucial. Only when there is coordination and consultation among the Chin people themselves will the building of Chin State succeed," President Duwa Lashi La said during the ceremony.

To achieve these objectives, the President stated that it is necessary to understand the characteristics of Chin State, which include geographical limitations and differences in tribes and group traditions.

"Although we share the same desire to end the dictatorship, success has been delayed due to fragmented forces. We must aim for collective success rather than individual organizational success. We must take to heart that without unity, success is impossible, but with unity, dictators cannot survive," said Pu Zin Kyung, Chairman of the Chinland Council.

Pu Zin Kyung stated that during the five years of the Spring Revolution, organizations have shared common goals: the total eradication of the dictatorship, the final abolition of the 2008 Constitution, the establishment of a federal democratic system in the future nation, and the return of power to the people.

The Chin National Day event, organized by the Chinland Council (CC), was attended by NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La, CRPH Chairman U Aung Kyi Nyunt, KNU Chairman Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, KNPP Chairman Khu Oo Reh, Chinland Council Chairman Pu Zin Kyung, and Chin State Government Prime Minister Salai Myo Htike, all of whom delivered speeches.

The date of 20 February is designated as Chin National Day based on a conference held in Falam from 19 to 22 February 1948, attended by over 5,000 people, where it was unanimously decided to abolish the traditional chieftainship system and replace it with a democratic system.

Out of the nine townships in Chin State, the Military Commission only controls Hakha and Tedim, while revolutionary forces have captured the remaining seven townships and are implementing public administration.

However, there are differing stances between two major forces in Chin State: the Chinland Council (CC), which includes the Chin National Army (CNA) and local defense forces, and the Chin Brotherhood (CB), which has captured some towns and is allied with the Arakan Army (AA).



## MYANMAR JUNTA ORDERS CRACKDOWN ON PRIVATE MINI-CINEMAS AND CANCELS EXISTING SCREENING PERMITS

According to reports published on 20 February by newspapers controlled by the Military Commission, legal action will be taken against the operation of private mini-cinemas.

The Military Commission has directed the Region and State Video Business Inspection and Supervisory Committees to immediately cancel any screening permits previously granted to these private cinemas. It also ordered that action be taken against unauthorized film screenings in accordance with the Television and Video Law.

The statement said the decision was taken after authorities found that some business owners had been operating private mini-cinemas using projectors or televisions in partitioned rooms resembling those in hotels or guesthouses. It warned that such activities could result in negative social consequences.

The statement also alleged that several private cinemas, including RIO Private Cinema in Sanchaung Township, and The Vibe Mini Cinema in Pyinmana Township, have continued operating unlawfully by screening uncensored films.

The Military Commission warned that it will take legal action against any private cinemas that continue

to operate or screen uncensored films without holding a valid business license.

When contacted by phone for comment, a representative of The Vibe Mini Cinema said only that the situation is as described in the official statement. Other private cinema operators did not respond to requests for comment.

The Military Commission's statement said that legal action would be taken under the Television and Video Law, but it did not specify the relevant section of the law.

However, under Section 32 of the Television and Video Law, anyone found guilty of operating a video business for commercial purposes without a valid license can face imprisonment ranging from a minimum of six months to a maximum of three years, along with a fine of up to 1,000,000 kyats. In addition, any property or equipment directly connected to the offense may be confiscated.



## NUG CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S INTIMIDATION OF TIMOR-LESTE DIPLOMAT

On 16 February, Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) condemned the military junta's reported intimidation and expulsion of Timor-Leste's diplomat, saying it violates international norms and urging global support for justice in Myanmar.

The statement is as follows.

The National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) strongly condemns reports that the terrorist military junta has pressured the diplomatic representative of Timor-Leste to leave Myanmar within seven days.

This act of intimidation against diplomatic engagement undermines the established framework of diplomatic relations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. While Article 9 permits a receiving State to declare a diplomat persona non grata, this authority must be exercised in accordance with

established diplomatic procedures and international law. Any form of coercion or intimidation is inconsistent with the spirit of the Convention and the principles governing peaceful diplomatic engagement.

The NUG maintains regular communication with several ASEAN member states, including Timor-Leste. The Myanmar military's decision to single out Timor-Leste raises serious concerns regarding its respect for international diplomatic norms and practice.

The NUG expresses its sincere appreciation to all countries, including Timor-Leste, for their continued support for accountability in Myanmar, justice for victims, and the end of the culture of impunity. We respectfully call upon the international community to sustain and strengthen its assistance to the people of Myanmar during this critical period.

# FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MYANMAR FACE SEVERE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CRISIS DUE TO PRISON ABUSE AND MALNUTRITION

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported on 18 February that thousands of female political detainees across Myanmar are suffering from serious menstrual disorders and reproductive health complications.

According to the report, extreme stress, physical abuse, and chronic malnutrition within the prison system have led to widespread hormonal imbalances. Many women have reported amenorrhea the total absence of periods for three to six months, while others suffer from premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) triggered by the harsh conditions.

Prison authorities bear a special obligation to provide healthcare tailored to women's biological needs, AAPP said.

Access to menstrual products remains a critical issue for women in detention, and ensuring regular menstrual health must be treated as a priority.

Female inmates across multiple prisons are grappling with health complications stemming from mental and physical abuse, with premenstrual dysphoric disorder emerging as the most common condition, according to a former political prisoner and female Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) health worker.

Women in detention are reportedly given only painkillers such as Diclofenac and paracetamol to manage menstrual cramps, a practice that risks long-term complications including kidney damage.

Some female political prisoners require medical examinations and even surgery for gynaecological conditions after their release, according to AAPP.

A political detainee who developed amenorrhea while in custody lodged complaints with prison authorities over the shortage of medication and the absence of a female doctor, but no action was taken, AAPP said.

Prison authorities, AAPP said, are downplaying prisoners' suffering and denying requests for transfers to external hospitals.

AAPP said that female prisoners' menstrual health problems are worsened by harsh prison conditions, abuse, malnutrition, limited access to drinking water and sanitary products, and poor hygiene, factors that can trigger infections and hormonal imbalances.

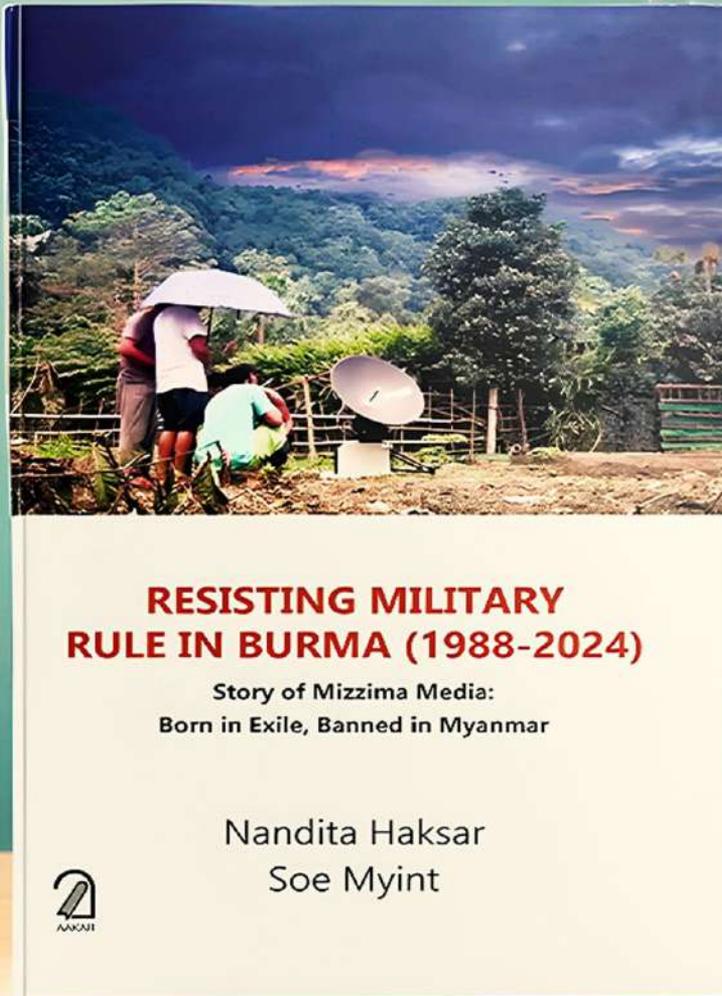
The challenges faced by women in prison represent not only a violation of human rights but also a long-term reproductive health crisis that could affect the well-being of an entire generation.

AAPP urged local and international organizations to closely monitor the situation and apply strong pressure on the authorities involved.

Data from AAPP reveals that of the 22,783 individuals incarcerated for political reasons across Myanmar, 4,308 are women.

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## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS TORCH 34 HOUSES IN YAESAGYO TOWNSHIP AS RESIDENTS FLEE ADVANCING COLUMN

**M**yanmar junta troops operating in the southern part of Yesagyo Township, Magway Region, set fire to Thamantapo village, resulting in 34 houses being burned to ashes, according to local residents.

On the morning of 15 February, a military column of approximately 100 personnel arriving from Yesagyo town entered and set fire to the village.

"The column advanced early in the morning. They entered the village after firing heavy artillery. Shortly after arriving, they started the fires. 34 houses were destroyed," a local man from Yesagyo said.

During the incident, 25 houses from Thamantapo (Middle) village which has about 600 households and

nine houses from Thamantapo (South) village were destroyed by the fire started by junta troops.

The military column of about 100 soldiers from Yesagyo-based Battalion 258 has now reached the vicinity of Gyi Kan village, forcing residents from surrounding villages to flee.

Previously, on 12 and 13 February, the junta used jet fighters and motorized paragliders to bomb Mon Nyin and Chin Yar Kone villages, resulting in the deaths of three civilians.



## MIZORAM SUSPENDS INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER TRADE FOR TWO MONTHS FOLLOWING DEATH OF INDIAN DRIVER

The Mizoram government has ordered a temporary two-month closure of the India–Myanmar border trade route starting 16 February, citing significant security concerns.

The decision, issued by the Lawngtlai District magistrate, follows the death of Lalramsanga, a 37-year-old driver from Mizoram who was found dead in Shin Letwa village, located in Myanmar’s Paletwa Township.

The suspension halts all border crossings and cargo transportation, effectively cutting off a vital supply line for essential goods.

“There is nothing we can do when the road is closed. We can only sit and wait,” a trader in Mizoram told Mizzima, urging authorities to reopen the route as soon as possible. “If the road reopens sooner rather than later, it will be convenient for everyone,” he said.

Local traders have voiced immediate concern over the impact of the closure, warning of imminent supply shortages and price hikes in Myanmar’s Chin and Rakhine States.

Perishable goods, including potatoes, onions, and tomatoes, are already at risk of spoilage, while

shipments of dry goods, fuel, and rice remain stranded at the border.

“Both sides will be affected,” a trader in Mizoram told Mizzima.

Goods are transported by road from Lawngtlai in Mizoram directly to Shinletwa, while during the rainy season they are shipped by waterways, including through Khaki, before continuing on to Kyauktaw in Rakhine State.

The order states that all cross-border movement and the import of goods are prohibited, warning that violations will be prosecuted under Section 233 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Mizoram police said an investigation into the death is underway and that action will be taken against those responsible. Similar incidents in previous years have also prompted the temporary suspension of cross-border trade routes.

Local traders are urging authorities to reopen the border trade route promptly, despite ongoing security concerns.



## BROUK PETITIONS ARGENTINIAN COURT TO ENSURE REPARATIONS FOR ROHINGYA

On 12 February, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) released a statement detailing their petition to a court in Argentina to ensure reparations are granted to Rohingya genocide victims. BROUK states that the Rohingya have a right to reparations under international law.

The text of the statement is as follows.

BROUK has filed a civil claim against the architects of the Rohingya genocide at a court in Buenos Aires, demanding reparations for Rohingya victims. The claim is part of a criminal investigation in Argentina, where the judiciary is already pursuing charges against senior Burmese military officials for genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya, under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Those named in the civil claim include Min Aung Hlaing and Soe Win, the Commander-in-Chief and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese military respectively, and other military officials.

“Rohingya have suffered through a decades-long genocide, affecting every aspect of their lives. The generations of Rohingya victims – whether still in Burma or living as refugees elsewhere – have a right to reparations, and we hope this case in Argentina will be the first real step towards that,” said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

BROUK’s petition stresses that senior Burmese military officials, including Min Aung Hlaing and Soe Win, hold significant economic assets that can be used to compensate Rohingya victims, as identified by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and others. This

includes the two major, military-owned conglomerates Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), as well as a series of other private, military-tied entities often called “crony companies”. Holding perpetrators financially accountable is an important step toward ending impunity and supporting justice for survivors.

BROUK has urged the court to work with the UN Independent International Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar, as well as domestic Argentine state-led financial investigative bodies, to identify further assets that could be used to compensate victims.

“It is unacceptable that the Burmese military is continuing to amass blood money from its web of private assets, while Rohingya victims are struggling to survive. We urge the Argentinian judiciary to take up this new case and ensure that Rohingya who have had to flee for their lives, suffer unspeakable violations, or seen family members killed get the compensation they deserve from those responsible,” said Tun Khin.

After BROUK filed its civil suit in Buenos Aires on 12 February 2026, the Argentinian judiciary is expected to assess the request.

This new civil claim builds on that momentum by extending accountability efforts toward reparations for victims. The case reflects sustained advocacy by Rohingya organisations to advance justice through international legal mechanisms.

### Background:

In 2019, BROUK filed a universal jurisdiction (UJ) case in Buenos Aires, alleging that specific current and former Burmese military and civilian officials committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya. The case was formally accepted in 2021, and in February 2025, the Federal Court in Buenos Aires formally approved the request and issued arrest warrants for 22 military officials and three civilians in connection with these crimes.

Under international human rights law, victims of violations have a right to reparations – a principle that is also enshrined in the Argentine legal code and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This could range from economic or other material compensation, to legal or medical rehabilitation, and public apologies or guarantees of non-repetition.

For Rohingya survivors, reparations are not only about financial compensation, but about recognition, dignity, and acknowledgment of the harm they have endured.



Photo: AFP

## HRM SUBMISSION TO UN SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA BUILDING 'DIGITAL DICTATORSHIP' TO CRUSH DISSENT

**H**uman Rights Myanmar (HRM) says Myanmar's military junta has constructed an integrated digital surveillance system to dismantle freedom of assembly and association in a report submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on peaceful assembly and association in November 2025.

HRM describes the system as a "digital dictatorship," combining AI-powered CCTV systems, internet firewalls, spyware, and sweeping cybersecurity laws to identify, track, and imprison critics.

The report details that since the 2021 coup, the junta has deployed facial recognition cameras in major cities, including Yangon and Mandalay, supplied by Chinese firms such as Dahua, Huawei, and Hikvision. Surveillance footage is allegedly matched against national ID databases to identify protest participants for arrest.

At the network level, HRM said authorities are building a "Great Firewall" system using deep packet inspection technology that can monitor and block encrypted communications. The group also documented the use of spyware obtained from suppliers in China, Russia, and Iran to infiltrate devices and track activists.

HRM's submission argues that the junta has dismantled legal safeguards and replaced them

with amended laws. These include the Electronic Transactions Law, Counter-Terrorism Law bylaws, and a 2025 Cybersecurity Law. Through these dubious legal provisions, authorities are granted broad powers to access data, criminalise online dissent, and prosecute VPN use.

As of November 2025, nearly 30,000 people have been arbitrarily detained since the coup, HRM said. Digital surveillance has served as primary evidence in many prosecutions.

Women activists have been disproportionately targeted through coordinated online harassment, doxing, and sexualised disinformation campaigns, often followed by offline arrests, the report added.

HRM warned that the expansion of biometric data collection and a national electronic ID system could enable what it described as "algorithmic repression" against ethnic minorities.

The group urged the UN and member states to suspend the transfer of surveillance technologies to Myanmar and sanction suppliers. Greater accountability should also be demanded of telecom operators and digital platforms that facilitate the system.



Photo: AFP

## UN CALLS FOR SCAM CENTRE CLAMPDOWN AMID 'STAGGERING' ABUSES

The UN human rights agency on 20 February called on governments to clamp down on scam centres, which have mushroomed in Southeast Asia and where hundreds of thousands of people have been trafficked into forced labour.

The agency released a report documenting torture, sexual abuse, forced abortions, food deprivation, solitary confinement and other abuses.

"The litany of abuse is staggering and at the same time heart-breaking," UN Human Rights high commissioner Volker Turk said, calling on governments to act against corruption that was "deeply entrenched in such lucrative scamming operations, and to prosecute the criminal syndicates behind them".

The UNHCR agency had already said in a 2023 report that hundreds of thousands of people were forced to work in the centres, that other investigations have found are responsible for billions of dollars of online fraud.

The new report said satellite imagery and on-ground reports show that nearly three-quarters of the scam operations are in the Mekong region and have spread to some Pacific Island countries, South Asia, Gulf States, West Africa and the Americas.

Based on accounts from victims, police, and civil society groups, the report said forced labourers had described being held in immense compounds resembling self-contained towns, made up of heavily fortified multi-storey buildings with barbed wire-topped walls and armed guards.

The report into forced labour at scam centres in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates between 2021 and 2025, reinforced reports of the deprivation that the scam centre workers are put through.

"A victim from Sri Lanka related how those who failed to meet monthly scamming targets were subject to immersion in water containers (known as 'water prisons') for hours," said the report.

"Victims also recounted being forced to witness or even conduct grave abuse of others as a means to ensure compliance; one Bangladeshi victim said that he was ordered to beat other workers and a victim from Ghana recounted being forced to watch his friend being beaten in front of him."

A Vietnamese woman told how she was starved for a week after trying to escape.

People said that police and border guards were sometimes complicit in the scam centres.

The UN said that many of the forced labourers were wrongly treated as criminals once freed.

The victims "require coordinated timely, safe and effective rescue operations, respect for the principle of non-refoulement, as well as available support mechanisms to ensure torture and trauma rehabilitation and address risks of reprisals or re-trafficking," said Turk.

AFP



Photo: AFP

# 235 CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS URGE UNHRC TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION

A coalition of 235 civil society groups from Myanmar and around the world issued an open letter on 18 February, urging UN Human Rights Council members to reject the Myanmar junta's sham election, push for accountability, and take concrete steps to weaken the military's human rights violations.

The text of the letter is as follows.

We, the undersigned 235 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations, urge the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to take decisive, principled, concrete and time-bound action to protect the rights and dignity of the people of Myanmar. As the Council considers its 2026 resolution on Myanmar, we call for the adoption of a robust resolution that:

1. Responds effectively to the escalating human rights and humanitarian catastrophe;
2. Unequivocally rejects the military junta's attempts to seize legitimacy through a sham electoral process conducted under the military-drafted 2008 Constitution and refuses recognition of any outcomes or governance structures arising from it;
3. Impedes the junta's capacity to carry out airstrikes and other atrocity crimes, including through measures that restrict access to aviation fuel, arms, and dual-use technologies;

4. Addresses transnational organized crimes and the criminal economies (or illicit financial networks) that enable the junta to continue its terror campaign; and

5. Advances accountability through all available international legal avenues.

Excellencies,

The Myanmar crisis is the direct consequence of the military's attempted coup in February 2021 and its subsequent campaign of systematic violence to unlawfully seize and consolidate power against the will of the people. Since then, the military junta has deliberately applied terror and repression with total impunity.

Over the past five years, the Myanmar military junta has waged a sustained campaign of terror attacks against civilians, marked by widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. These abuses include indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, massacres, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, conflict-related sexual violence, and mass arbitrary arrest and detention. Since February 2021, at least 30,476 political prisoners have been arrested, 22,780 of whom remain detained, while 7,804 people have been killed. Documentation records at least 501 massacres, resulting in thousands

of civilian deaths.

Hundreds of thousands of civilian homes and public buildings have been deliberately destroyed, often through coordinated arson and airstrikes, especially in Sagaing, Magway and Tanintharyi Regions and Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Rakhine States. The junta has carried out 9,794 aerial bombardments, including 7,330 airstrikes, 1,305 drone strikes, 820 paramotor attacks, and 339 gyrocopter assaults. These aerial attacks have resulted in 4,853 documented deaths. Since 2022, approximately 1,853 healthcare facilities have been attacked. IDP camps, schools, places of worship, and public gatherings are repeatedly targeted.

On 10 December 2025, International Human Rights Day, the military conducted airstrike on Mrauk-U Hospital in Rakhine State, killing approximately 34 people and injuring more than ten. In January 2026 alone, 633 human rights violations were documented, alongside 220 aerial bombardments that killed at least 69 civilians. Two major massacres occurred between 21 and 25 January: in Bhamo Township, Kachin State, at least 27 people were killed during a funeral and wedding; in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State, at least 21 people, including pregnant women and children, were killed. In February 2026, further airstrikes targeted displaced civilians in Sagaing Region, killing monastic novices, children, and villagers.

More than 3.6 million people are internally displaced, while acute food insecurity has continued at catastrophic levels, affecting an estimated 12.4 million people in 2026. The junta's attacks on civilian population are deliberate. They form part of a widespread and systematic pattern that amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity including war crime of starvation of civilians. The Council must adopt urgent accountability and civilian protection measures.

In addition, Myanmar has become a regional hub for transnational criminal activities. The proliferation of cyber-scam centers, human trafficking networks, and illicit narcotics production has accelerated, particularly in areas under the control of the junta and junta-aligned armed groups, militias, and military-linked business networks. These criminal economies generate revenue

streams for the junta and actors connected to it, helping the military evade and withstand international sanctions.

The consequences of these crimes extend far beyond Myanmar's borders and have directly affected neighboring ASEAN countries as well as the United States and Europe. Victims—often trafficked individuals—are subjected to forced labor, detention, torture, and other serious abuses that may amount to crimes against humanity, including enslavement and imprisonment. The symbiotic relationship between the military junta and transnational organized crimes is now a central feature of its survival strategy and must be explicitly addressed by the UNHRC and the international community.

In stark contrast to the junta's violence, the people of Myanmar have continued to organize, resist, and build alternative political and social systems under extraordinary risks. Civil society organizations, human rights defenders, women, youth and LGBTIQ+ activists, and democratic resistance groups have established people-led governance from the ground up, challenging the military-constructed, centralized, repressive state system and exclusionary nationalism. Through survivor-centered documentation, rights-based advocacy, community education, mutual aid, and local administration, communities are actively shaping a different political landscape that seeks to ensure a peaceful and sustainable future based on principles of human rights, justice, and federal democracy.

Against this backdrop, the junta attempted to manufacture political legitimacy through a systematically coerced and tightly controlled process. The military junta weaponized the entire electoral system—deploying the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), mobilizing pro-junta networks, and relying on fear, intimidation, and force—to impose a predetermined outcome. This carefully stage-managed process was falsely presented as a “return to democracy,” a narrative decisively rejected by the people of Myanmar. The election was neither legal nor legitimate. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights publicly affirmed that the military-imposed elections failed to respect fundamental human rights

and only deepened violence and societal polarization.

The junta-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) functioned as a direct instrument of military command, seeking to fabricate consent through surveillance, exclusion, and coercion. The three-phase election, held between December 2025 and January 2026, unfolded amid the widespread public boycott and junta's heavy militarization and collapsing territorial control. Polling stations were largely empty, with participation limited to pro-military supporters or individuals coerced through threats of arrest, economic punishment, or pressure on family members. Electoral secrecy and voluntariness were systematically dismantled through surveillance, forced advance voting, and arrests under so-called election protection laws, under which at least 404 people—324 men and 80 women—were detained. In addition, the junta's sham election took place amid ongoing massacres and airstrikes. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented and reported that at least 170 people were killed in more than 408 military aerial attacks during the voting period between December 2025 and January 2026.

While we acknowledge the UNHRC resolution adopted on 4 April 2025, the crisis—now entering its sixth year—demands far stronger, more concrete, and time-bound actions from UN mechanisms and the international community.

The UNHRC must unequivocally reject the sham election and its outcomes and make clear that no UN mechanism will recognize or engage with any governance structures arising from it. Any recognition, engagement, or technical cooperation that confers political legitimacy on the junta, including in the aftermath of its sham election, risks normalizing the junta's atrocity crimes and further emboldening it.

The Council must explicitly recognize and address the symbiotic relationship between the Myanmar military and transnational organized crimes and call for coordinated international action to dismantle these networks and cut off a key source of financing for the military.

We further urge the Council to call for a comprehensive global arms embargo, including

targeted sanctions on aviation fuel, cutting the financial flows that sustain the military's decades-long impunity. Any sale, supply, or transfer of weapons, aircraft, drones, or fuel directly facilitates atrocity crimes and may therefore give rise to state and individual responsibility for aiding and abetting the Myanmar military's crimes under international law.

The Council must also mobilize political support for concrete accountability measures, including the referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the establishment of an ad hoc or hybrid international criminal tribunal. We urge the Council to actively support the NUG's declaration under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, accepting ICC jurisdiction, and to increase support for cases under the principles of universal jurisdiction, including those pursued in Argentina, Timor-Leste, and other national courts.

Finally, the UN must move beyond reliance on ASEAN's failed Five-Point Consensus and adopt an approach that support a Myanmar people-led, rights-based solution grounded in international law, justice, and accountability.

Excellencies,

We urge you to support the people of Myanmar in their unwavering resistance against the criminal military junta and tireless efforts to build a federal democracy from the ground up, despite immense suffering. We urge the Council to match their courage with decisive action—by rejecting the junta's sham election and its results, dismantling the military's capacity to continue committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other international crimes, and advancing accountability without delay.



## **ATHAN PUBLISHES ANALYSIS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION UNDER INTERIM GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN MYANMAR**

**A** than Freedom of Expression Activist Organisation released a new report on 8 February providing a critical analysis of how interim governance arrangements in Myanmar handle the right to freedom of expression.

The report, available in Burmese and English, reviews how the Federal Democracy Charter, and regional arrangements including in Karenni State, Sagaing Region and Mandalay region have incorporated freedom of expression.

The text of the press release for the report continues below.

Findings indicate that, while revolutionary forces have established foundational legal norms to replace the abolished 2008 Constitution, significant disparities persist between these written commitments and on-the-ground realities. Administrative bodies frequently prioritize collective security over individual rights, creating legal ambiguities that facilitate restrictions on

media and public discourse. The study underscores that without clearly defined legal safeguards, the exercise of fundamental freedoms remains vulnerable to military pressures and fragmented local authority.

The National Unity Government (NUG), federal units, and local authorities should establish clear policy standards for freedom of expression, implement transparent procedures for security-related restrictions, and create internal grievance mechanisms to address arbitrary arrests or forced deletions of online content. Meanwhile, civil society organizations and the media are encouraged to systematically document violations and pursue solution-oriented advocacy to show that freedom of expression supports, rather than undermines, public security.



Photo: AFP

# GLOBAL SUMMIT CALLS FOR 'SECURE, TRUSTWORTHY AND ROBUST AI'

**D**ozens of nations including the United States and China called for "secure, trustworthy and robust" artificial intelligence, in a declaration issued Saturday after a major summit on the technology in New Delhi.

The statement signed by 86 countries did not include concrete commitments to regulate the fast-developing technology, instead highlighting several voluntary, non-binding initiatives.

"AI's promise is best realised only when its benefits are shared by humanity," said the statement, released by the five-day AI Impact Summit.

It called the advent of generative AI "an inflection point in the trajectory of technological evolution".

"Advancing secure, trustworthy and robust AI is foundational to building trust and maximising societal and economic benefits," it said.

The summit -- attended by tens of thousands including top tech CEOs -- was the fourth annual global meeting to discuss the promises and pitfalls of AI, and the first hosted by a developing country.

Hot topics discussed included AI's potential societal benefits, such as drug discovery and translation tools, but also the threat of job losses, online abuse and the heavy power consumption of data centres.

Analysts had said earlier that the summit's broad focus, and vague promises made at the previous meetings in France, South Korea and Britain, would make strong pledges or immediate action unlikely.

## US signs on

The United States, home to industry-leading companies such as Google and ChatGPT maker OpenAI, did not sign last year's summit statement, warning that regulation could be a drag on innovation.

"We totally reject global governance of AI," US delegation head Michael Kratsios had said at the Delhi summit on Friday.

The United States signed a bilateral declaration on AI with India on Friday, pledging to "pursue a global approach to AI that is unapologetically friendly to entrepreneurship and innovation".

But it also put its name to the main summit statement, the release of which was originally expected Friday but was delayed by one day to maximise the number of signatories, India's government said.

On AI safety risks -- from misinformation and surveillance to fears of the creation of devastating new pathogens -- Saturday's summit declaration struck a cautious tone.

"Deepening our understanding of the potential security aspects remains important," it said.

"We recognize the importance of security in AI systems, industry-led voluntary measures, and the adoption of technical solutions, and appropriate policy frameworks that enable innovation."

On jobs, it emphasised reskilling initiatives to "support participants in preparation for a future AI driven economy".

And "we underscore the importance of developing energy-efficient AI systems" given the technology's growing demands on natural resources, it said.

### 'Unacceptable risk'

Computing expert and AI safety campaigner Stuart Russell told AFP that Saturday's commitments were "not completely inconsequential".

"The most important thing is that there are any commitments at all," he said.

Countries should "build on these voluntary agreements to develop binding legal commitments

to protect their peoples so that AI development and deployment can proceed without imposing unacceptable risks", Russell said.

Some visitors had complained of poor organisation, including chaotic entry and exit points, at the vast summit and expo site in Delhi.

The event was also the source of several viral moments, including the awkward refusal of rival US tech CEOs -- OpenAI's Sam Altman and Dario Amodei of Anthropic -- to hold hands on stage.

The next AI summit will take place in Geneva in 2027. In the meantime, a UN panel on AI will start work towards "science-led governance", the global body's chief Antonio Guterres said Friday.

The UN General Assembly has confirmed 40 members for a group called the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence.

It was created in August, aiming to be to AI what the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is to global environmental policy.

India has used the summit to push its ambition to catch up with the United States and China in the AI field, including through large-scale data centre construction powered by new nuclear plants.

Delhi expects more than \$200 billion in investments over the next two years, and US tech giants unveiled a raft of new deals and infrastructure projects in the country during the summit.

AFP



## NO END OF HISTORY

**T**oby Mendel is a lawyer at the Centre for Law and Democracy, an international human rights organization based in Canada that focuses on foundational rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, association, assembly, and participation. Since 2012, he has worked extensively in Myanmar, engaging directly with government officials on democratic law reform, particularly in the area of freedom of expression, and later supporting civil society and local governance initiatives after the 2021 coup. His experience provides a deep and nuanced perspective on the country's ongoing struggle for democracy.

Mendel opens by describing Myanmar's democratic transition as flawed at every stage. Under the Thein Sein administration, he witnessed what he calls a genuine "pivot towards democracy," with senior military-linked officials putting in place new legislation and structures. Between 2012 and 2015, it felt like an exhilarating period of change, with international organizations energized and ordinary citizens experiencing new hope. "As a long-standing human rights activist, it was a heady time. We were doing great things, and it was exciting to be working in the country and seeing these things getting pushed through." The 2015 NLD election victory, however, did not extend this momentum. Progress "came to an abrupt halt," and during that period the Centre for Law and Democracy achieved almost nothing in terms of legislative reform. He points to the broadcasting law adopted in August 2015, just before the NLD took office. It could have created an independent broadcasting council, but the NLD never implemented it, leaving the reform blocked for their entire term. This was a striking contrast to the Thein Sein period,

when at least some laws were being passed that aligned with international human rights standards and military officials were unexpectedly open to external advice.

By the coup of 2021, Myanmar still had only twelve licensed radio stations; this was a media sector that was "absolutely not developed." Apart from the most repressive countries, Mendel comments that nowhere else in the world looked like that. While he acknowledges that the NLD faced constraints, he adds that these reforms were not military red lines, and earlier engagement with military officials on freedom of information showed they could be persuaded such laws posed no threat. The deeper problem, in his view, was the NLD's lack of commitment to certain democratic values. As he puts it, they believed in democracy as an abstract principle, but resisted aspects of its practice. "I don't think they were enthusiastic about having a free and open media which could criticize them," Mendel says. "They had some pretty serious psychological or attitudinal barriers to accepting a proper democracy."

That reluctance, he continues, extended to the Rohingya crisis. This, in his view, "didn't just happen, it was manufactured" during NLD rule. Aung San Suu Kyi, despite her "enormous moral authority and impact on the people of Myanmar," effectively went along with events during an unfolding human tragedy. As Mendel puts it, "Not using her moral and political authority was a significant failure as a leader." Since the coup, however, he notes that some anti-Rohingya attitudes have begun to shift, as many Burmese now understand the raw fear and violence that comes from confronting a hostile military firsthand.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/1/31/episode-481-no-end-of-history>



# MYANMAR JUNTA AMENDS PRIVATE HEALTH SERVICE LAW TO BAN POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHING IN MEDICAL SCHOOLS

The Myanmar junta, led by Min Aung Hlaing, has enacted a new amendment to the Private Health Service Law that strictly prohibits the teaching of politics, religion, or subjects deemed "incompatible with Myanmar culture" in private medical training schools, according to legislation issued on 17 February.

The junta amended Section 25 of the Private Health Service Law by inserting new provisions, including a clause banning the teaching of political subjects.

One provision states that private medical training schools must ensure they do not teach party political subjects unrelated to the approved curriculum, religious subjects, or subjects considered incompatible with Myanmar culture.

The provision requires those who establish, supervise, or manage private health services, along with health-care providers, to ensure that such subjects are not taught in the training schools.

The amendment also introduces two additional categories of private health services – private medical

training schools and private outpatient surgery services – along with new regulatory requirements.

Revisions to Section 31 now stipulate that anyone operating a private hospital, private medical training school, or private outpatient surgery service without a license faces a prison sentence of between one and five years and may also be fined.

Section 33 of the amended law also states that anyone convicted of operating any private health service without a license other than a private hospital, private medical training school, private outpatient surgery service, private maternity ward, or private clinic shall face a prison sentence of not less than three months and not more than one year and may also be fined.

Following the 2021 coup, the military authorities also enacted a private education law in 2023 that bars private schools from teaching, lecturing on, promoting, or discussing party politics or political issues.



# ONLINE REACTION TO BO NAGAR'S SURRENDER TO THE MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA

Last week, social media in Myanmar was buzzing with reactions after the high-profile resistance leader Bo Nagar and some of his family members reportedly turned themselves in to the military junta.

Military state media shared the news that Bo Nagar, the head of the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), surrendered after clashes with other armed groups in Sagaing Region.

Users on Facebook, Telegram, and X have debated what this event means for the wider resistance movement, with many seeing it as a significant shift over the past five years.

Some users express disappointment, claiming Bo Nagar's surrender weakens civilian resistance efforts and could encourage further fragmentation among anti-junta forces.

The social media user says as a conversation, "This shows cracks in the resistance. What happens next?" and one of the telegram user said, "Bo Nagar's surrender will discourage young fighters."

Some commenters highlight concerns that the military might use this event for propaganda by claiming strength and momentum, especially ahead of ongoing political events like the election and formation of a "civilian" government under the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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